

Will Spector

Dr. Bory

Hum-103

10 November 2023

The Cyborg: A Solution to Injustice

Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden; i.e., through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos. The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the Oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust (Haraway 9).

Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Social Feminism in the 1980s" proposes an adversary to many of the systemic inequalities present in modern society: the cyborg. Haraway's complex stylistic choices in this manifesto make it sometimes difficult to interpret—therefore a grasp of Haraway's portrayal of the "cyborg" is integral to a thorough understanding of the text. Throughout the first several paragraphs Haraway slowly paints a picture of her cyborg, with perhaps the most comprehensive depiction appearing in the third paragraph. In this passage, Haraway presents her case that the cyborg is an agent of justice and equality because of its lack of preconceptions and biases imposed by a flawed society.

The first sentence of the passage above utilizes a famous work of literature to contrast the cyborg with an exaggerated metaphor for the human. Haraway claims that "Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of

the garden; i.e., through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos” (Haraway 9). Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) is the story of young scientist Victor Frankenstein and his experiment, a humanoid amalgam of tissue given life by Frankenstein. Haraway contrasts the cyborg with Frankenstein’s creation by stating that, while the monster desires the fabrication of a heterosexual female mate by his creator, the cyborg, being part machine, has no such desires. While the monster is, to Haraway, an exaggerated metaphor for modern society’s human—an ugly, pleasure-obsessed shell that objectifies and conforms—the introduction of machine into the human allows the human to become a cyborg and therefore be freed from the shackles of compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy.

Haraway’s use of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* as a point of comparison is also an ode to Shelley, who was a pioneer in both the realm of women’s literature and the feminist movement. Additionally, her mention of this work is significant because of what Frankenstein’s monster represents: the oppressed. The creature is essentially a caricature of a Biblical figure affected with leprosy: an outcast from society whose physical features prevent any acceptance by other humans. In *Frankenstein*, a blind man has a conversation with the monster before his able-eyed family returns and casts the monster away. This man could be compared to Haraway’s cyborg: his vision is gone and is therefore uninhibited by a lens of societal norms and centuries of patriarchy that is worn by all other humans. Unable to recognise the monster’s “irregularities,” the man is unable to oppress him, just as the cyborg is incapable of being oppressed. Another notable point Haraway makes is that her cyborg, unlike Frankenstein’s monster, does not expect its father to save it, effectively removing the patriarch from its position

and returning the power to the cyborg itself. By removing power from the father figure, the cyborg removes the scales of equity so that everything drops to a plane of equality.

In the second sentence in this passage, Haraway continues her point that the cyborg represents a blank slate by considering the cyborg's relationship with the idea of the family. She states that "The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the Oedipal project" (Haraway 9). The cyborg does not subscribe to the traditional patriarchal family structure which is an antagonist to feminism. Haraway's mention of the Oedipal project further demonstrates this point. In Greek mythology, Oedipus is a man who mistakenly kills his father to marry his own mother. Named after this myth, Freud's Oedipus complex was his theory that each child is inherently attracted to the parent of the opposite sex and therefore sees themselves as a competitor of the parent of the same sex. The theory is rooted in gender norms of heterosexuality and masculinity, which the cyborg would supplant because it lacks a complex history and therefore does not have any notion of these norms.

The final sentence of this passage contains the most valuable contrast between the cyborg and the human. Here, Haraway writes that "The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (Haraway 9). In this sentence, Haraway continues her underlying argument that the cyborg has the capability to remove the norms and stereotypes that have been imparted on us by society. By not recognising the Garden of Eden, the cyborg rejects the Judeo-Christian tradition and the notion of "original sin," which is the cause of God's first punishment: giving Adam and Eve shame. Christianity holds that each human is, at birth, tainted because of this concept of original sin, but the cyborg is absent of the social beliefs pushed by the institution of religion and is therefore also absent of this inherent human "taintedness" that can be traced back to Eve's decision to eat the apple in the Garden of

Eden. Again, the cyborg represents a sort of blank slate. Haraway continues this theme by using the pronoun “it” when referring to her cyborg, confirming that it has transcended traditional gender constructs.

In the final words of the passage, Haraway offers a thought-provoking metaphor. The cyborg “is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust.” The juxtaposition of the cyborg to the human is striking. While humans are muddled by thousands of years of history, of precedent, of oppressive structures—the cyborg is not. It is free of prejudice, free of predispositions and bias. While humans are inhibited by the dream of returning to stardust, the cyborg is not—it needs not consider death as it is an artificial being.

Donna Haraway’s cyborg is an agent for change; it is a human without history, which means it is absent of predispositions and ingrained social norms. Stripped of these constructs, it is an idealized person that is not capable of oppression. A cyborgian society would be absent of racism and sexism; one where feminism and anti-racism would be unnecessary because equity would be pervasive. The cyborg reality is feasible given today’s technology—at this point, the only factor preventing it from existing is the social reality of the world. The cyborg represents a removal of gender and therefore of oppression altogether, which, as a hypothetical reality, could help humans work towards an improved future.

Works Cited

Haraway, Donna. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s ." *The Haraway Reader*, Routledge, 2004, pp. 7–45.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, 1797-1851. *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* : the 1818 Text. Oxford ; New York :Oxford University Press, 1998.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by A. A. Brill, Wordsworth Editions, 1997.