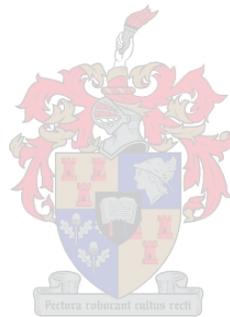**Fusions of the Feminine and Technology: Exploring the Cyborg as Subversive Tool for Feminist Reconstructions of Identity**

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Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Stellenbosch University

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March 2009

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OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis handel oor die "cyborg", die dominante metafoor vir die samesmelting tussen vroulikheid en tegnologie. Die figuur van die "cyborg" sal ondersoek word deur middel van die analise van verskeie tekste om te bepaal watter waarde dit het vir feminisme as 'n werktuig om die konstruksie van die grense van identiteit en geslag te openbaar. Hierdie openbaring laat die "cyborg" toe om 'n omverwerpende spasie te skep vir die rekonstruksie van vroulike identiteit. Die temas wat aangespreek sal word is temas wat dikwels verskyn in feministiese wetenskapsfiksie naamlik: voortplanting, seksualiteit, die konstruksie van identiteit en geslag deur middel van wetenskap, kultuur en ideologie, en die magsverhouding tussen mans en vrouens. Ander relevante konsepte wat aangeraak sal word is taal, self and Ander, voorstelling en perspektief. Feministiese wetenskapsfiskie en teorie poog om konvensionele grense van geslag en identiteit te destabiliseer en die tekste wat ondersoek word in hierdie tesis is almal gemoeid met hierdie destabilisasie. Elkeen van hierdie tekste bied 'n unieke perspektief op vroulike identiteit en die onderneming om huidige kategorieë van geslag te transformeer en hierdie perspektiewe sal ondersoek word in gedetailleerde analise.

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation the dominant metaphor for the fusion between the feminine and technology, the cyborg, will be examined through various texts to assess the value the cyborg has for feminism as a tool to exposes the constructedness of boundaries of identity and gender, thereby enabling a reconstruction of a new feminine identity in a subversive and transgressive space. The main themes which will be addressed are those that often feature in feminist science fiction: reproduction, sexuality, the construction of identity and gender through science, culture and ideology, and the power relations between men and women. Other related concepts which will be dealt with are language, self and Other, representation and perspective. Feminist science fiction and theory attempt to destabilise conventional boundaries concerned with gender and identity and the texts which this dissertation deals with are all, to varying degrees, concerned with this destabilisation, each offering a unique perspective on feminine identity and the attempted transformation of current gender categories which will be explored in detailed analysis.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, the dominant metaphor for the fusion between the feminine and technology, the cyborg, will be examined through various texts and popular culture phenomena to assess its value for the transformation of gender in feminist terms. To many feminist writers and theorists the cyborg symbolises the transgression of conventional boundaries, a figure which will ultimately lead to a re-conceptualisation of the term "woman" but also "human", constructing identities which will be more fluid and open. This dissertation will argue that the figure of the cyborg should not be seen as a messianic figure of redemptive change, but as a useful tool for feminists to wield in the process of deconstructing and reconstructing feminine identity. The figure of the cyborg cannot be a messianic figure; it has no inherent subversive qualities. Instead, it offers feminism a way to escape prescriptive gender identities whose authority is based in "nature" and biology. The notion of the cyborg which will be referred to throughout this dissertation is one which operates on a theoretical level of feminism, a metaphor of transgression and subversion that is concerned with political mobilisation, affinity and coalition politics. The central cyborgian figure around which this dissertation revolves is not concerned with near-magical transcendence of gender and identity boundaries, but rather with the exposure of these boundaries and the possibility of restructuring them. This cyborgian figure draws one's attention to issues of language, but also of voice and authority.

Originally the term cyborg was used by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in 1960 when they mentioned it in an article about how self-regulating human-machine systems could be useful in outer space and outer space travel.[1] Clynes later wrote, in an introduction to D.S. Halacy's *Cyborg: Evolution of the Superman*, that there was a new frontier that was "not merely space, but more profoundly the relationship between 'inner space' and outer space' – a bridge between mind and matter".[2] It is interesting how this idea can be related to how feminists later employed the metaphor of the cyborg; in a

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[1] "Cyborgs and Space," featured in *Astronautics* (September 1960)
[2] From the introduction to D.S. halacy, *Cyborg: Evolution of the Superman* (New York: Harper and Row Publsihers, 1965), 7.

manner of speaking a relation between mind and matter but one they more specifically interpreted as the relation between women's identities and their bodies. It is not only later generations of feminists who grasped the power of the metaphor of the cyborg, even before the term was coined, C.L. Moore recognised the promise of a metaphor which could open up a way out of the entanglement of women's identities and "nature" in the novella *No Woman Born* which was published in 1944. Her recognition of the cyborgian figure's potential does not stand in isolation, but was followed by many other representations including those of Donna Haraway in her *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Marge Piercy in her novel *He, She, and It* and in more recent times in the television series *Dark Angel*.

The texts used in this dissertation were chosen specifically to illustrate how different authors conceptualise the figure of the cyborg but also to show how limiting this metaphor can be if not implemented with full awareness of all of its implications. These texts reflect how the cyborg has been represented at different times: in different historical contexts and intellectual climates but also in various contexts ranging from Haraway's theoretical and philosophical cyborg to the gutsy and sexy cyborg in the television series *Dark Angel*. As it were, these texts are almost snapshots of how the figure of the cyborg has been represented and utilised since it emerged as a promising metaphor during times when women were struggling against restrictive "natural" gender identities which were prescribed to them.

In Chapter One, Configurations of Change and Redefinition: Central Concepts and Concerns of The Cyborg and Cyberfeminist Politics, a theoretical basis is laid out to trace out the most important issues revolving around the figure of the cyborg as an "imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings" (Haraway, 150). This chapter is mainly an analysis of the manifesto to identify the most influential and important issues raised by Haraway, and this process is aided by references to Sunden's theories concerning cyberfeminism. The cyborg is perhaps the most well-known and widely used metaphor for the subversion and transgression of conventional boundaries through the use of technology, providing feminism with new ways to think about the

interrelations between technology, culture, nature and language. The cyborg's fluid transgressions between self and Other will be examined in terms of political affinity and a possible reconstruction of feminist politics. A comprehensive description of the cyborg looks at the expectations and promises of Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* and how they relate to how the cyborg is currently viewed in theoretical terms.

In the second chapter, Cyborg Dancer: Changing Feminine Identity and Challenging Patriarchal Authority Through Subversive Performance**,** discussion of the figure of the cyborg moves towards an analysis of C.L. Moore's proto-feminist novella, *No Woman Born*, which was published in 1944. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the cyborg was conceptualised before Haraway's seminal text, but also before the advent of mass technological progress in everyday life. The narrative revolves around Deirdre, a dancer and singer who almost dies in a theatre fire, but who is given a new metal body that houses her brain by a Dr Maltzer and his team. This chapter will look at the strength of the female cyborg, how it resists and essentially deconstructs patriarchal authority and how it reconstructs feminine identity. Moore's plot subverts the conventional monster / creator plot by presenting the reader with an enthralling and inspiring female heroine who takes control over her own body despite the influence of the male gaze which would have her be either a weak female or an alluring sexual object. This chapter will show how, by using the female cyborg, Moore subverts traditional assumptions about gendered identity and the female body and reveals important perspectives of the power relations between men and women.

Chapter Three, *He, She, and It*: Spaces of Resistance and the Construction of Revolutionary Subjects, deals with Marge Piercy's novel, *He, She, and It* published in 1991, which centres around Shira and her family, the cyborg Yod and the cyborgian female Nili who all live in a future post-apocalyptic world. The parallel narrative in the novel is that of the golem Joseph and his creator, Rabbi Loew, whose tale is set in the sixteenth century. In this chapter, Nili and her community will be the focus of the discussion, but attention will also be paid to how Yod and the golem Joseph are portrayed and how their characters contribute to understanding the transgression of conventional

boundaries which the cyborg exemplifies in the novel. Piercy's novel was published only about five years after Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto,* and the novel reflects a time in which many feminists were exploring gender and feminine identity in terms of an affinity with technology. The chapter will focus on issues of reproduction, female desire, identity and, most importantly, language in relation to the cyborg and its value for feminism. In *He, She, and It* new conceptualisations of what it means to be "woman" and "human" are forged, destabilising boundaries of gender and identity, and not only revealing the constructed nature of categories of identity but, like the other texts examined in this dissertation, constructing new identities of femininity.

Chapter Four, "Girls kick ass, says so on the t-shirt": The Cyborg, Commodification and Misrepresentations of Feminism in Popular Culture, attempts to bring the exploration of the cyborg into a more contemporary perspective by analysing the television series *Dark Angel*. The series features a genetically modified young woman, Max Guevarra, who lives in a post-apocalyptic society. The discussion of Max's character is grounded in *The Bionic Woman*, a television series from the seventies, but also *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a contemporary series of *Dark Angel*. This series will be explored in terms of the complications which arise when the figure of the cyborg is coupled with popular (mis)conceptions of feminist power represented by "girl power": depictions of feminism in popular culture have always been muddied by the influences of commodification, superficial representation of feminist goals and the portrayal of overt sexuality in female characters. The purpose of this chapter will be to explore these problematic elements of *Dark Angel* and its protagonist, to determine whether the cyborg, as a transgressive tool of feminism, is neutralised by over-simplified depictions of feminism and the restrictions of normative gender categories which underlie the main narrative. In popular culture, the cyborg often serves to enforce or reproduce oppressive structures of identity, instead of transgressing or challenging these categories of identity and gender, and therefore it is important to determine what transgressive value Max's character has for feminism in terms of the depiction of her identity, social consciousness, femininity and Otherness.

The cyborg seems to embody humankind's fascination with "monstrous" figures who occupy the periphery of society, delineating the opposition between self and Other, and it is the liminality of the cyborg which provides such a useful space for feminist authors to construct meaning. The approach I have implemented in my research is in part an exploration of this liminality and an attempt to understand exactly why the metaphor of the cyborg is such a useful tool for feminism, but also to examine how that usefulness translates across different contexts, through the eyes of different authors. The figure of the cyborg encourages, and arguably empowers, women to write their own stories about their bodies, and social and political realities. By exposing the constructed nature of identity and gender boundaries the metaphor of the cyborg enables women to challenge oppressive gender structures, to question what "woman" is. Cyborg politics encourage subversive transgressions of boundaries, and it is these transgressions which call into question reified categories concerned with identity. Feminist politics cannot arrive at new forms of selfhood if power relations between self and Other are not explored and questioned, and the metaphor of cyborg functions as a site for this critical exploration precisely because this metaphor is always in process, thriving on ambiguity. The cyborgian figure provides feminism with new ways of thinking about technology, culture, nature and language, and the interrelations between these issues.

ONE

Configurations of Change and Redefinition: Central Concepts and Concerns of The Cyborg and Cyberfeminist Politics

Neil Badmington comments in his collection on posthumanism that a person surveying a certain part of the theoretical landscape would perhaps "agree with Allucquere Rosanne Stone's claim that many theorists, particularly those interested in posthumanism are suffering from something called *cyborg envy*" (Badmington, 86). For some theorists, not only in posthumanism but also cyberfeminism, the cyborg continues to fulfil its position as a dominant metaphor for the transgression of boundaries and subversion of dominant power hierarchies. Badmington even goes so far as to say that for some "[t]he cyborg seems to be the answer, the messiah who will lead 'us' to a promised land where humanism is a thing of the past" (Badmington, 86). Such statements give rise to all sorts of questions around what the cyborg entails as a metaphor for transgression and the success of the cyborg's subversion of traditional concepts and categories.

Arguably *the* seminal text on the cyborg is Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, and, whether one agrees with Haraway's view of the cyborg or not, it is undeniable that it has greatly stimulated ideas and theoretical discussion concerning the fusion between the feminine and technology. The analysis of the manifesto which follows will examine the crucial and influential points Haraway makes and to see how these pivotal ideas have been carried on by other theorists, Sunden's theory concerning cyberfeminism will also be touched on. This chapter will attempt to clarify how feminism can profit from a fusion with technology and science, and how useful science fiction can be to feminism in terms of opening up a space in which to explore gender in a relatively unrestricted way. The figure of the cyborg will be examined to determine how it provides feminism with new ways to think about the interrelations between technology, culture, nature and the role language plays in this interrelation.

In an interview with Haraway, she replied to a question concerning the manifesto by saying

> I didn't set out to write a manifesto; or to write what turned out to be a heavily poetic and almost dream-state piece in places. But, in many ways, it turned out to be about language. As a result, the Manifesto is not politically programmatic in the sense of proposing a priority of options, it's more about all kinds of linguistic possibilities for politics that I think we (or I) haven't been paying enough attention to. (Penley, Ross & Haraway, 18)

By describing the manifesto as "a heavily poetic and almost dream-state piece in places" that is not politically programmatic, Haraway seems to be admitting that her manifesto is by no means unassailable or complete, and if there ever was a theorist who would encourage her thoughts to be questioned in a constructive manner it is Donna Haraway. Part of her main argument is that she sees the cyborg as both a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century" (149), as a "fiction[al] mapping [of] our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful coupling" (Haraway, 150).

Haraway adopted the figure of the cyborg as a useful metaphor during a time in feminism when a response was needed to the restrictive "natural" identities which were prescribed to women and the cyborg has since been the metaphor many theorists turn to when they try to disassemble restrictive categories of identity. The main threads of Haraway's argument are still relevant today when one examines the increasing intimacy with and dependency on technology in the twenty-first century. The specific relevance Haraway's argument has to this dissertation is to provide a theoretical basis on which to build the analyses of the following chapters and to provide a framework to lend context to further discussions of the cyborg as a feminist metaphor. The cyborg is not only powerful because of its relevance to the current intimacy with technology, but also because of the fictional potential it has, specifically for providing women and female science fiction authors with an avenue through which to initiate transformation. Haraway was greatly influenced by the French feminist authors Monique Wittig and Luce Irigaray, who encouraged women to write their own "stories" about their bodies and not to just accept

patriarchal and masculinist discourse concerning the female body (Senft) and one can see this influence in Haraway's emphasis on re-inscription, language and reconstruction.

Judith Halberstam, a prominent theorist concerned specifically with posthumanism and the reconstruction of the category of "human" and the human body, writes that:

> The female cyborg becomes a terrifying cultural icon because it hints at the radical potential of a fusion of femininity and intelligence. If we define femininity as the representation of any gendered body, and intelligence as the autonomous potential of technology and mental functioning, their union signifies the artificial component in each without referring to any essential concept of nature. (Halberstam, 454)

It is through this union of "femininity and intelligence" that feminism can begin to deconstruct stable categories of identity, gender and the authority of language, discovering the power relations at work beneath the surface. By critically questioning these categories, the boundaries between the margin and the centre become more complex and confused than their apparent stability would have led us to believe. "[Exchanges between humans and technology] not only destabilise apparently secure boundaries between self and other but also make it increasingly difficult to identify a core essence that constitutes 'true' humanness" (Rossini, 4). It is this question about what it means to be human that posthumanism has opened up through theory, but also specifically through science fiction, and it is this latter space which offers feminism a way to explore identity and gender.

Some of the other crucial points in the manifesto are that "the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality, probably always, but certainly now" (Haraway, 181) and that "taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology" (Haraway, 181). These two points are inextricably linked to cyborg imagery and are also important to feminism. Women have been made out to be the Other in theory concerned with identity and gender, but Haraway argues that women themselves should not participate in totalising theory. The second point she makes can be directly linked to

the current intimacy with technology: women should not shy away from technology and its possibilities but embrace them.

Science and technology are a part of culture, in that their discourses are shaped by underlying ideologies which determine power hierarchies and relations. Technology and the figure of the cyborg provide feminists with a multi-vocal opportunity to make their voices heard: one voice cannot be representative of all feminisms. There is no one unifying element that brings women of all cultures, races or languages together in such a way as to provide them with one theory, one discourse or one strategy of politics. The construction and deconstruction of boundaries relate to the lack of one voice, and this directly links to Haraway's argument for affinity (relation by choice) rather than kinship (relation by blood) (Haraway, 155). A single, universal unifying element in feminism would be a return to essentialism and a patriarchal convention of "nature". Instead of searching for unifying elements in different groups to form a whole, relations between feminists are by choice.

> It has become difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective – or even to insist in every circumstance upon the noun. Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial and strategic. With the hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in 'essential' unity. There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women…Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terribly historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. (Haraway, 155)

Haraway urges women to reject essentialism and to base their politics on coalition, and coalition politics can be strengthened by the participation of women in the discourses of science and technology. Participation in those discourses enables women to reconstruct boundaries and meanings which mark them as Other or exclude them from partaking in power. The metaphor of the cyborg does not rely on an essentialist identity and it encourages politics based on affinity or coalition based on choice: "woman" is a socially constructed category which can be altered by women, using technology and the accompanying concepts of coding and inscription. This does not mean that technology is the holy grail of feminist theory or a perfect way to re-address inequalities, but that it is a

direction in which lies a lot of potential for re-assessing power inequalities which have persisted for centuries. These inequalities have been re-enforced by the traditional conception that women are associated with nature and men with culture, and that therefore women cannot practise "good" science.

Manuela Rossini comments that feminists who engage with technology do so from many different disciplinary angles and that these feminists pay particular attention to

> intersections between the organic, the technical, the textual, the economic and socio-political. They envision a future *with* technology but without dichotomous structures, without binary gender identities and, consequently, without hierarchical power relations. (Rossini, 6)

It is this intermingling of different disciplines, points of view, perspectives and feminisms which makes technology, science and science fiction such rich sources of subversive sites from which feminism can issue its challenges to patriarchal domination. Donna Haraway herself commented, six years after the publication of the manifesto, that "We need a concept of agency that opens up possibilities for figuring relationality within social worlds where actors fit oddly, at best, into previous *taxa* of the human, the natural, or the constructed" (Badmington, 90). Women need to use the cyborgian concept of agency to construct new categories of what it means to be human, and therefore also what it is to be a woman.

One of Haraway's best known definitions of the cyborg states:

> The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence…Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. (Haraway, 151)

A crucial process in the reconstruction of feminine identity by means of the figure of the cyborg is emphasised here: the cyborg functions in a way that reworks the relation between nature and culture. The cyborg does not possess any inherent subversive qualities but instead it draws one's attention to the changed relation between nature and culture: machines that can imitate human behaviour, that simulate reality, or humans so intertwined with machines so as to blur the lines between what is natural and artificial to such a point that distinction between these two categories are almost impossible to make.

Many theorists and female authors have recognised the potential of what Haraway calls "fruitful couplings" in the cyborg, as one can see in the novel *He, She, and It* by Marge Piercy, published only a few years after Haraway's manifesto. It is the liminal state of the cyborg that represents its transgressive potential, which in turn enables feminists who employ it to construct feminine identities that are partial, contradictory and that open up the self for reconstruction and reinscription.

The liminal state of the metaphor of the cyborg does not only transgress boundaries between different categories of identity and gender, but necessarily then also the thickly drawn border between self and Other. In Western ideology there is a huge investment in the separation of self and Other, a separation which Haraway attempts to expose and dismantle. She believes that the Western impulse to divide the world into a maze of reified dualisms is instrumental to the domination of women and marginal groups who are marked as Other.

> Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man …To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. (Haraway, 177)

It is this capacity to deconstruct and question reified dualisms through subversion that Haraway sees as the most useful aspect of the cyborg for feminists, especially in a society that has become so intertwined with technology. She even goes as far as to say that we are all "cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras…" (Haraway, 177), a statement which rings true when one looks at this age of global communication, bodily augmentation and huge leaps in science, specifically in biotechnology dealing with the body. Manuela Rossini comes to the same conclusion about the state of the category of "man" as Haraway.

> Technology is turning more and more people into 'posthuman bodies', eroding the putatively bounded, self-determined and supreme ontological category 'Man' and offering humanity a prosthetic existence instead, a cyborgian ontology which is perpetually 'under (de)construction'. (Rossini, 4)

Increasingly, the gap between science fiction and science is growing smaller; many science fictional texts of the early twentieth century seem now, in retrospect, strangely prophetic. Many feminist authors have recognised the inherent potential of science fiction and have agreed with Haraway in her identification of the cyborg as the most promising avenue by which to subvert patriarchy. It is important to note that even today science fiction remains a predominantly masculinist genre, and that female science fiction authors work from a marginal position. Jenny Wolmark notes that the very attempts by feminist authors to subvert patriarchal structures in their fiction are empowered by their experience of subordination (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 27).

Feminist science fiction places under scrutiny the contradictions in patriarchal discourse concerned with the self, identity and gender, and exposes the arbitrariness of certain patriarchal distinctions, a task for which the cyborg is uniquely qualified due to its intimacy with boundaries and their transgression. "The cyborgs populating feminist science fiction make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artefact, member of a race, individual entity, or body" (Haraway, 178). By focusing on femininity and female desire, feminist science fiction attempts to redefine the very category of woman by not only questioning traditional representations of the feminine but also by constructing a new representation often, as in the case of Moore and Piercy, with the help of technology and the figure of the cyborg.

This construction of a new feminine identity raises the subject of representation. Rossini presents a very comprehensive definition of representation:

> Representation…is itself a classificatory system because it constructs, deconstructs – but also reconstructs – notions and images of gender and other identity categories which individuals incorporate and live by. Images, in other words, are in themselves engineering reality – hence my use of the term imagineering. (Rossini, 1)

Following Rossini's argument, feminist science fiction authors use the figure of the cyborg to imagineer a new femininity, one which is both fused to and empowered by technology. Rossini extends her argument to include users of biomedical and scientific technologies, defining them as imagineers of bodies, cultural configurations and social

arrangements. "Both technoscience and literature, in short, is cultural production which affects the material life of human beings" (Rossini, 1). Feminism can no longer ignore the pervasive effect technology has on society and, specifically, how it offers a different perspective on traditional concepts. Another important thread in Rossini's argument is that this future which is to be imagined and brought about must be a "future in which human identity is not reduced to a single standard or norm and in which what it means to be human [and "woman"] remains an open question" (Rossini, 4-5). Haraway, and many of the feminist authors who draw on her work, experiment with anxieties about the self and they attempt not only to redefine femininity but gender as a totality, giving women a different perspective and, ideally, even new forms of selfhood. Haraway herself writes in the manifesto: "[M]y cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (Haraway, 154). By exposing the cultural fictions of masculinity and femininity (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 127) through the figure of the cyborg, feminist authors hand women the tools to reconstruct and re-inscribe their sense of self and identity.

The cyborg may provide a surface for this critical re-inscription or resignification. "The silicon chip is a surface for writing…Writing, power, and technology are old partners in Western stories of the origin of civilization" (Haraway, 153). It is through language and technology that women need to readdress the construction of women's identity by patriarchy. This intervention and re-inscription by women can be linked to Haraway's comments that cyborg writing is based on the power to survive by "seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" and that "[f]eminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control" (Haraway, 175). These comments highlight the pivotal role language plays in the representation and subversion of power. Haraway goes on to outline how important the act of writing is in the technology of cyborgs, and how cyborg politics is, in terms of language, the struggle against perfect communication as a central dogma of phallogocentrism (Haraway, 176). Cyborg politics encourages subversive transgressions

of boundaries and in doing so subverts so-called Western identity and its accompanying ideals of nature and culture, as well as the female body.

As William Covino notes, the manifesto "encourages the subversive rewriting of the dominating texts of culture, in fusion with its enabling technologies" (Covino 356). The manifesto encourages women to see their bodies as maps of power and identity (Haraway, 180), to recognise that they can play a role in the construction of the boundaries on these maps and that they have the power to change them; specifically the boundaries demarcating female embodiment as an extension of biology, an organic predeterminate (Haraway, 180). Donna Haraway's and Judith Butler's theories about gender and the female body seem to revolve around the same core concepts. Butler, too, views "'the body'…itself [as] a construction, as are the myriad 'bodies' that constitute the domain of gendered subjects" (Butler, 8). The cyborg has proved to be an excellent tool in exposing the constructed elements of identity, gender and the female body, as illustrated both in Piercy's novel and Moore's novella. Instead of there being a supposed congruence between anatomy and femininity, the cyborg exposes femininity as "automation, a coded masquerade" (Halberstam, 449).

The idea of femininity as an automation brings to the foreground the dualism of nature and culture. Baujke Prins provides a very descriptive summary of the manifesto, seeing Haraway's cyborg as a figure that feminists can use as their image of embodied subjectivity, an image which questions established boundaries but, most importantly, the opposition between nature and culture (Prins, 360). Prins goes on to assert that Haraway's central assumption is that social categories such as race and gender have been used to "reinvent nature" and that the manifesto encourages people who have been marked as Other to utilise the destabilising aspects of the Other in their favour (Prins, 360). Prins describes these Others who, in Haraway's terms, take up the tools which marked them as

> boundary creatures, they actually are monsters—'a word that shares more than its root with the word, to *demonstrate*. Monsters signify' (Haraway, 1991, 2). Deliberately posing as a monster, a hybrid creature shows the arbitrariness and constructed nature of what is considered norm(al). (Prins, 360)

Using a boundary creature or monster such as the cyborg enables feminist authors to explore, or in Rossini's terms "imagineer" a huge array of possibilities, ranging from politics to issues of identity and gender, that would have been impossible to imagine from "the mundane fiction of Man and Woman" (Haraway, 180). The cyborg can support imagineering more easily than traditional bodies: when so much radical social and cultural change concerning the human body occurs, something which can "encompass a new, complex, and contradictory lived experience" (González, 61) is needed, and the cyborg seems to be the most useful and sustainable figure to do so. Feminists should take advantage of this opportunity created by radical social and cultural change to refigure the category of "woman", but a crucial element in terms of this refiguring is perspective. "The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters" (Haraway, 154). The cyborg encourages multiple perspectives to exist simultaneously.

Visions of feminine identity need to acknowledge that gender, much like computer intelligence, "is a learned, imitative behaviour that can be processed so well that it comes to look natural" (Halberstam, 443), and that the way in which gender is represented culturally makes it seem organic, not constructed. By deconstructing the performance of femininity as it is now, examining its composite parts of patriarchal prescriptions and "natural" elements, women could then move to reconstructing femininity to be a more inclusive performance that celebrates being a woman. Through critical discussion, feminism and posthumanism both have the common goals of deconstructing identity and gender to destabilise the power relations between the margin and centre which have been in place for so long. This deconstruction of identity leads to a dispersal of coherence of gender and identity which leads to empowerment (Prins, 355).

There are many reasons why gender needs to be deconstructed, such as the fact that "sexual objectification…is the consequence of the structure sex/gender" (Haraway, 159), and that in patriarchal terms nature is constructed and truth is made (Preface, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature)*. Prescriptive categories of gender

would lead one to believe that nature is an unassailable truth which cannot be questioned, as the scientific exploration of nature is based on facts. Judith Butler also subscribes to the belief that nature, and therefore sex and gender, are constructed categories, as one can see from her theory of gender performativity.

> The univocity of sex, the internal coherence of gender, and the binary framework for both sex and gender are considered throughout as regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression. (Butler, 33)

Even though Butler is not involved in feminism which is concerned with technology and the cyborg, her concepts concerned with undermining patriarchal structures of gender have a certain affinity with the transformational thrust of the cyborg. Cyborg identity is always in process, a process which is never-ending, and lends itself to multiple inscriptions: "*woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot be rightfully said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification" (Butler, 33). Accordingly, in the manifesto Haraway writes that there is a great need to confront the dominations of race, gender, sexuality and class (Haraway, 157), and this is still true today in Western society.

Part of Haraway's confrontation of the dominations of gender consists of subverting and displacing so-called "natural" notions of gender that support patriarchal power, "to make gender trouble", not through a utopian vision but through subversive confusion. The cyborg might still be to some degree a utopian figure, but as technology progresses it becomes harder and harder to sustain this argument: Haraway's assertion that we are all cyborgs and chimeras is not so far-fetched. The metaphor of the cyborg is more than adept at creating subversive confusion, which can lead to the next step: not only subverting and displacing notions of heterosexist gender, but dismantling them and constructing new, more fluid categories of gender. The direction that humanity is taking with technology makes the cyborg the most qualified figure to lead feminism into the twenty-first century.

Judith Butler asks in her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* whether unity is necessary for effective political action (Butler, 15) and Haraway's answer in the manifesto is a resounding "no". By acknowledging a certain fragmentation between groups of female identities it might be possible to facilitate coalition political action "precisely because the 'unity' of the category of women is neither presupposed nor desired" (Butler, 15). If political action with the goal of constructing new revolutionary ideas is based on a foreclosed definition of female identity, then the emergence of any new identity concepts cannot fulfil the promise of transformation because there is no space to create a revolutionary subject. It is precisely in this capacity that the cyborg is so valuable to feminist politics, as it lends itself to multiple identity inscriptions which enable coalition or affinity politics, and one can see why Haraway chose the figure of the cyborg as the central image of her argument for renewal in feminism. As Butler writes, "[g]ender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred", and the cyborg will enable

> an open coalition…[which] will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences, without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure. (Butler, 16)

In an interview about the manifesto, Donna Haraway commented that women should not turn scientific discourses into the Other, but engage in those discourses to contest what nature means in terms of gender and femininity. "You've got to contest for discourse from within, building connections to other constituencies" (Penley, 11). Rossini writes in her article about imagineering bodies that she fears that the opening up of boundaries between human and non-human and self and Other, which has been brought about in part by our current intimacy with technology, might lead to "the very sharpening of unequal gender divisions and to the survival of the male gender as the normative human…Woman might remain on the side of nature, the animalistic, the monstrous, the non-human…" (Rossini, 9-10). It is for this reason that feminists should not only write academic essays on technology but should also become literate in scientific and technological fields; they must go where the power is and find out how it works (Prins, 363).

To summarise, Haraway encourages feminists to become technologically literate and to rewrite the "dominating texts of culture in fusion with its enabling technology" (Covino, 367) by reconstructing boundaries of identity and gender. The main responsibility feminists have in terms of the deconstruction and reconstruction of boundaries is for the re-conceptualising of the category of woman and therefore also gender. Haraway comments in the manifesto that she imagines a world without gender, but this is too idealistic for feminists to employ in practice, and, as Haraway herself admits years after the publication of the manifesto, one must look at the manifesto not as instructional but as reflective and designed to induce reflection in others on the status of being (Penley, 11).

There are strong parallels between the fictional work of Octavia Butler, a well-known science fiction author whom Haraway acknowledges in the manifesto, and Haraway's non-fiction writings which engage the reader in reflecting on gender and femininity. Both authors write about identity and the relations of power between self and Other, both explore "new forms of selfhood" by challenging these existing relationships through difference. And, most significantly, Haraway's non-fictional work is similar to Butler's fiction, which is about

> identity and the dimensions of the 'other' within those relations of power… Butler's fiction has consistently been concerned with transformations, difference, and the transgression of boundaries, which call into question the way in which the dominant discourses of race and gender attempt to fix definitions of 'alien' and 'other'. (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 29)

For both of these feminist authors what is most interesting and useful for feminism is the in-between, what emerges between the self and Other, between "nature" and "culture", when these categories are called into question. The point of convergence between these two writers is their recognition that the partial identities of a metaphorical figure of subversion and transgression such as the cyborg have the potential to achieve a different perspective on gender issues and femininity.

Even though the manifesto was published in 1986, more than twenty years ago, Haraway's comments, like many texts concerned with science fiction, are still useful and relevant today. In part, this enduring quality accounts for why this text has become such

a seminal one in connection with the fusion between the feminine and technology. It has also endured because of people's fascination with the Other, with technology and all the potential it holds, not only for mankind, but also womankind. One cannot help but invoke Haraway's words when looking at society today:

> I do not know of any other time in history when there was greater need for political unity to confront effectively the dominations of 'race', 'gender', 'sexuality', and 'class'. I also do not know of any other time when the kind of unity we might help build could have been possible. (Haraway, 157)

Haraway's inclination to subscribe to a "slightly perverse shift of perspective" (Haraway, 154) in order to contest for meaning and power in our current technologically mediated society has been acknowledged and praised by many other feminist writers and theorists involved in cyberfeminism.

The area of feminism which grew, in part, from Haraway's manifesto has close links to emerging communications technology, but cyberfeminism as a whole is not easily classified, and there are many divergent branches of feminism which are grouped together under this title. Sunden makes a distinction between the two main divergent tendencies in cyberfeminism:

> One of these [tendencies] operates on a sophisticated theoretical level of feminism and technoscience, where Donna Haraway's cyborg is a central character. The other formation is more openly connected to a political movement, searching to integrate different women's everyday lives and their actual use of communication technology. (Sunden, 215)

The focus of this dissertation is centred around the more theoretical cyberfeminism, but attempts to bridge the gap through a close analysis of how cyborg feminist texts encourage social action. The cyborg figures that are examined in terms of Haraway's parameters do not attempt some magical transcendence of gender boundaries with the aim of creating a "genderless utopia" (Sunden, 215) but rather it is shown that the cyborg can be a useful metaphorical tool for feminism in dismantling "natural" and restrictive female identities. This is not to say that the importance of online female communities, crucial in creating spaces of resistance for feminism, should be disregarded, but that for

analytical purposes the theoretical figure of the cyborg and the online feminist experience should be explored, to a certain extent, separately.

The figure of the cyborg as employed in feminist science fiction texts provides women with different ways of thinking "about how this world could be ordered through their inexhaustible telling of alternative narratives of our capacity for political change" (Sunden, 219). The cyborg functions to provide an alternative perspective on traditional and oppressive ways of thinking about the world, and most instrumental in its shifting of the boundaries of identity is transgression, followed by reconstruction, the latter two involving a step towards meaningful political action. Arguably, the cyborg's value lies in its liminal body which resists patriarchal appropriation, rather than encouraging social and collective feminist movements (Sunden, 219), but Nancy Paterson argues that cyberfeminism as a philosophy can create

> political identity and unity without relying on logic and language of exclusion and appropriation. It offers a route for reconstructing feminist politics and practice with a focus on the implications of new technology rather than on factors which are divisive. (Paterson quoted in Sunden, 221)

Cyberfeminist politics revolves around inclusion, affinity and choice, not only in terms of broader feminist politics, but more specifically in relation to technology. "Cyberfeminists investigate the celebratory yet contradictory nature of new technologies and work to determine methods of appropriation, intervention, or parallel practice to insert women's issues into the dominant technology discourse" (Flanagan & Looui, 181). This investigation by cyberfeminists is mainly framed in terms of transgression, and how technology allows women to appropriate power by means of deconstructing categories of gender. Cyberfeminism has progressed since Haraway's manifesto, but her emphasis on biotechnology rather than cyberspace still seems the most promising avenue for transgression and eventual change. Haraway's conviction that "biology – in its symbiotic relation with information systems – is an increasingly hegemonic discourse" (Kember, 626) means that feminists must engage with biotechnology to prevent the relegation of women in power hierarchies of gender to occur once more. Feminist strategies involving biotechnology must be "a more dialogic, less oppositional approach" which revels in the

non-homogeneous biological discourse and therefore "offers concrete and conceptual opportunities for change" (Kember, 627). Both biotechnological and cyberfeminist discourses are heterogeneous, and both are influenced by information systems theory which reads the body as code, a body which can be re-inscribed. Biotechnology is a promising avenue for cyberfeminism, as it is a branch of technology where "some of the most important political, ethical, social and economic issues of the day converg[e]" (Kember, 628). And as Haraway herself comments in later works "there is almost nothing you can do these days…that does not require literacy in biology" (Haraway quoted in Kember, 628). This perspective indicates the need for feminist engagement with biotechnological discourse.

The body is not something that is purely "textual" or "discursive", but it is something that can possibly "create a tension in relation to textual inscriptions", and it provides feminists with a site of resistance without it being viewed as "essence" (Sunden, 228). The female body is a site of performance, a site for patterns of femininity to be enacted upon and, in Rosi Braidotti's terms, a site where femininity can be treated "as an option, a set of available poses, a set of costumes rich in history and social power relations, but not compulsory any longer" (Sunden, 222). Cyborg identity is always in process, a fluid pattern consisting of performance and transgression. This approach enables feminist women to use traditional concepts in ways that enables them to create "new femininities and meaning" by imagin[ing] new gender identities by moving through the heart of traditional bipolar definitions of gender" (Sunden, 222). How feminist women relate to the category of woman reflects not only how the cyborg's transgressive elements enable the reconstruction of identity, but it also approximates what some online female communities do in terms of shifting and reinterpreting gender and identity categories, which in turn creates a space for the reinscription of feminine identity.

It is in the transgression and reconstruction of identity and gender that the value of cyberfeminism is manifested. Feminism is not a unified discourse, and it is in the divergent branches of feminism that true potential for change lies.

> [The] 'doubleness' in the heart of feminism can be a dynamic force that links very different women. The dynamic comes from the fact that both sides of the divide embrace elements from the other side, so that even if one chooses the same side over and over again, the decision can never be solid or final. One can be recalled to the locality of 'woman' any time, but one can never stay inside of these boundaries, because they keep moving. This implies that it is possible to change the meanings surrounding the divide—but it requires constant work. (Sunden, 230)

It is the cyborg's liminality, its implicit transgressiveness and its fluid identity which resists "natural" prescriptions of identity which Haraway first identified, which mark it as one of the most useful tools for feminism, best-suited to the task of moving in and outside the boundaries of "woman" to create spaces of resistance, to instigate change and to reconstruct what it means to be a woman.

TWO

Cyborg Dancer: Changing Feminine Identity and Challenging Patriarchal Authority Through Subversive Performance

In 1944, two years before the first computer was produced, the intimacy with technology which now characterises the world was still a science fictional dream, but its pervasive influence on the way we think and perceive the world around us could already be detected. An example of this influence is a novella by C.L. Moore entitled *No Woman Born* which was published in a pulp magazine entitled *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1944. Catherine Moore was one of the most influential science fiction writers of her time, a female author in the still male-dominated field of science fiction. Like any science fiction author of that era, she wrote from the male perspective, a perspective which remains unquestioned in her other novellas, but is utterly subverted in *No Woman Born*. As Rafealla Baccolini notes in her essay "In-Between Subjects: C.L. Moore's 'No Woman Born'", Moore's novella subverts the conventional plot of male creator and monstrous creation by presenting the reader with a strong female heroine who finds her own voice and who also gains control over her body. Through this female cyborg, Moore subverts traditional assumptions about gendered identities, but she also underlines the importance of perspective and its limitations, as well as the skewed power relations between men and women (Baccolini, 145).

This chapter will analyse *No Woman Born* in the context of the theories of Judith Halberstam and Anne Balsamo that are concerned with the female body and fusions of the feminine and technology. The text was chosen specifically because it pre-dates Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* by about forty years, an immensely useful text which draws attention to important issues in feminism, but can seem larger than life at times. *No Woman Born* clearly shows that the theme of fusion between the feminine and technology had been current in science fiction long before the manifesto. The novella was written before the feminism of the seventies, therefore it may be seen as a proto-

feminist text, which appeared at a time when the very real effects of technology on society were becoming clear.

No Woman Born is the story of Deirdre, a dancer and singer who enthralled the world with her performances which were broadcast all over the world. One night, a fire breaks out in the theatre where she is performing and the world mourns one of its greatest performers, but Deirdre is not dead. On the night of the performance a Dr Maltzer was present in the audience, and it is he who, with a team of specialists, crafts a metal body for Deirdre's brain, which was undamaged by the fire. A year after the fire, Deirdre is determined to perform once again in front of a live audience in a performance which will, as before, be broadcast live to the entire world. Harris, Deirdre's former manager, and Maltzer feel she is "too fragile" to perform, but Deirdre goes ahead as planned, and delivers a mesmerising performance. Afterwards, Maltzer attempts to commit suicide to try and stop Deirdre from continuing with her plans to perform again, but her new body also comes with new powerful abilities, and she saves him.

The feminist aspects of Moore's novella manifest in two ways: the deconstruction of the patriarchal perspective of the male characters who attempt to gain control over Deirdre, and the way in which Deirdre is able to speak for herself and resist their attempts at categorising her by presenting them with a completely revolutionary femininity. Although Moore herself never uses the term "cyborg", it is still clear that Deirdre is neither completely human nor machine: it is significant that the hybrid of human and machine with which the reader is presented is female. As Anne Balsamo notes in her essay "Reading Cyborgs Writing Feminism", "female cyborg images do *more* to challenge the opposition between human and machine than do male cyborgs because femininity is culturally imagined as less compatible with technology than is masculinity" (Balsamo, 151). Perhaps it is such a powerful image because Deirdre almost effortlessly avoids the controlling aspects of the male gaze which tries to sexualise her, and neutralise the threat she poses to the status quo. It is precisely Deirdre's constructed nature as a woman which is highlighted and subverted by her new body that is crafted from golden metal.

The first line of the story, looking back at Deirdre's life as a human reads, "She had been the loveliest creature whose image ever moved along the airways" (Moore, 200). Before we are introduced to her, Deirdre's beauty seems to be her defining aspect: the male gaze encompasses all that is important for the reader to know about Deirdre, that she is beautiful. While Harris is waiting to meet her, in her new shape, he imagines what she will now look like: "No one at all had known what shape would be forged to clothe the most beautiful woman on Earth, now that her beauty was gone…what metal shape could possibly do more than house ungraciously the mind and brain that had once enchanted a whole world?" (204-205). Harris is unable to imagine Deirdre as an undamaged person; he does not know how to think of her now that her conventional beauty is gone and she can no longer be defined by the objectified and sexualised nature imposed on her by the male gaze. As soon as Harris sees the new Deirdre the continual oscillation between impressions of her as human and then as machine start, an oscillation which will continue throughout the text.

> The first impression that his eyes and mind took from the sight of her was shocked and incredulous, for his brain said to him unbelievingly, *"This is Deirdre! She hasn't changed at all!"*
> Then the shift of perspective took over, and even more shockingly, eye and brain said, "No, not Deirdre—not human. Nothing but metal coils. Not Deirdre at all—"And that was the worst…Deirdre was gone, and this was only machinery heaped in a flowered chair.
> Then the machinery moved, exquisitely, smoothly, with a grace as familiar as the swaying poise he remembered. The sweet husky voice of Deirdre said,
> "It's me, John darling. It really is, you know."
> And it was.
> That was the third metamorphosis, and the final one. Illusion steadied and became factual, real. It was Deirdre.
> He sat down bonelessly. He had no muscles. He looked at her speechless, and unthinking, letting his senses take in the sight of her without trying to rationalize what he saw. (205)

Of course, the metamorphosis is not fact but still illusion, and remains illusion despite Harris's statement, drawing attention not only to the illusory boundary between human and machine, nature and culture but also the closely guarded boundaries of gender. Harris desperately seizes on the familiarity he perceives so as to once again try and define Deirdre as female, as controllable and desirable. Importantly, Harris is unable to

rationalise what he sees, and his strength literally leaves him in her presence, leaving him to sit speechless in his chair. Deirdre eludes attempts at pinning her down as either human or machine and this elusiveness is made even more evident by the images with which Moore describes her.

> The motion was very smooth. Also it was serpentine, as if the body beneath the coat of mail were made in the same interlocking sections as her limbs…Then she put her featureless helmeted head a little to one side, and he heard her laughter as familiar in its small, throaty, intimate sound as he had ever heard it from her living throat. And every gesture, every attitude, every flowing of motion into motion was so utterly Deirdre that the overwhelming illusion swept his mind again and this was the flesh-and-blood woman as clearly as if he saw her standing there whole once more, like Phoenix from the fire. (208)

Here the image with which the reader is presented moves from being serpentine, to the flesh-and-blood woman Deirdre once was. It is always Deirdre's laughter that allows the garment of humanity to slip over her metal form, assuring Harris and Maltzer that she is indeed still human. In another example, Deirdre's form is described as a "knight in armor" (207) and "th[e] odd likeness to knighthood was there again, with its implications of medieval richness behind the simple lines" (222). These images imply that her metal form is hiding her humanity in the way a knight's armour would, but also associating Deirdre's identity, and therefore also femininity, with a figure of strength, even of violence.

Deirdre is never named explicitly as a cyborg in the narrative, but Harris does say that "She isn't human…But she isn't pure robot either. She's something somewhere between the two, and I think it's a mistake to try and guess just where, or what the outcome will be" (219). Nowhere is the continuous oscillation between human and machine more prominent than during Deirdre's performance. Before she goes on stage, a line of dancers moves across the stage "solemn and charming as performing dolls", and the master of ceremonies "with features like an amiable marionette's announced a very special number as the finale" (221). Here the dancers and master of ceremonies who take the stage before Deirdre are described in terms which make them seem robot-like or inhuman. Deirdre too starts off her dance seemingly as a robot, "Many must have thought her at first some wonderfully animate robot…for certainly she was no woman

dressed in metal—her proportions were too thin and fine for that" (222). Then her performance moves to the realm of the super-human:

> By the time she reached the stage floor she was dancing. But it was no dance that any human creature could ever have performed…it was humanity that seemed, by contrast, jointed and mechanical now...The dance was no dance a human being could have performed. The music she hummed came from a throat without vocal chords… (222-223)

Deirdre's dance calls to mind how gender can also be seen as a performance, as propagated by Judith Butler's theory. Deirdre makes the dance her own and with each movement she creates an image, perhaps even illusion, which evokes certain expectations from her audience. Deirdre creates an identity for herself on stage, one that is completely fluid and under her control. Another shift follows and Deirdre moves from keeping her audience guessing as to her new identity, to seemingly resolving their dilemma by appearing as "just a woman".

> But when she reached the head of the stairs she turned to face her audience, and for a moment stood motionless, like a creature of metal, without volition, the hands of the operator slack upon its strings.
> Then, startlingly, she laughed.
> …And she was a woman now. Humanity had dropped over her like a tangible garment. No one who had ever heard that laughter before could mistake it here. (224)

Deirdre is neither a human nor a machine, she is both at once, destabilising more than one set of boundaries concerning humanity. The distribution of the human and machine aspects of the cyborg is not simply symmetrical and "the proximity of each to the other and the combination of dissimilar parts produces a hybrid often unrecognizable as any familiar personage" (Balsamo, 33). Because the cyborg disrupts the stable human / machine dualism, it also causes instability in other apparently reliable oppositions, specifically gender.

In *No Woman Born*, Deirdre is seen as fragile by Harris, and more specifically by Maltzer, precisely because according to his standards she is no longer a woman.

> She was so delicate a being now, really. Nothing but a glowing and radiant mind poised in metal, dominating it, bending the steel to the illusion of her lost

loveliness with a sheer self-confidence that gleamed through the metal body. But
the brain sat delicately on its poise of reason. (213)

As Deirdre becomes more assertive, the two male characters become weaker and lose
their definitive masculine traits. "[Maltzer] was clearly on the verge of collapse, and
Harris felt a sudden cold uncertainty open up in him in the one place where until now he
had been oddly confident" (202), and "[Harris's] knees let him down in to the chair she
had vacated. Mingled shock and relief loosened all his muscles in him, and she was more
poised and confident than he" (209). This reversal of traditional gender roles, where the
male characters are now weak, further transgresses gender and identity boundaries.
Conventional views of gender and identity are constantly displaced as Deirdre is revealed
to be stronger and more confident than her male creator and former manager. "Deirdre's
new body scares the men in the story because it violates female identity: the perception of
the sexual aura or power that her mechanical body emanates is extremely frightening for
Harris and Maltzer" (Baccolini, 146). No longer is Deirdre's female identity defined by
the male gaze and because of this her sexuality becomes threatening to Harris and
Maltzer: she has passes outside of the realm of their control and ability to define her as
"naturally" weak and submissive.

It is perhaps this challenge to patriarchy, as represented in the narrative by Maltzer,
which causes this "uncharacteristic" weakness in the two male characters.

> [C]yborgs are a product of fears and desires that run deep within our cultural
> imagination. Through the use of technology as the means or context for human
> hybridization, cyborgs come to represent unfamiliar 'otherness', one that
> challenges the denotative stability of human identity. (Balsamo, 32)

By denying the men traditional notions of masculinity, and more importantly, not
questioning this lack, Moore is implying that, like Deirdre, their male identity is neither
stable nor determined by their bodies. By deconstructing the "traditional image of man"
Moore is enabling the traditional perception of women's identity to be questioned as well
(Baccolini, 146), and it is in this sense that Deirdre's Otherness empowers her. Because
the cyborg represents a challenging and unfamiliar Other, it manages to expose the

constructedness of Otherness on which stable identity depends, much as it also exposes the constructed nature of gender, as well as the female body.

> Cyborg identity is predicated on transgressed boundaries…Formed through a radical disruption of other-ness, cyborg identity foregrounds the constructedness of otherness. Cyborgs alert us to the ways culture and discourse depend upon notions of 'the other' that are arbitrary and binary, and also shifting and unstable. Who or what gets constructed as other becomes a site for the cultural contestation of meaning within feminist politics. (Balsamo, 155)

To Maltzer, the loss of Deirdre's assigned gender makes her vulnerable but in fact, quite the opposite is true.

> "She all right?" Harris asked inanely, stepping inside.
> "Oh yes . . .yes *she's* all right." Maltzer bit his thumbnail and glanced over his shoulder at an inner door, where Harris guessed she would be waiting.
> "She *is* all right?" he demanded, taking the glass.
> "Oh yes, she is perfect. She is so confident it scares me." Maltzer gulped his drink and poured another before he sat down. (202)

Maltzer repeatedly tries to gain control over Deirdre and she consistently thwarts his attempts. In his eyes she is his Frankenstein-like creation for which he must take responsibility: Maltzer believes that he has crippled her because she is no longer a "woman".

> "Of course she can't compete [with the female dancers which perform before her]," he cried irritably. "She hasn't any sex. She isn't female any more. She doesn't know that yet, but she'll learn.
> …She's an abstraction now…I don't know what it'll do to her, but there'll be change…She lost everything that made her essentially what the public wanted, and she's going to find out the hard way.
> …One of the strongest stimuli to a woman of her type was the knowledge of sex competition. You know how she sparkled when a man came into the room? All that's gone, and it was an essential". (218-219)

To Maltzer, a woman is essentially defined by her gender, but Deirdre's hybrid status disrupts this. Judith Halberstam argues that the cyborg, because of its constructed hybrid nature, reveals gender as also being constructed. Moore exposes this constructed aspect of gender specifically through how Maltzer and Harris see and understand Deirdre and the female body. Maltzer believes that women's delicate and vulnerable bodies indicate a delicate and vulnerable identity (Baccolini, 144), but also, significantly, when Deirdre

loses her ability to be a desirable object according to Maltzer, it seems to seal her fate as a sub-human entity in his eyes. Maltzer believes in an essential organic nature of woman which, in Deirdre's case, is "corrupted" by her association with the artificial. No longer can he believe that there is a directly causal relationship between her body and her gender identity as a woman.

> The ground between the goddess and the cyborg clearly stakes out the contested territory between the category of 'woman' and the gendered 'body'. So, if the goddess is an ideal congruence between anatomy and femininity, the cyborg instead posits femininity as automation, a coded masquerade. (Halberstam, 449)

Deirdre's new body allows her to "manufacture" her own femininity, creating a fluid and dynamic identity for herself through her performance. This reconstruction reveals that her feminine identity before the accident was similarly constructed, but by patriarchal norms which were based on an ideal congruence between anatomy and femininity. Following Halberstam's argument about how the social relations between gender and science have drawn attention to "the politics of artificiality", Deirdre cannot be corrupted by the artificial because gender, therefore both femininity and masculinity, is artificial. A woman can no longer be defined by her femininity, which is associated with motherhood, emotion or apparent vulnerability: Deirdre resists Maltzer's attempts to force her into a category through which he can understand her, and instead, she forges her own. Her status as a female cyborg exposes the political motivations of patriarchy, embodied by Maltzer, who insists that gender stems from nature, by denying nature almost entirely with her golden body.

Deirdre's new cyborg body gives her access to power she had previously been denied, but regardless of Deirdre's new found self-assertion there is an undeniable link with Maltzer, who was perhaps not her creator as much as her preserver, but still the person who is responsible in part for her transformation. "There has been between them a sort of unimaginable marriage stranger than anything that could ever have taken place before" (203). There is in a way an exchange of gender traits between Maltzer and Deirdre which occurs during her "birth" as a cyborg: Deirdre ascends to the assertive position in the power relationship between them while Maltzer progressively becomes weaker.

"Now look, John! That's another idea you and Maltzer will have to get out of your minds. I don't belong to him. In a way he's just been my doctor through a long illness, but I'm free to discharge him whenever I choose…he doesn't own [my body], or me. The body may be his work, but the brain that makes it something more than a collection of metal rings is *me*, and he couldn't restrain me against my will even if he wanted to". (237)

A significant issue which Maltzer cannot grasp is Deirdre's "loss of humanity", an aspect of her new body for which he feels solely responsible. He repeatedly underlines her fragility which, in his opinion, stems from her distance from humanity, and he links this distance to the loss of her senses. To Maltzer, all of Deirdre's grace and charm stems from human contact and "the things that stimulate sensitive minds to creativeness"; and the loss of three of her five senses makes her "handicapped" and a "freak" cut off from humanity (220).

Everything she can't see and hear is gone…You know how liquor stimulated her? She's lost that. She couldn't taste food or drink even if she needed it. Perfume, flowers, all the odors we respond to mean nothing to her now. She can't feel anything with tactual delicacy any more. She used to surround herself with luxuries – she drew her stimuli from them – and that's all gone too. She's withdrawn from all physical contact…We need those primitive senses to tie us in with nature and the race (219).

Maltzer feels that Deirdre has lost touch with what made her essentially human – her "primitive" senses – and this belief also implies that she has lost touch with what made her essentially female: he sees her as fragile, as a freak. To him there is no possibility that Deirdre could have any abilities which could compensate for this loss and thus it makes her "less than human" (234). But contrary to this, she has in fact gained others which to an extent replace and perhaps supersede the conventional and primitive senses.

"You were afraid I had lost feeling and scent and taste," she went on, still pacing with that powerful, tigerish tread. "Hearing and sight would not be enough, you think? But why do you think sight is the last of the senses? It may be the latest, Maltzer—Harris—*but why do you think it's the last?"*
She may not have whispered that. Perhaps it was only their hearing that made it seem thin and distant, as the brain contracted and would not let the thought come through in its stunning entirety. (240-241)

Deirdre embraces her new cyborg form, with all its implications of distance from the essential nature, not only of humanity but also of femininity.

> The female cyborg…once and for all [severs] the assumed connection between woman and nature upon which entire patriarchal structures rest. The female cyborg, furthermore, exploits a traditionally masculine fear of the deceptiveness of appearances and calls into question the boundaries of human, animal, and machine precisely where they are most vulnerable – at the site of the female body. (Halberstam, 440)

The female body is a complex figure, and this complexity is emphasised in the tale by Deirdre's constantly shifting appearance. The deceptiveness of appearances is emphasised in the novella through the different images of Deirdre that are not all congruent, and the reader is presented with constantly shifting and contradictory representations of her.

> She looked, indeed, very much like a creature in armor, with her delicately plated limbs and her featureless head like a helmet with a visor of glass, and her robe of chain-mail. But no knight in armor ever moved as Deirdre moved, or wore his armor upon a body of such inhumanely fine proportions. (207-208)

These contradictory images also expose the male characters' single vision which is determined by their attempts to produce "universal, totalising narratives" (Baccolini, 146). Moore undermines this patriarchal perspective by showing that Deirdre's body and identity are not easily slotted into a determining category, that illusion can appear as reality and vice versa.

In the narrative, Deirdre's body is described in great detail, how it moves and how it reacts to her thoughts but, in a significant contrast, Deirdre has no face.

> She had only a smooth, delicately modelled ovoid for her head, with a . . . a sort of crescent shaped mask across the frontal area where her eyes would have been if she had needed eyes. A narrow, curbed quarter-moon, with the horns turned upward. It was filled in with something translucent, like cloudy crystal, and tinted the aquamarine of the eyes Deirdre used to have. Through that, then, she saw the world. Through that she looked without eyes…But he was glad they had not given her two eye-shaped openings with glass marbles inside them. The mask was better…The mask was symbol enough for the woman within. (206)

The passage draws attention to Deirdre's newly acquired perspective from her position as a cyborg, "Through that, then, she saw the world. Through that she looked without eyes…" (206). Deirdre is defined by her body, a combination of machine, the feminine

and human, which enables her to access power she had been denied before, but the phrase, "the mask was symbol enough for the woman within" draws attention to how "woman" has been defined by a constructed femininity which symbolises every woman in a very exclusionary process. Naomi Wolf's controversial book, *The Beauty Myth,* written in the early nineties, contains, by the author's own admission, some exaggerated statistics, but the central premise reminds sound: the beauty myth was constructed to perpetuate controlling measures concerned with feminine attributes and behaviour (Bryannan). Wolf argues that "a standard of femininity that is impossible to attain" (Bryannan) has been created and that women's internal measure of themselves as valuable individuals has been damaged, as it is largely based on physical attractiveness. Wolf traces the origins of these constricting rules of femininity to the nineteenth century, when women's identity was intimately connected to their ability to reproduce. For example, if a woman read too much "her uterus would 'atrophy' [and] if she kept on reading her reproductive system would collapse, 'and we should have before us a repulsive and useless hybrid'" (Bryannan). Participation in any activities which would lead to female empowerment, such as education, employment, politics and science, was made out to be the origin of illness in Victorian women. "When a woman displays scientific interest, then there is something out of order in her sexuality" (Wolf quoted in Bryannan). Constructions of femininity have changed over time, but the most unsettling construction is that of the "perfect woman" presented by the media.

Women are confronted by an image of femininity created in advertisements and other publications of a "perfect" woman who is beautiful, tall, and slim, in her mid-twenties with no visible flaws or wrinkles, and her hair, clothes and make-up always impeccable (Bryannan). Women judge themselves against this symbol of femininity created by professional stylists specialising in hair, make up and clothes, and more often than not those images have been digitally manipulated. Energy which could be used to further personal, professional, and political goals is utilised in an attempt to measure up to this symbol of femininity, with many women's confidence being undermined by feelings of inadequacy about their appearance, instead of their measuring themselves by their personal achievements. Of course, measures of control over the female body are not all

created so clearly by the media, and some measures appear to be "natural": women are naturally weaker than men, both physically and mentally, and females are seen as the caregivers, and should therefore be maternal and caring. The female body has been imbued with values and attributes which masquerade as "natural" to maintain the female as Other, and to ensure control over the construction of femininity. In *No Woman Born*, Deirdre's new body is described as a prison, but ironically her new body is the key which lets her out of the prison of her old gender-constructed body. "Could she be imprisoned in the cage of her own body? No body before in all history, he thought, could have been designed more truly to be a prison for its mind than Deirdre's, if Maltzer chose to turn the key that locked her in" (227-228). As the story progresses, we see that Malzer cannot "[choose] to turn the key" as he has no control over Deirdre: she finally owns herself.

This passage in the novella highlights the importance of the female body and suggests how it can be seen as a site where one can witness the struggles within the social order. The metaphor of the cyborg brings forth the possibilities of new forms of gendered embodiment because its indeterminate and trangressive body defies the "natural" physical identity of gender (Balsamo, 39). In the narrative, Deirdre no longer has a female body which can be identified with other women's bodies, but she still possesses a certain female energy which cannot be categorised by patriarchy. The figure of the cyborg does not only destabilise the concept of the body, but foregrounds the materiality of the body, something which should not be ignored by feminism: the body cannot simply be written out of the narrative of gender, and feminists need to engage with it in order to transform it into something not controlled or restricted by patriarchy.

Throughout the novella, the importance of Deirdre's body is highlighted. "From now on, Harris realized suddenly, it was her body and not her face that would have mobility to express emotion; she must act with her limbs and her lithe, robed torso…" (230). Deirdre's metal body is held together only with electromagnetic currents:

> So this body . . . did he tell you? . . . works entirely through the brain. Electromagnetic currents flowing along from ring to ring, like this." She rippled a boneless arm at him with a motion like flowing water. "Nothing holds me together—nothing!—except muscles of magnetic currents. (209)

Deirdre's cyborg body is an example of how the "cyborg connects a discursive body with a historically material body by taking account of the ways in which the body is constructed within different social and cultural formations" (Balsamo, 33). The body is not purely discursive or material, but is both at once. The body is understood through representations of knowledge about the body: there is no nature / culture dichotomy, as both are "mutually determining systems of understanding". The discourse of the body cannot be completely divorced from its material manifestation – both are shaped by interpretative frameworks (Balsamo, 22; 23).

Due to this exchange of meaning between the symbolic and physical body, neither can be viewed as "natural", and this enables feminism to deconstruct the so-called "natural" female body (Balsamo, 24). This deconstruction can be seen in Deirdre's case, as her physical body is unlike anything patriarchy has been confronted with before. Deirdre's duality manifests on almost every level of meaning concerned with the female human body, and it is exactly Deirdre's recognition of herself as a liminal subject which makes her such a strong and assertive figure (Baccolini, 151). Deirdre is able to consciously alternate between appearing as her old self or as her new metal body.

> To Harris she was the Deirdre he had always known, pale gold, exquisitely graceful in remembered postures, the inner radiance of her shining through metal as brilliantly as it had ever shone through flesh. He did not wonder, no, if it were real. Later he would think again that it might be only a disguise, something like a garment she had put off with her lost body, to wear again only when she chose. (235-236)

It seems that Deirdre is an excellent performer, and the oscillation between her appearance as human or machine and her femininity is completely under her control. Moore further subverts the patriarchal perspective by pointing out its bias in Harris and Maltzer. "He [Harris] had known her too well in the flesh to see her objectively even now, in metal (213" and "'I've [Maltzer] been too close to her…I have no perspective anymore'" (202). The reader gets the impression that the opinions and views of the two male characters are not to be trusted.

> The indomitable Deirdre herself shone so vividly through the metal that his mind kept superimposing one upon the other …

"I've always had…well, power over my audiences. Any good performer knows when he's got it. Mine isn't gone. I can still give them what I always gave, only now with greater variations and more depths than I'd ever have done before …" (214).

These shifts in appearance also reveal to the reader the constructed nature of the body, and this in turn relates to Michel Feher's "thick perception" of the body. This process of thick perception includes the analysis of the "different modes of construction of the human body" (Balsamo, 3).

> [The history of the body] is a history of 'body building', of the different modes of construction of the human body. The body perceived in this way is not a reality to be uncovered in a positivistic description of an organism nor is it a transhistorical set of needs and desires to be freed from an equally transhistorical form of repression. This body is instead a reality constantly produced, an effect of techniques promoting specific gestures and postures, sensations and feelings. Only in tracing these modes of its construction can one arrive at a thick perception of the present 'state of the body'. ("Of Bodies and Technologies", Michel Feher quoted in Balsamo, 3)

Deirdre's indeterminate body and identity reveal these different modes of construction, and the fact that she resists Maltzer's attempts at categorising her also denies his pseudo-scientific labelling. The different modes of construction can be related back to how the female body was historically constructed as a hybrid case, as Mary Poovey concludes after studying medical textbooks from the nineteenth century. She illustrates how the female body was

> historically constructed as the object of medical attention and control…the female body that is an effect of the construction of identity/authority of obstetricians in nineteenth-century medical discourse is a hybrid creature formed through the articulations among social practices, the development of new knowledge, and changing patterns of power and authority. (Balsamo, 27-28)

Thomas Laqueur's perspective on the female body concurs with Poovey's in that he argues that the female body "was at the center of a radical 18th century reinterpretation of the patriarchal social hierarchy", and he places this transformation in terms of the cultural perspective of the "nature" of the female body in the eighteenth century (Balsamo, 25). Science in the eighteenth century established and strongly reinforced the naturalised hierarchies among human bodies against which we are still struggling today. The female

body was defined in terms of its reproductive abilities and these definitions had far-reaching social and cultural consequences:

> The political, economic and cultural transformations of the 18th century created the context in which the articulation of radical differences between the sexes became culturally imperative. In a world in which science was increasingly viewed as providing insight into the fundamental truths of creation, in which nature as manifested in the unassailable reality of bones and organs was taken to be the only foundation of the moral order, a biology of incommensurability became the means by which such differences could be authoritatively represented. (Laqueur quoted in Balsamo, 26)

The reading Laqueur offers, emphasises issues of social control in relation to the female body. The question Balsamo asks is: If female bodies are fundamentally different from male bodies, and not simply inferior, then how does one control a body that isn't entirely knowable? (Balsamo, 26) It is here that Poovey's study of nineteenth century medical textbooks becomes so crucial in terms of issues of control. In her study, Poovey explains how medical discourse portrayed the female body as "excessive and threatening to the epistemological boundaries of the prevailing social order": the female body was defined as "always lacking and needing control" (Balsamo, 27). A paradox exists in this definition: a woman is an inherently unstable female body which thus authorises limitless medical monitoring and control, but this representation of woman as always requiring control "produces her as always already exceeding the control that medicine can exercise" (Poovey quoted in Balsamo, 27).

It is this liminal aspect of the female body which is the source of much of the power of the female cyborg, as it is a site of immense potential for the transgression of social boundaries. The liminal definition of the female body also highlights the fact that the female body is not an essential, natural or biologically determined figure, but is constructed through various cultural discourses situated in different historical contexts (Balsamo, 22): the body is understood through representations of knowledge about the body and there is no nature / culture dichotomy.

> The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of

meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other.   (Mary Douglas quoted in Balsamo, 24)

This way of defining the female body enables feminists to deconstruct the "natural" female body and, within this perspective, gender is then redefined as "a body attribute that is assigned, organized, and acquired through the process of social perception" (Balsamo, 24), in no way "natural" or biologically determined.   This argument also relates to Judith Butler's theory of the performativity of gender, which suggests that a body's gender is constructed through social acts and is not completely determined by physical aspects such as genitalia, although definitions of gender do rely on the "natural" body.

By emphasising the construction of the body and its associated gender, the unitary identity of the female body is resisted.   Veronica Hollinger points out that Moore's novella "offers, finally, not unified meaning, but difference and contradiction in its exploration of the role of woman-as-subject" (Hollinger quoted in Baccolini, 151). From this point of view, Deirdre functions as a metaphor for the complex feminist subject in the tale.   Cyborgs are not completely organic or completely technological, which translates into their ability to disrupt boundaries between the traditional dualism of nature / culture.   This disruption of boundaries enables us to rethink the "theoretical construction of the body as both a material entity and discursive process", and therefore provides a "framework for studying gender identity as it is technologically crafted simultaneously from the matter of material bodies and cultural fictions" (Balsamo, 11).   The following passage from the novella exemplifies how Deirdre can shrug off the constructed aspects of gender that the male characters try to force on her, but at the same time use those aspects if she so wishes.

> He did not wonder, now, if it were real. Later he would think again that it might be only a disguise, something like a garment she had put off with her lost body, to wear again only when she chose. Now the spell of her compelling charm was too strong for wonder. He watched, convinced for the moment that she was all she seemed to be. She could play Juliet if she said she could. She could sway a whole audience as easily as she swayed himself. (236)

The way in which Deirdre's character is presented to the reader, how attention is drawn to her metal body and how it functions, is a perfect example of the exposure of underlying gender and social structures which the cyborg enables: the female body is shown to be a "constructed artifact of various systems of meaning" (Balsamo 34).

The construction of gender can be likened to Deirdre's performance on stage.

> The languor and the rhythm of her patterns looked impromptu, as all good dances should, but Harris knew what hours of composition and rehearsal must lie behind it, what laborious graving into her brain of strange new pathways, the first to replace the old ones and govern the mastery of metal limbs…In her mind, Harris knew, the stage was a whole, a background to be filled in completely with the measured patterns of her dance, and she seemed almost to project that completed pattern to her audience so that they saw her everywhere at once, her golden rhythms fading upon the air long after she had gone. (223)

Deirdre constructs an image for her audience through an elaborate rehearsal of practiced moves, much like gender is an elaborate rehearsal of specific patterns to project a certain image of femininity or masculinity. The novelty of her hybrid gender is emphasised by how her dance signifies the beginning of something new. Harris describes how the stage looks just before Deirdre enters:

> [T]he effect was one of strange and wonderful anticipation, as if something very splendid must be hidden in the haze. The world might have looked like this on the first morning of creation, before heaven and earth took form in the mind of God. It was a singularly fortunate choice of stage set in its symbolism… (221)

Deirdre is truly something new on earth, not just in terms of her body but also her femininity.

Deirdre's new body allows her to subvert the attempts at controlling her. Maltzer tries to convince her that she is an unlawful creation, a mistake, and that she should live out the rest of her life in hiding, but Deirdre finds her voice and speaks out against him.

> "I'm not – well, sub-human," she said, a faint note of indignation in her voice…"There's a flaw in your argument, and I resent it. I'm not a Frankenstein monster made out of dead flesh. I'm myself—alive. You didn't create my life, you only preserved it. I'm not a robot, with compulsions built into me that I have to obey. I'm free-willed and independent, and, Maltzer—I'm human". (234; 235)

Her new body also provides a channel for her strength, and her inner strength is able to manifest in a physical way.

> And then, while they waited in anxiety for her to finish the sentence, she *blazed*. She ceased to be a figure in stasis—she *blazed*.
>
> It was something no eyes could watch and translate into terms the brain could follow; her motion was too swift… "Do you still think of me as delicate?" she demanded. "Do you know I carried you here at arm's length halfway across the room? Do you realize you weigh *nothing* to me? I could"—she glanced around the room and gestured with sudden, rather appalling violence—"tear this building down," she said quietly. (237)

Much as her strength is able to manifest itself, so is her voice, her ability to speak up for herself, manifested in an almost super-human power.

> She put her head back and a deep, vibrating hum gathered and grew in what one still thought of as her throat. It deepened swiftly and the ears began to ring. It was deeper, and the furniture vibrated. The wall began almost imperceptibly to shake. The room was full and bursting with a sound that shook every atom upon its neighbor with a terrible, disrupting force.
>
> The sound ceased. The humming died. Then Deirdre laughed and made another and quite differently pitched sound. It seemed to reach out like an arm in one straight direction—toward the window. The opened panel shook. Deirdre intensified her hum, and slowly, with imperceptible jolts that merged into smoothness, the window jarred itself shut.
>
> "You see?" Deirdre said. "You see?"
>
> But still Maltzer could only stare. Harris was staring too, his mind beginning slowly to accept what she implied. Both were too stunned to leap ahead to any conclusions yet. (240)

Deirdre is able to affirm her independence through her control of language, and this in turn enables her to redefine her humanity "independently of her creator's intention" (Baccolini, 142). Her new body and voice allow at least one of the male characters, Harris, to acknowledge her strength now that she is no longer categorised as a "fragile woman". "She turned away and moved smoothly, powerfully, down the room to the window. Now that Harris knew, he could almost hear the sheer power purring along her limbs as she walked" (242).

No Woman Born ends with Deirdre's words of contemplation on the possibilities her new form holds: "'There is so much still untried…I wonder, though…I do wonder—…'I wonder," she repeated, the distant taint of metal already in her voice" (242). These words

of speculation reject the patriarchal assumptions embodied by Harris and Maltzer in the narrative (Baccolini, 150). This is not to say that the cyborg should be viewed as a utopian figure or image for feminism, but rather as a tool to expose gender and identity constructions, and as parallel cases, both "woman" and cyborg are "at the same time produced symbolically and biologically and reproduced through social interactions" (Balsamo, 34). C.L. Moore's tale, *No Woman Born* shows the promise of the fusion of the feminine and technology has for feminism, long before Donna Haraway's manifesto or the advent of cyberfeminism.

The novella shows how the fusion of the feminine and technology can enable the construction of a new female subject that is not subject to patriarchal norms and categories. By de-centering the coherent self, the cyborg offers feminists the means to construct a new female subject (Baccolini, 141). Gendered subjects are constructed through language and culture, and the cyborg addresses the issue of identity specifically at the phase of construction, offering the reader a figure which is literally and figuratively constructed.

> Women, who for centuries had been the *objects* of male theorizing, male desires, male fears and male representations, had to discover and reappropriate themselves as *subjects*…The call went out to invent both a new poetics and a new politics, based on women's reclaiming what had always been theirs but had been usurped from them: control over their bodies and a voice with which to speak about it. (Suleiman quoted in Baccolini, 140)

In the story, Deirdre represents both of the aims of the new politics Suleiman describes: she has control over her own body and she has found a voice to speak about and for it. To undermine the female subject which was constructed by patriarchy, Moore presents us with a very complex figure of femininity, embodied in the cyborgian figure of Deirdre, a figure that has multiple dimensions instead of a conventional unitary self.

In her manifesto, Haraway encourages feminists to embrace this figure of the cyborg, which features explicitly in the breakdown of clear boundaries and categories that construct the Western self (Baccolini, 152), but a question which remains, despite the possibilities of the cyborg, is whether it is sustainable and will not simply collapse back

into old hierarchies of power relations of gender and authority. In *No Woman Born*, Deirdre is clearly the powerful figure, the one who overturns norms and expectations, but there is a note of doubt about whether her existence will signify a revolutionary change for *all* women.

> "What you did was kindle the fire for the Phoenix, in a way. And the Phoenix rises perfect and renewed from its own ashes. Do you remember why it had to reproduce itself that way?"
> "It was because there was only one Phoenix. Only one in the whole world". (241)

Deirdre redefines femininity in a revolutionary manner, but whether it will have implications for all of womankind in the tale is another question which is not answered completely by the narrative. One wants to believe that because of Deirdre's fame, and the fact that "never before Deirdre's day had the entire world been able to take one woman so wholly to its heart", she would be able to exert some influence on how women are viewed, but also how they think about themselves. Will her figure of femininity be too unfamiliar to grasp fully, or will any attempt at being like her result in poor imitations?

> "Why"—her voice took on a tinge of contempt—"already I've set a fashion in women's clothing. By next week you won't see a woman on the street without a mask like mine, and every dress that isn't cut like a chlamys will be out of style." (240)

However, this ambiguous note does not deny the subversion that Moore accomplishes in her novella: the narrative successfully questions gender categories and exposes their constructedness, creating a new figure of femininity, one who has gained power through her fusion with technology. Deirdre truly creates her own performance of femininity which she enacts with ease and confidence regardless of any doubts or fears raised by Harris or Maltzer. Deirdre altogether denies the power of the male gaze, she is no sexualised object, instead, she is able to adopt feminine attributes as it pleases her without allowing them to define her. She proves that the female body is not "always lacking and [in need of] control" (Poovey quoted in Balsamo, 27), but that she can own herself. To Deirdre, gender is something more fluid and malleable than patriarchal discourse would have us believe. Her new beautiful and powerful golden body denies the "natural" female body or gender identities which are imbued with prescriptive and restrictive

values: she embraces the ambiguity and fluidity which her new femininity bestows on her with grace, power and hope.

THREE

***He, She, and It*: Spaces of Resistance and the Construction of Revolutionary Subjects**

To paraphrase Marge Piercy, the author of *He, She, and It*, cyberpunk is all one playground (*He, She, and It,* Acknowledgements), and the genre of science fiction can be seen as a playground in which a writer can construct a future world, imagining what our world might become or what it could be if certain perspectives were to be adjusted. Marge Piercy's novel, *He, She, and It*, is an example of how the figure of the cyborg stimulates the imaginations of many feminists writers. The novel was published about five years after Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, and it exemplifies a moment in feminism when some felt there were possibilities in exploring gender through an affinity with technology, and that technology should be embraced as a possible avenue through which women could free themselves from the socially constructed restraints of gender.

The world of *He, She, and It* is one which survived pollution, disease and war on a global scale, where humans have taken refuge in the few parts of the globe left habitable. The remaining populations are divided into separate factions: people who live in the corporate enclaves built and controlled by the multinationals, people who live in poverty in the Glop and serve the "multis", the ones who are relatively independent of the multis who live in the free towns, and significantly, the community from which Nili originates, which has been hidden from the multis for several years. This world created by Piercy provides the "fictional environment for the reworking of both gender identity and gender relations" (Wolmark, *Cybersexualities*, 231), and the dystopic and utopic elements of the novel in relation to the construction of feminine identity, in particular in Nili's community, will be discussed in depth later on in this chapter.

In the novel, themes of control, gender, identity and authority are examined through various narratives within the novel. The two main stories we are presented with are that of the cyborg Yod, created to protect the free-town of Tikva, and the golem Joseph, who

was created to protect the Jewish community of Prague in the sixteenth century. This analysis of the novel will not focus on the tale of Joseph, although an analysis of the golem and the importance of language will be offered later. Piercy's novel is about identity and the Other and how, through exploring the power relations between the self and Other, one can arrive at new forms of selfhood when power relations are "challenged by difference" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 29). Piercy weaves a complex and interesting web of intersecting stories, but for the purposes of this analysis the focus will be on the two cyborg figures in the novel, Yod and Nili, and also the other female characters, Malkah, Shira, Riva and Chava. Other important concepts which will be addressed are feminist science fiction, the inter-related issues of gender, identity and reproduction, and the usefulness of the figure of the cyborg. A comparison between Piercy's conceptualisations of the cyborg and Haraway's vision will also be made.

He, She, and It, like some other recent feminist science fiction, engages with the anxieties about the self which came to be in the postmodern era, and attempts to redefine categories of gender (Wolmark, *Cybersexualities*, 230), giving women a different perspective on gender. In the novel, Malkah introduces the cyborg, Yod, to the story of the golem Joseph, and she comments on the time in which Joseph's story takes place:

> It is a time of beginnings and endings…This is a tale of my family from long ago when the world seemed to be breaking open. They called it rebirth. Renaissance. But nothing ever comes back the same. The world moves in epicycles on the human level, although at the time in which my story is wanting to be told, it was those very projected epicycles of the universe that were being discarded by a few brave astronomers in favor of a system that was simple, clear and utterly alien to the human, or rather the man-centered universe held to be immutable and pre-eminently Christian by most of those living in Europe. (*He, She, and It*, 17; 18)

There is a link that can be made between the times in which Yod and Joseph were created in the novel, but also the time in which Piercy created the fictional worlds in the novel. Piercy wrote the novel at a time when vital questions about identity, humanism, gender and the pervasiveness of technology in our lives were being asked, questions which are still unanswered today. The time the novel was published also reflects the questions about gender, identity and femininity which were being explored in feminism at that time. These questions are addressed in the novel, where a narrative concerned with

perspectives on and categories of gender is presented to the reader, mainly through the figure of the cyborg. This time cannot be described as a Renaissance in gender terms, but it was nonetheless a time when certain traditions and conventions were being left behind.

It is precisely the contradictory and liminal identity of the cyborg which enables feminism to question "natural" conventions of gender and restrictive definitions of identity. "[C]yborg identity is always in process. It thrives on ambiguity and destabilizes sexual difference" (Wolmark, *Cybersexualities*, 233-234). As will be shown in the analysis of Nili and Yod, the cyborg escapes categorisation or static definition in an enclosed way. Cyborg identity in the novel thrives specifically on the ambiguity of gender as a biological inevitability which is socially constructed. Malkah comments that:

> I cannot always distinguish between myths and reality, because myth forms reality and we act out of what we think we are; we know on many levels truths that are irrational as well as reasoned or experimental. Our minds help create the world we think we inhabit. (25)

The myth of gender shapes the reality of both men and women, and it is this authoritative myth of definition which the cyborg addresses by transgressing boundaries: the human-machine hybrid defies simple definitions of self and other, nature and culture. "[I]t is not transcendence that [cyborgs] seek but rather the dissolution of the boundaries between inner and outer, self and other, nature and culture" (Wolmark, *Cybersexualities*, 237-238). The purpose of this discussion about Marge Piercy's novel is to analyse how she employs the figure of the cyborg to interrogate gender and identity in the specific arena of feminist science fiction.

Neil Badmington comments that, in the novel, Yod's need for a mate carries the narrative away from Haraway's manifesto and towards popular romantic fiction. Badmington also comments that Yod is denied a history or family of his own, and therefore it is only rational for him to seek somewhere to belong, and that while Yod might be a laboratory creation, the novel is "in many ways, an old-fashioned tale of boy (borg?) meets girl" (Badmington, 89-90). Although Badmington never overtly alludes to this aspect of the novel as negative, one gets the impression that he disapproves of the direction the novel

takes. Jenny Wolmark's views are more positive, arguing that feminist science fiction combines the genres of popular romance fiction, traditionally a female genre, with the male-dominated field of science fiction (Wolmark, *Cybersexualities*, 230). By combining these two genres, female science fiction authors are sometimes able to create utopian-like fantasy worlds where women are empowered, and the authors lend these fantasies authority by referring explicitly to science.

This combination of genres allows female science fiction authors to redefine female identity and gender roles:

> Feminist science fiction uses the codes and conventions of both science and fiction and romance fiction, and as such it acquires that postmodern ambivalence described by Linda Hutcheon, whereby it is 'doubly coded' because it is 'both complicitous with and contesting of the cultural dominations within which it operates'. (Wolmark, *Cybersexualities*, 231)

Wolmark argues that this "double coding" allows feminist science fiction to make a real impact on the masculine genre of science fiction, enabling feminist politics and gender issues to be interrogated, but also allowing possible redefinitions of these issues through the figure of the cyborg. Wolmark's argument proposes that these "postmodern romances" are transgressive, not only because of the blurring of genre boundaries, but also because they focus on female desire while black and white definitions of masculinity or femininity are deliberately rejected (Wolmark, *Cybersexualities*, 232). Piercy's novel does exactly this by emphasising Shira's desire in her sexual relationship with Yod, and both Nili and Yod's sexual desires destabilise the boundaries between masculine and feminine: there is no easy definition of either. Also important to note is that Yod's parameters are created by Malkah: he is woman-made, and therefore embodies certain traits which are arguably feminine, but he also possesses both masculine and feminine traits as he was also created by Avram.

> Sometimes Yod's behaviour was what she thought of as feminine, sometimes it seemed neutral, mechanical, purely logical, sometimes he did things that struck her as indistinguishable from how every other male she had been with would have acted. (321)

This destabilisation of boundaries allows the relations between identity, gender, sexuality and desire to be interrogated and explored "outside the confines of fixed subject positions" (Wolmark *Cybersexualities*, 232). All of this is not to say that feminist science fiction offers perfect and non-ambiguous solutions to gender problems, but that approaching it in this "doubly coded" manner creates a different and multiple perspective on issues of gender and identity.

Piercy's text gives the reader a different perspective, not only by merging two different genres, but also by constructing the narrative itself as controlled by a woman. The story is told alternately by Malkah and Shira and, as Lucie Armitt argues, this narrative strategy results in the narrative "being controlled from within an entirely feminine domain" (Armitt, 60). Malkah's job requires her to deal with misinformation, pseudo-programs and falsified data: she creates technological chimeras to protect a network system (45). Malkah is intimately involved in constructing fictions, and her roles as narrator and constructor of Yod overlap in the text. "I know what the Maharal felt, for in all creation, in science, and in art, and in the fields like mine where science and art meet and blend, in the creating of chimeras of pseudodata, interior worlds of fantasy and disinformation, there is a real making new" (66).

In *He, She, and It* new identities are forged, along with new physical forms: both Yod and Nili destabilise boundaries of identity formed on the basis of gender and neither is completely human. Jenny Wolmark notes, "What are often held to be the innate characteristics of masculinity and femininity are revealed to be cultural fictions. In presenting these issues, the narrative [is] able to challenge the idea that gender itself is a stable and unchanging given" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 127). The novel asks vital questions about identity, what it means to be human and also what it means to be a woman. Because of the hybrid nature of both Yod and Nili, these definitions are no longer stable but shown to be in a constantly fluid state, thereby establishing the lack of stable or natural identity. Another way in which Piercy alerts the reader to issues of identity and gender, and specifically the constructed nature of these categories, is how

Malkah, throughout the novel, emphasises the importance of words, of naming and how abstract words have a very real impact.

> Shira used to object at this point in the story: how could a man of clay come alive? I remember that I spoke to her about the power of naming, what we cannot name, I said, we cannot talk about. When we give a name to something in our lives, we may empower that something, as when we call an itch love, or when we call our envy righteousness. (66)

One can link what Malkah is saying here to the power of socially and culturally constructed categories of gender and identity, how abstract words or thoughts are given power by having a name: the word "woman" is accompanied by many implicit associations and specific links to reproduction, childbearing and motherhood. Considerable emphasis is placed on the role of reproduction in the novel, because control over reproductive technology is a key issue in any political struggle for autonomy (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 31).

An example of how Piercy addresses reproduction in the novel is when Shira only feels that Nili is truly human when she finds out that Nili is also a mother. "Up until the moment she saw Nili heft Ari and beam at him, Shira had assumed that Nili was a mother as Riva was, in name only. Now she trusted Nili with Ari. She was real, Shira thought, all the way through" (374). According to Shira's reasoning, a mother is only a true mother if she exhibits caring and nurturing attributes normally associated with women, but Shira's perspective on motherhood and femininity is only one of many in the novel: female identity is not explicitly linked to motherhood in the novel. Riva is an almost absent mother to Shira, Malkah is a maternal figure to Shira, albeit an unconventional one, Nili the warrior is a mother and Chava, the educated Jewish woman, who gave up her son for a life as a scholar, is also a midwife. Birth is also almost never "natural" in the novel: Shira is the exception as she carried Ari to term after he was conceived in the "normal" way, but almost all the other human characters are the products of artificial insemination or other genetic manipulation.

> "Nili," she said suddenly. "Can you bear children?"
> Nili blinked in surprise. "Sure. We don't usually do it quite that way—that is, we go for implants after genetic altering and all that funny lab stuff first. But if I want to get pregnant, I can." (361)

Reproduction is not only connected to identity and gender but also to sexuality, a concept explored in various ways in Piercy's novel. "Sexuality was one of those areas that changed utterly from multi to multi, town to town. What was the norm in one place was forbidden in another" (98). In Tikva, "children were not instilled with nudity taboos", but in the multinational enclave of Y-S sexuality and sex are intimately linked with power and hierarchical positions: rigid sex roles are prescribed, especially for women, and there are very strict rules about which parts of the body can be displayed (100).

> Men in the upper levels of Y-S have toys, besides their wives …women who are cosmetically re-created, very beautiful. While the men work, they do nothing but shop. Only on rare occasions had Shira encountered such women, and then they had seemed scarcely human…sex was a regimented commodity in the enclave. Which persons you might make love to was as defined by your place in the hierarchy as the people to whom you bowed and the people who bowed to you. Sexual privileges depended upon your place and rank. (328; 329)

As Neil Badmington postulates, Tikva and Y-S insist on defining the difference between human and inhuman, simulation and reality, natural and unnatural, but the novel implies that it is impossible to tell the difference (Badmington, 97). Significantly, both Tikva and Nili's communities exist literally on the margins of society and sexual practices in these two communities differ from the patriarchal and strictly regulated society of Y-S. The fact that sexual practices differ so widely from area to area means that what is "normal" in one culture can be seen as completely "abnormal" in another, therefore what is "normal" or "natural" is a construction of culture and society.

Issues of reproduction and sexuality are prominent in feminist science fiction, texts in which gender and identity take centre stage. These texts all take part in the debate concerned with gender and sexual difference – whether gender is biologically determined or socially constructed or both – and by engaging in this debate these authors involve the reader in such a debate (Haran, 154). Piercy's novel does not give any straight answers or solutions, but instead, presents the readers with multiple perspectives. The main instrument which Piercy uses to present the indeterminate or ambiguous element in the debate about gender is the cyborg. Piercy utilises the imprecise hybrid elements of the cyborg to transgress boundaries of gender and identity. However, as noted by critics, the

possibilities of the text are perhaps not fully realised due to the focus on Yod's sense of self, framed in masculine terms, instead of Nili's sense of self (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 134). Although Wolmark argues that the utopian possibilities of the text are not realised because Yod is "an all too literal embodiment of a cyborg, which significantly undermines the power of Donna Haraway's original metaphor" (134), one could argue that Piercy is making the point that Yod's subversion of gender dichotomies does not succeed exactly because it is framed in masculine terms, and that Nili's subversion succeeds because it is empowered by a new feminine identity. To explore how the novel represents feminine identity and authority in the novel, one must look at all the main female characters.

An integral female figure is Malkah, Shira's grandmother, who raises her. She is presented as an unconventional figure who does not accept the categories prescribed to her by society. "In storybooks, bubehs made cookies and knitted, her grandmother danced like a prima ballerina through the webs of artificial intelligence and counted herself to sleep with worry beads of old lovers" (79). Malkah is important in relation to Yod, as she is the person primarily responsible for the programming which makes him able to form relationships, change his own programming and have sexual relationships. "Malkah had given Yod the equivalent of an emotional side – needs programmed in for intimacy, connection. A given need to create relationships of friendship and sexual intimacy, a need for bonding, the ability to bond strongly and consistently" (351). These abilities which Malkah programmed into Yod's hardware are important, as they fuse together his technological and human aspects even more intimately: Yod is a machine, but one who is almost more human than some of the human characters in the novel. Yod is able to love, and it is his love for Shira and her family which in part prompts him to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect them.

As Lucie Armitt points out, Malkah refuses to uphold, in Haraway's terms, "clear distinctions between subject and object…living and dead, machine and organisms, human and nonhuman, self and other as well as…the distinction[s] between feminist and mainstream, progressive and oppressive, local and global" (Armitt, 59). Malkah

transgresses the boundaries of human / machine by crafting Yod in a manner which makes him capable of love. "In Freud's terms, that old marvellously creative humbug, that sculptor of urges, I [Malkah] balanced thanatos with eros, Avram should not have let me loose if he wanted a simple man-made cyborg, for you are also woman-made. My knowledge is in you" (114).

Yod is not Malkah's only project when it comes to using technology: she also creates "chimeras", which are computer programmes that are designed to protect systems through misinformation, pseudo-programs and falsified data. These programs successfully protect the network systems because Malkah creates them to defy expectations and conventional thought patterns, since they appear to be one thing while being another. These programs, like Yod, have unexpected aspects that subvert assumptions made about their inner-workings. Malkah revels in the freedom that technology and the Base provide her with: "What is physical aging to a base-spinner? In the image world, I am the power of my thought, of my capacity to create. There is no sex in the Base or the Net, but there is sexuality, there is joining, there is the play of minds…" (161). Malkah's strength lies in her flexibility and fluidity of thought, very much in opposition to the rigid inflexible strength of Avram, her co-creator. For Malkah the lines between myth and reality and reality and simulation become blurred, to the extent that she does not feel the need to constantly make a black and white distinction between opposing categories: to her Yod "is a person…not a human person, but a person" (76). The rest of Malkah's life also reflects an intimacy with technology, as she has multiple relationships with both men and women through the Base, and she herself states that she feels she is nothing without the Base (74; 155).

Malkah's family is by no means conventional, but Shira is perhaps the most conventional of the three women. For Shira, motherhood and childbirth are viewed in more conservative terms: she had a natural conception and birth and had been, until the divorce from her ex-husband, raising her son in a "normal" family environment. For Shira, femininity is still intricately linked to motherhood and reproduction: she only acknowledges Nili as being "real" after she finds out that she is mother to a little girl.

Shira also resents her own mother, Riva, for being an absent parent, and she views Malkah as her mother. Shira at first appears as a weak character, in terms of representing normative feminine attributes, but as her relationship with Yod grows, she is able to access power she has never been able to wield in her own life. Yod helps her get her son back and he frees her from her emotional dependence on her old lover, Gadi. Yod makes Shira realise that she does not have to play the female role prescribed to her by Y-S society, that she can take what is hers and hold her own, not only in society but also in personal relationships. As Shira and Yod's relationship progresses she starts to feel more authoritative and even describes herself as the "sexual aggressor" (181). Shira learns to behave in a different manner, one which allows her to assert her own authority, and her interaction with Yod makes her more self-assured. "Making love with Yod made her feel strong" (322).

In contrast to Shira, her mother Riva needs no encouragement to assert her authority. "Did I [Malkah] ever suspect I was producing an independent strange strong female who would stand in the middle of my life shouting *No* at the top of her lungs, refusing everything I had to give her?" (228). Riva does not conform to gender roles; she is an information pirate, freedom fighter and activist.

> Riva did not fit into his [Gadi's] diagram of the social universe. In his world only poor women looked like Riva…cleaning robots did what such women would once have done for him and his colleagues…but Riva walked in like a general reviewing his best razors. She swaggered, she looked every man and woman straight on in the eyes. (305)

Riva acts in ways that are expected of a man, and she does not care whether she is physically attractive. Much like Nili, Riva is not concerned with the male gaze and does not modify her behaviour accordingly. Riva is in a relationship of sorts with Nili, the other significant cyborg figure in the novel. Their relationship can be seen as in opposition to the relationship between Shira and Yod, as they are the only non-heterosexual couple in the novel (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 133). Significantly, theirs is a relationship of freedom and non-dependence; Riva in fact encourages Nili to do what she wants.

An important female character who has not been discussed is Chava, the main female character in the alternative sixteenth century narrative of the golem, Joseph. Chava completely breaks with the traditional role of females of her time: she is able to read and write, "Maharal taught her like a son" (59), she gives her son up for the life of a scholar and, most significantly, she is also a midwife. Chava gives her son up, but she is still involved in helping other women give birth: this seemingly suggests that Piercy feels that female creativity should not be explicitly linked with biological childbirth and reproduction but that, as Lucie Armitt suggests, they still remain "figuratively bonded" (Armitt, 61). Piercy presents the reader with different perspectives on the feminine and its connection to reproduction, but Chava's craving for knowledge, in relation to her motherly role, seems more profound than Riva's neglected maternal role, or Shira's more traditional maternal role or even Nili's unconventional motherhood. "Chava is aware that to be able to read and write sets her off from the majority of women, who are blind to the words and knowledge of books. A terrible blindness" (113). This is not to say that Chava is an unfeeling or uncaring mother, as "frequently she misses [her son]. Giving him over to them was the price of her escape" (315).

Chava's character also brings up the issue of power relations between men and women, but also self and Other.

> "I am not a man, but I am a Jew. Thus you made me. It takes ten Jews. If I was an angel, would you tell me I could not make up a minyon? …
> Chava: "They tell me I'm a Jew but that I can't make up a minion either…whatever you are, you are not less than a man." (113)

Chava's experience as presented to the reader suggests that a woman can only harness her full potential when she is not a mother or a wife, when she can focus only on her own goals. Of course, Chava's character lives in the sixteenth century, therefore her experience comments on the history of women's oppression which is still intact to a certain degree in Shira's time. Piercy does not present the association of the feminine and childbirth in simple terms, and the reader plays an active role in creating meaning in the novel.

Nili is arguably the most important female figure in terms of subverting categories of gender and identity by transgressing conventional boundaries.

> "Is she human?" Shira asked abruptly, nodding toward an upside-down Nili.
> "What kind of question is that?" Riva bristled…
> "But Shira's question is reasonable, Riva. No one is criticizing Nili. We're just curious…"
> "She was wondering if Nili could be a cyborg."
> "That's a matter of definition," Riva said mildly. "Where do you draw the line?"
> "Was she born a woman?" (190-191)

From the moment Nili is introduced to the reader, she questions set definitions of what it is to be human. "Was she born a woman?" raises a significant question about the social and cultural construction of identity which is intimately linked to Simone de Beauvoir's statement "One is not born a woman, but becomes one". Nili also destabilises gender boundaries through her appearance; her hair is the colour of blood, she is very muscular yet still undeniably feminine and her body language is that of a warrior, Shira calls her an Amazon, and soon draws the parallel between Yod and Nili (187).

A very prominent concept which Nili's character emphasises, along with Chava and Riva's, is that access to language, reading and writing, equals access to power.

> "The ability to access information is power," Nili said with her slight accent in her husky voice…"The ability to read and write belonged to the Church except for heretics and Jews. We are people of the book. We have always considered getting knowledge part of being human. "(194)

This is an idea which Riva, social activist and information pirate, feels very strongly about.

> "You steal information."
> "I liberate it. Information shouldn't be a commodity, that's obscene. Information plus theology plus political bias is how we sculpt our view of reality" (193-194).

For Donna Haraway, Nili belongs to an oppositional tradition of reading and writing:

> Dove, raven, and reconstructed assassin, Nili fights for rebuilding Yerushalaim outside the appropriations of Christian salvation history—and outside the patriarchal assumptions of all the official peoples of the book, in both their religious and technoscientific incarnations. (Haraway, *Modest_Witness@ Second_Millenium .FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse,* 3)

It is clear that Nili's character does not challenge masculine hegemony only on one level of the narrative, but that there are many subversive elements implicit in her heritage. Nili's community consists of Palestinian and Israeli women who have untied and who clone and engineer genes to procreate. "We have no men. We clone and engineer genes. After birth we undergo additional alteration. We have created ourselves to endure, to survive, to hold our land" (198). They are a self-sufficient community and their hunger for knowledge is what prompts them to send Nili out to learn more about the world.

Nili's community illustrates a convention often used by feminist science fiction authors: a world which barely survives an apocalyptic event after which only women survive, and who then gain the dominant position of power in gender relations. In the case of Nili's community it is significant that her community represents a utopian element in the novel, though the novel itself is not wholly utopian. In this convention of an all-female community, the event which is responsible for the disaster is usually ascribed to patriarchy, in this case to the war in the Middle East, and therefore the "definition of woman as alien and other is effectively reversed in the women-only communities of the ensuing post-holocaust world, in order to provide a critique of gender relations" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 81).

Utopian narratives have always captured the imagination of readers, initiating reflection and reconsideration of current hierarchies of power and concepts of identity, self and Other and, in the case of many feminist science fiction texts, gender. The novel takes the reader on a journey through various utopic and dystopic spaces, unsettling categories of identity previously thought to be stable by exposing the constructed nature of identity. Although the figure of the cyborg is the main focaliser through which Piercy subverts categories of gender and identity, the female characters all play a vital role in questioning definitions of gender. The utopian possibilities of the novel are represented by the female characters because they oppose certain conventional gender expectations but arguably, the main female characters representative of utopian possibilities in the novel are the cyborg Nili as well as the community of Safed.

Nili's country is literally called "no man's land", the Black Zone, Safed where no one imagined that life could still exist. They live in extreme isolation but they have very highly developed technology, although they are not a part of the global Net, a global information network connecting the planet, much like the Internet. They use genetic engineering to have children and the children are raised by several mothers at once (362). Malkah, in particular, sees Nili's community as salvation:

> Her [Nili's] expectations of herself are unlimited. She is strong without excuses or apologies. I long for a community, a town, a principality of Nilis… I go to encounter the new that has come to be under the murderous sun of our century. I go to teach and to learn from women who will lift me up, wash me as if for burial and then give me renewed strength, rededicated life and the light I crave. I go in mischief, in the pursuit of pleasure and knowledge… (419)

It is significant that they live in isolation from the rest of the world and that Nili is the first envoy to be sent out. At the end of the novel one is hopeful that Nili and her community will bring something valuable to the world, perhaps initiate some change in the world of multis like Y-S, but the fact remains that they are able to flourish precisely because they are isolated, living, literally, underground in caves. Their liminality is what grants them authority, similar to the way in which the cyborg's liminality authorises its exposure of constructed power relations. Because the community of Safed is an indeterminate space, belonging to "no man", it is able meaningfully to question gender and power relations. Nili's community is not a utopia in the traditional sense, but rather a heterotopia which embodies elements of both utopia and dystopia, it is a "refuge from certainty" (Goodman, 1) allowing for a space in which to deconstruct and question categories of gender. The community of Safed is not an enclosed space; it is a more flexible structure that has opened its boundaries to allow Nili to come and go and Malkah also goes with Nili to Safed with the purpose in mind to connect their community to the rest of the world through the Net. "If I go to Nili's people to be remade, I also travel to remake them. To open them to the world is my little task" (418). This fluid reconstruction illustrates how heterotopias make us aware of how spaces are created and manipulated (Goodman, 10).

Heterotopias deny absolute authority, and they are more fluid and ambiguous than traditional utopias: both utopic and dystopic elements can occupy the same space, as in Piercy's novel where communities in the Glop, Y-S, Tikva and Safed all co-habit the earth. The reader travels with Malkah to the community of Safed to "meet Nili's people, the strongest women in the world" (417). At the end of the novel Malkah's optimism reflects the more utopic elements of Safed, as she travels with Nili to receive surgery to repair her ailing eyesight. Malkah goes with Nili to her feminine oasis in the desert, but Piercy does not construct a completely utopian, and therefore unsustainable world; rather, she suggests these possibilities at the end of the novel. As Jenny Wolmark acknowledges:

> [C]yborg texts, despite their contradictions and ambiguities, do contain a critique of the masculine hegemony of cybernetic systems which examines their impact on gender and identity, and asks whether those systems are capable of sustaining other sets of relations and meanings. (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 138)

This critique is important, as there cannot be simple answers to complex questions concerned with gender and identity. No metaphor can indefinitely sustain subversion of the dominant hierarchies of power, but questioning these hierarchies still remains crucial to feminism. The cyborg is a useful tool for subversion and questioning, as "The limits of social and cultural identity are tested when those who are different are depicted as active subjects who resist both the hierarchical relation between centre and margins and unitary definitions of difference" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 28). When the liminal figures of society, as embodied by the cyborg, gain agency and power, possibilities for the redefinition of gender are opened up.

Nili's community represents hope to Malkah: Safed is what could be if women were able to assert their authority in a comprehensive manner. There is not only an emphasis on how they have survived disaster and managed to build a flourishing community in the barren desert, but also on their Otherness. The most obvious dystopic elements of Safed are the restrictions placed on the community by their environment: they live in a wasteland known as the Black Zone that was almost completely destroyed by nuclear warfare, and they are forced to live in caves to survive. Paradoxically, it is also this

struggle for survival which has made them strong and through regeneration and renewal they become "the strongest women in the world" (417). These elements of destruction and renewal make this space in the novel transgressive and fertile for the critique of gender, as the reconstruction of gender can only take place in a liminal space, an "elsewhere" in de Lauretis' terms. De Lauretis' "elsewhere" is a subversive space which exists "beyond the parameters of the dominant discourse" (Robinson, 223), and to understand this concept one must first examine how de Lauretis defines a subject of feminism as a subject in discourse characterised by

> 'the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation,' a 'movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male-centered frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out, or more pointedly, makes unrepresentable'. (De Lauretis quoted in Robinson, 224)

This "elsewhere"' of discourse which de Lauretis describes can be found in the space between "woman" and women. This space is characterised by "the contradiction experienced by female subjects attempting to speak as women…the subject of feminism, then, enacts the contradiction between Woman and women; she is simultaneously inside and outside the ideology of gender" (Robinson 225, 226). De Lauretis' "elsewhere" does not place the subject of feminism in a non-place outside of man's truth or in a strictly utopian place unconcerned "with man's truth and his construction of the feminine". Rather, de Lauretis' subject occupies an unstable, double position (Robinson, 226), a position which is constantly in a state of becoming, which opens it up to resignification (Butler, 33). The community of Safed is a place where what it means to be a woman has been reconstructed and re-imagined, but the women of Safed also choose to send an envoy to open the way for them perhaps to rejoin the rest of the world's population.

Related to the feminine subject is the constructive process of experience which is so important in relation to Piercy's novel, as her text participates in the construction of gender primarily through exposing how gender is produced by alerting the reader to illusory and constructed boundaries of identity. Robinson argues that it is this effort to move in and out of gender discourse which "characterizes de Lauretis' female subject of feminism" and enables feminist authors "to explore the contradiction between Woman

and women, to speak as a subject gendered female without being reabsorbed in the space allotted to the feminine within Western discourses" (Robinson, 226). This contradiction allows for the meaningful deconstruction of traditional gender categories. "[Science fiction is] a site for significantly revealing ideological constructions "(Golumbia, 91), and gender is no exception. Feminist self-representation in feminist texts "constructs, deconstructs— but also reconstructs — notions and images of gender…"(Rossini, 1), and it is in this process that the reader is also able to participate. The reconstruction of gender in *He, She, and It* revolves largely around shifts in perspective. It is this re-positioning which empowers the female reader when reading feminist texts: these texts shift the position of observation by influencing the reader's perspective, and, therefore, truth and meaning are also shifted, especially in terms of gender**.**

It is the reconstruction, deconstruction and construction of gender that occurs simultaneously which empowers the female reader to reflect on, criticise and alter gender discourse through her own experience as a subject of feminism. Feminist science fiction is not about the future: it "is in dialogue with the present. It works by setting up a dialogue with the here-and-now, a dialogue as intricate and rich as the writer can make it" (Delaney quoted in Golumbia, 79). De Lauretis' reasoning on female subjectivity is that there must be a fluid interaction which is constantly in process and "open to alteration by self-analyzing practice" (Alcoff, 425). For de Lauretis, subjectivity is

> constructed through a continuous process, an ongoing constant renewal based on an interaction with the world, which she defines as experience: 'And thus [subjectivity] is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world'. (De Lauretis quoted in Alcoff, 425)

Through this process one's subjectivity becomes en-gendered and although this process is by no means unproblematic, it does offer a different perspective on how women themselves, and specifically the female reader, participate in the discourse of gender. Piercy, through her novel *He, She, and It*, is an "interpreter of possibilities" (Mumford quoted in Phillips, 299), offering the female reader multiple perspectives on gender.

Women must reconstruct their own subjectivity, not only through creating fictional and transgressive "elsewheres", but also through their own experience as female subjects. Marge Piercy provides female readers with the means to reclaim their own authority and voice in *He, She, and It*: she presents the reader with a representation of feminine authority which arises from a no-man's land, an elsewhere, a representation which reclaims a female voice that denies the power of a constructed category such as gender over her body and identity by constructing her own subjectivity. As Malkah explains, the power of words and naming is crucial.

> "For us the word is primary and paramount. We can curse each other to death or cure with words. With words we court each other, with words we punish each other. We construct the world out of words. The mind can kill or heal because it is the body…in Hebrew the word *davar*, as Andre Neber pointed out, means both word *and* thing, no distinction. A word, an idea, is a thing. We see and hear the world with our minds, in categories…" (258-259)

Malkah's reasoning underlines the importance of words and how significant having control over naming and the construction of categories of identity and meaning is.

Safed, and its representative Nili, expose the way in which we create and manipulate not only spaces but also ideas surrounding identity and gender. Safed is a heterotopic and liminal space where the boundaries of gender can be transgressed in a meaningful way: it belongs to no man, which translates into feminine authority and agency for its inhabitants. The way in which Safed is presented is important, as it participates in the deconstruction but also reconstruction of gender, and this in turn involves the reader, through her experience of gender and her own subjectivity. This experience influences the ongoing process of feminine subjectivity, allowing the female reader to find her voice as a subject. *He, She, and It* sets the reader off on a journey of discovery which revels in instability and shifts in meaning, a journey where the boundaries between myth and reality, reality and simulation, feminine and masculine are constantly transgressed –and most significantly –a journey which allows the female reader a different perspective on gender that enables her to resist the totalising effects of hegemonic discourse.

The construction of feminine identity is not limited to Nili's community, but also represented by her individual character. The boundary between feminine and masculine that Nili destabilises is very important in terms of the gender reconstruction undertaken in the novel. Nili is a strong female character who embodies traits normally associated with men, and this challenges "the assumption that heroism is a defining characteristic of masculinity**"** (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 54). The problem with female hero figures is that although they destabilise definitions of feminine and masculine, they tend to reproduce the patriarchal bias inherent in masculine discourse concerned with the figure of the hero: a woman can only be seen as strong when she possesses masculine traits. To add to this problematic aspect, feminine science fiction remains marginal in a genre that is still male-dominated: science fiction is "extremely problematic for feminist science fiction writers since it encodes a patriarchal discourse which contradicts the feminist discourse operation in the text" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 54).

The masculine elements implicit in Nili's character make the transgression, which the figure of the cyborg enables, problematic. "Ultimately, in fact, it is difficult to avoid the inference that what we read as cybernetic perfection is, in actuality, *masculine* perfection writ large" (Armitt 63-64). This reproduction of male ideology can also be linked to contemporary cinema and television series in which female heroes are presented, such as Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and in particular, Max in *Dark Angel*, a series which will be discussed in a later chapter of this dissertation. As Lucia Stasia comments, the image of women wielding weapons and "kicking ass" can be seen in terms of the binary codes of gender being conflated, in effect making these women "symbolically male" and reaffirming the conventional masculinity of action films or series (Stasia, 176-177). In Nili's case, her masculinised characteristics are in a sense reaffirming the masculine aspects of science fiction as a genre.

This is not to say that Nili's character offers no possibilities for rewriting gender categories or definitions. Jenny Wolmark notes that just because assumptions of gender are openly confronted in a narrative does not necessarily translate into "an interrogation of the way in which gender itself is constructed", but in rewriting these assumptions from

the female perspective a critical position can be achieved from which an interrogation can be initiated (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 54). Nili, like Deirdre in *No Woman Born*, offers an alternative "performance" of femininity, one that embodies both strength and grace, and rejects "natural" female attributes. Another example of how the novel confronts assumptions of gender can be seen when Shira speculates about what goes on between Gadi and Nili:

> Shira imagined that Nili must pick up Gadi like a macho man in the old romances and carry him off. She could see Nili accidentally breaking Gadi's arm simply by squeezing too hard. Yet Nili did not look like a man. She was a busty woman, with broad hips and a tight waist. (361)

While Nili is a warrior with many masculine elements present in her character, she is also a mother: she does not necessarily behave maternally in the conventional way, but it is clear that she loves her daughter**.** Nili does not understand why it may be problematic for others to reconcile her identity as a woman with her masculine characteristics and she is in no way ashamed of who she is. The narrative's subversive qualities should not be disregarded purely because there are ambiguous elements in its representation of gender: highlighting this ambiguity also highlights the contradictions inherent in patriarchal discourse. "Feminist appropriations are inevitably partial because they remain embedded within the conventional narrative structures" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 54). Piercy has shown in *He, She, and It* that ambiguity in relation to representations of gender does not mean that a text has no subversive qualities: introducing elements of uncertainty by transgressing boundaries of myth and reality, reality and simulation, feminine and masculine, and nature and culture, the ambiguity of the text reminds the reader that gender can only be reconstructed by means of partial perspectives.

Another very important issue which Nili's character addresses is the male gaze and the objectification of women.

> [Nili] "I don't want to be a toy. I have my own goals and the aims of my people. I am well loved. I don't need the love of strangers."
> "I don't sell or rent my body, by the organ or by the moment". (382)

Nili, not familiar with the conventions of interaction between men and women, underlines how objectification enforces traditional gender roles: men are valued as subjects while women are relegated to being objects. For Nili the pleasure is in the looking and not in being looked at (246). Nili become enraged when Gadi films her in secret with the intent to distribute images of her and she very clearly resists being a sexualised object (246). Nili does not need the male gaze to justify her value as a person: she completely lacks dependency on men and sees Gadi as a plaything and an experiment. A male character whom Nili does respect is the other cyborgian figure in the novel, Yod. When Nili and Yod first meet, Nili is suspicious of what Yod is, but learns to accept him, even though she still refers to him as "the machine".

> "The machine, he's not so bad when you get to know him…"He is very serious. My people would like him. He works hard and he is not easily distracted, admirable traits. You see, I'm no longer prejudiced". (256)

From the moment that Nili is introduced a pattern is established which compares her with Yod.

> "That is my lover you're holding at gunpoint."
> Why do you lie? This is a machine."
> "You are part machine and part human yourself," Yod said, sounding annoyed but also curious…
> "He's at least as human as you are," Shira said. (195; 196)

One tends to agree with Neil Badmington in his reading of the novel, that Nili must be read alongside Yod as a cyborgian figure and not in opposition to him. To read them in opposition to each other implies that there is a "false counterpart" and a "true cyborg": the figure of the cyborg is especially partial (Badmington, 92) and it does not reproduce the distinction between "true" and "false". Yod's character highlights issues of reality versus simulation and how identity is defined "at the point where the reality of the simulation and the simulation of reality intersect" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 128). "She was no longer surprised that she credited him with reactions: they might be simulacra of human emotions, but something went on in him that was analogous to her own responses and making the constant distinction a waste of energy" (97). This instability in distinguishing between reality and simulation has certain crucial implications for gender: when the relations between the real and simulated are uncertain,

"attempts to depict gender as unproblematic become fraught with difficulty" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 128-129). The figure of Yod is seen to emphasise this uncertainty by way of his hybrid "nature", which makes fluid the boundaries between reality and simulation.

Despite the gender and identity instabilities that are implicit in Yod's character, he creates his own "somewhat one-dimensional definition of himself as 'alive' [which] is contrasted to the female characters in Piercy's narrative, who strive for a definition of self which is both multiple and fluid" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 133). One feels that Yod is too limited by his patriarchal and capitalistic origins to really achieve subversive status, although he does help Shira in accessing her power. Yod remains too much under the control of his patriarchal creator, Avram, who programmed him to be a weapon. He is also very doubtful about his own status as a figure of change. When Nili boldly states that she is the future, Yod replies: "You may well be right," Yod said mildly, "I'm not a proselytizer for my kind. I am not persuaded I'm a good idea, frankly" (222). Yod is described in more ambiguous terms than Nili: the contradictory definitions of Yod are central to the narrative and are left unresolved on purpose, "a strategy that enables the question to be raised of the way in which the subject is constituted in culture" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 128). The element of Yod's character which is described in the most contradictory terms is his masculinity. In terms of his relationship with Shira, he is constituted as an object of desire, which denies him some of the apparent power which masculinity would lend his character. "This is my boyfriend, the machine, the slave" (323).

Yod's masculinity as programmed by Avram is in conflict with Malkah's programming and what he himself learns about gender throughout the novel.

> "He isn't male. He's a machine."
> "Avram made him male – entirely so. Avram thought that was the ideal: pure reason, pure logic, pure violence. The world has barely survived the males we have running around. I gave him a gentler side, starting with emphasizing his love for knowledge and extending it to emotional and personal knowledge, a need for connection. . . . " (142)

Yod possesses male genitalia, a programmed pleasure in violence and a male physique which, if one follows the prescriptive 'natural' definitions of gender, should therefore imply that as a cyborg he does not destabilise categories of gender. Piercy emphasises the fact that human beings learn how to be human, and therefore, men and women learn how to be men and women (Badmington, 95). Through his own re-programming and learning experiences Yod achieves a symbolic femininity of sorts.

> "Because you are programmed to please, do you ever feel used when we have sex?" she asked him…"
> "Aren't you programmed too? Isn't that what socializing a child is? I enjoy, Shira, never doubt that. If I've been programmed to find your pleasure important and fulfilling, don't women try to reprogram their men that way?" (321-322)

Yod, unlike Nili, does not have ultimate control over himself, as Avram programmed a self-destruct function into him, which leads to Yod doing the only thing which he can: he commits suicide, also killing Avram, destroying the information about his construction and saving Tikva from the threat which Y-S posed in its quest to obtain Yod for research purposes.

> Yod therefore occupies a contradictory position in the narrative, and Piercy uses his developing consciousness to question the way in which social and sexual relations are shaped by conventions and definitions that are thought of as fixed and natural. (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 132)

Yod learns about humans and gender interaction mainly through his relationship with Shira, but also by reading novels which he views as "manuals" of how humans work. "Your curiosity's like mine. I read novels as if they were the specs to your makeup. I study them to grasp the forces underlying your behaviour" (326). As Yod learns, reprograms himself and develops into a fuller character, he identifies more and more with the female characters and this acquired femininity is what poses the "real threat to the status quo" (Armitt, 62).

It is the threat which both Nili and Yod pose to the status quo of gender categories and power relations which makes *He, She, and It* such an important cyborg narrative. Piercy admits in the Acknowledgements of the novel that Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* had been a suggestive text, but Piercy's interpretation of what the figure of the cyborg

means for feminism remains her own. The novel touches on issues that are very important and relevant in feminism: reproduction, embodiment and the connected issue of the role of nature in gender. Neil Badmington argues that Haraway's promises become compromises in Piercy's novel, but just because some elements of the cyborg need "retuning" it does not automatically mean that the possibilities opened up for change are closed off (Badmington, 97). Piercy's vision of the cyborg might be less idealistic than Haraway's but in no way is it less comprehensive. Badmington proposes two ways in which the two texts differ: gender and family. He argues that Yod is a gendered cyborg while Haraway's cyborg is a post-gender being (Badmington 89-90), but he overlooks the manner in which Piercy employs questions of gender in the novel, not only through Yod, but also through the golem Joseph and Nili.

Badmington also states that the novel is a "family affair", a further infidelity to Haraway's manifesto (Badmington, 90) but, arguably, that it is not an infidelity at all. Haraway herself argues for affinity in the manifesto and Piercy does not only question definitions of gender in the novel but also traditional definitions of family. Piercy emphasises the importance of affinity – for example, Nili and Shira are related, as Riva used a spermbank. "'Actually you and Nili are related. Your father was Yosef Golinken, her mother's father—her grandfather'" (191).

> There is a sense in which the novel clearly refuses to understand the family as a natural, biologically-bound entity; what is described, rather, is a *construct* that is forever open to revision…The meaning of the term 'family' is, in other words, thrown open to contingency. (Badmington, 94)

Therefore, Piercy is also critiquing the social construction of categories through the concept of family, specifically a family of women.

The character of Joseph has not been the focus of this reading of Piercy's novel, but one cannot read the novel without taking into account the important implications of Joseph's presence in the "family" of characters in Piercy's narrative. Donna Haraway writes in the manifesto that the tools used to deconstruct origin myths and patriarchal ideology "are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of

naturalized identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture" (Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 175). Joseph's story is based on a real myth which Piercy has re-written in subtle but very important ways: her golem has a voice and she also includes a strong female character, Chava. Joseph serves more as a means to indicate how far the figure of the cyborg is removed from the figure of the golem than as an analogue of the cyborg. Despite superficial similarities, there are vital differences between these two figures which make the golem a creature which will always be contained or destroyed in the end, while the cyborg is able to break free from patriarchal restraints, despite its origins.

Donna Haraway does not believe that the cyborg has an origin in the sense that humans do, but one can see that Piercy shifts this perspective slightly in the way that she employs Joseph in the tale. Piercy emphasises the problem of coding and technologies which write the world when one looks at the golem and cyborg side by side. As Haraway writes:

> The phallogocentric origin stories most crucial for feminist cyborgs are built into the literal technologies – technologies that write the world, biotechnology and microelectronics – that have recently textualized our bodies as code problems on [a] grid...Feminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control. (*A Cyborg Manifesto*, 175)

One can argue, as William Covino does, that by placing Joseph's story alongside Yod's, Piercy is making the cyborg a latter-day golem, and that by doing so she proposes a continuity through time of the desire to locate "in a sign system the power of creation" (Covino, 356). Covino summarises the similarities between the cyborg and the golem in terms of language and control:

> The golem arises from a strictly ordained religious ritual in which a Rabbi recites thousands of Hebrew alphabetical permutations; letters themselves embody the spiritual and physical energy that constructs life. The cyborg is also a 'readout of the sign' the materialization of 'text, formulae, algorithm' (Piercy, 426) inscribed on silicon chips and embedded in the circuitry and hardware of functional form. (Covino, 356)

However, Covino seems to focus solely on the analogue between Joseph and Yod, and not on the other, arguably more important, cyborg figure in the novel, Nili. Covino's

perspective does highlight the importance of language though, in his terms, the cyborg "repels" the golem because the golem in traditional legends is "the product of and the testament to perfect language", while the cyborg explicitly corrupts this perfect language by transgressing traditional boundaries (Covino, 368). This reading of the cyborg in terms of language corresponds to the perspective which Haraway adheres to in the manifesto.

> Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. (Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 176)

Covino argues that for Haraway, the tale of the golem Joseph would serve as an example of a patriarchal salvation myth which needs to be erased to allow for transgression (Covino, 357), but Joseph's tale seems to provide a context against which to read the subversive potential of literacy that is not completely fulfilled in Yod, but is much more fully explored in the character of Nili and her community of women. Joseph may not be capable of subverting the power hierarchies which control him but his character questions the creation of a sentient being only to serve one's own desires or goals as he is created solely to protect a community, much in the same way as Yod. Viewed in this context, it is then important to note that Joseph is not mute, as golems of traditional legends almost always are. A speculative reason for why golems are traditionally mute is that it would be blasphemous for a human to create a speaking creature (Covino, 361). Another possible reason is that the golem's inability to speak, and speak for himself, signals his status as non-human as he cannot participate in political activities (Covino, 361). In the novel, Chava even teaches Joseph how to read, and he is able to articulate his own oppression. An example of this articulation is Joseph's thoughts when the Rabbi is reading the tale of the Jews' oppression in Egypt at Pesach.

> Chava beams at Joseph, who is brooding over the Exodus. They were slaves in Egypt, labouring under an overseer, making bricks from clay. He too is made from clay. He is a walking brick. He is a slave. (202)

Joseph's literacy and ability to question his political position lead to his destruction: he exists in a society where his transgressive character cannot not be allowed to exist, as he

violates too many "natural" laws. Yod, in contrast to Joseph's feeble resistance, most vehemently resists control, through voicing his concerns about his existence. Once again, Nili is the cyborgian figure in the novel that achieves transgression and is able, in a sense, to "damage" the patriarchal structures governing the world outside of her community without destroying herself. Joseph's tale in the novel serves as an example of the oppressive dualisms of machine and organism which the cyborg must transgress in order to be able to deconstruct these paired categories in which one term is always privileged (Covino, 369). Piercy also uses Joseph to further blur the boundaries between artificial and natural, as both Yod and Joseph often appear more human than some of the other characters.

He, She, and It is a novel which tests the limits of reified gender ideology where the masculine half of the equation is privileged and everything is read in a masculine / feminine dualism. The novel presents its readers with alternatives for both social and sexual relations. Haraway emphasises the importance of partial perspectives in her manifesto by stating:

> From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters. (Haraway, 154)

Piercy purposely presents the reader with a narrative that is constructed around "partiality and difference, rather than unity" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 55), and by doing so invites the reader to partake in the debate about the social construction of gender and sexual difference as biologically determined categories. One of the major concerns of Piercy's novel is the struggle of feminism to arrive at new forms of selfhood through affinity with technology. Technology, and therefore also the cyborg, are seen as tools to assist women in freeing themselves from the socially constructed restraints of gender.

Piercy gives female desire, agency, authority and identity centre stage in the novel, asking questions about what it means to be a woman, but also what it means to be human. She does this not only through the dual cyborg figures of Nili and Yod, but also through the female characters that are empowered by knowledge and technology and the oppressed figure of the golem Joseph. Piercy ultimately presents the reader with a world where it is virtually impossible to distinguish between reality and simulation, myth and reality, human and cyborg, and by doing so she reveals the boundaries of these categories to be constructed just like the boundaries of gender. The cyborg in the novel is an extremely powerful tool and representative of the promise that an affinity with technology holds for feminism, but it is not a messianic figure who will once and for all resolve the problematic issues surrounding gender. No metaphor can indefinitely sustain subversions of the dominant hierarchies of power, but what is important for feminism is the questioning of these hierarchies. Questioning so-called stable definitions of gender and identity opens up a space for redefinition, for creating new forms of selfhood from a female perspective from which further interrogation of gender and identity can be continued.

FOUR

"Girls kick ass, says so on the t-shirt": The Cyborg, Commodification and Misrepresentations of Feminism in Popular Culture

Depictions of feminism in popular media have always been problematic and the "popular" figure of the female cyborg is no exception. Problematic aspects of this transgressive tool become more troublesome as its potential for transformation is mediated by popular culture which encompasses more mainstream ideas concerning gender. Popular culture operates in an opportunistic manner by taking on elements and values from history, culture and current affairs in order to create an appealing narrative and it is this process of intermingling which clouds issues of gender. This chapter will examine the television series *Dark Angel*, which was aired from 2000 until 2002, in terms of its protagonist, and main female cyborgian figure, Max Guevara's attempts at destabilising gender categories. *Dark Angel* originated in a time when there was a great proliferation of television series featuring strong independent female protagonists. Similar series were *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Alias* and all these series performed well in ratings as it seemed that female audiences were seeking female role models who did things their own way.

According to Donna Haraway, the transgression of binaries is what empowers the cyborg to contest meanings, to develop inclusive politics which will not discriminate according to race, gender or class (Shabot, 224). The problem with this assessment by Haraway is that her conceptualisation of the cyborg is not representative of how the cyborg has been portrayed in popular culture (Shabot, 224). In popular culture, the cyborg often serves to reinforce or reproduce oppressive structures of identity, instead of transgressing or challenging categories of identity and gender. The purpose of this examination is to determine whether the figure of the cyborg still has value for feminism, even in a popular medium such as a television series. Max's identity, social consciousness, femininity and Otherness will be explored in terms of her character's potential for transgression. The degree of promise her character shows in terms of supporting feminist goals will be

analysed to determine whether the cyborg's potential in the series is contained and negated by commodification and over-simplified depictions of feminist ideals, or if it indeed makes a valuable contribution to representations of feminism in popular culture.

As Donna Haraway notes in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, "Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imagination" (Haraway, 180). This, in part, may explain the fascination audiences have with television series such as *Dark Angel* which depict individuals who possess extraordinary abilities which lead to them being categorised as monstrous as they struggle to come to terms with their identity. Max's fluid and hybrid identity is a central theme in the series, and this struggle within her identity can also be linked to contradictory representations of feminism in popular culture. It can be argued that feminism has not "infiltrated popular consciousness" in quite the way that second-wave feminists had envisioned (Gibson, 137) and today there are many diverse representations of feminism in popular culture. The media often presents female figures who have been freed from the constraints of feminism as either empowered women who "ha[ve] no need for outmoded second wave ideas or as the 'girl[s]' who [are] happy and confident in [their] sexuality, with no need for the tiresome ministrations of older, meddling feminists" (Gibson, 139). Most troubling is the representation of female figures who at first glance seem empowered and strong but are, on deeper analysis, still contained within a patriarchal framework.

At the start of *Dark Angel*, Max is portrayed as a young girl who is strong in her own right, well aware of the inequalities still existing in the world, not only in terms of gender but also power and money, but she tries to ignore these issues and focuses on her own problems. The viewer seems to be presented with the figure of the new woman: she is empowered in her own right but chooses her own individual needs and desires over those of the collective. Apparent empowerment notwithstanding, one must question the underlying ideology and values of series such as *Dark Angel,* as they have a powerful, if sometimes unacknowledged, effect on a younger generation of women. As Gibson states: "We need to ensure that there are no more insidious, covert attempts to fob us off – or

move us further to the periphery" (Gibson, 141), and it is for this reason that feminism must take note of and engage with representations of feminism in popular media.

Dark Angel has very definitive elements not only of science fiction, but also of cyberpunk in particular. Its creator, James Cameron, was also the director of movies such as *Aliens,* with Sigourney Weaver, and *Terminator*, both of which present the viewer with strong female characters similar to Max. In the first episode we are introduced to Max and the apparently dystopic world of Seattle that she lives in. The "damaged" world in which the series takes place exists because an electro-magnetic weapon, commonly referred to as "The Pulse" has disabled everything run by electronics. One can compare this dystopic setting to the harsh and uninviting worlds of other television series that depict strong female characters such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* Such shows are presented as "hopeful projections of women with agency" (Magoulick, 745), but in reality the female characters struggle in worlds characterised by violence. Buffy literally lives in a Hellmouth, Sunnydale, and Max lives in a world where she must constantly protect herself and what is hers, fighting for what she has. As Magoulick comments, "Each season in all these series finds the stakes rising higher, the villains becoming tougher, and the odds of winning smaller" (745). It is significant that both Max and Buffy have to fight to survive in a hostile world: this depiction of their struggle for survival implies that strong women will always have to face adversity and tests of their strength and resilience.

When we are first introduced to Max it is 2019, ten years after she escaped from a government facility, Manticore, with some fellow transgenics she views as her family. Manticore specifically bred soldiers, and its name refers to

> a mythical creature with the head of a man, the body of a lion and the tail of a dragon or scorpion; in other words, it is a chimera or hybrid of different animal parts. The similarity to the transgenics' combination of human and animal DNA is clear. (Jowett)

Transgenic is a term used in the series to describe individuals whose DNA has been manipulated through the use of biological technology and genetic engineering to provide them with specific abilities. Their transgenic status figures as a basis of discrimination

against them in the same way that gender and race are used to mark difference, and there is a clear parallel drawn in the series between discrimination based on race and discrimination based on genetic make-up. Max's division is called X-5 and they were all designed with the same purpose in mind: to be perfect soldiers. They all have super-human strength, regeneration abilities, exceptional intelligence and speed, and all their senses are heightened.

Great emphasis is placed not only on Max's strength, but also how she uses her body as a weapon instead of relying on firearms. This focus on Max's apparent strength, but also on her body, brings to light how femininity is represented in the series, as Max is not a 'typical' girl. Max is undoubtedly the strong central female cyborg figure in *Dark Angel* and her identity is crucial to determining the degree of transgressive feminist potential the series offers as,

> [w]ithin the context of unstable boundaries between the real and the simulated, human and cyborg, the question of identity becomes highly charged, because it can become a crucial means of contesting what Bill Nichols describes as the 'reification, the commodification, the patterns of mastery and control' that are at the heart of contemporary cybernetic systems. (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 127)

Not only is Max's body and identity a site embodying the struggle for control, it is also the site where contradictory elements of femininity converge. Max is at once a strong female figure who is also in need of connection with Logan, the cyber-journalist and social activist with whom Max also has a romantic relationship, and she struggles to balance her strength and her need for romantic connection. Max attempts to resist what she was made to do; she wants to control her programmed violence and compulsory hetero-sexuality[3] but at the same time she must forge her own identity.

In the first season each episode has an opening sequence and the images shown in this sequence are important because of how they define Max in terms of her femininity. The sequence starts with the image of a fetus, moving to an image of Max's seemingly naked and passive body; and then the screen flashes to an image of a barcode, like the one

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[3] Term obtained from Adrienne Rich's article "Compulsory Heterosexuality"

which marks Max and most other transgenics. The viewer is then presented with images of Max fighting, interspersed with images of a sexually alluring Max, and this is followed by a repetition of the image of the fetus which one sees reflected in Max's eye while she is sitting alone on the Space Needle, a well-known landmark in Seattle. The last shot one sees is a close up of the barcode on Max's neck. Although Max is shown as strong and assertive, the sequence both begins and ends with passive, perhaps introspective, images of Max alone and in conjunction with the image of the fetus.

Presumably the fetus signifies Max's conception and birth as a transgenic but it also serves to associate Max with reproduction and child-bearing, traditional female concepts which negate the potentially transgressive images of Max fighting and being assertive. This lead-in sequence illustrates the contrasting, and often contradictory, representations of femininity in the series: Max's displays of strength are counter-balanced with images emphasising her sexuality in terms of traditional femininity (Sharp, 517). The fact that the sequence ends with the fetus reflected in Max's eye and her sitting alone on the Space Needle simultaneously associates her with maternal imagery and isolates her.   The sequence

> encapsulates the show's address to feminism in what can be characterized as a strategy of resistance and containment… [*Dark Angel*] offers up the strong body of a female cyborg in its appeal to feminism but the oppositional meanings inhered in that cyborg image are recuperated by the competing tendency to represent [Max] within the terms of traditional norms of femininity. (Sharp, 517)

Other ways in which the series represents Max in terms of traditional norms of femininity are linked to her "engineered" weaknesses. The focus on Max's body is problematic as it emphasises women's connection to their biology, but also of Max's specific biological determination. Max has certain "engineered" weaknesses, problems which arise as a direct result of her genetic make-up, implying that certain individuals or even groups can be inherently weak as a result of their biology. Alternatively, the fact that her biology is engineered may point to the artificiality of assigning certain gender expectations to an individual because of their biological sex. This aspect of the series is probably the most troubling in the way it presents Max as flawed despite her strength, while at the same

time it makes her more "real" to a audience of younger women seeking a strong female role model to whom they can relate more easily.

The first "weakness" the viewer is introduced to is Max's seizures, which occur because of some mistake in her genetic code. This engineered weakness not only points to some inherent flaw in Max which negates her physical strength, but also emphasises that she is unlike other people and unable to "blend [in] with the crowd" (Season 1, Episode 4). The second significant engineered weakness which Max exhibits is when she is "in heat", as a result of an estrus-cycle that occurs because of her feline DNA. This estrus-cycle happens two to three times a year, causes Max to "run around acting like an average male" (Season 1, Episode 20). This weakness, even more so than the seizures, seems to imply that women are weaker because of their biology, an idea recalling Freud's "Anatomy is destiny". This biologically inherent weakness suggests that traditional prescriptive gender behaviour should not be violated and that women should guard their virtue. Max's strength, assertiveness and ability to be a leader are all to an extent contained within this framework of femininity. Of course one need not necessarily read these weaknesses as anti-feminist, but as a way of exposing how normal women's "inherent" weaknesses are just as engineered as Max's, as they are a result of their assigned gender. The problems Max experiences due to her genetic make-up are inextricably linked to representations of femininity in the series: it is not just the binary between masculine and feminine that is explored in the series, but also tensions between femininity and feminism.

Max's agency is an important factor which figures into the representation of femininity in *Dark Angel.* Max is able to move freely around the different sectors and in and out of the city because she has a sector pass thanks to her job as a messenger at Jam Pony, but also because she owns a motorcycle. Max's agency is exemplified not only by her freedom of movement but also through her challenge to conventional authority. Max rejects any attempts at imposing authority on her, and she only does what she thinks is right.

> LOGAN: In case you haven't caught on by now, this girl is gonna do what she's gonna do, no matter what you or anyone else says. Now you've got two choices: back off or pitch in. (Season 1, Episode 8)

Max does not allow her own authority to be subdued by male authority: most notable are the exchanges between Max and Zack, the "leader" of the X-5 group in the first season. Max gets involved in a one-on-one fight with Zack when he tries to prevent her from doing what she has decided is right (Season 1, Episode 9). The fight is very equal but Max walks away the victor not only because she subdues Zack physically, but also because she follows up her decisions with actions.

Another significant way in which Max resists conventional authority is when she names other transgenics: by giving them names instead of them being known by their designations, she symbolically frees them from the oppression of Manticore, and enables them to form their own identities instead of just being numbers and thus objects. Max names a group of young transgenics who escape from Manticore after she successfully destroys Manticore at the beginning of the second season. She not only names them, but encourages them to think for themselves instead of being blindly obedient to figures of power. Max's own position as a figure of authority is consolidated in the second season, and she continues to strengthen this position of power as the season progresses. In the second season, Max tells Logan's niece, the story of "The Little Mermaid", but she changes this iconic children's story to have the happy ending that she wants it to have. In the chapter on Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It* the power of naming was discussed, along with the importance of language in feminist attempts to gain authority. By changing the tale Max shows that one does not always have to accept the "stories" told to one, but that the power to change something lies with oneself. Max also defends her alteration of the story to Logan.

> LOGAN: And I don't think that's how it ends, actually.
>
> MAX: What?
>
> LOGAN: "The Little Mermaid." I think she falls for a prince or something, but then he blows her off for a real girl. *(He leans on the counter.)*
>
> MAX: What do you mean, "real"? Just because someone happens to have a tail doesn't mean they're not real. (Season 2, Episode 8)

Max not only changes the story, but she also changes the life of the real-life mermaid in the episode, a transgenic who has fins and breathes using gills who is captured by Ames White. Max frees her from captivity and returns her to her mate and her offspring.

The name Max was given by the other X-5s when they were children is vitally important to her, since it is this name that Max clings to in order to keep control over her body and identity when she is recaptured by Manticore. At the end of the first season, Max and some of the other X-5s fail in an attempt to bring Manticore down. Max is shot by a younger clone of herself and Zack, a fellow X-5, shoots himself to ensure that she will have a donor for a heart transplant. Similar to Max's resurrection, Buffy is also brought back from the dead not only once, but twice, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Max's resurrection does not seem to cause her as much pain as that which Buffy suffers: Buffy believes that she was in heaven before she was brought back a second time, and her return to a hostile world is unwilling (Magoulick, 747).

In contrast, Max, although saddened by Zack's fate, uses her second chance to attempt to bring about the changes she believes are necessary in order for transgenics and humans to integrate. Max is held captive at Manticore after her transplant, and even though she is back at Manticore she refuses to let them dictate her life. Zack's strength as a leader becomes Max's, his heart literally beats in her chest and she becomes a hybrid of male and female, symbolically bestowing power on her. By refusing to allow them to define her according to her designation, Max attempts to deny the identity prescribed to her by Manticore, taking ownership of her identity by not allowing them to take her sense of self away: she effectively reinscribes the identity dictated to her by Manticore. The name she was given by her fellow X-5s, her family, is a symbol of the control which she exerts, with a certain degree of success, over her own life.

One cannot deny Max's authority in the series as she resists being dominated by male characters, but perhaps the most troubling male figure, who remains on the periphery but who nonetheless has the most influence on Max's life, is Sandeman. Sandeman is the one who created Max with a specific purpose in mind, who crafted her destiny and whose

control Max never seems able to escape. Near the end of the second season it comes to light that Max is even more special than anyone thought, something which the viewer has had only mysterious glimpses of: Max has been specially created by Sandeman, the founder of Manticore, to be the saviour of the human race. Sandeman belonged to a cult which had existed for thousands of years whose sole purpose is to ensure that only the genetically superior flourish in their ranks so that they may survive "The Coming", an apocalypse they themselves are engineering. Max has no "junk DNA", and all her base pairs contain viable genetic information: this genetic anomaly presumably ensures that she will be able to protect people not belonging to the cult from "The Coming" (Season 2, Episode 2). Max's role as saviour of humankind means that she is not simply the threatening Other, tainted by technology, but also a figure of hope and potential redemption for the entire human race.

The fact that Max is presented as the one person who can save the human race is problematic, as it implies that there is something special about Max which cannot be harnessed or imitated by other women. Even though Max is not the only "Max", there exist at least three other clones of her, none of which seems to be able to gain as much authority as Max does. The clones emphasise the anxieties tied in with the figure of the female cyborg in popular culture: is this figure of power and transgression a reality for all women or is it possible only for one "special" woman? One can argue that a series such as *Dark Angel* does not portray women as equals, but that by bestowing special powers on a single strong female character it is implied that strong women are rare and that they need "what amounts to superpowers to survive, let alone thrive…" (Magoulick, 749). This issue of a strong woman being unique is very similar to the one surrounding Deirdre's strength in *No Woman Born*, C.L. Moore's novella discussed in chapter two, as she was "like the Phoenix", a singular phenomenon which can perhaps not be imitated. A significant difference between Deirdre and Max is the fact that Max teaches others to stand up for themselves by way of her example when she initiates social action but also in how she shatters social norms. To return to the issue of Sandeman's control over Max, the pivotal question surrounding Max's creation by Sandeman as the saviour of humankind is about choice: Does Max really have a choice as to whether she wants to be

the saviour of the human race or not? Is she merely a pawn in a greater struggle between Sandeman, her creator, and the cult which he has turned away from, or will she be able to use her special abilities not only to save the human race, but also to further her own dream of peaceful integration between transgenics and humans? These questions are not fully answered by the series, but the open-ended and seemingly hopeful ending of the second season suggests that Max will perhaps succeed in both of her endeavours, but not without resistance, this resistance being represented in the series mainly by the cult.

During an encounter with the cult, Max is cut with the snake-blood covered knife used in the initiation all children belonging to the cult must undergo, and she not only survives but suffers from none of the usual symptoms. After this encounter, strange runes appear on her skin, and the viewer later finds out that it is a message from Sandeman in Ancient Minoan, outlining her destiny to be the saviour of humankind (Season 2, Episode 21/22). The runes enhance the sense that Max is special, that she was designed with a specific purpose in mind: to destroy the cult which threatens humankind's continued existence, and by doing so breaking away from thousands of years of tradition. According to Haraway, the cyborg's ties to its origins need to be severed in order for it to become a truly transgressive figure, but Max's success in severing her ties with Manticore is questionable because of the persistent looming presence of Sandeman. The runes which appear on Max's body also reinforce the idea that Max is marked, that her body is encoded with a certain destiny which she cannot deviate from, a destiny conceived by Sandeman which makes it impossible for Max to break away from her origins.

Max's fight against the cult and what it plans to do is focused on Ames White, the eldest son of Sandeman, who is still true to the cult. White despises the transgenics as they represent his father's betrayal, as well as an unforgivable transgression against the selective breeding program that his people have enforced for thousands of years. Similar to Manticore, the cult represents oppression, and more obviously, the privileging of the male gender. The breeding program in practice means that women are often simply used as breeding partners, and then abandoned or killed when they have birthed the desired child. The women who are born into the cult, like the female warriors of the Phalanx, are

not concerned with their own goals, but only with ensuring that "The Coming" occurs. These women are complicit with patriarchal aims as they cannot break free from what they were born into. Max, on the other hand, is committed not only to preventing the cult's apocalypse from happening, but also to attempt to change public perception of transgenics and protecting them while the world is still hostile to their existence.

Max attempts to initiate change in her society and she is not alone in her fight, since she is able to mobilise others around her in her fight against injustice and oppression, and this in part is because she is such an authoritative and strong character. Max's strength also makes her the target of others who either want to neutralise the threat she poses or harness her power for themselves. It is important to note the influence which Max's childhood has on her actions and motivations later in life. Max's need for family stems from her lack of a caring family and the militaristic nature of her childhood at Manticore. One does not really appreciate her strength of character unless the indoctrination and rigorous training she underwent as a child are taken into account.

> *(Max walks away. She wanders into a side hallway and stops while she flashes back to Manticore. In the flashback, the young X5s are sitting in class, and a screen in front of the classroom flashes the following words:)*
>
> *KNOW YOUR ENEMY*
> *ENEMY*
> *DECEPTION*
> *DECEPTION IS A WEAPON*
> *SURPRISE A TACTICAL ADVANTAGE* (Season 1, Episode 7)

Manticore controlled every aspect of her life, and Max's escape from this control required strength and determination, both of which Max has in ample supply. Max is recaptured at the end of season one and in the first episode of season two we see her back at Manticore, but more resistant to its indoctrination than ever. Max stands firm when Renfro, the female director of Manticore, and other personnel, attempt to define her by her designation and, more significantly, she resists their attempt at controlling female reproduction.

Renfro figures as the most important female figure who is complicit with patriarchal aims of oppression in the series: she firmly believes that Max must be controlled in order to fulfil her destiny as saviour of humankind. As with the other cyborg texts discussed, *Dark Angel* also addresses the importance of reproduction in the struggle for autonomy. Manticore consolidates its control over female transgenics by regularly dosing its female transgenics with contraceptives to prevent uncontrolled reproduction (Season 1, Episode 15). Because Max and Zack destroyed the laboratory with all the genetic samples at the end of season one, the transgenics still at the compound must "copulate" in arranged pairs to provide Manticore with more transgenic DNA to use and study. The arranged pairs must then report back on the success of their efforts. Max is paired off with X5-494, who she later names Alec, but she refuses to comply with their orders. Manticore views the female transgenics as breeding machines who must provide them with new opportunities to perfect their genetic engineering. Two other X-5 females, Tinga and Jace, are hunted by Manticore because Tinga has a son and Jace is pregnant, and Manticore does not tolerate uncontrolled reproduction. Max tries to save Tinga from Manticore but is ultimately unsuccessful, while later in season two she is able to free Jace and get her and her unborn child out of the country. By helping Jace escape Max thwarts Manticore's attempts at control over the X-5 females' reproduction, and this signals a shift in power in Max's favour.

In the second season after Manitcore is destroyed, the cult's oppression of women, as well as transgenics, and its control over reproduction, become Max's main target. Max's fight against oppression and control can be seen as symbolic of certain second-wave feminist struggles: "the fight against sexual violence, and the 'justified feminist anger' young women experience in the face of patriarchal prohibitions and constraints" (Pender, 166). This idea of a female fighter standing up for herself and other women is also presented in other television series like *Buffy The Vampire Slayer,* and the female action hero, as an ambitious, strong and sexy female, is very prevalent in today's media. Lara Croft, *Alias*, *The Bionic Woman* and *The Sara Connor's Chronicles* all have strong female leads who are almost superheroes.

While Max is undeniably feminine, her strength, agency and authority are equally prominent. The new female action hero exemplifies agency and action in a female sphere, but an important distinction needs to be made between the public action hero, acting on the offensive, and the private action hero who acts out of self-defence. The public female action hero is the counterpart of the male action hero, while the private female action hero is arguably traceable to the rape-revenge heroines of the seventies movies like *I Spit on Your Grave* (Stasia, 175). Seen in terms of this distinction, Max's character is a hybrid, as she acts on the offensive but more often than not she only acts to defend herself or people close to her. A description of this new female action hero is provided by Stasia.

> [T]he new female action hero combines conventional 'femininity' and traditionally male activities (public and private); fashion sense and social responsibility (public) and nurturing and aggression (private)…[T]he new female action hero embraces her 'femininity' while not letting this mitigate her power… (Stasia 176).

This description of the new female hero seems to embody the hopes of feminism rather than what is actually represented by characters like Max. Although such a conflated image of feminine and masculine attributes destabilises traditional concepts of gender, the female action hero is not necessarily threatening to the status quo of gender relations, as she represents an impossible ideal "super beautiful, super sexy and super hero[underscoring] woman as spectacle" (Stasia, 178). A positive aspect of Max's beauty and feminine attributes is that she is undeniably feminine, which means that she does not seek to emulate masculine qualities: Max actively resists the violence Manticore "programmed" into her as a child and she does not embody traditionally masculine values such as aggression and competition. However, one cannot neglect to explore exactly how Max's appearance figures in the representation of femininity in the series, and also influences the transgressive potential of her character.

Dark Angel, and series like it, contain mixed messages about the strength of women, and this is very troubling in a feminist sense. The show's commercial success was in large part due to the sexual desirability of its lead character: Max is feminine and attractive, and while female viewers were drawn to the representation of a strong female character,

the show also had a large male fan base thanks to the appearance of the actress, Jessica Alba, who portrays Max. Max's beauty brings up the question of whether the female cyborg in popular culture is simply a sexualised object for male pleasure, and whether this aspect of its representation negates any progressive feminist possibilities the cyborg in *Dark Angel* may possess. This tension between female subject and object for male pleasure within the figure of the cyborg in popular culture can be traced back to the archetypal strong female character, Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman set the trend for female "superheroes" to be both strong and beautiful, and this depiction "underscores the binary of the masculine-subject/feminine-object relationship" (O'Reilly, 280). This element of female superheroes in popular culture opposes the inherent possibility for transgression possessed by the cyborg, and it is therefore important to analyse Max's sexuality more fully.

Max is represented as a strong female "kicking ass", while still appearing sexually alluring. Max's perceived strength affects how the viewer sees Max's femininity and her agency, but also her sexuality, since the latter influences one's perception of whether Max is an empowered female or a sexualised object. Is Max's sexuality used to effectively contain the transgressive possibilities of the cyborg figure because the series is simply attempting to showcase a female who can be both strong and sexy? Third-wave feminist thought would have it that Max should be allowed to be sexy and wear whatever she wants, as it has no influence on the strength or authority of her politics, but the implications of Max's sexuality are not as simple as that. Representations of feminine identity in the media, especially representations aimed at a younger audience, greatly influence young girls and women's perception of their own female identity. The cyborg in popular culture, as seen in *The Bionic Woman* series of the seventies, and arguably also in *Dark Angel*, can be hyper-sexualised, "exaggerate[ing] stereotypical features of sexualized bodies, creating figures that are easily and clearly identified with male or female entities, without leaving a place for any kind of ambiguity or uncertainty regarding their respective sexuality" (Shabot, 225). The viewer never sees Max in an unattractive pose; she often wears skin-tight clothing, and will readily use her appearance to attain her goals. Max's behaviour and appearance might imply to a younger audience

that to be accepted and successful in society one must conform to externalised expectations of beauty and behavioural codes. Of course, one can also argue that this flexibility in Max's character, her ability to be beautiful but not to be defined by it, is part of a strategy that liberates her from conventions of gender. It seems that everyone except Max acknowledges her beauty and therefore she is not defined by her appearance. Max controls the image of femininity which she projects she does not modify her behaviour according to the male gaze: it has no influence on her self-worth, though she still uses her beauty and sexuality as a tactical advantage in her encounters with male adversaries.

Another possibly restrictive factor that plays a role in Max's sexuality is the fact that her heterosexuality is compulsory, due to her feline DNA, which causes the estrus cycles during which she seeks out males to mate with. The cyborg in popular culture is predominantly created by men, as is the case with *Dark Angel*, and therefore representations of the cyborg in popular culture are infused with anxieties concerned with threatened masculinity (Shabot, 225). Because the cyborg threatens the denotative stability of human identity due to its connection with technology, other binary structures like gender are often reinforced to prevent "losing everything as a consequence of a pervasive, chaotic and total blurriness" (Shabot, 225). The transgenics in the series represent how the definition of what it means to be human is changing, and to counter balance this threatening shift of boundaries of identity Max, the main female character, is presented in relatively normative gender terms.

A useful series to compare with Dark Angel's representations of femininity is the 1970s show, *The Bionic Woman*. Sharp comments that in *The Bionic Woman*, the show's attempts "to represent a strong, independent woman with feminist sensibility was riddled with contradiction" (508), and one can argue that *Dark Angel* faces similar problems of representation. The lead character in *The Bionic Woman*, Jaime Sommers, is injured and one arm, a leg and an eye are all replaced with cybernetic equivalents. As with Max, Jaime is portrayed as an active and powerful female figure, but her power is diminished by the series' use of traditional representational codes of feminine norms of behaviour and sexuality (Sharp, 508). Even the recent remake of *The Bionic Woman* still presents the lead character in an overtly sexual way. A promotional advertisement for the remake

of the show depicts Jaime Sommers from her bare shoulders up, lips parted, with her one eye visibly inhuman and the text of the advertisement reading: "Meet the woman who really can go all night". In these terms, the figure of the female cyborg in *The Bionic Woman* is constructed as a non-threatening female figure who is defined in terms of her sexuality. Arguably, Max is not wholly defined by her sexuality, but the way in which it is presented in the series poses serious problems for a reading of the series as positive in a feminist sense. Young women need to be encouraged to produce their own representations of femininity (Munford, 145), and to do this they need new role models to provide them with the correct tools to construct these representations. Reformulating social categories such as "woman" includes reformulating the concept of femininity and sexuality. Arguably, in *Dark Angel,* Max's femininity and sexuality are not transgressive or progressive enough to provide a viable role model for young women.

Possibly the most restrictive element concerning the redefinition of femininity in the series is the way in which issues of feminism are undermined through the representation of commodification.

> LOGAN: Now, come on, Max. First I watch you take out a 250-pound ex-cop bodyguard without breaking a sweat...
>
> MAX: Girls kick ass. Says so on the T-shirt. (Season 1, Episode 1).

And:

> ORIGINAL CINDY: C.R.E.A.M., baby, C.R.E.A.M.
>
> *(Max turns to look at her, puzzled, and she finger-spells the acronym.)*
>
> ORIGINAL CINDY: Cash Rules Everything Around Me. C.R.E.A.M. It's just the world we live in. (Season 1, Episode 5)

As seen from these two examples, there is an awareness in *Dark Angel* of the dangers of commodification, but this awareness does not successfully deal with the problematic issues arising from the conflicting goals of commodification and feminism in the series. Series such as *Dark Angel* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are aimed at not only a younger female audience but also a male audience, which translates into female characters who

are not only strong but also sexually attractive. Often the strength of these female characters is also a ploy to appeal to a younger demographic which enjoys series combining action, comedy and romance. Therefore, the representation of feminist goals is played off against the emphasis on femininity and sex appeal in such series. Although *Dark Angel* represents feminist themes and goals they are too over-simplified to translate into real change, and imbedded within the narrative of the show is "a careful negotiation and containment of the feminist discourse implicitly evoked in this story of female empowerment" (Sharp, 514).

One of the biggest instabilities in representations of feminist ideals in popular culture is the danger of commodification, the danger that "Spice Girl Pencil Set Syndrome will settle in: girls buy products created by male-owned companies that capture the slogan of feminism, without the power" (Baumgardner and Richards quoted in Munford, 148). In the series, Max's value as a weapon and commodity is emphasised when she is hunted not only by Manticore but also by the mercenary groups and other military agencies. In episode three of season two, White manipulates Alec into hunting and killing other transgenics in order to save his own life, and he instructs Alec to bring back their barcodes as "[p]roof of purchase". Commodification as the cause of misrepresentation of feminism in television series brings to the fore the importance of feminism's engagement with popular culture to make sure that younger generations of women are not simply bombarded with images of strong women with no substance or depth: simplified and watered-down feminist ideas undermine the central ideals of feminism.

Given that series like *Dark Angel* are most often created by male writers, this means that Max, like the other strong female characters of Buffy and Xena, is in large part a projection of male fantasies: a woman who is strong but not so strong as to upset the status quo. The origins and purpose of such a series also lead to misrepresentations of feminism, as the goal of presenting the viewer with a female cyborg figure is not to subvert or transgress patriarchal power structures but to reinforce them. Any progressive elements in Max's character seem to be almost incidental, or in many cases, included to appeal to a female audience. In this way, the potential of the figure of the cyborg in *Dark*

Angel is corrupted and undermined, because the lead female character's persona "is determined partly through fairly conventional conduits of sexuality and physical and emotional femininity" (Magoulick, 729). These conventional depictions of femininity are most apparent in Max's relationship with Logan.

Max's relationship with Logan follows a pattern similar to, for example, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. In both *Buffy* and *Dark Angel*, the female leads are supported by male characters who

> give them their strength, help them to channel whatever power they have, and are always lurking, either as potential lovers, as controlling father figures or bosses, as potential threats, or sometimes all three at once. These powerful, sometimes threatening men and troubled relationships with men emerge as insidious and potentially damaging hidden messages within these shows. (Magoulick, 735)

When viewed in comparison with Buffy's relationships with men, Max's relationship with Logan seems less violent and damaging to Max than Buffy's relationship with Angel, her vampire lover. Buffy's romantic relationships are much more tempestuous than Max and Logan's relationship which, significantly, is never consummated. Max is represented as virtuous in a very conventional way which aligns her femininity with more traditional role expectations. Max only sleeps with one male character in the whole series: this happens when Max is 'in heat' and she is overcome by remorse, guilt and self-disgust afterwards. Buffy's main romantic relationship is with Angel, the vampire who has a soul but who, when Buffy loses her virginity to him, becomes his true self; the evil demon, Angelus (Magoulick, 737). Buffy is the catalyst for Angel's damnation, and in subsequent episodes Buffy and Angel have many battles, both physical and emotional.

Max's relationship with Logan is not marred by violent encounters and, even though they have their share of problems, Logan respects Max and she is never in any danger from him but, like Buffy, Max is also the carrier of her beloved's destruction. At the beginning of the second season, Max infects Logan with a genetically engineered virus made by Manticore which targets him specifically, thereby destroying any chance of them having any physical contact (Season 2, Episode 1). Just as Angel's life is endangered by his reversion back to his demon self, Logan's life is threatened by any intimacy between him and Max. Not only does the virus effectively separate Max and

Logan and nullify their chances of a romantic relationship, it also casts Max's sexual desires and needs in a threatening light, similar to the way in which Buffy's desire is, almost literally, demonised. Female desire as presented in *Dark Angel* is not liberating but restrictive: female desire is something that must be controlled, if not denied altogether.

Max and Logan's relationship is important because it addresses many paradoxical aspects of Max's character. Their inability to be together and the viewer's wish that they could have a happy ending raises issues of individuality in feminist theory: programs like *Dark Angel* become pleasurable for the viewer because the tensions in Max's relationship with Logan "play with some of the conflicting inheritances of feminism … [the] desire for both independence and companionship" (Gorton, 161). There is not only a struggle between Max's independence and her reliance on Logan, but also a tension due to traditional gender roles which Max does not strictly fulfil. Logan seems compelled to, unsuccessfully, fulfil the masculine gender role in the relationship: he abhors any weakness in himself and lashes out at Max because she is strong which makes him feel inadequate. Logan is confined to a wheelchair for most of season one, following a shootout in the second episode of the series, but the viewer is given hope on many occasions of Logan's recovery which seems to promise that Max and Logan will be able to be together in a romantic sense once Logan is able to walk again. This hope is almost completely removed after Max is purposely infected with the virus, and by implying that Max will never be able to have a romantic relationship, the series also implies that a strong woman cannot have both companionship and individual authority, as the two are incompatible. This may suggest to the younger generation of girls who watch(ed) *Dark Angel* that if they want to have a romantic relationship, they cannot be authoritative and independent in a feminist sense: the series' representations of femininity encourage female viewers to over-simplify issues of feminism, which leads to the misrepresentation of feminist ideals.

A related element of Max's character that needs to be analysed in terms of value for feminist ideals is her hybrid nature, which presents the transgression of conventional boundaries in *Dark Angel*. Max's status as a lab-created chimera is important in the

series, and she likens herself to a monstrous figure when discussing her origins with Logan. "Yeah, made-up creature, like in mythology. Head of a lion, body of a goat. Your basic hodgepodge" (Season 1, Episode 1). Max's hybrid nature is already established in the first episode: the expectation that she will destabilise boundaries of identity is created, but presenting transgression is not the same as practising it. What becomes problematic is how Max's hybrid nature is presented, how she herself reacts to it and also how others react to it. Max often describes herself as a freak, and one gets the sense that she would give up her unique powers if offered the opportunity to lead a more conventionally "normal" life. Max desires acceptance, not only for herself but for other transgenics, and while her close friends support her after finding out about her origins, she is reluctant to reveal her status to too many people, as the public at large still reject Max and the other transgenics. The transgenics' Otherness is too obvious and threatening to people, which means that they are hunted and alienated.

Anne Balsamo notes that cyborgs are the products of fears that represent Otherness, they challenge the stability of human identity and that "[f]ormed through a radical disruption of otherness cyborg identity foregrounds the constructedness of Otherness. Cyborgs alert us to the way in which identity depends on notions of 'the other' that are arbitrary, shifting, and ultimately unstable" (Balsamo, 32-33). The Other is always in opposition to the self, and one can argue that the self, the universal person, is conflated with the masculine gender, and that women are always marked as Other (Butler, 9). The associations between culture and the masculine and between nature and the feminine are questioned through the female cyborg: a body that is at once unquestionably female but also mediated by technology. In science fiction texts, the metaphor of the cyborg is used in a similar way to the metaphor of the alien: "to explore the way in which the deeply divisive dichotomies of race and gender are embedded in the repressive structures and relations of dominance and subordination" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 27). Having said this, not all representations of the cyborg question these divisions, and conversely, some reinforce or reproduce those divisions; and the cyborg in *Dark Angel* seems to reinforce these divisions. The ambiguity of the transgressive capabilities of the popular

figure of the cyborg further problematises how power relations, not only between men and women, but also between human and transgenic, are perceived in *Dark Angel*. As Ursula Le Guin comments:

> If you deny any affinity with another person or kind of person, if you declare it to be wholly different from yourself — as men have done to women, and class has done to class, and nation has done to nation — you may hate it or deify it; but in either case you have denied its spiritual equality and its human reality. You have made it into a thing, to which the only possible relationship is a power relationship. (quoted in Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 27-28)

In *Dark Angel* the transgenics are denied equality or any right to existence, the humans viewing them as abominations precisely because they are so different, and represent the feared dissolution of the boundary between self and Other. During the hostage situation at Jam Pony in the last two episodes of the series, a reporter has an interview with a member of the public outside the building. The woman who is interviewed does not hesitate to say exactly what she thinks of the transgenics, and her sentiments can be viewed as representative of the conservative public at large.

> Oh, there's no point in discussing human rights, since they're not human, so they don't have rights. They don't even have souls. And it's worse than that, because animals don't have souls, but they were meant to be here. These things were never even intended by God to exist. They are an insult to everything in His creation. (Season 2, Episode 21/22)

There is no escape for the transgenics: even though some of them can pass as human, they are all marked by the barcodes on their necks. Max's identity is intertwined with the technology which created her, and this is signified by the mark Manticore has programmed into her very genetics to appear on her neck. For Max, her barcode which marks her as a transgenic and Other, is a reminder of what she is fighting against but, at the same time also part of who she is: Max uses the power with which Manticore provided her against them. Max's barcode also presents the idea that she is a commodity, a valuable weapon to certain people and not an individual, and it is significant that Max cannot remove her barcode. In the last episodes of the second season Max does not deny her transgenic status, but she sides with the escaped transgenics who take up residence in Terminal City, a part of Seattle which had been exposed to biochemical pollution and is therefore uninhabitable to humans. Not all the transgenics created at Manticore look

human: Joshua, a good friend of Max's who escaped with her from Manticore in the beginning of season two, has the face of a dog, and others look like reptiles or even cats. These transgenics cannot blend into the human population as easily as Max, and therefore these "trannies" are the most viciously hunted, not only by Ames White, but also by the public once they become aware of the transgenics' existence.

In the first season, the transgenics who did not turn out according to plan were called anomalies, but in the second season there is no real distinction between anomaly and transgenic, they are all simply transgenic. In newspapers, television news and tabloid reports transgenics are continually referred to as mutants, monsters and freaks, further emphasising their marginalised status. Their Otherness stands in opposition to humanity, the transgenics exist on the periphery and their location in Terminal City, the almost uninhabitable borders of human society, is determined by humanist conceptualisations of what it means to be human. Much like Nili's community and Tikva in Piercy's *He, She, and It,* Terminal City is literally located on the margins of human society (Season 2, Episode 3).

For all the transgenics Terminal City is extremely important, as it becomes a refuge for "downstairs people", away from the "ordinaries" as they call humans. Terminal City is at once a refugee camp, a marginal sanctuary and. in a sense. almost a ghetto: the transgenics are safe as long as they remain within its borders. Max and Alec move in and out of Terminal City to rescue lost transgenics and take them to safety. The transgenics have no choice as to whether they live in Terminal City or not, since there is no other safe place for them: they are the marginalised, invested by humanity with its terrors (Rutherford quoted in Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 27). The process of Othering is based on the binary of self versus Other, and in the case of the transgenics, of created life versus conventional humanity. Since the cyborg figures as a transgressive figure, acceptance of the cyborg's hybrid nature is not always unanimous in a text, and in *Dark Angel* the marginalisation and Othering of individuals who embody difference is very prominent.

The hatred that humans exhibit towards the transgenics can be summarised in the definition of Otherness suggested by Jonathan Rutherford.

> The centre invests the Other with its terrors. It is the threat of the dissolution of self that ignites the irrational hatred and hostility as the centre struggles to assert and secure its boundaries that construct self from not-self. (quoted in Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 27)

The hostility the public feels towards the transgenics is presented to the viewer in the second season through violence committed against transgenics, tabloid headlines and the signs mobs of people hold protesting against the existence of transgenics. In the crowds that gather outside Jam Pony in the last episodes of the series, it is easy to discern the feelings of the public about transgenics.

> (*Outside Jam Pony, some people in the crowd are holding up signs with slogans like the following*:)

> OUR KIDS ARE NOT SAFE
> STAY OUT OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD, FREAKS
> MAKE OUR STREETS MUTANT FREE
> KILL THE FREAKS (Season 2, Episode 21/22)

The transgenics' can be viewed much in the same light as those traditionally persecuted because of racial or ethnic differences: they are a group of individuals marginalised because of their appearance, abilities and deviations from "normality" due to their genetic makeup. Certain clashes between the transgenics and "ordinaries" remind one of racial clashes in America, specifically in the South, where crosses would be set alight in front of the houses of unwanted black people. In the series, burning Xs are used to indicate that the transgenics are unwanted by the general public (Season 2, Episode 20).

The public not only reacts, but reacts violently, and it is not only the public that gets involved in the attempted eradication of the transgenics, but also religious leaders like the Reverend Terry Caldwell and the government, in the form of Senator James McKinley. The public soon finds out about the barcodes which mark these transgenics, and Max and Alec start to have theirs lasered off every few weeks to escape detection. By lasering off

her barcode Max is also denying her Otherness, something which she accepts at the end of season two. This acceptance is not without anxiety as one can see from the Halloween episode in the second season. Max does not want to take Joshua to town with her on Halloween and she gets into an argument about it with her friend Original Cindy.

> MAX: He's better off where he is. No one can ask him any questions or make any judgments.
>
> ORIGINAL CINDY: Judgments about who...him or you? (Season 2, Episode 5)

Max attempts to deny her difference, but she is ultimately unsuccessful, as one sees from the rest of the episode. Max falls asleep in the bath tub after her conversation with Original Cindy, and she then dreams that Joshua goes out with her on Halloween night and they get into a wild chase involving other transgenics. Joshua is caught by the police and Max is forced either to acknowledge that she is like him or deny it. In the dream Max denies that she is like Joshua and allows the police to take him away. The dream ends with Max sitting on the Space Needle in the same way she does at the end of many episodes, mulling over what has happened: "All I wanted was a normal night out. But I guess for a girl like me, normal is just too much to ask…" (Season 2, Episode 5). Max realises that she must accept who she is, and that accepting herself also means accepting her kinship with Joshua. These periods of reflection at the top of the Space Needle illustrates Max's development as a person, how her identity has changed over time and how she by the end of the second season has a better understanding of who she is and what the word "family" means to her.

Max has a very different definition of the word "family" from the conventional one, as she was raised as a soldier. Her fellow X-5s are her brothers and sisters and this definition later extends to include most other transgenics as well. Family here is defined in terms similar to those used by Haraway in the manifesto: family is an alliance that is chosen freely, affinity due to similar ideas, goals and ways of seeing the world instead of a family that is connected by blood. At the beginning of the second season Max is once again captive at Manticore after her near-death experience, but she wastes no time in destroying Manticore. Max uses the Eyes Only stream to reveal Manticore's location,

and Max's exposure of Manticore prompts Renfro, the woman in control of Manticore, to giving the order to lock down the barracks and burn everyone inside to destroy evidence of the existence of Manticore. Max returns to Manticore after she makes the broadcast to let out all the trapped transgenics: Max owns up to her responsibility towards all the other transgenics and instead of only the other X-5s being her family, they are now all family to her.

> MAX: This is happening because of me. I forced them to go. That's my family. Some of them are screwed up. Some of them don't look like you or me or anything anybody's ever seen before...but I'm responsible for them just the same. (Season 2, Episode 2)

Max recognises the importance of the kinship she shares with others like her, and she teaches this to younger transgenics as well. She helps the group of young transgenics she also named to get into Canada, and before they leave she reminds them of the importance of family by telling them not to make the same mistake she did: "Stay together. You're family" (Season 2, Episode 2).

Max is linked to the X-5s through their shared altered genetics but she also views Original Cindy, her best friend who works with her as a messenger at Jam Pony, as her sister, and their relationship is based on both respect and love. Max and Original Cindy's bond is tested when Max tells Original Cindy the truth about what she (Max) is after her final encounter with the Reds in the first season. Orginal Cindy accepts Max for who she is: Max and Cindy are family by choice rather than by blood but their bond is true.

> ORIGINAL CINDY: Before you go, there's something I want to say. You, Max Guevara, are my sister. You are my family. (Season 2, Episode 19)

Original Cindy's affection for Max is not affected by Max's status as an outsider. Similar to the extended family portrayed in *He, She, and It*, Max's family of friends and fellow transgenics opens up the definition of family by including individuals who would normally be deemed Other. One can relate Max's family to the call for a new feminism where women are not all simply linked by some essential concept which defines them under the unifying category of "woman".

Political organisation and a call to action are represented by the coalition formed by the transgenics and humans like Logan and Original Cindy in the last few episodes of *Dark Angel.* Logan and Mole, one of the transgenics, have a disagreement when they are all trapped at Jam Pony.

> LOGAN *(sarcastically)*: That's a good idea. Start shooting people, 'cause that's what White wants, and then you can prove you're the monster people think you are.
>
> MOLE: Shut up! You're not one of us!
>
> LOGAN: No, I'm not. But I'm standing right here with you, aren't I?
>
> MAX: All right, people, listen up! If we don't stick together, we don't get out of here alive. *(To Mole)* You understand that? (Season 2, Episode 21/22)

This alliance is not made completely voluntarily, as can be seen from the exchange between the transgenic Mole and Logan, but it becomes a more cohesive unity when they are under attack from the Phalanx and everyone fights together. Their alliance is not viewed in idealistic terms: there is internal conflict in the group, but they nonetheless stand together against the police, the public and White. In a later exchange between Logan and Mole, they discuss the fact that White is in fact only after Max, and Mole wants Max to go out and give herself up in the hope that it will save the rest of them.

> MOLE: Wake up, chimp! We're out of options here!
>
> LOGAN: No, *you* wake up. If she is the key to saving millions of people from some kind of apocalypse...
>
> MOLE: Your people or my people?
>
> LOGAN: People! Human beings, like you and me! (Season 2, Episode 21/22)

Here the distinction between transgenic and human appears to have been erased to a certain extent, although it does not completely disappear. Max realises that her fight against injustice and oppression will never be over and that social responsibility is not something one can choose to ignore. Cece, one of the transgenics, is killed in the attack

on Jam Pony, and Max feels responsible for her death, and in her subsequent conversation with Logan the viewer is again alerted to the fact that the fight is never over.

> MAX: This is all my fault. I let these people loose in the world. But there's no place for us out here. There's no place anywhere.

> LOGAN: You gave them freedom, Max. The thing about freedom...it's never free. (Season 2, Episode 21/22)

Another important issue which is addressed in the series' finale is that social action not only benefits the people who are committed and involved in it but also, more importantly, future generations. During the hostage situation at Jam Pony, Gem, a pregnant transgenic woman is in labour and her baby is born during the fighting: the baby girl seems to symbolise the coming generations of transgenic offspring who will have more freedom, thanks to the actions taken by Max and transgenics like her. Max takes control of the group and organises everyone in preparation for the attack of the Phalanx, an elite group of warrior from White's cult. The two groups engage in hand-to-hand combat and Max's group wins. It is important to note that in this fight Max only uses violence to protect herself and her friends, and she does not commit unnecessary and vindictive violent acts: Max's violence is purely defensive. The transgenics manage to escape from Jam Pony but the police still pursue them back to Terminal City. Max fulfils the position of leadership in the group and manages to convince the police to negotiate with her to prevent anyone else from getting hurt. Max also makes it clear that she will no longer be on the run, hunted by people who want to own, kill or study her or others like her.

The transgenic / human alliance mobilises in an overtly political way when they raise the flag that Joshua had created earlier in plain view of the people outside Terminal City. Joshua explains the meaning behind the composition of the flag to Max.

> *(Joshua explains the flag. He begins by pointing to the barcode.)*

> JOSHUA: This is you, me, even them. It's all of us. *(Points to the black stripe)* This is where we came from--where they tried to keep us.

> MAX: In the dark.

JOSHUA: Secret. *(Points to the red stripe)* This is where we are now, because our blood is being spilled. *(Points to the white stripe)* This is where we want to go.

MAX: Into the light.

JOSHUA: Right. (Season 2, Episode 21/22)

The flag makes their political intent clear: their goal is to be accepted as members of society. The series ends with Max (wearing gloves to protect Logan from the virus) holding hands with Logan while watching Joshua and some of the other transgenics raise the flag. Max and Logan's union implies that not only they, but also other humans and transgenics, will be united in the fight against oppression.

Issues of social action are comprehensively addressed in *Dark Angel,* and social action is implicitly intertwined with another crucial issue in feminism: that of the individual versus the collective, the feminist self and the "politically engaged feminist 'we'" (Siegel quoted in Munford, 150). Max's resistance to patriarchal authority is an important factor in her role as a figure of social action. She not only takes care of herself but she also stands up for women who cannot do so for themselves. To name two examples, she helps an abused girl (Season 1, Episode 4) and she frees girls who were abducted to be sold into prostitution (Season 1, Episode 10). Max's resistance to Manticore's authority culminates in the attempt by Max and some of her fellow X-5s to destroy Manticore in the last episode of season one. Max makes the conscious decision to not run any more; she works with the other X-5s to reclaim authority over their own lives. "Always on the run, constantly looking over your shoulder. You said it yourself. They'll never stop looking for us. They'll hunt us down, one by one, until we're either dead or in a cage. It's time to bring this war home" (Season 1, Episode 22).

Max opens young women's eyes to the fact that they are capable of more than they are led to believe by societal prescriptions of female behaviour and identity. In her discussion on the new female action hero, Stasia raises the concern that such female heroes

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provide images of an equality that has not been achieved, and that they mitigate their viewers' interests in exploring inequalities. It is easy to be seduced by images of strong women fighting, but these images capitalise on a basic belief in feminism evacuated of any consciousness of why girls still *need* to 'kick ass' (Stasia 181-182).

Through Max's display of social action and the emphasis on the fact that she cannot do it alone, young girls are shown that kinship, affinity and political action are all important in attaining feminist goals. In *Dark Angel* the fact that the fight is never over is emphasised in both seasons: Max can never lead a normal life because there is too much that still needs to be done. The second season ends with all the transgenics united under one flag, standing against the oppression which characterised their whole lives.

Just like Nili in *He, She, and It*, Max is the messenger, the fighter and the negotiator of her people, but Max's transgressive value for feminism in her character's attempts to destabilise traditional categories of gender are more ambiguous than Nili's. Max's value as a figure of feminism lies in the fact that she reaches a younger generation of women who need to be made aware that the "fight" is still going on and that feminism is certainly not dead. Younger generations of women need to be made aware of the fact that they share a kinship with all other women, despite race or class, and that affinity is forged by choice. Most importantly, they must be made aware of the fact that individual action does not result in progressive political action, but for social action to be useful and productive it must be a cooperative effort. As a cyborgian figure, Max "calls into question the boundaries of human, animal, and machine precisely where they are most vulnerable – at the site of the female body" (Halberstam, 440). Her character attempts to challenge the differentiation made between what is natural and unnatural, destabilising traditional boundaries of identity, but this challenge is neutralised by the representation of Max's femininity and gender in normative terms. It is undeniable that Max's character does transgress boundaries of identity, but the question is whether this transgression results in a meaningful deconstruction / reconstruction of gender for feminism, or whether the transgression is contained within more traditional parameters of gender and identity.

A prominent example of how possibilities of transgression are contained in *Dark Angel* is the way women's connection to their bodies and biology is portrayed. One must question whether an "ideal congruence between anatomy and femininity" is offered or whether Max's programmed weaknesses show that "femininity [is an] automation, a coded masquerade" (Halberstam, 449). One can argue about the degree of the transgression achieved by the series, but it does in fact demonstrate how the female cyborg is a tool which exposes gender and identity constructions, although Max also very literally interprets the more utopian element of the figure of the cyborg through her role as "saviour of humanity". Max not only embodies oppositional definitions of femininity, but she is also represented as a singular phenomenon, the "one" created to save the world from certain destruction.

Max's character confronts assumptions of gender, but this confrontation does not translate into a comprehensive interrogation of gender for feminism because her female perspective is not fully realised. The ambiguous and contradictory elements in *Dark Angel*'s portrayal of feminine identity emphasise the fact that "feminist appropriations are inevitably partial because they remain embedded within the conventional narrative structures" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others,* 54). The other factor that contributes to the series' problematic representation of feminism and feminine identity is that the series was created by male writers, who create plots and characters to attract viewers and not necessarily to question constructions of gender and identity. Shows such as *Dark Angel* seem to attempt to illustrate a hopeful future, but instead they reflect current gender and social inequality (Magoulick, 750) and, for the most part, strong female characters like Max lead complicated lives in hostile environments and have troublesome romantic relationships. Max, like the cyborgian figures in the other texts examined in this dissertation, possesses a hybrid nature that should expose the instability of categories of identity, but her desire to be 'normal' undermines the effectiveness of the cyborg as a tool. Another aspect of her character which undermines the representation of a truly strong female cyborg figure is her agency: Max exerts considerable control over her own life and the lives of others, she even assumes a position of undeniable power when she names other transgenics, but ultimately her "destiny" is still controlled by Sandeman.

The viewer cannot be sure that Max will be able to escape Sandeman's control, as her destiny as saviour of humankind is literally programmed into her genetic code. The last scene of *Dark Angel* provides hope that she will be able to reconcile her own political agenda with the destiny Sandeman programmed into her, as she has politically mobilised both transgenics and humans in her cause, but ultimately that hope remains unrealised.

Although representations of the female cyborg, feminist ideas and the subversion of gender are problematic in *Dark Angel,* it is still significant that the series presents liminal figures of society like Max and her fellow transgenics gaining agency and power because, when the other is depicted as an active subject resisting "unitary definitions of difference", possibilities for the redefinition of categories of identity are strengthened (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 29). Like Nili in *He, She, and It*, and Deirdre in *No Woman Born*, Max is an unconventional figure who does not simply accept what she is told to do or be. The most important element which empowers the cyborg is its liminality: it is this attribute which enables it to transgress boundaries of self and Other, nature and culture, and masculine and feminine, and it is the potential of this attribute that is contained within the normative parameters of identity and gender in the series. *Dark Angel's* representations of a potentially subversive feminine identity collapses back into traditional hierarchies: the adherence to an essentialist view of the female body and other prominent conventional aspects of gender neutralises the potent possibilities of the female cyborg in *Dark Angel*. But despite this failure to deconstruct categories of gender the series still, to an extent, presents the younger female viewer with a model of empowerment, illustrating the importance of social action and coalition politics.

According to Wolmark, feminist science fiction narratives should "test the limits of the dominant ideology of gender by proposing alternative possibilities for social and sexual relations which conflict with the dominant representations" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 55). Ultimately, *Dark Angel's* alternative representations of feminine identity do not successfully challenge normative categories of identity. A feminist narrative in popular culture concerned with the cyborg and its transgressive possibilities must be committed to social change and the questioning of the status quo, and to be successful in

this regard it cannot be infiltrated by commodification or over-sexualised images of women in the way *Dark Angel* is. Shows like *Dark Angel* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* appeal to female viewers' need for strong female role models, while offering no substantial potential for changing the ways in which femininity is perceived. *Dark Angel* is not a truly progressive show, as its attempts at illustrating change and transgression in connection with gender and identity categories are contained within traditional gender roles. "In spite of moments of complexity, self-reflexivity, and more hopeful, feministic impulses that the series offer, too many messages and image …perplex viewers looking for feminist heroes" (Magoulick, 748).

The misrepresentation of feminist ideas in series such as *Dark Angel* is why it is important for feminism to engage with popular culture and to point out these misconceptions.   Popular representations of independent and liberated women imply that "women have achieved the goals of second wave feminism – financial autonomy, a successful career, sexual freedom –and, therefore, that the demands associated with the movement of the 1970s have been superseded" (Gorton, 154). This means that younger generations of women are led to believe that there is no more need for feminism, despite a myriad of instances which point to the contrary. Feminism is essentially "contained" by the idea that image triumphs over political substance and power (Munford, 149). Television series that portray feminist ideals and goals in a productive and valuable manner seem unlikely to come to our screens soon, as authentic representations of feminism simply do not sell or appeal to male viewers and therefore strong female characters will always, to a degree, be contained within normative boundaries of identity and gender. All these factors contribute to the limitation and ultimate negation of any transgressive potential the figure of the cyborg might have in *Dark Angel,* but Max's character does have limited value for feminism as she shows a younger female audience the importance of affinity, coalition politics and social action.

CONCLUSION

As this dissertation has shown in each of its chapters, the female cyborg does challenge normative conceptualisations of the female body and feminine identity when used with full awareness of all of its implications as a tool of de- and reconstructing identity. The four texts analysed have shown how the metaphor of the cyborg has been represented at different times in the past and how various authors have employed it to call into question a "natural" and restrictive feminine identity. The figure of the cyborg figures as the main metaphor of the fusion between technology and the feminine and by revealing the constructed nature of feminine identity, it encourages and empowers women to write their own "stories" about their bodies and identities.

The metaphor of the cyborg reveals that the values attributed to the feminine are constructed to ensure that "woman" is categorised as Other, as something that is in need of control and restraint. Through an emphasis on the constructedness of the female body and its associated gender, the cyborg resists any unitary definitions of feminine identity when used by feminist authors. Not only does the figure of the cyborg, as used in fiction or non-fiction, reveal the constructed nature of gender and feminine identity by means of its liminality, it also provides feminism with a space in which to question and reconstruct feminine identity and, in this regard, is a most useful tool to be wielded in feminism's challenge to patriarchal authority. The cyborg, as a tool of feminism, challenges patriarchal authority in two different ways: it transgresses boundaries of identity by means of its liminality, laying them open to change and reconstruction, but it also advocates political unity based on affinity and coalition by emphasising that there is no essential category of "woman".

Gender is crafted from material bodies and cultural fictions (Balsamo, 11), and that process of construction largely depends on the reification of the nature / culture dualism, which in turn restricts women to a singular category of "woman". It is this reification which the metaphor of the cyborg destabilises and deconstructs as it makes fluid the boundary between human and machine, simulation and reality, feminine and masculine.

Feminist authors, who employ the cyborg as a tool in their writing, can create subversive confusion which de-centre the normative Western self and this decentring contributes towards the goal of constructing a new feminine identity. A feminine identity that empowers women, that allows them to find their voices to speak about their identities and bodies, ultimately handing them the tools to construct their own subjectivity.

As the cyborgian figures of Nili and Deirdre in this dissertation demonstrate, the cyborg emphasises the interrelations between language and identity, interjecting itself specifically at the phase of identity construction, revealing how women are cast in the position of Other. The figure of the cyborg's complex representation of femininity, possessing multiple dimensions, undermines the powerless female subject constructed and controlled by patriarchy. The metaphor of the cyborg allows the reader a glance at the workings behind the performance of femininity; it unmasks the elaborate pretence that would have women believe that their identity is biologically determined. In this way, the figure of the cyborg tests the limits of gender ideology which privileges the masculine over the feminine but it also offers an alternative, more fluid and ambiguous definition of what it is to be a "woman".

The cyborg is not a utopian figure that mediates magical transcendence of all boundaries but, unfortunately, in some cases it serves to reinforce boundaries of identity, restricting women to normative and over-simplified definitions of feminine identity, as was demonstrated in the analysis of the television series *Dark Angel*. Max's character exemplifies how the transgression of boundaries enabled by the cyborg can be restricted when a text is not committed to feminist goals and change, but is instead more concerned with appealing to an audience. Even though the transgressive possibilities of the cyborg, and therefore also its ability to construct a new feminine identity, is severely limited in *Dark Angel*, the series still focuses quite extensively on the importance of coalition politics and social action. Despite the positive representations of social empowerment, the misrepresentation of feminist ideals and goals underlines the importance of feminist engagement with representations, not only of feminism, but specifically of the cyborg in popular culture.

By contrast, the other two cyborgian figures examined in this dissertation, Nili and Deirdre, demonstrate what a feminist text committed to changing definitions of feminine identity can accomplish when employing the cyborg as a tool. Deirdre's character in *No Woman Born*, in particular, foregrounds the materiality of the body, exploring the ways in which the female body has been constructed to maintain control by disguising certain values as "natural". Deirdre's fluid and indeterminate body and performance reveals the different modes of construction at work in the case of the female body, resisting the exercise of control over the female body. Nili's character in *He, She, and It* embodies the transgressive and challenging potential of the cyborg. Her engineered nature calls into question the nature / culture dualism, while her motherhood, feminine strength, desire and sexuality all destabilise the masculine / feminine dualism. Her character challenges masculine hegemony on several levels, as she is not only a cyborgian figure, but also a descendent from a community of Palestinian and Israeli women who clone and engineer genes in order to procreate: subversion and the confusion of boundaries are implicit in her heritage, and the fusion between the feminine and technology is very prominent, not only in her character, but also by extension her community. Nili represents a particularly hopeful reconstruction of feminine identity, a revolutionary subject who is empowered, a subject who refuses to be sexually objectified as she denies the male gaze. In the novel, her community is representative of spaces of resistance that can be constructed with the aid of the cyborg.

The metaphor of the cyborg offers feminism different ways of thinking about how the world is ordered by calling into question boundaries of identity and gender, and by virtue of its liminality, deconstructing them and opening up ways in which to reconfigure feminine identity. When employed with feminist goals in mind, the cyborg can be utilised in creating a revolutionary non-essentialist subject, underscoring the fact that there is no unity in the category of "woman". When used in such a way, the cyborg demonstrates that coalition politics based on affinity and choice is the most promising organisational model for feminism's challenge to the reifications of patriarchal categories of identity. The metaphor of the cyborg lends itself to multiple inscriptions of identity which are based on inclusion as opposed to exclusion. The figure of the cyborg, and

therefore by extension technology, offers women an opportunity to establish themselves in positions of power, wielding tools of inscription and coding, and making their voices heard. As Haraway postulated in her manifesto, one must revel in the confusion of boundaries but also take responsibility for their construction (Haraway, 150). A political identity of inclusion and re-inscription is created by way of the cyborg's fluid identity, and the most appropriate representations of this re-inscription in technology today is biotechnology, concerned with the body and literally re-coding certain aspects of it. Women must engage with the discourse of biotechnology to prevent themselves from being, once again, relegated to an unfavourable position in power relations between men and women. The body, as seen in biotechnology, is not purely textual or discursive, but it can create a tension in relation to certain inscriptions of it, providing feminism with a non-essentialist site of resistance (Sunden, 228).

There are so many divergent branches of feminism today that it is almost impossible to refer to it in the singular: cyberfeminism advocates the fluidity of boundaries and inclusive politics and therefore the transgressive nature of the cyborg provides the ideal metaphor to take feminism[s] into the twenty-first century. Haraway, arguably, first identified the theoretical potential of the cyborg as a tool to be used in crafting a new femininity, but also in constructing more inclusive feminist politics. Feminists of various disciplines should be encouraged to embrace this figure that specialises in the breakdown of clear boundaries, but at the same time the cyborg should not be viewed as a messianic figure that will bring about revolutionary change but, instead, it should be viewed as a remarkably useful tool for the reconstruction of "natural" and restrictive feminine identity and politics. No metaphor can indefinitely sustain subversion or revolutionary change, and it is exactly because of this that it is counterproductive to view the cyborg as anything other than an extremely useful tool: the cyborg has no inherent subversive qualities, instead, it depends on the hand that wields it as a tool in reconstructing feminine identity. The metaphor of the cyborg creates subversive confusion that is grounded in a fusion between technology and the feminine and which leads to the displacement of normative notions of gender, opening up a promising space of resistance

where it is possible to reconfigure a new feminine identity that is more fluid, inclusive and authoritative.

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