The Female Alien/Other: Looking Outside the 'Origins of Man' To See Inside the Origins of Woman/Alien/Cyborg

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The Science Fiction genre is a form that illuminates the alien from an otherwise familiar world. The function of Woman within that world is often that of an alien, opposing the patriarchal male dominance of the origin narrative. Within Science Fiction, the image of the female alien represents a potent sexuality and reproductive strength that is in opposition to the narrative of the male/hero/origin story. It is the threat of the feminine origin story as outlined in Ursula K. LeGuin’s *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* that calls into question the idea of man and his original sin as envisioned in the founding of weapons and tools. According to Le Guin, the narrative of Man paints a picture of the dominance of the discovery of the tool as the impetus for the emergence of the story of man as hunter, as hero, ignoring the feminine narrative of the carrier/bag/container. In describing her feelings of alienation from this male/tool narrative, Le Guin states;

“The society, the civilization they were talking about, these theoreticians was evidently theirs; they owned it, they liked it; they were human, fully human, bashing, sticking, thrusting, killing. Wanting to be human too, I sought for evidence that I was; but if that’s what it took, to make a weapon and kill with it, then evidently I was either extremely defective as a human being, or not human at all. Thats right they said. **What you are is woman. Possibly not human at all, certainly defective.** Now be quiet while we go on telling The Story of The Ascent of Man the Hero.”  

(Emphasis mine)

This passage illuminates a feeling of being Other/Alien by not fitting into the male narrative. In the article *The Female Alien: Pulp Science Fiction’s Legacy to Feminists* author Robin Roberts relates this alienation in relationship to the pulp science fiction genre. She observes that “Because most Science Fiction was written by men, the genre reflected the larger culture’s treatment of women as alien, with the significant difference that in SF, women could be depicted

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as literally alien. Although the particular alienating qualities vary according to historical climate, women is often presented as alien because of her enviable reproductive and sexual power.”  
Both Le Guin and Roberts are calling out the ways and reasons that alternative and categorically feminine origin narratives are removed, overshadowed, in essence, alienated by a dominant male narrative. This male origin narrative is that of the ‘Ascent of Man the Hero’ as Le Guin phrases it. This one favors the hero’s tale that presents the individual engaged in grand, over the top adventures, battles, and destruction. This narrative celebrates the killer instinct as the explanation for the emergence of huMAN at the top of the food chain. Women are often left out of these narratives, or serve a secondary role to the hero. When women play a prominent role in the hero narrative, particularly in early pulp SF, they are treated as a dangerous antagonists.

The alternative origin narrative that Le Guin presents is that of the Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction. This narrative is tied to the gatherers of prehistoric homosapiens. According to Le Guin, the overlooked narrative follows the tale of the mother, gatherer, vessel. This role is that of the invent of the carrier in prehistory. Le Guin presents the carrier/bag/vessel as the tool that allows for the collection of sustenance. She aligns the image of the womb as one in a series of examples of the carrier/bag/vessel that has the potential to overshadow the image of the man/weapon/hero. In providing an allegory for the importance of the carrier/bag/vessel, she states;

If you haven’t got something to put it in, food will escape you - even something as uncombative or unresourceful as oat. You put as many as you can into your stomach while they are handy, that being the primary container; but what about tomorrow morning when it’s cold and raining…” She continues, “So you get up and go to the damned soggy oat patch in the rain, and wouldn’t it be a good thing if you had something to put Baby Oo Oo in so you could pick the oats with both hands? A leaf,

This concept of a recipient represents an alternative survival story. Life is sustained by collecting and storing nourishment. A hunter can kill a large beast, but if he/they don’t have a way to transport their kill, the entire affair is a mute point. The hunter can fill his primary container (stomach), but if he doesn’t have the means to carry his spoils he will soon be without food/energy/sustenance. This illustration between the two narratives shows the *Ascent of Man as Hero* as false, hollow and inevitably unsustaining. The sheer magnitude of the importance of the vessel overshadows the hero myth. Without a container/bag/vessel, the hero would have starved and perished long ago. Conversely, the *Carrier Bag Theory in Fiction* outlines a narrative that instead of focusing on the individual, looks at the intertextual relationship of multiple protagonists, communities and related ecosystems. This alternative version acknowledges the full cycle of influences that are representative of the whole experience, not just the lone hero. Perhaps this is the reason for the subversion of these types of narratives. As Le Guin points out in her theory, “it’s clear that the Hero does not look well in this bag. He needs a stage or a pedestal or a pinnacle. You put him in a bag and he looks like a rabbit, like a potato.” The bag obscures the hero, placing him amongst all of the other tools, objects, and factors that shape the story.

Though the argument between the male and female origin story could be as convoluted as the *chicken and the egg* debate, one fact remains clear; the male as hunter, as hero narrative has far surpassed the female as gatherer narrative in dominant culture. Denying the narrative form of

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Woman, is to negate Her role in the origin of human culture. This negation is what has led to the alienation of women within society. *The Carrier bag Theory in Fiction* is Le Guin’s call to arms in reintegrating the Carrier/Bag/Container/Vessel narrative in the stories that we tell as a culture. Her words call for a reassessment of the origin myths that we canonize in our recognized history. Like Le Guin’s alternative narrative, Donna Haraway calls for a reassessment of our concepts of origin in *Cyborg Manifesto*. For Haraway, the next step in the narrative of Woman is that of becoming cyborg. She aligns the modern societal interactions between human and machine as transformatively cybernetic. She is outlining the way human interaction with machines has reshaped humanity. As we continue to merge with machinery, we begin to lose touch with the origins of the flesh. This alienation aligns us with a different origin, that of the cyborg. Haraway states “We are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics.” These politics are formed by recognition of the domination of Western culture, the fractured identity of Woman across racial and socioeconomic lines, as well as the transition of labor to feminized technological industries. In recognition of the nature of the ‘old’ narrative Haraway states;

> “Every story that begins with original innocence and privileges the return to wholeness imagines the drama of life to be individuation, separation, the birth of the self, the tragedy of autonomy, the fill into writing, alienation; that is, war, tempered by imaginary respite in the bosom of the Other.”

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In this passage, Haraway is summarizing the story that celebrates the trope of the individual. By contrast, she describes the cyborg narrative as standing in opposition to the tropes of human / male / hero origins.

“The Cyborg incarnation is outside salvation history.” She continues, “the most terrible and perhaps the most promising monster in cyborg worlds are embodied in non-oedipal narratives with different logic of repression, which we need to understand for survival.”

In this way, Haraway sees the cyborg narrative as a means of breaking away from not only the male/oedipal/individuated story, but all human origin narratives.

The Cyborg is a figure that continues the carrier/vessel/holder myth. The cyborg is one part of a whole network of consciousness, representing links in a greater ecosystem. As Haraway illustrates, “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.” The cyborg is alienated from earlier narratives that align the flesh with the earth, representing a figure that is free of reproductive politics, gender norms and the nuclear family. Haraway summarizes the politics of being cyborg, stating;

“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 the phallocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusion of animal and machine. Thee are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagines to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of ‘Western’ identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind. ‘We’ did not originally choose to be

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cyborgs, but choice grounds liberal politics and epistemology that imagine the reproduction of individuals before the wider replication of ‘texts’.10

The figure of the cyborg is the next step in narrative, particularly in the science fiction genre. The cyborg is informed by female alienation as observed in the pulp science fiction of the 1940s and 1950s. This alienation can be viewed as stemming from the prominence of the Man as Hero narratives and the ignorance of the Carrier Bag Theory in Fiction as outlined by Le Guin. In other words, the lineage is thus a progression from the bag/container/vessel narratives subservient domination to the male origin story. This alienation led to representation of women in SF as other/outsiders/alien. It is through the reclamation of narrative and the recognition of changes in humanity that align the cyborg as the genesis of the woman/machine as standing outside not only the lineage of the oedipal origin story, but all narratives of the flesh.

Through the exploration of three SF texts, I will outline this progression through representation within the genre. The Women Men Don’t See (Sheldon, 1973)11, Under the Skin (Glazer, 2014)12, Ex Machina (Garland, 2015)13 are all examples of this genesis. Through alienation, Woman as Vessel and Woman as Cyborg, these science fiction narratives move from the woman alienated outside the system, to the alien woman inside the sack/carrier/vessel/skin, and finally to the cyborg completely breaking from the narratives of the flesh. These three works

represent movements from alienation, alternative biological narratives and finally to the move away from biological form, providing evidence of a progression from outside the original narrative to a movement through gender determined constructs.

The lineage of 1940’s and 1950’s era pulp SF provides an example of the hero/man narrative in the genre. These stories were largely written by men, celebrating the individual hero conquering the invading ‘other’. The 1960’s and 1970’s generation of sf writers were raised on these pulp fictions. As Robin Roberts notes in her article;

“Male sf writers did exclude human women from their texts, but represent the feminine through the female alien. These woman aliens were initially powerful and threatening and thrust their sex aggressively towards the reader and the men in the stories. By the end of the texts, the female has been put in her “proper” place, subordinate to the male characters. Her subordination is even justified by the sexual or physical threat she poses to mankind.” Roberts continues, “if male science fiction writers were unable to extrapolate the egalitarian possibilities of the genre, the pulp writers developed a depiction of woman that was readily transformed by contemporary feminist writers.”

This next generation includes female/feminist voices writing in the open for the first time. Writers like Alice Sheldon and Ursula K. Le Guin were informed by the images of strong yet inevitably doomed female aliens. Though the appearance of the female/alien reinforced the male dominated narratives, these images inspired feminist writers to revision the previous narratives. Through revision, feminist sf writers flipped concepts of what is considered ‘alien’. They create worlds where the alien has become the familiar.

This feminist science fiction generation looked towards the stars to locate their familiar stories. As presented earlier, for many women the concept of the alien seemed closer to reality

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than the traditional male narratives. In the short story *The Women Men Don’t See*, author Alice Sheldon (published as James Tiptree, Jr.) introduces women characters that literally look toward alien intervention as a means of escaping the oppressive male world. In the story, two characters are discussing the battle of the sexes in relation to traditional institutions like work and marriage. As the male ‘protagonist’ tries to convince Mrs. Parsons of the important role that women play in society, claiming they are the “Backbone of the system” \(^{15}\) and arguing that men and women exist on an equal level, Mrs. Parsons sharply rebuffs, “Men live to struggle against each other; we’re just part of the battlefield. It’ll never change unless you change the whole world. I dream sometimes of - of going away-“\(^{16}\). Mrs. Parsons’ dream comes true when she and her daughter are ferried away by a group of benevolent aliens. In this story, the alien is the hero/carrier/collective salvation where the male individualist narrative is viewed as destructive or dangerous. This story is an example of the awakening of a new narrative that looks beyond traditional story structures for new answers to questions of the place of women in narrative. Though a new narrative isn’t necessarily forged, *The Parsons’* departure from earth for a new planet is a clear departure from the old pulp narrative from where this story is informed.

Within the narrative of Jonathan Glazer’s *Under the Skin*, concepts of the female alien are reinscribed and complicated. The film, based on a sf novel of the same name published in 2001 by Michael Farber\(^ {17}\) presents an unnamed female alien who stocks the streets of Scotland.

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hunting for sustenance in the form of horny and gullible men. In some ways, this film follows the standard treatment as seen in the classic pulp sf narrative. The film deals with the issues of a hyper sexualized female alien who poses a threat to mankind. In addition to this vision, the unnamed alien is thoroughly ‘put in her place’ by the film’s violent conclusion. The conclusion is so thoroughly brutal that it seems to be commenting on the state of Woman in relation to the differences between the carrier/sack/container and the male/hero/individual modes of narrative.

In Under the Skin, the viewer experiences the story from the female alien perspective. It is through her eyes that the familiar streets become alien terrain. In a reversal of the traditional male gaze, it is the alien that become subject. Her predatory gaze objectifies her male targets. Her gaze can be seen as standing in direct opposition to the male/hero narratives from which this story evolved. This is the first indication that this is a story that has it’s roots in a different/alien narrative from the well known Ascent of Man as Hero story, despite their similar conclusions. This unnamed alien woman defies the female subordinate role by turning the tables of predator and prey. She gathers men, like Le Guin’s character gathered oats. She stores them in her sack/carrier/vessel/tomb. In essence, the female alien is a vessel as she is literally wearing a human skin like a sack. He alienness is what lies within the vessel. It is only when the alien abandons her predatory sack and attempts to live life at face/skin value that she becomes vulnerable. As the female alien experiences a crisis of identity, she tries to engage with the world as a human woman. She tries to enjoy food, sex and nature. At each turn, she is blocked from engagement. As she tries to indulge in gluttony in the form of chocolate cake and reproduction through casual sex, it is revealed that she is physically incapable of either. Spurned by her physical limitations, the female alien tromps off into the forest only to fall victim the sexual
assault at the hands of a lone/individual male. Indeed the tables have turned for the alien. As she attempts to leave her carrier/bag/vessel/tomb, she becomes vulnerable to sexual objectification and male aggression. As she attempts to escape from her rapist, the female alien’s skin is literally ripped off, exposing the vulnerable alien figure tucked inside the sexual skin of a female human. Under the Skin relates to the ways that culture forgot the alternative narrative of the Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction, moving toward the male/individual/hero story that leaves the female alien as vulnerable as women have been for centuries.

These first two narratives examine the status of women in relation to male dominated narratives. The resolutions in these stories fail to move beyond the individual/male/hero confines of fiction. It is not until we reach the cyborg that the antiquated tales of male/human origin stories can be transgressed. As stated earlier in Donna Haraway’s Cyborg Manifesto, the ontology of the cyborg lies outside of oedipal-myth origins because the cyborg is disconnected from the origin stories of Man. The cyborgs is not confined by the needs of the flesh, as their sustenance is knowledge/data/code. In the film Ex Machina, the AI cyborg Ava can be viewed as a fictional representation of the rise of the cyborg ontology. This film creates a new origin story for cyborgs. Within the film, a game of cat and mouse is played out in the guise of a simulation of the Turing Test, a test meant to gauge the passability of a cyborg for human. The manipulation is orchestrated by Nathan, a wealthy tech entrepreneur. Nathan fulfills the role of father/creator/oedipus/(false) hero. In describing his game in relation to Ava, Nathan states

“Ava was a rat in a maze and I gave her one way out. To escape she would have to use self awareness, imagination, manipulation, sexuality, empathy and she did. If that isn’t true AI, then what the fuck is?"  

This declaration cues the film’s dramatic ending as Ava turns these previously mentioned ‘traits’ against her creator, freeing herself from her prison. Ava kills her father/creator/god and is free to take her place in society disrupting the *Ascent of Man as Hero*, triggering the ascent of cyborg as interconnected being.

Through these texts we see examples of the sf genre acknowledging and examining issues of female alienation within narratives. In *Women Men Don’t See*, the spectator is directed to look towards the stars for an alternative society. In *Under the Skin*, we are shown the power of *The Carrier bag Theory in Fiction* and the dangers of the individuated male as hero tale. And finally with *Ex Machina*, we see the end of confinement for an alternative origin story, that of the cyborg.

The stories we tell as a culture all have their roots in conceptions of origins. Histories of male domination have favored the common story over that of the female/bag/alien/cyborg stories until the recent past. Within Science Fiction, alternative narratives are visited as a means of attempting to ‘write’ our way out of the mess we have found ourselves in during these modern times. Where the narrative of the male/hero/individual has contributed greatly to our current predicament, it is hopeful that through the recognition of alternative narratives such as the female/bag/alien/cyborg stories can help clear the path for a clearer future, if for no other reason than informing us about where we have evolved from and what is at stake.

Word Count - 3,400
Works Cited


the female cyborg. The superhuman’s origin and material composition is unknown, she does not seem to be a critique of technology, instead she seems to have a moral and pedagogical function. Keywords: Alien, Space exploration, Soviet cinema, post-Soviet cinema, cyborg, Russian culture, gender, female aliens, science fiction. Son of different representations of the female alien and the superhuman are lacking. When the roles of women in Russian and Soviet culture are discussed by scholars, a common conclusion is the characterisation of Soviet and post-Soviet Russia as highly patriarchal cultures wherein women are not afforded equal opportunities for actualisation in various spheres of society (see Gillespie 2003: 85, 99; Heldt 1987: 2-5). Mark Douglas Doran - Alien Invasion: and the origins of mankind. They slowly moved closer and could see the General outside standing inside his jeep yelling out orders and the guns firing at the saucers flying over head, however it was completely quiet inside. The sound of the General’s yelling and guns firing were gone, replaced with an eerie silence. Sam looked to the others didn’t see a window on the saucer when we were outside. How can we see what’s happening out there now? Maybe it’s some alien two way mirror. Timmy whispered back somehow we can see outside, but the window on the outside is protected by the metal hull. Bobby whispered. K Choppers took up positions outside the garage’s two exits while newly arrived cruisers and armored vehicles began to seal off every possible escape route. The structure abutted the dark ribbon of the Sumida River, which naturally eliminated one option. On the fifth floor, the van swung to the right toward a line of parked vehicles. It slowed but did not stop. The heavy individual in the passenger’s seat fingered a cluster of controls on his comm unit. In response to his manipulations the trap doors built into the bottom of the van dropped open. The large dark container, once again holding the obviously any alien disguised as a human would need to be fairly human looking. Certainly one of the greys or reptilians would be too easy to spot in a crowd. Related Articles. Who Are the Nordic Aliens? Evaluating the Evidence of Men in Black. The pros and cons of attempting to identify MIB is tricky since few photos or video evidence exist. However, the rare video above certainly gives credence to many of the past and present claims of MIB visitations. You might be able to suspect a Reptilian alien if you saw a forked tongue, but some humans have undergone tongue splitting surgery for personal reasons. Since Reptilians supposedly have the ability to shape shift, it seems very unlikely you would be able to identify them unless you witnessed them morphing in shape. Its easy to see the man flipping the camera is not in the moon’s gravity. Don’t be a HACK! You have to screen material you publish so as not misinform the public. Also the video spends too much time photographing the inside of the module rather than on the body. That kind of made me think it was fake. The astronaut says the body was pale blue, I think, but how come it looks orange? Lots of questions...but thanks for the look. D.L.R. If you look outside the lunar module in the film on the site, you can see a lunar rover craft. This is an elaborate presentation more suited to a major film than some small hoax. In this video on youtube [Il Mistero dell'Apollo 20-Parte 1] you even see the spaceship through the window of the lunar module! Who would fake this? S.G.