

**REPRODUCING AND REPRESENTING
REPRODUCTIVE POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY
NORTH AMERICAN TEXTS**

by

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines representations of reproductive politics in North American fictional texts since the early 1980s. I comparatively analyze texts by authors Toni Morrison, Kathy Acker, Shelley Jackson, Margaret Atwood, Nancy Huston, and Larissa Lai, and by film director Alfonso Cuarón, in order to argue that the anxiety surrounding reproductive politics, and especially the abortion debate, has increased since *Roe v. Wade* both inside and outside the US. I claim that the ideologies of individual “choices” and “rights,” which publicly frame reproductive politics, have been inadequate in making sense of the topic’s complexities, and that these fictional texts offer representations of abortion and other reproductive technologies, such as cloning, outside the confines of this discourse. They therefore present a chance to explore how these politics function culturally and creatively, as they tell stories about reproductive technologies and politics in a variety of ways different from traditional debates about whether or not certain reproductive acts are right or wrong, and in a manner that is often critical of the terms of the debates themselves. The texts help reveal the important connections between narrative and reproduction and highlight fiction’s ability to imagine alternate realities. At the same time, they reveal fiction’s ability to engage with the cultural and creative theories structuring the world in which it is produced, and I also argue that the texts engage with both political history and with feminist cultural and psychoanalytic theories in a way that productively complicates popular understandings of reproductive politics. Ultimately, I argue that the fictional texts help us see that reproductive technologies, and their associated politics, are deeply connected to cultural ideas about maternity, family, citizenship, race, technology, and, more recently, ideas about terror and terrorism— anxieties that cannot be contained under the rubrics of individual “rights” and “choices.”

Keywords: abortion; cloning; reproductive politics; biopolitics; pregnancy; cyborg.

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Introduction

Reproductive Déjà Vu

In a recent 2008 *Globe and Mail* article about popular Hollywood films *Knocked Up* (Apatow 2007) and *Juno* (Reitman 2007), columnist Judith Timson poses the question, “When did abortion become a dirty word?” (L1). Timson notes that abortion is either sidestepped or easily dismissed as an option in both films, even though each presents its female protagonist in a situation that would warrant a thoughtful consideration of abortion in real life. For instance, in *Knocked Up* Katherine Heigl’s character, Alison—a successful and ambitious journalist who is struggling financially and gets pregnant through a one-night-stand—will not even say the word abortion, and dismisses the idea outright. In *Juno*, one of the main reasons Ellen Page’s character, sixteen-year-old Juno, decides not to go through with her planned abortion is because the clinic “smells like a dentist’s office.” Timson compares these situations to the fact that thousands of women do choose to have abortions daily, and is left wondering “whether pop culture is trying to pretend that abortion doesn’t exist,” whether these films are “part of a subtle attitudinal shift against abortion,” or whether abortion is simply “the last Hollywood taboo” (L2). Pro-life conservatives in Canada and the US certainly hope these films are part of a not-so-subtle shift against abortion. They have heralded *Juno* and *Knocked Up* as pro-life victories, indicating the success of their campaign to focus less on constitutional change, and more, as Republican Mike Huckabee has put it, on changing people’s “hearts and

minds” regarding abortion.¹ In online commentary on *World Net Daily*, pro-life activist Jill Stanek even calls *Juno* “the movie pro-aborts will hate,” because it reveals that “abortion is not a wonderful ‘right’ [but] borne of tragedy and pain and feeling trapped and alone” (n.p.). Timson agrees that an unwanted pregnancy can lead to tragedy and pain, but remembers it was because abortion was illegal when she was a teenager that women felt trapped and alone; an unwanted pregnancy, she remembers, was “a nightmare” (L1). She therefore assesses these films as woefully out-of-touch with anyone who ever experienced pregnancy or abortion in the days before legalization. She states: “The newest crop of movies about unwanted pregnancy makes me feel like I’m living in a time warp” (L1).

Other recent articles in *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, and *The Nation* suggest Timson is not the only one with *déjà vu*. Cover titles that question, “Is there a Post-Abortion Syndrome?” (Bazelon 2007); reveal that there is an ongoing “Abortion Campaign You Never Hear About” (Gibbs 2007); or inform us that “Men with ‘Post-Abortion Syndrome’ are the new Poster Children for the Right-to-Life Movement” (Blustain 2007), are jarringly familiar. It was over twenty years ago that the idea of post-abortion syndrome was not only conceived, but debated in US Congressional hearings, argued over in newspapers, and finally decided on as non-existent by the American Psychological Association.² Yet the issue, like most abortion politics in Canada and the US, continues to crop up again and again. These magazine titles, like recent reports of a new “secretive, parliamentary anti-abortion caucus” in Canada (Makin 2008), or media

¹ Huckabee has used this expression to describe his position on abortion in several speeches. Recently, he used it on June 18, 2009 while debating abortion with Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*.

² In 1989 the American Psychological Association concluded unanimously that legal abortion does not create psychological problems for most women.

hype over 2008 US Vice-Presidential nominee Sarah Palin's pro-life views, are a reminder of how cyclical abortion politics have become. And the responses films like *Knocked Up* and *Juno* are garnering, including the old pro-life/pro-choice debate they have revived, reveal that Timson is not the only one left wondering how abortion has become a "dirty word" again.

In fact, it is in the spirit of "what is old is new again" that this project takes its cue, looking at how examples of North American fiction and film from the 1980s to the present might shed light on why reproductive politics continue to be so recursive. Following historian Rickie Solinger, I define "reproductive politics" as the struggle over who has the power over women's fertility, although this struggle is often focused on the topic of abortion in Canada and the US (*Pregnancy 210*). While the terrain of reproductive politics has shifted through this period, covering topics from abortion to surrogacy to invitro fertilization to cloning and stem-cell research, the terms of the debate remain largely the same. Reproductive politics continue to be popularly framed through ideologies of individual "choices" and "rights." This rhetoric also structures the two main political positions on reproductive debates, "pro-life" and "pro-choice," and saturates media discourse on the topic. While I use both pro-life and anti-abortion to describe political groups and ideologies opposed to abortion rights in this project, I favour the term pro-life because of the reasons just mentioned. That is, the term pro-life reveals how important ideologies of individual "choices" and "rights" continue to be to groups opposed to abortion as well as in favor of it. Compared to the term anti-abortion, which implies only a negative stance, pro-life suggests that one can, and should, always make the positive or "right" choice and "choose" life. This strategic use of the politics of

“choice” has made the term pro-life more successful (and insidious) at influencing the general public.³ Playing off the fact that arguments about individual choices and rights are endlessly oppositional and cyclical, the pro-life movement has successfully nullified choice (in the name of choice) through its position, and this has contributed to why we continue to talk about abortion in such a repetitive manner. As one of its founding premises, this project proposes that fictional representations of reproductive technologies offer a chance to examine reproductive politics outside cyclical frames concerned with “rights” and “choices.” It not only argues that these frames have been inadequate in making sense of the topic’s complexities, but that fictional explorations of abortion and other reproductive technologies, such as cloning, can help us see these inadequacies. Fiction, like other forms of representation, not only responds to and reflects the culture in which it is produced, but also that culture’s ideological gaps. At the same time, it also actively helps shape that culture, and its ideologies, by offering alternative narratives and ways of understanding. Therefore, the texts studied here offer an opportunity to examine how reproductive politics function culturally and creatively; as they reveal, reproductive technologies, and their associated politics, are deeply connected to ideas about maternity, family, citizenship, race, religion, technology, and, most recently, ideas about terror and terrorism—anxieties that cannot be contained under the rubrics of individual “rights” or “choices.”

In many ways the controversies surrounding *Juno*’s and *Knocked Up*’s storylines are a microcosm of the conversations, questions, and politics informing this project. Some of the questions I had when first viewing the films—such as how stories about

³Further, the term is more useful as it covers a range of topics as well as abortion, including an opposition to euthanasia, stem-cell research, and cloning.

unwanted pregnancies can sidestep abortion altogether and still make sense, or why the directors insist they are “pro-choice” but avoid abortion—can be asked of many of the fictional texts studied here. In Chapter One, for example, I approach Canadian Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and American Kathy Acker’s *Don Quixote which was a dream* (1986) and *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984), through some of the same queries I had when viewing the films. In particular, I use these key feminist texts from the 1980s to examine why the terms of the abortion debate, as staked out during that period, still frame reproductive politics, and what this says about the evolution, and erosion, of reproductive rights in North America since *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 US Supreme Court decision guaranteeing the right to abortion. In Chapter Two, I continue this line of reasoning and ask what this erosion says about the connections between reproductive politics and fictional representations of mothering; here the primary texts I consider are Canadian Nancy Huston’s *Instruments of Darkness* (1997) and American Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* (1997). In Chapter Three, I question how the terms of these politics have shifted and grown in connection to the controversies surrounding new reproductive technologies focused on cloning through a comparison of Canadian Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl* (2001) and American Shelley Jackson’s hypertext, *Patchwork Girl* (1995). Finally, in Chapter Four I turn to Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón’s 2006 Hollywood film, *Children of Men*, to look at the connections between reproductive politics, fetal citizenship, and apocalyptic narratives, something which returns me—appropriately enough given my argument about the cyclical nature of reproductive politics in North America—to questions I also address in Chapter One.

In each of these instances, I approach the texts in similar terms to how *Juno* and *Knocked Up* have been discussed in the media, asking how it is possible to be both pro-choice and to embrace fetal personhood, for instance, or to argue for a woman's reproductive freedom, but be uncomfortable with the "A" word (as abortion is referred to in *Knocked Up*). These types of paradoxes reflect the contradictions inherent in the language of rights and choices that I described above; models for reproductive rights based on ideologies of individual choices or freedoms have proven to be easily co-opted by pro-life and anti-abortion positions. One need only notice how successful pro-life groups have been at owning some of the major terms of reproductive debates—who would not want to protect "life," for instance—and distancing themselves from their Evangelical roots—claiming the pro-life movement is not about religion, but justice—to see this at work. What this type of co-option indicates about the evolution of reproductive politics in North America over the last thirty years, and how this evolution connects to my chosen fictional representations of these politics, is one of the main focuses of this dissertation; I argue that understanding how the discourse surrounding reproductive politics functions in fiction is an integral part of understanding where reproductive debates stand. Fiction can tell us something culturally significant about the time in which it was produced, and in looking at a range of texts from the early 1980s until the present moment, I not only investigate what I see as the repetitive or cyclical nature of reproductive politics in North America, but how these fictional texts have engaged with, subverted, and shaped this nature and these politics.

There is one more way that *Juno's* and *Knocked Up's* politics align with the texts studied here, and that is through the strong presence of Canadian creative talent in each

film (Michael Cera, Ellen Page, Seth Rogen, Jason Reitman). As both the films and the fictional texts in this project reveal, Canadian cultural production is intimately tied to US cultural production, with the US border often seen as an arbitrary marker for Canadians trying to establish themselves as artists, actors, writers and filmmakers. However, because American popular culture dominates and overshadows Canadian cultural production, the US is often also imagined with some anxiety by Canadians. To a large extent the same can be said for how Canadian social and political conditions have been influenced by the US, including our reproductive politics. The permeable quality of the Canada/US border, as it relates to an uneven trade in cultural production and representation, therefore, also shapes reproductive politics and policy. Canada, regardless of its own legislative and juridical differences from the US, symbolically and culturally registers the fallout of American moral and ethical debates on reproductive politics as they tie to nationalism, and the Canadian texts studied here reveal key aspects of this fallout. The presence of Canadian authors in a project largely concerned with US cultural politics, therefore, much like the presence of so many Canadians in *Juno* and *Knocked Up*, can at least partly be explained by these complicated relationships. The Canadian authors approach the reproductive politics in their texts with an acceptance-with-wariness of American sensibilities that indicates the ways in which the US has historically been the dominant default against which to position Canadian political critiques (reproductive or otherwise). Either taking a position that is extremely critical of American reproductive politics in their texts, such as with Atwood, or that acknowledges the ways Canada and other Western countries are complicit in and benefit from American political policy in general, such as with Huston and Lai, the Canadian texts in this project reveal an

important insider/outsider perspective on US politics that is not possible from other national positions.

Something similar can be said for the last fictional text in this project, Cuarón's *Children of Men*, which reveals a deep suspicion of American foreign policy and "border" politics even as it depicts a futuristic infertile England. Although the main comparative focus of this dissertation is a Canadian/US one, Cuarón's film expands the project conceptually and geopolitically to not only include all of North America, but the larger Western world, and this helps further situate some of the similarities and differences between the US and its neighbors when it comes to representations of reproductive policy, including fetal citizenship.⁴ As I detail in Chapter Four, North American border politics on reproduction also have a Southern dimension, one that is complicated by the US government's desire to stop the flow of people coming into their country from Mexico. This relationship is made more complex by the fact that reproduction and nation are always already entangled through gender politics. As many feminists note, within the logic of nationalism women are not only imagined as those who physically give birth, but also as those who symbolically reproduce the nation (Holc 2004). The film plays with this dimension by conflating and overlapping fetal citizenship with the status of the pregnant refugee's body in a way that expands and complicates the stance the Canadian texts take in this project. This oppositional relationship is further, and somewhat paradoxically, complicated by how Acker, Morrison, and Jackson also position some of their characters as excluded outsiders in their own country. The insider/outsider status of all of the fictional texts studied here, therefore, helps us learn

⁴ It does this largely through its setting in England. Since Lai and Jackson's texts in Chapter Three are retellings of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), a similar global engagement can be traced through their work.

something about North American politics and culture as well as about the relationship other Western countries have to the idea of “America.” As Levander and Levine state in the introduction to *Hemispheric American Studies*, literary texts offer uniquely rich evidence of the importance of looking at the cultural and historical consequences of the complicated relations between and across nations’ interests and identities in the Americas (7-13). In comparing North American texts, this project aims to follow Levander and Levine and adopt a perspective that views the US “beyond the terms of its own exceptionalist self-imaginings” (7); instead, I compare how US reproductive politics are both taken-for-granted and challenged in Western cultural discourse through creative fiction that is itself often critical of how reproductive politics connect to nationalist politics and citizenship rights.

This comparison is vital. One of the major premises of the dissertation is that the anxiety surrounding reproductive politics, and especially the abortion debate, has increased both inside and outside the US via legislative decisions like *Roe v. Wade*, and that the fictional texts studied here can help us make sense of how and why. In 1973 the US Supreme Court decided in *Roe v. Wade* that the choice to have an abortion was a fundamental right for women in the US when it ruled that most laws against abortion violated a constitutional right to privacy. As I detail below, in relying on a woman’s right to privacy as the basis for abortion rights, however, the court imagined the woman and the fetus as separate entities and thus set the stage for repetitive, paradoxical debates about the rights of the fetus versus the rights of the woman. While *Roe v. Wade* obviously affected women in the US at the time and continues to do so now, the decision affected women in any number of Western countries too. In Canada it was celebrated as a victory

by Canadian women's groups at the time and its influence was felt throughout the 1980s, especially in the 1988 Canadian Supreme Court decision, *Morgentaler v. Regina*, which effectively ruled all Canadian abortion law unconstitutional. Its influence is still felt in how ideologies of individual privacy, rights, and choices continue to permeate Canadian media discussions about reproduction, in how Canadian pro-life and pro-choice groups organize, and in how Canadian politicians position themselves on various current reproductive issues such as stem-cell research and cloning. It is because of the continuing influence of *Roe v. Wade* both inside and outside of the US that the project starts with fiction from the early 1980s. This period marks the beginning of the current incarnation of the North American pro-life movement and its connection in the US, especially, to a large, well-organized backlash against *Roe v. Wade* by the Christian New Right. This backlash set in motion many of the frameworks that continue to structure reproductive politics today, such as the language of reproductive privacy and choice mentioned above, and the concept of fetal personhood. These frameworks are seen in the fictional representations of reproductive technologies and politics in this project from the 1980s right through the 1990s and into the present moment. Even the discussions surrounding *Juno* and *Knocked Up* mentioned above reveal the continuing influence of this language and this period.

The project's trajectory indicates that while the terrain of reproductive politics may have shifted over the last thirty years, covering technologies from abortion to invitro fertilization to cloning, the popular terms framing the debates have remained largely stable. Reproductive debates continue to be framed through the ideologies laid out in *Roe v. Wade*, which have been popularly taken-up by pro-life and pro-choice groups as the

fetus's right to life versus the woman's right to individual sovereignty via reproductive privacy and freedom. This analysis connects to the second premise of this project, which is that these frames have been inadequate in making sense of reproductive politics' complexities. As the fictional texts studied here help reveal, choices are always constrained by circumstances; rights can be as easily taken away as given in the name of individual privacy or freedom; ideas about technology continually inform ideas about humanity; reproduction is always connected to citizenship and sexuality; and fundamentalist concepts of "right" and "wrong" can rarely make sense of reproductive decisions. Imagining reproduction in ways different from the dominant discourse on the topic, the texts, therefore, allow for a reading of reproductive politics that is critical of the terms of the debates themselves.

This connects to the final, and central, premise of this project, which is that the fictional representations studied not only reflect and engage with reproductive politics, but help produce them, shaping and influencing how these politics are understood popularly and culturally. They do this first and foremost through their ability to help define what is knowable. As Susan Squier notes in her analysis of the importance of literature to feminist science studies, literature helps mediate "social relations with material objects, as well as with subjects" ("From Omega" 135). All of the texts examined here participate in this type of mediation, tapping into the cultural and creative theories structuring the world in which they are produced. They sometimes do this by responding directly to reproductive debates in the media and elsewhere through their topics, tropes, and themes. They sometimes do this by playing with theories popular at the time in literary and cultural studies that take reproduction as one of their topics, such

as feminism, poststructuralism, posthumanism, transnationalism, psychoanalysis, and other critical theories on race, sexuality and gender. Finally, they sometimes do this by using narrative strategies, such as satire, pastiche, grotesque humor, fantasy, fragmentation, hypertext, and fairytale, to play with traditional conventions regarding representation and reproduction (both symbolic and literal). In fact, these techniques are often what help the texts subvert absolutes about reproductive decisions and establish the texts, and their themes and storylines, outside of traditional narrative confines in a way that opens up new ways of imagining reproductive practices and politics.

Acker's novels, for instance, engage with literary theory from the 1980s based on identity politics and include plagiarism, fragmentation, and pastiche as writing strategies. Huston's novel, on the other hand, uses postmodern techniques popular in the 1990s, such as multiple viewpoints, unfinished storylines, and characters who are ghosts. Through these and other techniques—such as Cuarón's use of a post-apocalyptic setting to interrogate post-9/11 politics, or Jackson's use of hypertext technology to explore the limits of cyborg theory—the texts not only make sense of reproductive politics, but help create them. That is, they use narrative strategies to envision reproduction outside of the ideologies outlined above, often questioning stereotypes about reproductive decisions and undermining fixed categories and dichotomies while working against commonplace ideas about what their characters should feel or experience when using or engaging with reproductive technologies. The texts are therefore able to imagine alternate realities, something that demonstrates how important narrative is generally to all politics, reproductive and otherwise. Opening up new ways of thinking about reproductive technologies and their limits and possibilities, the fictional texts studied here

simultaneously create and challenge the storylines that sustain reproductive politics. As they reveal, reproductive politics are at the epicenter of a variety of tensions and anxieties about the status of the human and are not simply about personal or private issues or choices.

History Meets Theory

Feminist theorists and historians have written extensively about the lead up to, consequences of, and fallout from *Roe v. Wade* on reproductive politics in North America.⁵ Rachel Roth, for instance, theorizes that *Roe v. Wade* follows a long line of reproductive policies and legal decisions aimed at controlling women's reproductive lives and did not "emerge out of a vacuum" (17). In the US, this history includes the control of women and their offspring through slavery and rape (Roberts), through forced sterilization and eugenics movements aimed at women of colour (Davies), and through forced adoption for single white women (Solinger). *Roe v. Wade* is tightly linked to this history and cannot be separated from it, but it did set in motion several factors on its own that structure current incarnations of reproductive politics in North America, and these factors form the historical background for this project. As Roth argues, *Roe v. Wade* set "new conditions for women's autonomy, provided the legal framework for thinking about fetuses, and realigned abortion politics by satisfying many people working for abortion reform while galvanizing the fetal rights movement in opposition" (17). To understand how it was able to do this one need only look to the language of the decision itself.

⁵ See Mackinnon; Solinger; Faludi; and Petchesky.

On January 22, 1973, the US Supreme Court announced its decision in a case filed by “Jane Roe” challenging Texas law that made it a crime to perform an abortion unless a woman’s life was at stake (410 U.S. 113). Ruling in favor of Roe, the court used the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution to decide that the right to privacy “is broad enough to encompass a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy” (*Roe v. Wade* 1973). In relying on the right to privacy as the foundation for abortion rights, however, the court also felt that it must state that at some point in time “potential human life,” as they termed it, logically rivals an individual’s right to privacy. Their solution was to decide that this critical “point in time” was the moment of fetal “viability,” and to define viability as when the fetus “has the capacity for meaningful life outside the mother’s womb” (*Roe v. Wade* 1973). As Mary Poovey explains in “The Abortion Question and the Death of Man,” by locating the “point in time” at which an individual acquires rights as a moment before birth, *Roe* left a very ambiguous connection between the terms “viability” and “meaningful life.” This, in turn, left the door open for anti-abortion groups throughout North America to focus on redefining the concept of “potential life” and quickly led to “arguments that the fetus can be interpreted as a legal person, and also, since the viable fetus cannot act independently, for doctors and the state to restrict a pregnant woman’s rights in the name of the potential child” (248). Anti-abortion lobbyists, left with few legal venues to completely overturn abortion laws by the 1980s, did just this, and soon joined forces with pro-life groups and the “right to life” movement—a movement which grew out of the Family Life Division of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB)—and started organizing immediately after *Roe v. Wade* was announced (Petchesky 252). These groups began to focus their

attention on proving and promoting the idea of fetal personhood, often using ultrasound technologies as “irrefutable” proof that the fetus is a thinking, feeling being, and petitioning the media, the courts, and the general public to consider the fetus as a little person. The debate soon became framed within the parameters of this dichotomy, as the word abortion itself was pushed away and groups began to argue in the media instead about a woman’s choice versus a fetus’s life, about a woman’s privacy versus a fetus’s vulnerability, and about a woman’s reproductive freedom versus a fetus’s freedom to live.

The results of this framing have been felt through the decades since *Roe v. Wade*, in both Canada and the US. In the early 1980s, for instance, Canadian activists such as Dr. Henry Morgentaler followed the US model and adopted the slogan “abortion on demand,” refusing to obey Canadian laws that insisted women undergo a three-doctor evaluation before being allowed an abortion. Morgentaler’s stance represented a growing shift in power across North America from the physician or judge to the patient concerning reproductive decisions, and this shift left many Canadians uncomfortable. Just as in the US, Canadian pro-life groups insisted the fetus needed some sort of representative against the interests of the patient, and the debate soon became framed as a competition between the rights of the woman and the fetus (McLaren and McLaren 138). This competition came to a head in 1988 when the Canadian Supreme Court declared in *Morgentaler v. Regina* that the entirety of the country's abortion law was unconstitutional. While this decision was seen as a major victory by abortion activists in Canada at the time, no law was given in its stead, which has left Canada with no official regulation whatsoever on abortion and in a state of legal ambiguity that has since fed the

fires of both the pro-life and the pro-choice movements. The outcome of this is most obviously reflected in the escalated violence of pro-life demonstrators since the late 1980s, with Morgentaler's Toronto clinic targeted with bombs in 1992, and three abortion doctors across Canada shot and wounded between 1994 and 1997. Pro-life demonstrations still happen vigorously across the country, and as recently as 2004 Morgentaler launched an unsuccessful legal battle against the New Brunswick government in an attempt to have abortion recognized as a constitutional right under the Canadian Charter.

Events in the US have unfolded in a more severe manner. Several court cases have challenged and modified the legal standard of *Roe v. Wade*'s "fundamental right" so that the current judicial interpretation of the US Constitution is that abortion is legal, but may be restricted by the states to varying degrees.⁶ Several states have therefore passed laws to restrict so-called late-term abortions, to require parental notification for minors, and to strip Medicaid funding from poor women seeking abortions. George W. Bush's administration pushed through several anti-abortion legislative decisions during his tenure, including the *Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act* (2003).⁷ Through this legislation, any doctor could face up to two years in prison and civil lawsuits for performing a late-term abortion, even to save a woman's life. In addition, the pro-life movement has been much more successful in the US, as it is not only a larger movement there than in Canada, but also one more tightly connected to right-wing politics and to several fundamentalist Christian organizations.

⁶ See the 1976 *Hyde Amendment*, which barred the use of federal funds for abortions, as well as *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (1989) and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1999).

⁷ A so-called partial-birth abortion is an act that is medically referred to as an intact dilation and extraction. The law was enacted in 2003 and constitutionally upheld in 2007 in *Gonzales v. Carhart*.

As I will detail in Chapter One, the connection between the pro-life movement and Evangelical right-wing politics began in the early 1980s when New Right Christian leaders supported Ronald Reagan's bid for the presidency and his promise to lobby to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. As Petchesky outlines, the anti-abortion/prolife movement was the "central vehicle through which the New Right [...] crystallized and developed its mass base and mass ideology" (245). While religion provided a framework for the New Right to espouse its moral absolutism, Petchesky reminds us that the New Right was still a political movement in the "most conventional sense" (245), as it revolved around controlling the economy, the state, the family and the churches. Despite its massive political influence, the New Right, and pro-life lobbyists, failed to overturn *Roe v. Wade* through legislative efforts in 1980s, and by the end of the decade anti-abortion groups turned their focus from Washington to more local venues. Arguing in 1990 that "the real battles of concern to Christians are in neighbourhoods, school boards, City Councils, and state legislatures" (Reed qtd. in Baird-Windle 139), the pro-life movement "shifted its strategic course from mass mailings to the mass media, from religious language and authorities to media-technical ones, and from lobby and lawsuits to clinic harassments and violence" (Petchesky *xi*). This strategic shift in focus proved successful and effective in helping organize groups of people to protest abortion clinics and their users locally under a national pro-life agenda, and by 1993, the Christian Coalition alone had 440 chapters and a \$12 million budget (Baird-Windle 140). A new municipally focused monetary push, combined with the continued efforts of anti-abortionist groups like Operation Rescue, which promoted and used theatrics with clinic demonstrations, and the addition of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, who was notoriously outspoken

against abortion, meant that the pro-life movement stayed in the political and media spotlight in the 1990s. The “hands-on” approach of protesting outside local abortion clinics led to several confrontations between abortion protestors, providers and police, and eventually more radical protesters started calling for outright violence against abortion providers and clinic workers. On March 10, 1993, Dr. David Gunn was assassinated as he entered his Pensacola, Florida abortion clinic. In the next twenty months, four others would be killed and within the next few years, many more wounded. According to statistics gathered by the National Abortion Federation, an American organization of abortion providers, eventually seven people would die, including three doctors, two clinic employees, a security guard, and a clinic escort.⁸ Recently, that number has increased with the death of Dr. George Tiller, who was gunned down inside his church in Wichita, Kansas, on May 31st, 2009.

In the last decade, pro-life movements in both countries have turned their efforts towards demonstrating against embryonic stem-cell research and cloning. Genetic issues have also taken prominence in the media, starting with the controversy surrounding “Dolly the Sheep” and the US *Dickey Amendment* in 1995, which banned federal funds for stem-cell research, and continuing with coverage of Canada’s *Assisted Human Reproduction Act* in 2004, which banned human cloning, and President Bush’s veto of the *Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act* in 2007.⁹ Media coverage of these legislative acts, which effectively ban cloning and limit public funding for embryonic research, is often juxtaposed with stories about the potential benefits and horrors of this research

⁸ See www.prochoice.org

⁹ President Obama’s recent 2009 lift of Bush’s ban on the use of federal funding to do stem-cell research on discarded embryos originally used in fertility clinics continues to shape this history, although he has yet to overturn Bush’s ban on the creation of new stem-cell lines.

(*Time* magazine's 2001 cover story, "Human Cloning is Closer than You Think," for instance). These issues are separate from but intimately connected to abortion politics and the historical narrative outlined here. As Valerie Hartouni points out in *Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies and the Remaking of Life*, technologies such as invitro fertilization or embryonic cloning are both shaped by and shape abortion rhetoric in that we make sense of these technologies through the very terms on which the abortion debate focuses, such as defining who or what constitutes a fetus, a human, a mother, or a family (5). This is partly why pro-life groups are so concerned with new reproductive technologies. It is also why accounts in newspapers and magazines often oscillate between discussing "how technology and science help the natural process complete itself and how the process of childbearing has become too technoscientific" (Davis and Dumit-Floyd 2). Switching between desire and dread, popular ideas about cloning and stem-cell research often fearfully imagine either a world of "Franken-babies" or a utopian dream-world where women can use these technologies to access their innermost maternal and biological drives.¹⁰ In both of these scenarios, as in the legislation discussed, there is a yearning to reset the boundaries of whom or what is considered human through an appeal to a singular, stable, self; this is the self that is at the cornerstone of pro-life rhetoric. Through similar humanistic appeals, therefore, discussions about cloning and stem-cell research connect to the history of abortion politics. They also connect to current conversations about the "politics of terror," which have taken over the political landscape and the media since the events of September 11, 2001. For instance, the resurgence of the rhetoric of "family values," which blended into

¹⁰ See "Frankenstein or Cure Divine? Two New Discoveries in Biotechnology Challenge our Morality," for instance.

the discourse about war and terrorism that framed much of the public response to 9/11, has much to do with reproductive politics. Like the discourse surrounding new reproductive technologies, this discourse focuses on reconstituting the conditions of “life,” but at a time when there has not only been a heightening of annihilation fears, but also a refocusing of those fears in terms of citizenship and reproduction. Immediately following 9/11, this was revealed in the US when the push to further legislate fetal citizenship paralleled a push to limit the rights of those already born through moves like *The USA Patriot Act* (2001), which suspends various branches of the US Constitution when terrorism is suspected.¹¹ Each of these moves utilizes the same rhetoric of privacy, choices, and rights that govern controversies over new reproductive technologies, and each is a continuation of the historical trajectory of reproductive politics in North America since *Roe v. Wade* that forms the backdrop to this project.

Feminist Narratives

Feminist and other literary and social theorists have responded to this history in a variety of ways, and their responses have helped shape the analytical method I apply to the texts in this project. For instance, the ways that pioneering feminists in the early 1980s, like Catherine Mackinnon, were critical of *Roe v. Wade*'s reliance on the concept of personal privacy as a basis for abortion rights are an integral part of the cultural narrative of the abortion debate, and are likewise taken up by critics such as Mary Poovey (1992), Judith Roof (1996), and Rachel Roth (2000) in theories of reproduction more generally. These

¹¹ The USA Patriot Act stands for *Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001*. The Act grants exceptions to liberties otherwise covered under the First, Fourth, Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, which may be suspended in the circumstance of suspicion of terrorist activity.

arguments, in turn, shape how I read reproduction in connection to arguments about personal “privacy” and “freedom” throughout the project. Mackinnon’s core argument focuses on “how the political and ideological meaning of privacy as a legal doctrine is connected with the concrete consequences of the public/private split for the lives of women” (“*Roe*” 54). She argues that the right to privacy is not effective as a basis for abortion rights because it only guarantees a right to be left alone, and it applies to women as if they are gender neutral, which only reinforces the very gendered division between public and private that often governs women’s lives (“*Roe*” 54). Poovey echoes this argument by claiming that the language of privacy and rights that abortion law relies on is inextricable from “a set of assumptions about the nature of the individual who is possessed of those rights, which is, in turn, intimately bound to a set of assumptions about gender” (241). Like MacKinnon, Poovey makes the case that the assumed gender neutrality of decisions like *Roe v. Wade* erases the fact that legal persons are always imbricated in a system of social relations that is itself gendered and politicized. This “neutrality” also ironically leads to arguments for fetal personhood (something I take up in Chapter Three through a discussion of fetal ultrasound imaging), as “the appeal to individual right *in the absence* of an interrogation of the metaphysical assumptions behind the idea of rights leads almost inevitably to a proliferation of those considered to have rights” (Poovey 250). By obscuring the social conditions within which women actually make “private” choices, conditions related to sex, race, and class—“the very conditions the privacy frame not only leaves tacit, but which it exists to guarantee” (Mackinnon “*Roe*” 53)—*Roe v. Wade* obscures the social conditions within which

persons are granted rights under the law, which in turn sets in motion arguments for why the fetus may be eligible for the same “neutral” rights.

Judith Roof, who forms another one of the theoretical cornerstones of this project, follows this line of reasoning when she claims, in *Reproductions of Reproduction: Imaging Symbolic Change*, that “despite the political value of feminist legal reform, legislative change does not finally represent the voluntary and enlightened alteration of the underlying cultural gender ideologies that continue to inform statutory application, enforcement, and judicial interpretation, and threaten constant regression into gender dualities” (101). Like Poovey, Roof follows Mackinnon in arguing that abortion laws like *Roe v. Wade* are “riddled with the conflict they are codified to sort out” (Roof 106). Contrary to Mackinnon, however, she also argues that psychoanalysis, especially the work of Jacques Lacan, can help us see why these riddles persist.¹² She adds to feminist critiques of abortion law by analyzing how *Roe v. Wade*’s reliance on the concept of privacy is also about the logic of private property, in that the act of passing on private property to future generations maintains the social order and kinship structures: “there is nothing but economics to prevent the establishment of non-traditional reproductive units” (118). Roof argues that the fetus is treated as a kind of property right in abortion statutes. She states, “the foetus’s interest in abortion laws, despite cultural identification of the foetus with principles of perpetuity and fecundity, is not necessarily identical with the

¹² Lacan’s system of psychic life relies on three orders, the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. The symbolic is the realm of “Law, order, and symbolic language” (S2 29). The imaginary is the realm of image and imagination and the closest realm to the body. It stems out of our first illusion in the mirror stage and is therefore connected to allure and deception (S3). The imaginary can only be understood through its translation into symbolic language. Finally, the real is the realm opposed to the imaginary in that it is “without fissure” (S2 97). It is the opposite of the symbolic and is outside symbolization because it is impossible to attain or imagine in any real way. Roof states that by the Symbolic or social she means the “sets of rules and language that comprise the socio-cultural order in its largest sense” (10). This is why she capitalizes the words Symbolic, Law, and Desire.

interest of either parent, but rather is identified with the interest of a Social order bent on perpetuating itself” (106). She concludes, therefore, that “the dilemma of abortion, while focused on a battle between mother and foetus, is the locus of a displaced battle between an individual’s desire not to procreate versus a social Law represented by the absent Father who demands reproduction” (106). This is seen in all of the chapters’ representations of reproduction, especially in how the texts subvert and play with the kinship laws Roof outlines. Like Mackinnon’s assertion that abortion laws based on the idea of privacy actually protect men, in that the women who benefit from them are women who already benefit economically from their private associations with men, the fictional representations of reproduction studied here ultimately show us what Roof argues—that laws like *Roe v. Wade* treat symptoms rather than the underlying gender drama that bifurcates and metaphorically genders social laws in the first place (101).

In order to understand why this happens Roof examines a variety of these “symptoms,” including literary, filmic, and other popular forms of representation, to diagnose what she sees as changes to the social order through technological and social advancements in the last fifty years. She claims that “the perceived loss of the family is a symptom of the loss of the myth of the patriarchal family rather than the loss of any coherent nuclear grouping” (98), and focuses her analysis on representations that are concerned with reproduction, patriarchy, and technology.¹³ Her work is especially useful because it takes historical and legal arguments like MacKinnon’s and Poovey’s, and social psychoanalytic theory, and mixes them together to analyze how popular representations of reproduction contribute to our understating of issues like abortion.

¹³ Reproduction has a double meaning for Roof in that it indicates both physical and mechanical reproduction, as well as the reproduction of meaning through means such as metaphor and metonymy.

Arguing that it is possible that the world of language, law, and meaning (the symbolic) can change (through challenges to patriarchal authority by statutes like *Roe v. Wade*, for instance) and that these changes will be registered, negotiated, and imagined through the world of conscious and unconscious images (the imaginary), Roof states that we can look at representations of reproduction as indications of the desires, fantasies and narratives that both sustain and challenge the social order. This is one of the methods I adopt in this project as well, reading the fictional texts as symptoms of a larger cultural crisis about reproduction, sexuality and gender in the wake of the legalization of abortion. I look at the fictional representations of reproduction studied here as symptomatic examples of how we negotiate real changes in the world, to kinship structures for instance, and ask what kind of cultural work these representations and images accomplish.

This theoretical framework is similar to Drucilla Cornell's claim, in *The Imaginary Domain: Abortion, Pornography and Sexual Harassment*, that because psychoanalysis offers a diagnosis of the symbolic underpinnings that govern many of our unconscious fantasies, it is particularly suited for analyzing how women are oppressed through the cultural Imaginary (7). Again, working off models proposed by Mackinnon and other feminists, Cornell argues that the problem with abortion law is that it assumes "the demand for the right to abortion and the concern for fetuses are antithetical" (32). Arguing that the right to abortion is a minimum condition for women to be able to imagine themselves as full persons in a gendered world, she states that "the denial to the right to abortion should be understood as a serious symbolic assault on a woman's sense of self precisely because it thwarts the projection of bodily integration and places the woman's body in the hands and imagining of others who would deny her coherence by

separating her womb from her self” (38). Pointing to the power of narrative in how people imagine themselves as whole, inviolable beings, Cornell asserts that if a woman’s personhood “is truly to be respected by the law, then she must also be the ultimate source of the decision to abort and the meaning given to that decision[...] [T]he narrative power is as important for her personhood as the decision itself” (35). Like Roof, Cornell contends that how we make sense of reproductive technologies and politics through creative stories and images, like those studied here, is as important as the language and the law framing those politics.

Roof and Cornell’s work offers a structure for my analysis of why representation and narrative are an important part of understanding reproductive decisions, technologies, and history.¹⁴ Through a mixture of psychoanalysis, feminist legal studies, philosophy, and textual criticism, their work lays a platform for approaching fictional representations of reproductive technologies and analyzing how these representations contribute to reproductive politics. Since the connections between history, politics, theory and narrative are an integral part of this project, this framework is invaluable. It can be traced back and forth from my use of Roof’s work in the opening chapter on Acker and Atwood’s fiction from the 1980s to the other theorists who make up the cornerstones of the project: Julia Kristeva, Donna Haraway, Lee Edelman, and Lauren Berlant. Kristeva’s work, for instance, also uses psychoanalysis to examine the symbolic and imaginary relationships we have as a culture with women’s bodies through her theory of abjection.

¹⁴ Rosi Braidotti also makes the excellent point that the imaginary is vital to our understanding of ourselves as political agents. As she states, the imaginary is a “set of socially mediated practices which function as the anchoring point—albeit unstable and contingent—for identification and therefore for identity formation. These practices act like interactive structures where desire and subjective yearning and agency in a broader socio-political sense are mutually shaped by one another” (“Teratologies” 169).

Analyzing the long history in the Western world of connecting fear and fascination to images of the mother's womb, Kristeva's theory of abjection provides a platform for understanding why abortion and other reproductive technologies are often imagined as threatening and grotesque, one of the central inquiries of my second chapter on Huston and Morrison's fiction from 1990s. Kristeva helps explain why fear of our mothers' bodies, and their ability to procreate, is displaced into stereotypes about "bad" mothering, and to a general suspicion that women need "guidance" in making reproductive choices for themselves.

Haraway's work, on the other hand, complicates this analysis by looking at the assumptions about gender, sexuality, humanity, and technology that inform kinship structures and psychoanalysis itself. Her work addresses how a variety of technological advancements, including reproductive ones like IVF or cloning, have changed how we understand dualisms such as human/machine or human/animal. Haraway theorizes that cyborgs, as hybrids of machine/animal/human, have the potential to break down the integrity of the boundaries of the body and therefore deconstruct dominant discourses. Her work writes against the presumed heterosexuality of the family drama that structures psychoanalysis in that it breaks the link between sex and reproduction while also questioning the value and danger of this break in women's lives. Her work structures my third chapter, which is concerned with how Jackson and Lai's fiction from the 1990s represents new reproductive technologies, cloning, and cyborgs; Haraway helps us understand how writing itself, as a type of technology, can articulate new images and contexts, and shape productive and pleasurable models for imagining reproduction, while also reminding us that "reproductive technologies provide the means for exercising

power relations on the flesh of the female body” (Balsamo 82). This paradox, part of the danger and joy inherent in the cyborg, offers another perspective in understanding the potential benefits and dangers of continued isolation of the womb, and by extension the fetus, from the rest of the female body through technological advancement.

Lee Edelman and Lauren Berlant also theorize the break between the woman and the fetus, looking at what happens when that break becomes institutionalized. Berlant, for instance, analyzes what she sees as “a contemporary national and mass cultural fixation on turning women into children and babies into persons through the media of photography and cinema” (146). Stating that the fetus has become a super-person, or super-citizen, Berlant argues that the fetus is now commonly imagined as an unprotected person, or a citizen without a country, vulnerable and “unjustly imprisoned in its mother’s hostile gulag” (150). Edelman argues a similar case through what he terms “reproductive futurism.” Like Roof, Edelman follows Lacan in arguing that challenges to traditional kinship structures through reproductive politics are actually challenges to our entire social order. He theorizes that reproductive futurism is the response to these challenges, and is the process by which the image of the Child (which he always capitalizes to distinguish it from the experience of an actual child) comes to represent the very notion or idea of the future itself. As Edelman explains, this leads to a situation where the “figural Child alone embodies the citizen as ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation’s good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights ‘real’ citizens are allowed” (11). Whatever appears as a threat to this mandate of the collective reproduction of the Child is a threat “not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to the social order as such, insofar as it

threatens the logic of the futurism on which meaning always depends” (11). As he describes, this is how it can make sense politically to deny rights to whole groups of people, such as refugees, queer couples, or pregnant women, for instance, in the name of protecting the nation, the future, the fetus, and the Child. This analysis is critical to my final chapter on Cuarón’s film, which questions how reproductive politics are connected to apocalyptic narratives about infertility, as it offers a platform for understanding why the fetus becomes the locus of all sorts of national desires, and “an index of natural/national rights with respect to which adult citizens must derive their legitimation” (Berlant 156).

In different ways all these theorists suggest that there is a logic to the history of reproductive politics in North America that has less to do with whether or not abortion, cloning, invitro, surrogacy arrangements, and other reproductive technologies are moral, just, or ethical, and more to do with how these technologies both construct and disrupt acceptable social norms. As Hartouni points out, there are “immense and complex acts of construction that are necessarily entailed in keeping intact and viable the world as it self-evidently appears to be” (*Cultural* 20). These acts of construction, which “shape and are shaped by a shifting reproductive landscape” (20), are part of “the high-stakes struggle over the making of subjects and social realities” (25). This project both engages with the struggle Hartouni describes and adds to those stakes by recognizing the important role narrative plays in how we make sense of our reproductive landscape. Fictional representations of reproduction not only help engage with social reality, but also play a vital role in how feminists, and other theorists, use social and cultural frames and tools to analyze reproductive technologies and politics.

Fictional Remakings

Each chapter of this dissertation looks at one of the facets of the “reproductive landscape” Hartouni references. Chapter One’s texts, for instance, address some of the fundamentalist and absolutist battle lines the pro-life and pro-choice camps drew in the 1980s as they fought for position in the aftermath of *Roe v. Wade*. The texts discussed in Chapters Two and Three, on the other hand, look at how these battle lines have shifted and changed since then, and place abortion within larger frameworks concerned with the connections between maternity, sexuality, and technology. Finally, the film by Cuarón I examine in Chapter Four looks at how reproductive politics currently interact with the politics of terror, and how this has changed how we think about citizenship rights and the conditions of “life.” In each of these chapters, history, theory, and fiction come together in a way that not only addresses the chapter’s particular topic, but also contributes to an overall analysis of the cultural narrative of reproduction in North America in the last thirty years.

To begin with, Chapter One takes up the concepts of reproductive “choice” and “privacy” directly in connection to abortion politics by considering Atwood and Acker’s novels within the political context within which they were written, specifically the backlash against women’s rights that gained momentum in the 1980s across the US and Canada. Using Mackinnon’s, Poovey’s, and Roof’s work on the contradictions inherent in abortion laws like *Roe v. Wade*, I argue that both Atwood and Acker represent reproductive decisions outside the rhetoric of personal choice by imagining worlds where it is impossible for reproductive decisions to be private. Atwood’s novel, for instance, imagines a futuristic infertile America named the Republic of Gilead, where reproduction

and women's bodies are strictly regulated by the state. The novel satirizes (from a particularly Canadian standpoint, as I will argue) the rise of the New Right in the US by imagining what would happen if Christian theocrats took over the government and turned fertile women into "handmaids," or sexual surrogates, for the state. The story follows a handmaid named Offred, who is a surrogate for a high-ranking military official. Handmaids have three chances to successfully produce a child in Gilead before they are banished to a toxic wasteland. Through Offred's narrative, readers are offered a picture of what the world might look like if privacy was obsolete, citizenship rights were linked solely to one's ability to procreate, and a woman's only reproductive "choice" was pregnancy or death.

Similarly, Acker's novels take concepts such as personal choice and freedom, concepts that were especially important to the abortion debate at the time she was writing, and undermine them by stretching them to their most extreme ends. Her novels purposefully "attack" this language through techniques such as fragmentation, pastiche, and plagiarism, in an attempt to deconstruct how language itself is an oppressive component of social concepts like femininity and maternity. Part of this attack is an outright rejection of maternity, and there are no marriages or babies in Acker's novels, just sex and abortions, which are described in graphic detail. Acker's graphic language is part of her attempt to highlight how language is gendered and is itself part of the problem women face in attempting to communicate as sexual subjects. Through this examination of language, Acker, like Atwood, is critical of the gender ideologies informing reproductive politics, language, and law. Read together, the novels offer an approach to 1980s North American reproductive politics that reminds us that reproductive choices are

always constrained by circumstance and privacy is always attached to patriarchy. They therefore imagine reproductive politics in a way that not only challenges the dominant paradigms which framed debates in the 1980s, but continues to frame them today.

In Chapter Two, I build on Atwood and Acker's critiques by turning to novels from the 1990s that deal with subjectivity, motherhood, and the cultural significance of the maternal body: Huston's *Instruments of Darkness* and Morrison's *Paradise*.¹⁵ I argue that these novels help contextualize reproductive politics in connection to the Western history of patriarchy, including the witch hunts in Europe and slavery in America, and that they simultaneously look backwards and forwards, helping to explain the state of reproductive politics at the time of writing while also offering alternative models for how reproduction could be imagined in the future. They do this through split narratives that jump through time and that thematically focus on how the maternal body has been constructed historically as threatening, abject, and contaminated through patriarchal institutions such as the Catholic Church, in Huston's case, and through processes of racial othering, in Morrison's case. Using Julia Kristeva's work on the abjection of the maternal body, I argue that the novels explore the possibilities and limits of these constructions, looking to how the refusal of motherhood in some circumstances, and the embracing of motherhood in others, connects to female subjectivity in similar but different ways. This comparison reveals that there are no easy reproductive choices, and that it is not always true that motherhood is a route to life and that abortion, infanticide, or miscarriage is a type of death; it is often the loss of a child that stimulates the "birth" of a story for the novels' characters and helps them create new ways of thinking and writing.

¹⁵ Huston's identity as a Canadian is complicated because she was born in Alberta as an Anglophone, spent her adult life in France and writes now in French, but still refers to Canada as her "home." I address the politics and poetics of her national identity more thoroughly in Chapter Two.

I argue that the novels therefore shift the reproductive frameworks discussed in Chapter One because they offer an ethics of reproductive politics that undermines fixed categories such as right/wrong and works against stereotypical ideas about what women “personally” or “privately” experience when they lose a pregnancy or a child. This alternate ethics is important because it offers a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of reproductive politics in North America than the pro-life/pro-choice stance offers, and at a time when fear was spreading throughout North America through assassinations, bombings and clinic protests. In contrast to the pro-life movement’s increasing militancy and fundamentalism in the 1990s, the novels present reproduction from a variety of realities at the same time, often from different points of history and from different and sometimes contradictory national and political positions. They not only do this through their storylines, but also through a variety of postmodern writing techniques, such as multiple viewpoints, fairytales, fantasies, and characters who are ghosts. These techniques help the novels open up the “borders” of how we imagine reproductive politics conceptually and historically, thereby undermining the assumption that a demand for reproductive rights and a concern for fetuses or children are antithetical.

In Chapter Three, I continue the theme of exploring an alternative ethics of reproduction, but I turn from representations of abortion to representations of cloning, cyborgs, and other new reproductive technologies. I engage with the proliferation of reproductive possibilities offered through technological advancements such as ultrasound and stem-cell research in the 1980s and 1990s, and examine how representations of cyborgs and clones interact with these advancements in texts from the late 1990s and

early 2000s through Jackson's hypertext and Lai's novel. Both retellings of Mary Shelley's famous story of assisted reproduction, *Frankenstein*, these texts take up Haraway's work on the potential possibilities of the cyborg and connect her theories on posthuman bodies to stories about reproduction, technology, and monstrosity. In Jackson's case, this connection happens on both a textual level and at the level of medium, as readers interact with the hypertext technology to form the story themselves as they read. Jackson's hypertext tells the story of a human/animal cyborg that is the reanimated female monster Victor Frankenstein destroys mid-creation in Shelley's novel. Readers, or users, create a story for this "patchwork girl" after Mary Shelley (herself now a character) sews her back together. The text plays with ideas of monstrous origins and bodies, embracing a concept of new reproductive technologies outside the norm by having the monster aware of how her birth was "assisted," and by having Mary act as both her mother and her lover. This monstrosity is reinforced through the materiality of the digital hypertext medium, as the theme of illegitimate/artificial life is aligned with an illegitimate/artificial text. Together, the text's duality can be read as a counter-narrative to fears at the time of writing about "Franken-babies," "Dolly the Sheep," and other monstrous clones by showing us a picture of these fears come to life in a text that draws attention to the made-up patchwork quality of not only bodies and identities, but also narratives and texts.

Lai's novel focuses on the story of a cyborg who is part fish and part human and who confronts her reproductive history by challenging her "maker," a man who also happens to be her father. Similar to *Patchwork Girl*, *Salt Fish Girl* deals specifically with the idea of origins and questions traditional concepts of kinship and family. The novel

imagines a future where everything has become so polluted and genetically modified that eating a durian fruit can make you pregnant and people suffer from a dreaming disease where memories from years past leak into their consciousness. Corporations rule in Lai's post-nationalist world and clones are designed specifically to work as cheap and disposable labour. Removing reproductive politics from a national setting and putting it into one where reproductive policy is governed only by the logic of capital, Lai's text focuses on the links between new reproductive technologies and corporate agendas. It therefore not only represents the hopeful mixing of humans and machines that Haraway outlines, and Jackson's hypertext enacts, but the oppression which results when humans attempt to control other humans through technology. Using Haraway's focus on the potential benefits and horrors of cyborgian subjects, I argue that the focus in both novels on cyborg births speaks to an ongoing shift in cultural anxieties about reproductive politics in North America and a focus from abortion to cloning. In writing stories that place reproduction outside of the political confines outlined in the previous two chapters and that play with ideas of assisted conceptions, cloning, and/or monstrous progenies, the texts both facilitate and undermine preoccupations with the potential horrors of new reproductive technologies, thereby drawing attention to how new reproductive technologies tap into cultural fears about who or what is counted as human.

In Chapter Four I continue to examine how the conditions of humanity and "life" are negotiated and understood by turning from the figure of the clone to the fetal citizen. Using Berlant and Edelman's theories on fetal citizenship and reproductive futurism I examine *Children of Men*, an adaptation of English author P.D. James's 1992 novel, *The Children of Men*. Set in 2027 and focusing on the results of world-wide infertility, the

film takes a particularly North American, and post-9/11, angle in its adaption, changing English characters into American ones and evoking obvious visual parallels to the war in Iraq and to Abu Ghraib prison. It also makes other significant changes that make it particularly suitable to this project. For instance, in the novel worldwide sterility causes apathy, political opportunism and economic strain, but in the film worldwide infertility causes nuclear war, mass migration, and terrorism. I argue that the film quite literally suggests that if women were to somehow stop having children the result would be world-wide destruction and dehumanization. It therefore participates very actively in the history of reproductive politics detailed in the project, as it promotes the idea that stopping terror is inexplicably linked to ensuring women's reproduction.

In arguing that the film's reproductive politics are deeply connected to its storyline about terrorism and war, I situate the film in an analysis of how the politics of terrorism have been framed in North America since 9/11 and how topics like abortion and fetal personhood connect to the current "war on terror." I argue that there is a relationship between reproductive debates and apocalyptic narratives and suggest that if part of our current political climate is a focus on what constitutes the conditions of life in a time of terror, then the not-yet-here child has become the ultimate symbol of hope. This is revealed in *Children of Men* through its focus on how reproduction is tied to biopolitical systems that regulate who does and does not get counted as human. For instance, Kee, the character who becomes pregnant in the film, is also an illegal immigrant and this complicates her position in the film as the mother of a new humanity. As Giorgio Agamben has shown in his work on "bare life," or life with no political meaning (*Homo Sacer* 3), it is possible to be physically alive but politically dead, and this is the position

Kee occupies as an “illegal” immigrant. However, as a pregnant woman she is able to gain political agency through the citizenship already afforded her fetus and via the film’s reproductive futurism. That is, the film also shows us how it is possible to be politically protected but not yet physically alive through its focus on her unborn child. Kee’s pregnant body becomes the battleground for these two opposing positions, as the film fetishizes the not-yet-here child at the same time as it offers a critique of the politics of migration. This reveals some of the slippery connections between the film’s reproductive politics and its other politics focused on the status of the family, the nation, and globalization. As the film makes clear, arguments about the status of the human, reproduction, and citizenship rights, fetal and otherwise, are vital to how we make sense of who does and does not count politically.

The concluding chapter returns to many of the themes laid out in Chapter One, but with an eye on how reproductive politics have shifted in some circumstances and stabilized in others since the 1980s. Historicizing the fiction it studies, the project reveals that the anxiety surrounding reproductive politics has increased since *Roe v. Wade*, and that the fictional representations studied here can help us make sense of how and why. In juxtaposing fictional texts against the dominant historical narratives that have popularly framed reproductive politics, the project helps flesh out these politics’ contours. This “fleshing out” reveals three things. First, it demonstrates the inability of traditional reproductive debates focused on “choices” and “rights” to contain what they claim to frame and the ability of the fictional texts to draw attention to these frames’ inadequacies. Second, it demonstrates the ways these creative texts have engaged with cultural studies and with literary and feminist theoretical frameworks in their attempts to write about

reproduction and reproductive politics. Last, it demonstrates the important connection between narrative and reproduction. Therefore, the fictional texts studied here not only provide a compelling entry point to examining how reproductive technologies, and their associated politics, connect to a variety of social anxieties, but also to understanding how these anxieties play out culturally and creatively.

Chapter One

Privacy, Patriarchy, and Abortion: Reproductive Politics in *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Blood and Guts in High School*, and *Don Quixote which was a dream*

Why are men so afraid of women? What is it about women that's so terrifying to men? Maybe it's not exactly women they're afraid of. Maybe it's an ancestral terror connected to being a man, to finding out if you're a real man or not. I believe that's a question men ask themselves a lot. That kind of question isn't very important for women. We know we're women. It's unavoidable.

~ Margaret Atwood, *Two Solicitudes*

An abortion is a simple procedure. It is almost painless. Even if it isn't painless, it only takes five minutes. If you MUST have it, weak, stupid things that you are, we can put you to sleep.

~ Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School*

This chapter considers the themes of women's sexuality and reproduction generally, and abortion specifically, in the works of two important feminist writers in the 1980s:

Canadian Margaret Atwood and American Kathy Acker. I concentrate on Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and on Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984)¹ and *Don Quixote which was a dream* (1986), situating these authors' representations of reproduction and abortion within the political context of the early 1980s. As outlined in the Introduction to this project, this period, which was an explosive time for reproductive politics in North America, saw the widespread rise of the pro-life movement and the start of an administrative backlash against feminism across North America with the election of Ronald Reagan in the United States in 1980. In Canada, this period marked the beginning of the decade-long Morgentaler case, and a move towards conservatism with the election of Brian Mulroney in 1984. Within this political climate, several frameworks became significantly entrenched within reproductive politics. These frameworks, which continue

¹ Written in the late 1970s and copyrighted in 1978, *Blood and Guts in High school* was not published until 1984.

to shape reproductive politics today, include the language of reproductive “freedom,” “privacy” and “choice,” as well as the concept of fetal personhood.

I argue that understanding how these frameworks functioned culturally and creatively through novels such as Atwood’s and Acker’s is an important paradigm for understanding shifts in reproductive politics throughout the 1980s, especially in connection to the Reagan era and the New Right’s focus on “family values.” The language of reproductive choice, privacy and freedom, so fundamental to the women’s movement in the 1970s, was taken up by New Right fundamentalists (those conservatives who often denounce abortion, pornography, homosexuality, feminism, and affirmative action) in the early 1980s in a parody of what that language originally promised, and was used in a backlash against women’s rights generally, and abortion rights specifically. As Hartouni describes in *Cultural Conceptions*, the New Right’s reproductive rhetoric in the 1980s was largely reactionary and often biologically reductive; it was “elaborated in the distinct but clearly related arenas of abortion and infertility, shaped by the newly imaged, newly ‘discovered’ fetal ‘person,’” and its overall aim was to refigure and reshape the “maternal drives and desires” of women in a post-liberation era (77). Atwood’s and Acker’s novels address this rhetoric through satirical and often ironic fictional representations of the reproductive “choices” open to their protagonists. As I argue, through these representations the novels engage with the limits of reproductive frameworks popular in the 1980s, which relied on ideologies based on an individual’s “private right” and “freedom” to “choose” what to do with her own body.²

² As the following chapters will demonstrate, these frameworks continue to structure reproductive politics today.

Atwood's novel takes up these frameworks directly by imagining a futuristic America, renamed the Republic of Gilead, where reproduction and women's bodies are strictly governed and regulated by the state. Gilead is a world where the government maintains its power through a strict theocracy that suppresses information, uses surveillance and violence to control the public, and copes with its major national issue, infertility, through forced surrogacy and sexual slavery. The storyline follows one such slave, a "handmaid" named Offred, who is given to a high-ranking commander and his infertile wife as a sexual surrogate by the state. Handmaids have three chances to successfully produce a child for their Commander before they are banished from Gilead to a toxic wasteland. Through Offred's narrative, readers are offered a picture of what the world might look like if women were not only banned from having abortions or using contraception, but were seen as no more than "two-legged wombs" and "ambulatory chalices" (Atwood 157). Gilead is a world where a woman's only reproductive "choice" is to give birth or perish, and where maternity and heterosexuality are so tightly linked to state oppression that any move against the state, from an unlawful sexual interaction to contraception, is considered a radical one punishable by death.

In Acker's work abortion is also a political move against a social order that relies on naturalized concepts of femininity and maternity. For instance, in *Don Quixote which was a dream* (a feminist rewriting of Cervantes' classic text) the protagonist becomes a knight by having an abortion, while in *Blood and Guts in High School* Acker writes that "abortions are the symbol, the outer image, of sexual relations in this world" (34). In both novels, abortions are seen as profoundly politicized acts that are attached to larger institutions of sexual oppression. They are acts that reveal how women's bodies are

imagined and treated within social systems (medical, political, historical) that rely on normative and oppressive sexualities. For instance, the protagonist in *Don Quixote*, our “knight/night” (10), uses her experience of abortion to help reveal the limitations of a social order that sees motherhood as the natural outcome of feminine sexuality. Refusing the role of mother, however, Acker’s *Don Quixote* also refuses the assumption that her abortion is a “private” choice or a straightforward way out of the confines of patriarchy and heterosexuality. Like Atwood, therefore, Acker imagines reproductive politics outside the confines of personal choice. Her novels help us see that choices are always limited by circumstances, and that reproductive models based on masculinist models of autonomy and freedom are inadequate for making sense of women’s reproductive decisions.

In their representations of reproduction, Atwood’s and Acker’s novels not only explore the limits of reproductive frameworks based on ideologies of freedom and choice, but also point to the potential literary texts have to critically engage with reproductive politics. The novels reveal how cultural processes of imagination, like fiction, respond to major symbolic changes in politics such as those instituted through legislative decisions that make certain reproductive decisions, like abortion, legal. To use Lacanian terms: if we can describe the symbolic realm as the rules and the language of the sociocultural order and the imaginary realm as that which enables desire, identification and representation, then we can see that “representations of reproduction often reveal anxieties about Symbolic change as well as providing compensation for it” (Roof 9). That is, as the symbolic changes, its transformation is manifested “through symptoms that appear in the representations that constitute the cultural Imaginary” (Roof 10). The

novels, as part of the cultural imaginary or unconscious, indicate some of the anxieties that reproductive debates create in the symbolic, with its reliance on patriarchal rules and laws. Put another way, the novels are examples of how narrative functions symptomatically at a particular historical moment (the early 1980s) in a way that both sustains and challenges that moment's politics (reproductive debates).

In the case of Acker, a novel like *Don Quixote* not only suggests that the language of the symbolic, which is the language of "choice," is inadequate for describing women's sexuality and reproduction, but that language itself is the problem women face in attempting to communicate as sexual subjects. *The Handmaid's Tale*, on the other hand, imagines this compensation for symbolic change taken to its most extreme end; the novel takes the anxiety caused to the symbolic by reproductive configurations that challenge patriarchy, and creates an ironic and frightening parody of this anxiety taken to its limit in its futuristic surrogacy arrangements. In each instance, the novels not only engage with the symbolic language of "choice" and "freedom," but also reveal the limits of this language. They do this through devices such as parody, pastiche, and irony, which show, for instance, how quickly reproductive rights movements can be eroded, co-opted, or perverted through the movements' own language. This play with language, in turn, challenges the idea that reproductive laws, such as those instituted by and challenged via *Roe v. Wade*, could ever contain what they claim to frame by showing how inadequate the language of the reproductive debates can be in presenting the full spectrum of the politics of reproduction.

Abortion and Family Values

In “The Rule of Law, The Rise of Violence, and the Role of Morality,” Marcy J. Wilder outlines the backlash against abortion rights in North America in the late 1970s and early 1980s following *Roe v. Wade*. Wilder speculates that part of the reason there was such a backlash against abortion by fundamentalists in the 1980s is that *Roe* essentially made the abortion question one about the competing rights of the woman and the fetus. She states: “the constitutional framework was unable to accommodate the fact that a woman and the fetus she carries are one entity [...] [T]he abortion conflict became strictly defined as a contest between the rights of women and the ‘right to life’ of a fetus” (73-74). As I outlined in the Introduction, one of the results of this framing was that as the New Right gained political clout in America in the early 1980s, it took up the cause of the fetus with a vengeance as part of its overall push to reinstate what it saw as lost “family values.” Arguing that they wished to reinvigorate an economy that had gone sour, and a society that had become morally and spiritually weak, New Right leaders backed Reagan’s bid for the American presidency in 1980 and his promise to lobby to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. As Rosiland Petchesky outlines in *Abortion and Women’s Choice*, “The politics of the family, sexuality and reproduction, and most symbolically, of abortion—became the primary vehicle through which right-wing politics sought to achieve state power in the late 1970s and the 1980 election” (242).³ These New Right politicians, church, and public leaders, such as Jerry Falwell, Phyllis Schlafly, and Jesse Helms, called for a “return to basics” and to the fundamentals of the heterosexual, nuclear, patriarchal family.

³ Petchesky notes that the New Right predates Reagan and made “important dents” in state policy during the Carter administration as well (242).

In America, this return included tanking the proposed Equal Rights Amendment and cutting funding to women's shelters and centres across the country. Canada was affected by these politics not only by proxy, but also through its own turn towards political and social conservatism in the 1980s, and through its own outspoken anti-abortion activists, such as George Grant, who called *Roe v. Wade* a "cup of poison to our liberalism" (72). In both countries, moves towards social conservatism included a call for a "return to basics," which often meant an attack on abortion, seen as "the symbol of the general malaise that was slowly but persistently destroying the social body (as it destroyed the natural-familial-maternal body)" (Hartouni, *Cultural* 32). This attack involved both an attempt to convince women their essential identity could only be fully realized in the home as housewives and mothers, and to convince the general public of the existence of fetal personhood. As Hartouni explains, the American New Right blamed the economy's recession on women's participation in the workforce. They argued that women had stolen jobs from men, and this had contributed to the breakup of the nuclear family and an "epidemic" of single mothers. Add to this mix another "epidemic"—infertility caused by women waiting longer and longer to have children in pursuit of their careers—and the economy (as well as men's self-esteem) looked ready to collapse. In their attempts to convince the public that women's participation in the workforce had hurt not only the family, then, but actually women themselves, the New Right joined forces with the pro-life movement to prove that abortion was the horrifying cost of such participation: "Just as animals kill their offspring when they are disturbed or in some way confused, so too were women killing theirs, in a 'restless agitation against a natural order'" (Luker, qtd. in Hartouni 40).

The beginning of the 1980s, therefore, initiated two separate but connected political drives across North America. The first was a push to persuade women that by straying from their natural paths as housewives and mothers they had endangered their families, themselves, and their country's economy; only a return to "family values" would repair this damage. The second was a push to institute strategic legislative efforts to overturn legalized abortion, and, barring that, to at least "redefine constitutional language, broaden the meaning of the word person, and give concrete reality to the idea of the 'fetus as a person'" (Hartouni, *Cultural* 34). Or, as Petchesky explains, the first was an "anti-social-welfare backlash" and the second an "antifeminist backlash aimed at abortion" (246). The outcome of these combined efforts was not only a joining of New Right politics with both anti-abortion and pro-life groups, but an overall depiction of women as adversely related to the fetus, the family, and the nation. Abortion was now *the* symptom of a morally weak society out of control and in need of a firm, patriarchal hand to get it back on track. While that hand never got quite the hold fundamentalists hoped for, one of the outcomes of this political push was that abortion became squarely imagined, not only by the New Right but by the general public in both countries, as a struggle between the woman and the fetus.⁴ Developments in ultrasound techniques that allowed pro-life groups to advertise images of the fetus in bus terminals, public restrooms, billboards, and magazine covers only added to this drama (Hartouni, *Cultural* 35).⁵ *Roe v. Wade* still had the final word on abortion, but through the very words that it

⁴ As of the writing of this dissertation in 2009, *Roe* has yet to be overturned and the issue itself is off the table for now in Canadian politics, although in several American states legislation has been passed in the last decade that makes it virtually impossible for women to obtain abortions in their home states.

⁵ Indeed, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, the picture of a free-floating and seemingly self-sustaining fetus is so common now it is often taken for granted. This image still frames the abortion debate today, as well as other reproductive issues such as infertility, surrogacy, and cloning.

had used in 1973, which separated the rights of the woman from the fetus, it had inadvertently set the stage for the abortion debate's most lasting legacy: pregnancy was now imagined as a struggle between two individuals, one innocent and desperately needing protection and the other often concerned only with her own "choices" and "freedoms."

Atwood Weighs In

The Handmaid's Tale engages with these politics by imagining a world where a group of Christian theocrats are able to seize power in the US and institutionalize an extreme form of patriarchy. Atwood has said that she imagined Gilead as the logical outcome of global politics at the time she was writing *The Handmaid's Tale*. In an interview with John Godard for *Books in Canada* in 1985, for instance, Atwood insists, "there is nothing in the book that hasn't already happened [...]. [A]ll the things described in the book, people have already done to one another" (8). On book tours for the novel, Atwood kept a file of newspaper clippings detailing human and women's rights violations from around the world as proof that the novel was not fabricated. As Shirley Neuman explains in "'Just a Backlash': Margaret Atwood's Feminism and *The Handmaid's Tale*," in the year Atwood was writing the novel (1984), US pronatalists were bombing and setting fire to abortion clinics, Medicaid had ceased to fund legal abortions, and several states passed laws restricting not only legal abortion, but even the provision of information about abortion (860).⁶ In Canada, Morgentaler had recently been jailed again for performing abortion outside the confines of the Canadian Criminal Code in Quebec and Ontario. Atwood

⁶ See Neuman, who also frames her analysis of Atwood's novel within the 1980s backlash against feminism, for a more detailed list of the political moves made against women and women's rights by the New Right in the early 1980s. Neuman also suggests Susan Faludi's book, *Backlash*, for a detailed documentation of the New Right's political moves.

addresses this political climate by imagining a world where religious fundamentalists manage to gain control of the American government. As she tells Victor-Levy Beaulieu in *Two Solicitudes*, the only way she can see this happening is if a group were to proclaim, “as the Republicans do now, ‘the will of God is with us, follow us’” (72).⁷ *The Handmaid’s Tale*, she states, emerges from this premise, and expands on what “the fundamentalists say they will do when they hold power” (78). The fundamentalists to whom Atwood is referring are those outlined above, and her repeated attempts to claim the novel as “real” are an indication of how pervasive their brand of reproductive politics were at the time she was writing. That *The Handmaid’s Tale* could be seen as a description of where the world was heading in 1985, not only by Atwood, but by the majority of her critics, indicates just how powerful these fundamentalists were in shaping public discourse.⁸

I mention Atwood’s assertion that *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a response to the political climate in which it was written because my reading of the novel also looks at how the abortion debate framed reproductive politics in the early 1980s. I read the novel as not only engaging with the political conditions of the abortion debate, but also as revealing a critique of abortion laws themselves, including *Roe*, which allow these conditions in the first place. I also draw connections in the novel between issues often seen as discrete from the abortion debate, such as infertility and the politics of surrogacy, which are tied intimately to abortion through the same set of reproductive frameworks

⁷ It is worth noting that Atwood’s critique here is that of a Canadian looking at America as both an insider and an outsider, which is a common theme in Atwood’s work. Atwood was educated at Harvard, and Cambridge, Massachusetts is the setting for the novel. Her experience in America is part of her critique here, as is her position as a Canadian who is wary of American influence in her home country. See Rosemary Sullivan for a detailed examination of this period in Atwood’s life and its influence on the novel.

⁸ Not all of her critics thought the novel was plausible. See Bannerjee, Flower, McCarthy, O’Brien, and Updike, among others, for critiques of why Atwood’s novel is unlikely.

discussed above. These factors make *The Handmaid's Tale* the ideal platform for examining the ways fiction interacts with reproductive politics.

Many critics have noted that Atwood's novel should be read as a feminist warning of what is to come if we are not vigilant about maintaining women's rights. Other critics are ambivalent about the novel's feminist politics, noting that Offred has little or no real agency in the story and gives up her struggle for freedom once she falls in love with another servant named Nick.⁹ I argue, however, that whether Atwood's novel is purposefully feminist or not is to a large degree irrelevant, as what the novel's storyline does is take various strains of reproductive debates in the 1980s and stretch them to their extreme ends in a way that is critical of the terms of the debate itself. The result of this "stretching" is that *The Handmaid's Tale* is a text that reveals how reproductive laws based on ideas of "privacy," "freedom," and "individual choice" can become circular. That is, these terms can just as easily be used to strip women's rights as they can be used to grant them. Contrary to many Atwood scholars, then, who read the novel in terms of whether or not we can trust Offred as a narrator and/or examine her relationship to Nick, I read the novel as engaging with several reproductive issues circulating at the time it was written, most notably the language of the abortion debate. At the same time, it also eerily explores many of the issues that were still to come out of reproductive debates, such as problems with surrogacy arrangements and the general acceptance of a post-feminist attitude, which sees women as liberated enough and feminists as "complainers." That is not to say that I believe Atwood intended to write back specifically to "what the fundamentalists were saying," or that she even intends the reader to find certain political

⁹ For more on the novel's feminism see, among others, Adams, Bouson, Davidson, Ehrenreich, Freibert, Hollinger, Howells, Mahoney, Neuman, Provencal, Rigney, Rubinstein, Staels and Stein.

critiques in the novel. In fact, I would say the novel's politics are both ambiguous and ironic. What it does mean, however, is that if we can read *The Handmaid's Tale* as part of the cultural imaginary as I outlined, then we can put it into its historical context to ask what kind of cultural work it does. In other words, we can read the novel as an indication of some of the narratives, images, and fantasies that both confronted and shaped reproductive politics in the early 1980s.

One of the most obvious ways the novel engages with the narratives, images, and fantasies structuring politics at the time it was written is through its engagement with the 1980s backlash against feminism. As Neuman aptly states, Offred is a fictional product of 1970s feminism who “finds herself in a situation that is a fictional realization of the backlash against women’s rights that gathered force during the early 1980s” (858). As a survivor of the new government’s takeover, Offred, who takes her name from her Commander Fred (Of Fred), bears witness not only to her new society, but also to the revolution itself as she recounts her life in what she calls “the time before.” Taking Neuman’s statement as a starting point, we can read Offred’s memories of “the time before” as an indication of feminist ideas circulating in the 1970s, and her descriptions of her present time as an engagement with the backlash against them. Most of Offred’s memories of “the time before” are of her husband, Luke, and her daughter, who was stolen from her and given to a high-ranking infertile couple after the family was caught attempting to flee the country. The other two people who play important roles in her memories are her mother and her best friend, Moira, and it is these two who provide the reader with an idea of what the world was like for women before the revolution. We quickly learn that both Offred’s mother and Moira were feminists, although of different

sorts. Moira, for instance, is young, brash and funny; she smokes and drinks, she's an out lesbian and proud of it, and she writes terms papers in university on date rape while also throwing ironic underwear parties in a spoof of suburban housewifery (42). Offred's mother, on the other hand, is described as angry and aggressive: "wiry, spunky, the kind of old woman who won't let anyone butt in front of her in the supermarket" (139). She takes her daughter as a child to pornographic book burnings (43), marches in "take back the night" protests (138), and is fond of saying "a man is just a woman's strategy for making other women" (139).

Offred herself does not identify with either of these women's politics. She is not the second-wave feminist that her mother is and has little interest in grassroots women's organization, yet she enjoys the personal freedoms and liberties her mother's type has won her, and grudgingly admires her mother's large group of female friends. Offred is not quite like Moira either, although they are close friends and she admires Moira's daring and humour. Mostly, Offred just wants to be left alone to be a mother and a wife, and is happy to let Luke make the decisions and lead the family. Taken together, all three offer a stereotypical account of the common "types" of middle-class white women in North America in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Her mother is the older feminist who calls Offred's complacent attitude "a backlash" and swears that history will vindicate her feminism (140). Moira is the young, third-wave feminist interested in exploring her sexuality and identity politics, and Offred is the post-feminist who believes in the redeeming qualities of heterosexual love, feels uncomfortable with her mother's "man-hating," and wilfully ignores her husband's sexism.

The novel, in many respects, portrays a caricature of these women's positions and ideals, especially Offred's mother's, in that it takes the foundations of their feminism—the concepts of freedom, equality, and choice, and the importance of women's difference and community—and turns them on their head. For instance, Gilead still has women's centres, but they are now training camps run by militant women named "Aunts" and called "Red Centers," in reference to the handmaids who "live" there. Offred is told at one such centre by Aunt Lydia that being a handmaid is about "women united for a common end! Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together" (187). Aunt Lydia often relies on quasi-Marxist or feminist language mixed with biblical quotations, and is fond of telling the handmaids how sacred their role is in Gilead as the last of the fertile women in the country. The handmaids are supposedly held in high regard since it is only through them that the population will continue, but it is for this reason that they are manipulated, controlled, and under constant surveillance. Offred notes, for instance, that when she is assigned a daily walking partner, another handmaid named Ofglen, it is not for protection or companionship: "the truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers. If either of us slips through the net because of something that happens on one of our daily walks, the other will be accountable" (21). This feeling of surveillance and suspicion is what Alice E. Adams describes as the handmaid's communal consciousness. It is "a paralyzing mix of helplessness, rage, and self-blame" (107), and the opposite of the feminist mantra of the "personal is political," which was supposed to awaken women's consciousness to the workings of patriarchy in the 1970s. Instead, what we see are handmaids forced to make group confessions about rape and abortion at Red Centers while other handmaids turn on the confessor and chant "*her fault, her fault, her*

fault” (82). Or, handmaids forced to participate in the group executions of other handmaids who have broken the law at events called “salvagings” (318). This terrified and vicious communal consciousness is a parody of 1970s feminism and an ironic reminder of just how true its mantra continues to be in Gilead. The “personal is political” for the handmaids in every suffocating detail of their day-to-day lives; it is just that the women’s community they now belong to is an empty shell of what Offred’s mother or Moira ever imagined when they insisted on the power of women’s community and difference.

Elaine Tuttle Hansen also argues that the novel “conflates both traditional misogynist and recent feminist notions of the special difference and power of the female body and the sacred, redeeming experience of maternity and pushes them to one horrifying, logical extreme” (29).¹⁰ This extreme is perhaps best exemplified in the bizarre surrogacy and birthing processes the handmaids go through as part of their duties. Once a month when each handmaid is ovulating she is forced to participate in a sexual ritual where she lies between her Commander’s wife’s legs as he has sex with her while the wife holds her hands. Offred describes how this handholding is supposed to represent that she and the wife are “one flesh,” but what it really indicates is that the wife “is in control, of the process and thus of the product. If any” (107). While the novel suggests that this ritual is taken from the biblical story of Rachel, Jacob, and Bilhah, we can also read it as a twist on Freud’s Oedipal conflict, in which the child wishes to sexually attract the parent of the opposite sex and usurp the position of the parent of the same sex. The

¹⁰ Hilde Staels also sees the narrative as suggesting that radical feminists may actually “reinforce the belief system of the New Christian Right in maintaining the governing idea that difference in biological essence between masculinity and femininity results in an essentially different type of thinking and feeling, which justifies differentiated gender roles in society” (162). I agree with Hansen and Staels that Atwood’s novel is cautious of all forms of dogmatism, including feminism.

novel plays with this idea further in how it infantilizes Offred, who is kept in her room, brought food, and treated as an invalid most of the time. Also, the Commander often takes on a fatherly role, playing scrabble with Offred, giving her treats and making jokes, and acting kindly towards her compared to Serena Joy, his wife, who takes on the role of a frigid and jealous mother. The disturbing part of this situation is that the taboo of incest is actually acted out with “mommy’s” full awareness and daughter’s complacency. Offred even wonders, “which of us is it worse for, her or me?” (109). Since the story of Oedipus is one of western culture’s most famous familial tragedies, this excessive portrayal can be read as an over-literalization of the drama and its connection between the paternal metaphor and law.¹¹ Considering the novel was written at a time when the New Right was arguing that “the family” was being eroded by the “epidemic” of single motherhood, the situation can be read as another instance of how the novel satirizes and engages with what was considered a pressing social issue at the time.

Offred states that her sexual situation makes her feel like she is “crazy” (107). When the commander is having sex with her, she even wants to laugh aloud, although she knows she doesn’t dare (109). She also admits that she does not consider the ritual rape. She states:

What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say making love, because this is not what he’s doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. Nor does rape cover it; nothing is going on here that I haven’t signed up for. (107)

¹¹ For Lacan, the paternal metaphor is the metaphorical character of the Oedipus complex itself as it involves the child identifying the father with the figure of the law (E, 1977: 97). Lacan refers to it as the metaphor on which all signification rests, as the child must realize that s/he is part of a social order and that this order prohibits the child from incest. The child must identify the father as law, and thereby defer his or her desire for the mother, or else face psychosis.

This description evokes Adams' argument that the handmaids are trapped by feelings of helplessness, rage, and self-blame. Offred's only other choice is to be sent to a place called the Colonies, a wasteland outside the sanctioned area of Gilead where barren women are forced to clean up toxic mess until they die from exposure. Yet somehow, Offred does not consider having to choose between death and forced sex as rape. Offred knows that this hysterical situation is the only hope she has of surviving in Gilead, and survival is her "choice." She therefore participates in the absurd arrangement, all the while knowing what the ritual makes clear: that she is simply a substitute and replaceable, only existing because of the "lower part" of her body. Completely separating Offred's rights from those of her potential child, the ritual satirizes the idea that women are only adversely related to the fetus, or future child, but are actually much less politically important. Offred is not only separate from "the product, if any" in her situation, but is literally effaced, described as a vessel only, and useful solely for her womb.

Surrogacy's Dramas

The handmaids' effacement continues if one of them is lucky enough to become pregnant. This handmaid is again placed between the wife's legs as she gives birth. The other handmaids all form a circle around the woman in labour and chant as she delivers, while the wife sits on the "birthing stool" (145), a type of throne, with her legs around the handmaid's body as if she too is in labour. When the baby is born, the wife is handed the child and she and the other wives act as if she had delivered the baby herself. Offred ironically comments after attending one such event: "Mother, I think. Wherever you may be. Can you hear me? You wanted a women's culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't

what you meant, but it exists. Be thankful for small mercies” (147). Obviously, by removing men and the medical establishment from the birthing process the handmaids are not able to appropriate maternal power, and this birthing scene is the opposite of what Offred’s mother would have wished for as a women’s culture, even parodying the idea of a home birth and midwifery. What we see instead is “how natural childbirth methods could be integrated into social machinery that subjugates women and servers mother-child ties” (Adams 110). In this scene the “correspondence between ‘personal’ and ‘political’ again finds brilliant and disturbing expression” (Rubenstein 102) by making public what is usually the most personal situation to reveal that all reproductive choices are always grossly political.¹² This scene also reveals how the perceived split between the woman and the fetus in real-life abortion debates could be used eventually to subsume women’s rights in the name of a future child. It therefore offers a critique of the connections between abortion rhetoric and other types of reproductive technologies and practices.

Offred’s surrogacy arrangement can be seen as a fulfilment of the reproductive politics which were about to play out in American media in 1986 with the case of “Baby M,” one of the first situations of a surrogate mother refusing to give up her biological child. In “Reproductive Technologies and the Negotiation of Public Meaning: The Case

¹² In “Nature and Nurture in Dystopia,” Rubenstein further argues that all reproduction is violated and inverted in the novel, from the genetic manipulation of plants to nuns being forced to renounce their celibacy, so that what is assumed as natural is actually portrayed as grotesque.

of Baby M,” Hartouni discusses the two trials in the Baby M case.¹³ She examines the rhetoric used in both judgments, each of which awarded custody of Baby M to the biological father, William Stern, and his wife, rather than to the biological mother, Mary Beth Whitehead. Hartouni states that each case allows us to see how “law simultaneously repairs and mystifies the relations of power that constitute ‘mother,’ ‘father,’ and ‘family,’ in the wake of their rupture, while also constructing these contested relations” (128). She argues that both trials work to recover naturalized concepts of paternity and maternity. For instance, in the first New Jersey state trial Judge Harvey Sorkow essentially judges Mary Beth Whitehead’s relationship with her child as unmaternal, even though they are related genetically, because “natural” mothers do not sell their children. In deciding to award custody to the Sterns, Hartouni argues Sorkow also essentially reinvents patriarchy. She quotes him as stating: “But for him [Stern], there would be no child [...]. [T]he biological father pays the surrogate for her willingness to be impregnated and carry his child to term. At birth, the father does not purchase the child. He cannot purchase what is already his” (Sorkow in Hartouni 122). This ruling implies that somehow there “can be a father without a mother” (122), something that Hartouni says makes “Baby M a ‘technobaby’ of purely paternal origins” (119).

¹³ In 1985 the conception of Melissa Stern, or Baby M as she was known, took place under an agreement in New York between Mary Beth Whitehead and William Stern. Whitehead agreed to be artificially inseminated by Stern’s sperm and to surrender her parental rights to Stern and his wife upon delivery of her child. Stern agreed to pay Whitehead \$10,000 after her surrender of a live infant. On March 27, 1986, Whitehead gave birth to a daughter whom she named Sara Elizabeth Whitehead. She took Sara home and turned down Stern’s \$10,000. A few days later, she gave the baby to the Sterns only to again take the baby back and claim she would never be able to give her up. The Sterns called the police and hired a lawyer. Eventually the case went to trial in New Jersey and then to the Supreme Court, and in both trials the Sterns were awarded custody of Baby M, or Melissa Stern. The media and the public followed the case closely, with many national and international newspapers publishing pictures of Baby M being passed from biological mother to biological father under surveillance by state troopers at the end of the first trial.

Hartouni argues that the following Supreme Court decision, which found on behalf of Whitehead by giving her visitation rights to what was still determined to be the Sterns' child, had no choice but to undo this extreme decision and acknowledge the biological mother. This acknowledgment did little to favour Whitehead, however.

Hartouni states: "In finding on behalf of the 'natural mother,' the Supreme Court's ruling is no less constitutive than Sorkow's; through a series of rhetorical moves, it stabilizes the notion of motherhood as natural and the biological discourse that grounds it as well as male prerogative" (119). Hartouni's point is that each judgment works to resolidify and naturalize either paternity or maternity. In the instance of the second decision, this recovering of maternity also entails what Hartouni calls a "re-covering"; the decision works to make natural precisely what new reproductive practices and situations could reveal to be historically contingent and conditioned by relations of power (119). Each ruling, therefore, achieves the same effect even as it proposes to find on behalf of different parties.

The government's reaction in Gilead to the technologies of the future, technologies which could precisely reveal reproductive politics to be "historically contingent and conditioned by relations of power" is, like Judge Sorkow, to revert to absolute patriarchy. All reproductive technologies are banned, including contraception, and a new form of patriarchal self-government is reinstated in each individual family. What is re-covered as "natural" for Offred in this position is her womb only. In Gilead, it actually is possible that there can be a father without a mother, because the state has decided "natural motherhood" is no longer biological. Offred is to be impregnated and carry to term a child that has already been decided on and figured as the Commander's

only. This is how it can make sense that the situation is seen by Serena Joy as a “business transaction” (17), but also as one that gives no rights to half of the partners in this transaction. Handmaids are not mothers; they are not even persons: they are slaves of the state and are replaceable and disposable. The novel’s inversion of what it means to be a natural mother, then, offers a strange caricature of the Baby M case in that it eerily predicts the complications that would come up in its trials. Just as in the two rulings, in the novel motherhood is separated into two categories—biological mother versus actual or natural mother—both of which work primarily to keep paternal authority intact. The novel offers a warning of sorts about what could, and will, happen when new reproductive situations and technologies threaten the status of the patriarchal or nuclear family. As the novel makes clear, law will work to re-cover and refigure those notions of paternity and maternity that are often threatened in surrogacy arrangements, even going so far as to make real the suggestion that there can be a father without a mother.

Freedom and the Law

The patriarchal culture the handmaids live in is most obviously revealed in the restrictions placed on them as surrogates. It is also reflected, however, in their simple daily interactions. For instance, on one of Offred and Ofglen’s daily walks, they encounter a group of Japanese tourists and both women are immediately disgusted by the Japanese women’s show of flesh. The handmaids are required to wear long red robes that cover their bodies and veils and gloves that cover their hair and hands. They even have large wings on either side of their headdresses that make it impossible for them to see the

world around them without turning their entire heads.¹⁴ When they encounter the Japanese tourists in what used to be typical Western fashion Offred thinks: “We are fascinated, but also repelled. They seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this. Then I think: I used to dress like that. That was freedom” (32). Here, Offred’s use of the pronoun “we” indicates that she shares these thoughts with Ofglen and that all handmaids would feel the same way about their dress. Her use of the word freedom, as well, indicates an ironic awareness that being allowed to wear revealing clothing did not necessarily make the handmaids any more “free” in the time before. This is something that her mother, or Moira, might have gladly pointed out to her then, but it has taken the revolution for Offred to understand the different degrees of freedom she was allowed then compared to now. For instance, Offred recalls that women were “not protected” in the time before and states, “I remember the rules, rules that were never spelled out but that every woman knew” (27). Women did not jog alone, they did not talk to strange men, and they avoided certain places at night. As she states, “now we walk along the same street, in red pairs, and no one shouts obscenities at us, speaks to us, touches us. No one whistles” (28).

This reverse logic of what type of “freedom” the handmaids are now offered plays a large role in Offred’s story, as the novel plays with the words choice, freedom and privacy. For instance, Aunt Lydia constantly tells the handmaids they are lucky that they are protected by the state. Offred wryly thinks: “where I am is not a prison but a privilege as Aunt Lydia said, who was in love with either/or” (8); and “we were a society dying, said Aunt Lydia, of too much choice” (28). These concepts are also played with when

¹⁴ This is an obvious allusion to the burqa. Atwood spent time in Iran and Afghanistan before writing *The Handmaid’s Tale* and the novel can be read as a critique directly related to that experience as well.

Offred's doctor offers to have sex with her to increase her chances of getting pregnant and she thinks "it's the choice that terrifies me. A way out, a salvation" (69). Here, choice is something Offred fears; later it is something she blames herself for when she thinks about her situation: "there wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose" (107). Looking back on the time before, Offred remembers that she lived by ignoring what was going on around her. She thinks, "[i]gnoring isn't the same as ignorance, you have to work at it," and "we were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom" (63). The word freedom here is again ironic, as it is this exact act of ignoring which allows the new theocracy to take over the government. For instance, when the President is assassinated, Congress is machine-gunned, and Islamic fundamentalists are blamed and used as scapegoats, Moira tells Offred, "you wait [...] they've been building up to this. It's you and me up against the wall, baby" (201). Offred ignores Moira, though, and when the theocracy's first act is to close the "pornomarts" and "feels on wheels" she is even happy, saying "it wasn't sad to seem them go. We all knew what a nuisance they'd been" (201). These acts of ignoring accumulate when Offred, along with all other women in America, lose their jobs and have their bank accounts frozen on the same day that a law is passed prohibiting women from owning private property. As Offred's boss tells her and her female co-workers that they are all fired and repeats "I'm sorry" and "it's the law," Offred wonders "what was it about this that made us feel we deserved it?" (204). This juxtaposition suggests perhaps it is the law itself that makes the women "feel they deserve it," as if they have always been waiting for their rights to be stripped.

It is no coincidence that banning women from owning private property is one of the first steps in controlling their reproductive lives in the novel. As Judith Roof points out in *Reproductions of Reproduction*, private property laws and reproductive laws are intimately tied together. Roof cites legal traditions that have often only allowed women to have abortions in cases where their lives are endangered or there has been incest or rape. She argues that “in one way, abortion laws are nothing more than the preservation of sperm rights as synecdochical of the ideological maxims of capitalism” (112). What she means by this is that the ideology of private property helps account for the hysteria surrounding abortion if we can understand that the child performs the same function as property in the continuation of kinship laws. That is, the child, like property, “perpetuates the name-of-the-father, represents power and potency, and allays the certainty of mortality through the immortality of a social order inscribed in tangible assets” (109). The surrogacy arrangements discussed above certainly reveal this, as do the actual judgments passed down in the Baby M case. Like abortion laws that limit abortion to circumstances such as a threat to the mother’s life, rape, or incest, the novel’s surrogacy arrangements actually “protect the interests of the father and through the father the interests of a social order premised upon orderly reproduction of identifiable patriarchal generations” (108). In each instance, patriarchy is protected in the name of the child, as the child is the product that ensures a line of kinship and thereby the continuation of paternal law.

For Roof, reproduction is “a metaphorical extension of the language of kinship and identity that forms social order” (105); it is a metaphorical extension of what she refers to as big “L” Law. Here, Roof is working off a Lacanian model of the Symbolic

when she describes big “L” Law as Paternal Law or Symbolic Law— that which creates social order—and small “l” law as those statutes and rules that attempt to put Law into practice.¹⁵ The distinction between these two types of law helps explain what she means when she states:

abortion laws are riddled with the conflict they are codified to sort out [...].
[A]lready the site of displaced issues of access to women and birth control, abortion embodies the crux of the family crisis as the mother, appearing to usurp the role of the Law, threatens to separate from the child in defiance of a father who is already nominally absent from the [abortion] statute. (106)

Abortion debates may be seen as a battle between the fetus and the mother, or as an attempt to recast the Oedipal conflict in its proper terms (mother desiring child, father protecting it from its mother only at the proper time, in his name), but for Roof the real battle is between “an individual’s desire not to procreate versus a social Law which demands reproduction as an illusory defense against mortality” (106). Therefore, the primary purpose of the law is not to protect the fetus but to protect “the product and perpetuation of the Law” (107). This is why Roof links reproductive laws to private property laws, because their intent is always to protect the product, be it child or land, which is supposed to continue the line of kinship in the name of Law.

Roof’s argument is similar to Mackinnon’s assertion that *Roe v. Wade* simply translates “traditional social values into the rhetoric of individual rights as means of

¹⁵ Roof explains: “Law, then, is not law as we know it, but rather the principle by which law operates. The Name-of-the-Father as metaphor that moors the Symbolic constitutes Law as substitutive process. ‘It is in the Name-of-the-Father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person clearly with figure of the law,’ says Lacan. The Name-of-the-Father’s particular substitution of something for nothing defines the character of this law. Law is that which produces a relation where none exists” (19).

subordinating those rights to specific social imperatives” (“Roe v. Wade” 49). The gist of both of their arguments is that even though feminist legal reforms have political value, they do not alter the underlying cultural gender ideologies that continue to inform Law. At best, what they offer us is a chance to see the complicated and inherently unstable relationship between Law and law, as laws are only ever metaphors for the Law itself and are therefore compensatory at best. In other words, once we can understand that all abortion laws, including *Roe v. Wade*, position fetus’ rights as the state’s rights, then we can see that mothers’ rights, which really only offer a margin of choice at most, are only ever the temporary suspension of the Law through a statute. We can better understand how easily the mother’s “choice” can therefore be taken away. *The Handmaid’s Tale* helps us see this split as it parodies the complicated and inherently unstable relationships between Law and law through its over-literalization and over-dramatization of patriarchal laws. For instance, the fact that Offred takes her name from her commander, Fred, parodies the illusory control of patriarchy, which takes its Symbolic power to a large extent from men’s ability to name women and children.¹⁶ This parody extends to such an extreme in the novel that women are named “unwomen” when they are unable to reproduce and babies are named “unbabies” when they are disabled or genetically flawed. These acts of naming take popular pro-life discourse, which posits that “women who advocate or have abortions are not only misguided or immoral; they are not properly female” (Ginsburg 64), to a point of ridiculousness. As Offred states, “there is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that’s the law” (68). The illogicality of this comment alone

¹⁶ In *Brutal Choreographies* J. Brooks Bouson points out that Offred’s name is also a play on the words “afraid,” “offered” and “off-read” (138).

echoes the workings of Law as Roof outlines them above. It also helps explain how Aunt Lydia cannot only claim the following, but has it make perfect sense in Gilead: “There is more than one kind of freedom [...]. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don’t underrate it” (28). Aunt Lydia’s use of the word freedom not only infantilizes the handmaids, but also reveals that Law always actually protects itself, even under the banner of protecting women and children. Obviously for women to only be free from rape or abuse through imprisonment is not an actual freedom, but the empty logic of Aunt Lydia’s comment indicates what happens when terms like “freedom” lose their social context; rights which are given in the name of freedom can just as easily be taken away in the name of another kind of freedom. The novel not only reveals some of the failings of Law, therefore, through this type of satire, but actually exposes how laws produce and keep intact particular forms and practices of life, and particular formations and relations of power even as they claim simply to describe these relations (Hartouni, *Cultural* 119). Gilead’s reproductive laws not only satirize “the inherent misogyny of patriarchal culture” (Bouson 137), but also reveal how ineffective concepts such as personal choice, freedom and privacy are for containing Law and its gendered reproductive politics.

Roof argues that the imaginary confusion sustained between gender and its metaphorical function—the confusion between the literal father and symbolic authority—has kept feminist efforts to effect statutory change within the frame of the law rather than questioning the basis and structure of legal authority itself. She states, “statutory reform assumes Law rather than treating the idea of law or Law itself; reform remains within the gendered parameters of Law and Desire, reinforcing the very idea of law (and Law) while

trying to challenge its more literalized instances” (101). I have argued that *The Handmaid’s Tale* can be read as a critique of these types of statutory reforms in its parody of reproductive laws. In taking law to its very extreme, the novel exposes the confusion between the literal father and Symbolic authority in a way that undermines this authority. Turning to Kathy Acker’s work, now, I would like to suggest that her novels do something very similar in their attack on patriarchy. Acker’s novels not only satirize Symbolic authority, but linguistically attack that authority, exploring whether other radically re-imagined possibilities exist for a female subject within the phallogentric narratives of Western culture. In other words, where Atwood’s novel reveals language’s failings, Acker’s novels attack language in an attempt to deconstruct the very idea of a female subject itself and show how this idea is wrapped up in social conventions reliant on oppressive concepts of femininity and maternity.

Acker’s Politics of Representation

Atwood and Acker differ when it comes to form and technique. Atwood’s writing often follows traditional forms of narrative, whereas Acker’s writing often uses pastiche, multivocality and plagiarism, appropriating from other Western texts, such as Hawthorne’s *The Scarlett Letter* (in *Blood and Guts*), or Frank Wedekind’s *Lulu* and Sade’s *Justine* (in *Don Quixote*), to name three. Despite these differences, Atwood and Acker have more in common than one might think, especially in their concern with the possibilities of communication and the responsibilities of being a writer, artist, and critic. Acker has stated in several interviews that her writing techniques in the early publications of her career (the late 1970s and early 1980s) were often about finding ways to communicate

and respond to what she saw happening in the world politically. In an online interview with Benjamin Bratton in 1999, for instance, Acker describes her early writing as “searching structurally for a new kind of narrative” (“A Conversation” n.p.). She explains, “I’ve always seen art as being something active [...] [I]deally, art and the political processes of the community should be interwoven.” Part of her search for new forms of narrative is remembering “I’m not just some ‘me’ that’s separate from the community. Myths need to be a way that we all talk to each other, that makes sense, and yet don’t reek of total nihilism” (“A Conversation” n.p.). Acker’s work is always concerned with finding new myths to live by, and often she turns to the connections between language and the body and between art and community in this search. As Ryan Simmons aptly asserts, “freedom and politics are the themes that recur in Acker’s discussion of her work. In short, she saw writing as potentially liberating” (321).

As freedom and politics are at the centre of Acker’s writing, these themes also structure her representations of reproduction. The ways she describes abortion in *Blood and Guts* and in *Don Quixote* can be at least partially explained by her desire to explore the political world around her and to tap into the deconstructive and potentially liberating aspects of writing by describing a topic that is taboo. These desires are similar to Atwood’s goals in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, although Atwood writes a story about reproductive politics from a critical distance while Acker erases the divide between the outside/inside and personal/political altogether in her writing. For example, she often adopts an autobiographical “I” when plagiarizing other people’s narratives and stories, and describes intensely personal acts and situations even as she destabilizes the notion that the “personal” or the “private” realm exists separately from the outside world. A

frequent topic in both *Don Quixote* and *Blood and Guts* is what it means to have a gendered and sexual body in a world structured by linguistic dualisms. She tells Bratton: “I grew up in a society where the body was excluded, and in a very major way women’s bodies were and are excluded from society” (“A Conversation” n.p.). Inserting women’s bodies and desires into society, therefore, is a central concern of her work, and this connects to her descriptions of abortion. These bodies are not, however, taken-for-granted as separate from or outside of language or as naturally or inevitably “female”; rather, the division between body and text, as with personal/political, male/female, and self/other, is collapsed in Acker’s writing so that body *is* text. She makes the point best herself when she writes: “I suspect that the body [...] might not be co-equivalent with materiality, that my body might be deeply connected to, if not be, language” (*Bodies* 166).¹⁷

Acker’s engagement with the body as text and with the private as political (and vice versa) means that she often writes her own experiences into her texts, adopting and using personal stories in the way an actor might call up past experiences in order to create the perfect “scene” or to further her craft. This use of the personal in combination with the plagiarizing of other people’s narratives creates the foundation of her textual politics. For instance, the abortion that begins *Don Quixote* can be partially explained through personal experience. In an interview with Lori Miller for the *New York Times* in 1986, Acker recounts how she first picked up Cervantes’ original text as a distraction from an upcoming abortion. She states “I couldn’t keep my mind off the abortion so I started writing down what I was reading, but the abortion kept getting into it [...] [A]ll sorts of feminist issues got involved” (10). Mixing her own experience with that of Cervantes’s

¹⁷ Much of Acker’s writing, and this comment especially, engages with theories on language, gender and sex similar to those outlined by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*.

knight in her well-known technique of reading/writing a text, Acker writes herself into Cervantes's text in a way that both destabilizes the text and her "self." She begins the novel by having her female protagonist knighted through the experience of abortion. Considering Acker's knight is on a parodic quest to understand whether or not it is possible for a woman to express desire in a patriarchal world, her abortion is an ironic twist on Cervantes's tale. Acker's female knight is on a quest for what she describes as "the most insane idea that a woman can think of" (9)—to find healthy heterosexual love. Therefore, her experience of being knighted through abortion fits perfectly with her quest, as her knighting is the opposite of the traditionally male event in that it is a uniquely female experience that undermines any courtly or romantic notion of what it means to be feminine.

Like Atwood's assertion that *The Handmaid's Tale* is a response to the political world in which it was written, Acker's technique of reading/writing herself into her novels is a type of political engagement. In fact, the way she collapses the divisions between body/text, inside/outside, and self/other as she reads/writes is as radical and political as her themes and topics. Through these techniques she does not engage with reproductive politics from the critical standpoint of an outsider like Atwood, but actively interrogates how those politics help constitute subjectivity itself. In other words, her work not only offers a critique of the political conditions of the abortion debate, but it also tries to reshape the types of narratives, images, and fantasies that create those conditions in the first place, and that situate the subject within those politics. Her writing does this in three ways. First, it imagines reproduction generally, and abortion specifically, in ways that are critical of both pro-life and pro-choice sides of the abortion debate. For instance, abortion

is described as the end result of women's oppression under patriarchy, and as a move that hurts women, at the same time as it is seen as the ultimate symbolic gesture away from the confines of patriarchy, and as a move that liberates women. What is radical about this is that these two moves must co-exist in the same instance in Acker's work, collapsing the divide between the two extremes. Second, these descriptions of abortion further Acker's goal of writing back to Oedipal narratives by exploring taboo subjects. That is, they help her goal of writing stories that refuse the narrative drive towards Oedipal conclusions that either have the protagonists discover something about the self or the law. As Roland Barthes, among others, has argued, the Oedipal drive is the central structure of narrative itself, and Acker's work tries to destabilize this by having her protagonists refuse social and sexual reproduction.¹⁸ This connects to the third way abortion functions in her work, which is as a textual event (something that also has to do with a stylistic progression between *Blood and Guts* and *Don Quixote*). Abortion is a deconstructive move that ruptures the self/text and represents a shift in subjectivity and storyline. Don Quixote, for instance, rebirths herself after her abortion in a way that not only signals a loss of identity, but also a loss of the illusory control society places on women via language; her abortion is a rupture to character/text that is simultaneously a defeat and a release.¹⁹ In turn, this abortion contributes to Acker's goal of writing against Oedipal narratives and against Symbolic language, which I have argued is the language of reproductive "freedom" and "privacy."

¹⁸ See *The Pleasure of the Text*, for instance.

¹⁹ These are not the only ways abortion can be understood in Acker's work. See Walsh, Clune, Brown and Henke, among others.

Power Through “Unnatural Means”

Acker’s protagonists in *Blood and Guts* and in *Don Quixote* are suspicious and critical of educational, medical, and governmental organizations. This suspicion extends into the texts’ representations of abortion, which often relay a deep mistrust that the medical establishment can adequately represent the rights or interests of women, and mock the idea that the experience has anything to do with choice or privacy. In this way Acker’s texts align with radical feminists in the 1980s who were wary of the effectiveness of liberal abortion reforms and instead called for a complete overthrow of patriarchy. As Joseph Losco describes in “Fetal Rights and Feminism,” radical feminists reject the rhetoric of choice in favour of the word control because they question “whether women living in a patriarchal society can avoid being exploited and manipulated by medical researchers and practitioners” (238). Instead, they call for an interrogation of the terms of reproductive debates themselves and the definitions of maternity, childbearing, and motherhood (238). Acker had an ambivalent relationship with much 1980s feminism, especially with the ideas of radical feminists such as Catharine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin,²⁰ and at times her novels deride their more extreme ideas in an attempt to thwart what she sees as their counterproductive dogmatism.²¹ However, she generally leaned towards the radical in all of her politics and her characters at times earnestly (while certainly at other times ironically) reflect many radical feminist ideals when they talk about the pitfalls of patriarchy.

²⁰ Mackinnon and Dworkin were especially outspoken about the ways pornography and sexual harassment exploit women. See Dworkin’s *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* and Mackinnon’s *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination*.

²¹ In “A Conversation with Kathy Acker,” Acker tells Friedman: “There is an attack on Andrea Dworkin in *Don Quixote*, not her personally (in fact I saw her on a TV show and quite admired how she stood up for feminism), but on her dualistic argument that men are responsible for all the evil in the world. Her views go beyond sexism. She blames the act of penetration in sexual intercourse. I find that not only mad but dangerous. With all the problems in the world, such a view doesn’t do feminism any good” (13).

This is seen especially in *Blood and Guts* when Janey, the young and poor protagonist, goes for her first abortion and is talked down to by the nurses and the doctor and has to pay for a procedure that is painful and humiliating.²² Janey goes to a clinic where there are about “fifty other girls” and she has to sign a form “that stated she gave the doctor the right to do whatever he wanted and if she ended up dead, it wasn’t his fault” (32). She states: “We had given ourselves up to men before. That’s why we were here. All of us signed everything. Then they took our money” (32). Here, abortion is described as both communal— “we knew we had put ourselves here and we were all in this together”—and as exploitive—“My factory line was ushered into a pale green room. In the large white room fifty more girls started to sign forms and give up their one-hundred-ninety stolen, begged-for, and borrowed dollars” (32). Making an obvious allusion to class politics through references to factory lines, and begged-for dollars, this description makes it clear that abortion is not an easy solution, financially or psychologically, for Janey or the other fifty women waiting. As Janey states, at the time she “didn’t know how much these abortions hurt me physically and mentally” (35). Considering the *Hyde Amendment* (which barred the use of federal funds for abortion and therefore limited abortion access to women on Federal Medicaid) had just passed US Congress as Acker was writing *Blood and Guts*, this scene is also a reminder of the ways reproductive “choice” and “freedom” were being reframed in the US at the time through class privilege, consumerist principles, and the privatization of social services. Or, how “having any sex in the world is having to have sex with capitalism” (*Blood and Guts* 135). As Petchesky reminds us, the *Hyde Amendment* contained “the antifeminist and the

²² Janey has been the topic of much debate by Acker scholars. See Clune, Phillips, and Hughes, among others, for discussions on her age (she is only ten), her incestuous relationship with her father, and her symbolic presence in the novel.

antisocial welfare components of New Right politics in a nutshell” (249-50). It framed abortion as an issue of morals, and suggested that poor women who seek abortions were “getting away” with something or getting a “free ride” and needed to be stopped. It helped the New Right to take an issue that *appeared* to be about privacy and personal choice and exploit that appearance in order to cement classist, racist, and sexist state policies.

Janey’s descriptions of her abortion suggest that abortion may be a universally feminine experience. This is indicated when Janey sarcastically states, “having an abortion was obviously just like getting fucked. If we closed our eyes and spread our legs we’d be taken care of. They stripped us of our clothes. Gave us white sheets to cover our nakedness. Led us back to the pale green room. I love it when men take care of me” (33). Here, popular rhetoric about reproductive choices and rights is undercut, as Janey’s sarcasm makes it clear that none of the girls are being taken care of at all. Her use of the word “we” instead of “I” also reveals that this experience of “getting fucked” by the medical establishment is not unique. This is reinforced when Janey is told by the nursing staff: “It’s all up to you girls. You have to be strong. Shape up. You’re a modern woman. These are the days of post-women’s liberation” (32). Janey’s experience suggests that if this is what women’s liberation indicates, then the women’s movement has been a failure, since the nurses’ words are as empty as Aunt Lydia’s notion of freedom. Janey’s description of her second abortion reinforces this failure. It is done by a doctor who has “killed 32-48 babies and netted 1,600 to 2,400 dollars a day” (34), and who pretends not to know Janey after she comes down with a case of Pelvic Inflammatory Disease one week after her abortion (35). Explaining this experience, Janey assesses that “abortions

are the symbol, the outer image, of sexual relations in this world. Describing my abortion is the only real way to tell you about pain and fear” (34). As she implies, whether it is through sex, birth, or abortion, women “get fucked” by patriarchy every day. Janey makes clear that the individualist rhetoric of privacy, choice, and rights, which shaped (and still shapes) both sides of the abortion debate at the time, is inadequate for describing women’s experiences of abortion. This language not only obscures the connections between class and reproductive “choice,” but reinforces patriarchy by reducing abortion to the sphere of the private.

Janey’s description of her abortion experiences echoes Mackinnon’s assertion that privacy as conceived as a right from public intervention only ensures that “women with privileges get rights” (“Roe v. Wade” 52). Mackinnon further argues that “virtually every ounce of control that women won out of [abortion] legalization has gone directly into the hands of men—husbands, doctors or fathers” (52). In Acker’s work this is true, but instead of blaming individual men—husbands, doctors or fathers—Acker attacks patriarchy itself, using husbands, doctors and fathers as symbols of patriarchy’s power to confuse the penis with the phallus. As Ellen G. Friedman explains in ““Now Eat Your Mind,”” this is why abortion plays such an important role in Acker’s work, as it indicates surrender of “the constructed self” in this political system (42). Analyzing the abortion in *Don Quixote*, Friedman argues that “the woman in position on the abortion table over whom a team of doctors and nurses presides represents, in an ultimate sense, woman as constructed object. The only hope is somehow to take control, to subvert the constructed identity in order to ‘name’ oneself” (42). Of course this is what the protagonist does, renaming herself in this instance as both Don Quixote and “catheter,” a character who is a

“glorification of ‘Kathy’” and a “night-knight” (10). Her abortion, however, is not only an act of objectification, but also a way for her to reject the confines of feminine sexuality, which is one of the major goals of her quest.

Don Quixote’s abortion can be understood as a refusal of the role of mother, and as a refusal to reproduce socially as well as sexually. Don Quixote may be objectified through abortion, like Janey, as she is told by the receptionist at the hospital that she will only be “saved” if she wants to share her money (11), but as Marjorie Worthington argues, this is not all that happens: “the abortion simultaneously symbolizes [...] an embrace and rejection of objectified femininity, a putting on and discarding of masculine subjective agency” (246). As Don Quixote explains, abortion is a way of “redressing through unnatural means the proper balance of human power. This is why women have to get abortions” (178). By grasping this power through “unnatural means,” Don Quixote is then able to start her quest, which includes taking on a selection of “evil enchanters,” including Ronald Reagan, the editors of *The Times Literary Supplement*, and even Andrea Dworkin (101-102). These are all people whom Don Quixote sees as upholding the status quo and reinforcing gender divisions, thereby thwarting her ability to love and live, or to both express feminine desire and still recognize herself as a full person with subjective agency. Don Quixote’s abortion is therefore a means of freeing herself from the patriarchal confines of feminine sexuality in a phallogocentric society as seen by both the New Right (Reagan) and radical feminism (Dworkin). It is a way of exposing the confusion of the penis with the phallus under patriarchy and freeing oneself from the confines of femininity. This freedom may be painful, humiliating even, but it is no more humiliating than the other roles open to her in the novel: wife, lover, mother. As she

states, she is “sick from heterosexual love” (31), and her abortion best reveals “her dilemma” between choosing her “self” or her lover (33). Her dilemma, like Janey’s, is that she loves a man (the Man) so much that she “can’t give him up. She loves him so much, she becomes pregnant, but she can’t have a child alone” (33). Left without any other option she chooses abortion, but as her descriptions make clear this choice has a cost that cannot be understood in the terms the “evil enchanters” espouse. It is neither about the right-to-life of a fetus nor the “evils” of heterosexuality. Her choice to have an abortion is a result of her circumstances both materially and symbolically—she is a poor woman who wants to live a life outside of the confines of patriarchy. As she puts it, her abortion is the result of her refusal to live under social control (18). It is therefore a refusal of the language on both sides of the abortion debate at the time, as seen in Dworkin *and* Reagan. Much like Janey’s experience, therefore, Don Quixote’s abortion is simultaneously a result of women’s oppression under capitalist patriarchy and the only means of liberating oneself from the confines of that oppression.

Anti-Oedipus²³

In an interview with Larry McCaffery for the *Mississippi Review* Acker talks about the connections between patriarchy, gender and phallogentrism; she states: “I don’t think the problem is with men [...] [T]his may not be a politically correct thing to say but I like men. I don’t have any problems with guys. But I have lots of problems with society” (96-97). Her problems with society largely start with the family, and in both *Blood and Guts* and *Don Quixote* “society is a kind of macro-family of powerful rulers and powerless

²³ This section title is an obvious homage to Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, which is a text Acker often talks about as a major influence.

subjects, terrorizing and terrorized, driving and driven mad—an extreme projection of the psychotic family and its vales, across the whole landscape of interpersonal relations” (Wollen 9). This is why fathers, doctors, and husbands are used to represent various characterizations and inverted-personifications of patriarchy’s power, as Acker uses the family to play out patriarchy’s faults and perversions. Part of this “play” includes having characters such as Janey or Don Quixote mimic and spout misogynist language in order to expose patriarchy’s structures. Worthington speculates that this play helps the novels fetishize “the traditional oedipal narrative structure and the misogynist violence inherent in it in order to explore that structure for site of feminine agency” (244). The novels take what is taboo and put it in words, often having characters parody misogynist language and go out of their way to fully and sarcastically embrace their structural positions as “women,” “men,” “husbands,” “wives,” “sons,” or “daughters.”²⁴ This can be seen especially in Janey’s description of her abortion, when she talks about how she loves it when men “take care” of her, or when she begs her father to have sex with her even though it physically hurts. Such unselfconscious parroting of sexist rhetoric “in the name of romantic love is surely meant to evoke feminist outrage” and perhaps even incite “ethical indignation over Oedipally inscribed sex-role stereotypes that define, and subsequently confine, the female subject of modernity” (Henke 105, 92). It is also surely meant to help Acker in her goal of exposing what she saw as “the frauds on which our society’s living” (*Bodies* 11). These “frauds” include normative standards of femininity and heterosexuality, but also the Oedipal Law Roof examines, which confuses the penis with phallus and thereby patriarchy’s power with actual men.

²⁴ As *Don Quixote* has Oedipus himself say, “I am the biggest shit in the world [...] I’d do anything for a hug” (147).

In *Blood and Guts* this confusion is revealed in Janey's ironic and graphically incestuous relationship with her father, and in *Don Quixote* it is shown when Don Quixote returns home to her family only to be told by her father: "you're my property," and "From now on, you will do whatever I woof you to do and, more important, be whoever I order you. This is a safe unit" (116). As Acker confuses the father's demands with the barking of a dog, and mocks the idea that the family unit is "safe" for all members, she uses family roles such as "father" or "daughter" to expose the flaws inherent in Oedipal Law. For instance, Acker's familial situations reveal the connections between abortion, incest and the overall Law of kinship exchange in her work. Using her father-characters as representatives of patriarchy's flaws, Acker's incestuous familial situations recall Roof's argument that the social exchange of women among men is of primary importance in patriarchal Law.

When Roof cites cases where abortion access is denied to women except in instances of incest, she reminds us that the contradictions between incest and abortion laws only make sense if we remember that "incest denies the exchange of women among men and thus breaks the Law by permitting the illusory fulfilment of interfamilial Desire" (108). Acker's incestuous familial dramas reveal Roof's argument, serving a similar purpose in the novels as abortion in that each situation breaks Oedipal Law in a comparable manner. On the one hand, abortions in the novels reveal Law's metaphorical lack; as Roof argues, "the premature oedipal conflict represented by abortion (Mom cuts off baby before Dad even has time to interfere) repeats the drama of separation and prohibition with the wrong characters at the wrong time" (106). On the other hand, incest in the novels ironically exploits Law's metaphorical function by describing situations

where the drama of separation and prohibition is violated by the wrong characters, but at the right time. In each case these transgressions help Acker's goal of revealing Law's structural workings by showing us this metaphorical element; these transgressions force us to ask what happens to Oedipal Law when the wrong characters play the right parts at the wrong time, or vice versa. As Roof speculates, "only strategies that either expose Law as metaphor or unveil the Law's lack via a shift in structural relations [...are] able to reveal the links between metaphorical gender, Desire and the Law" (Roof 103). Acker's descriptions of abortion and incest reveal these links by exposing the metaphorical function Law usually covers over. This, in turn, helps in her goal of tearing down Oedipal Law, and echoes the arguments of Gayle Rubin, for instance, who states that "feminism must call for a revolution in kinship" (199), because if the exchange of women among men were to end, the entire Oedipal drama would die.

Abject Textuality

Acker's attacks on Oedipal narratives via taboo language and irony reveal the connections between sexuality, reproduction, and the text in her work. As Karen Brennan states, for Acker the "problem of feminine sexuality is a textual, as well as a sexual, one, implicated as it is in the sexual/textual dilemma that positions women as objects of discourse and desire. The realm of the text and the realm of romance are thus inextricable" (247). While Brennan is speaking here specifically of *Blood and Guts*, the same is true for all of Acker's work, especially in *Don Quixote* with its focus on the romantic quest plot. Abortion plays a large part in the novel's exploration of the sexual/textual dilemma Brennan describes because it subverts the separation of mind, or

language, from body, which is the Cartesian split that has historically defined woman as body and as the object against a masculine subject. By having an abortion Don Quixote becomes a new subject: “Don Quixote uses the abortion to transform the suffering that results from the mind-body dualism into resistance to normalization” (Schlichter par. 13). Abortion represents a painful and liberating rupture from this dualism and acts not only as a metaphor for female sexuality in the novel—the rejection of maternity in favour of the quest—but also as a way for Don Quixote to escape the confines of patriarchal Law. In this last section I would briefly like to suggest that abortion also acts as metaphor for the ruptures in the novel’s textuality, which in turn reveals a shift in Acker’s writing strategies following *Blood and Guts* to a more deconstructive focus by *Don Quixote*.

Don Quixote’s abortion begins a cycle of rupture, death, and rebirth in the novel that both frames the narrative and functions as a metaphor for Don Quixote’s inability to fulfil her quest for healthy heterosexual love. This cycle is reflected in how the text is interrupted or ruptured and then resutured through Acker’s acts of plagiarism, and in how the protagonist herself repeatedly dies, or aborts her “self,” only to come back in another form or gender—a male hero, a dog, a pirate. This shifting of character and narrative means the novel’s heavy concentration on the theme of textuality connects to the protagonist’s quest for female sexuality; the text parallels its schizophrenic fragmentation to the abjection of female desire from Western society and literary history. The abject female body, therefore, plays a large part in how Don Quixote explores her sexual/textual dilemma. As Acker states: “Law is not patriarchal because it denies the existence, even the power, of women: after all, every King has His Queen. The Law is patriarchal

because it denies the bodies, the sexualities of women. In Patriarchy there is no menstrual blood” (*Bodies* 79).

The abject female body, therefore, helps Acker explore the limits of narrative in *Don Quixote*. There are continual references to menstrual blood and to the body as leaky (173), and Don Quixote herself states that patriarchal history and culture is really the denial of female menstrual blood (198). Don Quixote also often graphically equates her abject body with her inability to find a language to describe her desire as a woman. This connection between language, or mind, and body is outlined early when Don Quixote states, in reference to her abortion, “just as love’s object is the appearance of love, so the physical realm is the appearance of the godly; the mind is the body. This [...] is why I’ve got a body. That’s why I’m having an abortion. So I can love” (10). While Don Quixote hopes that “having an abortion is a method of becoming a knight and saving the world” (11), her rejection of motherhood is not enough to make her into the hero she wishes. Nicola Pitchford explains in *Tactical Readings* that by putting on the name Don Quixote, Acker’s female protagonist has “also assumed an obligation to fulfil Quixote’s narrative; she finds that existing structures of language act materially on the living” (56). This is because where the original Don Quixote’s foes were imaginary, Acker’s Don Quixote’s foes are “the grammatical rules of patriarchal language” (Friedman, “Now Eat” 45). While Don Quixote wants to believe that “an alternation of language, rather than of material, usually changes material conditions” (27), she ultimately finds that her attempts to subvert phallogentric language and culture are thwarted and that while she can expose the myths of her culture, she cannot find her way outside of it. What she is left with is repetition, and the ability to rupture, or abort, the text and the self when one subject

position becomes too constrictive. Cyclically, the novel then ends where it begins, with Don Quixote starting anew. Unable to find a position from which to articulate female desire, she finally falls alone at the end of the novel, only to state in the last lines: “I closed my eyes head dropping, like a person drunk for so long she no longer knows she’s drunk, and then, drunk, awoke to the world which lay before me” (207). Don Quixote is ultimately incapable of reconciling her sexual desires and her need to speak within a world that offers what she sees as unsuitable feminine positions, and is instead left in a continuous cycle of struggle to change representation. Therefore, there is no end to the quest in *Don Quixote*, as it is the struggle itself that counts.

Conclusion

If Atwood’s novel engages with the connections between the self and Law, or the self as subjugated to Law (and is therefore Oedipal), Acker’s novels try to subvert this structure altogether. By questioning the idea of the author, and authority itself, Acker’s novels expose the rules and regulations that make the social order, and therefore language, sexist and oppressive. While this is arguably one of the effects of Atwood’s novel as well—*The Handmaid’s Tale*’s focus on the power of language is shown repeatedly in acts such as the forbidden scrabble game, in how women are forbidden to read and write, and in the deeply sexist language of the epilogue, for example—Acker’s texts are more intentional in their political goals. Where *The Handmaid’s Tale* offers a parody of reproductive laws, Acker’s novels linguistically attack them, exploring other possibilities for a female subject within the phallogentric narratives of Western culture.

Friedman argues that because of these different strategies *The Handmaid's Tale* seems “mild” in comparison with Acker’s terrorist cultural assaults. She states:

Most readers would agree that Atwood’s work is not intended to challenge certain progressive *ideals* of marriage, motherhood, and child-rearing. She would simply like to see society live up to them, provided that women have equal opportunity to develop full personal and professional lives. Such a goal in the context of patriarchal cultural incarceration seems to Acker (who views cultural oppression as crushing) simply delusionary. (“Now Eat” 41)

Although what Friedman states is true, I do not completely agree with her. Atwood’s novel also tests the limits of patriarchal culture through its use of irony and satire in a way that *complements* Acker’s work, even if it is not as aggressive in these challenges. *The Handmaid's Tale*’s futuristic setting shows us that choices are always limited by circumstances and that rights are as easily taken away as given when they are based on concepts such as “personal choice” or “privacy.” In a similar manner, Acker’s novels touch the limits of reproductive frameworks popular in the 1980s by pointing out how linguistic models based on (phallic) ideals of autonomy and freedom are inadequate for making sense of women’s reproductive lives. In both cases, the novels engage with reproductive images and storylines in a way that is worth putting in dialogue, as understanding how the rhetoric of reproductive “choice” and “freedom” circulated culturally in the 1980s is an integral part of understanding why reproductive politics continues to rely on these concepts today.

Chapter Two

From Politics to Ethics: Maternal Abjection, Subjectivity and Community in *Instruments of Darkness* and *Paradise*

The idea of the mother-child relationship as a self sufficient functional unit is a social myth corresponding to a phantasy of daughters and sons. Many women abort when they realize its impossibility. The social order in which they get pregnant prevents them from carrying this process to term. They cannot adopt their pregnancy.

~ Martha Rosenberg, "Linking Abortion to Sexuality, Desire, and Subjectivity"

The only words we have for women's sexuality are filthy mutilating words. Consequently, the feelings associated with women's sexuality will be anxiety, phobia, disgust, and the haunting fear of castration.

~ Luce Irigaray, "Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother"

This chapter turns to two post-realist novels from the late 1990s that historicize the control of women's reproduction under patriarchy: Nancy Huston's *Instruments of Darkness* (1997) and Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1997). Huston was born in Alberta, Canada and lives and writes in France in both French and English, while Morrison is one of America's most celebrated African-American writers. They are vastly different authors, who write to and represent different communities, yet each focuses on the experiences of women in their work, often writing about North American politics from the position of a critical outsider. This position is especially acute for Huston, who has received much attention in Canadian literary circles for her insider/outsider status as a dual citizen of both Canada and France. Huston is often considered "one of our own" by both English and French Canadians despite residing in France, and has been nominated for and received several French-Canadian literary awards, including the Governor

General's Literary Award for fiction in French in 1993 for *Cantique des Plains*.¹ Putting aside this focus on Huston's national and linguistic identities by North America critics, I would like to suggest that her novels are also surprisingly similar thematically to Morrison's in their focus on the connections between language, memory, identity and history. For instance, both *Instruments of Darkness* and *Paradise* address the history of women's reproductive control in order to comment on current reproductive politics regarding women's community, subjectivity, mothering, and in Morrison's case, processes of racialization. The novels examine the history of patriarchy from different periods; Huston jumps between modern Manhattan and seventeenth and eighteenth-century France, and Morrison's setting is a small town in Oklahoma during the civil rights era. These settings historicize the politics of reproduction, while also allowing the authors to explore the sexual and racial politics pertinent at the time they were writing.

Huston's novel is a meta-narrative that uses a witch trial in eighteenth-century France to stage a modern-day encounter with reproductive ethics. Written as a novel-within-a-novel, the main character, Nadia, is an author who lives in Manhattan and writes a novel about the life and death of a real-life woman, named Barbe Durant, who was tried for infanticide and executed as a witch in France in 1712. Writing Barbe's story allows Nadia, who has had several abortions and has inherited a history of dread about the

¹ Originally written in English as *Plainsong* and rewritten in French when Huston could not find a North American publisher, *Cantique des Plains* received acclaim in France and was then released in English in North America. Huston's Governor General's award spurred heated debate in Quebec because she was not Québécois and she intended to publish in English first. This controversy continued when *Instruments of Darkness* was excluded from the Governor General's Award in English in 1997 because it was originally published in French as *Instruments de Tenebres* in 1996. Huston wrote the novel both in English and French and translated sections herself after completion. Angry at the slight, she told Myriam Anderson of the *Vancouver Sun* in 1999 that she was "thinking of sending them a letter to let them know I'm not interested in being a contender anymore" (E9). Since then she has won Quebec's Prix des Bibliothèques (1999), has been nominated for the GG's award in French (1998) and English (1999), has received the order of Canada (2005), and has received an honorary doctorate from McGill University (2006).

maternal body from watching her mother struggle with endless pregnancies and miscarriages, to confront her fear of reproduction. She does this by keeping a journal where she details her thoughts, experiences, and memories as she writes Barbe's story. The structure of intermixing Nadia's novel/Barbe's story with Nadia's journal allows *Instruments* to historicize reproductive politics, as each section focuses on what is abject and terrifying about female sexuality, reproduction, and maternity in either Barbe's story or in Nadia's journal; the novel connects what happens to Barbe in France in the eighteenth century to what happens to Nadia's mother, Elisa, in the US in the 1950s to what happens to Nadia in both the 1960s and the 1990s. Eventually, Nadia begins to meld her novel together with her journal so that Barbe's story becomes her own, and this becomes a strategy for letting go of her past. This conflation also allows Nadia to trace the history of women's reproductive control by patriarchal institutions back and forth from France to present-day Manhattan, a movement which helps her let go of her fears about the maternal body as she draws connections between abortion, infanticide, witchcraft, and midwifery.

Morrison's novel also stages an encounter with the past to comment on the present. The novel focuses on an all-black town in Oklahoma during the civil rights era, originally named Haven but now named Ruby, which was founded by a group of freed slaves as a defense against racism after Reconstruction's failure. Forced out of Louisiana by whites and then turned on by other lighter-skinned blacks while trying to settle in a town named Fairly—in an act always to be known from then on as “the Disallowing”—the first families of Haven set up the town as a way to escape from the horror and shame of this history. Although Haven flourishes at first, people begin to move away or move

on, and following WWII some of the descendents of the town's original patriarchs pack up, move further west, and rename the town Ruby. Through the years Ruby turns into a strictly-run patriarchy, so that by the 1970s a few men now control the borders of the town, and its racial purity, by trying to control who can and can not reproduce with whom. When a group of women of different races mysteriously comes to live at an old Convent on the edge of town, the men of Ruby see them as a threat, brand them as witches and abortionists, and kill them. Speculating on the possibilities and limitations of building ethical communities in a world structured by the failures of slavery and a history of white capitalist patriarchy, the novel uses its setting to look at themes about racial contamination, and the differences and connections between racism and sexism when it comes to reproduction. In this way it not only reflects on the civil-rights era in America, but also comments on the sexual and racial politics that drove that movement, such as the history of slavery and racial segregation that has structured America. In a similar vein it looks towards the future, as we make sense of the storyline from the vantage point of already understanding what happened to the civil rights movement, and how these struggles continue to frame current sexual and racial politics in the US. That is, while its main setting is the 1960s and 1970s, the novel is as much about the 1990s and the identity politics of the time in which it was written, as it is about the civil rights era. Like Huston's novel, therefore, it uses its setting to comment on the connections between women's reproductive control in past and present politics.

While the novels consider a different set of thematic issues overall, they both use their settings and structures to speculate on the connections between individual and communal relationships and reproductive ethics. In Huston's novel, the focus is on the

subjective experience of reproduction and sexuality. Nadia confronts what is abject and horrifying about the maternal body to explore the ways abortion, infanticide, and refusing motherhood connect to subjectivity in comparison to maternity and embracing motherhood. This comparison reveals that there are no easy distinctions between the “right” or “wrong” reproductive choices, and the novel proposes a model of reproductive ethics that moves beyond the presumption that motherhood is the only route to “life,” and abortion only ever a type of “death.” In Morrison’s novel, the focus is on the collective experience of reproduction and sexuality. The novel is structured so that each chapter tells the story of one of the women from the convent, or from Ruby, who are affected by the men’s violent attack. Taken together, these women’s narratives make it clear that focusing on individual experience is not enough to understand the complex ways in which women’s lives are structured by patriarchal institutions such as the church, the nuclear family, or mothering. *Paradise* does look at the subjective experiences of pregnancy, birth, and abortion, but its overall focus is on how these institutions are antithetical to building and maintaining political communities that support black women. In never revealing the race of the women telling their stories, the novel also forces readers to question their own assumptions about the connections between race, community, and certain maternal stories, scripts, or traits. Like Huston’s novel, Morrison’s also offers an alternate ethics, therefore, but one that looks at women’s community as a model for moving forward out of the patriarchal and racist institutions and laws that have structured America’s history.

In this search for an alternative reproductive ethics, each novel imagines reproduction outside “fundamentalist” or “absolutist” categories, such as pro-life or pro-

choice, which framed reproductive politics in the decades before they were written. As opposed to Atwood's and Acker's interventions into reproductive politics in the 1980s, for instance, which were pointed and polemical, Morrison's and Huston's novels take a more nuanced and ambiguous approach to discussing reproductive ethics. Their novels therefore help situate this project, and reproductive politics, within a larger discursive framework about what it means to be a mother, a woman, a person, and part of a community within a patriarchal culture. Their novels also parallel movements in feminist theory at the time they were writing, as many feminists in the 1990s were also embracing a more nuanced and indefinite stance on reproductive politics, analyzing the cultural and socio-psychological conditions within which reproductive politics are situated as opposed to directly engaging with these politics on the frontlines of media, law, and legislation. As I detail below, the novels' reproductive politics can be read alongside several feminist thinkers at the time who were looking for ways to understand reproductive politics outside of the confines of the debates that had so thoroughly saturated public discourse in the 1980s. In this respect, they can be productively analyzed alongside Drucilla Cornell's work in *The Imaginary Domain: Abortion, Pornography and Sexual Harassment* (1995).

Cornell argues that it is only in imagining women as capable of making their own reproductive decisions that women will ever be able to live as full persons in a sexualized world. She argues for the right to abortion under a model of equality that considers this, and states that there must be a "minimum degree of individuation" for any person to have the chance to become a person who can participate in public and political life as an equal citizen (4). For Cornell, becoming this person involves an "endless process of working through" and "each one of us must have the chance to take on this struggle in his or her

own unique way” (5). Much like Roof, Lacan’s theories on the imaginary are crucial to Cornell’s ideas; Cornell argues that those of us designated as women have a sexual imago that is “both encoded and symbolically enforced so as to split women off from themselves as sexual objects and to re-impose the person we associate with conventional femininity” (7). This splitting is what marks a woman as her “sex” and is what “rips her away from her identification of herself as a woman and as a person beyond the persona or masquerade of femininity” (7). Talking of anti-abortionists, Cornell notes this “ripping away” happens when anti-abortionists “assume that the demand for the right to abortion and the concern for fetuses are antithetical” (32). She counters this by arguing that “the right to bodily integrity, dependent as it is on social and symbolic recognition, demands the establishment of conditions in which safe abortions are available to women of every race, class and nationality” (33). What this means is that in order for women to be able to imagine themselves, and to be imagined, as full persons in society, they must be regarded as something other than their reproductive capacity. Therefore, the “wrong in denying a right to abortion is not a wrong to the ‘self,’ but a wrong that prevents the achievement, or the minimum conditions of identification necessary for any meaningful concept of selfhood” (33).

The novels align with Cornell’s argument in revealing the importance of this imaginary dimension. As opposed to focusing on symbolic change and how the “self” gains rights through law or language, Huston and Morrison reveal the important connections between “selfhood,” imagination, narrative, and reproduction. For instance, in *Instruments*, it is only through imagining Barbe’s pregnancy, infanticide, and trial that Nadia is able to narrate and contextualize her own reproductive choices. On the other

hand, it is only through a collection of contradicting voices and stories in *Paradise* that a character such as Mavis, who has killed her own children, is able to find a place in her community. Further, it is only through telling their stories and imagining themselves as full persons, in the sense that Cornell means, that the characters in both novels are able to achieve a concept of selfhood and trust themselves to make reproductive decisions. Analogous to Cornell's theory, therefore, Huston's and Morrison's novels represent reproduction in a ways different from traditional arguments about whether or not certain reproductive acts are right or wrong for women, for motherhood, and for children. Through their presentation of a variety of histories, realities, and voices, they not only historicize these reproductive acts, but also explore how each connects to communal relationships and to reproductive ethics. This undermines the assumption that a demand for reproductive rights and a concern for fetuses or children are always opposed, and offers a complex view of reproductive politics that cannot be conflated into one stance on whether or not certain choices are right or wrong.

Abjection, Theory, Reproduction

As with Cornell's work, the novels' themes connect to several other prominent theorists who were working on reproductive politics, social theory, psychoanalysis and feminism in the 1990s. They do this specifically through their representations of what is often seen as monstrous or abject about female sexuality and reproduction in their descriptions of Nadia's and the Convent women's histories of miscarriage, abortion, and infanticide. Theories on female monstrosity or "the monstrous-feminine" (Creed 3), which stem largely from the work of French feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, came

into the North American academic spotlight in the 1990s through Anglo-American scholars such as Judith Butler, Barbara Creed, Elizabeth Grosz, and Anne McClintock, among others. As Rosi Braidotti explains, in the 1980s and 1990s “much feminist ink” was spilt “in the attempt to analyse the links between the monstrous and the proliferation of discourse about ‘the feminine’ in later postmodernity” (“Teratologies” 164). Kelly Oliver speculates that this was because the tensions between social theory and psychoanalytic theory, which the French feminists focus on, became the central concern of Anglo-American feminists who were thinking about the relationship between the social world and individual political transformation (*French* viii). North American theorists, who wanted to better understand the complicated ways women become taken-for-granted as “different” or “other” in Western culture, turned to thinkers such as Julia Kristeva because her writings account for the ways the social order is set up against the feminine, especially the maternal. Huston and Morrison, writing on either side of this theoretical back-and-forth, were undoubtedly connected to the rise of these ideas through their own ties to academic communities.² Regardless of this association, Braidotti points out that the novels’ concerns with women’s reproductive power to both give and take life means that they are already engaging with ideas about monstrosity, as the association of women’s pregnant bodies as monstrous “goes as far back as Aristotle” (“Mothers” 63), and signals “the deep-seated anxiety that surrounds the issues of women’s maternal power of procreation in a patriarchal society” (“Signs” 139). In writing about this maternal power the novels cannot help but engage with this deep-seated anxiety, which is

² Huston, who studied in Paris under Roland Barthes and is married to Tzveten Todorov, borrows heavily from Kristeva’s ideas about maternity in her work. Morrison, on the other hand, is a public intellectual and taught at Princeton until 2006.

what Kristeva calls abjection in her famous essay, “Powers of Horror.”³ As I will detail, Kristeva’s work on abjection, and on the history of connecting fear and fascination to the mother’s womb in Western culture, is an apt framework for approaching the novels’ maternal themes. It provides a useful platform for examining how reproductive motifs function in *Instruments* and *Paradise*, and how these motifs connect to the novels’ thematic concerns with maternal subjectivity, community, and ethics.

Kristeva states that every society is founded on the construction of boundaries; every society is founded on the abject, on that which is “radically excluded” (“Powers” 230). Abjection, then, might be loosely defined as the negative attempt to establish the boundaries of self by expelling that which is not-self, with the “primal scene” of abjection seen as birth, separation from the mother’s body and movement into the symbolic order (231). The child must separate from the mother and to do so abjects her in order to imagine herself as the autonomous, independent subject idealized by Western society. In fact, as Doris Witt argues, this construction relies on making the maternal body abject, so that the womb is cursed and the “birthmark is denied” (“Where” 274). The child, however, knowing deep inside that she was once part of another, realizes the impossibility of complete autonomy and in attempting to abject the mother must also “spit herself out” (Kristeva, “Powers” 232). Since Kristeva posits that subjectivity relies on both an “identification and separation” (226) with the maternal body in infancy, and a replaying of this identification and separation throughout our lives, abject rituals and taboos continue throughout life. The infant-turned-adult must continue to spit herself

³ Kristeva is a Lacanian whose theories in “Powers of Horror” follow the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger*. Douglas looks at *Leviticus* to argue that fears of defilement and contamination are actually about boundary-maintenance. Her work on defilement becomes the basis of Kristeva’s theory of abjection.

out and abject the things in life—blood, vomit, faeces—which call into question the “cleanliness” of the borders of the body and the (illusory) autonomy of identity. In other words, abjection is both the desire for separation – from the maternal, from the body, from things, words, or foods that seem filthy or contaminated – and the realization of the impossibility of this separation. This impossibility is due in part to the fact that the abject is in-between-ness and “does not have, properly speaking, a definable *object*” (“Powers” 229). Rather, it is what draws us “toward the place where meaning collapses” (230) and is the very “want through which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded” (232). The abject is what threatens stability and identity. As Oliver states, it is “neither good nor evil, subject nor object, ego nor unconscious, nature nor culture, but something that threatens the distinctions themselves” (“Nourishing” 70-71); it calls into question both the identity of the subject and the unity of the social order.

Since the subject actually emerges because of abjection, precisely *because of* what is excluded, the abject actually points directly to the fragility of the symbolic order by highlighting its reliance on repression and exclusion. As Witt explains, “as a result of the inevitable failure of the process of othering through which the distinction between self and not-self is inaugurated, abjection, in Kristeva’s view, is the fleeting recognition that the threat (and temptation) of self-dissolution is harbored within” (*Black Hunger* 16). The implication of this part of Kristeva’s theory is that the construction of hegemonic identities in Western culture requires some form of abjection and that this abjection actually suggests the vulnerability of those identities, as one never fully departs from the process of abjection. For Elizabeth Grosz, this understanding reveals that bodies are thresholds and borderlines that “hover perilously and undecidedly at the pivotal point of

binary pairs” (23). Always “irreducible, sexually specific, and necessarily locked within racial, cultural and class particularities” (19), bodies for Grosz are the “very ‘stuff’ of subjectivity” (xi). For Barbara Creed, this reveals that our social order “is a sham built on sexual repression and the sacrifice of the mother” (41). And for Anne McClintock, it means that the abject “is everything that the subject seeks to expunge in order to become social; it is also a symptom of the failure of this ambition” (71). It is therefore “a formative aspect of modern industrial imperialism” (72).

Huston’s and Morrison’s explorations of what is abject and monstrous about the maternal body, combined with their insistence that women are persons in the way that Cornell outlines, means that they engage with abjection in all of these ways. Through a double movement to explore the aspects of maternity constructed as monstrous while critically embracing the revolutionary power of these constructions, their representations offer a frame for discussing how the psychic affects of abjection, and cultural fears about the maternal body, are connected to reproductive politics. If Kristeva is right and there is no greater psychic fear of violating bodily boundaries in our culture than the fear of the maternal body and the idea of pregnancy, where one body becomes two, then it makes sense that the control of the maternal body is a central feature of cultural and political life. The novels explore this control, and the ways it structures reproductive politics, by using their fictional settings and characters not only to imagine and confront abjection, but also to expose and undermine the fragility of a social order that requires exclusion in order to function.

Monstrous Techniques, Postmodern Media

Connected to their exploration of abject topics is the way the novels use postmodern tropes and writing techniques, which were also particularly current at the time of writing. For instance, Huston's novel is a layered meta-fiction that jumps through time, incorporates fairytales and fantasy, features ghosts as characters, and connects humour with the grotesque. These techniques help the novel subvert fundamentalist and moralist absolutes about abortion and infanticide. They also help establish the novel, and its themes, outside of the traditional confines of a linear, patriarchal narrative. Morrison's novel uses similar techniques, such as multiple viewpoints, unfinished storylines, and characters who may or may not be dead, to explore the limits and possibilities of community. At least two of the women in the novel have special healing powers, one woman talks to ghosts, and it is unclear if all of the women at the convent are even "living" to begin with, since they do not "die" when murdered by the townsfolk. Similar to Huston's novel, these techniques help the novel question stereotypes about the connections between race, mothering, and narrative voice, while undermining absolutes about "good" or "bad" choices. Similar to Acker's work, these techniques help the novels make death a textual event, or a metaphor, in that the stories themselves constantly rupture and abort each other, identity itself is killed (Nadia, for instance, removes the "T" from her name), and abortion, infanticide, and murder are neither concrete nor final acts. Like Barbe's insistence in *Instruments* that her dead son is really alive and that she can talk to him, these textual ruptures subvert the idea that death necessarily equals a complete ending in the novels. They also help posit an ethics of maternity that moves beyond the presumption that abortion, infanticide or miscarriage are only ever types of

loss, as it is through these experiences that certain characters are brought to life. Further, as stories of abortion, miscarriage, and infanticide are confused and overlapped at times, these techniques help expose, and undermine, the commonly held belief that any death of a child, regardless of the reason, is always the mother's fault. Dead children and fetuses not only continue to "live" for their mothers in the novels, but they are often the very reasons these women end up having a story to tell. The novels' postmodern techniques, perspectives and themes, therefore, help create a counter-narrative to the ways maternal behaviour is often overdetermined by cultural, historical and political specificities, dispelling the notion that women who decide to end a pregnancy are bad women or mothers.

The connection in the novels between postmodern themes and tropes, representations of the monstrous-feminine or abject, and reproductive politics is significant because it offers another reproductive narrative to what was publically happening in reproductive politics at the time of writing. Many who thought *Roe v. Wade* had settled the matter of abortion in the US in the 1980s realized throughout the 1990s that the debate was actually becoming more divisive, as abortion opponents became more militant in their efforts to intimidate abortion providers. The same can be said for Canada, where despite abortion's decriminalization in 1988 through *Morgentaler v. Regina*, the pro-life movement continued to gain energy throughout the 1990s. Clinics and doctors in Canada were targeted by protesters in a manner similar to the US, and even physically attacked. Dr. Garson Romalis, for instance, was shot by a sniper in his Vancouver home in 1994 and then stabbed in the back outside his clinic in 2000, while dozens of clinic workers and doctors were either killed or injured in the US throughout the 1990s.

Huston's novel speaks to this climate by exploring the ethics of abortion before and after *Roe v. Wade*, as well as by looking back to a time when reproduction and abortion were managed through natural remedies shared between women, and when being pregnant and unwed was a crime. Morrison's story speaks to these politics by showing us women in the 1960s and 70s who still use natural remedies to manage their reproductive lives and who, like Barbe, are branded as witches and sentenced to death. In each case, the novel's multiple viewpoints can also be read in contrast to the fundamentalist approaches, including increased violence and militancy, which were gaining momentum in the pro-life movement across North America in the 1990s. Ironically, just as postmodern theories about the fractured and split nature of identity and subjective experience were becoming commonplace (pop)culturally, pro-life groups were becoming more reliant on concepts of "truth," "experience," and "identity" in their rhetoric, often using these absolute categories as evidence of abortion's evil. For instance, these absolutes were employed and used as justification for the violent targeting and killing of abortion providers by militant pro-life groups, in the successful attempts to manipulate the emotions of potential abortionists through programs like *Operation Rescue*, and in the mass circulation of images of the free-floating fetus as "proof" of fetal personhood.⁴ The novels' representations of reproduction challenge the very concepts that were fundamental to the pro-life movement at the time, such as identity, experience, and vision. For instance, they challenge the idea that one can always believe what one

⁴ Although all of these facets of the pro-life movement were present in the 1980s, as Marcy J. Wilder discusses in "Law, Violence, Morality," President George Bush more explicitly encouraged violent tactics than President Reagan. In the early 1990s Bush, and his administration, intervened in at least two court cases on behalf of Operation Rescue (82). Also, once doctors began being murdered in the early 1990s, many political leaders, including Bush, were either slow to condemn the violence or were completely silent (83). For further information on Operation Rescue, and an excellent analysis of their political and performative aspects, see Peggy Phelan's "White Men and Pregnancy: Discovering the Body to Be Rescued."

sees, that one “sees” clearly or truthfully at all, that experience is ever unmediated, and that identities are stable or singular. Further, they present a variety of realities through their use of several voices at once, and break with linear narratives by privileging fragmented storylines. These narrative strategies help reveal the confusing and contradictory ways that motherhood is often socially and culturally shaped by multiple causes, including race, class and sexuality. Through these techniques, the novels refuse a focus solely on either the individual or on the social and political motivations behind reproductive politics, thereby showing us the ways these motivations always overlap.

Instruments of Darkness

Like many of Huston’s novels, *Instruments of Darkness* is full of abject images of violence, death, and rape. Of all the texts this project deals with, in fact, it is the one most obviously “about” abortion, as the novel is full of references to abortions, miscarriages, and dead babies. The story follows a divorced author living in Manhattan named Nadia who goes by “Nada” because she feels she is empty and full of nothingness. As she states, “myself I have named, or renamed. My parents called me Nadia and when it became clear to me that ‘I’ did not exist, I cut it out” (12). Nada finds the “I” in her name again by researching and writing a novel about Barbe’s experience of being persecuted as a witch and sentenced to death for infanticide. *Instruments* skips between Nadia’s journal, named the *Scordatura Notebook*, and her novel about Barbe’s life, aptly named *The Resurrection Sonata*, at times fusing the stories together as Nadia reads and writes her own personal history into Barbe’s story.⁵ For instance, in her own life Nadia dreams of a

⁵ *Scordatura* is Italian for mistuning or discordance. The first time Nadia hears this word she states, “That’s me, I’m the mistuned instrument” (27).

baby she aborted coming to visit her and names him “Tom Thumb” (265). She then writes Tom into Barbe’s story as the dead son with whom Barbe can still magically communicate (272). This becomes one of many instances where Barbe’s story allows Nadia to come to terms with her own reproductive past, which includes having abortions both before and after legalization.

Nadia’s history also includes years of watching her mother, Elisa, suffer through miscarriages when Nadia was a child. Nadia describes how as the eldest child she “was privy to the regular bedroom carnage, miscarriage after miscarriage [...] more than once a year, yes more often than once a year though seven mouths gaped around the dining-room table already” (30). These childhood experiences influence Nadia deeply, and shape the novel’s approach to maternity, abortion, and infanticide, as much of the novel revolves around Nadia’s fear and horror of the maternal body. Elisa’s miscarrying body is monstrous, messy, and disgusting to Nadia, and as an adult she has had several abortions in order to ensure that she will never be in her mother’s state. She states, “getting rid of my babies has moved me exactly as much as flushing down the toilet a beetle found on its back on the bathroom floor, flailing its legs in the air. A tiny distress; finished” (14). Yet, her fascination with Barbe’s pregnancy reveals that her own reproductive history continues to affect her deeply.

Nadia’s childhood experiences form her feelings towards motherhood, reproduction, and the Catholic Church, as the novel makes it clear that her mother endured so many miscarriages in the name of being a good Catholic wife. Religion plays a large part in Nadia’s life, both as a child raised in a strict Catholic family and as an adult who thanks a “daemon” (14) for being her muse and for teaching her how to lie, and

therefore to write. She credits her daemon for inspiring her creativity and states that all he has cost her is her “twisted-strings soul” (27) for “access to the beyond, the otherworld, the underworld” (14). The Church also plays a significant role in the novel’s reproductive politics, as Nadia’s earliest experiences with reproduction occur through Elisa’s adherence to her religion. These experiences shape Nadia’s perceptions of maternity and motherhood, and for most of the novel the maternal body is equated with blood, pain, contamination and sickness. As an adult Nadia is haunted by her father’s alcoholism and abuse of her mother, and finds that she is numbed by the idea of children and childhood itself and is unable to maintain healthy adult relationships. She is also guilt-wracked that her mother was complicit in her own (first) abortion and that during her adulthood estrangement from her family that her mother has lost her mind and is now often unable to communicate. Nadia worries that Elisa’s deteriorating sanity is the consequence of her shame in helping arrange Nadia’s first abortion. She worries Elisa is unable to reconcile her role as a Catholic mother with her participation in Nadia’s refusal of that same role. It is not until she writes Barbe’s story that she is able to face this guilt, deal with her own life, and imagine pregnancy as anything other than dangerous and disgusting. Barbe’s story of pregnancy, infanticide, and persecution becomes a tribute to Elisa’s and Nadia’s joint history; writing Barbe’s story not only becomes a way for Nadia to connect to Elisa as a mother, but to herself both as child and as woman who has refused the role of mother.

The relationship between motherhood and childhood is a concern throughout Huston’s work. In her autobiographical *Losing North: Musings on Land, Tongue, and Self*, for instance, she recalls explaining to a man why her novels about abortion and

infanticide are actually connected to childhood. After telling her that her novels leave him cold— “‘Abortion and infanticide,’ he said. ‘I mean you’ve got to admit that those are basically women’s themes’” (7)—Huston replies that although he may not care about these issues as a man, he should care about them as a child. When he protests that he is obviously no longer a child, she explains “we’re all our ages at once, aren’t we?”

Childhood is like the stone at the heart of the fruit—the fruit doesn’t become hollow as it grows” (8). Huston rejects the idea that abortion or death has little to do with childhood. This rejection, however, is not simply a repetition of the stereotypical mantra “what if *your* mother had chosen abortion.” Instead, it is a reminder that our relationships to each other as subjects stem from our primary relationships as children and is part of her overall goal of challenging traditional mind/body dynamics (Proulx 290). As Patrice J. Proulx explains, both “personal experience and a critical engagement with feminist issues have led Huston to privilege an exploration of the maternal figure in many of her works” (289). This is certainly true in *Instruments*, as Huston explores the maternal figure both through Elisa and Barbe, as well as through Nadia’s childhood eyes. This exploration allows Nadia to trace the history of women’s reproductive control by patriarchal institutions back and forth from France to present-day Manhattan—a movement which helps her let go of her own childhood fears about the maternal body as she historicizes these fears and draws connections between abortion, infanticide, witchcraft, and midwifery in modern-day reproductive politics.

Abject Reproduction

Nadia writes Barbe a strange and bizarre life full of extreme ups and downs, including escaping death on more than one occasion, watching a friend get struck by lightning, and giving birth in a manger on Christmas Eve. An orphan, whose mother dies in childbirth and who is separated from her twin brother, Barnabé, consequently, Barbe eventually finds her brother, who becomes a monk, but she continues to be separated from him repeatedly throughout the novel. When Barbe is raped by one of the men she works for as a maid, and becomes pregnant, she tries unsuccessfully to abort her pregnancy. However, she is secretly glad she fails because she is overjoyed at the changes to her pregnant body. She must hide her pregnancy because she is unwed, and when she delivers she is ill prepared and the baby dies immediately. She is tried and convicted as a witch for infanticide, but she continues to believe her child is alive in miniature form and she continues to communicate with him. When it comes time for her execution, Barnabé miraculously shows up and takes her place, letting Barbe escape death to start a new life. This fairytale-like narrative counters Nadia's real-life sadness at her own twin's stillborn death, her feelings about her own abortions, and her childhood horror at her mother's miscarriages, and allows Nadia to cope finally with her abject feelings about maternity.

In a rare review in English of *Instruments of Darkness* for *Canadian Literature*, Andrea Katz states that Huston's novel explores how "creative agency enables women to deal with grief and guilt" (152).⁶ Nadia throws herself into writing Barbe's story to escape her own history, but she "finds that instead of abetting an escape [...] Barbe leads

⁶ Although wildly popular in France, *Instruments* has received little scholarly attention in North America in either English or French.

[her] directly into this past” (152). Nadia is haunted by her past, and in writing Barbe’s story she is forced to reconnect with herself as a child and address her feelings about the maternal body. Chronologically, the novel deals first with Nadia’s memories of her childhood and her thoughts on her parents’ marriage before describing an important abortion her mother helped her obtain, and then Barbe’s pregnancy and delivery. This creates a cause-and-effect link between how Nadia feels about her mother’s miscarriages in connection to her own reproductive history, and how these feelings link to her own abortions, as well as her desire to write Barbe’s story. Often these childhood memories revolve around the fear Nadia experienced during her mother’s miscarriages. In these scenes Nadia describes her mother’s body as monstrous and out-of-control, and her mother as literally “emptied of her substance” (30). Recalling these memories leaves Nadia needing to affirm that “it is over now, over, over, finished, there is nothing more to fear. I am a fearless woman now” (31). Yet, even the sound of a child playing makes Nadia want “to weep and retch” (50), and she is haunted by a fear that “everything is always fading, withering, dying, falling away from me” (51). Like her mother’s body, Nadia is out of control and emptied of her substance, but her emptiness is emotional and psychological. It is what Kristeva describes as feminine melancholia and is deeply connected to her childhood terror at her mother’s monstrous body.⁷ Trapped in feelings of disgust and pity towards her mother, and therefore towards herself as a woman, Nadia is unable to imagine maternity as anything other than monstrous.

In “Mothers, Monsters, and Machines,” Braidotti argues that the feelings Nadia describes are old and archaic, as the association of women’s pregnant bodies as

⁷ In *Black Sun* Kristeva states that feminine sexuality is melancholic because to identify as women, females must identify with an abject maternal body.

monstrous is deeply entrenched in Western thought (63). Since women's bodies change shape during pregnancy, they have the ability to simultaneously be one and more than one, and are therefore a threat to a world of boundaries and individuation. As Braidotti explains, this ability to "defeat the notion of the fixed *bodily form*" makes women troublesome to the eyes of the logocentric economy, which focuses on the phallus as the signal of sexual desire (64). Women are therefore seen as anomalous and deviant vis-à-vis this phallic norm, and as a sign of difference or otherness: as monstrous. As Nadia describes, she never knows when her mother will miscarry because she never knows when she is pregnant. One second bloated with child and the next screaming through a miscarriage, Elisa is constantly changing shape, always with a child "in her arms, in her stomach, at her breast, on her back" (111). The mystery of her mother's body, and its ability to give birth sometimes and hemorrhage with blood at other times, leads Nadia to refer to her mother's miscarriages as simply "the horror" (58), and to wonder constantly when the horror will be coming next. This mysteriousness leaves Nadia wondering if she is even to blame at times, and she asks "was it my fault? *Was it my fault, Mother?*" (58). Nadia's feelings of guilt are heightened through Elisa's confessions to young Nadia that her next pregnancy might kill her, and through her insistence that Nadia hide her miscarriages from her father. Complicit in a terrifying situation that she does not understand, and which she blames herself and her mother for equally, Nadia is both scared that her mother will die and scared *of* her mother; she does not know when "the horror" will come, why it comes, or what it will do to her mother.

Elisa's pregnant body causes feelings of repulsion and fear in Nadia as a child and these feelings follow her throughout her life, affecting her perception of her own body

and its ability to reproduce. These feelings are what Braidotti refers to as the “unique blend of *fascination and horror*” (65) that only the maternal body can inspire, and are what Kristeva describes as abjection. As detailed above, Kristeva theorizes that abject rituals of separation are repeated over and over again in different forms on various levels of culture. However, the most obvious type of abjection that Nadia encounters is horror at her mother’s body.⁸ Of all abject threats, Kristeva sees the maternal body, representing the border between human and nonhuman, inside and outside, as the most fundamental threat. Not only is the maternal body a constant reminder we were all once part of another being’s body, but the mother herself is also the controlling force in the governing of the child’s bodily wastes and is connected intimately to two especially polluting categories of abjection—menstruation and excrement. While the experience of these maternal categories/threats can manifest itself in numerous ways, such as disgust at blood or breast milk, in *Instruments of Darkness* the abject maternal threat is intimately connected to the womb and its connection to “the cycle of birth, decay and death” (Creed 47). The womb represents the utmost in abjection “for it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside, bringing with it traces of contamination—blood, afterbirth, faeces” (Creed 49).

As Nadia describes her mother’s “sheets filled with blood and trembley velvet black clots of something like human flesh” (Huston 30), she experiences this acute type of abjection. She literally experiences the border between living and dead, inside and outside, as she views the physical evidence of the unstable boundary between the maternal body and its ability to create life. This boundary, and the disgust and

⁸ Kristeva sees language, law, and morality in Western culture as all based on abjection and food taboos as the most basic instances of abjection.

fascination it prompts in Nadia, is described when Nadia recalls the first time she sees a dead fetus. She states:

You'd just had another miscarriage, tearing up the stairs to the bathroom screaming your head off in fear, blood pouring out of you, *great gourds of blood* dear Macbeth on every step of the staircase, puddles of blood in the hall and on the bathroom tiles—later I would have to help you wipe it all up, quickly, quickly, get rid of the evidence before father returned, that was the only time I actually caught a glimpse of the thing, the fetus, that had spewed from your innards as the screams kept spewing from your throat. (58)

Here, the boundary between the “thing” and the “screams” that spew from Elisa’s body is blurred as Elisa is described as exploding from the inside out. Elisa’s body is monstrous to young Nadia, not only because of its ability to spew things from its “innards” but because it is capable of doing this spontaneously, liable to literally explode with blood and flesh at any time so that her mother must tear up the stairs leaving “puddles” of blood behind. Signifying a split between the permeable maternal body and the contained subject idealized in the symbolic, this scene is abject because it reveals how Elisa’s leaking maternal body disturbs “identity, system, order” (Kristeva, “Powers” 232) in its ability to spew forth mess, blood, tissue.

Nadia admits that she has never told anyone about her mother’s miscarriages and has taken the memories of them and “stored them away in formaldehyde” (59). She explains, “they are my *stigmata diaboli*, the numb spots of my soul, where the devil first touched it” (59). Her abject fear of her mother’s body has led to disgust not only at her mother’s generative power, but also her own body. She states of her many abortions,

which she calls her beetles, “My beetles are so much cleaner, so much drier, and more discreet! At least their murder makes no mess” (30). Nadia argues that she is unaffected by these experiences, and even jokes that it is a “good thing [she] killed all those kids. Had they lived, they would have had to start analysis at three” (134). Her actions, however, reveal that she still carries her mother’s “mess” with her and that she is secretly terrified that her body will make the same sort of mess. Her “beetles” may be cleaner than her mother’s miscarriages, but the fact that Nadia describes them as a type of murder reveals how affected she really is by these experiences. Further, her fascination with the maternal body in Barbe’s story also indicates that she is still trying to work through these feelings. Kristeva speculates that “in order to separate from their mother’s bodies females must separate from themselves as women and in order to maintain some identification with their mothers as the bodies of women females carry around the ‘corpse’ of their mother's bodies locked in the crypt of their psyches” (*Black Sun* 28-29). Nadia is locked in this in-between space Kristeva describes, both trying to separate from her mother and still carrying her around inside her psyche. When she dreams, for instance, that she is pregnant and carrying a child that is missing its heart she states that she knows the true meaning of this dream: “Myself: the heartless child” (105). Stuck in feelings of abjection and guilt for herself and about her mother, it is not until Nadia starts writing of her “formaldehyde memories” in her journal, and stops what she calls her “avoidance” (155), that she begins to move out of these childhood feelings and fears.

As Nadia presses herself to encounter the abjection of her childhood experiences she has more dreams, this time of her mother asking her to kill a cat whose brain is actually a womb and is pregnant with twins. After this dream of “atrocious, horrendous

images,” she states that her journal, the *Scordatura Notebook*, is a “rock and I a person drowning in a storm at sea. Help me, help ...” (176). Journal-writing leads her to recall more memories of her parents’ unhappiness together and of her mother weeping and “shuddering at the sight of ‘human souls slithering, flailing, drowning in blood’ (her words) ...” (181). Amidst these abject memories and dreams Nadia finally writes, “Who is my mother’s Witness? And who, if not my mother, can be mine?” (182). Elisa has lost her mind as she has aged and Nadia is unable to cope with constantly pushing herself to encounter the memories of her childhood; neither of them can act as witness for the other. If abjection signals “a frontier [...] a border” (Kristeva, “Powers” 236), and the “precarious grasp the subject has over identity and bodily boundaries” (Grosz 198), then Nadia has pushed herself as far as she can go to confront this precarious grasp without pushing herself over the edge. She therefore turns to Barbe’s story as a way to deal creatively, and therapeutically, with this abjection, and to explore her fear of and fascination with the maternal body without falling into nothingness.

Maternal *Jouissance*

It is writing Barbe’s story that initially prompts Nadia to explore her childhood memories. However, when these memories threaten to drown her, she actually turns back to writing as a way out of this grief, creating a fairytale-like narrative for Barbe that allows Barbe to escape the very situations that have trapped Nadia and Elisa in the past. In writing this fairytale Nadia also ends up reconciling with the maternal body, as she allows Barbe’s character to experience the maternal pleasure, or *jouissance*, which neither she nor her mother have been able to experience. *Jouissance*, defined by Kristeva

as desire that is beyond signification, is the maternal pleasure which threatens to make the mother a subject rather than the object through which the infant becomes a subject (“Tales” 325). It is a type of pleasure that is almost pain, what Lacan compares to orgasm and refers to as unknowable or “beyond the phallus” (S20 71). It spurs abjection and, like abjection, threatens the symbolic order of language, law, and morality. Since the idea of maternal pleasure is too much to bear in the symbolic order, which operates through a phallogocentric economy that sees the phallus as the central instance of desire, we deny *jouissance* and imagine our mothers as sexless and without pleasure. However, as Acker showed us in Chapter One, *jouissance* ruptures symbolic language through desire. It is therefore the trace left behind when we attempt to incorporate our mothers into the symbolic order through abjection. Barbe, who loves excessively, masturbates, and has supernatural abilities, represents this rupturing. Even though she is turned on by her community, accused of seduction when she is actually raped, and sentenced to death, her story is ultimately about finding pleasure in a maternal subjectivity. It therefore signals a hopeful shift away from Nadia’s and Elisa’s own histories, as Nadia is able to write Barbe’s story as she sees fit, and this creative agency allows her to confront the abject maternal body that has fascinated and terrified her whole life.

One of the most significant ways that Barbe’s story deviates from Nadia’s or Elisa’s is in her joy at her pregnancy. At first she is terrified of her pregnancy, and even visits H  l  ne Denis, a healer and midwife who had taken her in as a child, to ask her what she can do to abort. None of H  l  ne’s suggestions work, however, and Barbe is secretly happy, at times biting her lips “so as not to cry aloud in sheer delight” (208). As she states, “she tries not to be pregnant; she knows that in being pregnant she is heading for

disaster—and yet, in her heart of hearts, *she wants it*, and her secret wanting is more powerful still than the most powerful remedies of Hélène Denis” (200). When she is spied on while changing her clothes one morning by the village “idiot,” Barbe reveals her pregnant body to him just so she has someone to share her joy with, and lets him see her repeatedly after that and even masturbates while he watches her (202). Nadia writes in her journal that imagining Barbe’s pregnancy unfolding this way is “much like orgasm—the sensation that something is spilling out of one—and yet just the opposite of loss, depletion—the more it spills, the richer one feels [...]” (203). Describing her writing as a type of *jouissance*, and imagining Barbe has access to this same erotic pleasure through her pregnancy (denied to both Nadia and Elisa in real life), Nadia feels orgasmic about Barbe’s story. Nadia admits that she had “not expected Barbe’s pregnancy to go that way [...] it’s so very different from ... you know” (203). What Nadia is referring to are her own pregnancies, of course, and Barbe’s story is radically different than anything Nadia has ever experienced, as it is full of joy and wonder at the pregnant body. This joy and wonder continues right through to Barbe’s delivery, which happens to take place in a stable, on Christmas Eve, with Barbe actually hearing the voice of God tell her “I am here, I shall not abandon you, either you or your son” (247). This religious experience is a direct contrast to Elisa’s experience as a Catholic wife, beaten down both by her religion and her husband, and to Nadia’s cynicism, and bleak outlook on life in general. It is also further evidence that Barbe has access to something beyond the Symbolic, and a religious ecstasy related to *jouissance*.

As Barbe goes into labour she thinks she will die from the pain and that both she and her son will soon meet God. She is described as “torn apart with happiness, weeping

with happiness” and as “larger than herself, larger than the barn, larger than the village, she is the Earth itself, shaking, splitting, heaving, burning, exploding, disgorging its boiling lava” (251). Omnipotent and connected to the earth, Barbe is even part of “God himself. All, all, is God, and so is she, yes, she is part of this same irrepressible, tumultuous energy, and nothing can ever hurt her again [...]. Barbe understands at long last, how can it have taken her so long to understand [...] all women are Mary” (252). This description is significant, as Mary, who is always thought of as clean, unsullied, and Holy, is the opposite of Barbe, who heaves, bleeds and sweats through her delivery. As Kristeva explains in “Tales of Love,” “The image of the Virgin—the woman whose entire body is an emptiness through which the paternal word is conveyed—has remarkably subsumed the maternal ‘abject,’ which is so necessarily intrapsychic” (172). By making Barbe connected to Mary, Nadia writes against what Kristeva terms “the cult of the Virgin Mary,” which only allows Mary milk and tears rather than a speaking social subjectivity. Nadia, who herself is a writer rather than a mother, and is therefore filled with the “Word” rather than child, writes against this “cult” by describing Barbe as not only filled with God, but as having an abject maternal body that is also a desiring, sexual one. This allows Nadia to imagine a reconnection with her own mother, now mute, by encountering an abject maternal body that speaks and desires. Yet this connection is never overly romanticized, as the second that Barbe gives birth, her child dies. Putting herself back into the narrative in this way, Nadia stops Barbe’s story from becoming overly joyous and rapturous by having Barbe bury her dead child in the barn just as she herself has “buried” Tom Thumb away.

Calling to the (M)other

Mixed into the story of Barbe's birth and her child's death are chapters detailing how Elisa helped Nadia obtain an abortion before legalization. Like Barbe's act of giving birth alone, Nadia describes this as the one brave and defiant thing her mother ever did. She states, "I had never seen her behave this way before—like an autonomous adult. It was as if she had suddenly reverted to her pre-marital personality, recovered her ability to take initiatives, makes decisions" (260-61). Nadia, who is mostly ambivalent about her abortions, is saddened by this experience. She states, "The other babies I got rid of quickly, when they were but tadpoles. But this one was before Roe v. Wade. It grew. You grew, Tom Thumb" (239). Nadia explains that she tried to get an abortion before "Tom" developed. She recalls visiting many illegal abortionists, and how the angel-makers, as she calls them, would take her money, "then feel [her] up, running their hairy hands over [her breast and stomach, shoving them up [her] vagina, then ask for more money [...] and [she] would go home searing, jittery, broke. Broken" (240). Just as she despairs that she will have to have a baby she does not want in a marriage that is falling apart, her mother shows up at her doorstep to offer help. When it is all over, however, Nadia begins to have nightmares of "Tom" visiting her. Speaking directly to him, she states:

You would come and visit me at night, it would be raining in my dreams, always pouring rain, and you would be at the window, shivering, tiny boy, drenched to the bone, knocking desperately on the glass, "Mother! Mother! Let me in! Please! I'm freezing to death! Mother, please let me in!" [...] I have never stopped hearing those words. I'm trembling as I

write this. And yet, secretly, I yearned for the nightmare to return,
because at least it let me see you. (266)

Eventually, Nadia writes to Tom in her journal that “one not *be* matter to matter. You matter a great deal to me, my darling. And I apologize for calling you a beetle, in the first pages of this notebook” (266). As Nadia continues to talk to Tom throughout the section where she writes of Barbe’s pregnancy, she writes him into Barbe’s story when Barbe starts talking to her own dead child throughout her trial (272). Talking to Tom, like writing, becomes cathartic for Nadia, playing a restorative function in Nadia’s creative life as she is both haunted and comforted by him at the same time.

In “Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion,” Barbara Johnson examines the function of apostrophe in connection to abortion, looking at why female authors, like Nadia, so often talk to their aborted children in their work. Johnson argues that using apostrophe helps contemporary female authors, especially poets, evoke a perpetually lost other. They, like Nadia, speak to this lost other as a way to keep this other, who never quite existed, alive. Johnson uses this as a model for understanding some of the complex relationships between subjectivity, autonomy, gender, and responsibility within the abortion debate itself. She argues that this type of apostrophe rethinks the logic of choice in that it shows us that the speaker can be “both the subject and the object of violence at the same time” (635). As she states, the “choice” of abortion “is not between violence and nonviolence, but between simple violence to a fetus and complex, less determinate violence to an involuntary mother and/or an unwanted child” (635). She concludes that “arguments for and against abortion are structured through the rhetorical limits and possibilities of something akin to apostrophe” (636). Johnson’s analysis, like Nadia’s appeal to Tom,

shows us that women who have abortions still have the right to mourn their decisions, and recount their feelings about their choice without necessarily repudiating that choice as the “wrong” one. Nadia does this through her own narrative, and her writing of Barbe’s decision to bury her own child and refuse to admit to authorities where it is buried. These two narratives do what Johnson refers to as apostrophe’s impossible task; they “humanize both the mother and the aborted child, while presenting the inadequacy of language to resolve the dilemma [of an unwanted pregnancy] without violence” (Johnson 636). Nadia is able to keep Tom alive both through talking to him and through imagining Barbe’s story. This helps her to memorialize what could have been without necessarily mourning her decision to abort, thereby allowing her to keep him in her memory while also moving him out of her own life, so that both she and he may have an existence apart from their relation to each other.

Nadia confesses her story about Tom at the same time that she inserts Tom, and therefore herself, into Barbe’s story. Within pages, she begins to move on with her life, even stating for the first time that her name is, in fact, Nadia not Nada, which significantly happens while she is spending time playing with a neighbour’s child (282). Nadia states at this point that she senses “the worst [is] over, for Barbe and for myself, and that I [can] handle things from here on in” (282). She even changes the outcome of Barbe’s story at the last minute by having Barnabé swoop in to take his sister’s place at her execution so that Barbe can live on to start a new life. In writing this sacrifice, not unlike the one that Nadia imagines her own twin took during their birth, Nadia gains a sense of liberation by “watching” Barbe escape. With this liberation comes acceptance of her abortions and of her mother’s miscarriages. Nadia sees that her own subjectivity,

including her creative drive as an author, is tied to her refusal of motherhood, but that it is also possible to simultaneously experience joy and wonder at the maternal body.⁹

Through her encounters with abjection in both her journal and her novel, Nadia overcomes her fear of the maternal body, exposing this fear as part of a history of patriarchy and phallogentrism, which allows her to let go of her guilt over her own reproductive choices.

Combined, Nadia, Elisa, and Barbe's stories offer an ethics of maternity that moves beyond the presumption that abortion is only ever a loss, not only of a fetus, but also for motherhood itself. In its exploration of what is often abject and terrifying about the maternal body's ability to both give and take life, the novel also offers a frame for how the psychic affects of abjection, and cultural fears about the maternal body, have historically connected to reproductive politics and ethics. Aborting a pregnancy "entails much of what people find 'monstrous' about pregnancy and giving birth—the abjection of flesh and blood, the splitting into two what was one, and the demonstration of women's innate power to give or deny 'life'" (Mason 54). This demonstration of power signifies the fragility of the symbolic order, which relies on gender divisions and the sacrifice of the mother. It shows us that our identities as stable autonomous individuals are an illusion, and require the constant exclusion of the abject maternal. As Luce Irigaray argues, "If today's society is so polarized by the issues of contraception and abortion, surely this reflects the need to escape the question of the imaginary and symbolic relation to the mother, to the woman-mother. What is woman, apart from her

⁹ This is similar to Huston's own assertions in "Novels and Navels" that she is a split self as a mother and a novelist: "I realized that what it boiled down to was this. *Mothers must not kill their children* [...]. Everyone agrees that if you kill your own kids, you have failed as a mother. Novelists, on the other hand, must be prepared to kill their characters" (67).

social and material function in reproducing children, nursing, renewing the work force?” (242). Huston’s novel offers an answer this question through Nadia’s storyline; as it turns out, woman can be a creator in ways beyond motherhood. The novel shows us that the loss of a potential child, through miscarriage, abortion, or infanticide, can be as mighty a pillar of subjectivity as motherhood, and that these two extremes do not have to be antithetical.

Nadia confronts what is abject and horrifying about the maternal body to explore the ways subjectivity is connected to the refusal of motherhood in some cases and the embracing of motherhood in others, and in the end she collapses the distinctions between the two. Turning now to Morrison’s *Paradise*, I argue that it also collapses antithetical ideals in its representations of women, mothers, and reproduction; however, it also looks at racial contamination, and the differences and connections between racism and sexism when it comes not only to reproduction, but to representations of maternity. Where Huston’s novel recalls Cornell’s argument that one must have a “minimum degree of individuation” in order to become a full and equal citizen, and that achieving this individuation requires an “endless process of working through,” Morrison’s novel questions the process of “individuation” for racialized women in white capitalist patriarchy. The novel reminds us, for instance, that black women in the US have historically been denied the ability to name themselves as persons, never mind as women, through slavery. Or, as Donna Haraway explains, compared to how patriarchal kinship has historically “vested men with rights in women that they did not have in themselves” (as Huston’s novel reflects), Morrison’s novel reminds us that slavery abolished kinship “for one group in a legal discourse that produced whole groups of people as alienable

property” (“Gender” 95). The novel therefore historically contextualizes Cornell’s argument by insisting that the imaginary dimensions of psychic and symbolic life, which Cornell so aptly focuses on, have never worked in the same way for all women.

Paradise (Re)covered

Readers familiar with Morrison will know that *Paradise* is the third novel, following *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992), in her trilogy of stories focused on the migration of freed slaves throughout the US after the Emancipation Proclamation. Like the other two novels, *Paradise* focuses on the fallout from Reconstruction’s failure on black women’s lives. Of the three, *Beloved* is often thought of as the one focused on maternal discourse because of its main character, Sethe’s, story of infanticide. However, *Paradise* also explores the maternal through its plurality of women’s voices, many of them mothers’. The novel is structured so that each chapter is named after one of the women who live at the Convent (Consolata, Mavis, Grace, Seneca, and Divine) or in Ruby (Ruby, Patricia, Lone, and Save-Marie). These chapters tell the woman’s story they are named for, as well as many others, often in a round-about and fragmented way. We don’t learn at first, for instance, why two of the chapter names, Grace and Divine, are not the names their corresponding characters, Gigi and Pallas, actually go by, or why the town is named Ruby, or who Ruby even was, until after her chapter has ended. These chapters, like the stories they tell, undermine narrative authority and linearity. They create a multi-dimensional storyline that stretches back and forth through history, all the way to Louisiana in 1775, in order to explain how nine “God-fearing” men come to murder five defenceless women in July 1976. Through this structure the novel juxtaposes the histories of the two communities, starting with the men’s brutal murder of the Convent women and slowly explaining

Ruby's inception as an all-black town, named Haven, in 1890. This juxtaposition reveals Haven/Ruby's deterioration from a place of optimism, order, and safety to a place of fear, discipline, and control. It reveals how Ruby changed from being a place where the people are "free and protected" (8), and a woman could always walk in the dark without fear because "nothing for ninety miles around thought she was prey" (8). It is now a place where the "new fathers," or male leaders, are so insecure about losing their authority that they not only blame the Convent women for the inevitable and natural, even overdue, shift in their town's traditional patriarchal values, but they actually hunt them down, just like prey, and murder them.

Reviewers and critics have noted that by juxtaposing these two communities, *Paradise* speaks to the tension between past and present (Yukins), between life and death (Aguiar), and between Black Nationalism and its discontents (Jenkins). Holly Flint, for instance, sees the novel as an examination of imperialism, colonialism, and "the issue of black patriarchy and its relationship to (white) American society" (587). Peter Widdowson sees it as an allegory for America itself (325); and Naoka Sugiyama states that it challenges and deconstructs the very concept of the "maternal," while also replacing "the patriarchal grand narrative as representative of an all-inclusive reality" (78). Morrison refers to the novel as a speculation on why paradises always necessitate exclusions. She states: "All paradises are described as male enclaves, while the interloper is a woman, defenseless and threatening" (qtd. in Bouson 194). Full of contrasting and conflicting narratives and perspectives, covering two hundred years of history, and gesturing towards the political problems yet to come out of the civil rights movement, the novel can be read all of these ways and more. The following sections, however, will

focus on the representation of this “interloper” in the novel. Starting with an analysis of how abjection connects to the novel’s concerns with reproduction, I argue that the novel reveals that abjection can usefully be construed to help understand processes of racial and sexual othering. I then analyze how the novel can also be read as a comment on reproductive politics in both the 1960s and 1990s; although the novel is set in the civil rights era, it also speaks to the precise moment when it was written. Finally, I turn to two particular characters in the novel, Mavis and Consolata, as examples of how the novel engages with reproductive politics in the context of some of the above-mentioned tensions. These two characters, like Nadia and Barbe, offer stories of violence, guilt, and healing that undermine expectations about mothering and the maternal. They are vital to the novel’s structure and to its plurality of voices, which, in turn, offers a model of community that provides a necessary alternative to the exclusionary structure of Ruby’s patriarchy.

Abjection and Race

In “Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* and the Politics of Community,” Peter R. Kearly explains that the nine patriarchs who originally founded Haven wanted to be better men. Forced out of Louisiana by whites and then turned on by other lighter-skinned blacks in “the Disallowing,” the nine patriarchs, known as 8-Rocks because of the extremely dark colour of their skin, build Haven out of nothing; they literally create a safe haven for their families in a world where every “cluster of white men looked like a posse” (*Paradise* 16), and where they are repeatedly shown they can trust no one but themselves, not even other blacks. These nine patriarchs, led by Big Papa, or Zachariah Morgan, build Haven around

a code of ethics, “supreme among which [is] to protect and respect the women” (Kearly 11). Proud that none of their wives had ever worked in a slave owner’s kitchen, and has therefore hopefully been spared rape, Haven’s main symbol of this code is its original community Oven (always spelt with a big “O”), which is inscribed with the fearful warning “Beware the Furrow of His Brow.” The Oven serves as a place where Haven residents can gather to cook and eat, and it helps reinforce the town’s utopian ideals of order, safety and solidarity. When Haven begins to falter and many of its residents leave to find work or move on after WWI and II, fifteen families, the descendants of the patriarchs most devoted to the idea of an all-black town, decide to settle in a new town—a new haven. Spearheaded by the wealthy bank owners and twins, Deacon (Deek) and Steward Morgan, these new patriarchs, the “new fathers,” dismantle the Oven, pack it up, and reassemble it in a town further west. They name this town Ruby, rather than New Haven, when one of their sisters, Ruby Morgan, is denied treatment at a white hospital in the next town over and dies as a result. All of Haven’s descendants, and especially the Morgan twins, hold close the stories of their fathers, memorializing the Disallowing and keeping the “Old Fathers” alive through constant retellings of their original journey to Oklahoma. They swear they will not to let Ruby fail like Haven, going so far as to murder the Convent women to make sure “that nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town worth the pain” (5).

Kristeva’s theory of abjection functions as a useful model for understanding why the Convent women eventually become the target of the town’s, and especially the men’s, fear and contempt. Through juxtaposing Ruby’s residents and the Convent women the novel reveals how Kristeva’s model can be expanded to explore processes of abjection in

connection to racism and reproduction. To begin with, the novel shows readers how the racist abjection of one whole group of people from another through slavery leads to other processes of exclusion and abjection, which are just as humiliating and painful. The Disallowing, for instance, is more painful for the original patriarchs than their exclusion by whites because it mimics the abjection they have already faced. Their way of coping with this second humiliation is to create an isolated town and attempt to abject the outside world (which the Convent women ironically come to represent). In time, however, controlling who reproduces with whom, and monitoring the physical and metaphorical borders of the town, becomes a strategy of disavowing the humiliations of the past, which are themselves already connected to a long history of institutionalized and racialized reproductive practices. As Haraway outlines, where free men and women in the US have always been controlled through patriarchal kinship laws, unfree men and women inherited their condition from their mothers and were therefore excluded from law, left out of marriage and kinship exchange, and were “unlocated and so disposable” (“Gender” 96). In effect, “the African person was twice-fathered, but could not be claimed by one and would not be claimed by the other” (Spillers 129). The Disallowing reminds the original patriarchs of this double-rejection. Expecting to be turned on by whites, and to be abandoned by the law and by the white father, the denial of kinship with other blacks is too emasculating, and too humiliating to bear. Haven’s/Ruby’s patriarchal structure is an attempt to bury this history and this lack of paternal lineage. However, in the end it only ironically recalls it, as despite their best attempts the men of Ruby are unable keep the town stagnant and controlled. It takes very little, only five defenseless and free-spirited women, for instance, to reveal how their determination to build absolute, impermeable

boundaries between themselves and the rest of the world is deceptive, illusory, and ultimately dangerous to both enclosed communities. In a manner similar to how the maternal body is abjected from the psyche in order to provide the illusory idea of autonomy, even though we may never truly escape the knowledge we were once part of another, the residents of Ruby abject the Convent women in order to ward off the racial and sexual humiliations they cannot bear to recognize in themselves or in their past. The humiliations remain, however, revealing that the problem is not just between Ruby and the Convent, but also between Ruby and itself.

The conflict between Ruby and itself is best revealed in the militancy of Ruby's new fathers, and in their policing of the town's racial and sexual borders. This policing extends from the literal control of their wives' and daughters' bodies to an appropriation of the town's Oven. For instance, when Reverend Misner, the new Baptist minister in town who is active in the civil rights movement, supports some of Ruby's youth in their desire to change the wording on the Oven from "Beware the furrow of his brow" to "Be the furrow of his brow," the town's patriarchs, especially Steward and Deacon Morgan, are furious. As Steward states, Ruby's youth have no idea of the "humiliations they did not have to face" because of their efforts to protect the town (202). These efforts are intimately tied to the Oven, which not only represents the history of the old fathers, but acts as the town's centre (or womb) and symbolizes their great grandmother's perceived racial and sexual purity (which is only a myth, as field workers were certainly safe neither from their owner's sexual advances, nor potentially from rape). This obsession with racial purity extends to the townsfolk's treatment of anyone with racial "tampering." For instance, 8-Rocks who stray from their own "type" and leave Ruby only to return

married to lighter-skinned blacks, like Roger Best or Menus Jury, are not banished from the community, but their spouses and children are pushed aside from central decision-making, generally looked down upon, and are even written out of Ruby's communal memory. Writing of her light-skinned mother, for instance, Patricia Best, Ruby's school-teacher and self-appointed historian, notes that Steward Morgan once referred to her mother, Delia, as the "dung" the residents of Ruby were trying so hard to "leave behind" (210). Polluted and abjected, Delia's mixed-race heritage makes her unfit for membership in the 8-Rocks' tight community because she reminds them of the interracial tampering, and therefore of the interracial oppression, they are trying to escape (Jenkins 227- 28). The 8-Rocks are well aware that Delia's skin colour, as with all lighter-skinned blacks, can be traced back to the sexual exploitation of Black women by white slave owners (Jenkins 228). Their fear of her skin, and the exploitation it signifies, however, turns to prejudice so that not only Delia, but her daughter Patricia and her granddaughter Billie, are still thought of as contaminated many years and generations later.

The reaction the townsfolk have to the Best women reveals the impossibility of the town's attempts to abject its historical links to whiteness. As Kristeva details, abjection is not only a feeling of wanting to separate and flee, from the maternal body, from blood, excrement or death, but also a feeling of the impossibility of this separation: "a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which once has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace form the inside" (qtd. in Weiss 93). The Best women represent the internal menace the townsfolk wish to keep at bay. However, as Candice M. Jenkins argues, their reaction to this menace is not simply a reversal of white racism or just an

issue of colour. Ruby's racial prejudices must be historicized within the larger state-sanctioned white racial oppression that was happening at the time, as well as within class and sexual politics. As Jenkins asserts, femaleness bothers the town's patriarchs as much as whiteness, which is why the Convent women become such easy scapegoats for the town's anxieties. As she explains, part of the reason the women of the Convent inspire such distaste in the men of Ruby is not only that they are of mixed races, but that "they are women unprotected, socially or finically, by men" (284); racial politics are always connected to class and gender. This is part of why Steward Morgan is so furious when he finds out his brother, Deek, has had an affair with one of the Convent women, Consolata. Imagining that they might have had a "mixed-up child" together, Steward fumes that Deek "barely averted betrayal of all they owed and promised the Old fathers" and "narrowly escaped treason against the fathers' law, the law of continuance and multiplication" (279). Or, as Patricia Best sums it up, Ruby's "generations had to be not only racially untampered with but free of adultery too," which means that everything that worries the patriarchs "must come from women" (217). And it is this fear of how the maternal body is connected to the racially impure, or mixed, which is projected onto the Convent women.

The Convent's very existence threatens Ruby's utopian, yet exclusionary, goals. Made-up of a racially mixed group of women from diverse backgrounds and from all parts of the US, the Convent women embody "literally and figuratively, the lies in notions of racial purity" that Ruby's residents cling to after the Disallowing, and undermine the "need for fathers to govern the mating of sons and daughters to pursue [racial] pedigrees" (Kearly 11). Where Ruby represents fixed authority, control, and

patriarchy, the Convent represents disobedience, autonomy, and a looseness, or a “femaleness,” which is seen as threatening to the men of Ruby. For instance, the Convent women do not need men to heal or protect them, or to take care of them sexually or financially. As Lone DuPres, Ruby’s midwife, surmises, it is not just that they are women “locked safely away from men; but worse, [they are] women who chose themselves for company, which is to say not a Convent, but a coven” (276). And, in this “coven” the women create “a strong maternal space of community that poses a stark contrast to the patriarchal lineage and architecture of Ruby” (Kearly 12). At times referred to as “lazy,” “slack,” “sloven” and “nasty” (4), or as “bitches,” “witches,” “heifers,” and “sluts” (276), the Convent women are drifters and nomads, and what the men call “throwaway people” (4). They shift their identities, desires, goals, and sometimes their names throughout their time at the Convent, coming and going as they please, and transgressing both traditional subjective and communal boundaries in their exploration of themselves as women.

In comparison, Ruby’s women are obedient and traditional; they are cut off from all decision-making, marry who they are told, and have as many children as possible. They are also static, as the only place they ever go is to the Convent, and rarely for happy reasons. Teenaged Arnette, for instance, whose father states that he “will arrange her mind” (61) about an unwanted pregnancy, goes there to try and get an abortion after repeatedly bashing herself in the stomach, while Sweetie Fleetwood, who has not left her house for years because she is constantly caring for four sick children, goes there to have a mental breakdown. Although Ruby’s women go to the Convent to escape, what they often find there are other things they can’t find at home, such as healing and friendship. As Billie Delia states, “you can collect yourself there, think things through, with nothing

or nobody bothering you all the time. They'll take care of you or leave you alone— whichever way you want" (176). This openness is particularly worrisome to Ruby's men, who only go to the Convent for shameful reasons themselves, most often for sex. Often unable to admit the reasons they are drawn to the Convent, Ruby's residents, both male and female, project their shame at visiting the Convent back on the women. Deacon Morgan, for instance, places all of his humiliation over his affair with Consolata on her so-called animalistic "power" to seduce him. Arnette accuses the women of killing her baby, even though the baby died after she not only relentlessly hit herself in the stomach, but inserted a mop between her legs. And Sweetie blames the women for stealing or "snatching" her (130), when the women actually saved her after she wandered to the Convent in a snowstorm. As J. Brooks Bouson states, the Convent women become "the repository of all the scandalous secrets of the respectable 8-rocks" (203). No wonder, then, that the people of Ruby come to perceive the Convent women as objects of shame and as potentially threatening and dangerous. As the men state, the only way to explain the series of outrages that has been happening in Ruby—a mother knocked down the stairs by her daughter, four "damaged" infants born to the same family, daughters refusing to get out of bed—is to blame the Convent (11). Blaming themselves is out of the question.

The projection of the townsfolk's racial and sexual humiliations onto the Convent women, combined with a feeling that the women are outsiders, and therefore enemies, makes it especially easy for Ruby's men to use the women as scapegoats for their fears about losing their authority. As Bouson states, through this othering the women become "stigmatized outsiders [...] marked as different by the people of Ruby and viewed

through the distorting lens of culturally inherited racist and sexist stereotypes” (194). Stating that the Convent women “don’t need men and they don’t need God,” the townsfolk argue that if the women had “stayed to themselves that’d be something. But they don’t; they meddle. Drawing folks out there like flies to shit and everybody who goes near them is maimed somehow and the mess is seeping back into *our* homes, *our* families” (276). They therefore brand the women as other and even go so far as to blame the women for the violence they are about to encounter. Morrison describes the situation by stating: “You have a very profound Protestant religion in Ruby, and you have something that verges on magic that is non-instructional religion in the convent. The values are entirely different. The women are examples of the ‘70s. And the conservative black community is affronted and horrified by that” (qtd. in Bouson 157). As examples of the 70s, the women represent a changing, and encroaching, world most of the townsfolk find terrifying. In this way they represent real divides that were taking place in black communities in America at the time over what it meant to “be” black during the civil rights era. As the following section details, these divisions were shaped by the women’s movement and were also connected to questions about what it meant to “be” a woman at this time.

The novel speaks both to this history and to the fallout from this history on women’s lives in the 1990s. For instance, the portrayal of the Convent women as “throwaway” people who often have a fraught and complicated relationship to mothering, as seen especially in Mavis, speaks to tensions in the 1990s about reproductive politics following the (mostly white) feminist movement’s success during the civil rights era. Even though reproductive politics, especially those focused on abortion, are often thought

as irrelevant to Black Nationalism and to civil rights movements, they were an integral part of that time period. Historian Loretta J. Ross notes that although the struggle for reproductive rights was not commonly perceived as part of the civil rights movement it was “part of that movement until after World War II” (163). She states that, regrettably, African-American women were reluctant to vocalize or analyze their support for abortion rights following WWII because “to do so in the 1960s and 1970s seemed to support arguments for Black genocide” (165). However, Ross notes that there has always been a black presence in abortion rights movements in the US on some level, and that since the 1970s black women have not only become more vocal in supporting abortion, but have “forced the abortion rights movement to become a broader struggle for reproductive freedom” (199) by challenging white feminists to acknowledge the ways that reproduction is structured differently for Black women in America. The novel contributes to this history by showing us women, both black and white, in control of their own reproductive lives at a time when reproductive debates were thought to be a white, middle-class issue. It therefore undermines the perceived split between black and white women during the civil rights movement over topics like abortion, reinstating the history Ross details. In a move that manages to displace blackness without reifying whiteness, the novel destabilizes stereotypes without undermining the importance of race in connection to reproductive politics. It shows us women who are punished equally, regardless of their colour, for their reproductive practices.

Race and Reproduction from the 70s to the 90s

In *Black Hunger* Doris Witt uses Kristeva's work to explore the connection between reproductive rights and race in both the civil rights era and in the 1990s. Looking at various examples, from Black Nationalist pamphlets in the 1960s and 1970s to fetal rights policies initiated in the 1980s and 1990s, Witt states that "it seems likely that the preoccupation with black maternity [in these examples] was (and continues to be) so widely resonant because it allows the expression of anxiety about challenges to white as well as black racial identity, to white as well as black patriarchy" (94). In her analysis of the civil rights era, for instance, Witt notes that as white women gained abortion rights in the 1970s (and seemed to break with patriarchy), black women (who were already exempt from white patriarchal institutional control by virtue of their skin colour) moved in the opposite direction. Paradoxically, "by celebrating black women as the breeders of revolutionary warriors, Black Nationalist discourse actually worked to mire 'black women more firmly within white middle-class familiar ideology'" (93-94). Witt argues that once blackness was embraced by civil rights and Black Power movements, for example, it was embraced "not as filth and disorder, but as purity and order so that 'Blackness' became 'the Kristevan *corps propre*,'" and something else had to function as the abject in its place ("Where" 272). Black Power literature, which was preoccupied with "filthy" soul foods such as chitterling, with monitoring maternal behaviour, and with African American women's diets in general, reflects this shift. Given the preoccupation with reproductive rights and abortion movements at the time, Witt argues that it is no coincidence that Black Nationalist critiques of dietary practices in the 1970s were linked to attacks on the birth control pill and often focused on the eating practices of pregnant or

nursing women. This connection leads Witt to assert that much of the era's fascination with blackness in general, and with slave cuisine in particular, is that this cuisine "raises the specter of incarceration, contamination, and ultimately self-dissolution in the womb of an enslaved, enslaving mother" ("Where" 276). Reminding us that the mythic power of the "black matriarch" stems from real slave laws that stated a slave child must follow the condition of the mother, Witt argues that part of the Black Power movement's focus on controlling the behaviours and diets of women stems from how black women are always already understood as potential (and potentially emasculating) mothers.

The desire to legitimate blackness during the civil rights era and insert it into mainstream patriarchal culture meant the abjection of this matriarchal past and an ironic embrace of white middle-class ideology. Witt traces this double movement through the 1980s and 1990s to argue that "sociopolitical investments in the myth of black matriarchy ought to be understood in conjunction with fears about the future of white male dominance (and, indeed, white female reproductive practices) in the wake of the liberatory social movements" (*Black Hunger* 94). For instance, current fetal protection policies aimed at black women should be understood "as one strategy through which the dominant white culture is negotiating changes wrought by social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s" (*Black Hunger* 196). Once contextualized in this way, the recent media focus on black wombs as "the gravest of all possible dangers to the zygote, embryo, or fetus" can be understood as the "model for, not deviation from, the criminalization of white ones" ("Where" 276). Current stereotypes of the pregnant black addict, the black welfare queen, or the negligent black mother, for example, can be seen as a continuation of this history and as a strategy for displacing anxieties about contemporary white female reproductive

practices. As Witt sees it, these stereotypes can be traced back to slave practices which encouraged the punishments of pregnant slaves by whipping them in a manner that protected their fetuses. Arguing that this history is the primary model from which the contemporary obsession with wombs in general has been derived (“What Never” 415), Witt insists that current US reproductive politics, which are often wrongly thought to revolve around white women, are actually always already about race and are therefore really about control over “the *ontological status* of America” (417).

Morrison’s novel works against the very stereotypes that Witt discusses; its presentation of a variety of realities works to undermine the ontological argument Witt describes as shaping reproductive politics by disturbing the racial assumptions that influence who counts as “human” in America and who gets labelled as “mother” versus “breeder.” On the one hand, it undermines the stereotype of the dangerous black mother by giving one of the Convent women who carries the stigma of being a “bad mother,” Mavis, a voice. A fugitive, with a warrant out for her arrest for abandonment and suspicion of murdering her children, Mavis has accidently killed her two youngest children by leaving them in a hot car to smother while she grocery shops. Her story reminds us, however, that we must consider her actions as part of the climate of abuse she herself lives in, and her story reflects that her love for her children has little to do with her neglect of them. Since we are never told if Mavis is black or white, her story also undermines the assumption that neglected children, and incompetent mothers, are always black. It shows us a mother who kills her children, not because she is unmaternal or unloving, but because violence and death is inevitable in her situation. On the other hand, the novel also shows us a woman like Consolata who, like Nadia, has never given birth,

but who nonetheless becomes a “mother” to the Convent women, guiding them emotionally and providing them with an alternative to the patriarchal structure of Ruby. Like Mavis, Consolata also subverts stereotypes, as she is neither a self-sacrificing nurturer, nor a devouring, domineering mother, and like Barbe, Consolata is able to experience *jouissance*. However, she is also able to share this experience with others, showing the other women how to access this extreme pain/pleasure. Pointedly, Consolata is the only Convent woman whose race we are told, and she is described as mixed, with green eyes, tea-coloured hair and golden skin. Since she acts as the women’s spiritual leader and mother, this is significant; in making Connie the matriarch, the novel implies that it is *only* the impure, the mixed, and the tainted person who is fit to guide the women.

Mavis and Consolata

Of all the Convent women, Mavis is the most obviously maternal in that she has had five children. Much like Sethe, the main character in *Beloved*, Mavis has killed some of her children, and her narrative often focuses on how she deals with her grief over their deaths. Unlike Sethe, Mavis does not kill her children intentionally, but by accident. Her baby twins, Merle and Pearl, suffocate in a hot car while Mavis grocery shops for her abusive husband’s dinner. Soon after their death Mavis begins to suspect that her husband, who brutalizes, rapes, and degrades her, is trying to enlist her other children in a plan to kill her. She therefore steals her husband’s Cadillac and runs away from her home in Maryland. At first she goes to her mother’s house, but when her mother phones her husband to tell on her, she “realizes that her own mother, like her older children, will conspire against her because of the strength of the social norm that children and women

need to have a father and a husband” (Kearly 12). She leaves her mother’s house and sets out alone for California. Along the way she runs out of gas and ends up at the Convent, where she stays for the rest of the novel, except for brief stints to spy on her children.

All of the Convent women’s stories involve violence and desertion of some type—Consolata was raped as a child, Gigi is traumatized by witnessing the brutal death of a boy at a Black Panther demonstration, Seneca has been sexually abused, and Pallas is pregnant, possibly from a gang-rape. Mavis’s story, however, is especially disturbing because, like Barbe’s story, it involves the taboo of infanticide, and also like Barbe’s story, it shows us a mother who feels sadness without guilt about her actions. When reporters come to Mavis’s house to interview her after Merle’s and Pearl’s deaths, for instance, she refuses to accept the journalist’s falsely sympathetic statement, “this must be terrible for you,” by replying “Yes, m’am. It’s terrible for all of us” (21). Implicating her abusive husband and dysfunctional family in the twin’s deaths, Mavis refuses sole responsibility for a situation that would be easy to write off as simply a case of motherly neglect. When the journalist pushes Mavis to admit she acted wrongly, and that she must have been in the grocery store for longer than she remembers, Mavis refuses these implications, stating “I wasn’t expecting no danger” and “I couldn’t have been in there more than five minutes, tops” (23). Keeping to herself that the real danger for her, and her children, lies with her husband, Mavis is unable to explain to the reporter what the consequences might have been for her had she not gone to the grocery store that day, or had she not taken the twins with her and left them at home.

Bouson argues that if at first Mavis appears only to be “a victimized woman with a shameful past,” we quickly learn that she is able to “transcend easy social formulations”

(205). Able to hear the laughter and singing of children sometimes (*Paradise* 130), and to talk to Merle and Pearl, who “flutter in every room of the Convent” (171), Mavis, like Barbe, feels her dead children with her at all times. As Bouson states, this suggests the Convent may exist “in a liminal space between the material and the ghostly or spiritual worlds” (206). For instance, when Arnette delivers her baby prematurely at the Convent after repeatedly beating herself in the stomach, Mavis takes care of the dying infant with a smile on her face, seemingly oblivious to its impending death. Once the baby dies she states that it has gone to live with Merle and Pearl and that she hears them all laughing and playing together, saying, with a laugh of her own, “Hear that? They’re happy” and “I knew it. They love that baby. Absolutely love it” (182). While no one else at the Convent hears the children playing the way Mavis does, no one disputes that Mavis can hear them either, or that they are real. As Mavis explains, Consolata has “never questioned the reality of the twins, and for Mavis, who had no intention of explaining or defending what she knew to be true, that acceptance was central” (260). This acceptance allows Mavis to grow as a person at the Convent, and once there she starts to change and to stick up for herself, even physically fighting Gigi when insulted. As she states, her willingness to fight physically is “more proof that the old Mavis was dead. The one who couldn’t defend herself” (171). Allowed to be more than the mother who let her children die, the new Mavis will do anything to protect Merle and Pearl’s place in the Convent, even threatening to kill anyone who would threaten to take her life and leave them unprotected (259).

Mavis provides the most obvious counter to the stereotypes surrounding black motherhood at the time Morrison was writing, even though she is never explicitly defined

as “black.” In fact, Morrison goes out her way to keep the races of the Convent women secret, although she leaves enough clues that a determined reader can figure out that some of the women are not the famous “white girl” who is shot in the novel’s opening sentence. This strategy is purposeful, as readers who do attempt to pinpoint the women’s races are forced to question why they are pursuing such a difficult reading strategy and how or why this knowledge changes their perception of the characters. However, Mavis, like Consolata, is one of the characters that we can assume is not the white girl, as she is at least 15 years older than the youngest member of the Convent, Pallas, who is only sixteen. Regardless, the fact that Morrison keeps Mavis’s race obscured only works to further destabilize racist stereotypes about black mothers, as readers are forced to question their assumptions about Mavis’s race in connection to her story at all times. In this way, Mavis provides readers with a caricature of the media stereotypes that were floating around about black mothers at the time the novel was written. For example, in a manner similar to how Atwood’s novel speaks to the Baby M case, Morrison’s novel speaks to the Anna Johnson case, which provides an anchor for how Morrison’s novel engages with the reproductive politics of the time it was written

In “Breached Birth: Anna Johnson and the Reproduction of Raced Bodies,” Valerie Hartouni looks at the case of Anna Johnson as an example of the complicated matrix of presumptions and stereotypes framing motherhood in the early 1990s. Johnson was a black surrogate mother who attempted to sue for custody of the white child she carried for a mixed-race couple in 1990. She accused the couple, the Calverts, of not caring adequately for her or the fetus, claiming that although the child was not genetically hers that she had “more feelings for him than his natural parents” (qtd. in Hartouni 85).

During the trial Johnson was accused of welfare fraud and of taking advantage of the couple, and was predictably denied custody. Explaining the ruling, Hartouni argues that Johnson “occupied and was occupied by the category ‘black woman’” before she even entered court, and was therefore “an already densely scripted figure whose deviance, whatever its particular form, was etched in flesh” (86). She continues:

situated within a racially stratified society in which color is always already constituted and read through a received, if ever shifting, stockpile of commonplace images, Johnson entered the public discourse in terms whose meanings were narrowly circumscribed historical, symbolically, and politically, in terms that rendered the integrity and authenticity of her speech already suspect. (86-87)

Hartouni points to the proliferation of media stories in the late 1980s on black women defrauding social services, on the downfall of the African-American patriarch, on the crack mother “epidemic,” and on child neglect, and surmises that for Anna Johnson “‘her’ story preceded and prefigure her” (87). In a similar manner, Morrison writes Mavis’s story so that “her” story already precedes and prefigures her as well. Even though her character is set in the 1970s, to a reader in the 1990s Mavis’s story is a familiar one, well-scripted in the manner Hartouni outlines and reminiscent of cases like Johnson’s. That is why Morrison’s refusal to reveal whether Mavis is black or not is so important. It forces readers to admit the ways that certain maternal “narratives,” especially those regarding neglect, are always already raced. As Hartouni surmises, this is because narratives about black mothers, while varying historically from slavery to the present, have always shared the assumption that “although black women can and do

'breed' children, 'they' neither possess nor display the instinctual drives necessary for mothering them" (96). The fact that Mavis's story also offers resonant parallels to the 1994 Susan Smith case as well, the white woman who drowned her children in her car and then claimed she was carjacked by a black man, further enforces the idea that Morrison was well aware of the racial politics regarding mothering at the time she was writing. Mavis's racial ambiguity is significant, then, because as we are made to realize that it makes a "difference if Mavis is white or black" and "forced to notice that maternal discourse, far from being 'universal' and beyond ethnicity, is in fact ethnically specific and diverse" (Sugiyama 79).

On the opposite end of the maternal spectrum from Mavis is Consolata, who is arguably the mother figure of the entire novel even though she has never had children and has spent her adult life taking care of her own adoptive mother. Of all the Convent women, Consolata is the only inhabitant left from when the Convent was in full operation as a boarding school for Indian girls in the early twentieth century. As a child Consolata was adopted by a nun named Mary Magna, referred to as simply "Mother" in the novel because she was the school's Mother Superior, when Mary found Consolata on the streets of Brazil. After the school's closure, only the two of them remain for years, until Mavis arrives in 1968 and joins them, although by the time Gigi arrives in 1971 "Mother" has died. Consolata, or Connie as Mavis calls her, is the women's spiritual guide and leader. A healer, or a witch, Consolata is able to raise the dead and prolong life by "entering" people and "stretching" their life light (247). She also mixes herbal remedies, and acts as a midwife and abortionist for Ruby's women before the town turns on her. Sugiyama argues that Connie offers an "alternative to Ruby's patriarchal order, whose symbol is the

'Oven' that the original members of the town carried and reassembled but is not put to everyday use to bake bread anymore" (80). Like Baby Suggs in *Beloved* and other female Morrison characters who can heal, she guides the women in the Convent by "teaching them what they are hungry for" (*Paradise* 216) and showing them how to mourn their losses. Able to "read" people, Connie can see the other Convent women for who they are underneath their layers of guilt, anger, self-consciousness, and hurt. Stating that her one rule is that "lies not allowed in this place," and that "in this place every true thing is okay" (38), Connie's Convent, or coven, offers a contrast to Ruby, where as long as order and tradition are maintained lies are not only okay, but often necessary.

Kearly states that women have survived systems that have "excluded and tried to repress them. Their method of survival is not merely blaming men, but a method of trying to recover lost memories and trying to establish a community based on healing and mutual understanding" (13). This is particularly evident when Connie leads the women in a healing ritual in which they come to terms with the secrets they have been hiding.

Consolata, who has herself been grieving through alcoholism since Mother died, directs the women to testify about their lives and to mourn their pasts through a ritual that is part of the African-Brazilian religion Candomble—a hybrid mixture of Africana and Catholic religious practices. First instructing the women to strip and lie on the floor, Consolata paints the outline of each woman's body and tells them her own story. In turn, the women then testify about their own lives, eventually externalizing their grief as they draw pictures on the floor of their experiences and attach tokens, or offerings, to these pictures. Tammy Clewell states that "the experience of literally being beside themselves with their losses, an experience rendered safe by Consolata's guidance and one another's company,

allows the women to move from destructive to constructive experiences of haunting” (138). Enacting a type of “loud dreaming” (*Paradise* 264), where “half-tales and the never-dreamed escaped from their lips,” and where it doesn’t matter who “said the dream and whether it had meaning” (264), the women “step” from one dreamer’s tale to another and help each other sort through the meaning of their lives. As Bouson states, through this ritual Consolata “initiates the Convent women into the occult knowledge of the ancestors, thus helping them discover ‘the beloved’: the authentic and divine part of the self hidden behind the socially constructed layers of the personality” (209). Or, as the narrator of this section describes, “with Consolata in charge, like a new and revised Reverend Mother, feeding them bloodless food and water alone to quench their thirst, they altered” (264). Much like Barbe’s experience of birth, the women encounter a rebirth and a type of *jouissance* that is beyond symbolic language, as memory, history, body, and language collide.

This religious experience is a direct contrast to Ruby’s patriarchal, conservative order in that what is repressed is allowed expression and what is lost is grieved over. It is also much like Barbe’s experience of birth in that the women are able to gain access to a speaking social subjectivity that does not deny their bodies. However, as the novel shows us, this small communal healing, while remarkable, is not enough to affect the outside world or stop Ruby’s men from attacking them. The women may have learned to live with their personal losses through relying on Consolata and each other, but they are unable to reconnect those losses back to the racial, sexual, and gender division that created the social conditions within which their losses were produced. This is why even though they are warned, they still feel safe from Ruby’s wrath and do not believe they are in real

danger from the townsfolk. As Morrison states in an online interview with James Marcus, “It’s interesting and important to me that once the women are coherent and strong and clean in their interior lives, they feel saved. They feel impenetrable. So that when they are warned of the attack on the Convent, they don’t believe it” (n.p). Unable to take the important next step and “implicate poverty, gender inequality, and racial prejudice in the stories of their loss,” the women do not recognize the “present danger that awaits them in the assault waged by Ruby’s leaders” (Clewell 140). Unlike Huston’s novel, therefore, which posits Nadia’s personal healing as an endpoint in itself, the women’s murder in *Paradise* suggests that personal change must be connected to communal change in order to have a real effect in the world and stop the repetition of the past. This means that the women must take their renewed images of themselves back to the world at large and work to change the patriarchal and racist structures they see around them—to create coherent and strong exterior lives. If they do not, the space of healing they’ve created will turn into the same exclusionary road that Ruby’s residents have already walked down.

Conclusion

Bousoon argues that *Paradise* looks at “the formative impact of humiliated and traumatic memory on the collective group identity and on the individual and family” (195). One could argue that *Instruments of Darkness* does this as well, by linking the history of Elisa’s life to Barbe’s story of persecution and humiliation by her community. In each instance, readers are given stories of shame and guilt that revolve around reproduction and reproductive politics, and are shown how those politics connect to both the past and the future. The result of this historicization is that each novel is able to highlight some of

the connections between history, individual and communal relationships, and reproductive ethics. These connections are made even more apparent as each text critically explores the aspects of maternity that are culturally constructed as monstrous; in looking at how reproduction is related to abjection, the novels offer a frame for approaching how the psychic affects of abjection are connected to politics. This, in turn, helps the novels reveal that reproductive choices are always made “within a web of interlocking competing and often irreconcilable responsibilities and commitments” (West qtd. Wilder 89). Through a variety of histories, realities, and voices, the novels undermine the assumption that a demand for reproductive rights and a concern for fetuses or children are always opposed, and offer a complex view of reproductive politics that can’t be conflated into one stance on whether or not certain choices are right or wrong.

Chapter Three

Cyborgs, Clones, and Freaks: New Reproductive Technologies in *Patchwork Girl* and *Salt Fish Girl*

Reproductive politics are at the heart of questions about citizenship, liberty, family, and nation. Feminist questions are not a 'special preserve' but a 'general' discourse critical for science studies as such.
~Donna Haraway, "Fetus: The Virtual Speculum in the New World Order"

I don't know why I should find such things unpleasant. I eat eggs and I eat chicken. Why should I be horrified by the liminal state between the two?
~ Larissa Lai, *Salt Fish Girl*

This chapter turns from textual representations focused on abortion politics to ones that deal with other reproductive technologies, such as genetic engineering, assisted fertilization, and cloning, through an analysis of Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995) and Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2001). Jackson's hypertext tells the story of a human/animal cyborg who is the reanimated female monster Victor Frankenstein famously destroys mid-creation in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The story imagines Mary Shelley, now a character herself, lovingly sewing the monster back together after Victor violently aborts her. Mary then engages in a love affair with this monster, or patchwork girl, before the monster sets off from England to America to start her own story.¹ The text plays with ideas of monstrous origins and bodies, often embracing what would be considered flawed or sick about the body in real life. It imagines a hopeful outcome from the use of new reproductive technologies and the mixing of human, animal and machine. Similarly, Lai's novel is also a retelling of *Frankenstein*, but set in a futuristic Vancouver, BC, where everything has become so polluted and genetically modified that eating a durian fruit can make you pregnant and

¹ The story is also an obvious reference to L. Frank Baum's children's novel, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*.

people suffer from a dreaming disease where memories from years past leak into their consciousness. The story combines two narratives, one that focuses on two characters in this futuristic world, Miranda and Evie, and the other on an ancient mythical goddess named Nu Wa. Eventually we realize that Miranda is the reincarnation of Nu Wa and that Evie is the reincarnation of her lover (and the novel's namesake), the salt fish girl. Evie, a cyborg clone made up of .03% carp fish, is part of a series of clones specifically designed to work as expendable labour in shoe factories. With Miranda's help, she confronts her father/maker in a manner similar to *Frankenstein's* monster, questioning what it means to be human and why she was created. Examining how new reproductive technologies could be exploited for commercial ends, *Salt Fish Girl* not only represents the hopeful mixing of humans and animals/machines, but also the oppression which results when humans attempt to create and then control other beings through technology.

Jackson's and Lai's texts offer a chance to examine how new technologies interact with reproductive politics and shape the fictional representations of reproductive practices. Written in the same period as Morrison's and Huston's novels, Jackson's and Lai's texts deal with many of the same themes, such as the ethical dimensions of reproductive practices and the racialization of reproductive rights. However, in their focus on representations of new reproductive technologies, their texts also examine taken-for-granted ideas about gender, sexuality, race, technology, and humanity in a way that is different from any of the novels discussed so far. Their texts embrace technologically-assisted births, often celebrating what are popularly imagined as the potential horrors of new reproductive technologies by having characters who are genetically "mixed" and "flawed," and born of either single or same-sex parents,

themselves sometimes cyborgs or clones. In taking new reproductive technologies to this fantastical level, their texts are able to both facilitate and undermine popular preoccupations with the monstrosities new reproductive technologies are thought to evoke. As Lai herself explains, her futuristic setting allows her to explore and exploit the politics around her in a way that is not possible otherwise: “by extrapolating from things that are happening now and projecting them into the future, we get a vantage point of sorts. I think that only fiction could allow us to do this” (“Future Asians” 172). Much like Lai’s extrapolation, Jackson’s fantastical setting and hypertextual structure allow for a similar vantage point, imagining reproduction outside of the confines of real-life social structures. In each case, Lai and Jackson use these facets of their texts to imagine the connections between technology, sex, race, and kinship or familial structures in a more radical way than the other texts in this project.

A focus on how new reproductive technologies connect to and influence social relations helps broaden this project’s framework, situating abortion as one reproductive technology among many which have produced reproductive politics, and their fictional representations, in the last thirty years. As Hartouni argues, many reproductive technologies, such as invitro fertilization and cloning, are both shaped by and shape abortion rhetoric in that we make sense of these technologies through the very terms on which the abortion debate focuses, such as defining who or what constitutes a fetus, a human, a mother, or a family (*Cultural* 5). Exploring Lai’s and Jackson’s texts in this chapter places fictional representations of reproductive politics within this larger discursive context, looking at the powerful constitutive influence the abortion debate has had on issues often seen as distinct not only from the debate, but also from each other,

such as fetal therapy and repair, infertility, and ultrasound imaging. As discussed in the Introduction, a wide range of controversies reveal this connection, from the 1995 *Dickey Amendment*, to the controversy surrounding the 1997 cloning of “Dolly the sheep,” to the continued debates in both Canada and the US over the ethics of human cloning.

In each of these instances the way issues are framed via the language of “freedom,” “choices,” and “rights,” and often through an appeal to pro-life/pro-choice rhetoric, is reminiscent of the decades-old abortion debate.¹ As Robbie Davis-Floyd and Joseph Dumit argue in *Cyborg Babies*, stories about new reproductive technologies permeate the media, fluctuating between the same extremes as other reproductive issues (2). This fluctuation echoes the abortion debate as it tries to contain and stabilize new reproductive technologies as either inherently “good” or “bad,” often sidestepping the technologies’ revolutionary aspects in an attempt to naturalize the issues into traditional reproductive frameworks. In exploring how Jackson’s and Lai’s texts imagine this fluctuation, seeing new reproductive technologies as sometimes liberatory, sometimes oppressive, and as always revolutionary, this chapter examines how fictional representations of new technologies influence and are influenced by ongoing understandings of the reproductive frameworks already examined in Chapters One and Two.

Mapping how Jackson’s and Lai’s texts branch from the themes discussed thus far is just one of my goals in this chapter. I also want to trace how new technologies, reproductive and otherwise, connect with literary studies and posthuman theories in general by focusing on how Jackson’s and Lai’s texts use the figure of the cyborg. Just as

¹ For more on this see, for example, Franklin, Ganchoff, Green, Maienschien, Sparrow, and Squier.

reproductive politics have been influenced by new technologies, so have literary studies, especially those related to computing and cybernetics. For instance, the recent use of hypertext rather than traditional forms of writing, as in *Patchwork Girl*, is one example of how the meeting of literature and cybernetics has changed what it means to engage with or “create” a text. Most notably, the continued popularity and application of Donna Haraway’s work on cyborgs to literary readings, since she published “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” in 1985, is a perfect example of how technology has changed the ways we think about literature and cultural production, and what the terms “text” or “human” mean. A “cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (“A Manifesto” 291), Haraway’s cyborg is a coming together of organic and non-organic that changes the very definition of these two concepts. Described as “resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity” (“A Cyborg” 151), the cyborg is a political figure that has been celebrated by critics and scholars as having the potential to break down the integrity of the boundaries of the body and challenge official discourses. In turn, fictional representations of this figure, from classic texts about animal/human creatures such as *Frankenstein* to current science fiction films about clones, have been seen as an integral part of this celebration in that they contribute to how we re-imagine and re-present categories such as human, machine, and animal. Haraway’s theory has also changed how feminist and literary scholars approach fictional representation in general, as her ideas help us understand differently both the process of fictional creation (writing as a technology in itself), and the purpose of fictional creation (representation as a process used to define the human). For these reasons, in 2006 N. Katherine Hayles argued that Haraway’s manifesto is a

“legend of late 20th-century-scholarship,” that “remains vitally important, perhaps even more so than in 1985” (“Unfinished Work” 159). Twenty-five years after Haraway first published the Manifesto, the cyborg remains remarkably relevant to any study on the connections and practices between the human and the technological, including reproductive ones.

Jackson’s and Lai’s texts reflect Haraway’s definition of the cyborg as an assemblage or mixture that fits into neither of the categories “natural” or “artificial.” Their stories also overtly embrace Haraway’s political goals by portraying cyborgs and clones who are involved in ironic and perverse relationships and storylines. For instance, both texts show us births free of a dual-parent system, reflecting Haraway’s description of “cyborg replication” as “uncoupled from organic reproduction” (“A Cyborg” 150). In putting their texts in dialogue with Haraway, however, I do not want simply to demonstrate how they reflect Haraway’s theory. Instead, I want to examine, first, how Haraway’s cyborg interacts with new reproductive technologies and politics, and second, how Jackson’s and Lai’s texts reflect and imagine this interaction in connection to the ongoing history of reproductive politics in North America. That is, I want to use Haraway’s theory to examine how issues connected to new reproductive technologies and politics *and* to fictional representations of the posthuman subject meet and converge in Jackson’s and Lai’s writing through the figure of the cyborg. Therefore, in what follows I outline Haraway’s work more thoroughly to claim that the rapid growth in new technologies that spurred her work on cyborgs in the 1980s and early 1990s included reproductive ones, and that these technologies and their politics continue to shape debates in North America on issues such as fetal therapy and repair, cloning, and stem-cell

research. As I argue, these issues are connected both to Haraway's discussion of cyborgs, and to the ways that Jackson and Lai imagine reproduction; new reproductive technologies are neither discrete from other technologies, including digital, hypertext, or cybernetic ones, nor from other reproductive politics, including those focused on abortion, fetal life, or the politics of mothering. Haraway's theory helps flesh out these connections. It also provides a framework for approaching how Jackson and Lai explore these connections in their own non-traditional representations of kinship structures, family, and birth, as in these alternative representations their texts engage with our cultural anxieties about new reproductive technologies; their representations of assisted conceptions, cyborgian births, and monstrous progenies not only explore the possibilities and limitations of the cyborg, but also address current preoccupations with the potential benefits and horrors of new reproductive technologies. They therefore provide an ideal platform for examining some of the places where posthuman theories on the cyborg meet cultural representations of reproductive technologies and politics.

Haraway's Cyborg

In some ways the term cyborg has become so ubiquitous since Haraway published her 1985 essay that it needs no explanation. Haraway herself, however, is the first to admit that the essay took on a life of its own after publication and in many ways terms such as cyborg or posthuman have lost meaning through their broad application.² In *Cybercultural Theorists: Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway*, David Bell notes that Haraway's ideas have been taken up by so many other theorists that the term cyborg has

² See, for instance, Gane's interview with Haraway.

become a “meta-category” (110). He states, “other writers have arguably done more than Haraway herself to police the cyborg’s many new lives, to contain its celebrity,” and that the “manifesto has catalyzed a ‘cyborg industry’ in academia” (111). This is why Hayles notes that although Haraway has moved away from the cyborg in her own work, the manifesto remains vital and “remarkably prescient in many of its concerns” (“Unfinished Work” 159). This chapter follows Hayles’ assessment and argues that Haraway’s work on cyborgs not only influenced a whole body of writing in the 1990s, but still provides the cornerstone of any theoretical inquiry into the posthuman today. Even though Haraway has moved on from the figure of the cyborg to theorize the connections between species in general, and what she calls companion-species, her concerns in the Manifesto are the same concerns that not only frame Jackson’s and Lai’s texts, but still frame most conversations today about technology and the status of the human in connection to sexuality, reproduction, politics, and gender.³

Haraway’s concerns in the Manifesto were to find ways to theorize a connection between feminism, technology and the social movements popular in the 1980s such as eco-feminism and identity politics: “to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism” (“A Cyborg” 149). This became such a large project that it inspired a collection of essays titled *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), although the chapter titled “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” (an adaptation of the 1985 essay) is still the most popular in the collection. Both versions of the Manifesto start by outlining the ways cyborgs, as cybernetic organisms, fuse together the organic and the

³ See, for instance, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*.

technological and therefore transgress the fundamental boundaries that have structured our world and how we make sense of it. As Haraway details, the Manifesto is an “argument for pleasure” in these transgressions and “for responsibility” in the building of these boundaries (“A Cyborg” 150). She describes the cyborg as having “no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seduction to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of the powers of the parts in a higher unity” (“A Cyborg” 150). Resistant to any totalizing narrative, the cyborg appears in three places: “precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed” (152); in the leaky diction “between animal-human (organism) and machine” (152); and in “the boundary between physical and non-physical” (153). In transgressing these three borders, the cyborg offers an example of a subject who is not afraid of “partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (154). As Haraway explains, the “political struggle” the concept of the cyborg offers is “to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both domination and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point” (154). The usefulness of the cyborg metaphor, then, is in this duality. As Jenny Woolmark states in the introduction to *Cybersexualities*, the cyborg is capable of operating on two levels at the same time: “it can provide an account of the lived experience of the inequalities inherent in the ways in which science and technology structure social relations, as well as providing a means of imaginatively exploring the possibilities for fundamental change within those structures” (4). The cyborg simultaneously represents the similarities and distinctions between human and animal or human and machine, thereby redefining both the organic and the artificial.

The first section of “A Cyborg Manifesto,” describing what a cyborg “is,” is the one most often taken up by other theorists. The rest of Haraway’s essay goes on to make several arguments about the state of feminism and socialism, and how the cyborg is an essential category in understanding the continuing struggle amongst feminists to fight gender oppression. These other sections of the essay are vital for understating her goal in making the cyborg part of a new mode of thinking. As she states, “the cyborg is a disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code” (163). She asserts that “there are great riches for feminists in explicitly embracing the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar distinctions structuring the Western self” (174). One of these distinctions is gender itself, and Haraway goes so far as to suggest, at the height of radical feminism no less, that “gender might not be global identity after all, even if it has profound historical breadth and depth” (180). Asking readers to consider the idea that the cyborg might be the subject who can “suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (181), Haraway insists it is not only that the cyborg has the potential to disrupt dualisms that is important, but how these disruptions could lead to a breakdown in the “logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals” (Balsamo 33). In hoping for a “monstrous world without gender” (“A Cyborg” 181), Haraway’s cyborg is not just about liberating the subject from its material confines, but finding new ways to understand the body itself.

Part of Haraway’s project of finding new ways to understand the body was to think of strategies for feminists and socialists to engage with the science and technology

that was dominating politics and the media at the time.⁴ Many feminists felt they needed to resist new communication, information, and biological technologies because of how they were connected to and funded by capitalist and military goals. Haraway insisted feminists should stay critically engaged with new technologies so that they could remain open to their possibilities and monitor their application. Looking to issues such as biopolitics, microelectronics, and communications sciences, for instance, Haraway states, “we cannot go back ideologically or materially” (“A Cyborg” 162). Instead, we must acknowledge “communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies. These tools embody and enforce new social relations for women world-wide” (164). One area where feminists divided then, and now, was over how they saw these “new tools” changing women’s bodies and social relations through reproductive technologies. In the rest of this section I will briefly outline how new reproductive technologies, such as invitro fertilization, cloning, and fetal monitoring and repair, meet Haraway’s theories on the cyborg, especially in the image of the sonographic fetus. This will serve as an introduction to some of the ways that reproductive technologies not only connect with Haraway’s theory, but also with the abortion debate, and with feminist interest in reproduction more generally. In arguing that new reproductive technologies act as a limit to the possibilities of the cyborg subject, what follows will also serve as an introduction to Jackson’s and Lai’s texts, which expand these limits in their literary representations of the same technologies.

⁴ Written at the end of the Cold War, Haraway was responding to technological pushes such as Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative, or “Star Wars” program (see Fitzgerald, for instance).

Fetal Cyborgs

Marilyn Maness Mehaffy notes, in “Fetal Attractions: The Limit of Cyborg Theory,” that the sonographic fetus is in many ways the ultimate cyborg in that it is “created” in a space of virtuality that “straddles the conventional boundary between an organic body and a digital text” (181). The fetus, however, is rarely read publicly as a byproduct of technology or imagined as a cyborg; it is instead taken-for-granted as an independent and natural subject. This is partly because the actual fetus, inside a woman’s body, has become virtually interchangeable with its “free-floating” image through the mass circulation of fetal pictures in abortion politics and in the media more generally. Harkening back to the famous 1956 cover of *Life Magazine* that originally introduced the ultrasound picture to pop culture, the image of a free-floating fetus has become so commonplace that it now indicates “an independent fetal subject with interests and rights of its own,” often imaginable only at “the expense of pregnant women who are rendered invisible” (Valerius 129). As Haraway explains, this had made the sonogram “literally a pedagogy for learning to see who exists in the world” (“The Virtual Speculum” 177). She continues: “the visual image of the fetus is like the DNA double helix—not just a signifier of life but also offered as the-thing-in-itself [...]. It is a technoscientific sacrament” (178). Even though we know that we can only “see” the fetus by looking at a digital picture of sound waves passed through a pregnant woman’s body, the way these pictures are used, talked of, and imagined, construct the fetus as independent of this body and as independent of the sonographic equipment used to read this body. Mehaffy argues, for instance, that when we remind ourselves that the fetus is not separate from the pregnant woman, and that fetal images are constructed texts, the media’s use of fetal

images still “strategically invokes authority to ultrasound technologies which supersedes this knowledge” (181). We know that fetal images are depictions, yet the sonogram invokes a documentary-like access to fetuses that makes it easy to ignore this, which in turn can limit the authority and agency of pregnant women. This, combined with pro-life campaigns to institute fetal personhood as a legal category, has made the free-floating fetus into a “two-dimensional icon,” synonymous with personhood (Valerius 129), what Mehaffy calls a postmodern version of the Enlightenment-humanist individual (183).

Other feminists have come to similar conclusions. In “Fetal Cyborgs and Technomoms on the Reproductive Frontier,” Monica J. Casper suggests that our social, political, and technical landscapes are characterized by a proliferation of technofetuses and other fetal cyborgs. Casper not only looks at ultrasound images, but also at procedures such as fetal repair and surgery, to argue that women who undergo these procedures, often with profound consequences for their own bodies, also become cyborgs, or what she calls technomoms. Not only are fetal subjects of ultrasound culturally constructed, but so are pregnant women. Like Mehaffy, Casper wonders if Haraway’s framework is able to accommodate the cyborgs created through the use of new reproductive technologies. She argues: “fetal cyborgs may indeed be ‘monstrous and illegitimate’, but whether they also serve as sites for ‘resistance and recoupling’ (Haraway 1985: 154) and if so, for whom, remains to be seen” (185). Hartouni broadens this point by arguing that, in general, most reproductive technologies over the last thirty years have actually been unable to radically change social structures. She argues that they have instead been assimilated into the “order of nature,” and brought into the service of precisely those institutions, relations, and relationships or ways of life they once seemed

destined to raze (*Cultural* 114). She states: “as in the telling of most genealogical tales, then, where the monstrous was once spied roaming, mothers, fathers, and families now comfortably reside” (116). This is similar to Sarah Franklin’s argument about the everydayness of invitro-fertilization (IVF). She argues it is “the normality, even the ordinariness, of IVF that in turn gives us the everyday cyborg embryo, which, previously having been perceived as something of an oddity, now feels at home in the living room” (“The Cyborg Embryo” 177). Franklin is not necessarily critical of this turn, and notes that IVF has opened up whole new modes of everyday kinships. Hartouni, however, argues that new reproductive technologies alone will not change kinship structures unless social technologies change as well. She states: “the distinction between social technologies and new reproductive ones is formal at best: not only are individuals being reproduced, but so too are the social relations that organize and render them recognizable as such (both to themselves and others)” (*Cultural* 119). Hartouni ultimately finds, like Mehaffy and Casper, then, that technologizing fetuses may serve to make them seem more “naturally” human, as they become socially figured as independent subjects and patients.

While the fetus has always obviously been embodied, it may have become more naturalized by the very technologies that could have made it resistant to these categories altogether; the technologies that make seeing the fetus possible may work to distance it from the pregnant woman’s body. This distance, in turn, ironically covers over the fact that these technologies are often deeply connected to other reproductive practices such as abortion (itself often figured as the antithesis of pregnancy). For instance, abortion is implicit in the testing of new reproductive technologies such as amniocentesis or embryo

transfer, yet these technologies play a role in efforts to restrict abortion rights by positing the fetus in opposition to the pregnant woman (Balsamo 37). This is similar to how lesbian and gay families, poor women, and single men are restricted from accessing technologies such as IVF, which could make it easier for them to start families. It is not only that the sonographic fetus is publically represented as an Enlightenment individual, therefore, as Mehaffy argues. It is also that the very technologies which help us “see” and imagine the fetal subject as natural are those used to regulate who counts “naturally” as a mother or a family, and this often shapes the reproductive “choices” we are allowed to make. If Haraway’s cyborg is important precisely because it resists categorization as either technological or natural, then through the use of fetal imaging the sonographic fetus has become a boundary to this theory. As these examples show, the potential the fetus has to disrupt the digital/organic border as a cyborg is contained through the erasure of the technology that makes it visible in the first place. It therefore acts as a limit to how posthuman theories affect reproductive technologies in that it is a cyborg that is often used to reinscribe stable meanings to the human/machine dualism cyborgs are said to disrupt.

Frankenstein’s Kin

If the sonographic image of the fetus acts as a limit to the disruptive potential of the cyborg, then another technology, such as writing, may be better able to denaturalize the fetus/human/cyborg continuum by providing a more subversive place for imagining this potential. In “Reproducing the Posthuman Body: Ectogenetic Fetus, Surrogate Mother, Pregnant Man,” Susan Squier follows this line of reasoning to argue that it is literary

representations of reproductive technologies that are producing the conditions for the posthuman. Looking at the profound influence reproductive technologies have on how we imagine ourselves and our communities, she states:

Whether the result will be the emancipation from certain fixed and historically oppressive constructions, the cementing of a new, even more oppressive set of social relations or—as is the most likely—both at different times, depends not on the reproductive technologies themselves, but on the social and cultural conditions of their use. (113-114)

The “social and cultural conditions” Squier considers are fictional representations of reproduction, from the Romantic era to the post-modern, and she argues these texts play a crucial role in setting the social and cultural boundary conditions for reproductive technologies and their use (115). She states: “literary figurations of the reproductive body have always been open to a wide range of meanings, because literature functions as one of the institutions through which human beings are shaped” (115). I reference Squier here as a way to return to Jackson’s and Lai’s texts, as I agree with Squier that literature plays an important role in how we understand our cultural and social experiences of reproduction. I am also fascinated by Squier’s argument that the creation of a metaphoric break between mother and fetus, which allowed for the co-option of female procreative power through the literary image of male birth, began with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (115). Since Jackson’s and Lai’s texts are retellings of *Frankenstein*, then we can trace a connection, if Squier is right, not only between Shelley’s novel and theirs, but also between Shelley’s novel and current representations of reproductive technologies.

Frankenstein is one of the best examples of the “wide range of meanings” Squier discusses. Interpreted countless ways since it was reintroduced to the academic canon, one of the reasons the novel continues to have such a pull with readers is that it investigates what it means to be human in the most primal sense. Jackson and Lai take up this investigation in their rewriting of Shelley’s story, with Lai’s novel purposefully playing with the storyline of a “monster” rejected by its creator and Jackson’s text creating a whole new storyline for Victor’s unfinished female creation. In “Making Monsters: Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” Judith Halberstam discusses the exhaustive readings done of Shelley’s text and notes that “Frankenstein’s monster has attained mythic status both with the popular imagination and the critical project of literary history” (29). She continues: “by his very composition he [the monster] can never be only one thing, never represent only a singular anxiety” (36). While Halberstam is certainly correct, what I want to concentrate on here is how the monster connects to the reproductive politics in Jackson’s and Lai’s texts. Risking a reductive reading of *Frankenstein*, I want to take up Halberstam’s argument that the novel is not about the making of a monster but “really about the making of a human” (38) to further argue that what drives Victor’s fear in the novel, that his monster will procreate, is exploited in Jackson’s and Lai’s texts in order to confront modern fears about reproductive technologies. As many *Frankenstein* critics note, these modern fears are already connected to Shelley’s time in that our current criticisms of science and technology echo Romanticism’s criticism of Enlightenment.⁵ Shelley’s novel gestures to a paradox similar

⁵ Jay Clayton, Teresa Heffernan, Mark Hansen, and other *Frankenstein* theorists have noted that there is a strong connection between the Romantic period and our own when it comes to critiques of the effects of technology and science as well as of Enlightenment discourses in general. Clayton actually argues that the novel is both anti-enlightenment and anti-romantic (128).

to the one that underlies contemporary reproductive debates; just as the novel was written at a time where what it meant to be a “man” was rapidly changing through the industrial revolution, our own political situation questions what it means to be a “human” in the wake of new scientific and reproductive technologies. Ernest Larsen suggests, for instance, that it is “the enlightened rational patriarchal system as personified by [Victor] Frankenstein that itself produces monstrosity” (238); Victor wants to remove reproduction from the living (woman’s) body and create life from the scientific instruments of his laboratory, to find the secrets of life that “had been the study and desire of the wisest men since the creation of the world” (Shelley 80). This can be read as the real monstrosity in the novel, as this desire to overcome the limits of the mind leads to a creature that is the opposite of his intentions, in that Victor views the creature as all body. Victor’s desire to ward off death and control life can therefore be read as a caricature of the Enlightenment individual who wants to guarantee autonomy and privilege the power of the mind over the body; as the monster’s story becomes the core of the novel, Victor’s desire becomes futile.

Enlightenment discourse about the mind/body split, which often focuses on the potential terror of a body out of control, continues to inform current debates over reproductive issues such as cloning and genetics. Larsen goes so far as to suggest this connection can even be seen in the graphic nature of pro-life protesters, who not only show pictures of fetal body parts at protests, but argue against stem-cell research in the name of protecting the world from the possibility of Franken-babies. He states that Shelley’s caricature of male pregnancy, “in which a man gives birth to a living, breathing, speaking, eight-foot abortion,” can be credited with giving birth to the image of the

(aborted) “fetus as monster, the fetus as revived corpse, the fetus as a pile of used body parts” (238-239). Some might argue against Larsen’s assertion that Shelley’s text can be linked to the horror we experience when we view pro-life posters of fetal tissue. There certainly is a connection between monstrosity, reproduction, and feelings of anxiety, however, and this is the link Jackson and Lai exploit in the representations of cyborgs. Their cyborgs evoke the terrifying monstrosity of Victor’s messy laboratory birth, and embrace this monstrosity, celebrating the technologies that made their own messy creations possible. Their stories imagine new reproductive technologies taken to the extreme by having their cyborgs born outside of heterosexual reproduction and often genetically flawed and deformed. In their retellings of one of the most famous stories of assisted reproduction, Jackson’s and Lai’s texts therefore exploit both Victor’s fear of monstrous procreation and the Enlightenment ideals that drive this fear, as well as modern day fears about assisted reproduction. Through this exploitation, their cyborgs work against the monstrous subjectivity ascribed to Victor’s creation, and also against the naturalized subjectivity that the image of the fetus evokes. That is, Jackson and Lai embrace a different type of cyborg than the one most commonly associated with new reproductive technologies, both old and new. They not only rewrite *Frankenstein’s* reproductive politics, but also represent the disruptive potential of Haraway’s cyborg in connection to reproduction in a way that popular media and politics have failed to embrace in the sonographic image of the fetus.

Patchwork Girl

Patchwork Girl's thematic focus on the connections between monstrosity, subjectivity, and new reproductive technologies is apparent from its very first page (typically called a lexia), when readers, or users, open the hypertext to find a picture of a scared and naked female body sewn together with a single dotted line. This first image acts as a metaphor for the hypertext, which plays with the (dotted) line between human and monster, text and body, reader and writer. Readers enter the text by clicking on this body and following its "limbs" or links to different sections of the text. These include, among others, "body of text," which contains the monster's story and theoretical musings; "graveyard," which tells the stories of the creatures and corpses used to make the monster's body; and "journal," which records Mary's interactions with the monster. Readers not only encounter the patchwork girl's story by clicking on these links, but also Jackson's thoughts, other fragmented narratives, and extensive quotations from Shelley's novel and theorists such as Derrida, Cixous, and Haraway, among others. As Christopher Keep tells us in "Growing Intimate with Monsters: Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* and the Gothic Nature of Hypertext," because of this narrative structure, "the corpse buried here is also the corpus, the material form of a creature that disturbs conventional distinctions between animal and inanimate, the authentic and the inauthentic, the born and the manufactured" (1). In this way, *Patchwork Girl* highlights the technologies, reproductive and otherwise, that always make text/body itself an assemblage.

Part of highlighting how the text/body is an assemblage in *Patchwork Girl* revolves around rewriting one of *Frankenstein* more disturbing scenes: the abortion of the female monster. In Shelley's novel, Victor's male monster, shunned from society and

unbearably lonely, begs and blackmails Victor into creating a mate for him so that he can live life with one who is just “as deformed and horrible” as he and who “would not deny herself to [him]” (Shelley 168). Victor agrees to make the monster a mate, but is suspicious his next creation will disgust him just as much as his first. As he assembles the female monster, he begins to imagine that she could mate with the male monster and “make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror” (190). He becomes so terrified at the thought of her procreating that he tears her to pieces mid-assembly and aborts his creation while the male monster watches in astonishment and grief.⁶ Jackson picks up the female monster’s story at this exact instant and brings her to life in all her aborted glory. In Jackson’s text, however, the monster is in control. She states: “I told her [Mary] to abort me, raze me from her book; I did not want what he wanted. I laughed when my parts lay scattered on the floor, scattered as the bodies from which I had been sprung, discontinuous as I myself rejoice to be. I danced in front of the disassembly” (her).⁷ This passage encapsulates the tone of Jackson’s text, with its joy in rupture and discontinuity, and is one of many where the monster laughs at the abject messiness of her birth and her body. Part male, part female, part animal, one-hundred and seventy-five years old, and only “raised” up through hypertext technology, the patchwork

⁶ Judith Halberstam argues that it is because Victor Frankenstein connects monstrosity with maternity that he is unable to create a female monster as a companion for his male monster. Halberstam cites the differences between Victor’s feelings when creating the male monster (ego-driven delight and rapture) and the female monster (disgust and fear) and states that it is the idea of building a womb that stops Victor from finishing his second creation. Although Victor is able to create a male monster out of corpses and animal parts with ease, he is conversely disgusted at creating a female subject that would essentially be “all body” (47). Victor becomes paralyzed by the “material horror” of the female monster and the idea of “female genitals enrages and terrifies the scientist [so much] that he tears her from limb and scatters her flesh upon the ground” (47).

⁷ Laura Shackelford makes the excellent point that in quoting a single text box “one cannot do justice to the movements between lexias and interrelations these movements reveal” (78). As the text has a seemingly unlimited amount of pathways, the meaning of each textual box changes depending on the path of links one followed to get there and where they go next.

girl is a different type of cyborg than discussed so far; she is a reproductive “freak” whose story only comes into “being” through hypertext and who embraces her “flaws” at every turn of the story. For instance, she carries the characteristics and genetic traits of all the people who made her, including Mary, and actually has access to their memories. She is also often mistaken as a transsexual and gawked at for being unusually large. As opposed to other fictional cyborgs, who are often unable to cross the “gendered boundary between male and female” because it is so “heavily guarded despite new technologized ways to rewrite the physical body” (Balsamo 9), the patchwork girl subverts naturalized markers of gender in this appearance. She therefore embodies many of the imagined potential horrors of reproduction, and reproductive technologies, in that she is a cyborg who is queer, disproportioned, and visibly scarred.⁸ She both facilitates and undermines preoccupations with the benefits and dangers of reproductive technologies by embracing all of the monstrosities that reproductive/fetal screenings are imagined to “catch” and one day prevent. Here, however, these genetic flaws are viewed as playful attributes in the story.

One of the ways the story posits a concept of new reproductive technologies outside the norm is by having the monster aware of how her birth was “assisted.” The monster knows that she is an assemblage of body parts rather than a unified self because she carries memories of her own creation as well as those she is made up from: “the different creatures from whose parts she is made retain their distinctive personalities” (Hayles, “Flickering Connectivities” 24). For instance, in a link called “tongue” the monster states “my tongue belonged to Susannah, who talked more than she ate, and ate

⁸ For instance, one could argue she evokes all of the fear surrounding the “gay gene” controversy. See Levay’s *Queer Science* for more on the “gay gene” controversy in the US.

more than the baker and butcher combined” (tongue). Citing Susannah for her ability to taste, as she does Margaret, who supplied her lips, for her sense of mirth, or Richard for why her liver is “affectionate,” the monster draws attention to her assembled body in a way that plays with modern ideas around genetics; like a sci-fi storyline she carries the emotions and memories of those whose organs have been transplanted into her while also developing her own distinct personality. This works to undo what Hartouni argues is often the appeal of studying genetics or genome mapping, which is the idea that genes are “a self-evident guarantee of individual originality and authenticity as well as of cultural diversity” (*Cultural* 118). The patchwork girl’s multiple subjectivities make any retreat to ideals of originality or authenticity impossible as her unique genetic make-up allows her to carry these other personalities and traits while also maintaining her own agency. As she tells us, her body parts will remember her one day too: “I will still act, dispersed as I am, catalyzing group actions, tics, a stitch in the side. My erstwhile foot, returned to its owner, will know the tango [...]” (mementos). Unlike actual studies of genetics, then, which often redefine “us as genitally distinct individuals [...] [while] rather ironically, render[ing] us genetically determined” (Hartouni, *Cultural* 118), the patchwork girl’s multiplicity opens up endless genetic possibilities and connections; she can draw on the strengths of those from whom she is made when need be, and make them part of her always-shifting, always-birthing “self.”

The patchwork girl has had many parents and many births, and the storyline(s) remove reproduction from a heterosexual matrix and place it in a distinctly feminine and queer setting. Mary not only births the patchwork girl through an activity often associated with women’s work—sewing—but also single-handedly “parents” her while also

becoming her lover. She confesses she is both fearful of and erotically attracted to her creation, and she and the monster make love through several lexias named “turned,” “weight,” and “her, me.” These familial transgressions accumulate when Mary and the monster trade pieces of skin in a symbolic gesture of their maternal/sexual relationship. This trade works in direct “contrast to the relations between the male monster and Victor Frankenstein” (Hayles, “Flickering Connectivities” 34), by creating a primal scene between creator and creature that stands in opposition to the violence of the novel’s original abortion. Mary adds the monster’s skin (taken from another’s skin of course) to her body and is happy to leave a mark on herself that makes her, like her creature, monstrous. As the monster describes this experience of exchanging skins she explains, that Mary picks a piece of skin that Percy “will likely never miss” while she picks a scar—“a place where disparate things joined in a way that was my own” (join). She states: “I sliced off a disc of scar tissue [...] and slid it off the point of the knife onto the raw spot on her leg; she took the knife and laid her piece on me” (join). The monster, through becoming Mary, actually learns to love herself for the first time as she takes on Mary’s feelings and emotions by adding Mary to her genetic make-up. She states, “The graft took, the bit of skin still a living pink, and so I remember when I was Mary, and how I loved a monster, and became one. I bring you my story, which is ours” (us).

Mixing together words, skin, and memory, this joining of monster/human, creator/creature, mother/child is a joyful exchange that deliberately disrupts traditional kinship structures. It directly confronts one of the main fears circulating around new reproductive technologies: that technologies such as cloning could disrupt the linear sequencing of generations. As Hartouni argues, because kinship structures are

“conventionally regarded not as a social or discursive technology, but as a ‘natural’ and naturally ordered set of arrangements and relationships” (*Cultural* 123), one of the more disturbing ideas to opponents of cloning is “the possibility that who we call ‘mother’ we could also call ‘sister’” (123). *Patchwork Girl* embraces this possibility by making the monster not only “child” but also lover in a manner that disturbs the definitions of these two terms themselves and opens up the possibility for imagining a mother/child relationship that is erotic without being incestuous, both technological and natural, and digitally anti-Oedipal.

The multiple trajectories of *Patchwork Girl* transform the stability of the text so that the reader, like the patchwork girl, is always emerging; disruptive activities and ruptures in narrative are not only encouraged but are also insignificant. Chronology is broken, and the past and present are presented in a seemingly unlimited number of ways, so that a new sense of being in space and time is created within the text *and* within the user. This new sense of being is further heightened by the text’s constant references to the patchwork girl’s body. As Balsamo notes, cyborg bodies “cannot be conceived as belonging wholly to either culture or nature [...] [T]hey not only subvert the certainty of what counts as nature, but as Haraway lays out, they also subvert the certainty of the ‘textualization of everything’ by pointing to the lived relations of domination that ground cultural reading(s)” (33). A large part of how this subversion of “the textualization of everything” takes place in *Patchwork Girl* is through the hypertext technology, as readers are constantly confronted with the part they play in creating the patchwork girl’s story. Reading here is not just a process of interpretation, “it is rather a physical activity [...] Jackson shows us that electronic texts do not so much passively respond to the interests

and choices of the reader as interact dialectically with her” (Keep 4). This means readers of *Patchwork Girl* encounter a type of cyborg subjectivity themselves since they are intertwined with the technology that controls the story’s creation; they sew their own monster and create their own monstrous text while recognizing their own desire to interact with the monster spurs their choices and decides their links. The technology therefore mingles “the subjectivity we attribute to characters, authors, and ourselves as readers, with the non-anthropomorphic actions of the computer program” (Hayles, “Flickering Connectivities” 51). Functioning as a metaphor for the ability to live different, and sometimes contradictory narratives, since it represents experience as discontinuous and spacialized, *Patchwork Girl’s* hypertextuality (like the monster’s body, like the reader’s body) is impure, improper, and disorienting. This blurs the lines between human and monster, text and body, reader and writer—a blurring that drastically alters the original version of subjectivity portrayed in Shelley’s novel. The ideal image of the unique individual in full possession of himself is radically undermined in Jackson’s hypertext as readers encounter a narrative structure that challenges idealized concepts of a unified or autonomous text while thematically challenging definitions of monstrosity and reproduction.

The patchwork girl is able to break down the integrity of the human body in the manner outlined by Haraway because she is a “creature in a post-gender world” that “has no origin story in the Western sense” (“A Cyborg” 150). This lack of origins extends not only to how she connects to other bodies, but also to animals, and even to particles. For instance, in a link named “self swarm” she states, “I am made up of a multiplicity of anonymous particles, and have no absolute boundaries. I am a swarm” (self swarm).

Describing the body as fantastical and imaginative, we are told that “the body as seen by biology is chimerical” (bio), and that “we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras” (identities).⁹ These instances offer examples in the text of seeing the body as free from totalizing discourses in the way that Haraway outlines. Not only is the patchwork girl an assemblage of bodies and fluid subjectivities, she also connects to other inanimate objects. This normalizes the subject-as-assemblage, and “present[s] the subject-as-unity as a grotesque impossibility” (Hayles, “Flickering Connectivities” 29), as the body is both multiple and material. Yet the body here is not seen as belonging wholly to the fantastical either. The patchwork girl not only subverts what counts as natural through this multiplicity, but also subverts the postmodern fantasy of the possibility of the “textualization of everything.” She suggests the body is a constructed text, yet reminds us of the times she is outcasted or scorned for that body, thereby pointing “to the lived relations of domination that ground cultural reading(s)” (Balsamo 33). In this way the patchwork girl highlights all the technologies—reproductive, cultural, biological, cybernetic, hypertextual—which construct the body. She challenges definitions of monstrosity by constant references to the state of her deformed and genetically modified body, expressed through a narrative structure that is itself neither originary nor unified and autonomous. This offers a counter-narrative to the naturalized subjectivity that is often ascribed to the fetal cyborg, while also undermining the monstrous subjectivity ascribed to Victor’s monster.

⁹ This is a reference to Haraway.

Salt Fish Girl

Patchwork Girl treats language “as material, even corporeal, to the point where it is no longer possible (or even meaningful) to tell the difference between the creation of texts and the creation of bodies” (Sunden n.p.). *Salt Fish Girl*, however, sees the creation of new bodies as fundamentally connected to the creation of new texts. It looks at how reproduction and new reproductive technologies connect both to the creation of new bodies and to new myths and stories of origin. Accordingly, conception and origin scenes, which are “divergent, reiterative, and multiple” (Mansbridge 123), dominate the narrative. This starts in the opening chapter, when we begin with the story of an ancient Chinese shape-shifter named Nu Wa, a half-woman and half-snake, who creates the first humans from the muddy banks of the Yellow River and becomes so lonely that she exchanges her snake tail for human legs, painfully splitting in half so she can join her offspring. As the novel progresses, we find out that Nu Wa eventually falls in love with the salt fish girl and migrates from China to Canada, where she is reborn as Miranda, the novel’s narrator. In opening with Nu Wa’s story, which imagines creation “outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition” (Mansbridge 123), the novel immediately engages with a theory of origins that involves a cyborg who is able both to give birth and be reborn; Nu Wa’s story offers an alternative to the Christian myth of the Fall and its reliance on pure origins by making creator into the created, past generations into future ones, thereby reminding us that all of our tails, figuratively speaking, are already split (Birns 6). Nu Wa’s story establishes the novel’s goal of exploring the construction of bodies, and identities, outside the limitations of traditional binaries

This goal continues as we move from Nu Wa's story to Miranda's, set in a futuristic Pacific Northwest in the years 2044 to 2062, in two areas that resemble what is now greater Vancouver, BC. The first is Serendipity, a gated suburb run by a transnational corporation, where Miranda grows up. The other is "the Unregulated Zone," an urban ghetto that is not regulated by any of the "big six" corporations that dominate life in the book. This is where Miranda meets Evie and the "Sonia Series" clones that share Evie's DNA. The Unregulated Zone is an unstable, poor, and violent area that represents a place of subversion and potential rebellion in the novel because it is outside of watchful corporate eyes. Serendipity, on the other hand, is a phony town modelled after an "ideal" suburb, what Lai calls a simulacrum, or a replication of a thing without an original. Lai explains Serendipity as a type of violence, in that it claims a perfect history "that has never existed" and "utterly erases what was [there] before" ("Future Asians" 172). Modelling the town after the real-life creation in 1996 of an ur-American town named Celebration by the Disney Corporation, Lai describes Serendipity as an attempt "to think and narrate through [her own] contemporary moment" (171). She also incorporates other events happening at the time she was writing the novel, such as "the cloning of Dolly the sheep, the arrival of three rusty ships from China on the West Coast of British Columbia carrying around 600 Chinese migrant labourers, Monsanto's suing of a farmer whose canola crop, probably through natural pollination, had picked up some of Monsanto's altered DNA, [and] the patenting of slightly modified basmati rice by a large Texas corporation" (171-72). These concerns come together in *Salt Fish Girl* through its structure, as Lai blends science fiction with ancient myth to create both forgotten histories, through Nu Wa, and imagined new futures, through Miranda and the Sonias.

For example, in mixing Nu Wa's story into Miranda's futuristic setting, Lai draws attention to how the ongoing history of Chinese migration to Canada connects to current corporate interest in genetically modified farming, and how this corporate interest, in turn, connects to new reproductive technologies such as cloning. In this way it combines "ethnic historiography with science fiction" and "canvasses a new model for Asian-Canadian fiction" (Birn 4), which focuses on looking backwards and forwards at the same time.

The novel's use of the cyborg is particularly apt for this focus. As Hayles explains, because the cyborg "looks to the past as well as the future," and stands "at the threshold separating the human from the posthuman," stories about cyborgs are simultaneously "imbricated within cultural narratives while still wrenching them in a new direction" ("The Life" 158). The novel shows us this wrenching; both Nu Wa/Miranda and the Sonias look forward while back, as they are both ancient and modern, mythical reincarnations and futuristic cyborgs. This back and forth is partly possible because of their multiple conceptions and births. Joanna Mansbridge explains in "Abject Origins: Uncanny Strangers and Figures of Fetishism in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*," that it is in their ability to split, transform, and modify themselves through rebirth that "Lai's clones, as well as Nu Wa and Miranda might all be read as posthumanist cyborgs" (129). Able to resist humanist notions of identity, they also escape the social situations in which they were created, jumping out of the laboratory, and out of history, to multiply, grow, and change on their own terms. Using new reproductive technologies to rewrite the "myths and metanarratives upon which notions of authenticity rest and from which a unified identity emerges" (Mansbridge 125), Lai's novel undermines both the naturalized

subjectivity often connected to new reproductive technologies via the fetal cyborg, as well as the monstrous one imagined as the inevitable outcome if these technologies are not strictly monitored and controlled. The novel therefore “acts as a literary interrogation of the continued patriarchal confluence of ‘monstrosity’ with female reproduction, a conjoining that also attempts to mask white, patriarchal fear of difference” (Morris 9). Like *Patchwork Girl*, it exploits Victor’s fear that his monstrous creation will procreate, using representations of assisted conceptions, cyborgian births, and monstrous progenies to explore the possibilities and limits of the cyborg.

Corporations manage everything in Lai’s futuristic society, including media, advertising, policing, and government, and are therefore able to do as they please, such as abandon whole factions of society and rewrite history. As the saying goes, however, history refuses to be ignored. For instance, many people, including Miranda, are infected with a “dreaming disease” that stems from the genetically modified food they eat, where memories from the past leak into their consciousnesses. For Miranda, her dreams start as a child when she has no idea yet that she is cyborg or the reincarnation of Nu Wa, and she still lives in Serendipity (before her father is fired from his job as a tax collector and they must move to the Unregulated Zone). As part of her disease, Miranda is plagued by the smell of durian, which follows her everywhere she goes and smells “of pepper and cat pee” (*SFG* 15). Like her dreams, her smell stems from the genetically modified durian that her mother ate, and which Nu Wa was hiding in, when she was conceived. This fruit also gives Miranda two small fistulas above her ears, and leaves her shedding fish scales. As a child, Miranda is aware of her difference from other children in Serendipity, but is not aware that other people do not have memories of things that went on before they were

born. As she states, “I did not realize other people did not have these memories. I did not think of myself as a child afflicted by history, unable to escape its delights or torments” (*SFG* 70). Too young to understand that there are many others out there with the same condition, “with variations of the same bizarre symptoms, and whose bodies reeked of oranges, or tobacco, or rotten eggs, or cabbage” (70), Miranda knows she doesn’t fit in, but is not sure why. As Lai explains, Miranda’s bad smell is a “constant reminder that many things are repressed and denied in order for them [her family] to have this comfortable way of life [in Serendipity]” (“Future Asians” 174). Perhaps this is why when Miranda’s father loses his job and the family moves into the Unregulated Zone to open a grocery store, Miranda is relieved. She can hide her smell amongst the actual durian fruit sold at the store, and what is denied and repressed is allowed to surface. Not coincidentally, it is here where she meets Evie, who also smells, but like salt fish.

Evie, or Sonia 113, is the prototype for the Sonia clones designed to work as disposable labour in Pallas shoe factories by her maker/father, ironically named Dr. Flowers. Made up from the DNA of a frozen Japanese-Canadian woman who was interned in WWII and mixed with 0.03% carp fish, Evie and her sisters are created solely to be exploited. Like the dreaming disease, and history itself, however, they become uncontrollable. Lai describes Evie as a “genetically modified organism, a clone belonging to a particular prototype of which there are several thousand in circulation,” and as an “attempt to play with the figure of the cyborg Asian, and at the same time, she is a figure of the exploited factory worker” (“Future Asians” 175). She is also, like Haraway’s cyborg, slippery, perverse and disloyal to her origins. As Lai explains, Evie is “Abused, repeatedly reproduced, she emerges as a sort of damaged superhero figure, but one

seething with spite and fury [...] no figure of purity. She is a murderer and a traitor. She is vindictive, brimming over with anger. But she survives” (175). Able to adapt to her circumstances, mutate, and reproduce, Evie becomes the agent that not only changes Miranda’s world, but also the future of many other Sonias. Escaping from a Pallas compound, Evie flings herself over a razor-wire fence and crosses a “glacier to throw them off the scent. Just like Frankenstein” (*SFG* 159). She then rips the surveillance equipment out of her body (her “guardian angel”), liberates other Sonias, and begins to sabotage Pallas factories. She is able to do this because, unlike Frankenstein’s monster, Evie is not grotesque or disproportioned and looks much like other humans. In this way, she is reminiscent of other clones and replicants seen in Hollywood films such as Ridley Scott’s *Bladerunner*, itself a retelling of *Frankenstein*. This is deliberate, as Lai’s text draws attention to the ways appearance is connected to definitions of humanity, and how racialization influences who does and does not count as fully human.

In comparing Lai’s text to both Shelley’s novel and Scott’s film, Robin Morris notes that Lai uses Shelley’s novel as a platform to interrogate the historical racing of human difference. Morris argues that Shelley’s novel is an obvious choice, as it is “both a charting and critique of a racialized Enlightenment rhetoric that continues, in the post-modern age, to bind discussion of human creation to skin colour and ‘race’” (82). Morris reads Lai’s overt references to Shelley’s text, as well as subtle references to Scott’s film, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and other classic Western texts, therefore, as “a sustained interrogation of a colonialist discourse that perpetuates a fear of the visually raced other” (82). This interrogation connects to another one of Lai’s goals in *Salt Fish Girl*, which is to undermine the logic of late capitalism. In its portrayal of how the Sonias are exploited,

for instance, the novel not only looks to the connections between race and humanity, but also between race, labour, and the inevitable inequalities of capitalism. The novel shows us bodies that are not only coded as “other” through skin colour, but also through the corporatization of science and reproductive technologies. For example, when Miranda discovers brown-skinned cyborg women who have been “dumbed down” and designed to function solely as workers in her elementary school, she is told “they’re not women. They’re Janitors” (76). This is just one example of where Lai conflates gender, race, labour and technological control to reveal the ways race and gender shape who we do and do not think of as ignorable or disposable. These women’s bodies have not only been exploited through the genetic engineering that makes their consciousnesses easier to control, but are specifically designed to look like those who are “expected” to be janitors or factory workers. As Morris points out, it is no accident that Lai’s clones are women or have “brown hair and brown eyes” (*SFG* 160). They are “cloned from the DNA of Third World and Indigenous peoples of the past” and purposefully “wear on their skin the same physiognomy of difference that raced their forbearers” (Morris 83). They therefore offer a different reading of the cyborg subject than Jackson’s text in that they show us how technology can be used not only to liberate the body, but also to oppress it. They remind of us of Haraway’s insistence that the cyborg’s potential does not lie simply in its ability to disrupt dualisms, but in how these disruptions might undermine capitalism’s reliance on the domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, and animals.

Despite its futuristic elements, *Salt Fish Girl* is in some ways a more straightforward and traditional retelling of *Frankenstein* than *Patchwork Girl*. Evie is turned on and abandoned by her maker/father and eventually confronts him, demanding

not only to be recognized as his child but also questioning the very idea of what it means to be human. Unlike Shelley's novel, however, it is Miranda, not Evie, who ends up attacking Dr. Flowers after he has arranged the massacre of a group of renegade Sonias. Also unlike Shelley's novel, Evie does not demand a mate from her maker, as she has already found a community through other Sonias and she has already found love with Miranda. Their love story provides a counter-narrative to the original monster's story of isolation and pain, as Miranda and Evie not only find comfort in each other, but also a way to reproduce on their own without the assistance of a doctor or a scientist, by discovering the reproductive abilities of a genetically modified durian tree. The durian plays an essential role in how the cyborgs and clones in the novel are able to reproduce themselves. For instance, it is within a durian that Nu Wa hides in miniature snake form until she is eaten by Miranda's mother and slides into her womb. Also, when the renegade Sonias discover the durian seed's reproductive capacities, they plant their own tree and begin to reproduce as they see fit. This allows them to engage in a form of reproduction outside of the capitalist system that produced them originally, and outside of the nuclear, heterosexual kinship structures that dominate life in the rest of the book; communal parenting and same-sex relationships flourish as (heterosexual) reproduction is disconnected from sexual pleasure. Allowed access to a reproductive technology that is not involved in the corporate, scientific means of production the "big six" have patented and controlled (through them), the Sonias use the durian to try and start a utopian community. As they give birth to free, baby Sonias, they find "a sense of freedom and a chance of longevity that was denied to them on the factory production lines" (Morris 90). Even when the Sonias are massacred at the end of the novel, the durian still contains the

possibility of this type of freedom, as it is where “past and future, human and non-human, maternal and paternal origins converge” (Mansbridge 124). It is therefore beyond corporate control.

Despite the fact that they are murdered, the escaped Sonias, as well as Evie and Miranda, are able to take control of their own reproductive lives through the durian tree. Explaining why she chose such a smelly fruit as the reproductive vehicle in the book, Lai states that she wanted to tap into “that kind of immediate connection one feels to a moment in the past when one is confronted by a scent. I want to call up its sensual, sexual aspects, its feminine aspects, its connection to the moment of birth” (“Future Asians” 173). The Sonias use this smelly, sensual, feminine fruit to reproducing as they see fit, stepping outside of what Halberstam calls the “Freudian family sitcom” or the matrix of heterosexuality (*Posthuman* 13) by growing their own durian tree. Like the patchwork girl, they seize reproductive power and change their abject origins, creating a redemptive space and a female community unavailable to Frankenstein’s original monster. Although they are eventually destroyed, the redemptive space they create lives on at the end of the novel when Miranda, who has eaten a durian from the Sonias’ tree, gives birth to a baby girl. As she goes into labour, she and Evie get into a hot spring and mutate into fish, growing tails. Miranda states: “[Evie] stretched her tail through mine and our coils interlocked and slid though one another [...]. Blood streamed into the water, staining it. I howled with the pain of womb spasming deeply, and there was a dark head between my legs, a human face. [...] Everything will be all right, I thought, until next time” (269). Here, reproduction is both human and technological without being paternal; although it involves a womb birth, it is also outside what Haraway describes as the masculine urge to

reproduce “the sacred image of the same, of the one true copy, mediated by the luminous technologies of compulsory heterosexuality and masculinist self-birthing” (Haraway qtd. in Morris 91). As Tara Lee argues, this final birth is outside of essentialism in that it “neither retreats to nature, nor glorifies a purely scientific body” (108). It is a birth that is much like the seeds of the durian tree, which have become “neither natural nor controllable” (*SFG* 256); that is, it is not quite organic, not quite technological, and is instead unfixed. It is a birth that acknowledges how the creation of new cyborg bodies through innovative reproductive technologies might lead to the creation of new myths and new ways of imagining and representing the world; at least, as Miranda states, until next time.

Conclusion

Haraway hopes the cyborg might be the subject who can “suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” and provide a model for a “monstrous world without gender” (“A Cyborg” 181). However, so far the way new reproductive technologies have been used, talked of, and understood in politics and the media in connection to cyborg theory has not been able to help us see our way out of the maze in the way Haraway outlines. As Hartouni argues, new reproductive technologies have become, to a large extent, part of a “highly sentimental narrative of biological desire and drive that displaces the image and threat of technoscientists playing god with portraits of the happy, heterosexual, white nuclear family—dysfunctional, perhaps, but hardly unrecognizable—that would not exist but for the ‘pioneering efforts of scientist on the frontiers of reproductive discovery’” (*Cultural* 115). For instance, the

fetal cyborg's subversiveness has been undermined by the ways its image is used, so that it no longer exposes dualisms, but helps erase them. Thought of as "autonomous, self-regarding, and more or less self-sufficient" (126), its subjectivity, like the individual imagined as the outcome of most new reproductive technologies, is portrayed as "a self-evident fact of nature or a sexed, stable, noncontingent value" (125). In contrast, Jackson's and Lai's fictional portrayals of new reproductive technologies challenge these images. Their cyborgs are not born into or interested in being part of traditional kinship structures, and they do not want to be self-sufficient, stable or autonomous. Instead, they are happily marginal, queer, illegal, and subversive.

If there is a limit on how we can use cyborg theory to complicate and contest the naturalization of reproductive technologies in real-life, then we need to seek out other portrayals of cyborgs and other representations of reproductive technologies where the machine/human dualism is not only disrupted, but broken down. Jackson's and Lai's texts are two such representations. Like Haraway's work, their texts point to a specific moment in literary history and cultural theory that continues to affect how we think about the connections between reproduction, technology, and the body. Hayles argues that as valuable as Haraway's cyborg has been, we now need new figures to help us theorize the ways that technology is changing our world ("Unfinished Work" 160). I argue, however, that whereas the figure of the cyborg may have run its course in some areas of the media or politics, such as in the instance of the fetal cyborg, the way it is explored in fictional texts is not only still relevant, but essential for making sense of current connections between posthuman theories and reproductive technologies. As long as we continue to talk about and understand new and assisted reproductive technologies, such as stem-cell

research or cloning, through literary allusions to “Franken-babies” or clichéd apocalyptic narratives, literary representations of cyborgs will play an essential role in the social and cultural conditions of how reproductive technologies are imagined, talked of, and used.

Chapter Four

The Limits of Citizenship: The Fetus and the Refugee in *Children of Men*

The introduction of citizenship identity for the fetus brings with it a new terrain on which the anxieties of nations and democracy play out.

~ Janine P. Holc, "The Purest Democrat"

Only on tape and records do we now hear the voices of children, only on film or on television programmes do we see the bright, moving images of the young. Some find them unbearable to watch but most feed on them as they might a drug.

~ P.D. James, *The Children of Men*

This chapter departs from the previous three by turning its focus to a Hollywood film, Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), an adaptation of English author P.D. James's novel, *The Children of Men* (1992). The film tells the story of a futuristic infertile world plagued by pandemics, terrorist attacks, and global wars since women stopped being able to reproduce. Its storyline follows what happens when a young black refugee and prostitute in England, named Kee, finds herself pregnant eighteen years after the last baby was born. The film differs from the other fictional texts studied in this project not only in terms of medium, but also because it is an adaptation of a novel written by an English author, is set in England, and has a Mexican director. Despite these differences in national setting and authorship, the film complements and expands the project's national scope as it is a text that simultaneously touches on North American and global reproductive politics. Also, by weaving a storyline about infertility into one about terrorism, refugees, and the politics of migration, it speaks to how those politics have adapted and shifted since September 11th, 2001 and the beginning of the US-lead "War on Terror."

As a Mexican director, Cuarón occupies a relational position to the US that is similar to that of the authors already studied. Like Atwood, for instance, Cuarón is a North American insider/outsider whose work is critical of the political influence the US has on his own country specifically, and the West generally. This critical engagement is revealed in the film's changes and additions to James's story, such as several verbal references to the US that are not in the original, the Americanization of Julian, (played by Julianne Moore), who is not only English in the novel but is the character who becomes pregnant, and the addition of Kee as a crucially racialized refugee (played by Clare-Hope Ashitey). It is also revealed in how the film addresses its themes from a standpoint that is suspicious of US foreign policy, as shown by obvious visual allusions to Abu Ghraib prison and the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, as well as by critical depictions of fascist border policies. Cuarón states in an online interview with Richard von Busack that this is on purpose, as the film questions, "the ethics of borders when there is humanity in need." As Cuarón explains:

I'm a Mexican. There's been a constant migration between Mexico and the United States. And the anti-immigration laws are getting tougher. The United States is clinging to archaic solutions, instead of trying to find new structures. The same country that praises the tearing apart of the Berlin Wall is building a single wall between the Mexico and the States. It's an expensive and archaic solution, and like all such solutions it will completely backfire. (n.p.)

Cuarón's choice of England as a setting helps him imagine this "backfire," as he uses its geographical location as an island as a way to imagine what he calls the ultimate "comfort zone," where the characters "feel they're lucky to live there, but there's a big

percentage of outsiders waiting to get in” (Busack n.p.). This setting, however, should not take away from the film’s critique of American politics. Matt Brennan, for instance, states in an online article for *Bright Lights* that “being set in Britain makes *Children of Men* no less American, at least in the sense that American politics dominate (for better or worse) the world stage, and that those politics emerge as the target of Cuarón’s sharp portrayal of a futuristic Britain saddled with a government poisonous in its policies and devoid of humanity” (n.p.).¹ As Brennan ironically points out, the film’s engagement with American politics also makes it decidedly global, and other visual allusions to the Iraq War, the Gaza strip, and the Holocaust support this idea. These allusions help to historicize the film and situate its concerns within the last century’s history of war, migration, and terrorism. Like other authors whose texts depict settings that are post-American (Lai, Atwood), or partly outside the US (Jackson, Huston, Morrison), therefore, the film uses its setting to draw attention to the ways national boundaries affect identities, policies, and governments.

In its storyline about a young black refugee who finds herself pregnant, and therefore vulnerable in a world where controlling her child equals political power, the film’s storyline also addresses many of the reproductive technologies and politics already discussed. It not only engages with the connection between abortion debates and apocalyptic narratives seen in Chapter One, for instance, but also imagines the fetus, or the not-yet-here child, as the solution to the world’s problems in a way that eerily fulfils some of the scenarios set out in that chapter. Like Chapter Two, it engages with the racialization both of mothering and of certain reproductive practices through the creation

¹ See Kapur and Boyle, who also classify the film as American.

of Kee, who often lacks verbal and physical agency in the film. And, like Chapter Three, it speaks to concerns over new reproductive technologies and (in)fertility by embracing the fetal personhood I have argued is partly a byproduct of how those technologies are talked of and used. Finally, it expands these chapters' concerns by representing some of the connections between reproductive politics, "family values," and the so-called war on terror. If part of our current political climate after 9/11 has been a focus on what constitutes the conditions of "life" in a time of "terror," then the film plays with that climate by imagining the not-yet-here child as the ultimate symbol of hope in a world that is full of violence and terrorism. It therefore acts as a bookend to this project by not only engaging with many of the reproductive technologies and politics already discussed, but also by revealing some of the ways representations of those politics have transformed in the last ten years to accommodate new definitions of who or what counts as a family, a fetus, and a human in the wake of a global political climate focused on stopping terrorism by protecting national borders.

While I view *Children of Men* as obviously engaged with reproductive politics through its plot, characterizations, and themes, Cuarón has been adamantly ambivalent about the reproductive side of the film's politics. In interviews, he has claimed that the film's premise of a futuristic infertile world is insignificant and is "just a metaphor" for the current state of humanity (Franklin n.p.). Stating that he "decided to not even care about [the infertility] and just take it as a point of departure," Cuarón explains that he found James's idea of a childless world "haunting," so much so that he "realized that the premise could serve as a metaphor for the fading sense of hope that humanity has today" (Roberts n.p.). In the film's DVD commentary, Slavoj Žižek echoes Cuarón's sentiments

when he states that he, too, sees the film as having little to do with its storyline. Instead, what Žižek claims the film gives us is a hyper-real version of our current reality in that what is shown in the background—a destroyed environment, suffering refugees, terrorist attacks, and other effects of global capitalism—is the real story. As he states, the film shows us “a society without a history, or to use another political term, biopolitics [...] [T]he basic problem in this society as depicted in the film is literally biopolitics: how to generate, regulate life” (“Children” n.p.). For Žižek, the film’s premise of an infertile world is a metaphor for the ideological despair of late-capitalism; “the true infertility is the very lack of meaningful historical experience” (“Children” n.p.). This infertility reflects a type of cultural impotency or stasis and the storyline of a miracle pregnancy and birth are metaphors for a reawakening of political or cultural hope. Undoubtedly these metaphors do their job, as the film’s spectacular background images of human suffering and bleak landscapes certainly tell their own story apart from the plotline. Despite this effective use of symbol and metaphor, however, viewers are still left watching a film that revolves around a storyline about infertility and pregnancy. In the same way Cuarón describes James’s idea of a childless world haunting him, the film’s reproductive politics haunt his attempts to separate this storyline of infertility and pregnancy from the film’s “actual” themes of globalization, terrorism, and the despair of late-capitalism.

One of the more obvious ways that this haunting takes place is in the film’s alteration of the novel’s central reproductive premise; whereas in James’s novel the world is sterile because all sperm suddenly loses its potency, in the film all women mysteriously stop being able to stay pregnant. Pausing to consider the political implications of this

change, it is obvious that the film's point of departure is actually quite value-laden. The impossibility of an equal exchange of sterility for infertility—that it is not possible to say sterility means the same as infertility—indicates how difficult it is to claim the film is only using its premise as a metaphor. Yes, infertility clearly symbolizes the state of humanity in the film, but the film's reproductive politics cannot be confined solely to the level of metaphor. Even further, I would like to suggest these reproductive politics are integral to the film's exploration of what Cuarón and Žižek see as its “real” themes. For instance, the film's look at the effects of globalization, capitalism, and migration means it engages with ideas about futurity, nation, and family. These ideas, in turn, are always already linked to reproductive politics in a manner that goes well beyond the scope of the film or its use of metaphors. This means that the film not only engages in reproductive politics in an obvious way through its storyline, but also in a much more subtle way through its exploration of these other themes connected to the failings of democracy, the effects of terrorism, and the status of the human.

In what follows, I trace some of the ways these layered politics reveal themselves and circle within the film's logic. Starting with an analysis of some of the differences between the novel and the film, I look at how fetal personhood is used in the film's advertising and how the pregnancy is visualized and talked about in its storyline. I then move on to question how the figure of the not-yet-here child is fetishized in both the novel and the film in connection to what Lee Edelman calls “reproductive futurism,” and how this relates to the fantasy of the heterosexual family in the story. I finish by examining how the film's concern with biopolitics and the status of the refugee connects to its reproductive politics more generally through an analysis of Giorgio Agamben's

work on “bare life,” or life without any political meaning. The aim of this trajectory is not to prove Cuarón or Žižek wrong in their analysis that the film is about the state of humanity and the effects of global capitalism. Rather, it is to say that the film’s storyline acts as more than just a metaphor because its reproductive politics are vital to how viewers make sense of its other politics. Put another way, it is because it does *not* seem strange that a film about mass infertility should also be one about the end of humanity and the spread of terror that we can assume the film’s reproductive politics are more than simply a point of departure.

From Text to Film

One of the more disturbing aspects of James’s novel is that the political effects of global sterility are apathy and complacency. The English population has become so apathetic and depressed that as long as they have “freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom from boredom” (James 96), they go along subserviently with the government’s terrible solutions to the problems of an aging population.² No one votes, no one notices when people are mysteriously shipped off to a penal colony, and no one protests when the government enforces group suicides/murders of the population’s oldest and weakest. Immigrants are brought into England to serve as indentured nurses and no one cares when they are shipped home to die. People look the other way when old women walk around with dolls in baby carriages or dress up their pets as children. It is as if the lack of children leads to a lack of any sense of “the future,” so that there is a complete “undoing of social organization, collective reality and, inevitably, life itself” (Edelman 13). While

² This obviously echoes Aunt Lydia’s “freedom from” speech in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, as discussed in Chapter One.

this sense of hopelessness certainly exists in the film as well, the film's infertility is not directly linked to political or cultural apathy. Instead, what Cuarón shows us is a setting where worldwide infertility, if not straightforwardly leading to, has certainly played a large part in the massive spread of nuclear war, terrorism, and fascism. Many people such as our hero, Theo (played by Clive Owen), are depressed and disillusioned, but they are certainly neither purposefully ignorant of their social reality as in the novel, nor are they complacent out of indifference—they live instead in a state of almost constant anxiety and total despair.

As opposed to the novel, where everything takes place secretly or behind closed doors, the film also shows us a world where refugees are plainly and routinely rounded up, beaten, and locked in cages on the streets, and where suicide bombs are a part of everyday life. This change extends to the differences between the political dissidents in the novel and in the film as well. In the novel, the group who protests the government's policies, the Five Fishes, has five members who are mostly idealistic and compassionate. However, in the film's world of terrorism, the Fishes are a huge network of activists who are politically ambitious and thrive in a complex system of organizations and safe houses. The film makes it clear that the government is the enemy; fascism has led to a situation where even the Fishes are corrupt, terror is the order of the day, and humanity has become as bankrupt and as barren as the world's wombs. Of course it is this juxtaposition in the film that I want to explore further, as the film naturalizes the connection between reproduction and the state of humanity in ways that are both unsettling and indicative of how deeply these themes are already culturally connected. Even though Cuarón attempts to sideline the theme of reproduction in the film (perhaps because of this attempt

actually), the film's metaphorical connection between reproduction and the state of humanity suggests a direct correlation between infertility and terror. This correlation not only eerily evokes political talk about the sacredness of family values in connection to the war or terrorism, but perhaps more disturbingly it also plays off some of the strongest contentions of America's Evangelical pro-life movement: the ideas that abortion could bring on the apocalypse, that infertility is a punishment, that if women were to somehow stop having children the result would be world-wide destruction and dehumanization, and that protecting the fetus, or the future child, from women's reproductive choices, their whims and desires, is the only way to protect the future, the nation, and the family. What this suggests, in turn, is not that *Children of Men* is a pro-life film, but that the connection between reproductive politics and an imagined apocalypse is so commonplace culturally that a film about infertility cannot help but engage with this narrative.³

The film's relationship to this narrative is indicated in its advertising, as one of the film's posters revolves around the overly signified image of a free-floating fetus. This fetus is perfectly formed, floats alone in a clear bubble, and is set against a plain black background without the body of the pregnant woman who presumably holds this fetus inside of her being anywhere in sight. As discussed in detail in Chapter Three, the image of the free-floating fetus has become so prevalent and deeply caught up in prolife politics in America that it has become a "two-dimensional icon" (Valerius 129). It now represents "an independent fetal subject with interests and rights of its own imaginable at the expense of pregnant women who are rendered invisible" (129). This iconography is so effective that although this poster is not actually a representation of a real-life fetus, it

³ See Mason for more on the apocalyptic narrative of pro-life politics.

nonetheless works as a performative discursive practice by producing what it claims to represent, a fetal subject. This means that those viewing the film's poster must go so far as to actually remind themselves that this is not an image of a "little person" floating peacefully in space completely viable on its own. When considered alongside the accompanying tagline—"In 20 years, women are infertile. No Children. No Future. No Hope. But all that can change in a heartbeat"—it is not even a stretch to imagine the film's poster as a pro-life advertisement in its own right, especially true considering the emphasis on women's culpability for this state of hopelessness, and the focus on the heartbeat, which has been one of the central areas of attack in the pro-life movement.

Obviously the poster is a not pro-life advertisement, but it does suggest the degree to which pro-life discourse has so saturated public thinking about the fetus as to now set the terms of that discourse "and seem part of the fabric of fact" (Hartouni, *Cultural* 6). Further, this poster elaborates overtly what the film's premise suggests: that there will be an end to the world as we know it, an end to the very idea of the future itself, if we do not protect our future children and citizens by safeguarding the fetus and ensuring women continue to reproduce. It also suggests that this worldwide catastrophe could be stopped, and apocalypse diverted, simply through a fetus' beating heart. As Lauren Berlant notes in "America, 'Fat,' and the Fetus," it is this logic that has lead to a state of fetal citizenship, where "the pregnant woman becomes the child to the fetus, becoming more minor and less politically represented than the fetus, which is in turn more privileged by law, paternity, and other less institutional family strategies of contemporary American culture" (147). Analyzing what she sees as "a contemporary national and mass cultural fixation on turning women into children and babies into persons through the media of

photography and cinema” (146), Berlant argues that the fetus has become a super-person, or a super-citizen through the pro-life movement’s successful merging of an “American counter discourse of minority rights with a revitalized Providential nationalist rhetoric” (150). The result is that the fetus is now commonly imagined as an unprotected person, or a citizen without a country, vulnerable and “unjustly imprisoned in its mother’s hostile gulag” (150). Appearing to be personhood in its “natural completeness, prior to the fractures of history and identity” (156), the fetus in this poster, as well as the one in the film, is posited as the ultimate citizen and as the solution to our current and *future* problems—hence, true parenthood—simply through its own existence.

Its promotional poster is not the only example of how the film engages with a pro-life narrative, or with reproductive politics more generally. Perhaps the most obvious way the film engages with reproductive politics is by racially rewriting the body of the pregnant woman from the novel to the film. In the novel the only pregnant woman in the world is Julian, a married, middle-aged, white, political activist who does not realize she could become pregnant until she has an affair with a white priest named Luke, who has been exempt from sterility screening because he had epilepsy as a child. Julian is a stranger to Theo in the novel and we first meet her when she approaches him because of his connections in the government. Theo, a self-described lonely, miserable academic who lives a solitary life, knows that his “only claim to notice is that he is cousin to Xan Lyppiatt, the dictator and Warden of England” (James 4). This is why Julian approaches Theo, as she hopes he will use his influence with Xan to address the concerns the Five Fishes have about how the government is dealing with an aging population. Theo becomes infatuated with Julian and does assist the group, eventually not only helping

Julian give birth to a baby boy after her husband abandons her, but also killing Xan and assuming power of England in order to protect Julian and her son. This storyline, of course, changes greatly in the film, as Julian becomes an American ex-pat and the leader of the Fishes, Luke becomes a (black) Judas character who treacherously arranges Julian's murder in order to gain control of Kee's future child, and Theo becomes a despondent and cynical alcoholic whose cousin still works for the government, but is certainly not its leader. In the film, Julian and Theo are also given a romantic back story as old lovers who once had a son die in a flu pandemic. This is why Julian turns to Theo and asks him to help her get Kee to a humanitarian group named The Human Project, as they share this familial history. While these changes themselves are not problematic—in fact some film critics have praised the change of the pregnant character from Julian to Kee—they are worthy of a moment's thought considering how the film engages with various reproductive tropes and themes.

In an article for *Film Comment*, Jonathon Romney states that he sees the creation of Kee's character as a radical decision because both the novel and the film play off obvious Christian themes in their focus on a miracle birth that saves humanity. Romney notes that the fact Kee is a black refugee who gives birth to a baby girl, rather than a white woman who is impregnated by a priest and gives birth to a baby boy, means that Kee and her daughter can be seen as subversive. He sees a "delightful irony," as he puts it, in the fact that the film opened in America on Christmas Day 2006, in that the film's message is a nativity story with a twist since it posits the next Messiah is an African baby girl (35). This idea is backed by Cuarón himself, who states in an online interview with Garth Franklin that his decision to have Kee's character be black was intentional and "has

to do with the fact that humanity started in Africa” (n.p.). While the argument that Kee is a radical change has merit and could be well supported, it is an oversimplification to state she is subversive simply because she is African or because she is a refugee. In fact, the way her character is scripted, she often comes close to a stereotypical Virgin Mary, full of milk and honey, but lacking agency and voice.

In “(Re)Conceiving the Surrogate: Maternity, Race, and Reproductive Technologies in Alfonso Cuarón’s *Children of Men*,” Sayatani DasGupta also argues that Kee lacks subjectivity. When the film splits James’s character of Julian into two separate protagonists, for instance, Das Gupta states that it enacts “a separation of female sexual and maternal desires” (n.p.) that leaves Kee with little agency. Kee’s lack of sexual appeal or desire, her missing family, friends, and storyline, and the way she is infantilized by parental figures in the film, contribute to this lack of subjectivity. As DasGupta argues, “Kee, whose name itself suggests an object status (a key) rather than subject hood” is without “context or history” (n.p.). In contrast to the active role given to the pregnant Julian by James, for example, the film reduces Kee “almost entirely to her reproductive and symbolic role: she does not act but is acted upon” (n.p.). She therefore fulfils a reproductive function in the film that DasGupta argues “enacts the same sort of discursive violence against Third World women that [the film] critiques on a wider scale” (n.p.). In Kee’s characterization as a vulnerable, and often mute, black woman in need of Theo’s (white) protection from another black man (Luke), the film reduces her to the

status of Spivak's subaltern, unable to speak for herself and constructed as needing white, masculine, imperialist protection.⁴

Kee's lack of agency is reflected in several scenes in the film, most notably when she reveals to Theo that she is pregnant by taking off her clothes and showing him her enlarged belly and breasts. Set in a manger amongst dairy cows as cathedral music swells in the background, this scene has obvious biblical allusions. Instead of telling Theo she is pregnant, Kee (in one of her only speeches) addresses the film's concerns by talking about how the milking machines are unnatural. She then undresses in front of Theo and reveals that she is pregnant in a way that fetishizes her body for both Theo and the viewer.⁵ As the camera moves from Theo's astonished face to Kee's naked form she is both animalized and naturalized like the swollen cattle around her.⁶ This *mise-en-scène* not only evokes the nativity story, but, as DasGupta argues, it also conjures "unavoidable associations of Kee with the Hottentot Venus" (n.p.),⁷ in that it makes Kee's body into a spectacle. Theo's exclamation of "Jesus Christ" when he realizes what he is seeing is a clear indication that this is indeed a biblical moment. When the other Fishes burst into the barn and protest Kee's willingness to include Theo in her secret pregnancy, Kee stands mute as Luke and Miriam, Kee's midwife, argue on Kee's behalf, with Miriam stating that it is "Kee's right" to show Theo her body. Portrayed here as "all fertility, 'savage' simplicity, bestiality, and childlike trust" (DasGupta n.p.), Kee is passively reduced to her

⁴ In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak looks at how Western theorists and intellectuals ironically reassert their dominance over subaltern subjects by "speaking for" the subaltern condition and by assuming that there is cultural solidarity among colonized peoples.

⁵ Lauren Berlant notes that although it was once considered transgressive and shameful for a woman to display her naked pregnant belly, "the pictorial display of pregnancy is now an eroticized norm in American public culture" (146). For more on the cinematic gaze and fetishization, see Mulvey.

⁶ For more on the fetishization of the black female body, see Gaines and Lutz & Collins.

⁷ The Hottentot Venus was a woman named Saartjie "Sarah" Baartman. She was born a slave of South African farmers and was forced to tour Europe showing off her body as a live, naked, and caged exhibition in the early 1800s.

pregnant body in this scene as it is put on display for both Theo and the viewer and assumed to speak for itself.

Miriam's assertion of Kee's rights poses an interesting dilemma in this context, as the film makes it clear that the only "right" choice for Kee is for her to be happy about her pregnancy. This is opposed to the novel, which questions what the cost will be to both mother and child if Julian's baby turns out to be an accident and the only child born twenty-five years after all others. In the novel Theo asks Julian (who assumes at this point that she is going to have a girl):

How many other lives will your child cost before she gets herself born? And to what purpose? [...] You believe that she'll be the first, that other births will follow, that even now there are pregnant women not yet aware that they are carrying the new life of the world. But suppose you are wrong. Suppose this child is the only one. To what sort of hell are you condemning it? Can you imagine the loneliness of the last years—over twenty appalling, endless years with no hope of ever hearing another live human voice. (218)

No one in the film ever brings up a similar concern, or suggests that Kee's pregnancy may be anything but a miracle. In a marked difference from other dystopian stories, such as *The Handmaid's Tale*, where the possibility of giving birth to a baby who is genetically flawed or mutated is always a deep fear, Theo's close friend Jasper sums up the film's take on the pregnancy perfectly when he tells Kee, "Your baby is the miracle the whole world has been waiting for." Even Kee, whom one might assume could be terrified by her situation, seems full of steely determination. In the only scene in which she talks about feeling ambivalent about her pregnancy, and admits she thought of using

a suicide pill called Quietus when she first realized she was pregnant, Kee ends up stating that it is through her pregnancy that she has become truly alive. She states, “Then the baby kicked. I feel it. Little bastard was alive, and I feel it. And me too. I am alive.” Here, Kee espouses traditional rhetoric that suggests women become truly alive and fulfil their destinies as women through pregnancy and motherhood. Of course in the context of the film this kicking *is* a miracle moment and Kee truly is alive in the most poignant way, now that she is about to be the mother of a new humanity. But the film’s extreme context effaces the other factors that might normally make this pregnancy more ambivalent.

It is easy to forget in this scene that Kee is a young, poor, homeless refugee who lacks any family, and in any other context her pregnancy might take on a multitude of significations including, but certainly not limited to, self-realization. Further, this is a Hollywood film aimed at an American audience, and as Rickie Solinger notes in *Pregnancy and Power*, it is important to remember that any discussion of reproduction in America is always also about race, as “the systematic, institutionalized denial of reproductive freedom has uniquely marked Black women’s history in America” (132). Therefore, Kee’s story of how she realizes that she is truly alive through her pregnancy should also be contextualized within a history of reproductive racism in America that has often refused black women the right “to decide when and whether to become pregnant, to stay pregnant, to have abortions, to become mothers, and to keep and raise their children” (*Abortion Wars* 8).⁸ Miriam’s comment in the barn that it is “Kee’s right” is a loaded one,

⁸ Berlant and Solinger also point out that debates about fetality are heavily racialized debates, with black, Hispanic and poor women often figuring as more dangerous to the fetus in public discourse than white women and the state more heavily monitoring poor and black women’s lifestyle choices, nutrition, and use of state services. As discussed in the previous chapters, this monitoring stems from a history of reproductive chicanery by the state, which led to thousands of women being sterilized by coercion throughout the 1960s and 70s and which can be traced all the way back to the legal status of black women’s bodies during slavery (Berlant 149).

then, as Kee's rights are framed within the film by her easy acceptance of being a modern-day Mary and her assumption of this position by way of either mute complacency or predictable rhetoric. Romney may be correct that it is subversive to have a black woman in this role, especially considering what Solinger points out, but this subversion is undercut by how the film uses its extreme storyline and premise to naturalize Kee's embrace of her situation.

The Fantasy of the Child

The effect of this effacement in the film is that the fetus, and by extension the child, comes to represent the natural inspiration, if not the solution, to a world of terrorism, despair and fascism. This naturalization, in turn, leads to an embracement of what Lee Edelman has termed "reproductive futurism" (2). In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Edelman argues that reproductive futurism is the process by which the image of the Child (which he always capitalizes to distinguish from the experience of an actual child) comes to represent the very notion or idea of the future itself. Reproductive futurism relies on the fantasy that we may somehow return to our own innocence or childhood, to a time that-never-quite-was, through constant attempts to protect our future world and our future children. In this way the image of the Child, much like the fetal citizen, is put in the position where it not only represents "the telos of the social order," but is also seen "as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (11). Edelman is working within a Lacanian framework by claiming that the image of the Child functions as a necessary part of the Symbolic because it works as a political fantasy by

screening out the temporality of our own lives and the fragility of our own egos; it screens out the death drive.⁹

Edelman argues that reproductive futurism is connected to the death drive in two ways: first, in how the image of the Child enacts a logic of repetition that helps fix our identities as we identify with the future of the social order; and, second, in how the image of the queer (which can be any number of queer figures for Edelman, including gay men and women, feminists, and those in favour of abortion) “comes to embody that order’s traumatic encounter with its own failure, its encounter with the illusion of the future as suture to bind the constitutive wound of the subject’s subjection to the signifier, which divides it, paradoxically, both from and into itself” (26). In other words, if we are always focusing on protecting our future generations rather than facing our own mortality we are given the illusion that our lives have purpose, order, and form so long as we can ensure those future generations will exist. The fantasy of futurity therefore “assures the stability of our identities as subjects” and ensures coherence to “the Imaginary totalizations through which those identities appear to us in recognizable form” (7). As Edelman explains, this leads to a situation where the “figural Child alone embodies the citizen as ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation’s good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights ‘real’ citizens are allowed” (11). Whatever appears as a threat to this mandate of the collective reproduction of the Child is a threat “not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to the social order as such, insofar as it threatens the logic of the futurism on which meaning always

⁹ For Lacan, the death drive stems from a loss of harmony in the pre-oedipal fusion with the mother’s breast. The trauma of this loss of unity turns into an urge for repetition and a compulsion to relive the original disturbance this separation entails. The death drive is therefore a kind of compulsion whereby we attain a painful satisfaction through repetition and failure (S2, 326).

depends” (11). The Child who does not yet exist represents *the* one figure that is always worth fighting for politically and worth protecting legally because as a symbol of the future this Child is part of the logic of futurity upon which Symbolic meaning is built. This is how it can make sense politically, for instance, to deny health-care benefits to queer couples (who actually once were children) in the name of future Children who, in turn, are imagined to be safe only through ensuring the “sanctity” of heterosexual marriage and reproduction (i.e.: futurity).

The effect of this is that heterosexual reproduction comes to represent the future itself and queerness is figured as the “unfuture” or limit of this system, as death itself. The image of the Child becomes privileged as the embodiment of all that is “good” about heterosexuality; it is used to place “an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity” (2). Edelman sees this as a circular system, where the image of the Child becomes an imaginary fullness for the subject, the future becomes synonymous with heterosexuality, and the queer is seen as antithetical to the Child, or as the place outside or beyond the system where the future ends.¹⁰ As he explains, this means “we are no more able to conceive of a politics without the fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child” (11); the Child is futurity itself, which helps explain why the “fantasy of the nuclear family is still the centerpiece of our cultural imagination” (Oliver *xvii*). The

¹⁰ This is why Edelman connects queerness with the death drive, as that which is the remainder of the Real, and that which threatens the stability of the Symbolic by insisting on the void that is in and of the subject, “beyond its fantasy of self-realization, beyond the pleasure principle” (25). Edelman calls for an embracement of this position throughout the book. He states, “at the heart of my polemical engagement with the cultural texts of politics and the politics of cultural texts lies a simple provocation: that queerness names the side of those not ‘fighting for the children’” (3). He argues this position has subversive potential because “by figuring a refusal of the coercive belief in the paramount value of futurity, while refusing as well any backdoor hope for dialectical access to meaning, the queer dispossess the social of the ground on which it rests” (6).

image of the Child not only sets the limit on what is imaginable politically, but also gives subjects a fantasy to invest in so they may ward off their own lack, ward off the death drive and the queer, in hopes of maintaining the illusion of Symbolic wholeness, identity and meaning.

To say that *Children of Men* engages with Edelman's idea of reproductive futurism may seem a bit obvious at this point. It is, after all, a story which uses the birth of a baby to symbolize the renewal of humanity and civilization—the renewal of the futurity. Compared to the novel, however, which Edelman references at several points to explain how reproductive futurism leads to the fetishization of childhood and the Child, the film has a much more ironic attitude to this fetishization, due in large part to Cuarón's attempts to sideline the reproductive storyline. For instance, the whole opening sequence plays off the child as fetish by drawing viewers' attention to the unhealthy obsession the world has developed with the image of the Child. In the very first scene Theo walks into a café where a crowd has formed around the television to stare in horror as they are told of the death of the world's youngest citizen: eighteen-year-old Baby Diego. Baby Diego is, of course, no longer a baby, but the world's insistence in continuing to refer to him as "baby" reveals just how strongly the fantasy of the Child's vulnerability is connected to reproductive futurism (Edelman 21). As the broadcaster describes how Baby Diego was stabbed to death after refusing to sign an autograph for a fan, only Theo seems unaffected by the television, and he quickly gets his coffee and leaves the café just in time to watch it blow up from a bomb.

The juxtaposition of the story of Baby Diego and the bombing of the café alerts viewers to two of the film's major thematic concerns: infertility and terror. It also quickly

reveals what type of world Theo lives in, one where the death of the world's youngest adult leads to national grieving, but the bombing of a café has become so commonplace as to not even warrant media attention. The public mourning of Diego, which Romney claims echoes the national hysteria over Princess Diana, "concisely tells us that the world has been plunged into despair by the near-certainty that there will be no future generations" (Romney 34-35). Theo's disgust with this national hysteria, however, suggests there is something not-quite-right about this despair and viewers quickly realize the film is actually scornful of this hysterical distraction from what is really going on politically. This wariness continues as viewers follow Theo to his government job and the camera pans over his co-worker's desk filled with teddy-bear figurines and other children's kitsch. As Romney observes, this one scene "tells us everything we need to know about this doomed world's morbidly sentimental fetishization of childhood" (35). A byproduct of Edelman's notion of reproductive futurism, the type of fetishization Theo's co-worker indulges in is the necessary outcome of our endless identifications of and with the Child as the preeminent emblem of the future (13). This scene draws attention to how grotesque these fetishizations could become if these identifications were severed; the film shows us the psychic cracks that may appear if there are no future generations to invest in and the project of reproductive futurism must be abandoned. Of course the film's examples pale in comparison to the novel's fetishization of the Child, where women go to such lengths as to baptize their cats and to walk around with dolls in baby carriages and coo over each other's "children." In the novel, Theo refers to these dolls as "alien and monstrous" (James 34), and they are, in that they make hypervisible the self-congratulatory narcissism most parents are encouraged to embrace in the

everyday (Edelman 13). They also indicate just how far people could be willing to go to maintain the illusion that they may access an imaginary fullness through the Child and that they will always be here in some form or another as long as they have faith in futurism.

The film's ironic look at the image of the Child in its opening reveals to viewers that the grieving of Baby Diego is not right; it is another symptom of a world that has gone awry both politically and spiritually. Viewers are immediately aligned with Theo and his disgust and distrust at this display of unity over one person's death. The effect of this alignment, however, is that viewers take up Theo's subject position so strongly that by the time Theo views Kee's naked and pregnant body and becomes our reluctant hero, we too are also genuinely affected and quickly come to admire his steadfast commitment to her future child. In fact, Theo so thoroughly governs our logic of perception that when we are swept up in a more subtle version of reproductive futurism than the national hysteria over Baby Diego, it is hard to notice. For instance, it is easy to overlook the way that Theo and Julian are actually represented as what DasGupta calls the film's "true parents," or how the film's storyline ends up reinforcing the sanctity of the heterosexual nuclear family. In the novel, Theo has lost a child and a marriage, but it is because he accidentally backed over his daughter in his car that his life falls apart. The film, on the other hand, romanticizes Theo and Julian's history and sentimentalizes their son Dylan's death, making it the result of an influenza epidemic, or of what Jasper sadly calls "fate." Dylan's death is so painful for Julian and Theo that twenty years after the fact Julian tells Theo that it is hard to look at him because Dylan had his eyes, and they get into a yelling match about who still suffers more. As Theo states, "I never understood how you got

over it so quickly,” and Julian replies “No one could get over it. I live with it, I think about him every day. You don’t have a monopoly on suffering, you know,” it is clear that Dylan’s death haunts the film as a symbol of the grief and tragedy that has been infecting the world since women stopped being able to reproduce.

It is also clear that this is the reason Julian turns to Theo for help when she finds out about Kee’s pregnancy. Although Julian comes to Theo under the guise of helping to secure Kee some travel papers, as DasGupta points out, we can read her desire to reconnect with Theo as a desire to reconstitute her lost family and as a symptom of her continuing grief over her lost role as mother. Considering Julian’s power and influence as the leader of a huge terrorist organization compared to Theo’s position as a broke, lowly government worker, the only reason Julian would go to Theo is to recreate the familial scene that they lost when Dylan died. Julian therefore takes Kee under her wings, “like an intended mother awaiting her surrogate’s delivery date” (Das Gupta n.p.), and turns to Theo. Their surrogate family even has a moment of fulfilment when Theo, Julian and Kee (together with her midwife, Miriam, and Luke) all travel together in a car towards the coast; Julian and Theo flirt heavily, tossing a ping pong ball intimately back and forth between their mouths and making jokes about whether or not Theo still “likes it in the afternoon,” while Kee childishly shifts between shock, disgust, and amusement at their sexual display. Just as this moment is achieved, however, Julian is murdered and Theo must take on the responsibility of sole “parent” to Kee and her unborn child after Julian’s death. Viewers, aligned with Theo’s point of view, also participate in this parenting, watching as Theo sacrifices his own life in order for Kee’s child to survive, and as he dies in the last moments of the film after Kee tells him that she has decided to name her baby

Dylan. In this naming the idea of “the white, happy, heterosexual family unit is saved, as the (live) Black female child is symbolically transformed into the (dead) White male one” (DasGupta n.p.); the film comes full circle, bringing Dylan, and therefore symbolic meaning, back to “life.”

The film’s ending fulfils Edelman’s definition of reproductive futurism as a push towards “generational succession, temporality and narrative sequence, not toward the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness, of turning back time to assure repetition” (60). In metaphorically recreating the lost heterosexual family, the film creates this double movement, ensuring the generational succession that Edelman figures as the very structure of symbolic meaning. That is why it is possible for the film to make sense even though it ends before we see if Kee actually makes it to The Human Group. As Cuarón himself states, it does not matter what happens next, or that Theo dies before “seeing the Promised Land,” because “he doesn’t need to see the Promised Land. He recovered what he was looking for which was his sense of hope. And as long as you have that sense of hope, then you do not need confirmation of things” (Roberts n.p.). Through the storyline’s reproductive futurism, Theo and viewers are able to access a nostalgia for the future that creates its own fulfilment, as futurity, hope, and the sanctity of heterosexual reproduction are reinstated.

Bio-Reproductive Politics

It is precisely because *Children of Men* does what Cuarón and Žižek suggests it does—it uses the birth of a baby to symbolize the renewal of political and cultural hope in an infertile world—that the complicated relationship between reproductive politics and the

other politics in the film needs further analysis. What follows in this final section is an attempt to flesh out how the reproductive politics already discussed in this chapter connect to the film's other political concerns, especially its focus on the status of the refugee, globalization and the workings (or failings) of democracy. If Žižek is right that *Children of Men* is essentially about biopolitics—the regulation and generation of life—then the film offers an obvious opportunity to explore how the regulation and generation of *future* life connects to these politics.

In further online commentary on the film titled “The Clash of Civilizations and the End of History,” Žižek elaborates on how he sees *Children of Men* engaging in biopolitics by stating that the film strikes at the very heart of what ails us as a world today—the tyranny of modern-day democracy. To describe how the film engages with this tyranny, especially in relation to the current “war on terror,” Žižek refers to the prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and to what Giorgio Agamben refers to as those who are *homo sacer*—those whom the state can kill at will because their lives hold no legal value. This is an apt analogy to what Cuarón is showing us considering the film's obvious visual allusions to both Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prison. Literally, the film shows a world where the streets are a prison and where the logic of Guantanamo dictates all life, so that anyone can be killed by the state at any time with impunity. Žižek's reference to *homo sacer* is indicative of just how pervasive Agamben's theory has become in recent years. Agamben's analysis of *homo sacer* and “the state of exception” can help explain exactly what Žižek claims Cuarón is able to show us: how the logic of capitalist democracy lends itself so easily to fascism. What I would like to suggest is that Agamben's theory might also shed light on why the figure of the refugee

and the figure of the fetus/child might appear together in a film that is so concerned with the topic of democracy. Perhaps it is no coincidence that these two liminal figures make an appearance in a film about human rights, as they not only aptly reflect the political goals laid out in the film but also reveal the limits of the biopolitical system itself.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* Agamben introduces the figure of *homo sacer* in connection to Carl Schmitt's work on sovereignty and the state of exception. Drawing also from Aristotle, Michel Foucault, and Walter Benjamin's ideas about law, state politics, and democracy, Agamben connects these theorists to an obscure figure from Roman law named "*homo sacer*," or sacred man. In Roman times, *homo sacer* was a legal designation for one who was excluded by and from juridical law. Cast out of the city by a sovereign ban—through abandonment—*homo sacer* could be killed, but not sacrificed, in that taking his life was considered neither homicide nor divinity. As Agamben states, *homo sacer* was outside of mediating law and as such was the original figure of "bare life" (4). Banned from the city and exposed to death, *homo sacer* was excluded from *bios*, which is political or community life, and instead embodied the concept of *zoë*, which is mere existence or "the simple fact of living" (1). Applying this framework to modern biopolitics, Agamben argues that the politicization of *zoë*—the entry of *homo sacer* or bare life into the political realm itself—is what characterizes modern politics. As he states, "democracy presents itself from the beginning as a vindication and liberation of *zoë* [...] [I]t is constantly trying to transform its own bare life into a way of life and to find, so to speak the *bios* of *zoë*" (9).

For Agamben, bare life—life exposed to the force of death—is what characterizes the modern sovereign state in that it is the very creation of the state of exception (the

sovereign ban that allows *homo sacer* to exist in the first instance) that brings sovereignty into being. This process of suspending the law in the state of exception is the basis of sovereign power, as through exclusion “the sovereign decides not the licit and illicit but the originary inclusion of the living in the sphere of law” (26). In this way, “bare life remains included in politics in the form of the exception, that is, as something which is included only through exclusion” (11). Citing the concentration camp as the most obvious model of the state of exception, and the refugee as the most current instance of *homo sacer*, Agamben argues that instead of functioning as an archaic legal category, *homo sacer* now functions as our current way of political life. We are all now “virtually *homines sacri*” (115). We are all “at least potentially if not actually abandoned by the law and exposed to violence as a constitutive condition of political existence” (Mills 47). The very conditions which originally created the sovereign’s ability to decide who did and did not count as living—as human—are now included in the mechanisms and calculations of state power so that at any point any of us could be *homo sacer*.

It is in this analysis of how we are all virtually sacred men that Agamben’s text offers a framework for approaching the bio-reproductive politics of *Children of Men*. Agamben argues that the modern sovereign system cannot successfully regulate zoë in the name of bios because it cannot guarantee that birth immediately leads to citizenship; sovereign power is only created through an act of exclusion and the refugee is the example *par excellence* of the system’s limit because she or he reveals this lack. Put in other words, this means that as people ascribe more and more of their lives to state power through acts such as declarations of rights, what really takes place is a continued regulation of bare life and a further exclusion of *homo sacer* to uphold the system. As

Žižek explains, this reveals that “our most elementary ‘zero’ position is that of an object of biopolitics [...] [P]olitical and citizenship rights are given to us as a secondary gesture, in accordance with biopolitical strategic considerations” (*Welcome* 95). An important scene where The Fishes have a discussion about the fate of Kee’s unborn child highlights this in *Children of Men*. One of the Fishes makes the argument that the Fishes should claim Kee’s baby as their own as the baby is “the flag that could unite us all.” When Theo argues that they should instead make Kee’s pregnancy public, another Fish scoffs at him, saying sarcastically “Oh right, and they [the government] will say ‘we were wrong, foogies [refugees] are human too.’” This comment is followed by another Fish saying that the government will take the baby away and “parade a posh black English lady as the mother.” After Theo protests one more time, Luke finally states matter-of-factly, “we all know this government would never acknowledge the first human birth in eighteen years was from a foogie.” Luke is correct, as he knows that the government cannot afford to have the first pregnant woman in eighteen years be a refugee; the government cannot claim Kee is one of their own since it is through the very process of excluding Kee that England exists. Therefore, the child cannot be both Kee’s and “England’s” without exposing the very “secondary gesture” Žižek describes and undoing the fiction “that *birth* immediately becomes *nation* such that there can be no interval of separation [scarto] between the two terms” (Agamben 128). As Agamben explains, the refugee represents a crisis in the sovereign system by “radically calling into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state, from the birth-nation link to the man-citizen link” (134). This is why Luke wants to take the child from Kee and claim it as his own, since he understands the danger the child poses to the nation-state.

This is also why the only place where Kee's pregnancy and child are not treated as a threat is in the refugee camp in Blackpool, named Bexhill, itself already excluded from the state. As Žižek observes, Bexhill is the only place Kee and Theo encounter a community who do not want the child for their own gain. He states: "the only place in *Children of Men* where a strange sense of freedom prevails, a kind of liberated territory without this all-pervasive suffocating oppression, is Blackpool [...] [N]o wonder the newborn makes its appearance there" ("The Clash" n.p.). In Blackpool, Kee gives birth to a baby girl with Theo's help and finds allies who are willing to put her child before their own interests in order for her to make it to The Human Project's boat, which Julian has arranged to pick Kee up off the coastline. Clearly, the abrupt change in compassion that Kee and Theo encounter in Blackpool further suggests that it is the refugee, *homo sacer*, who is truly capable of solidarity and sacrifice. This sense of sacrifice extends beyond the refugees themselves, as even the soldiers in the camp encounter a brief flash of humanity during the film's climax when all warfare stops as Kee, Theo, and her child pass by them.¹¹ As the soldiers drop to their knees and pray in awe, the messianic aspect of the film is revealed and Cuarón shows us what Agamben postulates: that it is only the refugee who can "clear the way for a long-overdue renewal of categories in the service of a politics in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted, either in the state order or in the figure of human rights" (Agamben 134). As a newborn, however, this messiah is not just any refugee, and as a mother neither is Kee.

As discussed in the previous section, the fact that the film's messiah is a newborn means it engages in reproductive futurism; the film's storyline indicates how important

¹¹ If any doubt remained that this scene solidifies the allusion to the nativity story, we have only to note that Kee, Theo and child walk by in a triad that obviously resembles Mary, Joseph and Jesus, complete with Theo in sandals, the child wrapped in a rough blanket and cathedral music in the background.

the image of the Child is to the creation of symbolic and narrative meaning. Edelman's theory complicates Agamben's celebration of the refugee as having the potential to sever personhood from the nation state by highlighting the contradictory ways symbolic meaning is upheld in relation to state and judicial power. What I would like to examine here, however, is how Kee's status as a woman also complicates this celebration by highlighting the gendered dimensions of legal abandonment and bare life. Agamben quite obviously sidesteps gender (as well as race, class, and sexuality, for that matter) in his analysis of bare life, and feminists have noted this critical absence, arguing that we are not all *homo sacer*, nor subject to bare life, in the same ways.¹² In her analysis of Agamben, for instance, Geraldine Pratt notes that "there are real limitations to generalizing across the experiences of men and women, and across racialized and gendered forms of abandonment," and that "gender hierarchies support and relay the split between biological and political life, which is both cause and effect of abandonment" (1057). This is particularly true for pregnant women, who are commonly, and sometimes legally, required to efface their subjectivity in favour of the perceived needs of their fetuses. In "The Inversion of Exceptionality: Foucault, Agamben and 'Reproductive Rights,'" Penelope Deutscher supports this analysis by looking at what she calls the "spectral and inverted relationship" Agamben's work has to the states of exception associated with the history of abortion law in the Western world (59). As Deutscher argues, Agamben's omission of the reproductive body from his theory is particularly odd since the pregnant body represents a "zone of contested and intensified political stakes around the threshold between what some would consider 'prelife' and what is to be

¹² See Catherine Mills, for instance.

identified as nascent human life, meaningful human life, and/or rights-bearing life” (Deutscher 58). She speculates that Agamben leaves women’s bodies out of his theoretical framework because “once the interconnections between biopower and women’s reproductivity are considered,” one must engage “with the history of abortion regulation” (58). As Deutscher surmises, if Agamben were to consider fetal life and pose questions on that “which ‘has not already been recognized’ rather than that which is ‘no longer’ recognized as a bearer of rights” the stakes would be altered (59).

Deutscher alters those stakes herself by using abortion law as an example of how forms of sovereignty relate specifically to women. She notes that most often abortion is only available to women through legal states of exception, such as processes that continue to render it illegal except in some circumstances (such as rape or to protect a woman’s health), and through decriminalization rather than legalization, such as in Canada. As she argues, even in cases like *Roe v. Wade*, where it appears that women have secured legal access to abortion, “the law deems this access as either tenuous or an exception, however broad, and regulates the reinscribed possibility that women might not have that access” (64). Deutscher compares this process to other acts of exception, such as the USA Patriot Act (October 26, 2001), which grants “a blanket exception to liberties otherwise covered under the First, Fourth, Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, which may be suspended in the ‘exceptional’ circumstance of suspicion of terrorist activity” (61). Like the USA Patriot Act, abortion statutes often also put aside previous laws, suspending them to various degrees. As she explains, these two cases

may be considered exercises, forms, and constructions of sovereignty [...] whether the exception seems to protect while concurrently stressing the

vulnerability of women's reproductive autonomy, or whether it seems to defend a state while weakening civil liberties, bodies are being intensified, weakened and invested with their possible exposure to violence. (62)

The film reveals these bodily intensifications by overlapping the reproductive body with the refugee's body. Through Kee's storyline we see that she is exposed to both types of violence simultaneously; although Kee may be abandoned by the state through laws like the USA Patriot Act, she is then further marginalized through her vulnerability to other forms of sovereignty focused on reproduction and fetal citizenship. That is, the film's focus on her future child as the ultimate citizen complicates her status as a refugee by appealing to a type of fetal citizenship that threatens to erase her even further into bare life.

Deutscher argues that this type of erasure is common in abortion rhetoric generally and is due to how the pregnant woman is often figured legally as "a potentially murderous competing sovereign whose self-interest wholly thwarts the intervening motivations of the state concerned with the [fetus]" (66). The fetus, on the other hand, is figured not as "*zoë*, *bios*, bare life, nor *homo sacer*" but "rhetorically and varyingly depicted as all of these" (66). She asks: what does this rhetorical production of fetal life as pseudo-*homo sacer* do to the woman's body? She answers that it is in fact the woman, then, who becomes reduced to actual-*homo sacer*, potentially reducible to naked life through her reducibility to reproductive life: "As she is figured as that which exposes another life, she is herself gripped, exposed, and reduced to barer life" (67). While the film does not figure Kee exactly as the dangerous sovereign Deutscher describes, it does point out the complicated biopolitical relationships she occupies. If she is originally

subject to bare life through her status as a refugee, she is then resubjected to another form of bare life through her reproductive body, as it is only through her ability to carry the “super-person” or “unborn citizen” that Berlant speaks of, and facilitate the reproductive futurism that Edelman argues is fundamental to all narrative, that she is able to access any type of political agency in the film. As DasGupta points out, even then, this political life is still facilitated through characters like Julian and Theo, who represent full inclusion in the nation state even when they are fighting against its rules. The film therefore offers a striking example of how the fetus and the refugee currently relate to conversations about both reproductive politics and human or citizenship rights, and offers insight into a political climate focused on the regulation of who or what is considered “alive” by simultaneously deeming others politically dead.

Conclusion

Agamben argues that the conditions that originally created the sovereign’s ability to decide who did and did not count as living are now included in the mechanisms and calculations of state power. This means that some people’s lives can easily cease to be eligible for basic, if not human, rights while others can become increasingly regulated under the guise of human rights. Within this divide, bare life “comes to be displaced from strictly political motivations and areas to a more ambiguous terrain in which the physician and the sovereign seem to exchange roles” (Agamben 143). It is in this exchange that we find the current status of the fetus, as now that ultrasound technologies are used to redefine life before the moment of birth and the fetus has become “visible” to an unprecedented degree, the fetal cyborg now represents another limit-concept of bare

life—one that seems to need constant regulation and legal redefinition. As Cuarón’s film reveals, fetal citizenship occupies a special position biopolitically, one that is akin to how the refugee functions, just on the other end of the political spectrum. For instance, the constant push by the medical establishment to improve ultrasound technologies and fetal monitoring techniques reveals just how invested sovereign powers are in the scientific redefinitions of who or what is and is not considered “living.” These investments reveal that much of “the struggle over the worth of different types of human lives takes place through medicalized, gendered and racialized discourses about health, vigor, and the civility of the body” (Pratt 1054). There really is no recognized “life” prior to the state’s decision upon categories that render life into existence. The film shows us this by overlapping fetal citizenship with the refugee in a way that highlights how it is often on the level of reproductive policy that biopolitics takes on its gendered and racialized dimensions, especially in the management of who or what is called a fetus, a baby, a person, a mother, or a family.

Conclusion

Bio-Reproductive Futures

Deutscher's complication of Agamben's theories of bare life through her analysis of abortion as a state of exception—and my own application of Deutscher to complicate the popular political readings of Cuarón's film—returns me to my point of departure for this dissertation, which proposed that the critical conversations surrounding two other Hollywood films, *Juno* and *Knocked Up*, could be seen as a microcosm of the questions and queries structuring this project as a whole. I originally asked why the terms of the 1980s abortion debate were used to frame these films' storylines in the media, and what this said about the evolution of the representation of reproductive technologies and politics in North America since *Roe v. Wade*. My analysis of the other fictional texts in this project proposes some answers to these questions; the preceding chapters not only point to the ways in which the language of reproductive “choice,” “freedom,” and “privacy” has become repetitive in the media since the 1980s, and how accepting fetal personhood has become commonplace in that time, but also to how other fictional representations of reproductive technologies engage with the politics that *Juno* and *Knocked Up* portray, sometimes embracing those politics and at other times subverting them.

For instance, Atwood's and Acker's novels satirize the politics of “freedom” and “choice” that *Juno* and *Knocked Up* play off in their storylines of women who have all the material, psychological, and emotional resources of “choice” at their disposal, and still decide to go through with an unwanted pregnancy, a decision that ends up yielding happy results; Huston's and Morrison's novels complicate the reproductive ethics that the

films take for granted in this happy-go-lucky acceptance of their heroines' situations, by refusing to portray any reproductive choices as easy; and Jackson's and Lai's cyborgian texts deconstruct the fetal personhood the films assume as fact, by refusing to make distinctions between natural/technological, text/body, and fetus/woman. Cuarón's film, on the other hand, while interrogating the politics of migration and globalization, makes commonplace several tenets of pro-life politics in a similar manner as *Juno* and *Knocked Up*, by embracing reproductive futurism and fetal citizenship. This similarity speaks to the current state of reproductive politics in popular culture, and furthers my claim that the main frameworks used to make sense of reproductive debates since *Roe v. Wade* have become entrenched and cyclical. It also speaks to the question of genre, as the pressures put on Hollywood films to follow certain narratives, stories, or scripts is different from those put on a novel, or on other technologies, such as hypertext, which in turn reinforces this project's claim that much can be gained from putting a variety of different types of fictional texts in dialogue with each other.

In ending the project with Cuarón's film, it may appear that I have moved away from a North American context to a global one and from a literary focus to a filmic one to answer my initial queries. As I hope the project demonstrates, however, these national and formal distinctions, while offering useful vantage points, are fluid; North American reproductive politics are always already informed by global biopolitics (and vice versa), and there are no easy correlations between certain fictional forms and their potential to engage with or shape what is knowable. In fact, it is through reading the texts together that the project reveals the many ways fictional representations can mirror the language, images, and fantasies that support and surround reproductive technologies and politics. In

this reading, we also see the important role representation and narrative play in how reproductive politics are popularly presented. What this suggests is that even though reproductive debates have become cyclical, often continuing to rely on the same arguments that have structured conversations about abortion for over thirty years, fictional texts can simultaneously address and challenge these cycles. As Acker's and Atwood's texts show us, for instance, satire and other forms of language play can be powerful tools for confronting expectations about all sorts of taboo subjects, including abortion. As Huston's and Morrison's texts show us, so can the exploration of what is monstrous and abject about the body and about representation, as the combination of multiple viewpoints, unfinished storylines, and grotesque fairytales can create ways of seeing reproductive politics outside of the dichotomies through which they are usually structured. These techniques, like Lai's and Jackson's uses of speculative storylines and hypertext technology, or Cuarón's use of an apocalyptic setting, allow for new ways of representing and understanding reproductive technologies, in that they help imagine the impossible as possible, the unrealistic as reality. Whether this leads to revolutionary ways of reimagining the body, reproduction, technology, and humanity, reifies old assumptions and positions, or achieves something in between, it shows us that fiction is able tap into the ideologies structuring the world in which it is produced, and this demonstrates how important narrative is to reproductive politics.

If fictional representations of reproductive technologies not only help make sense of reproductive politics, but actively shape them, then it is vital that we continue to examine their influence on how these politics are generally understood. As W.J.T. Mitchell speculates in "The Work of Art in the Age of Biocybernetic Reproduction," in

our postmodern age, the ongoing conjoining of new processes of reproduction, both organic and artificial, with new processes of representation, made possible through high-speed computing, will continue to frame our daily existence. The relationship between artistic production, such as fiction, and these new forms of being is vital, as Roof, Haraway, and Agamben, among others, have made clear. As Mitchell explains, artists, technicians, and scientists have always been united in the imitation of life and the production of images and mechanisms (384). At this particular moment in history, which he describes as a meeting “between the utopian fantasies of biocybernetics and the dystopian realities of biopolitics, between the rhetoric of the post-human and the real urgency of universal human rights” (384), it is more important than ever to examine how things like dystopic and utopic images, biopolitical definitions, and representations of human rights, circulate around reproductive politics.

The chapters here have made clear that the fight over women’s fertility is at the center of discussions about humanity, and about who does and does not get access to political life; reproductive technologies, such as abortion, cloning, and invitro fertilization, are also social technologies, and they therefore constantly shift the parameters of who or what is considered worthy of social protection and human rights. This is shown in all of the texts studied, from Atwood’s portrayal of “unwomen” and “unbabies,” to Lai’s use of the durian fruit and the Sonia Series disposal clones. It is especially shown in Cuarón’s film, where the conditions of fetal citizenship meet the urgent call for human rights Mitchell argues is shaping our present moment. As this final chapter makes clear, the fetus’ status “as an unborn citizen has somehow become a marker of democracy” (Berlant 147). The history of how this marker came to be is also

the history of this project, and the reproductive politics the other three chapters detail are essential for understanding how fetal citizenship collides with other forms of citizenship in our contemporary moment, of which I take *Children of Men* to be an exemplary cultural text. As Deutscher speculates, as long as biopolitical considerations govern citizenship considerations, women's bodies will continue to be a battleground for the state's interest in definitions of who or what is considered a person and a citizen. Fetal personhood will continue to have a complicated relationship with other facets of human rights, especially in connection to global trends that are not only seeing the movement of people across state borders, but unprecedented surveillance of these same people. Fictional representations of reproductive politics offer an opportunity to think through our current biopolitical system, complicating the borders of the body and the nation, and the logics of a political system that focuses on the regulation of who or what is considered "alive" by simultaneously deeming others politically dead.

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