Making Babies

Anne Enright

Breeding

Growing up in Ireland, we didn't need aliens – we already had a race of higher beings to gaze deep into our eyes and force us to have babies against our will: we called them priests. It is great being Catholic. A loopy Protestant, on the other hand, has to make it up as she goes along. And no one makes it up better than your American Protestant, driven mad by all that sky. In the 1980s, while we were fighting for contraception and abortion, they were fighting for the future of the human race. I am talking about those people who are forced to carry alien foetuses against their knowledge or will. In 1994 it was said that the alien breeding programme had already affected 'up to two million' carefully selected Americans. What I want to know is – who was counting? How do you get on this programme? And why do you have to be white to qualify?

Not that I am smug about being Irish, Catholic and obliged to give birth in a field – personally I would rather see a flying saucer than a vision of the Virgin Mary, I think it would be less frightening. The alien breeding programme that leaves strange bruises around the genitals of middle America, though spooky, may just have been preferable to the vicious fight in Ireland over who owns your insides. 'Get your rosaries off our ovaries,' was the battle cry as we voted, over and over, for or against abortion, while the pro-life louts hung around the Dublin streets with their short hair and jars full of dead baby. I used to live in the centre of town and passed them on my way to the shops, waving their grim placards. Instead of spitting or shouting, I would amuse myself by imagining shafts of light with small putty-coloured creatures floating in them; creatures with rubbery fingers and blank, shiny eyes. Because nothing looks more like a foetus, of course, than your average small grey from beyond the Horsehead Nebula.

Never mind the folk legends, the National Enquirer, or trash paranoia on the Internet, for easy reference aliens in America can be sorted into two types – boys' aliens and girls' aliens. The boys' aliens are the ones that everyone knows about. They fly around the place in different-shaped craft, many of which could turn on a dime. They come from big mother ships that are so big you just couldn't say how big they are. These craft appear over long roads and in big skies; they glow strangely and don't do a lot – a few scorch marks in the grass, a crop circle, some mutilated cattle. The CIA know all about boys' aliens, the radar blips and the pilot's black box, because boys can not only verify their aliens scientifically, they also suspect other boys of conspiring to cover this proof up.

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Girls do not deal in proof. Girls' aliens happen under the skin. Girls' aliens make you fall in love; they manifest themselves in the things that you have forgotten, until you remember it, all in a rush. Despite the fact that girls not only meet the aliens, but also have their babies, they do not remember their impregnation, except under hypnotic regression. How can Hollywood get it so wrong? There are no tentacles, and no one speaks English – aliens have no need of mere speech. There are enough transcripts of these women weeping as they recover the details of their alien abduction for us to arrive at a reasonably consistent anatomy. We're talking three fingers here, not five, or none, or six. Aliens have no knuckles, no knees, and no muscular structure. They have difficulty walking. Their mouths never open when they speak. Above all, aliens never ever have sexual organs and a pregnant alien is a contradiction in terms.

Things move fast in the alien business. Abductees are so up in the nature of the beasts that float them out of their cars or beds on shafts of light that, though distressed, they are never old-fashioned. 'There was just this usual grey crap,' says one woman, recovering her first memory of being on board an alien craft. Still, they are surprisingly hard to describe. At the borders of conscious memory, when they are walking around our planet, aliens may use strange props, something slightly 'off ': a stetson hat of unnatural size, a miner's lamp, or a false moustache pinned beneath a non-existent grey nose. The silver suits of the fifties are well gone, as are the space-bitches of the sixties: 'I am Lamxhia and I need your earth sperm.' When you're on the ship these days, with your clothes in a heap on the floor, lying on a one-legged table with your ankles in (optional) stirrups, there are only two types of alien – small greys and tall greys. Small greys move you around despite your protests and the fact that your legs don't work, and when they have attended to all those little surgical details, taking tissue, scraping out eggs, putting in foetuses or nasal implants or the small implant that goes in the back of your calf, then it's time for the tall grey to come in, wave them off, and gaze deep into your eyes. This is the moment when it all makes sense. Aliens' eyes are large, lanceolate and black, they are non-reflective and have no pupils. It is a terrifying thing to look into an alien's eyes, but, against your will, you may find yourself saturated with emotion and a sense of meaning; helpless with love.

Abductees are 94 per cent Caucasian, 75 per cent female and they have 1.9 children. All of them arrive at the hypnotherapist's office seeking help, frightened and distressed, with a story about missing time. They saw something strange at the foot of the bed, they saw something strange at the side of the road – then it's two hours later and they are in the wrong place with no idea how they got there. They are heading south on the wrong highway and the tank is still full of gas. They wake with the sheets awry and a husband who is sleeping too soundly. They arrive for work two hours late with their blouse on the wrong way around. (You see? It's happened to you.)

What they remember, eventually, is a hidden reproductive history. Men may have their sperm mechanically harvested, in a sudden access of unwelcome pleasure, but it is the women (mostly) who get pregnant. The pregnancy will subsequently disappear, with no evidence of a miscarriage. Sometimes the hymen is left unbroken. Where does the foetus go? On the spaceship,

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victims might see rows of jars with something growing in them; whole walls or rooms full of them. They might remember, like Debbie Tomey, being spreadeagled on a table with 'a terrible pressure within her loins', shouting, 'It's not fair! It's mine! It's mine!' They might remember later – years later – meeting a slender, hybrid daughter with ivory skin, no eyebrows, and sparse, cotton-coloured hair.

One of the main practitioners in the field of hypnotic regression is Budd Hopkins, the New York artist who stumbled into the aliens business when an article he wrote for the Village Voice, SANE CITIZEN SEES UFO IN NEW JERSEY, won him a postbag of frightened people who wanted to know what had happened to them after they, too, saw a strange light in the sky. He is now experienced in the techniques of hypnotic regression, or assisted imagination – 'Let's allow it to start getting dark in the room . . . I want you to get the feeling of getting into your bed.' His abductees have group therapy sessions to deal with their sense of isolation, helplessness and overwhelming anger. They are now abducted so regularly, they don't know what to do any more. Their children are abducted, their parents are abducted, and their grandparents feel a bit off-colour.

Budd seems like a nice man – like many other regression therapists who investigate alien abduction. Many are handsome in a rugged kind of way and admit to being brought up as 'strict materialists'. They really do want to do something. They really don't know what is going on. Their world view has been exploded by a series of highly distressed women whom only they can help. The women's sincerity, the weirdness of their accounts, the fact that they are so normal (read stupid), convinces them that 'she couldn't be making it all up'. How, for example, could you make up the detail about a small grey trying on your shoes? Speaking as someone who makes things up for a living, who can spot a 'strict materialist' from five hundred paces, I think the shoes are a nice detail, as is the green elevator shaft with eyes, and the man in blue striped pyjamas.

Nine of Hopkins's abductees were tested blind by an independent psychologist who found them to be 'of above average intelligence', with a 'considerable richness of inner life', which is tied to a 'risk of being overwhelmed by the urgency of their impulses'. They suffer from lowered self-esteem and relative egocentricity. Under stressful conditions 'at least six of the nine showed a potential for more or less transient pyschotic experiences . . . with confused and disordered thinking that can be bizarre, peculiar, or very primitive and emotionally charged'. These people are not pathological liars, paranoid schizophrenics or hysteroid characters subject to fugue states and/or multiple personalities. They are normal. They are not making it up – at least, they don't know that they are making it up. Perhaps you could say that the story is making them up instead.

Time was, people who suffered childhood sexual abuse were accused of 'making it all up'. As many as 35 per cent of abductees were also abused, yet they are 'making up' something else entirely. As therapist John Mack (Ph.D.) points out, regression therapy moves through dissociative strategies and false memories to approach the real facts of a patient's past. The difference

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with his patients is that some of them have a false memory of sexual abuse, which in fact covers the real story of alien abduction. It is only of limited use asking whether this man should be in jail.

Whatever the facts, there is a considerable amount at stake here: the word 'hysteric' is as charged and as complicated as the women it tries to identify. Besides, what about all those, to quote one abductee, 'Baby things. Baby here. Baby there. Baby everything. Everything is babies. Oh, God, I mean like babies, OK?'

The first foetus to star in a movie was the one in 2001: A Space Odyssey, a star child, the first of a new hybrid race. I wonder if the actor was ever born.

The first female protagonist of a Hollywood science fiction film was Sigourney Weaver in Alien – a film so saturated with reproductive anxiety it still makes you check for something stirring in your guts. (Is that a tapeworm, or was it just wind?)

Look at a copy of the National Geographic, a magazine that will always exist in 1973, and there it is – between a photo essay on the birth of a distant galaxy and an article about breast decoration among the Nuba, floats the foetus, 'the world within'. It drifts free, like an astronaut on his umbilical cable; glowing, weightless; with pads for fingers, and plum-like, radioactive eyes. The foetus sees nothing, knows everything. It does not eat, or speak – the mouth is a bare line – but it seems to smile. It lives in water. It is a different life form. The foetus has no capacity for wonder. There is something blank and mean-spirited about it, perhaps. It lurks. It is all potential. We do not know if it means us well.

As Julia Kristeva says, quoting Mallarmé, '"What is there to say concerning childbirth?" I find that question much more pungent than Freud's well-known "What does a woman want?" Indeed, what does it mean to give birth to a child? Psychoanalysts do not talk much about it.'

What is it like being pregnant? 'It is like having an alien inside you,' a woman said to me, many years ago. 'No really, it is.' She had three.

We do not choose, sometimes, to be occupied by this other creature, and this is one reason why women find pregnancy unsettling. It is assumed that our bodies will 'know', even if we don't, what pregnancy is like and what it is for; that we are, on some cellular level, wise, or even keen on the reproductive game. But I do not know how such cellular knowledge might happen, or where it might inhere.

A woman probably does know what she wants when she says, 'I want a baby,' because a baby is, first and foremost, an act of the imagination (unless it is an act of fourteen tequilas after the office do). But there are many cases of women who do not know that they are pregnant until they go into labour. There are cases of woman who 'know' that they are pregnant, but who are not. In discussions about reproductive choice, it seems to me that we do not know what we are talking about, or that different people are

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talking about different things, and the experience of pregnancy, because it is so difficult to describe, is skipped or ignored.

In Ireland the imagination is still held in high regard. 'Making things up' is a normal and often social activity. This has its drawbacks, of course. There are always the priests, some of them abusive – and the babies. In Ireland we have babies all the time. Easy-peasy. We have them just like that.

'I think you should forget about aliens,' says Gerry, my friend. 'All that nonsense. Have a baby instead.'

And I say, 'Watch the skies.'

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