From the Feminine to the Maternal: Elusive Maternal Subjectivities and the Rejection of Motherhood in Contemporary American Fiction

Hanan A. Alazaz

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To my family. Thank you for everything.

Declaration

This thesis has not been submitted in support of an application for another degree at this or any other university. It is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration. Many of the ideas in this thesis were the product of discussion with my supervisors Professor Hilary Hinds and Dr Brian Baker.

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Hanan A. Alazaz MA (Hons), Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University, KSA

Lancaster University, UK

Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of representations that revise perceptions of motherhood and gender through the concept of rejection of traditional maternal ideals in American novels written between the 1970s and early 21st century. Themes of voluntary childlessness, postpartum depression, child abuse and infanticide are explored through representations that narrate alternative and nuanced perceptions of motherhood and gender. Shifts in the perspective of representative maternal characters revise perceptions of motherhood and disrupt the discourse structuring the maternal ideal. Theorized by Lisa Baraitser in *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (2008), the maternal ideal is deconstructed through the concept of interruption to the mother's perception of herself as a maternal subject. Concepts like maternal ambivalence, revealed through the portrayal of interrupted transformation into the maternal subject, revise the discourse about the potential mother in every female which is questioned in texts like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Adrianne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976).

Interrupted transformation both as a *blocked* transformation into the maternal subject or a *reversed* transformation into the maternal subject, produces forms of writing subjectivity outside the boundaries of the maternal ideal. Interruption in that sense gives way to a flow of an alternative discourse about motherhood, reproduction and gender. The interrupted transformation into the maternal subject reflects issues of stigmatized and marginalized forms of motherhood revealed in various genres and how it shapes the maternal experience in the United States. Interruption is explored as a form of representing perceptions of monstrous motherhood, and its impact on the rejection of maternal ideals to investigate the impact of a racialized motherhood in shaping of African-American culture.

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Contents

Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of fictional representations of motherhood in contemporary American novels. The publication of the texts examined in this thesis spans the 1960s to the early twenty-first century. It focuses on narratives that delineate, interrogate, reform and reject the maternal ideal of the caring mother. Instead, these narratives address abortion, postpartum depression, abuse, child abandonment and infanticide. An examination of these representations shifts the focus to alternative modes of mothering to explore aspects of culture and politics in the United States that go beyond motherhood and gender ideals.

The ideal of the caring, nurturing mother who maintains a strong relation with her child has long been mobilised as a potent image in American culture that is specifically targeted towards middle-class women. A stock of images associated with the maternal role shapes it into an unattainable and unrealistic ideal to which women and mothers should aspire. Disruption of that ideal feeds and complicates the debate about motherhood. This debate about maternal ideals is articulated in a range of cultural forms and social phenomena, all of them invested in the reach and remit of the material role and its performance. It can be seen in debates about the appropriateness (or otherwise) of nursing a child in public spaces such as restaurants.[1]

[1] The controversy started when a mother posted a picture on Facebook of her feeding her daughter on the toilet under the caption 'This is motherhood and it ain't always pretty'. Responses to her post were divided between those supporting her and recalling similar incidents that happened to them or those who berated her for being unhygienic and promoting a bad example of mothering. See Michelle Stein, 'Photo of Mom Breastfeeding on a Toilet Causes a Commotion', *What to Expect*, April 29, 2015 [Accessed 10, September 2018], < https://www.whattoexpect.com/wom/family-life/0429/photo-of-mom-breastfeeding-on-a-toilet-causes-a-commotion.aspx >. The debate about the restaurant that sent the breastfeeding mother to the toilet took place in Georgia in 2012. Although this is not an isolated incident the report can

The advent of the second-wave feminist movement in the 1970s generated similar debates relating to the maternal ideal. The disruptions to family life caused by World War II and presence of women in the labour force outside the realm of the home affected all aspects of family life in post-war America that are closely linked to motherhood.[2] The idea of a deterministic quality to women's biological potential to be mothers was resisted through the use of birth control and the earlier work of activists like Margaret Sanger (1878-1966). Birth control separated women from their biological potential to be mothers and led to the revision of traditional gender roles. This impacted the traditional structure of the division of labour in the family by promoting women as bread winners and not only mothers who work inside the home.

The legalization of abortion is a socio-political shift that led to revising gender-assigned roles in the United States. A panel of doctors was required to decide whether a woman could have an abortion or not in the 1960s.[3] The legalization of abortion took place in the 1970s through the Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade* (1973). This decision had a significant impact, separating women from their biological potential by providing them with the ability to choose whether to be mothers or not. As well as having access to safe abortions, the possibility of choice allowed women to regulate their own bodies according to their individual needs. As well as providing women with the ability to control the number of their children, abortion contributed to their entry into the work force without the economic consequences relating to childcare. Women's roles as wives and mothers were disrupted through the availability of abortion opening up other careers than motherhood.

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be seen in The Huffington Post https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/18/dawn-holland-breastfeeding_n_1893681.html.

[2] This overview of the historical shifts that led to revising traditional perspectives on femininity and motherhood is brief and is used to indicate key debates about maternal ideals in post-war America. Key studies used to produce this historical background are Judith A. Baer's *Historical and Multicultural Encyclopaedia of Women's' Reproductive Rights in the United States* and Elaine Tyler May's *America and the Pill*.

[3] Elaine Tyler May, *America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril and Liberation* (New York: Perseus Books, 2010), p. 77.

The separation between sex and reproduction offered through birth control contributed to modifying social perceptions on gender in the United States. It contributed to the acceptance of premarital sex as a norm by removing the pressure of stigmatised pregnancy out of wedlock. Moreover, contraception and abortion being used by married couples suggests that voluntary childlessness was a stepping stone towards redefined gender perceptions in the USA. Stereotypes of the wife who longs for motherhood were resisted through women's choices to regulate their fertility. Perceptions of gender in the United States were no longer the same with the advent of birth control and abortion. They changed all aspects of how women were perceived and perceived themselves, by separating them from their potential to be mothers.

In spite of the impact of birth control and the legalization of abortion in the United States, women were ideologically still tied to their biology by laws that discriminated against women based on their reproductive potential, or what is otherwise termed as 'foetal protection' laws in the 1970s.[4] These laws prevented women of childbearing age from taking paid jobs that required dealing with hazardous materials because they may have caused birth defects in the case of pregnancy. For instance, one corporation's regulations banned employing women whose ages ranged from five to 63, which is far beyond childbearing years.[5] This law spared women from being exposed to a harmful work environment that may have endangered them, especially when some women may have opted for these jobs due to socioeconomic circumstances. However, this regulation may have been viewed by other women to be a form of gender discrimination limiting their job opportunities. Women's lives and bodies were heavily regulated because of their potential role as mothers even if they rejected that role or

[4] Judith A. Baer, *Historical and Multicultural Encyclopaedia of Women's Reproductive Rights in the United States*, (Westport, Conn, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002)< http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzg2NjM2X19BTg2?sid=66b37ae7-3a33-4acf-ba29-2fc7f71a7fc4@sessionmgr4005&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>,[Accessed 12 Jan.2016]. p. XXV.

[5] Ibid.

wanted to expand on their potential through having a career outside the socially imposed restrictions on their gender.

Women's civil rights movements in the 1970s exposed the limitations of patriarchal perceptions of gender, and the political impact of the feminist movement and the political and economic reverberations disrupted perceptions of traditional modes of mothering in the United States and resulted in the rejection of many maternal and gender ideals within the movement. This rejection of patriarchal ideals that produced a diversity of feminist theorizations and ideologies can be seen at work in the feminist writings of authors such as Betty Friedan and Adrienne Rich.

Early Feminist Interventions

Women's rights to reform or resist taking a maternal role have been the centre of debate since the publishing of key second-wave feminist books such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976). These influential texts rewrote how femininity and motherhood were perceived. They wrote about women who were or might become mothers, but also wrote about women who rejected the role. *The Feminine Mystique* proved to be pivotal in changing perceptions of the social context of post-war years as well as revolutionizing women's perception of themselves. Friedan's book criticizes patriarchal discourses of femininity, a phenomenon she names 'the feminine mystique'.[6] This belief system is based on the image of the modern white American housewife as a 'heroine'.[7] Friedan describes how this concept is reinforced and reproduced by representations of women in the media or by 'experts in marriage and the family, child psychology, sexual adjustment, and by the

[6] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Book, 2010), p. 45.
[7] Friedan, p. 21.

popularizers of sociology and psychoanalysis'.[8] The discourse in which the maternal role is structured becomes problematic when it is idealised through associating it with heroism. The image of the mother as a heroine transcends any other role that a woman chooses to take. The idealization of the mother as a heroine also carries with it its own set of expectations that include selflessness and surrender of the self towards the survival of the other, rather like a war hero.

Friedan rejects the discourse of a feminine ideal as fictional when she writes that 'when a mystique is strong, it makes its own fiction of fact'.[9] The fictional maternal ideal that entails every woman's potential to be a mother is founded in women's reproductive potential. The fictional ideal producing her role in child-rearing is a result of her role in child-bearing. As a result, 'the line between mystique and reality dissolves; real women embody the split in the image' which is the split between fact (not every woman can/wants to be a mother) and patriarchal fiction.[10] This, according to Freidan, is the reason why American women who struggle to embrace the image of the domestic goddess of the *feminine mystique* feel the existence of a problem which 'has no name', because it does not exist in patriarchal discourse.[11]

Friedan's book proposes a perspective on the social articulation of femininity that was revolutionary for the Civil Rights era. Friedan's writing distanced itself from the psychological essentialism that set the feminine mystique as an unavoidable way of life for women. She stresses the importance of a self that must be recognized as human rather than only feminine. In a chapter entitled 'The Forfeited Self', for example, she reviews the importance of fulfilling a hierarchy of needs for all humans regardless of

[8] Friedan, p. 21.
[9] Friedan, p. 43.
[10] Friedan, p. 41.
[11] Friedan, p. 5.

gender, one of which is 'self- realization' that is not recognized within the feminine mystique.[12] Friedan writes:

> the desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for mastery and competence, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom' is not really recognized for women...despite the glorification of 'Occupation: housewife', if that occupation does not demand, or permit, realization of women's full abilities, it cannot provide adequate self-esteem.[13]

Friedan suggests a space outside the realm of the patriarchal conceptualization of the feminine and maternal to realize what she calls a 'complete' self.[14] Reviewing concepts that are limited to describing masculine subjects in patriarchal discourse, she points out where patriarchal discourse fails women. Limiting women to a male-centred ideal of a housewife excludes her from her full potential as a human subject. Friedan's conceptualization of women's full potential places them outside patriarchal conceptualizations of femininity and away from their fictional ideals.

Like Friedan, Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) rejects discursive constructs of patriarchal feminine ideals that include the rejection of the self in favour of full dedication to the other (the Child). Rich refers to motherhood as a patriarchal social institution arguing that 'institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal "instinct" rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self'.[15] The notion of surrendering the self to the child in the relationship between mother and child as pointed out here by Rich gets its authority from what she called the 'sacred calling'.[16] Like Friedan's conceptualization of the mother as a 'heroine', Rich points out how

[12]Friedan, pp. 253-4.
[13]Friedan, p. 254.
[14]Friedan, p. 309.
[15]Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), p. 42.
[16]Rich, p. 43.

patriarchal discourse structures the maternal image through idealization and veneration.[17] Although Rich, unlike Friedan, highlights the religious aspect inspiring the maternal image with the word 'sacred', they both locate the image as a social ideal that women should aspire to reach. Rich proposes the home as the location of this 'sacred calling' of motherhood.[18] According to Rich the 'home…had never before existed. It was a creation of the Industrial Revolution, an ideal invested with the power of something God-given, and its power *as an idea* remains unexpunged today'.[19] The religious aspect lending authority to the home as the woman's place contributes to the idealization of mothering. Although Rich suggests that it has its roots in the Industrial Revolution and the advent of capitalism, this idealization of mothering through presenting it as a sacred role still endured in the twentieth century and beyond.

Rich points out of the dangers of idealizing motherhood. She writes:

> The image of the mother in the home, however unrealistic, has haunted and reproached the lives of wage-earning mothers. But it has also become, and for men as well as women, a dangerous archetype: the Mother, source of angelic love and forgiveness in a world increasingly ruthless and impersonal … the symbol and residue of moral values and tenderness in a world of war, brutal competition, and contempt for human weakness.[20]

Rich points out the impact of the ideal on American society. The maternal ideal, in Rich's formulation, impacts working mothers who do not fit the ideal by performing the maternal role outside the idealized location, the home. Rich describes the idealization of the mother as dangerous for both men and women because it is unrealistic. The archetype of the mother is not based on human behaviour; it is based on the desire for an ideal world in patriarchal standards. Much like Friedan's 'heroine', the ideal mother

[17]Friedan, p. 21.
[18] Rich, p. 43.
[19] Rich, p. 49.[Author's italics]
[20] Rich, p. 52.

in Rich's writing saves the world from all that is evil. She heals what is broken and shields her child from the reality of being human.

Both Friedan's and Rich's writings are instances of resistance to the cultural ideal of motherhood. Through Friedan's 'heroine' and Rich's 'sacred calling' the maternal ideal emerges as unrealistic the discourse that structures the ideal is exposed. For both authors, the ideal substitutes for desires that extend beyond the boundaries of motherhood. According to the ideal, motherhood should save and heal. By locating the ideal outside the maternal role when it is mythologized as necessary to save the world from wars and injustice, Rich highlights where the ideal crumbles because it is no longer about motherhood.

One of the most important revisions of dominant ideologies attributed to Rich and Friedan is how they separated women from their socially assigned roles. This highlighted women's identification with their desires rather than their roles. Both authors emphasize the discursive element in structuring perceptions of motherhood and the self and how being a mother does not include surrendering the self for the child. This does not mean that Friedan and Rich reject motherhood. They reject the discourse that suggests that motherhood is the surrender of the self. According to both authors the self and its desires remain active in spite of the relationship with the child. Rich in particular attributes instances of the rejection of motherhood, like infanticide, to the structure of patriarchal motherhood or institutionalized motherhood that demands following unrealistic maternal ideals.[21] Friedan and Rich pose issues about mothering in post-war America that are still urgent in the representative texts analysed in this thesis which are published in the 1990s and early twenty-first century. This suggests that they diagnosed the various complexities of performing the maternal role in the United States and the lack of resolution to the problems they identify.

[21] Rich, pp. 265-80.

Friedan's and Rich's writings on women's struggles suffered from limitations when it came to taking into account disenfranchised classes of women like poor women and women of colour. Both authors pay attention to this problem in their later writings. But they approach this shortcoming in different ways. For instance, Friedan in *The Second Stage* (1981) does not directly write about women of colour or economically challenged women. She suggests that the first stage of the feminist revolution inspired by *The Feminine Mystique* that paved the way for women to believe in their ability to develop an identity outside of being a housewife and mother and to leave the house and join the workforce must be followed by the 'second stage'.[22] This stage according to her started 'when we feminists broke out of our own rhetoric and dealt with women's most basic concerns within the larger family context, we were able to bridge that polarization and win overwhelming majority support for second-stage solutions'.[23] What Friedan refers to as the most basic concern within the family context is the issue of childcare. The shift from the first stage, of the choice to join the workforce, must be followed by second stage solutions such as affordable childcare that enables women to leave the home. She cites research that indicates that difficulty in securing adequate childcare is one of the major issues that is interfering with women's equality with men because:

> part of the problem comes from the lack of real economic measures or political attention to the previously private women's work, in home and family…But the way all this is still being treated, by society and women themselves, as *women's problem*, is in itself the main problem now, the main obstacle to the restructuring of work and home that is required.
>
> The new imbalance is becoming visible, at least. Equal job opportunities for women "will turn out to be a recipe for overwork" unless "the sharing of unpaid household labor between men and women becomes a reality" said a research report issued by The World Watch

[22] Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981:1998), p. 91.
[23] Ibid

> Institute in 1980. Although nearly half of the world's adult women are in the labor force out of choice or necessity, "they have retained an unwilling monopoly on unpaid labor at home".[24]

The focus on equality within the home when it comes to labour within the private realm of the family and childcare is what constitutes the struggle for the second stage of women's equality for Friedan. Although she has been critiqued for ignoring disenfranchised classes of women in *The Feminine Mystique*, drawing attention to childcare issues as part of women's rights to equal opportunities can be classified as beneficial to women of lower classes especially that she mentions women who work out of 'necessity' and not only for self-fulfilment. [25]

Friedan dedicates the afterword in the 1998 edition of *The Second Stage* to reflections on her experience at The United Nations World Conference of Women in Nairobi in 1985. Nevertheless, the author, rather than including a wider perspective on women's issues globally, is critical of women's region-specific issues in relation to race. For instance, she is critical of Arab and Communist delegations who 'engaged, as usual, in "anti-Zionist" and "anti-imperialist" rhetoric'.[26] This dismissive approach to how race and economy shape women's experience once again interferes with Freidan's perspective. It puts all women into one monolithic category and threatens to overlook possible solutions that may offer a better quality of life for these poor and racialized women globally.

Adrienne Rich, however, offers a more direct revision of her approach to the limited perspective on the influence of race and class on women. The author adds a new introduction to *Of Woman Born* in 1986 in which she includes women from different

[24] Friedan, *The Second Stage*, p. 99.
[25] Daniel Horowitz in his examination of early drafts of *The Feminine Mystique* offers a critical but forgiving reading of how Friedan seemed to focus on a limited audience. He suggests that the book narrowed its focus, from including poor and women of colour to white middle-class women, due to the demand at the time of its publication to a genre that focuses on personal growth. See Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and The Making of the Feminine Mystique* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), pp. 209-212.
[26] Friedan, *The Second Stage*, p. 344.

racial and economic backgrounds in an account of issues that shape women's lives. She laments the way the chapter: 'Motherhood and Daughterhood' was written because it was limited by the 'the territory using instruments then most familiar to me: my own experience, literature by white and middle-class Anglo-Saxon women'.[27] She dedicates part of her new introduction to revising her previous limited approach by reading the mother-daughter relationship through a reading of Afro-American, Afro-Caribbean, Asian- American, and Native-American literature as well as literature written by Latina women which 'offers the complexity of this different perspective'.[28] The cultural sensitivity to rewriting how motherhood is perceived in other cultures not only enriches her analysis of perceptions motherhood. These new perceptions produce a fresh and more sophisticated understanding of the other's perspective as well as the reader's own.

A significant addition to Rich's revised introduction lies within her reading of Angela Davis's reflections on African-American motherhood.[29] Issues of abortion and sterilization in the United States as suggested by both Davis and Rich have different meanings and histories associated with them which significantly reshape perceptions of women's rights according to the racial context in the United States. What is perceived as a woman's right to abortion and elective sterilization is distorted by practices like forced abortions and sterilizations resulting from eugenicist government policies imposed on poor people and people of colour.

Angela Davis's writings on women's experience in a racialized context during and after slavery offer different perspectives on the maternal role in the United States. The maternal experience is strikingly different in a racially discriminatory environment from how writers like Friedan and Rich represent the experience of middle-class white women. For instance, Davis discussed how African-American women view housework

[27] Rich, pp. xxiv-xxv.
[28] Rich, p. xxv.
[29] Rich, p. xix.

differently from white middle-class women in ‘Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves’ (1971). She writes:

> Domestic labor was the only meaningful labor for the slave community as a whole...Precisely through performing the drudgery which has long been a central expression of the socially conditioned inferiority of women, the black woman in chains could help to lay the foundation for some degree of autonomy, both for herself and her men. Even as she was suffering under her unique oppression as female, she was thrust by the force of circumstances into the center of the slave community. She was, therefore, essential to the survival of the community.[30]

Instead of being associated with the inferiority of women, housework for slave women represents a different set of meanings related to the survival of the community, social responsibility and even freedom. Housework for the slave woman, although a further burden because she is forced to work outside her home in the fields or her master’s home, places her in the centre of the slave community, according to Davis. Because of their efforts in cooking, cleaning or taking care of the children, the slave community relies on women for survival. The most interesting point raised by Davis is how slave women might see housework as a liberating experience. Perceived by middle-class women as a restricting experience, housework for the slave women might ironically be liberating because it is not for the benefit of her owner. It is for her and her own people.

Although housework is experienced as an unrecognized and unrewarded form of labour for the disappointed housewife, housework for African-American women, in spite of being paid, is paid minimally according to Davis. It is also a further burden that includes the worker’s work in her own home as a wife and mother. Although Friedan demanded that women should be able to find fulfilling work outside the home, African-American women according to Davis are forced to provide for their family doing

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[30] Angela Davis, ‘Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves’, *The Massachusetts Review*, 13, 1/2, (Winter - Spring, 1972), 81-100 < https://www.jstor.org/stable/25088201>[Accessed: 3-7-2019], pp. 86-7.

housework for other people which is a kind of work that has its roots since slavery but continues for economic reasons. Davis argues in *Women, Race and Class* (1981) that African-American women as 'paid housekeepers…have been called upon to be surrogate wives and mothers in millions of white homes...domestic workers have tried to redefine their work by rejecting the role of the surrogate housewife'.[31] The association of African-American women with housework as either paid or unpaid work in their homes racially limits their potential as women for reshaping themselves outside the borders of gender. How racialized women view themselves as subjects is not only shaped by gender. The racial context interferes with how they perceive themselves. Davis and Morrison's writings question the universalization of women's experience when race is involved in shaping it. The experience of self-perception through the boundaries of race and gender as represented in the fictional narratives in the last chapter help to explore how the maternal experience can be represented and explored in various ways.

Maternal Subjectivity

The fictional narratives highlighted within this thesis contain nuances whereby both the social and psychological levels of the maternal experience are explored. Their social and political dimensions are revealed through the contextual elements of the narratives. Specific social and political circumstances produce contemporary American stories that recount, question and revise perceptions of gender. But the psychological aspect of these narratives is revealed through representing the struggles and the psychological experiences of women as taking place internally as well as externally. This is particularly related to how characters view themselves and their experience, either being

[31] Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (London: the women's Press, 1981), p. 238.

ambivalent towards mothering their child or rejecting the mothering role completely. The reader is able, through internalization and empathetic imagination, to experience these characters' perspectives as social subjects that are marked by the gendered potential to be mothers. The fictional tool of internalizing a character's experience is effective in revealing an array of processes and transformations that the female characters go through in different contexts of the maternal experience and provides more nuance in the reading of narratives about themes of rejection of maternal ideals.

The notion of subjectivity is central to this research. What I will call 'feminine subjects' are characters that do not perceive themselves as maternal subjects in spite of being pregnant or having a child; in other words, their subjectivities are constituted through broad, diverse and diffuse conceptions of femininity. 'Maternal subjects', by contrast, are characters who view themselves as mothers: this is the primary reference point by which their subjectivities are articulated. In embracing the role of 'mother', they reconstitute themselves as subjects. Central to my thesis is the concept of the subject's resistance or refusal to undergo the transformation from feminine to maternal subjectivity. The shifts in perspective from the feminine into the maternal perspective or transforming from the feminine into the maternal subject represents the maternal role as a social construct rather than a result of a biological change. Resistance to the notion of an inevitable shift from a feminine into a maternal subjectivity further highlights the social aspect of the formation of maternal subjectivities. Resistance to social frameworks separates women from the biological aspects of giving birth to a child.

One of the objectives of my thesis is to explore how social science theories can be implemented to explore the discourse of patriarchal feminine/maternal ideals in fiction. The concept of feminine subjectivity and the associated assumptions of feminine relationality and ambivalence are much debated in this field of study. These

concepts are used in this research to explore how maternal ideals are constructed. Christine Battersby in *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (1998) theorizes what she describes as the aspect of fluidity or mutability in feminine subjectivity as a result of what she proposes to be the relational female subject-position. Battersby analyses what she describes as the 'characteristics of the female subject-position' that make it paradoxical if the male subject-position is taken as a norm.[32] Battersby suggests that women are perceived to have 'fleshy' cultural identities that reflect the 'female' not the 'feminine' and that women are 'embodied subjects' in the English language. As subjects they are linked to the body not the 'soul'.[33] Mothers are socially associated with their biological potential. Reading maternal characters through their psychological perspectives on themselves as subjects resists the notion of the material aspect of motherhood, such as giving birth and breast-feeding, as definitive. It focuses instead on the psychological and social aspect of motherhood as an experience. Battersby suggests that this aspect of the feminine subject position is paradoxical, and that the paradox is produced when the cultural attribution of relationality to women paradoxically entails different subject positions, due to the relationality which is another aspect of the female subject position.[34] In other words, Battersby points out the paradox within gendered social structures rather than reducing her distinction of the female subject position from the male one to a biological essence. For the female subject, relationality paradoxically becomes fluidity. Culturally assigning relationality to woman paradoxically assigns fluidity to the female subject position. Due to relationality, a woman can perceive herself as the subject of different structures and positions including ones that reject gender ideals such as the role of the mother and wife.

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[32]Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 8.
[33]Battersby, p. 9.
[34]Battersby, pp. 8-9.

In her analysis of the aspects of the female subject-position highlighted as the opposite of the norm which is the male subject-position, Battersby suggests that understandings of female subjectivity should be revised within the framework of gender difference. She suggests that because of their gendered subject-position, women are united by femininity. This however, does not mean that femininity is experienced by all women the same way, because gender is a social construct. It defines the experience in a specific discourse but does not dictate it. She argues that 'female selves can be scored into specificity by differential patterns of work experience and other features of acculturation'.[35] They go through temporal transformations as subjects that emerge out of what Battersby calls 'difference in sameness'.[36] Battersby insists that the female subject position is *fluid*. She writes:

> the self emerges as involving a relational dynamism between past, present and future- not just surface or without depth.... Furthermore, different experiences and different histories would produce different selves, with different potentialities and different futures.

The female subject's interactions with the *other* produce a fluid subject that has the potential for various transformations. Battersby's theorization of the feminine subject-position highlights a 'transcendental' self that distinguishes 'self' and 'other'.[37] She writes of subjects whose 'identities are fluid and might be transformed – or dispersed or metamorphosed into new structures and propensities'.[38] This potential of the subject to become the subject of alternative structures is limited to the female/male dichotomy in her theorization of social/political aspects of culture.

The notion of a perspective on the self that has the potential to change and develop producing a fluid sense of subjectivity that has the potential to transform is

[35]Battersby, p. 201.

central to my research. I propose that fictional representations of the rejection of motherhood are suggestive of this fluidity. In this thesis, the female characters are analysed according to their perspectives on being mothers. Through the rejection of or ambivalence towards motherhood, they experience feminine or maternal subject positions differently. This, like Battersby's theorization of the feminine subject, suggests that women in their sameness as potential mothers react to their experience differently as suggested through the narratives. Shaped by different psychological and social aspects of their subjective experience, they might embrace or reject being a mother in different ways.

The concept of *interruption* to maternal subjectivity is a valuable framework for this thesis. The idea of maternal transformation theorized by Battersby is extended in Lisa Baraitser's *Maternal Encounters: the Ethics of Interruption* (2009). To transform from a feminine subject into the maternal one, Baraitser suggests a dynamic aspect of the maternal subject that marks it upon various experiences of motherhood. She suggests that:

> the self "never returns to itself from the Other"…From the mother's perspective, we could say that as the infant destroys her, she is marked by the other, contending with self-loss, through which, according to [Judith] Butler, an altered self may also emerge.[39]

The transformation into the maternal subject, according to Baraitser, is the 'most extreme formulation of subjectivity, in which the subject gives herself over entirely to the other in an act of *substitution'.*[40] The mother is separated from her old self when adapting a new one. She goes through a process of contact with an Other that turns *her* into an *other*, substituting the essence of her subjectivity. If this substitution does not take place, the feminine subject will not be as empathetic to the child's needs as the

[39] Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 34-5.
[40] Baraitser, p. 41.

maternal subject, whose sole mission is to anticipate the child's needs. This substitution is deemed socially necessary to assume 'ethical responsibility' for the Other, the child, and anticipate its needs.[41] A mother's subjectivity could then be 'thought to emerge at the point of her ethical responsibility'.[42] This relational subjectivity that encompasses empathy to the child's needs is described by Baraitser as a series of interruptions that form the experience of maternal subjectivity. She writes, 'the other which constantly interrupts the mother, bringing her to a myriad of points of disjuncture in which she is surprised, dislodged or shaken from whatever she is embedded'.[43] This rendition of the relational maternal subjectivity with the child is reshaped and reformed by a series of interruptions by the child and the context associated with it. The maternal subject emerges to be called 'into a new relation with [itself]' as a result of these interruptions.[44]

What I propose, based on Baraitser's theorization of the transformation into the maternal subject and the interruptions that shape it, is that another set of interruptions that range from blockages to reversals to transforming from the feminine into the maternal subject can potentially emerge within the maternal experience. My aim is to create a dialogue between social structures and fictional texts about the rejection of maternal ideals. These engage on a discursive level in representing various nuances of the feminine and maternal subject that include blockages and reversals of transformation into a maternal subjectivity.

An important term utilized in Baraitser's theorization of maternal interruption is ambivalence.[45] She assesses that 'mothers have emotional experiences of mothering that

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[41] Baraitser, p. 39.
[42] Baraitser, p. 155.
[43] Baraitser, p. 75.
[44] Baraitser, p. 89.
[45] The term maternal ambivalence has been introduced in various memoirs of American mothers to describe conflicting feelings of doubt that the mother feels towards her child and her position as a mother. Naomi Wolf in *Misconceptions: Truth Lies and the Journey to Motherhood* (2001) and Rebecca Walker in *Baby Love*: *Choosing Motherhood after a Lifetime of Ambivalence* (2007) write about their thoughts and Journey of doubt and uncertainty towards motherhood.

are complex and are inflected by unconscious dynamics including ambivalence'.[46] Including feelings of ambivalence towards mothering as part of the maternal experience is especially important in redefining maternal ideals, including every woman's potential or predisposition to be a mother. The notion of maternal ambivalence represents the essence of the rejection of maternal ideals and interruption to maternal subjectivity.

Key terms used in my argument about the representation of interruptions to the transformation into the maternal subject are drawn from a number of conceptual writings about motherhood and femininity from the mid-twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. These terms are produced within discourses resisting feminine/maternal ideals and revising concepts of feminine/maternal subjectivity. These terms reject conventional perceptions of motherhood and reproduce maternal ambivalence to revise the maternal ideal. For instance, the representation of women's interrupted subjectivity due to the societal gaze as implied in John Irving's *A Widow for One Year* (1998) and Jacquelyn Mitchard's *The Deep End of the Ocean* (1996) demonstrates the durability of the issues raised by Rich's theorization of institutional motherhood.[47] The rigid social standards set for mothering, and society's observation of the performance of mothers in order to achieve the required standard for being a good mother, is a symptom of what Rich calls 'motherhood as an institution' where the maternal role is subject to the surveillance of the dominant social structures. Institutional motherhood in Toni Morrison's novels, for example, poses similar questions about mothering within the standards of dominant institutions of race and gender. Self-realization outside of these institutions becomes one of the questions within the representation of the rejection of maternal ideal in the representative texts throughout the chapters.

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[46] Baraitser, p. 21.
[47] Discussed in detail in the fourth chapter, 'Giving up on Mothering: Maternal Ambivalence between Remembering and Forgetting'.

The limited scholarly work that examines fictions rejecting conventional representations of motherhood inspired my work in this thesis. Beth Widmaier Capo's book *Textual Contraception: Birth Control and Modern American Fiction* (2007) served as a starting point for reading about the representation of the rejection of institutional motherhood in fiction and the media. Capo offers a rich survey of a wide range of narratives in short stories, novels and variety of media forms reviewed against a historical American social and political background that is specific to the context of birth control and abortion from the 1910s into the Depression era of the 1930s. This thesis differs from Capo's approach to texts about the rejection of the maternal ideal in both scope and methodology. My thesis diversifies the representations of the rejection of motherhood. These are not only limited to birth control (including abortion), as is the case with Capo's approach. Capo includes a wide range of references to each chapter divided either chronologically from 1910 up to the depression period or thematically when she talks about the impact of birth control on marriage, motherhood and the 'Eugenic impetus of the 1920s and 1930'.[48] My approach adopts a close reading of texts that disrupt concepts of the maternal ideal through representing themes of abortion, post-partum depression, grieving and infanticide. My research investigates texts that address representations of the rejection of motherhood in radical feminist utopias, novels about post-natal depression, grieving for a child and infanticide. Reading representations of different forms of interruption to maternal transformation offers a wider scope in which to observe various nuances in the representation of American culture in general and targets the feminine/maternal ideal specifically, to disrupt it and revise the representation of the maternal subject.

[48] Beth Widmaier Capo, *Textual Contraception: Birth Control and Modern American Fiction* (Columbus: the Ohio State University Press, 2007), p. 110.

This thesis analyses how some writers rewrite the feminine subject, through the construction of a fluid maternal subjectivity. These novels separate the feminine subject from the maternal subject when they explore a particular individual and social fact: not every woman chooses to be a mother. These fictional texts represent feminine subjects who reject patriarchal ideals about the role of the mother. They depict female characters that are subject to patriarchal social structures; and these characters are expected to go through a transformation from feminine subjectivity to perform the maternal role according to patriarchal feminine/maternal ideals. The transformation, however, is interrupted, by being either blocked or reversed. Interruptions to maternal subjectivity are the point of departure in my readings of scenes of representative texts from the 1970s to the present which highlight the cultural dimensions of such rejections of motherhood. As opposed to analysing novels according to themes such as abortion, child abuse or racialized motherhood, the concept of interruptions to maternal subjectivity, such as the blocked or reversed transformation from the feminine into maternal subjectivity allows me to observe a more complex web of political, social and literary nuances that flow through contemporary fiction written by both men and women.

What I propose in this thesis is that the idea of the rejection of motherhood through the concept of maternal interruption offers a revision of the feminine ideal portrayed in conservative discourses about femininity in the United States in the period after 1970. I shall explore how the idea of interruption of the transformation from feminine into maternal subjectivity tackles the feminine ideal from within, by disrupting the patriarchal discourse that dictates a feminine essence. It will also investigate how ideals of ‘natural’ maternal instincts in every woman are called into question through these representations, revealing a femininity that is unfamiliar.

This thesis will be developed through observing the interplay of the discursive layers concerning the representation of the rejection of motherhood in fictional texts published from the 1960s to the present. It will ask: in which ways were the novels engaged with dominant theoretical and political ideologies of motherhood in the era in which they were produced? In what terms did they challenge the ideological assumptions of their respective periods? The thesis will examine how the nuances of fictional representations situate them vis-à-vis contemporary feminist American writings that examine the rejection of the maternal ideal. It will trace how fictional narratives representing the rejection of maternal ideals articulate feminine subjectivity across a multitude of perspectives both inside and outside the maternal experience.

The methodology is primarily literary-critical and historical, examining how close readings of literary texts can illuminate understandings of the social and political debates of a given era: in this case, the post-war United States. As already indicated, it also draws on work from feminist social science, such as that of Christine Battersby, Lisa Baraitser and others. It also, where appropriate, refers to other theoretical frameworks to better observe the various historical, political, cultural and psychological nuances within the narratives about the rejection of motherhood. These include psychoanalysis, as in the use of the theory of hysteria in a historical sense included in Chapter Four about the grieving mother. Biopolitical theory is another framework in which to observe how political structures form the maternal and racial ideals, proving to be useful in the reading of the texts in Chapter Five.

The rationale for specifically choosing novels to be analysed in this thesis is to provide the tools by which the representation of a complex issue like the rejection of motherhood can be explored. The movement and weight of narratives in the novelistic form allow for enough momentum in which the internal experience of characters as well

as the complexity of context can reveal a network of meanings that shape motherhood. Morrison's novels, for instance, provide the tools in which historical and social contexts interact with character and narrative structure to suggest how motherhood as an image is formed in a racialized environment. The variety of genres enables the analysis of the rejection of motherhood across different novelistic forms to uncover various and sometimes contradictory nuances. Reading different genres that represent the same issue, like the analysis of the representation of abortion and voluntary childlessness in Chapter Two, challenges the limitations of generic form by putting these different narratives in dialogue with each other. Dystopian texts read along Irving's realistic narratives to explore how abortion and voluntary childlessness helps to observe nuances that might not be revealed in a limited reading of one genre. Not limiting the choice of novels to those written by female authors also constitutes a valuable addition in this thesis. Although I am not suggesting that authorial identity dominates a text or that the author's gender determines what the text can address or envision, having a mother's perspective written by a male author provides an interesting perspective on how femininity is represented. Brian J. Gale in *Childless* (2011) and John Irving in *The Cider House Rules* (1985) both enrich the feminine/maternal character's perspectives with their exploration of a woman's experience as an ambivalent mother.

Review of Chapters

In the first chapter of this thesis I discussed how the dominant post-war discourses of the maternal subject is rejected through radical feminist manifestos, feminist fabulation and cyborg theory. Through defamiliarizing the reader's relationship with patriarchal gendered ideals associated with femininity and motherhood, these writings introduce elements that are perceived to be traditionally masculine to the discourse of

motherhood. This form of rejecting maternal/feminine ideals through associating masculinized images of violence and technology with women resists patriarchal narratives of gender. The gender lines in these writings are blurred to disrupt conservative discourses of mothering and to highlight new perceptions of the maternal subject that self-reproduces and survives as the fittest gender, epitomizing the human rather than the gendered feminine/maternal subject.

The radical edge in Shulamith Firestone's and Valerie Solanas's rhetoric, the restructured gender elements in feminist utopias and the cyborg theory are grouped under one utopian umbrella, allowing these writings to exist in a discursive space with more room for revision of the maternal ideal. The nonfictional aspect of these writings is in dialogue with the fictional representations of these issues, giving more room for the examination of the reimagining of gender across a range of modes of writing. Reading nonfictional theorizations such as radical feminist manifestos and cyborg theory alongside second-wave feminist utopias like *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and *The Female Man* (1975) allowed this research to reveal the new fictional spaces in which motherhood has been reimagined and revised.

The second chapter of this thesis begins by introducing the main theme of the research: namely, the representation of interruption of maternal subjectivity as a way of examining, revising and rejecting traditional maternal ideals in post-war and contemporary American novels. What I refer to as the representation of a blocked transformation into the maternal subject in these novels exposes the dynamics of the stigmatization of pregnancy out of wedlock and abortion as a shaping force of women's subjective experiences. The chapter explores the role of didactic discourse in YA fiction as interventions in the debate about abortion. The visibility of teen sexuality introduced by these writings gives space for revising stigma and the perceptions of motherhood out

of wedlock and voluntary childlessness. The framing of John Irving's *The Cider House Rules* (1985) as a bildungsroman lends his novel a tone of hopefulness when it comes to social perceptions of stigma and abortion because of the aspect of growth that transcends character development into the perspective on abortion in the country.

In the context of their historical and cultural moment these narratives are representational milestones that expose structures of stigmatization in order to revise them and negotiate their dynamics. The last genre discussed in the chapter is represented by two dystopian novels published in 2011. I suggested in the chapter that Brian J. Gail's *Childless* and Hilary Jordan's *When She Woke* are players in the ideological struggle between conservative and liberal ideas about abortion. Each of these narratives becomes a parody of the other's ideology, suggesting the urgency of the debate about abortion that is still present in the United States at the beginning of the 21st century.

The third chapter revolves around the theme of postpartum depression as a representation of rejection of maternal ideals. What I suggest as the delineation of blocked transformation from the feminine into the maternal subject disrupts traditional maternal ideals about the doting mother. The characters in the representative texts about postpartum depression suggest a pattern of monstrous motherhood where abuse is involved. The exploration of monstrous motherhood in relation to the political context in the United States suggests an irony where conservative ideals result in a destructive environment. Rather than having an association with maternal tropes as a producer of life, the maternal trope in the image of monstrous motherhood in the representative novels becomes a figure of death and destruction. In its context, this metaphor is associated with another metaphorical layer where it represents conservative politics in the United States that theoretically strive for life and prosperity but is shown as being

premised on a destructive politics. Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2003) and Amy Koppleman's *A Mouthful of Air* (2003) are two texts that are not limited to representations that revise maternal ideals. More broadly these texts question political structures in the United States without limiting themselves to revising gender politics.

The fourth chapter revolves around the representation of the rejection of the maternal ideal through the theme of child bereavement. Here, the idea of a reversed transformation from the maternal into feminine subjectivity suggests how maternal subjectivity is destabilized rather than made rigid in conservative representations of motherhood. A reversible subjectivity in that regard is a fluid one that disrupts traditional maternal ideals. In John Irving's *A Widow for One Year* (1998) and Jacquelyn Mitchard's *The Deep End of the Ocean* (1996), nuances associated with child bereavement and gendered cultural notions like hysteria and feminine sentimentality serve to question gender ideals. The chapter also investigates the processes of remembering and forgetting to redefine feminine and maternal subjectivity through emotionality and trauma. It explores what the memory of the lost child stands for in terms of perceptions of feminine sentimentality and what is socially acceptable as a part of the traumatic experience in representations of the grieving mother. What I suggested in the chapter is that the representation of maternal bereavement highlights a paradox within the maternal ideal when love of the lost child becomes what seems to be hate for her other children as the mother rejects the maternal experience. This love/hate paradox implied within maternal bereavement questions the maternal ideal.

The fifth and final chapter investigates the theme of infanticide as a representation of the reversed transformation into maternal subjectivity in Toni Morrison's work. The includes readings of the maternal figure in several of Morrison's

novels, such as *God Help the Child* (2015), *A Mercy* (2008), *Beloved* (1987) and *Sula* (1973). I suggest in the chapter that the image of the murderous mother exposes the political forms that create the maternal experience for African American women in the United Statas. Infanticide in her novels is a radical form of resistance through violence which lays bare the gendered and racial structures that govern the experience of mothering. The chapter also explores the nuances of this image with regard to the value of life in a racialized setting. Perceptions of colour and Black Power play a part in forming the image of the mother and subject formation in a racially defined setting. I also argue that this representation of subject formation with regard to the complexity of race in Morrison's novels develops specifically in her writing of race and motherhood. Compared to the rejection of motherhood represented through infanticide, the theme of child abandonment featured *in A Mercy* adopts a less extreme delineation of gender and race politics because it assumes an alternative discourse about the recurrent theme of the rejection of motherhood in Morrison's novels. Representing a less racist and more inclusive past, the novel is an imagining of a future where race relations are not as tense as they currently are in the United States. This alternative discourse suggests the possibility of healing racial wounds.

Contemporary American fictional production with regards to perceptions about femininity and motherhood offer a nuanced critique of many aspects of social and political institutions. The representation of motherhood in fiction, as a dialogue between literature and the social pressures of institutional motherhood, is pivotal in revising the maternal ideal of the doting mother that loves her child unconditionally. This research reads the representation of motherhood through the interrogation, reformation or rejection of its ideals by analysing maternal characters that reject being mothers in a range of contexts. It explores nuances of their representations of clocked or interrupted transformation through the analysis of maternal subjects who reject the maternal role.

The social structures in which maternal ideals are located are revised through rewriting literary discourses of motherhood. Building the image of the mother and its ideals on a discursive level and critiquing it on that same level opens new spaces for writing about gender and motherhood. These spaces are formed by questioning, reshaping or rejecting the traditional, rigid maternal trope and embracing a new, more fluid, one.

1 Manifestos, Utopias and Cyborgs: Feminist Futures and the Rewriting of Motherhood

As a prelude to an analysis of contemporary American texts that question traditional representations of motherhood, a reading of utopias that engages with and critiques contemporary modes of motherhood is illuminating. American feminist utopias published in the 1970s highlight specific political and social issues associated with discourses of mothering in the United States that were brought to the forefront by feminist writing. Leading and often running parallel to representations of the rejection of motherhood, American feminist utopias representing motherhood in the post-war era confront the political structures that have shaped perceptions about femininity and motherhood. These utopias map a space where patriarchal discourse about the maternal ideal is disrupted. Motherhood as an institution is reformed by imagining it in different structures in Second Wave feminist utopias.

The discourse in which utopian representations of motherhood is shaped by the era in which they were published. The impact of gendered politics of the post-war years in the United States pressuring women to fit into the role of mother and housewife was at its most intense, and most conservative, in the 1950s.[1] The marginalization of women's potential in the labour force produced a social conflict that contributed to the formation of the Second Wave feminist movement.[2] The politics of post-war years that

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[1] See Robert H. Bremner, "Families, Children, and the State", *Reshaping America: Society and Institution 1945-1960*, ed. by Robert H. Bremner and Gary W. Reichard (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982) pp.3-33. Also see Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and Its Relation to the Policy Process.* (New York: Longman, 1975), and Betty Friedan, "The Happy Housewife Heroine", *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Classics, 1963-2010), pp. 21-50.

[2] The publication of President John F. Kennedy's "Presidential Commission on the Status of Women" report in 1962 reflecting the gender inequality in the workplace contributed to starting the second wave

created a vacuum were based on perceptions of femininity that were shaped by specific heteronormative notions of gender. Because of their biological role in child-bearing childcare is associated with women. The association with the maternal role limited women's engagement outside the home in the post-war years.

The limitation of women to a narrow range of specific roles in the period after the Second World War led to the Second Wave feminist movement and the publication of Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which was one of the books that launched Second Wave feminism. Friedan's writing questioned feminine/maternal ideals, and argued that they were based on patriarchal perceptions of women inspired by socioeconomic factors in post-war America. She challenged these ideals through tracing women's disillusionment with it as a discourse and with the political structures that form it.[3] Friedan's contribution, along with other Second Wave feminist authors like Adrienne Rich, disrupted this feminine/maternal ideal. It potentially created an alternative discourse that expressed what could not otherwise be expressed in patriarchal discourse: disillusionment with and within institutionalized motherhood.

Friedan's critique is often characterised (and sometimes critiqued) as liberal and middle class.[4] However, the post-war socioeconomic context in the United States also produced more revolutionary feminist critiques of male-dominated politics in the 1960s. Debating the structuring of different social roles based on the biological potential of each gender, these books sought to revise gender through technology. The writings

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feminist movement aside from the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* leading to the organization of women's rights' groups that helped to launch the movement and influence US policy towards women's rights.

[3] Friedan's contribution to challenging perceptions of gender is discussed at length in the introduction of this thesis.

[4] Bell Hooks's critique of Friedan because 'she ignored the existence of all non-white women and poor white women' diagnosed the issue of classism in Friedan's writing. See Hooks, Bell, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 2.

produced in the late 1960s and 1970s were a reaction to a post-war politics informed by conservative social and economic perceptions of femininity that stressed the importance of specific gender roles based on biology. Developments in science, computing and technology in the 1970s inspired revolutionary perceptions of biotechnology and its potential influence on revising gender roles. Advancements in reproductive medicine and technology, including the development of less harmful, regulated hormone birth control pills, safe IUDs and in-vitro fertilization changed the public perception on the future of the reproductive role of women. These authors saw the potential of biotechnology in freeing women from specific gender roles based on their role in reproduction.

Alternative perspectives on motherhood in fictional or nonfictional Second Wave feminist writings create a space outside of conservative discourse that suggests hopeful and positive utopian tendencies. It promotes a space for social/political reform that starts from reforming the way gender is perceived. Although these texts did not themselves necessarily generate social change, utopian writing used Second Wave feminist ideas to create a platform for the reform of gender politics by imagining other possibilities of perceiving gender, and motherhood. Utopian writing deconstructs dominant discourse through the imaginative space created by the possibilities within alternative discourses about gender and motherhood.

Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) and Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto* (1967), although perceived as radical in their revision of patriarchal political structures, have feminist utopian theorizations of a better world for women achieved through biotechnology. Adopting a militant approach to patriarchy, Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto* assumes a separatist stance from the male-dominated mid-century United States. Solanas compiles a list of what she sees as social problems propelled by

patriarchy, such as war and prostitution, and critiques the limitations imposed by patriarchy on knowledge, sexuality and friendship. She declares in her manifesto the emergence of a new class of rebellious women, the Society for Cutting Up Men (or SCUM), who will utilize the violence that dominates them to retaliate against men. The 'disease' of maleness, according to Solanas, will no longer exist if all women became SCUM and took the reins of production and reproduction.[5] If they fought and boycotted men, they would accelerate their control of the world. Solanas's writing, influenced by psychoanalysis, associates motherhood with power and critiques the utilization of the concept of motherhood in post-war America to weaken women. She writes, 'It's not for the kid's sake, though, that the "experts" tell women that Mama should stay at home and grovel in animalism, but for Daddy's; the tits of Daddy to hang onto'.[6] Associating maleness with the Oedipal complex and suggesting that maleness is an 'emotional deficiency', Solanas critiques the power of the image of the mother.[7] Social norms that structure the maternal ideal of the nurturing mother are associated with an Oedipal complex, according to Solanas, that form patriarchal perceptions of femininity. The image of the nurturing mother is a social construct that is *told* and taught by 'experts' to women. Solanas's theorization of patriarchy as constructing the maternal ideal implies the image of the phallic mother as an object of desire. What controls women, according to Solanas, should also be the source of their empowerment.

What is most notable about Solanas's writing is its utilization of parody to explore and express both masculinity and femininity. Her parody of male violence in her theorization of patriarchy and how to combat it expresses femininity in an unfamiliar way, which contributes to structuring new perceptions of femininity outside

[5] Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1991), p. 35.
[6] Solanas p. 12.
[7] Solanas, p. 35.

the ideal. For instance, she goes as far as suggesting that men should be 'gassed to death', connoting Nazi violence.[8] Her extreme response to patriarchal mid-century America recreates masculine modes of violence and directs it towards men to create a new mode of thinking about femininity. This parodic alternative tone of expressing a woman's perspective about men plays with registered notions about femininity and masculinity and destroys feminine ideals, questioning the structures behind these ideals.

In order to insure the survival of the separatist society Solanas suggests utilizing biotechnology to resume reproduction through 'laboratory production of babies'.[9] However, her examination of the experience to which male violence structures her separatist feminist utopian society is taken further to critique another aspect of patriarchal social contracts. She implies that reproduction stems from the masculine notion of spreading the seed and suggests the futility of reproduction when she writes, 'Why should there be future generations? What is their purpose? Why should we care what happens when we're dead? Why should we care that there is no younger generation to succeed us?'[10] Her critique of humanity's devotion to posterity is a critique of reproduction within a patriarchal social structure where 'the effect of fatherhood on males, specifically, is to make them "men".[11] Her questioning of reproduction within a patriarchal context that insures its continuity is a questioning of the roots of the social system. Her radical approach to reproduction translates into an alternative discourse from which to read motherhood, reproduction and femininity outside of patriarchal concepts of the same themes. Although Solanas's vision of a man-free world slips into a nihilistic direction when human survival is questioned, her vison

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[8] Solanas, p. 46.
[9] Solanas, p. 35.
[10] Solanas, p. 35.
[11] Solanas, p. 10.

is still utopian in the sense that she encourages the imagination of a utopian world where patriarchal society, riddled with men's vices, becomes a feminine utopia.

Questioning the gender perceptions structuring the politics of post-war America and building an alternative discourse in which to express a utopian vision of future gender politics is Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970). She presents a vision of a future where patriarchal gender perceptions are eliminated and biotechnology eradicates gender hierarchies. The prospect of technological advancement in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in regard to reproduction, shaped Firestone's vision of a reformed post-war gender politics in the United States. In her book, Firestone critiques patriarchal capitalist organization of the family based on a gender hierarchy like the nuclear family. She proposes a revolution based on the 'elimination of the (sex) dualism' in culture to create what she calls an 'androgynous culture'.[12] Firestone's vision of reformed gender politics based on altering biology challenges patriarchal control over science and calls for the subversion of the patriarchal monopoly of science.[13] Although Firestone predicts that her vision will be seen as 'utopian', her vision was based on the potential of advances biotechnology to achieve social and political reform.[14]

Firestone, like Solanas, points out the role of patriarchal social perceptions in structuring discourses of mothering and reproduction. Firestone calls for the 're-examination of the ancient value of motherhood'.[15] The idealization of motherhood becomes the source of her subordination because she is placed, through bearing and

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[12] Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex (New York: William Morrow Company Inc., 1970), p. 215.
[13] The shift in feminist writing's perception of technoscience as a liberating space through its role in freeing the discourse about gender from patriarchal associations can be seen later in Donna Haraway's writings which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.
[14] Firestone, p. 237.
[15] Firestone. p. 227.

rearing, within 'a slave class'.[16] A woman freed from biological links to mothering is freed from the patriarchal structures that define the maternal ideal. She points out that 'the patriarchal mentality [is] concerned only with its own interests, and with its progeny only insofar as they are heir and ego extension, in a private bid of immortality'.[17] This suggests the structuring of reproductive ethics and the maternal ideal around patriarchal psychological desires to which women are subjected. This critique isolates institutional reproductive ethics that structure the maternal ideal that insures a patriarchal imperative for posterity.

Both authors challenge the discursive structures around reproductive politics to redefine the boundaries of motherhood. They question the relation between femininity and reproduction outside the limitations of institutionalized maternal ideals. In my reading of Solanas and Firestone's rewiring of the politics of reproduction through the introduction of the potential of biotechnology to reform gender politics is especially significant. Their innovative vision breaks the boundaries set by patriarchal discourse about femininity and motherhood. The potential of separating motherhood from gender boundaries through artificial reproduction becomes the catalysts by which motherhood as feminine role maybe rewritten. What Solanas and Firestone offer to their readers as the way from patriarchal domination to salvation through biotechnology is the creation a new discourse through which motherhood can be imagined outside the limits of the maternal/feminine ideal. Their visions of liberating women from the limitations of biology are not simply an ideology that promotes separatism. It is rather a critique of the dominant ideology by setting alternative scenarios that highlight the defects of patriarchy through eradicating it altogether as a system.

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[16] Firestone, p. 232.
[17] Firestone, p. 222.

The impact of what is perceived as radical feminist writing is influential in shaping an alternative discourse of femininity and motherhood can be perceived. The proposed separation between gender and reproduction through biotechnology stands as a utopian theorization of gender politics for the end of the twentieth century and beyond. With the separation between reproduction and sexuality, the link between femininity and the maternal is revised or eliminated through utopian imagining of a more empowered femininity. The discourse of radical feminist writing inspired the feminist utopian fiction in the United States by providing an alternative discourse from which to explore and theorise gender. Angelika Bammer in *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s* reviews feminist utopian writing in light of both mainstream and radical feminism of the 1970s. Bammer alludes to what she calls a 'utopian impulse in 1970s' (1991) feminism'.[18] She argues that utopian feminist representations were structured around what Hélène Cixous describes as an 'orgiastic anti-politics in which women would "take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it...dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures"'.[19] The emptying of structure is the emptying of discourse from its meaning and finding another discourse from which to describe restructured societies. The issue identified by Friedan as a problem that could not be named through patriarchal discourse is finally named and problematized in feminist writing. Feminist manifestos critique this discourse in a series of bold and sometimes excoriating proposals. Radical feminist fiction, in turn, offers a solution through its imaginative restructuring of social reality.

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[18] Angelika Bammer, *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 48.
[19] Bammer, p. 55.

Separatist Utopia

What Bammer describes as a utopian 'impulse' in the 1970s can be seen in the publication history of a separatist utopian novel published in 1915 and republished to accalim in the 1970s. *Herland,* written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, is a revolutionary text in relation to its own age as a historical utopian vision represents a world where men are annihilated, leading to the establishment of feminine authority and power uninterrupted by patriarchal influence.[20] Shaped by the political atmosphere of the First World War and the reverberations of the suffragette movement, *Herland* represents dynamics that would be central to the utopias of the second wave feminist movement. Initially published as a serial in Gilman's literary magazine, *The Forerunner*, *Herland* was only published in novel form in 1979.[21] Republication at the height of Second-Wave feminism was due to the relevance of its vision. Gilman's fiction originally formed outside the context of Second Wave feminist politics, but it explores similar revolutionary ideas that were circulating by the 1970s.

A separatist ideology revealed either in radical feminist writing or feminist utopian representations stems from the heart of patriarchal social and psychological perspectives of femininity. Separatist politics are a response to concepts of gendered othering of women or the concept of women belonging to the private realm, the home. Bammer reviews the radical feminist position on separatist ideology:

> women withdraw from these institutions and create alternate structures of their own. The ideological basis of this position was the concept of "woman as outsider." The argument went roughly as follows: either because of their historical exclusion from the realm of (male) power or

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[20] See Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (New York, Dover Publications, 1998).
[21] Lisa Maria Hogeland, *Feminism and Its Fictions: The Consciousness-raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 112

> because of their "natural" difference, women's essential being has not been implicated in the hegemonic structures of patriarchy...If the fact of woman's otherness constitutes her as an antithesis to the patriarchal norm, then women already contain their alternative in "what is dark and deep within [them]".[22]

Patriarchal othering of women based on their difference was adopted but rewritten by separatist feminist theorists in an alternative empowering way. Theorizing women's exclusion from patriarchal power, due to what Bammer refers to as "natural difference", is hypothesized by another radical feminist, Susan Griffin. Analysing what is "dark and deep" within women as an alternative to patriarchal power structures, in *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978) Griffin suggests that perceptions about women's gender difference can be the reason for their empowerment. She presents readers with an array of patriarchal notions reflected through cultural and religious narratives about women to suggest the identification of women with nature and earth. This identification, according to Griffin, serves a patriarchal-capitalist social structure in the United States when women are 'bred for domestic labor', leading women to believe in and adopt their social roles as housewives and mothers.[23] Women's othering, however, becomes the source of their empowerment when women 'revive what was buried', referring to the resistance to the subjugating narrative and the power of nature being used to dominate them.[24]

Although Griffin's approach to women's exclusion from major power structures might be perceived as essentialist, her writing establishes another power domain located within women's exclusion. She highlights the empowering potential of women's

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[22] Bammer, p. 90.
[23] Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1978) p. 75.
[24] Griffin, p. 203.

identification with nature through restricting the discourse around it. What Bammer refers to as feminist writings that celebrate the "dark and deep" in woman is also perceived by Griffin's writing, a strategy that restructures the discourse about difference by highlighting the empowering aspect of a feminine 'essence'. The separatist conceptualization of women's societies in second wave feminist writings, then, is a rewriting of exclusion. The othering of women becomes the othering of men. Men become othered through inclusion as much as women become othered through exclusion. Like Griffin, Bammer argues in favour of the separatist position. By stating that the 'inversion' of the structures that contain 'culture/nature, man/woman, oppressor/oppressed' is empowering to women, they reinstate femininity as the 'positive antithesis to the negativity of man'.[25] The concept of the separation of women on the basis of gender and its role in forming separatist utopian feminist visions of an ideal society is drawn from patriarchal discourses about femininity. This reformed perception of separation and othering empowers women within utopian theorizations.

The imagining of a separatist intervention to rewrite feminine subjugation into empowerment was a popular theme in the 1970s feminist utopias. Separatist feminist science fiction is represented by Sally Miller-Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1978) and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) are examples of utopias in which the continuation of the species is sustained through biotechnology, rather than evolution, to maintain male-free societies. *The Female Man* tells the story of four women who meet each other through a technology similar to time travel. Through their conversations and perceptions of each other's worlds and their own world, the reader is exposed to the different social structures, whether patriarchal, matriarchal or separatist, in which

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[25] Bammer, p. 90.

women can participate. One of these women refers to the others as 'my other selves'.[26] One of these societies constitutes a technologically advanced agrarian Utopia named Whileaway, in which women live separately from men and continue the cycle of production and reproduction. In order to overcome the lack of the other sex, technology is utilized when 'Whileawayans bear their children at about thirty – singletons or twins as the demographic pressures require. These children have one genotypic parent, the biological mother (the "body-mother"), while the non-bearing parent contributes the other ovum ("other-mother").[27] In this utopia, the women work hard to maintain their society economically through agriculture, thereby making the existence of men irrelevant. However, the Whileawayan woman's work stops when she becomes a mother. Janet Evason, the Whileawayan woman, describes mothering outside patriarchy in her Utopia as a 'vacation'.[28] Mothering is community work that is done in communal 'baby rooms' for five years, where mothers are 'reading, painting, singing, as much as they can, to the children, with the children, over the children'.[29] This contrasting image with institutional motherhood where mothering is described as 'labour' forms an alternative discourse of motherhood in *The Female Man*.

A similar version of a separatist society to that of of Whileaway is introduced in *The Wanderground* in a utopia that is formed of 'hill women' who are separated from men who are contained within the cities and rendered impotent outside so the women are relieved of the threat of sexual violence outside the cities. The hill women develop powers that contribute to the structure of the Utopia. They can communicate telepathically, they can "windride*"* to move from one place to the other, they can heal

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[26] Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (Boston: Gregg Press, 1977), p. 160.
[27] Russ, p. 49.
[28] Russ, p. 14.
[29] Russ, p. 14.

animals and each other with their blood, and most importantly they can reproduce without men by a process called "implantment", whereby ova are merged. A woman referred to as a 'flesh mother', will carry the child to term.[30] Raising the child is a communal task where seven sisters help each other in the care of the child.

Being products of their time, the representation of biotechnologically advanced utopian societies like the ones in *The Wanderground* or *The Female Man* differ from *Herland*, in which evolution forms a separate society. The representation of motherhood and the reimagining of reproduction in 1970s utopias utilize biotechnology to imagine the revision and elimination of gender hierarchies. Men's physical contribution to reproduction is rendered unnecessary as soon as women learn how to merge ova. Biotechnology in both utopias contributes to the eradication of men, setting women as the one-and-only class of human in the utopia. This representation is a product of its age: the technological advancement in reproduction and birth control that took place in the latter half of the 20th century, separating sex from reproduction, paved the way for the separation between gender and reproduction. What was perceived as a technology that produced a sexual revolution through advances in birth control inspired an imagining of a technology in which reproduction is no longer gender specific to women.

The focus on the representation of one dominant gender in separatist feminist utopias entails the marginalisation of the other. These representations focus on a biological aspect of gender and try to physically overcome it because of the conclusion that biological difference is the basis of social gender hierarchies. The representation of the two separatist utopias sets the biological aspect of gender difference as the axis along which the conflict occurs. When gender difference in these utopias is reformed

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[30] Sally Miller-Gearhart, *The Wanderground* (London: The Women's Press:1985), pp.47-50.

into sameness in having only one unified gender, the conflict is resolved. These utopias thrive on this aspect of gender sameness and exclusivity among women. Any different elements that infiltrate them will make their utopian potential collapse because it is dependent on biological sameness and separation between the two sexes. The biological binary opposition of gender is not restructured in these utopias, but is dissolved. This dissolution is based on substitution of one power structure with an equally powerful, albeit different, structure. The representation of motherhood in that context is reformed into a new concept because it is not formed through a division of labour between mother and father. All meanings associated with institutional motherhood are substituted. All the tensions associated with the nuclear family and gender hierarchies are diffused through the concept of single-gender utopias.

Androgynous Motherhood in Utopia

While separatist feminist fictions representing motherhood harness the idea of separation from men to achieve a utopian society through overcoming gender hierarchies, other feminist writers create androgynous characters to achieve the same effect. One utopia in which the representation develops (or constructs) an alternative to the separatist vision and renegotiates the physical aspect of gender is Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). The utopia in this novel is Mattapoisett, a future world mentally contacted by Connie, a victim of institutionalized motherhood. As a result of breaking her daughter's hand when she is inebriated, Connie is sent to a mental institution in which experiments are conducted on the patients' brains. The effect of these experiments is similar to lobotomy, in that these procedures are promoted as a way of making violent patients more docile. However, Connie notices that the patients

emerge from these procedures as different people because it strips them of their personalities. Connie manages to mentally escape from her horrific experience in the hospital by communicating with a future Utopia.

In Piercy's utopia, biotechnology eliminates the physical attributes that form gender difference, making maternal labour a social rather than an individual task. Firestone's radical vision to eliminate the oppression of women through the 'freeing of women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology by every means available, and the diffusion of childbearing' is realized here through the utopian reproductive politics of Mattapoisett.[31] Connie's character is introduced into an androgynous society in which institutionalized motherhood is revised through the prospect of biotechnology. Foetuses grow in synthetic wombs outside women's bodies.[32] Men are treated with hormones to make them lactate.[33] As a consequence of assigning the biological aspect of bearing and breast-feeding the child to both sexes, caring for the child is no longer a gender-specific activity. Three mothers, male and female, are assigned to the communal task of caring for the child.[34] Piercy's utopian vision allows for imagining the possibility of eliminated, or modified, gender hierarchies in the future as a result of the biotechnological advances in the 1970s regarding reproduction. Its representation of the future is more gender-inclusive than that of separatist utopias. The imagining of an inclusive utopia in which maternal care is assigned to both sexes applies what is considered to be feminine traits to both sexes, biological equality leading to social equality.

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[31] Firestone, p. 233.
[32] Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, (London: The Woman's Press, 1979), p. 102.
Motherlines by Suzy McKee Charnas, a separatist utopia published in 1978 offers the same revision of reproductive possibilities when reproduction is achieved through insemination with horse semen to achieve full independence from human males.
[33] Piercy, p. 134.
[34] Piercy, p. 119.

Woman on the Edge of Time, like *The Wanderground* and *The Female Man*, revise the physical aspect of gender as well as institutionalized motherhood. However, Piercy's utopia disperses motherhood, by blurring the line between the two genders. This non-separatist representation bypasses gender tensions and eliminates the question of hierarchy that is still posed in *The Female Man* and *The Wanderground*. For instance, the 'other' is still a looming danger in Jael's world in *The Female Man*. A man tries to kill Jael and ends up being killed by her when she dares to step into "Manland", where patriarchy remains dominant. *The Wanderground* is also infiltrated by the danger of the male other when the hill women discover a victim of rape that is suspected to have taken place outside the city. Piercy's novel bypasses this othering and attempts instead to mould gender difference into sameness. This sameness is reflected in language when characters refer to both males and females as "per" and "person" rather than using gender pronouns.

The dystopic representations in both *The Female Man* and *Woman on the Edge of Time* reflect a nuanced depiction of biotechnology that may not always be on the side of women. The representations in Piercy's and Russ's novels suggest that biotechnological interventions to manipulate gender difference and reproduction as proposed by Firestone cannot be guaranteed to achieve social change. As well as linking biotechnology to its role in dissociating women from their reproductive potential, both novels link biotechnology to dystopic depictions. Piercy thus provides readers with a nuanced representation that associates both utopia and dystopia with biotechnology.

Piercy's utopian representation of androgynous motherhood in Mattapoisett as achieved through biotechnology is disrupted when she highlights technology in patriarchal contexts. In future world of 168th and General File in a future New York, biotechnology plays a major role when women undergo plastic surgery to exaggerate

their feminine attributes in order to get contracts to be sex slaves. Other women are 'cored to make babies all the time'.[35] This description of the process of manipulating the female body through 'coring' connotes femininity as a receptacle. Coring a woman in this dystopia is hollowing her and removing the contents of her uniqueness as a subject, reducing her to a receptacle, merely a womb or vagina. The women cored to reproduce constantly become the embodiment of an institutional perception of women as mere potential mothers[36]. Manipulating the female body suggests an alternative dimension of medical technology in service of patriarchy. The representation of women who are biotechnologically manipulated in that world reinforces ideologically sanctioned versions of femininity rather than blur it. The representation of women as sex-slaves or women in a constant state of mothering as a result of biotechnological manipulation suggests a critique of assumptions that altering biology would produce social change, and reminds readers that there is nothing essentially utopian about reproductive technologies.

The representation of both dystopic and utopian worlds where technology achieves contrasting ends questions the social/political structures that guide gender hierarchies and ideals. For instance, Russ suggests this aspect in her dystopia when the women's visit to Jael's world reveals to them that both separatist societies, Manland and Womanland, enforce a gendered ideal. In Manland two out of seven boys undergo plastic surgery to transition into women. These operations are conducted according to recommendations sent from Womanland that describe what a 'real woman' is. Jael

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[35] Piercy, p. 290.

[36] A later dystopian representation highlighting the patriarchal emphasis on the biological aspect forming femininity is Margret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Piercy's and Atwood's depiction of patriarchal perceptions of femininity isolate and augment the role of biology in structuring women's reproductive role to the point of dedicating the existence of women only to be child-bearers in their dystopias.

admits ‘the specifications we send them every year grow wilder and wilder and there isn’t a murmur of protest’.[37] Patriarchal perceptions of the feminine ideal are exaggerated in utopia to highlight its artificiality. In Womanland, Jael’s boyfriend is lobotomized to make him docile, as if to suggest a violent masculine subjectivity that can only be contained by means of a lobotomy. His otherness is contained by science in a parody of the artificial feminine ideal. Biotechnology is used to change men into women biologically; socially, however, this dystopia implies that biotechnology proves futile when transwomen are relegated to an inferior position as soon as they display signs of femininity. They become the ‘other’. In other words, biotechnology in this dystopian representation proves that technology has the potential to both liberate and subjugate women. Manipulating gender does not entail manipulating reproduction or the liberation of women from a feminine/maternal ideal in both androgynous and separatist utopian representations.

Another speculative representation of an androgynous motherhood avoids the issues posed by the portrayal of biotechnology to revise gender. Ursula LeGuin in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) expresses the concept of biological evolution to achieve the blurring of gendered difference delineated in Piercy’s work. This representation was not be influenced by Firestone’s manifesto, but proceeds its interest in understanding and changing the relationship between gender, reproduction and biotechnology. The novel’s feminist utopia is represented in a world called Gethenians. These humans are androgynous beings who have both male and female reproductive organs. They reproduce via a process called ‘Kemmer’ when the Gethenian organs of one gender become functional for a few days in a month which can be analogous of a female period

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[37] Russ, p. 169.

that affects both male and female Kemmerers. This process is complete in the case of conception when the Gethenian human carries the foetus to term and prepares for breast feeding after birth. A Gethenian in that sense can be a mother and father and is responsible for child care.[38] The extent of this attempt to eliminate a gendered essence assigned to one group is revealed when the 'king was pregnant'.[39] Contrary to gendered social structures that strip women from claiming their children as theirs by title, King Argaven's child, born from his womb, is more entitled to inherit his kingdom because he is an 'heir of the body'. Any 'kemmering sons' fathered by the king do not have as much claim to throne.[40] Ai, an envoy sent from Hain to negotiate cooperation between their worlds is alienated and viewed as a pervert because of his permanent state of Kemmer or gendering.

This representation of a feminist utopia is important as it highlights the concept of sameness that contains difference in order to revise gender hierarchies based by reproductive roles. Cultural politics are revised in *The Left Hand of Darkness* by assigning what is typically perceived as two separate genders to the same person. The association of a specific gendered essence to one group that suffers the consequences of this essentialization becomes impossible with this duality of gender. The title of the novel highlights this sameness and inclusiveness of a gendered essence when a poem is recited at the end of the novel. The poem reads:

> Light is the left hand of darkness
> and darkness is the left hand of light.
> Two are one, life and death, lying
> together like lovers in kemmer,

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[38] Ursula LeGuin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (London, Orbit, 1992), pp.72-8.
[39] LeGuin, p. 50.
[40] LeGuin, p. 80.

like hands joined together,

like the end and the way.[41]

One character, Estraven, comments on the poem by agreeing that 'duality is essence'.[42] The 'essence' in that sense is not formed through the fixed female/male dichotomy. It adopts new meanings that encompass the two producing new imaginings of gender. This duality or sameness that resides in difference lies at the core of the novel. However, it is difficult for Ai to get to grips with this concept and he falls in several instances into the trap of gendered association instilled in him in his world prior to coming to Karhide. For instance, Ai observes how Estraven 'figured these differences into the food ration calculation, in his scrupulous way which one could see as either housewifely or scientific'.[43] Ai is confused by Estaven's androgynous status, and the fact that he is specific in his measurements can be either (feminine) and housewifely or (masculine) and scientific according to Ai's gender-biased perspective. He is still ambivalent towards the pattern of gendered duality he encounters in the Gethenians. He struggles with cultural associations instilled in him that rely on biological difference in their definition of gender. Ai's perspective stems from patriarchal discourse that fails to encompass the values of the androgynous Gethenians.

Gendered discourse in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, however, does not liberate itself from traces of patriarchal discourse. Le Guin splits feminine and masculine aspects rather than merging them in its portrayal of androgyny. When Ai is hiding with Estarven, the latter comes into kemmer and his femininity becomes prominent in the presence of the male Ai. Ai observes as Estraven 'looked at [him] with a direct, gentle

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[41] LeGuin, p. 190.
[42] LeGuin, p. 190.
[43] LeGuin, p. 197.

gaze. His face ... as soft, as vulnerable, as remote as the face of a woman'.[44] Femaleness is still associated with aspects of weakness, softness and vulnerability in the novel. Another example of these associations is when Shusgis, another androgynous Gethenian, declares that while pregnant 'I couldn't keep warm -- my feet were like ice' which yet again associates the feminine status with weakness and vulnerability.[45] The pregnant king who loses his child is observed by Ai to be 'like a woman who has lost her baby, like a man who lost a son'.[46] In spite of adhering to this image of the duality applied in the representation, the fact that the binary oppositions associated with the woman who loses a 'baby' while a man loses a 'son' still display essentialist linguistic structures.[47] The duality associated with androgyny in that context carries aspects of both sameness and difference and raises questions about the possibilities with imaginative gender revisions in fiction including androgynous characters and how they function within social structures.

The suggested deconstruction of gender in some fictional utopias serves to revise the discursive traces of social hierarchies of gender that form patriarchal constructs of the feminine/maternal ideal. The representation of separatist and androgynous utopian societies reveals an array of possibilities for revising gendered ideas about femininity and motherhood. Veronica Hollinger in 'Reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, and the Defamiliarization of Gender' (2000) suggests a reading of these utopias that would revolve around the 'queering of our reading of

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[44] LeGuin, p. 202.
[45] LeGuin, p. 95.
[46] LeGuin, p. 237.
[47] In the revision of her 1976 essay about the use of gender in her novel, Le Guin declares that her 'utter refusal' to 'mangle English by inventing a pronoun for he/she...collapsed' in 1978 because 'the generic pronoun he/him/his...exclude women from discourse...and was an invention of male grammarians'. Although she states in the essay that her novel is primarily about people that never went through a war, the gender question and her use of the male pronoun generated a debate that she had to address in her essay and later revisions in various publications. See Ursula Le Guin, 'Is Gender Necessary? Redux', in *The Language of the Night,* ed. Susan Wood,*(* New York: Ultramarine Publishing, 1979), p. 169.

feminist issues in science fiction'.[48] This is achieved when we 'dismantle the sex/gender system itself as a system of political oppression...the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically or politically, or ideologically...*woman* denotes a class of subjects circumscribed by the gender binarism of heteronormativity'.[49] Lesbian separatist representations according to Hollinger are how these feminist utopias revise gendered structures by separating gendered associations from cultural associations with sexuality[50]. In other words, Hollinger suggests the deconstruction of the female (essence) as it is represented in heteronormative discourse in these utopias. Although Hollinger acknowledges that these utopias do not completely free themselves from discursive traces of heteronormativity, she suggests that these utopias:

> repeat them differently, and sometimes excessively...Queer, however, suggests a postmodern and utopian space for exploring sexual difference(s); it promises much in terms of recuperating traditionally abjected figures like monsters and grotesques, as it deploys , in Butler's words, the "repetition of hegemonic forms which fails to repeat loyally".[51]

This attempt to navigate the essentialist aspect in the representation of these utopias relies heavily on the deconstruction of associations of sex/gender in order to function as a feminist discourse. In that sense separatist utopias like *The Female Man* and *The Wanderground* break away from the heteronormative discourse when they represent the queer as a deconstructed excess that dissociates itself from gender hierarchies. This

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[48] Veronica Hollinger, 'Reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, and the Defamiliarization of Gender', pp. 197-215, *Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism*, Marleen Barr, ed. (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 200.
[49] Hollinger, p. 200.
[50] The concept of revised perspectives of gender structures through lesbianism is theorized by Monique Wittig as early as 1978. In the 'The Straight Mind' Wittig suggests that '[l]lesbians are not women' because they 'break off the heterosexual contract' that is based on 'different/other at every level'. *See* Monique Wittig, 'The Straight Mind' in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Russel Ferguson et. al. (New York: The Museum of Contemporary Arts and MIT Press, 1990), pp. 54-56. The deconstruction of gender hierarchies through homosexuality destroys the man/woman dichotomy in culture including literary representation in lesbian utopias revising the heterosexual perception of women and femininity.
[51] Hollinger, p. 209.

deconstruction entails the revision of meanings associated with mothering within traditional social constructs in the United States that dictate norms of maternal (labour) and regulation of the female body. Defamiliarization in feminist utopias offers fresh perspectives on gender structures. It achieves this through utilizing the discourse that constructs abjectness, queerness and the grotesque while both maintaining and shifting elements of masculine violence. These perspectives allow for a revision of gender politics through defamiliarization.[52]

Deconstructing meanings associated with mothering continue through the 1980s with novels including *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* by Katherine V. Forrest (1984). The novel takes mothering outside of the limitations of patriarchal discourse and associates different meanings. This deconstruction of mothering in the novel includes a radical revision of the social space in which institutional mothering functions. The novel revolves around the story of a woman, Mother, who comes from the planet *Vernan* and marries a human. She gives birth to nine daughters. Her daughters decide to leave earth after 'documenting and forecasting the continuing irrationality of Earth's belief's, customs, and mores, and clearly demonstrating the need for concern and change'.[53] Setting themselves outside the narrative about women on Earth, Mother's daughters point out the discrepancies within the discourse and prepare the reader for an alternative one.

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[52] The term 'defamiliarization' first coined by Victor Shklovsky to distinguish artistic forms of expression. The term is also used by Daphne Patai in critiquing utopian writing. She examines gender reversal in several utopian novels that span from late nineteenth century to mid-20th century. She suggests that the element of defamiliarization can be utilized more effectively in earlier utopias like *Beatrice the Sixteenth* (1909) by Irene Clyde. She reads gender reversal along what she perceives as a failed attempt at defamiliarization by Le Guin when Clyde keeps the gender of the creatures from another planet a mystery rather than the use of masculine pronoun in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). See Daphne Patai, 'When Women Rule: Defamiliarization and the Sex-Role Reversal Utopia', *Extrapolation***,** 23 (Spring 1982), 56-69, p. 59.

[53] Kathrine V. Forrester, *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (Los Angeles, Alyson Books, 1984-2002) p. 8.

The point of view of the narration in *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* marks the empowerment and takes the narrative into the hands of women. Although it should be noted that the narrational point of view is divided between three different characters, they are all women, one of whom is a female lieutenant from Earth who gradually dissociates herself from the culture that she came from and finally chooses to stay in Maternas highlighting a shift towards a gynocentric perspective. The male sociologist in *Herland* as a narrator is analogous to the female historian in *Daughters of a Coral Dawn.* The bearer of knowledge, the narrator, attempting to gain the trust of the reader, is shifted from maleness to femaleness marking the developing gender politics in the 1970s. A gynocentric approach to structuring the narrative through the point of view of a female narrator allows more space for a feminist perspective, setting the female narrator and her point of view as the source of knowledge about the narrative, and giving the feminist point of view more weight within that narrative.

Motherhood as a trope is dominant in the novel. The daughters leave Earth and build a utopian society on a planet that they name *Maternas*. Associations between motherhood and colonization are featured through the women's colony on *Maternas*. They name it Cybele, 'the symbol of universal motherhood. She was a Greek-Roman deity known as Great mother of the Gods'.[54] Rather than associating motherhood with childcare in the novel, it is associated with power and domination. This is particularly unusual within the political context of the 1980s creates its own set of critiques about the politics of the period. It questions the popularity of conservatism and of a specific brand of American political approach during Reagan's presidency, which advocated for

[54] Forrester, p. 96.

conservative family values viewing feminism as a threat to the family unit.[55] What the novel achieves in revising the discourse about motherhood is seen when the discourse and space of mothering is altered. The novel moves motherhood from Earth to another planet to reach a different potential. The hybrid, Earth and Vernan women, who establish *Maternas,* where motherhood relates all, are a deconstruction of the essence of a woman who aspires to achieve patriarchal ideals. Their hybridity and separatist ideology represents the queering of a feminine/maternal ideal and revises images associated with motherhood in the conservative social space of the 1980s. The dominated/colonized maternal body of the 1980s becomes the power that dominates a different planet and another world.

Through defamiliarizing the status quo and the discourse that represents it, feminist representations place femininity and motherhood in other discursive dimensions where the relations between femininity, the maternal role, reproduction and the feminine ideal are not only rearranged but somehow severed and reattached in different ways. To stress the importance of this discursive modification in speculative feminist fiction, Marleen Barr coins the term 'feminist fabulation' in 1987 to protest perceiving feminist SF 'as a feminine creative appendage of a genre which appeals to and is still directed towards male readers'.[56] Barr suggests that 'members of the SF community should insist upon a new, appropriate and correct term to replace "feminist SF".[57] She bases the modified term for feminist speculative fiction on Robert Scholes's

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[55] The nomination of the pro-life judge Sandra Day O'Conner in the Supreme Court in hopes that she will reverse *Roe v. Wade* can be viewed as an example of the popularity of conservative values during the 1980s.

[56] Marleen Barr, "Feminist Fabulation; Or, Playing with Patriarchy Vs. The Masculinization of Meta Fiction." *Women's Studies*, 14 (Dec. 1987) 187-191, p. 187. <EBSCO*host*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=5808028&site=ehost-live&authtype=ip,shib&user=s1523151>.

[57] Barr, 'Feminist Fabulation', p. 187.

definition of fabulation as '"fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way"'.[58] She refers to feminist speculative fiction's discursive shift from traditional modes of representation to the point of dismantling the original patriarchal discourse. In other words, the familiar becomes unfamiliar in order to confront the familiar and critique it. The renaming of a genre places it in an alternative space where the familiarity of patriarchal perspectives of SF is removed. By renaming these fictions as feminist fabulations, they are removed from traditional discursive expectations into new ones where alternative modes of gender perceptions can be created. These feminist writings described by Barr as fictions that 'create useful tools for deconstructing patriarchal signs and replacing them with feminist signifiers' constitute the essence of utopian literature as a critique.[59] Through resisting patriarchal modes of representation and dismantling them through rendering their discourse devoid of meaning, feminist fabulation acts as a critique of both conservative social constructs and their representations.

Feminist fabulations, like androgynous and separatist utopias, are the result of the possibilities offered by second wave feminist ideology and the technological advancements of the 20th century. However, it is literature that offers its own set of possibilities. It offers the hope in utopia of revised gender politics that change the social/political terrain of femininity and motherhood. In spite of all the hopeful possibilities offered by these utopias, one possibility stands as the crucial element in these feminist utopias: possibility of modifying patriarchal discourse through creating

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Barr returns to expand on the definition of 'feminist fabulation' in later publications like Marleen Barr, "Food for Postmodern Thought: Isak Dinesen's Female Artists as Precursors to Contemporary Feminist Fabulators' (1990) and *Feminist Fabulation Space/Postmodern Fiction* (1992).

[58] Barr, 'Feminist Fabulation', p. 188.

[59] Barr, 'Feminist Fabulation', p. 188.

new meanings to signify gender and motherhood. The possibility of worlds without men, foetuses born out of artificial wombs, men that can/will breast feed and genderless humans are all images expressed in a new language that is filled with fresh new possibilities that structure new perspectives of gender and motherhood.

The Utopian Potential of Cyborg Theory

The feminist utopias of the 1970s imaginatively create unfamiliar, better worlds achieved through recreating dominant modes of motherhood and reproduction through the intervention of biotechnology. This imaginative approach to critiquing and deconstructing the dominant discourse by portraying the politics of gender and mothering through a utopian lens is not exclusive to fiction. It was also a characteristic of the political manifestos already discussed (by Solanas and Firestone), but another influential manifesto, from the 1980s, combines the manifesto form with some of the imaginative tools of utopian fiction. Donna Haraway's 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' (1985) rely on elements of defamiliarization in the writing of gender in order to deconstruct the meanings associated with the discourse that structures it. Deploying the potential of technology in the 1980s, such as the development of genetic modification and transfer, together with the growing access to home computers, this manifesto draws on this increasing accessibility of technology. Approaching gender from an unusual direction, this manifesto shows the potential of deconstructing the ideals linking gender and femininity. It demonstrates the discursive shift that paved the way for Judith Butler's deconstructive theory of performativity that reconceptualized socially defined notions of mothering and femininity.

Haraway interrogates social constructs and proposes a new way of perceiving gender in the light of technological advancements of the late twentieth century. In her analysis of the feminine ideal within patriarchal social structures, she suggests that women are an illusion in the realm of knowledge that is 'constituted by another's desire'.[60] If images associated with femininity and motherhood are projections of patriarchal desires, then this suggests the deep need to create alternative ways of constructing and perceiving gender. Haraway turns to deconstruction to propose a different way in which humans might perceive themselves as subjects. She suggests they should restructure their perception of the world around the concept of the cyborg. She relies on the technological and scientific context of the late twentieth century to deconstruct perceptions that rely on racial and gender hierarchies. Her theory suggests that current structures are based on the perception of sharp boundaries of unified classes of people are outmoded. In order to overcome these problematic boundaries creating differences of class, gender and race, she suggests cyborg theory 'as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings'.[61] These fruitful couplings include the blurring of these boundaries utilizing what she calls as the 'stakes of the border war' between 'organism and machine' which are 'territories of production, reproduction and imagination'.[62] All concepts created within the boundaries of these territories could be re-envisioned and restructured by blurring the boundaries between them.

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[60] Donna J. Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. by Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990), 190-233, p. 190.
Haraway includes a note on this version of her article stating that it 'is substantially the same as the 1980 version [published in *The Socialist Review* No 8] with minor revisions and correction of notes'. See Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', p.190. Reading this version with her notes gives a sense of how her thoughts about her theory were modified because of the response to her controversial article.
[61] Haraway, p. 191.
[62] Haraway, p. 191.

One way of deconstructing these boundaries is by uniting organism and machine in the image of the cyborg. This will challenge what Haraway calls the 'traditions of "Western" science and politics — the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture'.[63] These cultural concepts create fixed monolithic entities of class, gender and race. The blurring of the boundaries created within these cultures is only available through what Haraway suggests as a shift in perspective of the self and the world. This includes what she calls 'double vision' in which we see two perspectives of a cyborg world that is:

> about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defence, about the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war (Sofia,1984). From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.[64]

The 'double vision' blurs the boundaries created by traditional perceptions of the world. It renegotiates the fixed boundaries created by that discourse and their insistence on 'either/or'; Haraway, instead, argues for a more inclusive, 'both/and' perspective. Masculine modes of violence appropriating women's bodies as the site of reproduction structuring artificial feminine and maternal ideals are radically revised through this vision of a cyborg world. Social structures reliant on an idea of humanity that fixes gender and race boundaries are revised by this inclusivity: to be understood as at once a human, an animal and a machine builds new structures and destroys the old. These new identities are based on a deconstructed self that includes different identities coming

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[63] Haraway, p. 292.
[64] Haraway, p. 196.

from different sources in different proportions. Notions of a unified specific human identity triggering gender and racial differences are disrupted through cyborg theory. The cyborg is not bound by gender or its social role; instead, the cyborg is guided by subjective experience as a hybrid. This utopian theorization of revised social structures sets the tone for the value of the cyborg theory as a means to deconstruct gender roles.

Social constructs setting the boundaries of the maternal role are disrupted when the mother is no longer only a human. Haraway writes that women suffer from:

> integration/ exploitation into a world system of production/reproduction and communication called the informatics of domination. The home, workplace, market, public arena, the body itself all can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways, with large consequences for women and others.[65]

In Haraway's contention, the shattering of the unified entity of women created by traditional discourse through adopting cyborg theory and perception modification by utilizing 'communication' technologies will create a 'disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self… the self feminists must code'.[66] This cyborg self is liberated because it 'is not subject to Foucault's biopolitics; the cyborg simulates politics'.[67] This point is especially important because it concentrates on deconstructing the value system that created gender difference that relegates women to an inferior, subjugated unified class. Science and nature outside cyborg theory classify and dominate this class. Concepts of subjectivity are restructured to target the politics of domination. Haraway reimagines reproduction as regeneration rather than a political location of the practice of power.

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[65] Haraway, p. 205.
[66] Ibid
[67] Ibid

Although the utopian approach of Haraway imagines potentially deconstructs gender specific roles, the ambitious concept of a post-gender human has its limitations. This is specific to femininity because the concept of the cyborg, a hybrid human/animal/machine, can be problematic given the association of women with animals and stressing the biological aspect of their role in reproduction as being "natural". Moreover, in a capitalist context women are placed in the same space as that of the machine, specifically household appliances. Placing women and domestic appliances in the same cultural space makes these machines an extension of the housework which is an extension of women in a traditional setting. In other words, women who use machines to perform their role as housewives and mothers can be considered cyborgs when these machines are associated with their role. The cyborg theory loses its emancipatory potential when the woman as a cyborg is the housewife who uses machines to perform her socially assigned role.

The problematic potential of the cyborg theory is discussed further in Judy Wajcman's *Techno Feminism* (2004). Discussing the relation between technology and gender, the author reviews the contribution of cyber-feminism theorists like Donna Haraway. Wajcman points out some of the issues with cyborg theory focus on the role of body modification 'to reinforce gender stereotypes rather than subvert them'.[68] The blurring of the gender line in that case is lost within the attempt to be faithful to gender ideals in these operations. Wajcman also points out the problematic relation between militarization and the cyborg that attaches conventional notions of masculinity and male-power to the cyborg image. Although recognized by Haraway, Wajcman stresses how this issue taints the feminist potential of cyborg theory. She writes about the

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[68] Judy Wajcman, *Techno Feminism*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), p. 92.

atmosphere within the Manhattan Project after the bombing of Hiroshima, stating that '[w]hat is striking is the sheer joy experienced by this group of male inventors in achieving technological perfection. Certainly their cyborgian identification with the bomb, a transcendent blending of self and machine, makes for disturbing reading'.[69] The militarization of the cyborg adds to the controversial aspect of the cyborg theory as a feminist approach to revising gender socially and politically. Although the author cites Haraway's attempt to reflect the nature of work within a capitalist environment and the potential of the cyborg within that environment, Wajcamn problematizes this potential even further. She points out that 'the feminization of work is not so much about a new cyborg identity, but rather reflects burgeoning demand for service workers with conventional feminine qualities'.[70] This particular reading of cyborg theory questions its potential in blurring gender lines. What Haraway proposes as a utopian future premised on a cyborg entity that overcomes gender constrictions is threatened by the concept of a feminized post-human labour that serve a patriarchal capitalist structure.

However, Haraway alludes to the issue of the exercise of power on the female body in a capitalist scientific context that targets gender, class and race again in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse*™ (1997). The book revolves around the concept of acquiring knowledge of the world through perception. However, this act of witnessing according to Haraway must be modest enough to acknowledge 'the natural kinship of the fully artificial FemaleMan© and OncoMouse™'.[71] The references to Joanna Russ's concept of the socially restructured human in *The Female Man* and Oncomouse, a genetically modified mouse used for

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[69] Wajcman, p. 97.
[70] Wajcman, p. 98.
[71] Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse*™ (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 270.

cancer research, illustrate the technological possibilities in the new millennium. Haraway's modest witness in this context:

> insists on its situatedness, where location is itself always a complex construction as well as inheritance, and that casts its lot with the projects and needs of those who could not or would not inhabit the subject positions of the self-invisible and the discursive sites, the "laboratories" of the credible, civil man of science.[72]

This ability to transcend traditional or conformist perceptions liberates otherwise culturally invisible marginalized groups in a capitalist political context that attaches itself to science to manufacture convenient facts. This is a reiteration of her call for perception modification in her cyborg theory. Modest witnessing in that sense would modify the perception of the female body as not indicative of unity of a single class. The modification of how facts are created will create new connections. "Facts" structured on a discursive level like the relation between femininity and motherhood and the feminine/maternal ideal will be modified through creating new discourses. What is considered to be factual is the product of social structures that create discourse. The new connections created through new discourses about gender and motherhood are produced by the modification of the social structures behind the social (facts).

Haraway's deconstruction of sex/gender in the theory of the cyborg offers another space where the political and utopian possibilities of gender equality are advocated, instead of restructuring a hierarchal social system and specific gender associations. Haraway herself uses the concept of queering to refer to her proposal to think of 'selves such as scientists and places such as laboratories. By the end of the second Millennium, it is past time to queer them permanently, to revise them

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[72] Haraway, *Modest Witness*, p. 270.

generically, to colour them back into visibility'.[73] This revision or queering of the self and world is a direct challenge of traditional perceptions that create gender difference. Haraway's theorization of the cyborg blurs social and physical limitations. It aims to disperse hierarchies altogether. Femininity and motherhood in the spaces of utopia and the cyborg theory are reinvented and redefined.

Haraway's desire to modify the perception of human subjectivity is described by the author herself as 'utopian'.[74] However, read within the context of the 1980s, her cyborg theory exposes the incongruity between politics structuring gender ideals and the level of technological advancement of the decade. It finds the discourse of the maternal ideal to be obsolete. The politics structuring the maternal ideal should be revised as implied by Haraway's disruptive theorization of the cyborg. What cyborg theory offers is a utopian strategy for the deconstruction of narrow and conservative maternal and gender ideals. Haraway's cyborg theory introduced the possibilities offered by deconstructing gender discourse. She achieved this by redefining notions of mothering through a playful reframing of some of the cultural association of new technologies. In the decade of the first successful surrogate pregnancy, personal computers and robotics, the maternal ideal needed not be perceived or expressed only within conservative frameworks. Motherhood in the age of the cyborg can be conceived outside of the conventional boundaries of gender and femininity. New meanings associated with gender and technology evolved out of the very limits of patriarchal discourse and generated new possibilities for expressing the human. The utopian potential of cyborg theory's expression of motherhood is revealed when the discourse about reproduction is freed from conservative gender associations. Perceived through the eye of the cyborg,

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[73] Haraway, *Modest Witness*, p. 269.
[74] Haraway, p. 292.

human, animal and machine reproduction is not liberated from its old gendered constraints.

Conclusion

American feminist theoretical writings in the latter half of the twentieth century inspired a number of feminist utopias: fictional revisions of a gendered essentialism that questions of the foundations of gender difference. Whether they represent separatist or androgynous societies, these utopias reflect new structures that entail the dismantling of the ideal. They play with concepts of gender sameness and difference to challenge how women are perceived and function within repressive patriarchal social/political systems.

Utopian rewritings of motherhood and gender through radical feminist manifestos, feminist fabulation and cyborg theory disrupt discourses about the feminine ideal by means of defamiliarization. They pull meanings of mothering, reproduction and feminine subjectivity out of patriarchal frameworks and create an alternative discourse for restructuring conventional perceptions of mothering, femininity, gender and subjectivity. These forms of writing defamiliarize elements otherwise perceived as masculine in conservative discourse and associate them instead with femininity and mothering to create new possibilities for the perception of mothering. In these manifestos and utopias, technology and sometimes violence, both more conventionally associated with masculinity, are appropriated to newly imagined forms of femininity and motherhood.

The refusal of masculine meanings and the blurring gender boundaries contributes to the creation of utopian forms of writing that destroy perceptions of the feminine/maternal ideal and highlight new forms of subjectivity in which the subject

can be perceived and expressed. Although the influence of Second Wave feminist writings paved the way for a revision of the concepts of femininity and mothering, the spaces created in feminist manifestos, utopias and cyborg theory map a revolutionary vision of the human subject. The construction of a new world in feminist utopias and the construction of a new self in the cyborg theory that emerges out of the ruins of conservative discourse about femininity, motherhood and gender are only realized through the possibility offered by new technology and a new platform on which a new self and world can be imagined and performed.

What these radical fictions and theorizations achieve is a rejection of the conventional terms of motherhood a deconstruction of a gender essence in these American feminist utopian writing entails the deconstruction of meanings associated with motherhood. Motherhood outside patriarchal discourse emerges outside the confines of the nuclear family and norms of labour division associated with it. Ideals of child-bearing and rearing in conservative discourse about women in the United States are questioned within radical feminist writing that introduces the idea of separation between sexuality, reproduction and femininity. The language expressing femininity, motherhood and gender in radical feminist manifestos, utopias and cyborg theory removes the concept of motherhood from its associations with conservative discourse that frames motherhood as a narrow ideal. They replace motherhood in an alternative framework of images and associations that remakes motherhood outside the ideal as a potential for every woman.

The utilization of images of biotechnological reproductive advancement and the deconstruction of gender ideals that muddles specific associations with masculinity and femininity rework these associations. According to these imaginings, motherhood is not the happiness and satisfaction for women in giving birth and raising babies. Motherhood

assumes meanings of leadership, sisterhood, and freedom of choice. Motherhood can be a man's role or a women's role. Motherhood can be performed as a part or a whole of traditionally structured roles, or within radically reimagined social and cultural structures. These writings express motherhood and femininity differently through emptying the discourse about motherhood from their limited associations with specific and narrowly gendered reproductive roles. Although this separation between femininity and reproduction is expressed as a utopian vision, the fictional representations help readers to reimagine motherhood differently outside the confines of the familiar.

Writing as a critique of patriarchal social structures and discourses of gender is disrupted in both utopian conceptualization of gender and in representations about interruption to the transformation into maternal subjectivity where notions about the maternal ideal are questioned. Narratives about radical, feminist utopias and narratives about interruptions to perception of the self as a maternal subject all revise and critique the conservative discourse about motherhood and introduce a set of new possibilities for perceiving gender and femininity. Utopian representations turning the ideal into the unfamiliar offer revisions of a variety of issues associated with femininity in the United States. They replace the patriarchal ideal of woman/and mother with a utopian ideal of the subject. They deconstruct the rigid feminine/maternal ideal and express the feminine/maternal subject in an alternative discourse that frees it from gendered associations. Both forms of writing reject, disrupt and interrupt notions of the maternal ideal and give birth to new perceptions of motherhood and gender.

The delineation of motherhood in feminist utopian and radical writing and the portrayal of the rejection of motherhood through the concept of interruption to maternal subjectivity all become forms of writing that disrupt and interrupt conservative modes of writing motherhood in post-war and contemporary American literature. The

representation of interruptions to transformation from the feminine into the maternal subjectivity discussed in the following chapters tackles the feminine ideal from within. Interruptions to women's perception of themselves as maternal subjects through the delineation of themes like voluntary childlessness, abuse and infanticide deconstruct feminine ideals from within revealing a femininity that is unfamiliar. American narratives about abortion, postpartum depression grieving and mothering while black revise the maternal trope and reject the ideal associated with it. These representations, like utopian revisions of motherhood, contribute to the dialogue about motherhood as an ideal in the United States.

2 Rejected realities and rejected motherhood(s): The marginalized reality of the maternal experience and the stigmatization of abortion

Although this thesis began with the representation of alternative forms of imaging gender and motherhood, the focus of the following chapters is the rejection of motherhood. The texts explored in this chapter focus on the representation of female characters who resist patriarchal feminine ideals foregrounding every woman's potential to be a mother. The interrupted transformation of the character into the maternal subject in this chapter represents the blocked transformation of the feminine subject into a maternal subject. The representation of resistance to the feminine ideal is what I propose to define as a blocked transformation into maternal subjectivity in representative characters.

Novels representing this form of feminine subjectivity highlight the continuing stigmatization of sexuality outside of wedlock, single motherhood, voluntary childlessness and abortion in the United States from the 1960s through to the 2010s. Representations of motherhood and abortion in the selected texts show subjects who are trapped by stigmatization, revealing more about the norms that structure this stigma and feed into it. This chapter explores generic, political and historical shifts in the representation of stigmatized motherhood in postwar American fiction to highlight debates that both critique and shape women's social realities with regard to voluntary childlessness.

The novels rage from those published before *Roe vs. Wade* (1973) in order to highlight the shifts in discourse about morality and abortion from the 1960s up to

beginning of the twenty-first century. Writers represent a variety of perspectives ranging from the conservative in Brian J. Gail's *Childless* (2011) through to the liberal critique of prolife politics in John Irving's *The Cider House Rules* (1985). The chapter also includes novels from a variety of genres such as Young Adult fiction published as early as 1969 and dystopic fiction such as Hilary Jordan's *When She Woke* (2011). This range of abortion literature indicates the complexity of postwar debates about morality in relation to abortion and its representation through the medium of fiction.

The structuring of stigma in relation to the feminine subject is evident when sexual relations out of wedlock are perceived as a threat to family values and the unit of the nuclear family. Images associated with single motherhood, specifically of poverty and reliance on government support, contribute to the stigmatization of extra-marital pregnancy. Pregnancy in these circumstances becomes an embodiment of the stigma. The rejection of motherhood and a blocked transformation into the maternal subject becomes the result of the assertion of the social reality of stigmatized motherhood in these texts. Socioeconomic aspects that hinder the chances of growth of the feminine subject are highlighted through fictional representations. When the transformation into the maternal subject becomes in itself the subject of stigmatization in the case of choosing an abortion, another layer of stigmatization takes place. The stigmatization of abortion is a branding, a rewriting of the verdict of the social norm on the body. The effect of the event on the body is moulded through stigma into a brand that marks her as a monster. It makes what is elected to disappear *appear again* as a scar, suggesting the lack of morals and dignity of the feminine subject who does not conform to socio-sexual norms.

Stigma in Young Adult Novels

The thematic relations between the representative Young Adult fiction in this chapter are guided by the discursive elements of their time. Ranging from the end of the 1960s to the 1980s, they coincide with shifts in the discourse of abortion. On the one hand, Second Wave feminism produced a dialogue about women and their life-choices. On the other hand, abortion, as one of these choices that relate to women's body, was criminalized, questioned and challenged. The years leading *to Roe vs Wade* 'were witnessing a rapid evolution towards increased personal freedom for women', according to Katha Pollitt, and a series of political and economic developments contributed to the shaping of the discourse about abortion and the decision in *Roe v. Wade.*[1] Based on the Fourteenth Amendment due process clause, the 1973 decision extended women's right to privacy, limiting states' control over the decision to have on abortion. Marking a shift towards the right, President Nixon's policies had sought to limit government interference in social and welfare systems, considering it as overdependence and a symptom of socialism.[2] This limiting of the control of government during Nixon's presidency was a response to President Lyndon Johnson's programs for The Great Society, in which he intended to fight poverty through welfare programs. This approach ironically might have influenced the discourse about women's rights to abortions and government control over women's bodies.[3] What was intended as a liberal policy also had unintended conservative consequences.

The stigmatization of single motherhood is Young Adult fiction. Directed towards teenaged readers specifically, this genre sought to shape perceptions of abortion

[1]Katha Pollitt, *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights* (New York: Picador, 2014), p. 19.
[2] Iwan W. Morgan, *Beyond the Liberal Consensus: A Political History of the United States since 1965* (London: Hurst and Company, 1994), pp. 50-120-2.
[3] Philip Roth's *Our Gang* (1971) satirizes Nixon's approach towards the criminalization of abortion in light of war crimes in Vietnam and question his moral standing when it comes to the argument about the sanctity of life utilized within anti-abortion perspectives.

and the stigma of teen pregnancy in the United States. Fiction intended to be read by teenagers during the period leading to *Roe v. Wade* included narratives that express what can be described as a didactic approach to the issue of abortion and sexuality. Although the issue of regulating abortion is not specific to the 1970s, writing about abortion in that period gains particular urgency because of the public debate that led to the Supreme Court's decision. What was considered 'problem literature' addressed the social shifts that influenced teenagers' lives. It grabbed the reins of social change and attempted to guide teenaged readers into the future.

This fiction portrays young female protagonists who struggle with navigating sexuality within their society's moral norms and who resort to abortion themselves or assist their friends in obtaining one. Each of the texts carries specific nuances that emerge from the discourse of its era. Oscillating between Second Wave feminism and the conservative approach to family values characteristic of the Nixon and Reagan administrations, they offer their young readership different perspectives on sexuality, morality and ethics. Their didactic approach limits the representation of women's social reality that leads to a blocked transformation into the maternal subject, specifically in conservative representations. In other words, the showing and telling about stigma and social taboos in these texts sometimes diverts from representing the structures that form stigma when these structures are embedded in the discourse of the novel. However, the fiction struggles to articulate critique because the structures of social stigma are embedded in, and normalised by, the narrative. Political and social structures forming stigma extend to forming the discourse of the novel rather than being questioned as a source of stigma.

Jeanette Eyerly's *Bonnie Jo, Go Home* (1973) stands as an example of this tendency. This novella contains elements of didacticism that are clear in the tone of the

character's journey through her blocked transformation into the maternal subject. A Midwestern girl who travels from her town to New York to obtain an abortion because it is one of the few places in which abortion was legalized in the United States, Bonnie Jo travels alone because both the boy who got her pregnant and her boyfriend abandon her. The reader is exposed to Bonnie Jo's thoughts as she takes on the difficult journey of a complicated abortion because of her advanced pregnancy and financial difficulties. The journey finally ends when the abortion is successful. Bonnie Jo is not willing to face the reality of raising her child in a society that stigmatizes her instead of rewarding her for being a mother. Her transformation into the maternal subject is blocked by potential stigmatization.

The association between female sexuality and the stigma of immorality justifies the character's turn to abortion to maintain the social code of honour rather than become representative of the stigma of unwed motherhood. The novel is discussed as one of the texts revealing a pedagogic paradigm in Jeff Koloze's 'Adolescent Fiction on Abortion: Developing a Paradigm and Pedagogic Responses from Literature Spanning Three Decades' (1999):

> the dominant feature of adolescent fiction on abortion is best characterized by the ending statements. If an adolescent abortion novel ends in the killing of the unborn child, then the ending will be as sad as that in Eyerly's *Bonnie Jo, Go Home*: 'Leaving New York eleven days after she had arrived, her face seemed to have aged a year for every day she had been there'.[4]

Although the novella's ending might suggest growth out of the experience, Koloze points out the tone of warning. Having an abortion is a traumatic experience, the novel suggests, that will age a girl, and the aging body symbolises the decaying morals of teenage sex and having to undergo an abortion. The didactic approach of *Bonnie Jo, Go*

[4] Jeff Koloze, 'Adolescent Fiction on Abortion: Developing a Paradigm and Pedagogic Responses from Literature Spanning Three Decades', *Life and Learning*, 9 (1999), pp. 347 -385, http://www.uffl.org/vol%209/koloze9.pdf [accessed 6 May 2015], p. 378.

Home suggests female sexuality as leading to imminent disaster and distress. Instead of delineating the circumstances that led to her blocked transformation into the maternal subject, it concentrates on the aftermath of the character's decisions. This suggests the existence of a moral lesson within the narrative and reveals contemporary sexual and social mores of its time.

The main character is as continuously threatened with the stress of the financial ruin of her father as she is faced with an abortion fee that keeps increasing daily.[5] This position is clearly revealed in the title that is encompassing the imperative to *Go Home.* The situation leading to this imperative sentence is clarified further in the novel when the same sentence appears in the novel in the form of Bonnie Jo's interior monologue of the main character, Bonnie Jo, before she has sex.[6] This is represented as a call for self-control and abstinence lest a girl falls into the same situation where she would resort to the rejection of motherhood. This part of her interior monologue is so important, as a didactic message, that Eyerly elected to be the title of the novel.

Not all teenage fiction of the mid-twentieth century took the same approach to portraying abortion and stigma. Other novels represented abortion in a different tone to how abortion and stigma are structured in Eyerly's novel. An earlier Young Adult novel entitled *My Darling, My Hamburger* (1969), written by Paul Zindel, offers a different perspective of sexuality out-of-wedlock. The novel is related from the points of view of two high-school friends, Maggie and Liz. Both are struggling with negotiating their relationship through the demands of social rules and their sexuality. Liz however, is raped and resorts to having an illegal abortion. The novel ends with Liz having a haemorrhage as a result of the abortion and Maggie, in an attempt to save her life, calls

[5] Jeanette Eyerly, *Bonnie Jo Go Home*, (New York, Bantam Books, 1972), pp. 90-2.
[6] Eyerly, p. 63.

the police. This incident leads to exposing the abortion and marks the end of their friendship, as the stigma of the abortion takes its toll on Liz's family.

One incident in the novel is suggestive of the tensions between social reality of women and social norms. At the beginning of the novel the students discuss an incident in the sex-education class where the teacher is asked by a student about what to do when a girl is pressured by her boyfriend to have sex. The teacher's 'advice was that you're supposed to suggest going to get a hamburger'.[7] This specific scene in the novel points out the shortcomings of a didactic approach to teenage sexuality because of the gap between reality and the lesson. What the teacher perceives as the woman's moral responsibility to prevent pregnancy and comes from the patriarchal demands on femininity to be attractive and submissive as well as being chaste. A younger woman, according to the patriarchal discourse of the teacher, is consumable. Her body is interchangeable with a hamburger. While she politely substitutes her body with food according to the instructions of the teacher, the representation exposes the tensions within the feminine ideal. The didacticism reflected in the teacher's approach fails to encompass the full dimensions of women's reality. The simplification within the equation of the female body to a hamburger is the simplification contained within the feminine ideal. A one-dimensional woman, whose subjectivity is not complex and is without desire, is suggested. The interchangeability between women and food becomes the interchangeability between the feminine ideal and stigmatisation.

The didactic approach to sexuality outside of wedlock in *Bonnie Jo, Go Home* is suggested by the association of men with wolves. This predatory association referring to sexual perversion and monstrosity, often used in didactic literature, is displayed in the novel when the boy who Bonnie Jo has sex with is called Wolf. When she tells him

[7] Paul Zindel, *My Darling, My Hamburger* (New York: Red Fox, 1969), p. 13.

where she lives he ominously tells her that he lives elsewhere, as 'Wolves live in the woods'.[8] Directed towards women in particular, this image places the responsibility for sexual continence and the protection of chastity on the woman. She detects the wolf and she steps away from danger because he is a predator who cannot help but attack women. Texts that *cry wolf,* isolating and shifting the responsibility of observing morality towards women, seek to instil this image in young readers. Bonnie Jo's attitude when she refuses to take contraceptive pills from the doctor after the abortion reveals an attempt to criticize female extramarital sexuality as part of the novel's didactic message. When the doctor gives her the contraceptive pills, Bonnie Jo says, 'It's not going to happen again' but the doctor insists that she should take them and 'keep them until you're married'.[9] The novel ends with the impression that Bonnie Jo has learned her lesson and that she will never again fall into the thorny fields of premarital sex to avoid repeating the experience of abortion or stigmatization.

In *My Darling, My Hamburger* the stigma of sexuality out of wedlock combined with the stigma of abortion culminates in isolation. Although Liz's character is subjected to stigma and isolation, her female friend's reaction removes her outside the circle of stigma. The friend laments that Liz's boyfriend who refused to marry her is not blamed too. She wishes that she could ask him 'Are you satisfied about what you did to Liz when you give someone the kind of shame you gave her - the kind that stops her from showing her face in public?'[10] Woman's social isolation with the stigma associated with acting outside the norms is questioned as well as the double standard when men are treated differently within the same context. Eyerly highlights the gendering of responsibility and stigma and revises it to critique the reality that creates stigma rather than focusing on stigma as a force in itself.

[8] Eyerly, p. 48.
[9] Eyerly, p. 113.
[10] Zindel, p. 145.

An institutional perspective that attaches female sexuality to immorality build the discourse of stigma. Sexually active women are prevented from keeping their children because of a stigma that is so severe that it prevents married women from benefiting from contraception. In 'Authoritative Knowledge and Single Women's Unintentional Pregnancies, Abortions, Adoption and Single Motherhood: Social Stigma and Structural Violence' (2003), Marcia A. Ellison traces the history of social forces affecting the decisions of women who conceive out of wedlock across five decades. Ellison interviewed of females who resorted to abortion or child abandonment in the United States and specifically South California, an area that, the author insists, has a transient population that represents the cultural background of the whole country.[11] The research asserts the role of society as an authority that affects the decision of women to adopt away their children or obtain an abortion. By alienating women who keep children conceived out of wedlock, society forces woman to reject motherhood. Instead, out of fear of being stigmatized. According to the survey conducted by Ellison:

> isolation and fear were common themes in single women's procreation stories… The trauma women describe illuminates the common core of authoritative knowledge that influenced the pregnancy and child bearing decision, a code of honor regarding women's sexuality, fertility, and maternity. That is, regardless of era of the participants' pregnancy, an ideal of female sexual purity and honor was the most pervasive and enduring form of implicit cultural knowledge. While participants were keenly aware of the sexual double standard of their situation, each feared being stigmatised as an "easy" or "loose" woman…The women negotiated these symbols of social stigma by drawing on culturally implicit "rules for breaking rules" that is to preserve their personal and family honor. [12]

[11] Marcia A. Ellison, 'Authoritative knowledge and single women's unintentional pregnancies, abortions adoption and single motherhood: Social Stigma and structural violence', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 17 (2003), 322-347. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/doi/10.1525/maq.2003.17.3.322/epdf> [Accessed 6 May 2015], p. 327.
[12] Ibid, pp. 329-31

This quotation describes the accepted social knowledge that forces women to reject motherhood. This structure is based on social codes of honour that separate femininity from sexuality out-of-wedlock. The consequence of breaking the 'code' is a social stigma that is so powerful that it can affect the mother's family and child. The result of this stigma, as cited by Ellison's survey, is alienation and 'isolation'.

The excruciating fear described by participants in the survey, nothing short of 'trauma', is the main reason why single women in particular choose to reject motherhood and prevent themselves from giving in to transformation into a maternal subject. The representation of the rejection of motherhood in fiction is inspired by these realities and hints at the institutional and repressive sexual codes of honour. Yet didactic teenage-fictional representations of stigma also help to deconstruct stigma through highlighting the forces that structure it. These fictions intervene to shape perceptions of teen sexuality and stigma through decoding the social norms that stand behind it.

The representation of debates about the stigmatization of abortion contributes to building and maintaining those norms. A contemporary conceptualization of the stigma highlighted in the texts above appears in the writings of Erving Goffman in 1968. The author diagnoses how the stigmatization of various subjects (like homosexuals or the differently-abled) was formed. He points out the pivotal role of social perspectives in forming stigma. Goffman suggests that the formation of stigma is due to the gap between what he calls '*a virtual social identity*' and an '*actual social identity*'.[13] Formed through 'an imputation made in potential retrospect', the virtual social identity becomes the translation of what society considers as the norm. The actual social identity, however, is formed through the 'attributes he could in fact be proved to

[13] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (London: Penguin, 1968), p.12. Italicized in the original text.

possess' referring to the subject.[14] The gap between the *virtual* and the *actual* social identities is formed when:

> evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind- in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma.[15]

Aside from the irony in limiting what constitutes a stigma to a masculine subject since women are more affected by stigmatization because of norms relating to the feminine ideal, the definition draws attention to the role of social norms in forming stigma. Difference to the norm stands as the factor that reveals the stigmatized as such. The marking of women as immoral, if pregnant out of wedlock and choosing abortion, are elements of difference to the virtual social identity associated with women. The feminine ideal stands as the barrier forming the tainted identity of the stigmatized subject.

Zindel's novel suggests a progressive notion: namely, that stigma is triggered through social norms in relation to specific societies (which is suggested by Goffman in the structuring of stigma). Maggie and Liz and their boyfriends go to see a film called *Primitive Love*. The movie is about the social structure of a tribe in Africa. The narrator comments in the film:

> The Children Born to the Women of the Wambesi are raised by the entire tribe. Every male member is considered the father and every female the mother. This lack of a family unit as we know it tends to eliminate many of the anxieties known to our culture. [16]

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Zindel, p. 19.

The alternative social structure in the tribe shifts the responsibility and subsequent stigma to both genders instead of placing it on women solely. The nuclear family and the responsibility of maintaining family values are revised by suggesting the possibility of going back to a more 'primitive' form of social structure that resolves what is called in the novel as an anxiety of modern societies.[17] This discourse both revises the gendering of responsibility and subsequently the gendering of stigma. It reshapes stigmatization by shifting society towards a utopian version where stigma does not exist.

The Preaching of Stigma

Texts published in the period of *Roe v. Wade* suggest different approaches to abortion and teen sexuality. Nixonian conservatism in the 1970s, along with the social and political shifts in the perception of abortion, produced political tensions that are implied in the representation of women who resort to abortion. The range of publications shaping the social and literary scene in the 1970s includes sexually progressive writings that promote sexual liberation of women specifically and the acceptance of abortion. The publishing of texts theorizing patriarchal social tendencies and their role in producing sexual repression in the 1950s paved the way for the delineation of more ope perspectives on teen sexuality in teenage fiction in the 1970s.[18] However, these publications were counteracted by conservative writings representing abortion and directed toward younger readership. In their discussion of didacticism, publishing and teen romances, Linda K. Christian-Smith points out the didactic aspect of fiction

[17] Ibid.
[18] For instance, Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955) and Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death: The psychoanalytical meaning of History* (1959) highlight the role of repression within modern patriarchal society. They introduce a more progressive, if not a utopian, perspective in understanding sexuality and in the social/political context of the United States.

addressed to young female readers in shaping a feminine ideal of morality, and comments on the role of the social/political atmosphere in shaping publishing demand:

> Being a woman means having one's desires constantly shaped, courted, packaged and lured by discourses that often sustain male privilege…Teen romance novels are 'packaged desires'… Teen romance fiction appeared at the moment of the shift in the political climate of the United States to conservatism.[19]

Her description of teen romances as 'packaged desires' is indicative of the approach towards directing these narratives to a specific class of consumers. Unlike the consumable female body in *My Darling, My Hamburger*, young female readers in this case are the target consumers of this literature. In other words, teenaged girls are only allowed to desire what their society desires. They receive packaged themes, packaged characters and packaged plots designed specifically to guide their behaviour. Christian-Smith, however, specifies what influenced the production of conservative teen romances to the 1980s.

Although Reagan's administration represent a further shift towards conservatism, the production of conservative American teen romances with didactic purposes can be traced to writings that originated earlier where stigmatization is more pronounced. Deborah O'Keefe suggests that novels published as early as the 1940s and 1950s are an extension of Victorian literature.[20] Her book offers the author's reading of what she calls in the title 'good girl messages'. She explores the embedded lessons in conservative novels like *Letters to Jane* (1947), which she describes as a book of

[19] Linda K. Christian-Smith, 'Sweet Dreams: Gender and Desire in Teen Romance Novel', *Texts of Desire: Essays in Fiction, Femininity, Schooling* (London: Flamer Press, 1993), pp. 45-67, p. 47.
[20] Deborah O'Keefe, *Good Girl Messages: How Young Women Were Misled by Their Favorite Books* (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 25.

'advice on teen behavior and sex'.[21] Commenting on the didactic approach to sexuality and morality of romances like *Gone with the Wind* (1936), O'Keefe writes:

> Ambivalence was the right attitude toward the racy young heroines. We emphasized when they were taken advantage of and betrayed; we yearned to be as clever and beautiful and bold as they; but we realized that their restlessness turned too easily into ruthlessness. The naughty girl characters went too far, neglecting family, morality, and decency, and were punished. [22]

Although her comment is about characters in historical settings like Scarlett O'Hara, the message about sexually adventurous strong feminine characters who challenge the gender stereotype of their time remains relevant later. The intended lesson in these texts is to avoid being like these characters because immoral women are eventually *punished*. This message is reiterated in conservative representations of feminine characters who are not afraid to explore their limitations and sexuality.

The role of didacticism in structuring the feminine ideal becomes problematic, however, when representing childlessness as a choice. Negative connotations attached to adventurous female characters who choose their path in life in earlier American novels cast their shade when writing about abortion as a choice. Books written in the 1970s about abortion carry the same message; exploration of sexuality will have dire consequences. Even *My Darling, My Hamburger* in 1969 has similar undertones when the sexually adventurous Liz jeopardizes her relationship with her family and friendship. Her eventual punishment is when her life is threatened with a haemorrhage as a result of abortion. The novel concentrates more on reflecting the impact of the stigma of women's choices than revealing the social realities that led to those choices. The focus in the representation of these novels is not on the character's journey of

[21] O'Keefe, p. 143.
[22] O'Keefe, p. 163.

blocked transformation from feminine into maternal subjectivity, but represents abortion as either a punishment or a resolution. .

In *Bonnie Jo, Go Home,* the heroine suffers the consequences of her sexual exploration and subsequent abortion is contrasted by another text published in 1973, the same year as *Roe v. Wade*. Written by Norma Klein, *It's Not What You Expect* addresses social anxieties associated with the conservative approach to abortion. The book is about siblings, Carla and Oliver, who are faced with a dilemma when one of the servers in their family's restaurant business gets pregnant. Oliver suggests that they should pay for the expenses of her abortion from the profits. In spite of Carla's reluctance at the beginning, she relents and they offer their friend the money. However, the server refuses their help and states that he will take care of the problem with his girlfriend, who obtains the abortion with no complications.

The novel assigns the stigmatization of abortion to social norms and perceptions rather than to the procedure itself. In a discussion about abortion the mother tells Carla 'your generation is lucky…when I had an abortion, the doctor was so nasty and cold. He made me feel so rotten, like I'd committed some heinous act. It was so humiliating!'[23] Abortion in this narrative is normalized rather than stigmatized. The sharing of experience from mother to daughter identifies abortion as a potential aspect of having a female body. The stigma according to the mother is related to the generation rather than the act itself. With the marginalization of the impact of stigma in the novel, the representation sheds light on the economic factors that led to the server's rejection of becoming a mother.

To ease the effect of the anxiety of the stigmatized abortion on the readers at the time, the abortion is associated with one of the secondary characters. This helps to avoid

[23] Norma Klein, *It's Not What You Expect* (New York: Random House Children's Books, 1973), p. 115.

its identification with the heroine.[24] Merely a spectator, Carla tells the story of her friend from the side-lines rather than dragging young readers into details that will draw more complexities into the representation of abortion. She tells readers:

> I kept looking at Sara Lee. She looked so calm and composed. Of course, why shouldn't she be? It's only in old-time movies that people lie around pale and fainting after abortions…But it also seems like these events you expect to be melodramatic never are. [25]

As the title of the novel suggests, abortion is *not* what you expect. Carla's inner monologue about expectation versus reality when it came to abortion suggests the images dominant within traditional perspectives of abortion. These images suggest that it is physically painful and mentally devastating, that it is a *punishment*. Carla's friend's calmness and health suggest otherwise. The reality does not match the expectation. The expected conservative discourse of novels that represents abortion as a dramatic exaggerated event is dismantled in this novel. Conservative representations are revealed to be an exaggerated parody, where an anti-abortion/ pro-life discourse discredits itself with misrepresentation and exaggeration. Abortion turns out to be a resolution to a predicament rather than a punishment within another punishment.

Young Adult fictions of the 1980s also represented the same social and political tensions due to the persisting opposition to the decision in *Roe v. Wade*. For instance, in 1984, the Republican Party 'called for a constitutional ban on abortion with no mention of an exception to save the woman's life'.[26] However, two Young Adult novels written

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[24] The technique of associating abortion with a different character's perspective does not always divert the reader from internalizing the experience of abortion as a traumatic one. This can also contribute to the didactic element of the narrative when it is related through the perspective of the (innocent) character who is not tarnished with stigma. Ann Rinaldi's *Promises Are for Keeping* (1982) is narrated from the point of view of the friend of the girl who has an abortion. The central character's innocence is suggested through her sheltering from sexuality by her brother. Her traumatic encounter with stigmatization through her friend's experience reflects the attitudes of its time. See Ann Rinaldi, *Promises are for Keeping* (New York: Walker and company, 1982).

[25] Klein, pp. 111-112.

[26] Pollitt, p. 66.

in this decade indicate different approaches to abortion. Although the 1980s are associated with predominantly conservative political attitudes, the two texts suggest different nuances to the issues of abortion, teen sexuality and morality. *Promises Are for Keeping* by Ann Rinaldi (1982) and *Our Sacred Honor* by Morton L. Kurland, M. D. (1987) confirm the ongoing debate about abortion and are a continuation of the tradition of didactic literature directed at young readers.

Kurland's novel consists of two sections revealing two central characters: one is Jamie's, the girl, and one is David, the boy's section. Aside from allowing readers to look at the issue from two points of view, this format hints at the equality of responsibility for the issue. Jamie is a fifteen-year-old girl who lives in Nashville, Tennessee and who is granted a scholarship to Vassar; it is her experience of blocked transformation into maternal subjectivity that forms the focus of the novel. Kurland represents the circumstances and social forces that lead women to choose abortion rather than become a teen mother. The stigmatisation of abortion in this novel is not represented with the same intensity as in *Bonnie Jo*. Unlike Bonnie Jo, who goes to have her abortion alone, or Liz in *My Darling My Hamburger* who goes with her friend without the knowledge of her family, Jamie has the full support of her family. Her family gather in what she calls a 'big summit' to discuss the different possibilities with David's family.[27] Although the name of the event is suggestive of the politicized female body where higher political authorities are involved in taking the decision, the representation of social stigma is less intense than what the reader would expect from a middle-class white family living in the South in the 1980s.

Jamie's blocked transformation into the maternal subject as a result of stigma is reflected when she describes her sexual encounter. She asks readers:

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[27] Morton L. Kurland, *Our Sacred Honor: Jamie* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group,1987), p. 68.

> You remember seeing that movie *King Kong*, when the gorilla had that girl up on top of the Empire State Building? Well, this gorilla had me up at the Ramada Inn. I always wondered what the movie baby would have looked like between King Kong and Fay Wray, the actress.[28]

The passage marks Jamie's transition of perspective from seeing her pregnancy as a product of love to seeing her lover as a monster and the product as monstrous. The comparison with King Kong draws him as a predator, an aggressor. The baby that could have been born to King Kong and the girl he kidnapped is the embodiment of stigma, a deformity produced by a relationship that shouldn't have been. Her new perspective on her pregnancy suggests the effect of stigma in blocking her transformation. The character's sense of victimization by a monster carries on via another comparison: Jamie tells her reader that 'it's gonna take a lot more convincing than some old Bogey movies and a walk in the rain to get me to believe in Prince Charming again. This is one Sleeping Beauty who is really awake for good'.[29] The inclusion of images from popular culture in these representations like King Kong or Sleeping Beauty and the connotations within these images brings its own set of moral structures to the text. Portrayed as sleeping, images associating women with naiveté and innocence are revised by waking from a doze of immorality. On the other hand, the didactic message in the novel suggests abstinence as a state of moral awakening and awareness of the importance of purity.

From the outset, the reader gets the impression that the novel is intended as a lesson. Jamie addresses her reader when she states, 'I'm trying to tell you how it all worked out so that you can understand and save yourself in case it should happen to you'.[30] This language continues throughout the novel. At one point, Jamie's friend, Audrey, takes her to see Mary Beth, a girl in their class who decides not to have an

[28] Kurland, *Jamie*, p. 59.
[29] Kurland, *Jamie*, p. 87.
[30] Kurland, *Jamie*, p. 16.

abortion and to keep her child after she gives birth. When the girls see how difficult it is to care for a child and Jamie is repulsed by the smells and the appearance of her friend's house because she is overwhelmed by the duties of motherhood, Audrey points out that she brought her there as a 'lesson'.[31]

The development in Jamie's subjective experience of ambivalence towards motherhood from embracing it to rejecting motherhood and opting for abortion suggests the choices available to women. Most importantly, it suggests that women are not the same. During the journey to her decision Jamie meets three women: Audrey, who chooses abortion; Alana, who gives up her child; and Mary Beth, who keeps her child. Mary Beth's experience represents the complexity of maternal responsibility. At the same time, it suggests ambivalence towards motherhood. Although Mary Beth seemed satisfied with her choice, at one point in the conversation she tells Jamie that when she feels overwhelmed by motherhood she tells herself 'you made your bed, now you're going to lie in it'.[32] This statement suggests that *having a baby* is a punishment: not abortion. Although it suggests that she is being punished for making love at a young age, her ambivalence about her child is highlighted in this statement. Audrey, on the other hand, who has an abortion, does not have her education interrupted like Mary Beth. She even manages to hide the fact that she had an abortion. Child abandonment, however, is not reflected in the same favourable light as abortion. Alana who gives up her child because of her Catholic parent's reputation is consumed with grief. Amongst these heroines available to Jamie's as role models, abortion is represented to be less damaging.

Didacticism as a tool for representing and reproducing the stigma of teen sexuality and abortion in Young Adult fiction is evident within both conservative and

[31] Kurland, *Jamie*, p. 53.
[32] Kurland, *Jamie*, p. 51.

liberal discourses. The genre's availability as a field for pedagogy lends itself to revealing the struggles of maternal reality and blocked transformation into the maternal subject as a result of stigma. However, the reality represented can be marred by the suggestions included within conservative representations where stigma becomes a reason for punishment. Although novels like Norma Klein's revise conservative anxieties about teen sexuality and abortion, others reflect abortion and stigma as an ominous experience. The theme of punishment runs through these representations to highlight the stigma of sexuality and abortion. The social reality of the stigma of having a child in a conservative context is drowned by the noise of blaming women for pursuing their sexuality out of wedlock and abortion. The idea of a blocked transformation into the maternal subject because of the social reality of stigma is relegated to a lower position in favour of patriarchal representations of stigma promoting ideas of punishment and isolation.

Clashing politics during the Eighties

The writings of John Irving that explore women's rights, beginning with *The World According to Garp* (1976) and *The Cider House Rules* (1985), represent traces of conservative and liberal social and political tensions that led to the atmosphere of the Reagan years. *The Cider House Rules* considers the impact of conservative restrictive politics on women's lives. Efforts to criminalize abortion increased during Reagan's presidency due to conservative policies that culminated in his appointing of the first majority of conservative Supreme Court judges since 1930.[33] Nevertheless, efforts to reverse the *Roe v. Wade* ruling and to grant individual states the right to criminalize and control abortions were unsuccessful. *Akron v. Akron* serves as a case in point when

[33] Morgan, pp. 218-9.

several statutes against abortion rights, like waiting periods and availability of adoption resources in the city of Akron, Ohio, were challenged in the Supreme Court in 1983. Although conservative efforts to reverse *Roe v. Wade* were unsuccessful, they indicate that conservative political dominance impacted the medical establishments that offered reproductive services in different states and increasing pressure on abortion rights in the United States found its way into *The Cider House Rules,* where the impact of politics controlling women's lives is questioned and resisted. The novel highlights the changing experience of pregnancy out-of-wedlock. Spanning the 1920s to the 1950s, the novel's setting offers a glimpse of the impact of the stigmatization and criminalization of abortion in United States. The narrative revolves around the life of Homer Wells, an orphan who grows up in St. Cloud's orphanage. The narrative offers the reader a glimpse into the stigmatizing abortion and the moral and ethical paradoxes in criminalizing it.

Trained by Dr Wilbur Larch to be an obstetrician and an abortionist, Homer's journey from a prolife to a prochoice position begins when he leaves the orphanage, abhorring Larch's activities because he sees a foetus, an experience which changes his beliefs about abortion. However, his experience outside of the confines of Larch's clinic and away from the abstractness of the process of abortion, as knowledge, gives him a perspective into what leads to abortion as *a choice*. His dilemma about his own illegitimate child and being faced with the horrors of incest makes him adjust his moral rules and he returns to St. Cloud's to carry on Larch's mission of helping women in need. The delineation of the social reality forming around voluntary childlessness in the novel reveals the nuances within both representing it and marginalizing it. The novel also reflects the paradoxes within the control granted to a medical authority to influence the social reality of women.

Irving's novel puts women's subjective experience at the centre of representation to highlight how voluntary childlessness maybe formed. The circumstances leading to the blocking of transformation into the maternal subject is delineated in *The Cider House Rules* through Candy's character. Candy's first pregnancy leads to choosing abortion as a result of stigma. When she gets pregnant for the first time from Wally, she tells him 'It's just that we're not ready…I mean, we aren't, are we?'[34] Her question exposes the extent to which women rely on a man's permission to decide whether to have a child or not in a repressive social environment. It suggests that patriarchal social structures form women's reality although patriarchal political authority displays itself within activities that limit child and health-care for women and maternity leave as well as the regulation of free family planning clinics offering abortion services.

However, she starts with the statement indicating that *she* is not ready, suggesting her ambivalence about having a child. The omniscient narrator reports to readers that Candy wants the opportunity to 'refine herself, and educate herself, if left to her own means'.[35] This delineation can be read to suggest that abortion for personal reasons, like Candy's wish for refinement, is selfish. This perspective sheds light on the reality of mothering a child as a responsibility that could limit a woman's subjective experience, leading to a blocked transformation into the maternal subject. Aside from stigmatization that contributes to blocking the transformation, Candy's jeopardized opportunity for education suggests a clash between this opportunity and motherhood. Although *The Cider House Rules* is set in the 1940s, Irving suggests that the maternal ideal can be incongruent with maternal subjectivity. It alludes to the fact that mothers do

[34] John Irving, *The Cider House Rules* (London: Black Swan, 1986), p. 191.
[35] Irving, p. 191.

not receive the support to allow them to achieve the lifestyle they planned before becoming mothers.

Candy's experience of abortion represents a scenario other than the extremes utilized in debates about legalizing abortion like rape and incest. The idea of blocked transformation into the maternal subject to maintain subjectivity outside the space of motherhood in representing Candy's abortion legitimizes this notion rather than portraying it as a selfish act. Katha Pollitt, who sees abortion as a fundamental right for women, argues for women's right to choose abortion for personal reasons. Pointing out the weakness in the discourse of prochoice activists, Pollitt describes the 'apologetic rhetoric' when:

> [w]e hear endlessly about rape victims, incest victims, women in risk of death and injury, women carrying foetuses with rare fatal conditions… But we don't hear much about the vast majority of women who choose abortion, who are basically trying to get their life on track or keep it there.[36]

Rather than suggesting that her choice is inspired by selfishness, the novel validates women's right to a *life on track* by representing Candy's blocked transformation into the maternal subject as a choice.

The novel suggests a gender-fluid aspect of maternal subjectivity by attributing maternal ambivalence to women, and the maternal role to men. When Candy gives birth to Homer's son and learns that Wally survived his plane crash in Burma, she decides to pretend that her son is not hers because she does not want to hurt Wally's feelings. Instead, she decides to pretend that she adopted an orphan from St. Cloud's with Homer. They bring the child home and the child lives with Homer in his bedroom at Wally and Candy's house. Candy's transformation into the maternal subject is

[36] Pollitt, p. 41.

suspended in that regard. She is not allowed to completely be a maternal to her son because of the stigma adultery. Candy sets up her relation to her son in a way that does not jeopardise her social status. Homer stands as the *maternal* figure for their son on several occasions in the novel. For instance, Homer occupies the same room with his son, which suggests a revision of the maternal ideal when maternal responsibility is assigned to the father.[37] Their son sleeps in the same room as the father who is, consequently, required to respond to his needs and separated from the mother who does not need to respond. In one instance, Olive, Wally's mother, says 'Candy was as much of a mother to that child as Homer was'.[38] The statement either identifies Homer as a maternal subject or Candy as a paternal one, to disrupt structures of the maternal ideal and to reform gender associations that are traditionally attached to the roles of father and mother. Candy even refers to the child as 'your son', when addressing Homer.[39] With this utterance, her character is detached from maternal responsibility. This revisionist perspective of the maternal ideal, in associating maternal care to fathers, also highlights the impact of stigma in creating a barrier blocking women from becoming mothers.[40] Candy relinquishes her status as a mother to protect her reputation. She rejects the transformation into the maternal subject that compels her to care for the other. This opens up the representation to be read as either a progressive critique of gendered parental roles or a conservative critique of deficient motherhood.

Forces behind Norms

However, Irving's delineation of the subjective experience of women does not mean that he overlooks the social underpinnings of that experience. The novel suggests

[37] Irving, p. 545.
[38] Irving, p. 546.
[39] Irving, p. 577.
[40] The revision of masculine images associated with fatherhood is discussed further in chapter 4 through exploring the representation of the *emotional man in the attic*.

a hierarchy of control over women's lives, highlighted in the reaction to a letter sent by a prostitute to 'the state board of medical examiners'.[41] The letter calls for a 'GODDAMNED DOCTOR, AND A GODDAMNED SCHOOL, AND EVEN A GODDAMNED POLICEMAN AND A GODDAMNED LAYWER IN ST. CLOUD'S'.[42] The call for these authorities to come and organize women's lives in St. Cloud's in the 1920s highlights each patriarchal authority shaping women's reality. Ironically, the unconcerned head of the board sends the doctor he thought the least experienced, the young Dr. Larch. The board, in this situation, and its head have administrative authority over all aspects of life of the women in St. Cloud's. However, they send the character that both represents their authority, as a doctor, and *challenges* it at the same time, by performing abortions.

The conflation of medical authority with medical knowledge is suggested by the numerous references to medical terms and medical equipment which situate Larch as a part of the medical elite. He is not simply *declared* to be a doctor; the scientific medical discourse in the novel establishes Larch as a doctor in the consciousness of the reader. Larch describes one of his abortion procedures to the lover of a patient revealing his exclusive knowledge as a doctor:

> I have made this observation about the wall of the uterus,' Dr Larch told the ghostly young man. 'It is a good, hard, muscular wall, and when you've scraped it clean, it responds with a gritty sound. That's how you know when you've got all of it- all the products of conception[43].

Referring to the contents of her womb as either 'it' or 'the products of conception' suggests the infiltration of different ideologies through medical discourse about abortion. The quotation suggests the power of knowledge associated with the doctor.

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[41] Irving, p. 19.
[42] Irving, p. 19.
[43] Irving, p. 92.

The context of his speech, however, reveals that he uses his knowledge as a punishment to the male lover through both the visualization and verbal expression of the experience of abortion. The man is forced to experience abortion, at least as a witness. Not only does witnessing in this part of the novel establish the regulating patriarchal authority over the female body, it also serves as a medium for transferring an experience. This witnessed experience of abortion would otherwise be hidden in the archives of feminine memory.

The representation of the doctor in the novel touches on a significant element within women's experience of medical authority. In Foucauldian terms, the doctor as a sovereign comes to represent the ultimate authority over life. In *The Birth of the Clinic*: *An Archeology of Medical Perception,* Foucault refers to the similarity between political and medical authority. He posits a:

> deeply rooted convergence between the requirements of *political ideology* and those of *medical technology*. In a concerted effort, doctors and statesmen demand, in a different vocabulary but for essentially identical reasons,...the association of doctors which prevents the formation of a centralized medical consciousness, and the free play of an experience that is allowed to reach the universal without imposed limitations; and, lastly, the Faculties, which recognize that which is true only in theoretical structure and turn knowledge into a social privilege.[44]

Medical authority protects its position with a monopoly on knowledge that turns doctors into a social elite which consequently reinforces their authority. This monopoly of knowledge producing power over the body in relation to women's reproductive health is critiqued by Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born* when she suggests that the impact of masculine medical authority on women when she discusses how midwives were historically substituted by male obstetricians because doctors monopolized medical

[44] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*: *An Archeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), pp. 38-9.

knowledge and because of patriarchal perspectives about women's incompetence in science. This monopolized knowledge is exemplified by the use of forceps, which are described by Rich as a 'masculine weapon', suggesting the extent of domination over women's bodies.[45]

Irving's, however, revises the authority of the doctor. The novel suggests that obstetric medicine should be informed by women's subjective experience rather than being primarily a medium for political or religious authority. Dr Larch is an obstetrician who chooses to perform abortions in spite of the prohibition during the 1920s. He keeps performing abortions although they are illegal because of 'the fear' he saw in the faces of a family who adopted and abused Homer Wells.[46] That fear to Larch represents the unexpected failure to perform a duty, failing to take care of Homer when they thought they could. Larch thinks that this is the fate of a woman who is forced to have a child that she cannot care for. He wants to protect not only the child but also the mother from the imminent failure and the shock that comes along with it. Larch thinks that 'no one, he believed, who had seen such fear should ever make a woman have a baby she didn't want to have. "NO ONE!"'.[47] The presentation of the doctor who is sensitive to the social reality forming voluntary childlessness and the impact of forcing women to have children revises conservative discourse about abortion. It suggests that the legal position about abortion should be structured around the perspectives of women, those most impacted by the prohibition of abortion.

The notion of an omnipotent medical authority that ignores women's choices is critiqued through the paradoxes within the image of the sympathetic yet powerful doctor. Larch exposes Homer, from a young age, to the knowledge of obstetrics because

[45] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (*London: Virago Press, 1977), p. 146.
[46] Irving, p. 25.
[47] Ibid

he wants him to assume the authority that gives women an outlet to practice their own authority over their bodies. However, to display the paradox of a confiscated control granted to women by the sympathetic doctor, the trainee, Homer revolts and declares that he does not condone abortions. This sheds the light on the hierarchy of sovereignty over a woman's body and her reproductive rights, which further suggests the paradox of associating the choice of abortion with a medical authority that can disassociate itself from women's needs.

Homer experiences ethical shifts throughout the novel that represent the nuances of his authority over women's bodies. Representing a prolife perspective, Homer, at the beginning of his career as an apprentice, is ethically challenged when he sees an embryo after an abortion performed by Larch. He is confronted with the dilemma of considering the right of the mother to abort or the right of the child to live. Homer is moved by a 'curled up beginning that lay dead in his hand. (That thing he held in his hand could not have been a hero)'.[48] Homer's image of the foetus's *lack of choice* represents the ideological perspective of pro-life advocates. This ideology is supported by the idealized notion of the human's capability of being a hero; but, that hero's life is cut short because of the choice of his mother. Homer, as a result of this vision tells Larch that he is not going to perform any abortions.

Homer's ethical attitude is focused on an idea of the sanctity of life and transformed by experiencing the reality of subjugated women. His perspective shifts into considering the impact of abortion on the lives of women when he is faced with the reality of incest in Rose Rose's experience. Women's social reality becomes the context that develops Homer's ethical position. When he realizes that Rose is impregnated by her father for the second time, Homer decides that it is time to give up what he thought

[48] Irving, p. 99.

as the rights of the foetus to life and consider the impact of its birth as the product of incest on the mother and child. Performing the abortion, Homer thinks:

> This might get easier. Because he knew now that he couldn't play God in the worst sense; if he could operate on Rose Rose, how could he refuse to help a stranger? How could he refuse anyone? Only a God makes that kind of decision. I'll just give them what they want, he thought. An orphan or an abortion.[49]

Although suggesting that abortion is ethical in extreme cases like incest, this representation of the shift informed by women's reality gives weight to women's choice. It revises the religious anxieties associated with abortion and influencing medical authority. Homer's words refer to the doctor setting himself as the sovereign when it comes to controlling women's lives. Describing this control as the 'worst sense' when refusing abortion, this suggests that another sovereignty as a doctor could be a *better sense.* Playing God in the *best sense* in that regard would be to perform abortions, to determine who lives and dies, who gets to be an orphan and what gets aborted. This sovereignty becomes *better* when informed and channeled through women's choices. The alliteration in Homer's last statement sets it as poetic motto inviting the reader to *sense* the beauty of choice.

These ethical shifts suggested through Homer's character are a metaphor of the shifts in the changing perspective on abortion and women's choices in the United States. The novel is a Bildungsroman, tracing the growth of Homer's character. The genre is important in structuring the novel as a metaphor of the potential of growth in the social discourse on abortion. Homer's shifting attitudes towards abortion due to his encounters with the various aspects of women's experience implies the nuances within the social attitudes towards abortion in the 1980s. More importantly, the final

[49] Irving, p. 696. Rose Rose's character in the novel is responsible for modifying Homer's perspective on abortion due to her exposure to rape incest.

development in his character when he is confronted by incest implies the need for more flexibility as to how abortion should be perceived within American society. Through suggesting the potential of change and including the subjective experience of women into this perspective, Homer's growth is likened to the growth of a society.

Irving and the Marginalization of the Stigmatized

The metaphorical significance embedded within the form of Irving's novel is not limited to its genre. Another structural aspect adds additional metaphorical dimensions to the novel. *The Cider House Rules* involves a shadow and light technique that structures characters' perspectives with the marginalization of specific characters' perspectives a technique to generate meaning. The novel excludes the perspective of women who resort to abortion or who abandon their children in the orphanage. Only Candy's perspective is represented. The novel constructs these women as voiceless. The women who come to the orphanage are represented through the eyes of Homer, who watches them as they come and as they leave. He observes that they 'appeared ashamed' when one of the employees of the factory makes 'a rough remark' to the women seeking help at the hospital; the remark 'drove the waiting women away from the coach like a blast of the winter wind. The women who boarded the coach did not look back ...They didn't even speak'.[50] Structuring his perspective through the women's silence, Homer observes that:

> [i]t was unquestionably more meaningful that he first saw them as they were taking their leave rather than arriving, full-bellied and undelivered of their problems. Importantly, Homer knew they

[50] Irving, pp. 32-3.

> did not look delivered of *all* their problems when they left. No one he had seen looked more miserable than those women; he suspected it was no accident that they left in darkness[51].

Women suffer while hidden in darkness and obscurity, in order to hide their stigmatization. The reader is not allowed to perceive their perspective or experience. The only one of these women who dares to have a voice and comes to ask Larch for help is silenced (by death) because Larch refuses to give her an abortion. Her silence is found at an earlier more graphic incident when she resorts to getting money for her abortion by putting a pony's penis in her mouth in order to get paid by a pornographer. Her mouth, sealed by the pony and then by death, is the consequence when a voiceless woman tries to speak. Never narrated through the perspectives of the women who reject motherhood, the novel suggests marginalized perspectives in the novel to highlight marginalized voices and lives. While this representation could be read as a marginalization of the voice of the stigmatized woman, it also suggests that the image of the marginalized woman forms another layer of representation that revises the image.

The absent voice can be read as a narrative technique to empower women. Highlighting the image of the marginalized, voiceless woman stands as a critique of women's social reality in the United States. This is achieved through the prevention of identification with the character to produce newer, fresher perspectives. Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* comments on choosing the right perspective to achieve a certain effect as a part of his analysis of 'authorial silence'. He suggests that '[if] granting to the hero the right to reflect his own story can insure the reader's sympathy, withholding it from him and giving it to another character can prevent too much identification... The author who is determined to keep his narrator realistic may achieve

[51] Irving, p. 33.

some of the same effect by choosing the proper observer'.[52] *The Cider House Rules* reveals a narrative of weakness and subjugation when narrated through the perspective of women who reject their children. Narrating the novel through an abandoned boy, serves to maintain a delicate space in which representing the women who experience a blocked transformation is hidden to produce new perspectives to revise social reality. Although this particular representative technique hides an important narrative of subjugation of the marginalized woman from the reader, it reveals her subjugation through the eyes of the abandoned child. The experimentation with different perspectives reveals the theme of voluntary childlessness, from Candy's perspective about herself to Homer's perspective of the women who abandoned their children, or had abortions, at St. Cloud's.

The Cider House Rules offers a nuanced representation of the social reality leading to voluntary childlessness that questions more conservative and conventional ideologized discourse about abortion and stigma by offering a glimpse into the subjective experience of stigmatized women. It also expressed the marginalization of women's perspective on their subjective experience to produce an effect dedicated to the representation of their reality and suggests that the impact on women should inform and shape the authorities controlling women's lives.

Dystopia and the authority structuring stigma

The dystopian novel represents another discursive shift in the debate about abortion and Young Adult fiction of the 1970s and 1980s helped shape the discourse about abortion. Irving's depiction of the same themes explored the historical ethical complexities within

[52] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961-83), p. 282.

abortion rights in the generative tone of a Bildungsroman, suggesting room for change about understandings of abortion. What I am suggesting in this section is that as a genre, the dystopian novel, due to its specific ideologized perspective, is a corrosive reshaping of another's ideology. The representation of women's social reality leading to choosing abortion in dystopian fiction falls within a frame of ideologized discourse. Ideological elements can interfere with dystopian representations of the social reality leading to the experience of blocked transformation into the maternal subject due to the nature of dystopian fiction. The SF element in structuring dystopias speaks to how oppressive politics influences subjects. It thematises some political or ideological forces that appear in 'everyday' life as potential oppressive systems of control. I discussed the role of science fiction in structuring feminist utopias in the previous chapter and how it serves to revise politics about women in feminist utopias like *The Wanderground* and *Woman on the Edge of Time.* This section will analyse how SF presents mutual dependence between political power and scientific power, where knowledge forms an absolute power that stands between women and their bodies. It will also reveal how dystopian fiction, as a genre, reflects the stigma of abortion through divergent perspectives that exude with the spirit of its time which is marked by the high intensity of clashing political views about abortion.

Focusing here on two dystopian novels published in 2011 highlights the continuing intensity of the debate about abortion. A significant year for the debate about abortion rights, 2011 was the year when the highest number of abortion restrictions since *Roe v. Wade* were enacted in 50 states. Between bans and waiting periods, these restrictions fuelled the debate about abortion and the extent of women's rights over their

bodies and their lives.[53] Although the enactment of restrictions increased in the following years, the publishing of these dystopian works coincides with the intensifying debate about women's rights to choose. The novels represent two distinctive discourses, each highlighting the other as the centre of the hegemonic authority that supresses the other. Each work situates the other as the initiator of a dark reign of social chaos and political oppression. These dystopian novels are *Childless* (2011) by Brian J. Gail (2011) and Hilary Jordan's *When She Woke* (2011).

While both represent the experience of feminine subjects under an oppressive political structure, one fails at this portrayal because it is overpowered by its ideological perspective. The point in *Childless* is lost when women's social reality and the influence of stigma is drowned by the noise of religious patriarchal discourse. The dystopian representation of women's reality in *When She Woke*, however, does not disengage with this reality in the way that *Childless* does. What I propose as the *what if…* scenario suggested in both novels serves to highlight and exaggerate certain aspects of the reality of women in 2011 and beyond. While one text loses track of this reality, the other cleverly highlights the impact of stigma and the struggles of the feminine subject in an oppressive environment.

The representation of regressive social and political policy through dystopia in *When She Woke* is a tool of social critique. M. Keith Booker in *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* (1994) reviews twentieth century dystopias as representations of social/political problems of their times. He argues that 'utopian and dystopian visions are not necessarily diametrical opposites…one man's utopia is another man's dystopia…dystopian societies are generally more or less thinly

[53] See *Guttmacher Institiute*, 'Last Five Years Account for More Than One-quarter of All Abortion Restrictions Enacted Since *Roe'*,(2016) ,https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2016/01/last-five-years-account-more-one-quarter-all-abortion-restrictions-enacted-roe>.

veiled refigurations of a situation that already exists in reality'.[54] The aspect of dystopia that Booker calls here 'refigurations' of reality, or what he calls in other parts of the book 'defamiliarization' in dystopic fiction to produce 'new perspectives on literary themes to specific social and political issues in the real world', entails different perspectives according to which dystopias are presented.[55] In other words, social problems can be viewed and represented through different perspectives that dictate the structure of dystopia. What Booker describes as one man's utopia as another man's dystopia suggests that same duality of discourse in dystopia, where each representation is a parody of the other's discourse. The *what if* -scenario represented through dystopia, however, serves to reintroduce readers to a new perspective to challenge his standpoint on issues that seem to be morally settled.

Both novels express the stigmatization of abortion and interrupted maternal subjectivity through distinctive perspectives. The blocked transformation into the maternal subject, represented through abortion avoids the reality of stigmatised motherhood in *When She Woke*, sheds light on the trauma within stigma. This dystopia embodies the prolife discourse where abortion is considered to be murder, set at an unspecified time in history when *Roe v. Wade* is retracted by what is described as SOL law. This retraction takes place because of a sexually transmitted disease that affects women's reproductive organs rendering them infertile.[56] Although the disease is treated, the United States government emerges out of the state of emergency with draconian laws attempting to control crime. The plague "clap", affecting women, provides conservatives in the country with a reason to claim that promiscuity is the cause.

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[54] M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* (London, Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 15.
[55] Booker, p. 19.
[56] Hilary Jordan, *When She Woke* (London: Harper, 2011), p. 36.

With abortion banned in all states, specifically Texas where most of the events are set, the prison system is substituted with *chroming.* This process is designed to distinguish criminals according to their crimes and make the process of surveillance a public duty which assigns different colours to criminals. By injecting criminals with a virus that causes the colour of their skin to change, murderers become red, child molesters blue and thieves yellow. Because abortion is considered murder, the protagonist, Hannah, is chromed into the colour red because she resorts to abortion in order to protect herself and her married lover, a respected minister, from the stigma of pregnancy out-of-wedlock. Shunned by family and friends and displaying the very sign of stigma that she wanted to avoid on her body, Hannah tries to resist the draconian laws of her country and flees to Québec where the process of chroming can be reversed.

When She Woke revises norms and ethics that govern this reality. In order to restructure perspectives about women's choices concerning abortion, the novel can be described as a modern dystopian version of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1864). Jordan's rewriting of stigma includes the stigma attached to abortion and revises the romantic representation of forbidden love suggested by Hawthorne's novel. It also rewrites the idea of abortion as an alternative to the "bastard", which introduces new nuances to representing stigmatized motherhood. The representation of the social reality of stigmatised women in this dystopia exaggerates the isolation and danger of stigma. The parallels with *The Scarlet Letter*, aside from the representation of the stigma of sexuality out-of-wedlock, are most evident in the colour red indicates the danger of stigma. *When She Awoke* attaches murder and blood to the meaning of the colour indicating the influence of religious political discourse on women's lives. While the letter and colour of stigma is superficial and is placed on Hester's clothes, the colour of stigma is embedded in Hannah's skin, turning her into an Other. Chroming is the sign of

social isolation setting the *criminal* to be a mark for public perception and the regulating gaze of society.

When She Woke highlights the marginalization of women's social reality in a very conservative setting. While Hester Prynne gives birth to a child, Hannah resists laws that require her to carry her pregnancy to term even as a single mother. Her choice to avoid the stigma of her relationship with the minister by choosing abortion moves her stigmatization to a deeper level. Her choice of abortion results in a punishment that brands her body and her skin, permanently. Described as a murder by her religious brother-in-law, her choice to take control of her life is her crime. He recites to her from the Bible, 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed'.[57] This is an allusion to prolife discourse that attaches more importance to the life of the foetus than to the mother.

Describing the foetus as a person who has rights, the perspective of advocates of the prolife movement in support of the rights of the unborn is summed up by John Paul II's statement to the third Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life in Vatican City in 1997. He declared that 'the human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human to life'.[58] The majority of weight in this argument is placed on the foetus's right to obtain life. However, the *quality* of this life is ignored, along with the decision of the mother who is best equipped to assess the prospective life of the foetus. This discourse operating according to knowledge outside the domain of the experience of the mother marginalizes the social reality of stigmatized motherhood.

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[57] Jordan, p.45.
[58] John Paul II, 'Discourse of Holy Father John Paul II: On the Occasion of the Third Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life', *Priests for Life*, Feb. 14-16, (1997), <http://www.priestsforlife.org/magisterium/97-02-14holyfathertopal.html> [Accessed 17 Jan. 2015]

According to her brother- in-law's bible quotation, Hannah's life is dispensable because of his religious beliefs.

The depiction of the religious discourse about abortion in this dystopia, and how it marginalizes the reality of stigmatized mothering and subsequent blocked transformation into a maternal subject, is made clear in Hannah's perception of her own abortion. In spite of choosing abortion, Hannah is ambivalent towards her decision. The theme of punishment revealed in teen romances is used in this dystopia to indicate how women are conditioned to think of decisions over their lives. Hannah recalls the moments after her abortion when the 'PUNISHMENT TONE sounded, jerking her back into her cell, back into her bleeding body...Blood that comes out of you and blood that doesn't'.[59] Imitating the impact of noise, the capitalized letters of *punishment* become the epitome of the pain she thinks she deserves for her choice. While the blood suggests purification and healing like bleeding an ailing body, she thinks that some will remain within her, poisoning her body and soul, punishing her. The ambivalence towards her choice suggests that conservative conditioning can influence a woman's perceptions of abortion even if she has it to *avoid* stigma. The representation suggests that the religious condemnation of women who choose abortion and deserve to be punished can be penetrative in cases of religious social conditioning.

The irony within conservative religious discourse emphasising the personhood of the baby and the marginalization of women's reality in the novel is taken further through the representation of the doll. Hannah, as with other women who abort their pregnancies, is asked to make a doll that represents their aborted foetus as a baby.[60] The women who make dolls are asked to name and care for their dolls/babies. When one of the women is about to leave the centre and wants to take the doll with her, the

[59] Jordan, pp. 33-4.
[60] Jordan, p. 83.

Enlightener, a religious zealot who lectures the women stigmatized by abortion, demands to take the doll. He pulls the doll while the woman pulls another part of the doll and 'the doll's leg came off in the Enlightener's hand'.[61] Stigmatizing and criminalizing abortion, this zealot assumes the position of the abortionist and destroys what he perceives as a baby. This irony revises the prolife claim, suggesting that activism is directed towards supporting an idea while it ignores women and their children. What a religious activist does to her by preventing her from having an abortion is suggested to be destroying her child in other ways.

One of the key aspects of a dystopian representation of the control over women's choices in *When She Woke* is the depiction of the female body as a colonized space. The exaggerated details highlight contemporary political regression when it comes to women's civil rights in the United States. What this dystopia represents as a warning sign about abortion restrictions in 2011 predicts an escalating political regression in 2017 when the Trump administration proposed cuts to government funding directed towards organizations like Planned Parenthood that provides services including birth control and abortion. This institutional control over women's choices builds a terrifying reality of women colonized when their bodies become government property that is regulated and controlled.

The regulating authority over women's bodies in *When She Woke* has already been represented in dystopias like *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) which features a dystopian scenario where the U.S. government is overthrown by the conservative dictatorship of Gilead. Women in their reproductive prime in Gilead are called *handmaids*. They are forced to be impregnated by government officials in a bizarre

[61] Jordan, p. 141.

manner that reflects the female body as a vessel.[62] Offred's colonized body is a vessel for reproduction for a government official like the female body in Plato's philosophy of the womb as a *chora*. Offred is reduced to her reproductive function as a carrier of the child, and not even a potential mother. Her body is colonized for the utility of the Commander's family. The same concept of the vessel is suggested in *When She Woke* when Hannah describes herself as a 'mote' and a 'void'.[63] Her abortion is the emptiness of the vessel and images of the mote and void reflect meanings of emptiness. Hannah's ambivalence about her abortion is indicated in her impression of herself in these images suggests the influence of patriarchal discourse that perceives her merely as a vessel. Emptiness is suggested in Atwood's dystopia when a woman who is unable to get pregnant is declared an 'Unwoman' in Gilead.[64] Not a woman, or a man, the woman is suspended through her empty womb and redefined into subjugation.

The idea of the dominated woman in *When She Woke* is questioned through the concept of fragmentation as a punishment for abortion. Fragmentation becomes symbolic of marginalized social reality where the experience of blocked transformation into the maternal subject is cancelled through patriarchal domination of women's psyches. When Hannah is punished with chroming, the injections are planned and carried out by the Federal Chroming Agency. In order for the Chromes to remain under punishment/chromed, renewal shots of the virus must be administered every four months. Fragmentation is an effect of unrenewed shots. It starts:

> with faint whispers, sporadic and indistinct. As your brain slipped further into fragmentation, the grew louder, giving way to full-blown auditory hallucinations, you became convinced that the world and everyone in it where malevolent, you didn't even notice that your skin was returning to normal, because the paranoia consumed you to the point where you disconnected from your

[62] Margret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 104.
[63] Jordan, p. 275.
[64] Atwood, p. 137.

> physical self… Your speech became nonsensical, as scrambled and incoherent as your thoughts, eventually, the voices turned on you, and you mutilated or killed yourself, only a renewal shot could stop the process.[65]

This element of Jordan's dystopia, where abortion is punishable with chroming, is the result of resisting punishment of the colonized woman whose body is dominated to the point where she loses the right to choose. Her social reality is ignored in the laws of the country and she is punished when she chooses to control it. The fragmented woman represents the same aspect of the dominated woman who is split from her consciousness and body when she chooses to control her life through abortion. A *blocked transformation* from feminine into maternal subjectivity is punishable with the fragmentation of the subject where she does not recognize herself. The authority of her dominators extends to the point where she carries out their punishment onto herself and kills and mutilates herself.

Childless also includes the representation of abortion but marginalizes women's social reality in favour of conservative approaches to family values and the sanctity of the life of the foetus. The novel is a narration of the struggles of the devoutly Catholic Gillespie family against what they perceive as laws that restrict Catholic rights. Maggie Gillespie, who owns and manages a family planning clinic in Pennsylvania that 'existed, primarily, to help people conceive and carry just such new life to term', is confronted by the dilemma of a fourteen-year-old girl who is raped by her mother's boyfriend.[66] Maggie and Jim Gillespie leave Philadelphia's Regina Hospital as its CEO and Head of Oncology, because the hospital rejects 'their recommendation to terminate the hospital's Ob/Gyn department and replace it with a Natural Family Planning clinic' and refuse to offer the girl an abortion in their clinic because it is against their religious

[65] Jordan, p. 86.
[66] Brian J. Gail, *Childless* (Ohio: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2011), p. 215.

beliefs.[67] The girl files a law suit. As a result, the family considers its religious values to be under threat of government legislation that offers women reproductive rights and threatens the dissolution of 'family values'.

The marginalization of women's social reality in favour of conservative structures of family is reflected in the novel. When Tamika for an abortion, she is told that 'she was carrying the miracle of precious new life'.[68] When she insists, she is told that she will be introduced to a woman who runs a home for 'expectant homeless mothers'.[69] After offering her a final choice which is arranging for adoption, Tamika leaves and files a lawsuit against the clinic. Gail's depiction of Tamika's resistance to conservative coercion focuses on reflecting conservative values rather than her struggle through resisting these values. The *choices* suggested in the novel mirror coercive policies in conservative states that attempt to change the course of women's choice to terminate their pregnancies. The language, defining pregnancy as a child, suggests another layer criminalizing women's choices. Tamika's choice, although downplayed by what Gail suggests as alternatives to abortion, suggests a paradox of a struggle that is narrated as a convenience. The choices offered to Tamika instead of abortion become *choiceless* choices.

The conservative perspective on birth control in *Childless* is a dystopic setting because of religious and economic reasons. For example, Terry Delgato confesses to Father Sweeny that she has been 'ringed' because 'the thumb pads at store checkout counters will be able to detect whether women have been ringed'.[70] The *ring* is a mandatory contraceptive device. If a woman is not *ringed*, then she cannot shop anywhere. Moreover, the Federal Government will 'provide abortion services to any

[67] Gail, p. 26.
[68] Gail, p. 215.
[69] Gail, p. 216.
[70] Gail, pp. 240-1.

and all who seek this provision–regardless of ability to pay'.[71] Easy access to abortion and birth control services is the worst-case scenario from the Catholic perspective of the novel. Women's choice of voluntary childlessness is restructured in the novel as a threat to family values. The novel's discourse concerning women's choices delineates their choice of abortion as a monstrosity that needs to be battled and resisted.

The representation of the role of science in redefining reproduction in the novel adds another layer to the marginalization of women's social reality in *Childless*. Science is a threat to a traditional family structure that includes visions of a maternal ideal becoming the basis for a dystopian representation. The Gillespies discover that the President is being controlled by a scientist, Siliezar, who leads a program 'packaged around the utopian promise of the Life Sciences Revolution' in order to produce a new man.[72] To pave the way for the prosperity of his *new man,* Siliezar pressures the American government to enforce a birth control program to stop natural reproduction. The new man is 'Icarus Redux' and is grown in a glass bubble.[73] This new man:

> by age twelve will have the strength of ten men, the speed of a swift animal, and the intellect of a chess champion neurologically powered by a main frame ...At eighteen he will be fully prepared to lead a new age of men, similarly endowed. They will conquer fear and ignorance and want... They will integrate humanity behind a common purpose and rule with tranquillity. And they will fill the earth with unimagined wisdom that will redound to the benefit of all and will direct its luminescence to the outer edges of our universe and beyond, which will come to know intelligence for the first time.[74]

This description touches on a number of conservative anxieties in the United States. Aside from birth control represented as a threat that entails the revision of conservative perspectives on women in family life, the *new man* becomes an emblem of a

[71] Ibid.
[72] Gail, p. 340.
[73] Gail, p. 346.
[74] Gail, p. 345.

conservative representation of dystopia. The new man in the discourse of this American novel suggests racial, economic and ethical revisions of the masculine ideal. The racial ambiguity of the new man who possesses the strength of ten men becomes a source of anxiety to notions of masculinity, constituting a dystopic representation from an American conservative perspective.

The convergence between conservative religious and capitalist values can be seen when services provided to maintain women's health are perceived to be a part of a conspiracy against family values. Progressive advancement to birth control and reproductive technologies are exaggerated to imply that progressive policy will produce an imminent threat to the structure of the nuclear family. Putting more importance on religious people's rights to control women's choices is inspired by neoconservative attitudes whereby healthcare for poor women as part of a government interference with civil liberties. This conservative attitude was translated, in 2014, in the Supreme Court ruling of *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores* where the US government was required not to interfere with employers who refuse to provide insurance covering birth control if it contradicts the religious beliefs of the employer. This ruling paves the way for more conservative action towards limiting women's civil rights a conservative ideal of mothering.[75]

In dystopias, ideologized perspectives impact thematic boundaries and discursive dynamics represent voluntary childlessness. Abortion as a stigma that entails the marginalization of women's social reality in Jordan's dystopia represents a parody of conservative politics. In spite of the feminist perspective on women's right to

[75] Institutional perspectives on abortion are reiterated in another Christian novel, *see* Frank E. Peretti, *Prophet* (1992) where abortion is portrayed as a sign of social decay. *The Atonement Child* (1997) by Francine Rivers suggests that fate will punish women for abortion when a woman chooses to atone for her abortion by helping to raise her raped-daughter's child. This genre of religious fiction represents institutionalized perspectives of women's reality and reflects reproductive rights as threat to women rather than a solution.

voluntary childlessness in *When She Woke*, Jordan denies the possibility of indicating the circumstances that lead from blocked transformation into the maternal subject. On the other hand, the duality of discourse available in the representation of the same issue in Gail's *Childless* reflects a parody of liberal perspectives on abortion. It reflects the marginalization of women's social reality as a necessity to maintain conservative family values. *Childless* delineates a conservative dystopia where abortion is available and coercion of women to give up their civil rights is punished. To structure of this dystopian scenario, Gail employs the techniques of conservative fear-mongering where religion and family values are threatened by women's reproductive rights.

Conclusion

The three genres explored in this chapter question and reshape the debate about abortion politics. A distinctive generic element of each, however, allows for specific tools to explore and negotiate debates about abortion, voluntary childlessness and women's right to choose. By exposing the forces and norms forming the stigma, the novels dramatize punishment to measure the influence of stigma on women's subjective experience. The didactic discourse of the Young Adult fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, regardless of the conservative and liberal nuances within these works, contributed to reshaping the discourse of abortion. Through the transparent exploration of the complexity of the issue, novels offered visibility to the debates about abortion. The investigation of women's subjective experience through stigmatization in teen fiction offers a roadmap to young readers, fulfilling an explicit didactic purpose.

Irving's bildungsroman in *The Cider House Rules* gives a space for hope and social growth. Homer's growth becomes a metaphor for the growth of American consciousness of the experience of women. Irving's work manages to contain a dialogue

between both discourses, conservative and liberal, without sacrificing the representation of women. The experience of blocked transformation from the feminine into the maternal subject is granted more space to reveal itself within the novel. Although this is achieved in *My Darling, My Hamburger, Bonnie Jo, Go Home* and *Our Sacred Honor*, the didactic messages in these narratives prohibit a more complex or ambiguous analysis of this social phenomenon. Irving's depiction of Candy's experience of transformation into the maternal subject, however, reflects social and psychological influences on her development as a subject. The novel even utilizes the marginalization of women's perspective to highlight the reality of women's subjective experience in an environment that stigmatizes their choice. What the historical context of these novels reflects how the debate about abortion has been ongoing since *Roe v. Wade*.

While the two dystopian novels explored in the chapter are certainly not one-dimensional, their perspectives, whether liberal or conservative are clear, they parody each other. Women's social reality is subsumed into discourse that goes *for* or *against* abortion. However, in 2011 the emerging dystopian representations of a world influenced by abortion politics suggest the urgency and intensity of the debate. The extreme reimaginings of abortion politics within dystopian scenarios is the sign of how extreme political attitudes reflected through generic representation of political issues.

3 Fake Mothers, Monstrous Mothers: Interrupted Maternal Subjectivity in *We Need to Talk about Kevin* and *A Mouthful of Air*

Writing about maternal ambivalence through the experience of mothers who go through postpartum depression renegotiates perceptions of motherhood and gender ideals, and nuanced representation of these issues can be explored through the internalized experience of characters that struggle with accepting being a mother. These writings reject maternal ideals by resisting the assumption that every woman longs to have children. Traditional maternal ideals are based on the premise that the ability to perceive oneself as a maternal subject is latent within every woman and that having a child will trigger the woman's transformation from the feminine to the maternal subject.

Unlike the feminine subject, the maternal subject is relational, structured in relation to the child, according to traditional perceptions of motherhood. This relationality is idealized through the assumption of an inherent instinct that mothers have to care for and protect their child. The health and functionality of the relationship between mother and child is both assumed and naturalised as the consequence of childbirth, the consequence, therefore, of women's identity as mothers. This ideological construction has assumed that women understand themselves within a relational maternal subjectivity and through the lens of their child's needs. This assumption can be challenged by reference to the possibility that women might be ambivalent about motherhood even before getting pregnant. The concept of transformation from a feminine to a relational maternal subject entails a sense that mothering is a process rather than a state. This transformational process suggests that it can be interrupted.

I analysed the portrayal of maternal interruption in American fiction in the previous chapter, when the potential mothers' transformation into the maternal subject is interrupted as a consequence of the impact of stigma. Within that analysis, I suggest that the representative texts reveal specific implications about the characters' reaction to this interruption and blockage of transformation by rejecting motherhood when resorting to either abortion or refusal to acknowledge their child as their own. This chapter is an analysis of the rejection of motherhood that materializes through a struggle to transform into the maternal subject, while maintaining the idealised social role as a mother. The chapter addresses a number of questions about the representation of the female subject who is not transformed into a maternal subject. These questions investigate the effect of socially imposed motherhood on the characters and their families in a number of texts. It will also explore how characters deal with the social expectations of motherhood in their inability to transform. I suggest that the model of monstrous motherhood represented in these novels highlights that the demands of the maternal role can deform socially expected effects. The representation of monstrous mothering in the novels suggests that what can result from an ideal of mothering is a violent destructive mode of existence. It empties the ideal of mothering of its socially designated meanings and replaces reproduction with destruction. The representation of the monstrous mother who is ambivalent about motherhood and resists the maternal ideal, who assumes a façade of the maternal role because she resists transformation into the maternal subject, is utilized in the novels to expose the fragility of the maternal ideal. It undermines the discourse in which the idealized role has been constructed.

The representative texts for this chapter are Amy Koppelman's *A Mouthful of Air* and Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk about Kevin*. Published in 2003, both novels represent mothers who suffer from post-partum depression and experience a sense of detachment from their child. Koppelman portrays a mother, Julie, who attempts suicide

after giving birth to her first child and resorts to using antidepressants to prevent a second suicide attempt. The novel proceeds as a delineation of her struggle and her resistance to the maternal role which ends with a second attempt to commit suicide when the mother drowns herself along with her second born child. In *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2003) Lionel Shriver delivers a gripping version of the depressed mother when the ugliness of her depression materializes in the reaction of her child. The novel portrays the experience of Eva Katchadourian's struggle with having a child but failing to love it as a mother. The intensity of this maternal struggle is heightened when her son proves to be a difficult child. This epistolary novel reveals Eva's perspective on her child's tormenting behaviour that is crowned by killing thirteen people, including his father and sister.

I have chosen these texts because of their representation of the mother's perspective. Like the female characters explored in the previous chapter, these mothers also experience a blockage that prevents their transformation from the feminine into the maternal subject. However, the characters analysed in this chapter suggest a resistance to the rejection of motherhood as well. They are different because of their ambivalence about mothering. Suspended in a liminal space *between* the feminine and maternal subject, they resist the transformation yet maintain the maternal role due to social pressures to adopt the ideal. The novels emphasize readers' access to the perspectives of the struggling mothers. *A Mouthful of Air* is fully devoted to exposing the psyche of the struggling mother. In *We Need to Talk about Kevin,* Eva's letters to her dead husband expose multiple dimensions of her perspective as a struggling mother who rejects but then feels forced to raise her child. This opens a window through which readers are able to visualise the ambiguous experience of mothers who conform to the role yet violently resist it.

Motherhood Interrupted

To set a framework for maternal struggle with the transformation from the feminine into the maternal subject, the novelists represent two very different mothers' resistance to fitting into the maternal social role. Both characters resist the social demands of the maternal role. Both value personal achievement outside the realm of motherhood. Although Eva seems to be more accomplished than Julie because she establishes her own company publishing travel guides, Julie Davis is convinced of a correlation between childlessness and achievement and yearns for 'choices. She can run away and start over. A suitcase. A few grand. A farm town. Cows, sheep, anonymity. She can be a ticket taker at a small theatre in Iowa. A librarian up in Poughkeepsie'. [1]She yearns for options, none of which includes motherhood, which is primarily a relational subjectivity in which the mother is choiceless at least as far as her connection to the child is concerned. These options reflect a commitment only to her work and her personal achievement outside the domain of the family. In that sense, Julie, is childless and autonomous in her fantasy.

Ambivalence towards motherhood is evident from the moment their children are born. Julie Davis in *A Mouthful of Air* experiences her first moment of struggle with an alienation. She describes the moment after giving birth and the 'look of awe in her husband's eyes.[2] '"Is that his head?" he asked the doctor, "Julie, I can see his head"'. [3] In contrast, Julie is not as responsive. Her husband's expression suggests that, emotionally, she's not in the room. Aware of this, her husband takes up the task of relating the events and his own sense of wonder for her. The mother goes further in describing her detachment from her child and failure to appreciate him physically. Her

[1] Amy Koppelman, *A Mouthful of Air* (San Francisco: Mac Adam Cage, 2003), p. 75.
[2] Koppelman, p.37.
[3] Ibid.

perspective on her husband's reaction to his son and her lack of the emotional connection is clarified when 'she looks at the muscled bodies of the ballplayers in front of her'; there, in contrast, she sees 'instances of beauty, real beauty'.[4] Julie is more capable of appreciating the 'beauty' of the 'muscled bodies' of the ballplayer than the physical beauty of her son.

This alienation from the experience of motherhood is illustrated when Julie decides to take her child on a stroll. She tells herself 'Mrs. Julie Davis...can bring her baby to the street, hail a cab. She can take him with her. Together they can run away from this life'.[5] Her detachment from mothering is demonstrated in the use of the third person in referring to herself. There is a split between Julie as the mother holding her child and the Julie who watches her. Her thoughts are those of a spectator of Julie Davis, the mother. They do not reveal her as someone who is fully involved in the experience. The character who escapes her social role as wife and mother ironically takes her baby with her. This point in the fantasy represents her maternal ambivalence. She clearly struggles to transform into the maternal subject and is suspended in a liminal state. This ambivalence is revealed in her fantasies. The liminal state either shifts towards the subjectivity of the woman who escapes motherhood alone or shifts to assume the maternal subjectivity of the mother who escapes her life but carries her child with her.

In *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, Eva's experience is also shrouded by a sense of alienation from the idea of having a child. This alienation reflects her untransformed state into a maternal subject because she does not experience motherhood as expected from the role. During the birth she refuses the epidural because she wants to be brave and prove 'an exemplary patient...as if passing this little test were the point and not

[4] Ibid.
[5] Koppelman, p. 114.

passing an infant son'.[6] The untransformed mother here does not simply perceive birth as the beginning of a relational process involving her and her son. She views birth as pathology when she describes herself as a 'patient'.[7] The process of birth is as unnatural for Eva as a disease that ravages her body. This is illustrated further when the character describes birth as a 'test' placing her against her reproductive system.[8] For Eva, the female body is an enemy. This tone in describing pregnancy and birth echoes second wave feminist writings that reflect on women's biological potential as suggested by Firestone when she wrote about the freeing of women from their biological bondage, which implies the female body is an enemy of the woman and that women are at a state of war against their bodies.

In another allusion to motherhood and war, Sara Ruddick proposes the idea of 'natal reflection' in 'Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Births'.[9] Ruddick is specifically focused on the experience of suffering during giving birth as a separate process from having a child. Ruddick writes that '[t]here are already many representations of the pain of birthgivers. Most notably, a birthgiver's suffering is equated with a warrior's sacrifice'.[10] She suggests that the event of having a child is separate from the process of giving birth when taking into consideration the perspective of the thinking mother who would perceive birth as a war and her body as the enemy. Motherhood in that sense emerges as a struggle and a source of alienation which then carries into the relationship with the child.

Metaphors of war associated with the image of the mother run throughout both novels. These metaphors highlight mothering as a state of constant struggle and

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[6] Lionel Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003), p. 74.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Shriver, p.75.
[9] Sara Ruddick, 'Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Births' , *Representations of Motherhood*, Bassin, Honey and Kaplan ed. (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 41.
[10] Ruddick, p. 42.

psychological strife. For instance, the idea of motherhood as a social territory and a contested terrain is suggested in both texts. Travelling and mobility away from the maternal role is emphasized with motherhood as the familiar and already mapped location and other places as coveted and mysterious escape routes for the mothers. The specificity of Poughkeepsie for Julie and the generality of Africa for Eva represent the unexpected. These places are territories located outside and beyond the domain of social demand. Roaming the territory of motherhood is something to be controlled by society because of the nature of the relationship between mother and child. Roaming other territories, on the other hand, is a more liberating autonomous experience. If motherhood had a map, the novels suggest this map is not only complicated, but also restricted by social expectation. Navigating the map on the way to Poughkeepsie, in Julie's case, or designing the travel guide map, in Eva's case, is a liberating experience. It is incomparable to the task of motherhood that is mapped by society in a very specific way. What is unexpected, for both characters, is contrasted by society's expectations for them as mothers-to-be. Both women are socially conditioned to what is expected from them as mothers and idealized social expectations are embedded in them. Eva resents this fact and admits 'I associated Kevin with my own limitations – with not only suffering, but defeat'.[11] The process of birth, to her, is anticipated as an adventure, one more trophy proving her strength as a person. The anticipation of a child is non-existent in this equation of personal glory, indicating a failure to transform into the maternal subject and an alienation from the experience of mothering.

[11] Shriver, pp.74-6.

Adapting to the Interrupted Transformation

To the mothers *in A Mouthful of Air* and *We Need to Talk about Kevin,* mothering becomes a role or mask. It hides their continuing sense of autonomy and their resistance to the maternal role.[12] Due to their blocked transformation from the feminine into the maternal subject, both characters assume the role of mothering to be a façade or a performance. Julie and Eva stand behind the façade. Julie Davis tells her son a story of the Rabbit and the Skin Horse that serves as a metaphor for her sense of mothering. The conversation between the Rabbit and the Skin Horse goes as follows:

> "Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you...when a child loves you for a long, long time...REALLY loves you, then you become Real."
>
> "Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.
>
> "Sometimes...When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."
>
> ..."Does it happen all at once...or bit by bit?"
>
> "It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become...That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily'[13].

The story is concerned with a transformational process that happens to some but fails for others. However, the concept of being 'Real' illustrated in this story indicates a potential that only happens to those who are ready to accept it and transform. The fact that Julie struggles with the idea of motherhood to the point of taking medication supports the assumption of failure to transform because becoming 'Real' hurts, as suggested by the testimony of the Skin Horse, and does not happen to 'people who break easily'. She does not 'become' a 'Real' mother because she is too fragile for the task. Postpartum depression is utilized in the text as a sign of the mother who cannot fully embrace the experience of motherhood in the novel. Her acting and imitation of

[12] The idea of motherhood as a mask or a façade of femininity can be traced to Joan Riviere's 1929 study case analysing masculinity in women in 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' as well as Butlerian conceptualizations of gender as a performance that also impact the analysis of representations of motherhood as a façade.

[13] Koppelman, pp. 121-4.

the role are suggested through the story because when Julie finishes recounting it to her son, she thinks that if she 'can play the part she will emerge a girl able to balance air under her feet, a woman'.[14] This statement is a testament of her role as a woman who acts 'the part' of mother rather than actually being a mother. Eva's acting is acknowledged by her when she admits that she 'anticipated being sued for parental negligence. I was acting a part'.[15] What is behind her maternal façade is exposed by her admission. Her *acting* the role of the mother is a sign of interrupted transformation into the maternal subject in spite of her attempt to play the part.

Emily Jeremiah, in 'We Need to Talk about Gender: Mothering and Masculinity in Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk about Kevin*' (2010) also suggests that the maternal role is a mere act in Shriver's novel. Jeremiah draws on Butler's theory of performativity when she writes that:

> Shriver understands (maternal) experience as constructed, or performed...Eva performs pregnancy; she "assemble[s] [herself] into the glowing mother-to-be," (52). She deliberately styles herself as a "mother-to-be," then, drawing on the stock of cultural associations and imperatives (asexuality, radiance, and sobriety) that attach themselves to that figure. [16]

In her description of Eva's attitude toward motherhood, Jeremiah confuses the maternal *role* with maternal identity. In a sense she makes performativity specific to mothers who perform the role of the mother without transforming into the maternal subject. Interestingly, performativity, as defined by Jeremiah in the quotation, is general for all mothers whether they transform into the maternal subject or not because motherhood is a culturally defined role. In other words, when Eva's maternal subjectivity is interrupted, she draws on cultural associations that form a feminine ideal as much as the

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[14] Koppelman, p. 125.
[15] Shriver, p. 39.
[16] Emily Jeremiah, 'We Need to Talk about Gender: Mothering and Masculinity in Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk about Kevin*', *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literature*, Podnieks, Elizabeth O'Reilley, Andrea ed. (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University, Press, 2010), 169-184, p. 175.

woman whose transformation is uninterrupted. Both perform motherhood according to the standards set by their society.

Jeremiah overlooks how Shriver represents Eva as a *conscious* performer of the maternal role. The character is repeatedly presented in the novel as a conscious actor. Jeremiah even cites one of the examples of a conscious confession of the maternal role as an act or performance when Eva admits that she 'reached for a line from TV' when she tells her husband he is'beautiful', referring to Kevin after giving birth.[17] The example however applies specifically to Eva's character and not all mothers because of her specific detachment from the maternal experience and admission that she could not appreciate her son's beauty. However, she consciously admits to resorting to a line from TV, an apparatus that connotes drama, scripts, acting and performance. As opposed to a Butlerian sense of performativity or the adoption of a social role, the performance in the novels is a conscious one. Eva's character contemplates and measures the quality of her performance of the maternal role. The representation of motherhood in these novels is as the performance of a performance.

The idea of resorting to *acting the maternal role* brings us closer to answering the question of how these characters attempt to resolve their untransformed maternal subjectivity. One scenario suggested in the novels is to attempt to compensate for the ambivalence about the maternal role by acting the part. The characters try to retain their sense of autonomy while consciously attempting to construct themselves as mothers. This representation questions biological determinism because it represents the conscious response to motherhood as opposed to an instinctive transformation of the female subject into the maternal one in the moment of giving birth.

[17] Shriver, p. 82.

The untransformed maternal subject in the novels is juxtaposed with the concept of motherhood as an inevitable transition for women. This creates an implicit debate about whether motherhood is naturally acquired or not. One theme reflecting the nuances in this debate is commitment to and responsibility for the child's care. It is explored in the novels by contrasting the characters' conflicting attitudes towards commitment to marriage and their commitment to having a child. What makes these women choose to be committed to a husband and not to a child?

Eager Wives, Reluctant Mothers and the Dilemma of Commitment

The delineation of Julie and Eva does not necessarily inspire an image of the liberated woman who refuses to be tied down by a child. Both characters are married. Why would the mothers accept one traditional role, that of wife, and reject the other, which is the role of the mother? Andrew J. Cherlin analyzes changes of attitudes towards traditional marriage in the United States in the twentieth century in 'The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage' (2000). His paper introduces two terms that describe the progression of the attitudes towards marriage, distinguishing a more conservative traditional attitude that was common prior to the 1960s from a more liberal approach to marriage that became more common afterwards. What is important about these terms is that they distinguish the attitudes of the husbands and wives in the novels, when reproduction is seen as a necessary consequence to marriage.

The paper distinguishes more traditional 'companionate marriage' where the spouse looks for companionship, including the companionship of children, and the more recent 'individualized marriage' when spouses 'began to think more in terms of the development of their own sense of self and the expression of their feelings, as opposed

to the satisfaction they gained through building a family'.[18] The marriages of both characters are established on these distinctive attitudes causing a strain on these marriages because husbands and wives have different goals. This distinction does not mean that the development of attitudes is gendered or chronologically limited to a specific period. Consequently, remnants of the more traditional attitude towards marriage can still exist, as represented in the characters of the husbands. Both Eva and Julie are struggling with establishing their sense of self while their husbands want to reproduce. This highlights the pressures on women who adopt one approach to marriage but have to conform to another, causing the transformation of their maternal subjectivity to be interrupted.

Both characters are shown to be struggling to establish their sense of autonomous self. The two characters' devotion and commitment to the traditional institution of marriage is clear when Eva gives in to having a child only because her husband wants one. The same values tied to traditional marriage and the wife's role in procreation is displayed in Julie's behaviour when she asks herself '[w]hat keeps a man' and answers 'the children'.[19] Her priority is the commitment of her husband which is guaranteed by their having a child.

The reluctance to add the commitment to a child to the commitment to a husband highlights the different attitudes towards marriage held by the wives and their husbands. Eva directly states that 'a child can't substitute for a husband'.[20] This indicates that a husband's commitment to her cannot be substituted by being committed to a child. A husband substitutes for a child but not the other way around. The idea of

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[18] Andrew J. Cherlin, 'The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66 (2004), 848-861, p. 852, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00058.x/epdf [Accessed July 4, 2015]
[19] Koppelman, p. 131.
[20] Shriver, p. 48.

substituting her dependency on one person with the dependency of another person on her poses itself as a reality for Julie. It leads to marriage but not necessarily children because they will be most dependent on her. Her commitment to marriage does not extend to her child and only stops at the level of her husband. Commitment to the child in this case is forced and causes strain on the untransformed mothers.

One complication of this interdependency in marriage is that the wife will have to reproduce to prove her commitment to her husband. This reveals the contrast between the perspective of the untransformed mothers in the novels and the perspectives of their husbands. The contradictory attitudes towards the traditions of marriage and raising children place the women's perspective of her role into a cultural conflict. Patriarchal, institutionalized attitudes towards offspring create a struggle for the untransformed mother to maintain what she does not have, a yearning for posterity which will affect her commitment to the institution of marriage. This issue is typically associated with a masculine social discourse that associates the responsibility of the continuity of the human race on women because of their reproductive potential. According to this discourse, wanting a child for women is not only a part of their reproductive potential. It also feeds into conservative attitudes of a wife's role towards her husband, to continue his family name and define his masculine role in the marriage.

Eva and her husband refer to this socially created system of thought, establishing the necessity of posterity as the 'the big question' which suggests the pursuit of an answer.[21] Kevin is supposed to be the answer to the question. Eva laments the disruption of her life only so that her husband can find the answer in reproduction, telling him 'I'd been much too busy attending to a flourishing business and a marvellous marriage to bother about what it all amounted to'.[22] The "big question"

[21] Shriver, p.275.
[22] Shriver, p.275.

highlights the contrast in the attitudes in their goals for marriage and willingness to commit to achieving these goals. In other words, husbands and wives have different answers to the question when the wives' transformation into the maternal subject is interrupted. What makes the question more prominent is the fact that it encompasses two different attitudes to posterity and the commitment to the answer is different.

What is referred to as the big question by the husband in *We Need to Talk about Kevin* indicates the need for an answer that ensures the filling of a void created by the institutionalization of marriage. His attitude towards marriage is part of a social narrative that values posterity and marks childless marriages as futile and pointless. Karen Lesnik-Oberstein in *On Having an Own Child: Reproductive Technologies and the Cultural Construction of Childhood* (2008) touches on the pressure to have children as part of a cultural narrative. This narrative or what Oberstein calls a 'story' stands as the *answer* to the husband's question as a part of a conservative heritage that needs to be observed.[23] If this cultural narrative is centuries old, it reproduces a sense of the naturalness of reproduction. This associates reproduction with the *desire* for reproduction which confuses the two and poses the desire to have a child to be as natural as physical reproduction. Lesnik-Oberstein cites the biblical story of the childlessness of Elkanah and his two childless wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Lesnik-Oberstein argues that this story:

> is a story about desire and a desire that is reproduced and passed on...it imprints itself on the unwitting child, or the unwitting society, which carries the story further and implants it in return. Like the embryo implanted in the womb, the story is implanted and reproduced in this way...the story is carried through time by redescription and repetition... "the intense longing" is both established and validated by its longevity and continuity... In this way, these ideas of stories of desire for the child share with ideas of the wanting of a child as being natural, genetic, or

[23] Karen Lesnik-Oberstein, *On Having an Own Child: Reproductive Technologies and the Cultural Construction of Childhood* (London: Karnac Books, 2008), p. 10.

> instinctive, a concept of origin that itself has no prior cause or source. The story is simply present, just as the natural is.[24]

When husbands view reproduction as a natural consequence of marriage, the answer is the filling of the void by fitting into the social narrative that seeks conformity and the normalcy of having a child. Lesnik-Oberstein quotes Gay Becker in her analysis of how the desire for a child is a cultural construct rather than a natural one. Becker suggests that:

> Cultural dialogues about reproduction are not simply about different means of reproduction: they reflect dominant views in the United States about what constitutes a person...While people's stories and their actions are ostensibly about reproduction, the underlying issue is about fitting in – about fulfilling society's expectations.[25]

This is an excellent example of when culture adheres to traditional values that render marriages that do not result in offspring as nonconformist. Although Becker and Lesnik-Oberstein rely on culture as a prospective source for the desire to reproduce, other attitudes toward a partnership like Andrew J. Cherlin's 'individualized marriage' cannot be overlooked because they constitute a more recent approach to marriage and a claim to posterity. Whether the conservative attitude towards marriage of the husbands or the more liberal one of the wives, the novels suggest a conflict created by these incongruent and incompatible attitudes towards having children. This causes women whose objectives of marriage exist outside that traditional narrative to be pressured to fit in because they want the husband's commitment to them through marriage.

The ambivalence towards the need to be committed (to a husband but not a child) is highlighted when the issue of the relation between posterity and expectation is

[24] Lesnik-Oberstein, pp. 10-11.
[25] Quoted in Lesnik-Oberstein, p. 12.

raised, when Eva attempts to analyze its source. She is confused by it. She tells her husband:

> "You know that euphemism, *she's expecting*? It's apt. The birth of a baby, so long as it's healthy, is something to look forwards to. It's a good thing, a big, good, huge event. And from thereon in, every good thing that happens to them happens to you, too".[26]

Eva's comment reflects the sense of appropriation parents associate with offspring. Their whole existence is a domain that belongs to parents. This confusion of the sense of having a child as a process of appropriation suggests an unconventional approach to having a child.

This issue is negotiated further in *We Need to Talk about Kevin* when the notion of the appropriation of offspring associated with masculinity is challenged by Eva. In spite of rejecting motherhood but attempting to fit the social role, Eva views giving Kevin her family name, Katchadourian, as an attempt to claim him materially rather than emotionally.[27] She is represented as more of a consumer of the culture promoting the maternal role rather than a mother who enjoys the relationship with her child. Reproduction for Eva, in that respect, is reduced to a materialist value that reshapes perspectives about the maternal and emotional involvement with the child.

Reproduction as a domain of appropriation is challenged further in the novel when Kevin resists his mother's appropriation. This renders the idea of appropriation of the child unstable and questions the social constructions of posterity and legacy. The struggle of an untransformed maternal subject is represented as resisting representation. To preserve her current state of subjectivity as a globe-trotter and owner of a travel-guide company, Eva adorns a wall in her living room in her house in the suburbs with a collage of different maps of countries in the world. She does this to set it as a shrine that

[26] Shriver, p. 20.
[27] Shriver, pp. 61-2.

separates her from the maternal role. This is set in a house that she detests because it is the domain of the motherhood she rejects. When she's done with her project, her son sprays her collage of maps with a mix of ink and juice using his squirt gun. Eva perceives this as a personal attack on her when she declares 'I felt as if I were evaporating'.[28] Eva perceives the collage, representing her personal achievement, as an embodiment of herself. The destruction of the collage is the destruction of her achievements and her own entity as a world traveller and entrepreneur. She and her achievements dissolve into her child's actions. Becoming a mother for her character is to evaporate as an independent traveller.

The conflict of her subjectivity with that of her son is set to define the instability of the meaning of motherhood. Once again the metaphor of motherhood as a war is utilized to highlight the character's conflicts and ambivalence towards motherhood. Maps and territories connoting the mother's conflict with perceptions of the boundaries of subjectivity are repeatedly represented in the novel. Contrasted with the geographical maps of various countries, motherhood is not charted by a map. This complication is stressed again in the novel when Eva describes her son as an intruder or a 'stranger [who] could have turned up nine months later. We might as well have left the doors unlocked'.[29] The alienation between the mother and her role is highlighted in the sense that she is 'trapped in someone else's story'.[30] This story is a traditional story about the wife who must be a mother next. It is a story of the socially defined role. She tries to reclaim her story by the maps on the wall that represent her individuality. When the project is done she admires it, saying 'I love my study. I love the maps. I love them'.[31]

[28] Shriver, p. 153.
[29] Shriver, p. 50.
[30] Shriver, p. 32.
[31] Shriver, p. 157.

The maps are an escape, a destination that waits for her, while the son is an intruder who barges in and limits her choice to move or escape. Her statement locks her son out of her domain as a feminine subject. It is her declaration that she is not maternal. Her relationship to her son is expected to form of maternal love is non-existent according to her statement of how much she loves her maps. The son's attempt to sabotage her work, aside from her perspective on it as an intrusion that evaporates her, suggests that offspring try to show the mother a map of how to reach them as an invitation to reach them. Whether she chooses to decipher the map or not is up to the mother. But, alienated and split from her maternal subjectivity, Eva can only mourn the glory of her achievement as a traveller. She is unable to read the map that would lead towards her son. The unreadable map reveals the instability of motherhood to her. The inaccessibly of the map becomes a sign of her maternal ambivalence. Her tool to navigate motherhood is an enigma because she does not *perceive herself* as a mother. *We Need to Talk about Kevin* sheds light on the irony that motherhood does not have maps or manuals. The mother is *expected* to reach her son. The signals sent by the child may feel as shocking and abominable as a school shooting. What society perceives as the *expected* is as unstable as a maternal subjectivity that is never stable or predictable.

Ironically, female ambivalence towards having a child is hidden to the point of lack of signification in language. Eva's attempts to describe her rejection of motherhood to her husband fail several times. She tries to communicate the idea to her husband that 'before her hapless son has even managed to survive the inhospitable climate of her clenched, reluctant womb, she has committed what you yourself, Franklin, deemed the officially unspeakable: She has capriciously changed her mind'.[32] The rejection of motherhood is so inconceivable that it lacks a signifier in his discourse. Motherhood and expectations from the role is instilled in the social structures to the point of

[32] Shriver, p. 70.

preventing any exceptions and other than the 'unspeakable'.[33] The meanings that are included in the rejection of mothering a child defy the socially constructed language, and therefore they are deemed "unspeakable" as a result.

Role of the Limited Perspective

The limited perspective of the maternal characters in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *A Mouthful of Air* introduces further dimensions to representing the blocked transformation into the maternal subject. The reader perceives the maternal experience only through Eva's letters and Julie's narration. While Monica Latham maintains that the effect of the single perspective of *We Need to Talk about Kevin,* which results in hiding the murder of the father until the end, is merely to produce a 'generic aspect of the novel as a thriller', I think that it serves another purpose.[34] Eva's limited perspective of Eva (one that leads to hiding her husband's death to the end of the narrative) feeds into the irony of trying to define the rejection of motherhood in the novel only to render it undefinable. In spite of Eva's various attempts to shed light on *the unspeakable* and trying to identify it in the novel, the fact is that four hundred pages of her definition are reduced to nothing because they are addressed to the *dead* Franklin. Eva's rejection of her child is still unspeakable because it is addressed to her husband who fails to recognize Eva's perspective when he is alive. When he dies, Eva's perspective is reduced to the silence of Franklin's death.

The role of confession in both novels raises the issue of existing guilt due to interrupted transformation and to socially-ascribed maternal responsibility. Julie confesses to throwing away her antidepressants in an attempt to defy society's attempt

[33] Shriver, p. 70.
[34] Monica Latham, 'Breaking the Silence and Camouflaging Voices in Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk about Kevin',* in *Voices and Silence in the Contemporary novel in English,* ed. Vanessa Guignery (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 130-148, p.130.

to normalize her and make her a fit mother. She does not hide the satisfaction of seeing the pills' 'descent, circling at the trap of the drain for a second or two, only to drown'.[35]

Medicating Julie into motherhood is thereby questioned in the novel. The rejection of motherhood is deemed a disease by society and it should be chemically corrected into what society perceives as normal. The irony of interfering with the natural state of the woman's body and mind to coax her into what society perceives as 'natural' is very clear here. As a result of refusing to take the medication, Julie cannot tolerate her daughter's crying. She squeezes her too hard and finally cuts her daughter's lip because she pushes the bottle too hard in an attempt to stop the child's crying.[36] Upon the sight of blood, Julie is crushed with guilt and by her failed sense of responsibility. She takes her daughter to the pool and drowns herself with the child. The last two chapters in *A Mouthful of Air* are marked by a narrational shift. Julie is no longer referred to by her name. Instead, she is called the 'young mother'.[37] The effect of this shift is the drowning of her perspective at the moment of her death. From this point forward in the story Julie no longer has a voice. The shift establishes the *unspeakable* as it is perceived by society not the mother. The hiding of her voice renders her experience as unspeakable because she is unable to narrate it any more. Julie's death is an essentialization of the unspeakable. Only the voice of society remains to tell the story of the mother who refused to be.

What society deems a natural progression for women exposes the specific contradictions in institutionalized motherhood utilizing the perspective of the untransformed mother is at the forefront. For instance, Eva's confession and sense of responsibility as revealed in her perspective is even more nuanced than Julie's. In one occasion for example, Eva portrays her son as a diabolical creature to avoid being held

[35] Koppelman, p.189.
[36] Koppelman, pp. 192-206.
[37] Koppelman, pp. 209-12.

responsible for his crime. However, the novel reveals other instances where Eva's confession, to being responsible for her son's behaviour bubbles to the surface. In other words, Eva's narration suggests a correlation between Eva's deformed motherhood and her child's behaviour. Eva's perspective is divided between moments of seeing her child as a monster and moments of suspicion that she created the monster with what she perceives to be a deformed state of motherhood. She shies away from accepting the traditional responsibility of the mother yet confesses to failing to maintain it. These conflicting attitudes towards responsibility are observable in Eva's perspective on her son which reveals a causality dilemma to highlight the effect of biological determinism within an American context. The question is: what comes first? Is it Eva's "monstrosity" as a mother or Kevin's as a child? The novel, however, does not offer a definitive answer to this question, but instead opens up many issues about maternal ethics for contemplation and debate.

Pressuring the mother into a role based on her biological potential to reproduce leads to a deformed version of the maternal ideal. Trapped in a liminal stage, Eva is suspended in a state of interrupted transformation. This in turn inspires an image of the monstrous mother. Eva's perspective suggests that the monstrosity of the mother causes the monstrosity of the child. Eva sees her child as her monstrous nemesis. When he ruins his third birthday cake, she represents it as a gruesome act saying that '[h]e had ripped its heart out' in spite of her acknowledgment that he does not 'grasp the concept of *slices'*.[38] Eva's perception of her child projects him as a leech sucking the blood of those who surround him. In her letter to her husband the image of Kevin as a leech reappears when she describes how he sucks his candy 'leeching off their neon coating'.[39] Being a mother is being exposed to the leeching of a child according to Eva's perception. The negative representation of Eva's child limited by her perspective

[38] Shriver, pp. 116-7.
[39] Shriver, p. 124.

is again revealed in Eva's account of how her daughter lost her eye. Eva reluctantly gives in to the idea of trusting Kevin to babysit his sister while she and her husband work. She receives a call from her husband telling her that her daughter injured her eye with a drain-cleaner and it is beyond saving. Eva is convinced that it is Kevin's fault. She tells herself 'as a mother I must *accept responsibility*. Fair enough. But if I was so all-fired responsible, why did I still feel so helpless?'.[40] Her helplessness stems from her ambivalence about her son. It affects her perception of him as a potential danger. Eva starts observing her daughter around her brother and is surprised that she is not afraid of him. She finally asks her daughter what Kevin did on the day of the accident and the daughter answers 'I got something in my eye. Kevin helped me wash it out'.[41] Her daughter's statement does not implicate the son. However, for Eva, her son's monstrosity is not debatable. Her perspective is challenged by the fact that her son might have helped his sister instead of injuring her but her need to relieve herself from the responsibility is only achieved by representing her son as a diabolical being that could not inspire her to become a maternal subject.

On the other hand, in her delineation of Eva's character, Shriver alludes to her responsibility for the person her child has become. She confesses to her husband that she 'amplified an incidental, perhaps merely chemical deficiency into a flaw of Shakespearean proportions'.[42] Most importantly, her confession reveals her perception of her role in creating him as a monster because she is failing to love him like a mother. Eva admits that Kevin 'would be as lovable to me as I allowed him to be' because she feels that she failed to provide him with the connection that is typically provided by a

[40] Shriver, p. 302.
[41] Shriver, p. 305.
[42] Shriver, p. 27.

mother.[43] Again, the maternal Eva's conception of motherhood is based on ideal of the doting mother.

One incident in which Eva's perspective pulses with a sense of her responsibility for her son is when she breaks his arm. Eva is convinced that Kevin is using his bowel movements against her since he refuses to be toilet trained. When her son tells her one day that 'In kendergarden evrybody says my mother looks rilly old', she is furious.[44] Eva confesses in her letter:

> I'd turned beet-red, and that was when I sniffed another telltale waft. After I'd just changed him *twice*. He was sitting cross-legged on the floor, and I lifted him to a stand by the waist, pulling his Pampers open to make sure. I lost it. "How do you *do* it?" I shouted. "You hardly *eat* anything, where does it *come* from?"
>
> A rush of heat rippled up through my body, and I barely noticed that Kevin was now dangling with his feet off the carpet. He seemed to weigh nothing, as if that tight, dense little body stocked with such inexhaustible quantities of shit was packed instead with Styrofoam peanuts. There's no other way to say this. I threw him halfway across the nursery. He landed with a dull clang against the edge of the stainless steel changing table. His head at a quizzical tilt, as if he were finally *interested* in something, he slid, in seeming slow motion, to the floor.[45]

Eva is angry, offended, and tired of maternal demand. However, her outburst and subsequent physical abuse of her child is paralleled with the violence of the shooting. Eva suggests that her behaviour deserves punishment because the level of her anger is stronger than what is socially acceptable for a mother. This is a fact detected by Eva when she does not feel remorseful, but feels indebted because Kevin does not tell anyone about what she did. Eva is relieved yet burdened when she states 'I would owe him one for a very long time'.[46] Eva's perspective reflects the suspicion that her

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[43] Shriver, p. 120.
[44] Shriver, p. 194.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Shriver, p.197.

violence is balanced by an equal amount of violent behaviour by the child in reference to the school shooting. The deformed motherhood in that sense takes responsibility for the deformity of the child.

The debate about Eva's perspective and whether it reveals a sense of responsibility for Kevin's monstrous action is discussed by Monica Latham in 'Breaking the Silence and Camouflaging Voices in Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk about Kevin*'(2009), and Jen Webb in 'Who is Kevin and Why Do We Need to Talk about Him?'(2009), who take opposite sides of the debate. Webb discusses Eva as 'an unreliable narrator'.[47] Part of the unreliability of her narration is that her perspective is the only perspective received in the novel: 'she tells us consistently on the one hand, though she denies it in her implicit telling, a bad mother'.[48] According to Webb, Eva's limited, unreliable perspective reveals to the reader her denial of her own part in causing Kevin's monstrous act. She tells the reader about being a 'bad mother' causing Kevin to be evil. However, she 'implicitly' suggests, by her unreliable narration, that she is not responsible and is not guilty of Kevin's monstrosity. Monica Latham, on the other hand, insists that Eva does not deny her guilt and responsibility and role as a monstrous mother in the creation of her son. She describes 'the narrator's introspective self-examination and the avalanche of verbosity displayed in her letters in which she voices her guilt'.[49] Latham continues: '[c]onfessing is an open admission of guilt. Eva feels "contaminated" by guilt because of other people's pragmatic conviction that someone is necessarily to blame for "*Thursday*"'.[50]

Although both Webb and Latham agree that the narrator is unreliable, Latham's discussion of Eva's perspective stresses her guilt at her role in creating Kevin. Blaming

[47] Jenn Webb, 'Who is Kevin and Why Do We Need to Talk about Him?', *Australian Literary Studies*, 24 (2009), 133-143, p. 139.
[48] Webb, p. 139.
[49] Latham, p. 131.
[50] Latham, p. 137.

her son does not exclude her from taking some of that blame herself. Her unreliable narration suggests that she tries to avoid blaming herself. This does not mean that she succeeds in that mission with readers. In spite of various attempts to demonize her son in order to avoid being blamed for the way he became, her admission of guilt is evident in various parts of the novel. She shares her son's guilt in statements like '[i]t's beyond me on most days to defend myself'.[51] This suggests that she thinks it is inconceivable that she is not responsible for a part of his crime and reveals the extent of her social conditioning into the maternal ideal. She is consumed by the guilt of maternal responsibility and perceives her son's crime as her failure as a mother. Eva adopts a very conservative discourse of maternal responsibility in spite of her ambivalence towards motherhood and resistance to the role. However, the most significant confession is that 'I worried that what Kevin was missing was a mother like mine'.[52] This statement embodies the weight of the maternal ideal its tone of regret and lamentation. The statement is an admission of guilt that she had more than what she could offer to her son but leaves a void in place of the maternal subject in his life.

The delineation of the monstrous mother is exaggerated in both novels to underscore the complications of the socially defined maternal role. Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1982) suggests a connection between the image of the mother and monstrosity. She defines the abjection of women as a way to find the self when she writes that 'the hope for rebirth is short-circuited by the very splitting: the advent of one's own identity demands a law that mutilates'.[53] Kristeva suggests that a monstrous mother or what she calls the 'devouring mother' is necessary for subject formation.[54] The mother is a site of horror. Splitting from her is a basis for self-formation. Her

[51] Shriver, p. 65.
[52] Shriver, p. 110.
[53] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 54.
[54] Ibid.

monstrosity is a demand for abjection. The novels, however, exaggerate monstrosity to highlight the restructuring of the role as a perversion. The novel exaggerates the monstrosity turning it into a trauma rather than subject formation.

A maternal ideal that is already monstrous is pushed to the limits of perversion in the novels, to restructure the ideal and reveal its fragility. The representation of the monstrous mother in the novel questions institutional motherhood. By suggesting that some women resist the role while maintaining it, the idea of an ambivalent mother weakens the social structures that attempt to stabilize femininity. Any subject formation according to the representation in the novels will affect the children of the monstrous mothers. However, the representation of violence that reproduces more violence is a representation of the trauma of the monstrous mother that contributes to forming subjectivity of the child. In other words, the child's monstrosity is reproduced through the monstrosity of the mother.

The Politics of Motherhood

The representation of monstrous motherhood in *We Need to Talk about Kevin* and *A Mouthful of Air* extends beyond the critique of social ideals. It contains broader political nuances produced through fractured political and social ideals in the United States. One layer in the representation of monstrous motherhood underscores the impact of economic factors in structuring maternal ideals. The connection between reproduction and consumerism highlight contradictions in the politics that institutionalize motherhood in a way that dehumanizes it. Friedan suggests this in *The Feminine Mystique* when she compares institutionalized mothering to the dehumanizing effect of being in a concentration camp, because a mother can 'lose her sense of self as a

housewife'.[55] The author draws on self-*worth* in her comparison which highlights the commodification of the self. Although Freidan admits that the comparison between prisoners and mothers might not be fair, the purpose of the comparison is to underscore the economical aspect of institutionalized of motherhood. According to Friedan, American housewives 'have learned to "adjust" to the biological role. They have become dependent, passive, childlike; they have given up their adult frame of reference to live at the lower human level of food and things'.[56] This association between mothing and commodities like food and things contributes to the construction of the maternal ideal and the idealized image of the good mother who takes care of her child's appearance and nutrition targets mothers as valuable consumers.

The parallel drawn between mothering and the commodification of childcare goes back to key post-war American manuals like Dr. Benjamin Spock's *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care.* Aside from relying on an especially gender-specific approach to parenting obvious in the illustrations and the opening sentence that insists that as a mother '[y]ou know more than you think you do', the book establishes a consumeristic attitude towards mothering.[57] Spock suggests that women might not have enough knowledge of the items that makes her maternal experience *ideal*.[58] A life revolving around "food and things" serves to dehumanize mothers by creating a consumerist environment. It constructs an ideal of mothering that should follow the rules and demands of this environment.

To critique the association between mothering and consumerism, parallels between children and consumer goods are drawn by Koppelman and Shriver. When

[55] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Classics, 1963-201), p. 247.
[56] Friedan, p. 248.
[57] Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Childcare* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1966), p. 3.
[58] For instance, the book required a list of items like 'apron...soap, washcloth, towel, absorbent cotton for nose and ears, oil or powder…a bath thermometer' to provide ideal childcare. See Spock, p. 150.

Julie is in the supermarket with her child, she sees 'another mother with a stroller who interestingly enough is piling the food around her baby. Julie places 'the chicken and the container of breadcrumbs on top of Teddy's blanket'.[59] Eva refers directly to this capitalist approach to reproduction and posterity when she declares after her daughter's injury 'that children were a perishable consumer good'.[60] Children and consumer goods are perceived as equal in value and necessity. The convergence between capitalism and reproduction in the novels extends the self-indulgence and selfishness of the one (consumer capitalism) to the other.

Associating themes of monstrosity, horror and consumerism in American literature is not a new idea, as suggested by Linnie Blake in her analysis of the Apocalypse-inspired movies of George A. Romero. The author attempts to provide a context for this creative genre when she suggests that:

> it was in the 1970s that the United States acknowledged, for the first time since the Great Depression, the nation's ongoing inability to realize the dreams of its anti-materialist, spiritually-driven early settlers. At the hands of the authoritarian militarism of successive governments and the rapacious self-seeking consumer fetishism of individuals, the nation of Romero had broken its foundational paranoid jingoism so powerfully encapsulated in the zombie apocalypse. [61]

Like Romero's work highlighting the disillusionment of an American dream displayed in an apocalyptic world, the representative novels highlight the disillusionment with the maternal ideal and the commodification of this ideal. Horror, violence and trauma are utilized to underscore it fragility.

A maternal ideal that morphs into monstrous motherhood is associated with allusions to conservative political ideals like the pursuit of freedom that become

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[59] Koppelman, p. 117.
[60] Shriver, p. 303.
[61] Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008). [Accessed 24 April 2016] <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt155j8f0.10.>p. 125.

monstrous. Both monstrous motherhood and monstrous politics are suggested to be deformed versions of an ideal that produces more death than life. Julie and Eva need to fit into the maternal role by reinforcing the social ideal of the nuclear family, which causes Julie to kill herself and her child and Eva to raise a son into a heartless killer who murders thirteen people. Kevin declares to his mother, after hearing about his father's intention to divorce her, that he is 'the context' of the separation of his family.[62] Reproducing him creates the 'context'. The family starts with adding him, a single person, but ironically ends with the death of 13 people including half the family. The representation of the desire for posterity within a conservative framework is questioned to highlight the irony of forced motherhood which results in a monstrous motherhood and more death rather than reproduction. By deforming the ideal, the representation suggests its fragility. It reveals that the maternal ideal can become monstrous. It suggests that this ideal might have unideal consequences on society due to maternal ambivalence. The novels suggest that mothers who fail to transform into the maternal subject consequently may kill their children or inspire their children to kill.

Aside from representing mothering as a war, Shriver questions the tone of conservative policies in the perception of mothering and nationalism. Eva suggests that Kevin's TV programming is carefully censored to prevent him from being exposed to any sexual or violent content. He could only watch the 'The History Channel' which is full of documentaries about war.[63] Eva maintains conservative rules in raising her son. She performs the role of the protective mother but at the same time she allows what is perceived as patriotic or nationalist values into the child's environment that can only be maintained through the war and violence shown in the programming of the history channel. The ideal of the protective mother is associated with censorship and militarism are associated to suggest that they are produced by the same conservative discourse.

[62] Shriver, p. 349.
[63] Shriver, p. 144.

Images of power and control imposed in conservative reproductive rights policies and conservative war policies are highlighted to suggest that violence is committed against the powerless when conservative values are adopted.

The metaphor of mothering as a war is an aspect in Shriver's novel that is impacted by the political context of the post 9/11 era, particularly the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan. Eva's perceptions of her maternal experience as a war are echoed in her son's behaviour. Kevin's inspiration for his murderous act is Robin Hood, the epitome of benevolent and egalitarian heroism. This brings values associated with heroism and valour to the foreground by questioning violence that is acceptable in one domain but not the other, and the futility of the pursuit of human reproduction when violence is considered by some as an act of heroism. However, because Kevin's perspective is reflected through the narrative as a form of monstrosity, the boundaries of heroism and violence and their romanticization in conservative discourse are interrogated through Kevin's new perspective of his own violent acts.

The irony within the unrealized expectations of the maternal ideal alludes to the outcomes of conservative politics that claim to produce order, only to result in chaos and violence. The trauma of monstrous motherhood is aligned, thereby, with the trauma of the war on terror. This kind of implicit reference to 9/11 in this representation is suggested by Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn in 'Representing 9/11 Literature and Resistance' (2008). They suggest that early 'narratives' of the event 'grappled with representing 9/11, but as distance from the events has increased, later texts have registered the reverberations of 9/11'.[64] While I'm not suggesting that novels that represent monstrous mothers are specifically based on the trauma of 9/11, the events of the period contribute in structuring the irony within an ideal of motherhood.

[64] Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, 'Representing 9/11 Literature and Resistance', *Literature after 9/11,* (New York, London: Routledge, 2008), p. 4.

These narratives allude to the shattered expectations and disrupted ideals of conservative social and political structures. Images of the fear, trauma and violence of recent American history are borrowed to intensify the effect of the representation of the fear, trauma and violence of a fragmented maternal ideal.

The irony of an idealized reproductive ideal that leads to death is highly impacted by the political background of both novels. The atmosphere of fear created during the Bush administration along with the infringements of public liberties in the name of national security is an important issue that influences the representation of motherhood in the novels. Published in 2003 and set in New York, both novels are impacted by the trauma of 9/11. In *A Mouthful of Air,* after Julie's death 'a plane is flying overhead. It is low and loud. It will be landing in La Guardia'.[65] This image taking place before her suicide suggests the trauma of her monstrous motherhood, may be globally suggestive of the trauma of 9/11.

The representation of Kevin's character to highlight the violence within the context of American politics is analysed by Roberta Garret. Shriver suggests that the representation of the relation between Kevin and his mother is indeed a feminist representation which critiques what she describes as 'the competitiveness and sexism endorsed by contemporary American parenting culture'.[66] She also suggests that the violence in Kevin's behaviour underscores the atmosphere of retaliation in the United States as a consequence of the 9/11 attacks. Garret writes that:

> Although *Kevin* does not refer directly either to 9/11 or the aggressive US foreign policy...,it certainly explores the deep vein of violence, ... and entitlement embedded in the mind-set of middle class American culture...Published in 2003, the novel's preoccupation with violent death, the causes of evil and the complacency and arrogance of American attitudes toward the rest of

[65] Shriver, p. 201.
[66] Roberta Garret,' Lionel Shriver's (We Need to Talk about) Kevin: The Monstrous Child as Feminist and Anti-American Allegory', *Women's Fiction and Post- 9/11 Contexts* ed. by Peter Childs et. al, (London: Lexington Books, 2015), pp.107-124. p.117.

> the globe suggests an oblique allusion to 9/11 and its immediate aftermath, particularly in relation to the middle-class, right-wing community's vengeful attacks on its chosen scapegoat- Eva- after the massacre.[67]

The last sentence sheds light on the perception of the maternal ideal as regarded and guarded within conservative discourse. Shriver does not simply associate violence with Kevin and the context in which he is raised. The representation deconstructs the maternal ideal by Eva's ambivalence. Then, it utilizes the conservative idea of maternal responsibility for the violence of the child to criticize the very same conservative discourse that glorifies military violence.

Conclusion

The monstrous mother is a device that sheds light on the problems of institutionalized motherhood and imposed social systems. Shriver suggests that pressuring women to reproduce may even result in the production of monstrous children. Reproduction in that context becomes another link in the cycle of death. What is suggested by a monstrous maternal ideal is that conservative ideals are unrealistic: an ideal of the protective mother does not necessarily produce what is expected from it, an ideal human. Performing the maternal role according to patriarchal expectations of the good mother can result in the opposite of what is expected from the ideal. The ironic image of the monstrous mother who tries to perform an idealized maternal role, only to produce monstrosity, resists conservative ideals by highlighting the effects of adhering to those ideals.

Both novels explore the clash between traditional and new attitudes towards motherhood and reproduction. Both novels question the ideal of motherhood and

[67] Garret, p. 119.

highlight the fluidity of feminine subjectivity. Meanings of femininity and motherhood, usually perceived as two sides of the same coin, are fragmented in the image of the untransformed mother, who maintains the role of the mother as a façade to keep her husband's commitment to her as a wife. Meanings associated with conservative attitudes towards reproduction and motherhood are reversed and *miscarry* when they lead to death, rather than protecting life.

4 Giving up on Mothering: Maternal Ambivalence between Remembering and Forgetting

This chapter will focus on the interruption to the process of transformation from the feminine into maternal subjectivity in the form of a reversal resulting from child bereavement. The novels represent mothers who experience ambivalence towards motherhood after they lose a child. This ambivalence is investigated through the juxtaposition of the image of the *good mother* with images of the ambivalent mother. The reversal of the transformation into the maternal subject focuses on a mother who gives up on relationality with her child. As a result of the trauma of losing a child, the characters in the representative novels resist performing ideals of maternal love and care, and even resort to abandonment of their other children. This image of the bereaved, grieving, rejecting mother highlights what is encoded in patriarchal discourse about feminine emotionality and tendencies towards hysteria, but also suggests a sense of the fluidity of feminine subjectivity. The representation of maternal bereavement highlights the paradox within the maternal ideal when love of the lost child becomes too much, as the mother rejects the maternal experience. This love/hate paradox implied within maternal bereavement puts the maternal ideal under scrutiny and resists the socially stabilized image of the feminine in patriarchal discourse.

The chapter will focus mainly on two novels that represent the rejection of motherhood after losing a child. One of these is John Irving's *A Widow for One Year* (1998), that tells the story of a woman who conceives a child after she loses two sons in a car accident. Consumed with grief and struggling with feelings of rejection towards

her four-year-old daughter, Marion Cole decides to abandon her daughter. She leaves to start a career as a writer in Canada. Jacquelyn Mitchard's *The Deep End of the Ocean* (1996) tells the story of a mother whose son is kidnapped from a hotel. Devastated, Beth Cappadora struggles with her relationships with her other son and daughter while she tries to find her lost son. While the character finds her son towards the end of the novel, she gives him up to his adoptive father, the husband of the woman who kidnapped him. Both texts represent images of the bereaved mother who struggles with her subjectivity as a mother as a result of losing a child and manifest a maternal ambivalence caused by an excessive love that turns to hate.

Both Marion Cole and Beth Cappadora show maternal ambivalence. Marion declares that '[s]he had *never* wanted Ruth', her last child.[1] Her statement is definitive. The finality of her decision is completed by abandoning her daughter. The reversal of her subjectivity from the maternal into the feminine highlights an interruption to her relationality with her daughter. However, the novel reveals a sense of fluidity to that interruption. It is not as stable as is suggested by her decision to abandon her daughter. On the day she abandoned her, Marion holds her daughter for the last time:

> [She] continued to hug her sleeping daughter to her breast: with one hand, she still shielded the four-year-old's face from the sun. Eddie had never before seen Marion manifest such a degree of physical affection for Ruth.[2]

Although her care for her daughter takes place on the day that she decides to leave her, the shift highlights maternal guilt rather than a budding relationality to her daughter. The lines that her subjectivity crosses, from the maternal into the feminine subjectivity, are blurred to question the stability of the feminine ideal.

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[1] John Irving, *A Widow for One Year* (London: Black Swan Publishers, 1999), p. 107.
[2] Irving, p. 160.

The same ambivalence towards mothering is suggested in Mitchard's novel. After the loss of her child, Beth acknowledges her rejection of her other children. But moments of ambivalence about her rejection are suggested in the texts. Surrounded by memories of her lost child which separate her from her remaining children, she sees her son. The glimmer of hope that she feels when she sees him breaks the wall of memories that prevents her from connecting to her other children.

> [W]hat Beth had already seen gave her, for the first time in nine years, sufficient courage to let herself experience the yielding body of her youngest child. Kerry's fingers were spangled with marker dots; she smelled of fruit and dish soap, and something warmer beneath- down, innocence. Beth looked up over Kerry's tangled hair at the crest of the avalanche, the mountain of memory and half-memory, of rerun, regret, poignancy, and courage, poised to hurtle down and paralyze her.[3]

The passage reflects the tensions forming her ambivalence. Although the hope of her son's return makes her rekindle her connection to her daughter, she is ambivalent toward any other love but for her lost son. There is a sense of movement to her maternal love. It ebbs and flows. Although the passage suggests a moment of insight into a new maternal experience that was halted by her grief, it also suggests that it is temporary as the movement of her emotion is yet again dragged down by her memories of her lost child. For the first time, she gains an insight into details about her daughter that she did not notice before. However, her *avalanche* of emotion drags her down to depression. The movement and shifting of maternal ambivalence from top to bottom is displaced by another force which is that of repetition. The repetition of memory that is both fragmented and complete closes upon her to drag her back again to her grief. Beth's ambivalence:

[3] Jacquelyn Mitchard. *The Deep End of the Ocean* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), p. 295.

> was that palpable sense of presence shoved up against the reality of absence…she knew that for a very long time she had not actually 'loved' the children, though she was careful to be mostly kind…She was certain that Kerry especially, who had never known Beth any other way, didn't feel the difference.
>
> But Vincent did.[4]

Beth contemplates the extent of her maternal love and grief. She is consumed by guilt for the shifting of her perspective as a mother. Between the ideal and her sense of her subjectivity, she is torn. Beth fears that the interruption of her maternal connection with her children will be obvious. She knows that her oldest son knows because he has experienced a relationship with her as a maternal subject and can sense the change. Unlike her son, her daughter is oblivious to what Beth believes is an unachievable ideal. This representation reveals the character of a mother who fears the judgement of her son because he knows the extent of her traumatization by the loss of her other son. Her oldest son is a witness to the conflict between presence and absence. Beth not only fears that he is a witness to the absence of her son or the presence of her grief, she fears that he is a witness to the absence of a maternal relationship with her children, and the presence of what is perceived as an excess of sentiment that defines her reality as a grieving mother.

Gendered Bereavement

Although a sign of maternal love, the trauma reflected in the representations of maternal ambivalence towards their other children is suggestive of an overt feminine emotionality. Both novels draw a pattern of trauma that reaches a state of emotional paralysis when it comes to mothering. When the maternal experience is affected by

[4] Mitchard, p. 7.

child bereavement in the novels, a paradox of child love/hate is produced. Maternal characters in the representations are transformed by the loss of a child into beings who are consumed by emotion to the point of hysteria.

The specific characterisation of grieving in the novels goes as far as distinguishing feminine from masculine forms of grief. For instance, Marion's love for her sons feeds into rejecting her daughter because of the trauma of her brothers' deaths. Compared to her husband's, Marion's grief is portrayed as more powerful. Marion 'almost hated Ted for absorbing his grief better than she could absorb hers. What Marion could only guess was that Ted might have hated her for the superiority of her sadness'.[5] Juxtaposing herself with her husband, Marion celebrates her sentiments, describing them as *superior*. The superiority of the ideal of maternal love is transformed into another, patriarchal construct, of feminine excess of emotion. Describing her grief as superior highlights the irony of the maternal ideal. When maternal love is maintained through memory it becomes an affliction that makes Marion jealous of her husband who absorbs and processes his emotions in a different way.

The novel highlights a gender divide when it comes to approaching grief. Describing her grief as *superior*, because her sadness causes her to reject her surviving child, targets gender ideals. It questions and confuses the perception of the feminine ideals of excessive emotionality as well as ideals of the doting mother. The gendered approach to representing grief can be traced to the social perspective of grieving. Jenny Hockey describes the tendency towards gendering in the representation of grief as a product of 'AN EMOTIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR'.[6] She detects:

> A gendered approach to the ways in which death, dying and disposal are viewed in that it highlights the masculinist bias within the process of representation. It provides us with a way of

[5] Irving, pp. 47-8.
[6] Jenny Hockey, 'Women in Grief: Cultural Representation and Social Practice', *Death Gender and Ethnicity*, ed. by David Field, Jenny Hockey and Neil Small (London: Routledge, 1997), 89-106, p. 91.

> thinking about the representation of the aftermath of death, its grievous losses, through images and accounts of women in mourning and in grief…in a society where grief is often experienced in private and signalled in public, such representations play a core role in illuminating that which, for many members of society, is a threatening yet hidden aspect of life.[7]

The gendering of grief is another level of othering of an already *othered* process of death. Threatening and mysterious, the burden of grieving is assigned to women in representation as part of a discourse of othering, which removes associations of death from the masculine sphere. Also suggestive is Hockey's proposition that grief is experienced privately but signalled in public. The suggestion that grief is *revealed publicly* for both men and women but *experienced privately* indicates that grieving belongs to the private realm, where women are located. Marion's 'superiority of sadness' alludes to a gendered *division of grieving* in this representation. This division of grieving is questioned through what society perceives as an appropriate amount of grieving according to gendered maternal ideals.

An excessively emotional way of experiencing grief is suggested by the novels when it comes to mothers. The relation between women and a specific mode of grieving and the gendering of grief is dictated by a discourse of excessive feminine sentimentality. This discursive configuration of women in American culture is analysed by Lauren Berlant in 'The Female Woman' (1992). She discusses Fanny Fern's and Harriet Jacobs' writings as part of a celebration of feminine sentimentality or what she calls a 'sentimental domestic culture [where] the most explicit expression of this elastic "feminine" form is the "complaint"'.[8] Berlant's reading of the discourse of feminine sentimentality displayed in the *complaint* is taken further when she writes:

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[7] Hockey, pp. 92-3.
[8] Lauren Berlant, 'The Female Woman', *The Culture of Sentiment: Race Gender and Sentimentality in 19th Century America*, ed. by Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 268.

> The female complaint is thus an aesthetic "witnessing" of injury […] the complaint often relies on the bribe of its sentimental reflex, representing masculinist practices in a feminist way, but accepting as semi-fixed and even describable the domestic axes of patriarchal culture in memories of the mother and dreams of marital bliss.[9]

The discourse of feminine sentimentality highlights issues of feminine emotionality and a gendered 'sentimental reflex'. It remains dedicated to a patriarchal definition of the feminine ideal of the wife and mother. The representation of gendered bereavement and excessive emotionality of the mothers in the novels I am studying here takes part in forming the discourse about the sentimental reflex. Sentimentality is celebrated in patriarchal discourse when it comes to associating it with the image of the feminine ideal.

The specificity of this discourse in American culture is discussed again by Berlant in *The Female Complaint* (2008) where she suggests that feminine sentimentality is part of women's identification with sentimentality in the political sphere. According to Berlant:

> 'women's culture' is distinguished by a view that the people marked by femininity already have something in common and are in need of a conversation that feels intimate, revelatory and a relief even when it is mediated by commodity, even when it is written by strangers who might not be women.[10]

The excessive emotionality of the bereaved mothers in the two novels is part of this discourse. The representation of women who suffer and share the experience, reacting in similar ways, and their ambivalence to mothering as a result of trauma, contributes to associations of women with sentimentality. The gendering of bereavement in these novels is established by the discourse of feminine sentimentality. The representation of

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[9] Berlant, 'The Female Woman', pp. 268-9.
[10] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. viii-ix.

the intimate experience of losing a child and the ambivalence created by the interruption to maternal subjectivity produced by the trauma creates a voice for bereaved mothers within the novels.

If representations in American fiction of mothers who experience ambivalence resulting from losing a child are part of a wider discourse in American culture about feminine sentimentality, Berlant describes how this discourse defines women as a group:

> The identification of women with the pleasures and burdens of reproducing everyday life in the family, which in the United States, since the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, has meant, among other things, being charged with managing dynamics of affective and emotional intimacy.[11]

Emotional responsibility is assigned to women as part of the role of maintaining family life. Being cast in the role of the *emotional* gender in patriarchal discourse further associates women with emotional labour. According to this division of labour:

> [w]omen are not only expected to be compassionate and understanding, but to act both as teachers of compassion and surrogates for other's refusals or incapacities to feel appropriately and intelligently.[12]

The normalizing of the image of the emotional woman feeds into the maternal ideal by constructing the image of the emotional mother, who has an excess of emotion to compensate for the failure of compassion of the men in her family. It structures both the patriarchal images of the feminine/emotional mother and masculine/logical father. The gendering of emotional labour in the family suggests a specific shape and scope to the maternal ideal when it comes to sentimentality that serves to maintain family life. Excessive emotionality, being part of the discourse about feminine sentimentality and

[11] Berlant, *The Female Compliant*, p. 170.
[12] Berlant, *The Female Compliant*, p. 171.

the experience of womanhood, impacts the representation of gendered bereavement. The image of the ideal emotional woman is jeopardized by the image of the grieving mother who rejects mothering her other children. The ideal resists itself in the representation of bereavement that causes a reversal of maternal subjectivity.

The suggested emotionality of the mothers in *The Deep End of the Ocean* and *A Widow for One Year* is established within the discourse about a feminine ideal that adopts excessive sentimentality to maintain family life. However, the paradox contained within patriarchal discourse both celebrates the image of the emotional grieving mother and shuns the image of the emotional, grieving *but rejecting* mother. In other words, patriarchal standards of feminine sentimentality allow for a very specific structure for mothering that requires excessive emotionality to maintain life and rejects this emotionality when it resists or exceeds the 'normal' structure by rejecting the maternal ideal.

The gender-based approach to the maternal ideal and grief is suggested by *The Deep End of the Ocean*. Beth's husband berates her for her sadness claiming that she has 'made a career out of being unhappy…You were always waiting for an excuse to be miserable'.[13] She adopts his discourse when she states that 'Pat grieved for Ben as a normal person would grieve'.[14] Although her statement does not associate grief with gender, she adopts the social standards of normalcy of grief that are associated with men. Normalcy is juxtaposed with the othering of her own grief. It marks her grief as an excess, beyond the normal. Describing her sentiments as a 'career' suggests a devotion to her sadness, that women's devotion to their sentimentality involves a state of eager anticipation to share their emotions with the world. The husband accuses Beth of being prone to sadness, suggesting that she is exaggerating her emotions to the point of

[13] Mitchard, p. 455.
[14] Mitchard, pp. 4-5.

indulgence. More importantly, this representation presents a split from what is perceived as a normal image of the grieving mother.

The resistance and restructuring of the idealized image of the grieving mother runs throughout the novel. For instance, years after her child's kidnapping, Beth describes her feelings upon arriving at the hotel where her son was kidnapped. She 'felt the thump and shift of the avalanche, heard its creak'.[15] Her sadness reaches a physical level. She hears it and lives it as an imminent danger that is repeated through memory. The image reflects a separation from her surroundings as a result of being consumed by her feelings. Although she is in the company of a friend, Beth only hears her own grief in the magnitude of an avalanche that threatens to pull her down into a deeper level of grief. The *avalanche* as a recurring motif marks a drastic change in the landscape of motherhood. It reveals a sweeping motion of emotion that restructures the maternal ideal.

The effect of a consuming grief which separates the mother from her surroundings is also evident in Irving's novel. When Marion Cole is asked about the accident by her lover, Eddie, she is paralysed by memory. The intensity of her emotion is drawn as a death-like state when

> it seemed to Eddie that Marion's heart had stopped…her spine was straight, her back rigid, her shoulders square… her eyes, which were open but distant: her lips, which when she slept were full and parted were thin and closed.
>
> 'I'm sorry,' Eddie whispered. 'I'll never ask you again.' But Marion remained as she was – her face a mask, her body a stone.[16]

Petrified by her sadness, the mother is reduced to a state of the living dead which is reiterated in the novel to describe her state. Eddie's father describes her as a 'zombie'.[17]

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[15] Mitchard, p. 237.
[16] Irving, p. 111.

She is cut off from the rest of the world by the scale and intensity of her sadness. Her emotion is dragged onto her body, marking it with a state of living-death as if she is thrusting the experience upon herself, punishing herself with her love for her lost child. Engulfed by their emotions, the characters stress a state of heightened emotional reaction to losing a child that is inspired by a discourse of female sentimentality.

The discourse of hysterical women in the novels suggests the darker side of conservative discourse about feminine sentimentality, when women who resist the ideal are cast as hysterics. The paradox of a feminine sentimentality that turns love to hate in case of bereavement pathologizes the rejecting mother as abnormal, a hysteric. The association of female characters with hysteria, specifically the sexual insatiability of hysteria, is introduced by a Freudian pattern that goes much further back in time than the 1990s. References to hysteria assume a gendered discourse as the word hysteria itself 'derives from the Greek term for the womb'.[18] In his analysis of the case of Frau Emmy Von N., Freud associates tendencies towards hysteria with femininity and sexual repression, which is a similar pattern to what is represented in Irving's novel. Freud's patient described in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) is a forty-year-old widow who suffered from 'depression and insomnia' and started her treatment with Freud in 1889.[19] Freud writes that his patient:

> has been living a year in sexual abstinence. Such circumstances are among the most frequent causes of tendency to anxiety…this woman who was so passionate and so capable of strong feelings had not won her victory over her sexual needs without severe struggles, and that at times her attempts at supressing this most powerful of all instincts had exposed her to severe mental exhaustion.[20]

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[17] Irving, p. 58.
[18] Jane M. Ussher, *The Madness of Women* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 18.
[19] Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies On Hysteria*, ed. by James and Alix Strachey and Angela Richards, trans. by James and Alix Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 105.
[20] Freud and Breuer, pp. 148-65.

Although she is not a grieving mother, Freud's patient's gender, grief and sexual abstinence are all concepts that feed into the discourse about femininity and the tendency towards hysteria. This association found its way into the twentieth century, including Irving's representation of Marion. In a *Widow for One Year* Ruth 'recognizes that measure of melancholy and continued hysteria which was often detectable in her mother's voice'.[21] Marion's grief is associated with hysteria that is 'detectable' by a four-year-old. This association of the grieving woman with hysteria that affects not only her behaviour but also her voice goes further in the novel to associate Marion with sexual insatiability. Both grieving mothers, Marion and Beth, have affairs outside of wedlock while they were grieving to highlight the relation between sexuality, grieving and hysteria. Marion even has an affair with a sixteen-year-old who makes love to her twice a day for six weeks.

Although the allusion to hysteria and grieving in the novel relies on outdated perspectives on femininity that originated in the nineteenth century or even Ancient Greek philosophy, Jane M. Ussher in *The Madness of Women* (2001) cites more recent associations between femininity and hysteria of the womb:

> Angold and colleagues claimed in 1999:
>
> In later life (after age 55), the female excess of depressions diminishes; mostly because of falling rates in women at a time when their oestrogen levels are again low.[22]

Perspectives on the gendering of feminine sentimentality are embedded in patriarchal discourse that continues and survives and seeps into more recent texts. Ussher suggests this when she writes that the more recent 'bio-psychiatric' perspectives on depression are:

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[21] Irving, p. 17.
[22] Ussher, p. 20.

> reminiscent of the advice given to mothers in the late nineteenth century, when adolescence was described as `naturally a time of restlessness and nerve irritability' for girls. A `period of storm and stress' and of `brooding, depression and morbid introspection.[23]

Hysteria and depression are related to the female body. Whether in the symptoms of puberty or menopause, the discourse about the female body's effect on the mind is riddled with suggestions of hysterical tendencies. This deterministic medical discourse assigns tendencies towards an excess of sentimentality to becoming a woman (and the female body). According to either older or more recent versions of psychological evaluations relating women and hysteria, becoming a woman can trigger a series of psychological problems.

The same association between femininity and hysteria in patriarchal discourse discussed by Ussher in *The Madness of Women* was addressed by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979). They discuss women's writings in the nineteenth century and question of the stereotypical representation of woman between the angel and the witch. The representation of women's hysteria and the tendency towards mental illness is analysed at length in nineteenth century fiction by women as an 'infection'.[24] This infection is caused by a tradition of representing women as hysterics:

> Nineteenth century culture seems to have actually admonished women to *be* ill. In other words, the "female disease" from which Victorian woman suffered were not always a by-product of their training in femininity; they were the goals of such training. [25]

Indeed, what Gilbert and Gubar describe as an infection of patriarchal representation of hysterical women has found its way into the representation of the women in Irving and Mitchard's novels. The infection of representation finds its way into the literature of the

[23] Ussher, pp. 20-21.
[24] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, second ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 52.
[25] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 54.

20th century to influence the representation of the grieving mothers as well as other characters in the novels into becoming part of this culture of 'female invalidism'.[26]

Part of the gendering of the grieving process is the representation of different modes of healing when it comes to fathers and mothers in the novels. This specific mode of healing includes healing *into* their maternal subjectivity and resuming their relationality to their children. In contrast to their husbands, Marion and Beth, are not shown to have the potential to heal by having another child. Marion for instance,

> had sex with Ted only once since her sons had died, and that one time - entirely at Ted's initiation - had been strictly for the purpose of getting her pregnant. (She had not wanted to get pregnant, but she'd been too despondent to resist).[27]

Marion passively resists becoming a mother again. Her passivity in declaring her rejection of mothering another child is a sign of her consuming depression rather than doubt about her interrupted maternal subjectivity. The father, on the other hand, is revealed to be attempting to overcome his grief by substituting a living child for his dead children. The same theme of substitution to suggest a masculine potentiality towards healing appears in Mitchard's novel.[28] For instance, when Beth's husband, Pat, tries to convince his wife to have another child to substitute for Ben, he thinks that the substitution of his lost son is his way towards healing. Pat tells his wife

> Bethie, I was the guy who had three kids. Everybody thought I was nuts, you know? *Three kids*? But one of the worst things is, for me, that the house was so full of their noise before. I would want to run up the walk at lunch-'
>
> 'Pat, I don't want another child,' she said.
>
> 'You said you would think this over.'

[26] Ibid.
[27] Irving, p. 109.
[28] The concept of substitution is related in the previous chapter to the representation of monstrous mothers who are substituted with the nanny to emphasizes all women's potential to be mothers. In this chapter, the concept is shifted to highlight men's potential for healing when one child can substitute for another.

> 'I *have* thought it over. And every time I think of having another child in me, and that maybe it would be a body…' Her voice got funny, like she had a bread ball stuck. 'Pat, it isn't going to change anything. Don't you see that? Just so you can be the guy who has three kids again.'[29]

Here again, substitution is associated with healing fathers. Unlike the character of the mother, the father in this representation reflects what is perceived to be a *masculine potentiality towards healing*. One aspect of this potential to heal is associated with a typically masculine image of pride in the sexual virility associated with having too many children. Although he admits to this notion being a façade for how he wants to appear in front of his peers, he still wants to maintain this image, the image of the Italian man who has a large family. The representation of the mother on the other hand does not suggest healing through substitution. Beth's grief in this passage is suggestive of her reversed transformation into the maternal subject. Unlike Marion, Beth is active in declaring her interrupted maternal subjectivity and her confidence in the impossibility of healing into a maternal subject. For Beth, no change is near when it comes to becoming a mother of another child.

While the novels reveal a gendered representation of grief, this issue is revised in parts of Irving's novel. This revision is specifically suggested by the reversal of the emotional division of labour in relation to masculinity and femininity. The representation of the father in *The Deep End of the Ocean* reveals a stereotype of the Italian-American breadwinner whose hyper-masculinity makes him less susceptible to his grief (unlike his wife). The image of the masculinized father in Mitchard's novels contrasts with the less emphasized masculinity of Ted Cole in *A Widow for One Year*. In other words, the novel deploys a more typically feminine emotionality in the character of the father and suggests that he takes part in the emotional labour that is more usually associated with the mother. In Irving's novel, aside from the association

[29] Mitchard, p. 195.

between Marion and child abandonment, the character of her husband displays an emotional attentiveness that suggests a feminized relationship between mother and child. For instance, after Ted Cole shows his daughter the photos of her brother and patiently discusses each one, father and daughter have a conversation about death. 'They had a conversation of this kind almost every day. With her mother, Ruth had similar conversations - only shorter'.[30] The emotional attentiveness to the child by the father suggests a reversal of the (typical) role of the mother onto the figure of the father.

The excessive emotionality attributed to the grieving mother Marion, when she is in a petrified state or like a zombie because of her grief, is transferred to the character of the father. In the novel, in the site of the accident where his children get killed, Ted Cole describes his reaction to his wife's attempt at retrieving her son's shoe from the wreckage. Marion does not know that the shoe is still attached to her son's severed leg. When she goes to retrieve the shoe, Ted 'wanted to stop her, but - talk about "turned to stone"- he felt at that moment absolutely paralyzed. He could not move, he could not even speak. And so he allowed his wife to discover that her son's shoe was still attached to a leg'.[31] His reaction as a sign of his shock is similar to Marion's, who is also described in the novel as turned to 'stone'.[32] Movement and speech crumble in the face of emotions and grief. Talking about a 'leg' marks the rupture in Ted's memory where the leg is no longer his son's leg but is a fragment of a body that is now detached from his paternal experience.

An earlier representation of the gendered grieving process and rejection of motherhood that suggests a similar pattern of reversal of gendered roles is found in Judith Guest's *Ordinary People* (1976). The novel features the conflicting relationship between a mother and her son after her first born is killed in a boating accident. Caught

[30] Irving, p. 36.
[31] Irving, p. 206.
[32] Irving, p. 111.

in the middle of the conflict, the father in the novel, Calvin, also represents the reversal of the role of the emotionally attentive parent that is more typically associated with the mother. After a struggle with the grief of losing their son that ends with the surviving son's suicide attempt, the family is exposed to a new series of conflicts. These mother/son conflicts end with the mother leaving her family to go to Europe without setting a date for her return. The juxtaposed representation of the father and mother in the novel and the reversal of the gendered emotional roles in the family offer a feminist perspective that questions the excessive emotionality typically attached to mothers in patriarchal discourse.

The reversal of the gendered emotional care aspect of parenting in *Ordinary People* is suggested by the father's emotional attentiveness to his son, especially after his suicide attempt. The novel is introduced with Calvin being engulfed by anxiety over his son's mental health. The father contemplates his role in his son's life by considering:

> [r]esponsibility. That is fatherhood. You cannot afford to miss any signs because that is how it happens; somebody holding too much inside, somebody else missing signs…
>
> Now that he is home again, things are different. The responsibilities seem enormous. Staggering. His job alone, nobody else's. Motherhood is different somehow…*Your mother wants me to tell you, you have a closetful of decent clothes*. [33]

Comparing his role to a mother's, Calvin associates emotional responsibilities with fatherhood. This is indicated by his guilt over missing the signs when it came to his son's suicide. He is attentive to his son's struggles when he holds too much inside. After the suicide attempt, Calvin is willing to take more responsibility for his son's health to prevent him from committing suicide. When the son reports the mother's wish for her son to dress better, it suggests a distant mother who is not connected to her son as much as the father. It also signals her emotional distance from her son, when all she

[33] Judith Guest, *Ordinary People* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), pp. 8-9.

cares about is his appearance more than his mental wellbeing. The father reporting this wish as the mother's wish indicates his aversion to taking responsibility for the material aspect of parenting and rather focusing on the emotional aspect of it.

The father's emotional attentiveness to Conrad is suggested again when his psychiatrist asks:

> "So who's worrying about you?"
>
> "My father, mostly. This is his idea."
>
> "How about your mother? Isn't she worried?"
>
> "No."
>
> "How come?"
>
> "She's - I don't know, she's not a worrier."[34]

The son's perspective on his parents also reflects the emotional attentiveness of his father and the distance he perceives in his mother. Published in the 1970s, changing social perspectives of masculinity are a factor in this representation, as John Beynon suggests in *Masculinities and Culture* (2002). In 'changing views on masculinity', Beynon writes:

> It is not only feminists who have attacked masculinity since the 1960s. In the 1970s some men themselves began to call into question, particularly within the so-called men's movement in North America, with their call for male liberation (to parallel 'women's lib'). Traditional masculinity began to be regarded as a 'neuro-muscular armour' that forced them to suppress tenderness, emotion and any signs of vulnerability.[35]

The movement towards stressing the importance of masculine emotionality rather than suppressing it might have been one of the factors that influenced the representation of the reversed role of the emotional parent in *Ordinary People*. The shift in representation marks the generational shift of post-Baby Boomers, when what is perceived as the

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[34] Guest, p. 39.
[35] John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2002), p. 15.

counterculture emerged to replace traditional social perceptions. These representations that reverse the gendered roles of parents highlight what can be perceived as the 'emotional man in the attic' rather than (the mad woman in the attic). In other words, men's emotionality oftentimes suppressed and hidden is celebrated by its representation in these novels. Ted Cole's turning to stone after his son's death, and Calvin Jarret's emotional attentiveness to his suicidal son after his other son dies, in some ways reclaims and emphasizes the emotional side of fatherhood.

The emotional emancipation of fathers and role reversal is reflected in Guest's novel when the mother berates her husband's excessive attention to their son's feelings. She tells her husband:

> "He's not your little boy," she says. "He'll be eighteen years old next month. For some reason, you want to think he needs your constant concern and protection. You worry over his every reaction. He smiles and you smile. He frowns and you baby him-".[36]

The father's attention implies a reversal of the gendered roles of parenting, based on emotion, and highlights a father who treats his son like a child but with whom he has an emotional and caring connection. This emotional attentiveness to the details of a smile and a frown show the extent of his responsiveness as juxtaposed with the mother's distance, even callousness. What makes her speech ironic, highlighting the gendered roles based on emotion, is that she wants her son to 'man up' and wear what Beynon calls a 'neuro-muscular armour', only to appear as the one who wears that armour because of her emotional unresponsiveness to her son.[37]

Guest's deployment of emotionality as a new way of structuring masculinity is implied by the son's suggested hysteria. His excessive emotionality in reaction to his brother's death and subsequent suicide attempt highlights this aspect of Conrad's

[36] Guest, p. 119.
[37] Beynon, p. 15.

character. While the mother is represented as a hysteric 'to the point of madness', her son is associated with hysteria which undermines gendered associations in the novel.[38] The impact of grief is associated with the brother, as well as the father, rather than the mother. Conrad asks himself:

> So, how does a Christian deal with grief? There is no dealing; he knows that much. There is simply the stubborn, mindless hanging on until it is over. Until you are through it. But something has happened in the process. The old definition, the neat, knowing pigeonholes have disappeared. Or else they no longer apply.[39]

The association of hysteria with men in this passage is revealed when he describes his grief as mindless. It refers to his mental health and how it is affected by trauma. It suggests how his trauma fragments memory when the 'pigeonholes' that contain memory no longer exist or function. Yet, his words reveal the possibility of healing. This possibility is also suggested in *The Deep End of the Ocean* and *A Widow for One Year* as a masculine aspect of gendered grief, where men are more likely to heal than women. Conrad experiences a rupture in his subjectivity after the trauma of death of a loved one, where he is changed and never the same person as result. Like the representations of the mothers in the 1990s novels, this earlier representation of the effect of grief, although attached to a male character, suggests an excess of emotionality, hysteria and a shift in subjectivity. However, it reverses gendered associations to hysteria and excessive emotionality.

Mother on a Pedestal

The characters' grief suggests an excess of maternal love that transforms these women into a spectacle for the social gaze. It highlights the paradox contained within the ideal of maternal love that turns to a rejection of motherhood as a result of

[38] Guest, p. 83. The mother's madness and display of emotion is associated with cleanliness and order rather than grief and bereavement.
[39] Guest, p. 48.

bereavement. The paradox within maternal love questions the extent of the societal gaze that observes the fulfilment of the maternal ideal. The societal gaze is the surveillance of mothers pressuring them to observe the standards of good mothering set by society. Like Foucault's prisoner, the mother is pressured into self-policing because of her sense of that gaze.[40] When Marion's grief is described as a 'mask', her emotionality is watched like a play.[41] Like a performance, her bereavement is represented as a dramatization of maternal love. Pushed to the limits of love, maternal love in the novels is posed as a *mask* separating the mother from others, including her children. It becomes a role that is performed and observed by others. Her sentimentality stands as a true expression of her grief, an expression exaggerating her passion and forming a barrier of emotion, summoning an audience to observe the mask of maternal sadness. It others the mother and highlights her as an object of surveillance. Her grief is monitored by her lover, husband and people around her. Beth's character also recalls images of separation and the societal gaze when she describes her grieving self as a 'spectacle' at the beginning of the novel.[42] Again, feminine sentiment is posed as a tool of difference, exaggeration and separation. It separates the grieving mother from her audience, from the witnesses to the magnitude of her emotion and from the spectators of her unique experience as a grieving mother. Standing alone before the societal gaze she wears her mask of grief to show them the extent of the maternal ideal.

The value of the omniscient narrator in particular is important because contributes to the figurative aspect of novels in associating the narrator with the societal gaze. Dorrit Cohn in 'Optics and Power in the Novel' borrows the figure of the panopticon to describe the power granted to the omniscient narrator in conveying the ideological perspective of the novel. Originally, the panopticon was designed by the

[40] For reference to Michel Foucault's theorization of the gaze and surveillance, see *Discipline and Punish* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 171-4.
[41] Irving, p. 111.
[42] Mitchard, p. 1.

philosopher Jeremy Bentham as a building where inmates could be watched without knowing who watched them. The idea was later employed by Foucault in his theorization of surveillance and the gaze. In her discussion of the panoptical view of the omniscient narrator, Cohn tests different aspects of narration (transparency, omniscience and focalization) against the narrator's ability to convey the ideological stance of the novel and concludes that a panoptical view of the omniscient narrator cannot convey a single ideological perspective. She writes:

> in my view, free indirect discourse cannot be understood as bearing a single, fixed ideological-cultural meaning, no more than the figurally focalized type of fiction in which it is most often found and no more than the contrastive, authorially focalized fictional type.[43]

The panoptic view granted to the omniscient narrator does not produce a single ideological perspective even in a case of authorial intervention in narration and didactic discourse. However, Cohn's theory is important to this exploration of the representation of bereavement. This aspect is figuratively pivotal because it represents both the narrator and reader as observers of the characters of the mothers in the novels. The reader's gaze is assumed to highlight the surveillance of the mother through the panoptic view provided by the omniscient narrator. Their gaze focuses on the mother's conformity to the social standards required of mothering in the novels contributes to portraying the mother as a spectacle for the societal gaze from inside (the narrator) and outside (the reader). The panoptic view provided by an omniscient narrator is therefore a metaphor for the mother being watched and policed. She is placed in the centre view and the reader, through the panopticon of omniscient narration, watches and judges her behaviour in an imitation of a social situation.

[43] Dorrit Cohn, 'Optics and Power in the Novel', *New Literary History*, 26 (1995), 3-17 < https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/article/24214> [accessed 31 October 2016], (pp. 15-16).

The societal gaze poses itself in the novel as an authority determining (good) mothering. In the novels, mothers are the centre of attention, a spectacle, separated from the fabric of the societal gaze. Their mothering is constantly judged and they are aware of the pressure of the maternal ideal. The maternal ideal is referred to when Marion in *A Widow for One Year* is judged by her husband when she leaves who asks '[w]hat kind of mother doesn't even try to get custody of her child?'[44] Her husband sets himself as the arbiter of the societal gaze that operates within the discourse about good mothering. His question suggests the many categories of mothering and he struggles to fit Marion into one as when Marion tells Eddie that despite every appearance to the contrary, she was once a good mother. 'But I won't be a *bad* mother to Ruth,' She added, still in a whisper. 'I would rather be *no* mother to her than a bad one'.[45] Marion defines the state that her husband failed to recognize: the state of absence. To avoid the social gaze, she chooses absence. The maternal ideal disintegrates into an undefinable void when she decides to abandon her daughter. Her resistance to the maternal ideal and her ambivalence towards mothering are revealed when she leaves a space rather than succumb to it.

Marion's absence creates a vacuum where the categories of both good and bad mothering collapse. This issue is central in *A Widow of One Year*. The idea of maternal substitution is displayed when the father performs the maternal role in the novel. Ruth, the child, emerges from her motherless childhood unscathed by her mother's abandonment. She has a child who meets her mother at the end of the novel. The representation of the mother's return in the novel suggests the continuity to her role in spite of her absence. When she meets her daughter for the first time after more than thirty years of absence, her first utterance is '"Don't cry honey," Marion told her only

[44] Irving, p. 182.
[45] Irving, p. 92.

daughter. "It's just Eddie and me"'.[46] Continuity is highlighted when the exact same utterance is made by Marion when her crying four-year-old daughter enters the room after she overhears her mother having sex with Eddie. Four-year-old Ruth thinks that her mother is being attacked by her lover, so she cries, only to be consoled by the same words that appear at the end of the novel.

Although the word 'scream' at the beginning of the novel is substituted with cry, the repetition of the words suggests an aspect of continuity to the mother's presence *in spite of* her absence.[47] It suggests her ability to pick up right from where she left off as a mother. Again, she is defined by her role as a mother after thirty years of absence and rejection of the maternal role. The categorization of good and bad mothering is revised through maintaining the role after a period of rejection of that same role. Absence diverts the societal gaze from the maternal role but empowers the maternal character when she no longer is subjected to the gaze. Continuing after an absence is the rewriting of the maternal role outside of the ideal and beyond societal dictation of (good) mothering.

The role of a societal gaze in defining the maternal ideal is also suggested in *The Deep End of the Ocean*. Beth does not only refer to the maternal ideal, she also refers to the feminine one when she assumes:

> There were roles, all with certain motions to perform: brave, obedient daughter-in-law; grieving mother; plucky friend; loyal wife. She could do them, however awkwardly. But the motions were themselves exhausting in their ultimate uselessness. Like brute and repetitive muscle exercise, they ate time and kept Beth in shape for…for what? For the resumption of a life, an altered life, post-Ben, which Beth couldn't really imagine, but which she figured might sometimes be expected of her.[48]

[46] Irving, p. 668.
[47] Irving, p. 19.
[48] Mitchard, p. 131.

Marking the change in her subjective experience, Beth draws attention to the roles of both a feminine and maternal subject she is required to perform. The societal gaze rests on the grieving mother, daughter-in-law, wife and woman expects her to perform, to act according to specific rules. The passage above alludes to the extent of conditioning when the character is aware of the role and the effect of its pressures on her body while she surrenders to the role. Her ambivalence between performing the role and changing it is evident. However, while she is aware of the role, she is not aware of her belief in it. The maternal ideal and the futility of the role is suggested when Beth tells her friend 'You'd be a wonderful mother' and her friend answers 'So would you, Beth'.[49] According to the discourse of the maternal ideal, every woman is potentially a wonderful mother. When it comes to mothering, only good mothering is expected. In spite of Beth's maternal ambivalence, her potential to be a good mother is highlighted to point out the extent of the social expectation and the discourse of good mothering adopted by women themselves.

The root of the concept of the (good) mother that produces a mode of self-surveillance to adopt the ideal is not limited to the social constructs of mothering. Aside from the cultural aspect of defining the ideal of the good mother, a theorization of the concept is credited to D. W. Winnicott, a psychologist who published his work in the 1950s and 1960s. Winnicott's theorization of an ideal of maternal care reveals the ironies within a discourse that highlights a maternal natural essence, while insisting on the need to identify and describe this (natural) essence in detail. His writings reflect the irony within what is perceived to be a natural state that must, in fact, be indoctrinated. As a paediatrician who became a psychoanalyst, Winnicott's experiments and writings about child development suggest the importance of maternal responsibility in the child's subjective formation. His theories about the effect of the mother on the child's psychic

[49] Mitchard, p. 506.

development influenced the definitions of the 'good enough mother'. In 'Primary Maternal Preoccupation' (1956) Winnicott, in biologically essentialist terms, describes the state when good mothering can be achieved. He describes the state of 'primary maternal preoccupation' is a 'special psychiatric condition of the mother' that:

> gradually develops and becomes a state of heightened sensitivity during, and especially towards the end of, the pregnancy.
>
> It lasts for a few weeks after the birth of the child.[50]

This description of the state of *primary maternal preoccupation* is essential as it stipulates that femininity includes a state of high sensitivity to the child that develops with pregnancy. Feminine subjectivity according to Winnicott's analysis of this state is influenced by the reproductive potential of the female body.

Interestingly, Winnicott's description of this state in terms of the need for recovery suggests his acknowledgment of the mother as a subject who is separate from the child. This is suggested in spite of his claim of her unconscious adaptation to the state of mothering by developing maternal preoccupation and heightened sensitivity to the child. Winnicott suggests an ideal degree to this state of 'maternal preoccupation':

> I do not believe that it is possible to understand the functioning of the mother at the very beginning of the infant's life without seeing that she must be able to reach this state of heightened sensitivity, almost an illness, and to recover from it. (I bring in the word 'illness' because a woman must be healthy in order to both develop this state and to recover from it as the infant releases her. If the infant should die, the mother's state suddenly shows up as illness. The mother takes this risk.)
>
> […] there are certainly many woman who are good mothers in every other way and who are capable of rich and fruitful life but who are not able to achieve this 'normal illness' which enables them to adapt delicately and sensitively to the infant's needs at the very beginning; or

[50] D. W. Winnicott, *Through Pediatrics to Psychoanalysis* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 302.

> they achieve it with one child but not with another. Such women are not able to become preoccupied with their own infant to the exclusion of other interests, in the way that is normal and temporary. It may be supposed that there is a 'flight of sanity' in some of these people...When a woman has a strong male identification she finds this part of her mothering function most difficult to achieve, and repressed penis envy leaves but little room for primary maternal preoccupation. [51]

Influenced by Freudian approaches to femininity such as the idea of penis envy and hysteria as a result of grief, Winnicott here describes the ideal state of what he describes as a necessary and natural psychic process of mothering. Although he acknowledges the processes of development into and outside of maternal subjectivity, Winnicott's description of the primal maternal preoccupation suggests a deterministic aspect to maternal subjectivity that relates to nature and the body.

His choice of the word *illness* is paradoxical as he suggests that this illness is the normal state and that mothers who do not develop into it are not normal. What he describes as a healthy mother, who develops into this state and then out of it, will remain 'ill' if the child dies. The framework relating hysteria to grief is pivotal in understanding how Winnicott restructures the concept of heightened sensitivity to the child's needs, into hypothesizing that hysteria can be a result of grief. In other words, Winnicott's maternal ideal is a state of illness without the potential for recovery unless the child releases her. This point becomes clear when he uses the oxymoron 'normal illness' to describe this state of maternal ideal when he accuses some mothers of failing to adapt sensitively to their child's need at the beginning.[52] A mother who has interests other than her child immediately after giving birth is a failed mother who fails to fall ill. Winnicott's allusion to hysteria when he describes the state of not being able to have a heightened sensitivity to the child as a 'flight of sanity' suggests that what he describes

[51] Winnicott, p. 302.
[52] Ibid.

as an illness *is the norm* when it comes of femininity and mothering.[53] Any variations to this state outside what he considers to be the norm marks the failure of motherhood. He continues in his description of this specific state that produces a *good enough mother*, he draws on the impact of this ideal on the child:

> if the mother provides a good enough adaptation to need, the infant's own line of life is disturbed very little by reactions to impingement…Maternal failures produce phases of reaction to impingement and these reactions interrupt the 'going on being' of the infant. An excess of this reacting produces not frustration but a *threat of annihilation*. [54]

This description of the ideal of the good enough mother who is highly sensitive to her child's need follows a very specific pattern that does not allow for a variation of what Winnicott considers as the norm. Too much and too little adaptation to the child's needs and reacting to them will, in his analyses, affect the child's subjective formation causing either problematic interruption to the child's subjective formation or the threat of annihilation if the mother smothers the child with too much care.

Winnicott's (good enough) mother is very susceptible to failure when it comes to adopting his maternal ideal. Winnicott's theorization has contributed to what is perceived to be a scientific way of representing the discourse of motherhood. Although his classification of the good enough mother suggests that the maternal subjectivity can be interrupted, in the case of the bad mother, Winnicott remains representative of the discourse that establishes patriarchal perceptions about mothering.

Remnants of this conservative discourse of the 'good mother' are still reproduced decades later in the United Sates in images like the *supermom*. Having been adapting to the working mother the image of the *supermom* of the 1990s is alluded to in *Encyclopaedia of Motherhood* (2010) edited by Andrea O'Reilly. The book points out

[53] Ibid.
[54] Winnicott, p. 303.

that the image of the supermom popularized by the media is a reaction to feminism. Highlighting conservative undertones in the image, she writes:

> An intensifying cultural backlash against feminism was reflected in American media representations of motherhood through the 1980s and the 1990s. Advertising in particular gave rise to the image of the supermom- the working mother who retains energy at the end of a long day for her children and husband and who relies on the innovation of consumer culture to assist her in this balance.[55]

She points out the role of capitalist commodification in the formation of the discourse of the *supermom.* As a late twentieth century version of the good mother, examples in the media that have popularized the image include Claire Huxtable in *The Cosby Show* and even Marge Simpson in *The Simpsons*.

The infiltration of the image of the supermom into pop culture pressured mothers to fit into a more specific maternal ideal. The Encyclopaedia highlights the role of the media in increasing pressures on mothers to self-regulate. Fear-mongering tactics that place more responsibilities on mothers, including the duty of self-surveillance, to achieve the ideal were used by the media:

> Television and print journalism in the 1980s and the 1990s abounded with maternal stories: tampered-with Halloween candy; Child abduction; non-compliant surrogate mothers (Marybeth Whitehead); mothers killing their own children (Susan Smith, Andrea Yates);mothering consuming alcohol; crack babies; abandoned new-borns in dumpsters; teen mothers; and most notoriously welfare mothers.[56]

This role stems from patriarchal perceptions of the maternal ideal. One of the most important features of this media interference in the definition of good mothering is the pressure of self-regulation and surveillance lest mothers fall into the traumatic scenarios attributed to a failure of mothering. In the 1990s, the media contributed, more than ever

[55] Andrea O'Reilly, *Encyclopaedia of Motherhood* (SAGE Publications, 2010), p. 749.
[56] Ibid.

before to building the image of the maternal ideal and stressed the importance of self-surveillance to achieve this ideal.

Maternal Guilt

The societal gaze and its impact on self-surveillance produces guilt in the protagonists of the novels. The characters' guilt is thus suggestive of failing the standards of good mothering. Guilt occurs when the mother questions her mothering according to the rules of society, generating self-blame by casting the societal gaze upon herself. This representation of maternal guilt as a figure of self-surveillance is clear when Beth, months after losing her son, reacts to a joke from her friend: 'And Beth, to her horror, laughed, instantly covering her eyes and feeling that she was about to choke'.[57] Beth checks her joy. She physically stifles her laugh with her hand. Her sense of guilt and fear of failing the ideal of the grieving mother is a cause of horror that shakes her to the core. Her surveillance of herself immediately results in blocking any signs of joy to the extent of a physical reaction. For the grieving Beth, her momentary happiness is a source of guilt as if she is betraying her child. The proportions of her guilt are massive as she reacts not with fear, but with horror. She rushes to put herself back on the track of the *good mother* who forgets joy and only grieves her son.

Guilt as a feature of social gaze and self-surveillance is suggested by Irving in his representation of Marion's experience. When Marion plans to escape her life as a wife and mother because of her depression that was triggered by losing her son, her plans include an explanation of her purpose to her husband. This explanation is to be delivered by her lover. However, her lover asks:

[57] Mitchard, p. 107.

> [b]ut who's going to explain it all to *Ruth*? Eddie had asked. There then crept into Marion's expression that same aura of distance that Eddie had witnessed when he's asked her about the accident. Clearly Marion had *not* scripted the part of the story where someone explains it all to Ruth.[58]

Eddie's question represents the societal gaze on Marion's mothering. Her inefficiency as a planner is criticized by neglecting to consider her daughter in the passage. The tone of the narrator in describing Marion's reaction assumes a critical stance that is displayed in the stress on *not*. Again, Marion is portrayed as a performer who adheres to a script. Whether triggered by her sense of her lover's gaze or her self-surveillance, the distant look described in the passage is suggestive of guilt. She is detached from maternal subjectivity and is distant when the relationality of motherhood is suggested. Marion falls under the pressure of the gaze. Both her ambivalence and guilt are portrayed by the distance from the maternal relationality portrayed in the passage.

Mitchard represents guilt as an extension of the social gaze and self-surveillance when Beth, feels guilty about her older son. Beth's guilt about not being able to connect with her son, Vincent, is revealed in a dream when she:

> woke one night, shaking, from a dream of Vincent. Vincent… injured. Aged about five, in the hospital, a broken wrist. She'd dreamed of busting through swinging doors - not one, or two, but an endless series - to follow the trail of wails to Vincent.
>
> She could have her son, Beth thought, setting up. Her lost-on-purpose son. Not the one lost by accident. If she had the guts, if she had the time, if she could find the ropes. If miracles could really happen. [59]

The passage conveys the extent of Beth's guilt about what she considers a failure of her mission as a mother to her first son. It conveys the reversal of maternal subjectivity as both an act of determination (on purpose) and cowardice at the same time. The language

[58] Irving, p. 131.
[59] Mitchard, p. 499.

conveys mothering as an act of struggle and bondage. A character who laments losing her child on purpose because she could not be a mother to him anymore also describes mothering as bondage. Whether the reference is to ropes that pull or ropes that tie or ropes that transfer her to her son like an acrobat, the image of the ropes is suggestive of tension and complexity. Although she acknowledges a shift in her perspective by calling a shift back into maternal subjectivity a *miracle*, her sense of guilt is evident. Maternal interruption in this passage is an injury. The hospital has the authority of the gaze on her mothering. Like the hospital, that gaze is established on rules and regulations.

The dream is significant in this passage as a Freudian allusion to the impact of guilt on the subconscious. Her dream reveals the contents of her psyche which is a wish for a point of return to her maternal subjectivity. An endless series of doors represents her ability to overcome interruptions to her maternal subjectivity. The doors are her entrance into one state and exit from another. She takes herself back to her child but does not find him. She only hears his pain, but does not ease it. Trauma in this passage is both the trauma of the mother and of the child. It is the pain of losing and being lost, of looking for something and never finding it. The memory that takes her back to her son's injury when he is five is the wish for return and redemption. Injury and trauma mark her psyche as much as her guilt pressures her for a point of return.

Memory, Trauma and the Grieving Mother as a Subject

Trauma and memories attached to it in *A Widow for One Year* and *The Deep End of the Ocean* are a gateway to understanding the complexity of the representation of maternal bereavement in American fiction. In spite of allusions to excessive emotionality and feminine sentimentality in the gendering of bereavement, the novels invest in trauma as the heart of bereavement to suggest a regenerative aspect to trauma. The interrupted

maternal subjectivity, reversed as result of trauma, highlights the generative feature of trauma. The novels engage memories to structure new perceptions of the subjectivities of mothers. The discourse of the good mother is questioned in the novels by the figure of the ambivalent mother. The maternal ideal represented by an excess of maternal love in the bereaved mother is questioned by the rejection of motherhood of the traumatized mother. In a dialogic representation of motherhood in the novels, maternal love and maternal hate engage in a conversation that asks the question, how much is too much when it comes to maternal love? Is a loving mother allowed to be a hating mother? Is a bereaved mother allowed to reject motherhood? The ideal and its opposite collide in the representation of the reversed maternal subjectivity. They question each other by memories of love lost and the reality of love denied.

If association between mothering and trauma highlights the regenerative aspect of trauma and memory, this regenerative aspect is structured around metaphors suggesting fragmentation and replacement to reveal how memory shapes trauma and rewrites maternal subjectivity. The interplay between Beth's trauma and memory is highlighted from the beginning of *The Deep End of the Ocean* when Beth:

> tried and sounded like a fool, telling him about people who had a disease-Korsakov's syndrome- that sliced their memory to moments. Such patients, mostly alcoholics, could meet a doctor, a social worker and talk intelligently for long minutes, about the weather, their health, the stories on the front page of a newspaper spread on a desk. But should the doctor or the social worker leave the room, even for a minute, victims of Korsakov's would have no memory of ever having met any such person. Introductions would begin all over again.
>
> That, Beth told her husband, was nearly how she felt- how, in fact, she longed to feel.[60]

The traumatic event of losing a child is expressed in the fragmentation of memories. Memory is reduced to fragments to confront the trauma. The figure of the hysterical

[60] Mitchard, p. 4.

woman is yet again present to associate trauma with disease, a disease that fragments memories. Allusions to Korsakov's syndrome highlights the trauma of child bereavement when the mundaneness of everyday conversation is erased by the impact of the losing a child. What is considered to be normal is shattered and fragmented. Beth's maternal subjectivity is dispersed by trauma and she reinvents herself only to have this new self fragmented again.

Fragmentation as a figure for memory is alluded to in Irving's novel in the image of the severed leg of Marion's dead son. Marion:

> couldn't have *imagined*- that her boy's shoe was still attached to his leg […]
>
> Ted *wanted* to stop her…He could not move, he couldn't even speak. And so he allowed his wife to discover that her son's shoe was still attached to a leg. That was when Marion began to realize that Timothy was gone, too. And that …Ted Cole said, in his fashion, 'that is the end of the story.'[61]

The fragmentation of her son's body, his image in her last memory of him, is what amplifies her trauma. The whole, to her, becomes fragmented so that, like Korsakov's patients in Mitchard's novel, she cannot rebuild the fragments and tell the story. Only her husband is able to tell Eddie the story. He is also able to mark the end of the story, unlike Marion, who cannot mark the beginning and the end because of fragmented memories that stem from the trauma of the fragmented body.

Photographs is a significant metaphor in both Irving's and Mitchard's novels. Beth is a photographer.

> Pictures were talismans to her. But she also had a sense that a time might come when she could cherish those photos…the simple passage of time, or religion, or resignation, might make it her

[61] Irving, p. 206.

> bitter sweet delight, a record of Ben the last time she saw him- well, not the last time she saw him, but the last time she saw him as he was. [62]

Although fragmented, memories, like photographs, are granted a power of their own. Invested with powers of time passing, faith and the character's surrender to what the picture reveals, images have the power to regenerate. Out of the ruins of trauma, the fragmentation of a photograph heals and recreates.

In *A Widow for One Year* suggest the same meaning of regeneration and renewal suggested within metaphors relating to fragmentation. One photograph in particular represents the idea of fragmentation more than the other photographs and it, ironically, is left behind by accident when Marion could not find the time to get to the framing shop to retrieve it. In the photo:

> taken in the morning sunlight in a hotel room in Paris, Marion is lying in an old-fashioned feather bed; she looks tousled and sleepy, and happy. Beside her head on the pillow is a child's leg, in pajamas, disappearing under the bed covers. Faraway, at the other end of the bed, is another bare foot- logically belonging to a second child.[63]

The fragmentation in this photograph lies in two different aspects. One is the son, who only appear as legs in the photos. The physical fragmentation from the traumatic accident is foreshadowed in it to suggest the fragmentation of the memory of either the accident or the remaining photograph. Moreover, this photograph is the only one where Marion is described to be *happy.* Her old self as a happy mother, no more existent in her daughter's world, is suggestive of the shift in her subjectivity. She only exists as a fragment of her old self, a physical one.

Marion's obsession with pictures of her sons gains other meanings when she loses them. She decides to reclaim the photographs as her own when she escapes life

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[62] Mitchard, p. 3.
[63] Irving, p. 73.

with her husband. Although this suggests that she is suspended in the past, it also suggests an attempt to create a new life from the fragments in the photographs. Claiming them as her own is another factor that contributes to the shift in the meaning of these photographs. Instead of belonging to the family they belong only to Marion. This suggests the shift from the maternal into the feminine is also indicated by the metaphors of war in this passage. It takes place after Marion's departure and after she takes all the photographs of her sons with her.

> There was a quality to Marion's absence that even to a four year old suggested permanence … the presence of the picture hooks- not to mention those darker rectangles that stood out against the faded wall paper-contributed to the feeling that the photographs were gone for ever.
>
> If Marion had left the walls *completely* bare, it would have been better. The picture hooks were like a map of beloved but destroyed city.[64]

The darkness of the passage alludes to the trauma. Her departure is given the quality of death and permanence. Fragmentation is displayed in the images of the faded wall behind the frame and the hooks left behind. All are suggestive of remnants left behind. Although the hooks represent a promise of renewal, the empty hook is a symbol of absence. The images of war, like the map of the destroyed city, are suggestive of her victory in reclaiming her photos. This territorial language of mapping and war utilized to describe motherhood, suggested also in texts like Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk about Kevin,* in a similar revisionist discourse about mothering. It alludes to images of a mother's power. However, in Irving's novel maternal love both wins and is defeated. It claims and rejects. Marion's subjectivity is reversed; her maternal subjectivity is left a faded space on the wall of the maternal ideal.

Aside from Irving's representation of maternal absence in *A Widow for One Year* (1998), other American novels published in the same decade allude to the same

[64] Irving, p. 180.

theme. For instance, in *The Secret Life of Bees* (2001) by Sue Monk Kidd, a mother leaves her abusive husband but leaves her daughter with him. The novel represents the daughter's journey through her mother's abandonment and subsequent suffering from her father's abuse. Lily, the daughter, moves in with a family of African-American sisters who sheltered her mother when she first escaped her abusive husband. Towards the end of the novel when August, one of the sisters, senses Lily's struggle with her mother's abandonment, she introduces to her the idea of substitution as a means of dealing with absence. August tells Lily:

> 'Remember when I told you the story of Beatrix,' she said, 'the nun who ran away from her convent? Remember how the Virgin Mary stood in for her?
>
> 'I remember,' I said. 'I figured you knew I'd run away like Beatrix did. You were trying to tell me that Mary was standing in for me at home, taking care of things till I went back.'
>
> 'Oh that's not what I was trying to tell you at all,' she said. 'You weren't the runaway I was thinking about. I was thinking about your mother's running away. I was just trying to plant a little idea in your head.'
>
> 'What idea?'
>
> 'That maybe our Lady could act for Deborah [the absent mother] and be like a stand-in mother for you.'…
>
> 'Our Lady is inside me,' I repeated, not sure I did.
>
> 'You have to find a mother inside yourself. We all do. Even if we already have a mother, we still have to find this part of ourselves inside.'[65]

Although she initially suggests religion in the figure of Mary as a substitute for her absent mother, August insists that it is not the only option for satisfying the demand for filling the absence of the potential void left by the mother. This image of the mother

[65] Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees* (London: Headline, 2004), pp. 356-7.

suggests that the void may exists even when the mother is present. That absence and demand are always there. It is up to every person to attempt to fill the void from within. Although this representation does not stipulate that it will be filled, it suggests the subject's role in filling this role. Like Ruth's hooks, Lily's image of the Virgin Mary is a reminder of maternal absence and also the potentiality of substitution. In other words, both representations reflect a revision of the maternal ideal that can be changed, substituted.[66]

Trauma, survival and fluid feminine subjectivity

In her reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in a work about trauma and memory, Cathy Caruth suggests a regenerative quality to trauma and survival. She writes that trauma is produced 'because the mind cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxical, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living'.[67] People emerge from a traumatic event with a new perception of themselves and their existence. In my reading of the reversal of the process of maternal subjectivity into a feminine one as a result of trauma, the regenerative aspect of trauma and survival is foregrounded. *The Deep End of the Ocean* and *A Widow for One Year* suggest that the representation of the reversed maternal subjectivity after losing a child is one way of questioning feminine ideals.

A novel that probes the concept of subjective regeneration and renewal in the representation of maternal bereavement and survival is Constance Warloe's *The Legend of Olivia Cosmos Montevideo* (1994). In the novel, Roberta Masters gives the reader a

[66] Another text that explores substitutions to the maternal ideal is *The Hours* (1998) by Michael Cunningham. The novel alludes to perceptions of maternal absence within the context of the 1950s. The novel suggests that the lost mother is found in her son's work and that her absence can be generative. See Michael Cunningham, *The Hours* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006).
[67] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 62.

first-person account of her journey through the trauma of losing a child to the Vietnam War in the 1970s. The choice of setting signifies a generational shift in the 1970s, to highlight the change in the perceptions of the maternal ideal. The novel represents a grieving mother's journey from Arlington, Virginia westwards towards Wyoming after losing a child in the Vietnam War. This physical journey almost synchronises with a spiritual journey in which the character works through her bereavement and the trauma. The grieving woman changes her name and takes a young lover, which is also suggestive of a regenerative aspect of trauma in developing new perspectives on the maternal experience. In other words, survival of child bereavement is a process of healing from which the mother can emerge as a different subject.

The imagery is similar to Irving and Mitchard's works that represents subjective fragmentation produced by trauma. The mother describes her son as 'one of the numbers' when she hears the body count of the war.[68] Her subjectivity as a mother due to trauma begins its process of reversal when her son is reduced to a mere statistic of war. The fragmentation generated by bereavement is suggested when Roberta, says 'I am a decent person who is temporarily lost'.[69] Although it foreshadows her healing, Roberta experiences a fragmented self, as a precursor of her reversed maternal subjectivity. This fragmentation revises of the image of the mother and restructures the meanings attached to it. She loses parts of herself and announces her transformation when she states, 'I dreamt of a woman who turns into a girl'.[70] The dream alludes to Freudian interpretations of trauma. The woman becoming a girl is her subjectivity being reversed by her traumatization. The dream continues when the girl finds a ship and takes it home only for the ship to be wrecked and turn into a 'troop carrier' and the

[68] Constance Warloe, *The Legend of Olivia Cosmos Montevideo* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994), p. 28.
[69] Warloe, p. 128.
[70] Warloe, p. 25.

screams 'Mayday'.[71] The dream alludes bereaved mothers in the context of the Vietnam War. The ship is symbolic of her journey through her trauma. She no longer perceives herself as a mother anymore. Her journey is not a return to youth; it is a journey of a maternal experience erased by the trauma of losing a child.

When Roberta leaves her husband and embarks on her journey, she encounters a road sign that reads

OLIVIA 5

COSMOS 9

MONTEVIDEO 15

> Olivia Cosmos Montevideo. It reads like a name. My own wilts by comparison. Roberts Patterson Masters sounds plain, safe and undecided; Olivia Cosmos Montevideo sounds exotic, dangerous ad downright empathic. A woman with a name like that could never have lived on Branchview Court…Her gestures would topple trees; her words would humiliate husbands. I cannot contain the image.
>
> "What a Woman!"[72]

The ring of the words on the road sign makes her revise her subjectivity. She craves power and a new self, born with a new name announces her new self. To mark her new perspective, Roberta renames herself Olivia Cosmos Montevideo. This new self is a complete opposite to her old repressed self in every way. This revisionist aspect of the novel represents a more explicit approach to the regenerative aspect of traumatised motherhood. In Irving's work, for instance, renewal and regeneration is only implied by the new career and new life outside the country. In Warloe's novel, however, renewal that is generated by survival takes the more explicit image of reborn self, renamed and reinvented out of the remnants of the maternal subjectivity. Later in the novel the choice

[71] Warloe, p. 25.
[72] Warloe, p.81.

of name reveals the impact of trauma on the mother. Roberta explains her new name is 'a euphemistic way of saying "oblivion." Olivia-Oblivion'.[73] This association between a name that is initially suggested to be chosen for its power and the concept of oblivion highlights the abandoned maternal self: 'This woman is rising from the slime. Olivia Cosmos Montevideo is rising form the primal slime, and she looks back only occasionally to check on the creature behind her'.[74] Slime suggests the contamination of the maternal image. The primal slime reproduces through trauma a renewed subjectivity. It is not static but fluid. It changes and adapts.

Suggestive of closure and healing, the novel does not only revise the maternal ideal through trauma. Roberta returns to her husband and resumes her life as mother *in spite of* her trauma. She demonstrates a hopeful tone about healing for her and others when at the end of her narrative she relates how she reads the name on the body count next to her son:

> "James Lee Storey," I continue. "Warrensburg, Missouri April 3, 1950, to May 19, 1970."
>
> Andrew looks at me, probably worried that I am going to begin the long roll call of Gary's entre section. But I'm not. I couldn't stand the pain. I would be there reading all day and all night and I would never stop. But just this one, this neighboring boy, I had to read his name.
>
> "One time. . ." I say weeping. "when I was here, you know. . . "I can't get the words out: One time when I was here I met his parents, and they were just like us.[75]

By rereading the list, Roberta relives her traumatic experience. She cannot detach from trauma. She survives, only to remember it by identifying as the mother of another dead soldier as young as her son. She relives the trauma through the experience of another

[73] Warloe, p. 198.
[74] Warloe, p. 87.
[75] Warloe, p. 304.

woman, James Lee Storey's mother. She is taken to the same place by reading his name. However, she survives and talks about it in terms of the past.

Conclusion

The representative texts in this chapter highlight culturally specific concepts like hysteria and feminine sentimentality by relating them to the trauma of losing a child and investigate these perceptions by questioning the feminine ideals associated with grieving. They highlight patriarchal concepts of feminine sentimentality and hysteria in the images of the traumatized mothers whose maternal experience is affected by child bereavement. These representations raise a number of issues about sentimentality and its associations with maternal love. The images of the ambivalent mothers in the novels employ the processes of remembering and forgetting to redefine feminine and maternal subjectivity via emotionality and trauma.

The gendering of hysteria in patriarchal discourse shapes the image the (good mother). The gendering of grief is questioned when nuanced experiences of different stages of grief are represented within characters of fathers and mothers. The (ideal) and expected display of grief associated with women through excessive emotionality is also associated to men to revise perceptions of feminine sentimentality. The representation of grief in these narratives shatters expectations of gender specific displays of grief. Grieving mothers do not only grieve their child by showing excessive emotion, they reject the maternal experience altogether and start over with new perspectives on themselves. Perceptions of how the maternal role should be performed, including how to grieve a lost a child, is disrupted when the rejection of motherhood produced through trauma is depicted. The image of the mother who rejects the maternal experience is fragmented, separating the grieving mother from the grieving woman. The clash

between good mothering and the chaos of trauma shatters expectations of both good mothering and feminine sentimentality in the narratives. Mothers who love their children become mothers who reject their children. What is expected from good mothers is reshaped through what is expected from grieving mothers.

The representation of maternal bereavement highlights the paradox within the maternal ideal when love of the lost child becomes excessive, causing the mother to reject the maternal experience. The love/hate paradox implied within maternal bereavement puts the maternal ideal and suggests the fluidity of feminine subjectivity. Being a woman and mother in these texts resists the ideal. Expectations from women and mothers on psychological and social levels are destroyed when representative characters do not meet the ideal of the emotional woman and doting mother. The trauma of losing a child gains a regenerative aspect that revises the maternal ideal and the gendered perspectives of patriarchal discourse of grieving. Women reinvent themselves through these narratives by finding new perspectives on themselves as subjects. The characters' shifting to and from the perspective of the mother suggests an aspect of fluidity that is not contained within conservative conceptualizations of femininity and motherhood. Through the concept of reversed maternal subjectivity, the character of the mother is reborn anew.

5 Race and the Reversal of Maternal Subjectivity: Tracing the Borders of the Self in Motherhood as a Motif in Toni Morrison's Novels

Motherhood in fiction as a dialogue between literary representation and institutional motherhood is pivotal in revising the maternal ideal. However, when race is put into the equation, the dialogue about motherhood becomes more complex. It exposes an intersection between race and gender that highlights *mothering while black* as a unique subjective experience that carries a new set of challenges in the United States. This representation, however, does not set mothering in a racially discriminatory environment as fundamentally different or marginalized. These representations dissect the maternal experience as part of the human consciousness when racial discrimination is involved and prevalent. The horror of infanticide, child abuse and abandonment in the representations emphasizes the human subjective experience in an extreme environment that is racially defined. The reversal of the transformation into the maternal subject in a racialized experience takes the form of a radical approach to resistance of the elements of that experience, which suggests the potential of self-realization outside of institutional racism in the United States.

Toni Morrison's work revises gender hierarchies within a racially discriminatory environment. Her narratives represent the resistance to the cultural ideal of the African-American woman's body as a site of appropriation. Both the feminine ideal and racial-political structures are dismantled and restructured in her work. Infanticide offers a revisionist perspective of the maternal ideal that reassembles both gender and racial dimensions of maternal subjectivity. The ambivalence towards the child in her novels

reflects the fluidity of feminine subjectivity that has the potential to react to power structures and resist them. Healing as a subject is drawn through the novels' discourse to revise the feminine ideal rather than essentialize it.

This chapter explores the reversal of the process of transformation into a maternal subject through maternal infanticide, child abuse and abandonment in a racial context. The complexities contained within institutional motherhood in a racial context are explored and revised in Morrison's novels. Her work revises the representation of gender and race hierarchies through the trope of motherhood. Her writing about the institutional motherhood acknowledges radical African-American attempts at self-realization and empowerment within institutional racism in the United States. She draws on resistance to racism as an attempt at redefining the self through the concept of rebirth. The texts utilize concepts adopted by the Black Power movement and separatist approaches to racism to redefine the African-American identity in the United States.

Mothering While Black

The mothering experience in a racially discriminatory environment presents a different set of political structures that influence the maternal ideal. The ideal is based on an intersection between gender and race that shifts the maternal experience into different realms of suffering and sacrifice. Most importantly, mothers stand in a racial domain as the source of difference and the reproducer of the other. Felipe Smith in *American Body Politics* (1998) cites a significant law that associates the mother specifically with racial status. Passed in 1662 in Virginia, the law stipulates that 'all children borne in this

country shalbe [sic] held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother'.[1] The mother's status, as a slave, becomes a condition that begets the exploitation of the offspring. The law of *the condition of the mother* produced a problem for the slave owners in the colonies of Virginia and Maryland in the 1660s when slaves sought to spare their offspring from the horrors of their condition by fathering children with white indentured servants. This was perceived by the law as a felony, and the law was adjusted to state that white women who reproduce with slaves are punished with serving the father's master, along with their offspring, for thirty years. Described by Smith as a 'colonization of the female womb', this law subjugates women by both their race and gender as mothers.[2] What is considered to be a choice for the white woman who marries a slave is dismantled by making her a slave by association. The law discriminates against womanhood as well as race by subjugating women on both ends of the race spectrum. The adjustment to the law encouraged slaveholders to coax white indentured servants to marry their slaves in order to 'make the white woman herself a slave for life'.[3] Mothering as a condition of being, in a racist environment, is an extreme state of surrender for survival. Colour and gender were the definitive rules for surrendering the body to appropriate enslaved women in a racist social structure. The maternal experience is hegemonized and restructured into an ideal of full appropriation.

The appropriation of the mother and her offspring during slavery developed into an appropriation of the womb after the emancipation of the slaves and the conditions of living as an African-American during segregation. While mothers were encouraged to reproduce labour power during slavery, the process of subjugation is inverted into preventing African-American women from reproducing to limit their access to welfare.

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[1] Felipe Smith, *American Body Politics: Race, Gender and Black Literary Renaissance* (Athens, London: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), p. 12.
[2] Ibid
[3] Smith, p. 14.

Andrea O'Reilly refers to the inequity of opportunity between White and Black mothers in the United States when she discusses the limited support available to women of colour when it comes to having a child. Limited access to affordable healthcare is one of the factors that influence the experience of mothering for poor African-American women as well as 'access to methods used to become a mother (e.g., fertility treatment-adoption)' are available to classes that can afford it which are predominantly white.[4] This relation between the economic circumstances resulting from institutional racism and its effect on the maternal experience is part of the control of reproduction that racially affects African-American women:

> poor women of color are penalized for childbearing, while affluent white women are encouraged to use fertility treatments to have more children. There is empirical evidence that African-American women in the United States are less likely to use fertility treatments, and such treatments are less likely to result in a live birth…The most explicit evidence of racism and choosing to become a mother is non-consensual sterilization.[5]

This regulation of African-American access to reproductive healthcare is an appropriation of the womb. Practices of institutional racism influence their subjective experience as women and mothers. Class and race collide to limit their experience as mothers by rendering them subject to another discriminating political system. Again, the *condition of the mother,* being poor and black, thrusts the mother into a state of subjugation to racializing political structures.

With the surrender contained within *the condition of the mother* comes the surrender of that condition as a subjective state. Being subject to society's perception of what constitutes a good mother and submissive woman becomes the framework of surrender that is resisted in the novels. The representation of infanticide is a case in

[4] Andrea O'Reilly, *Encyclopedia of Motherhood* (California: Sage, 2010), p. 1051.
[5] Ibid.

point. Infanticide becomes an adjustment to the laws of mothering, borrowing from the fluidity of adjustments to the laws that govern the maternal ideal. Disruptions to the maternal experience occur in this condition of surrender of maternal subjectivity. What is considered to be a transformational process from the feminine into the maternal subjectivity is reversed back into the feminine subjectivity by the inaccessibility of *the condition of the mother.* Infanticide becomes an amendment to feminine subjectivity.

Before discussing the representation of infanticide and the rejection of mothering a child as a means of resistance of the dominant political structure I will review how Morrison represents African-American motherhood within a racialized environment. The reversal of the maternal subjectivity as a metaphor of reinventing a more empowered self through the representation of infanticide is not the only form of representation of the role of motherhood in structuring empowerment. Other modes of reversal of maternal subjectivity are utilized in the representation of mothering in a racialized environment to highlight the means of an empowered self that resists the hegemony of another. Rejection of motherhood in the representations, like abuse, imply that a form of monstrous motherhood stems from the monstrosity of the environment. From that monstrosity the child emerges as a new and empowered subject. The reversal of the mother's subjectivity in the representation of monstrous mothers within a racist environment reflects both the monstrosity contained within the social structures, and the potential of a rebirth of a more empowered subject outside of the confines of this monstrosity.

The representation of child abuse in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* (2015) alludes to the effect of racist perspectives in forming African-American subjectivity. It highlights the impact of racial conditioning and the adoption of racist perspectives in viewing the self. The reversal of maternal subjectivity in this representation is produced

by adopting racist perspectives. The mother's character is conditioned into rejecting and abusing her child because of her colour. The monstrosity of racist social structures is absorbed by the mother, producing her monstrosity in abusing and rejecting her child. However, the potential in emerging out of this monstrous existence reflects the potential of resisting it.

Morrison tells the story of Bride, a professional make up designer and marketer who overcomes an abusive childhood. The abuse starts with her mother's and father's rejection of Bride because of her dark skin. The mother's deep shame of her daughter's skin colour reaches the point of fear.[6] The mother considers committing infanticide because of her shame of her skin colour when she states 'I held a blanket over her face and pressed. But I couldn't do that, no matter how much I wished she hadn't been born with that terrible color. I even thought of giving her away'.[7] Her struggle with the rejection of her daughter that forces her to find ways of getting rid of her daughter is partially resolved when she decides to deny that she is her mother, at least to herself, and prevent her daughter from calling her mother. Instead the daughter calls her mother Sweetness, her first name. Through this denial of the maternal title, the character establishes the reversal of her maternal subjectivity. The disruption to the violence of infanticide in this scene signifies the shift in the mode of racial violence compared to the imagery associated with slavery and the racism in the Jim Crow South. The imagery associated with maternal violence in this novel signifies a reproduction of the mode and intensity of racial violence during slavery. Infanticide in the 1980s becomes a passing thought as opposed to a necessary choice during slavery.

The social conditioning into blackness as a sign of inferiority is represented in *God Help the Child* through the perspective of the mother and child to examine the

[6] Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child* (London: Vintage, 2015), p. 3.
[7] *God Help the Child*, p. 5.

political structures that produce racist discourse. The mother's reversal of maternal subjectivity triggered by her shame of her daughter's colour is a metaphor for the adoption of racist perceptions and self-hate in African-American communities. The novel utilizes another scenario of the reversal of maternal subjectivity when the mother mentions that her grandmother 'passed for white and never said another word to any one of her children. Any letter she got from my mother or my aunts she sent right back, unopened'.[8] Although Sweetness does this because she does not want to go back to being defined by racial standards, she opts to give up mothering her children along with all ties to her race. She leaves the letter unopened to try to contain the struggles of being associated with her race. The unopened letters reflect the lack of signification where words reflecting her subjectivity as a mother remain uncommunicated. They lose their meaning and signify nothing. The reversal of her maternal subjectivity is triggered by hatred of that maternal subjectivity. Mothering black children for her is a source of shame. She chooses to be white when she has the choice. Her blackness is hidden by the severed ties to her children. The severed racial ties suggest a mode of self-mutilation when traces of her race are denied, hidden and wiped out by *passing* as a person of another race.[9]

The mother's hatred of her daughter's skin colour in *God Help the Child* represents the internalisation of a racist ideology. The adoption of the ideology leading into an experience of self-hate in the African-American consciousness is suggested by the mother's hatred of her daughter's skin colour. The reversal of maternal subjectivity stands as a metaphor of a phenomenon of adopting the racially inferiorizing perspective

[8] *God Help the Child*, p. 3.
[9] Passing as white and its relation to forming the maternal subjectivity is explored in *Passing* (1929) by Nella Larson. The novel represents the experience of two fair skinned African-American characters as mothers who have the ability to pass. While one character chooses to pass only when convenient to gain access to services available only to white people, she chooses to marry a black man. The other mother chooses to pass to spare her offspring from her experience in a racist environment. However, she remains ambivalent about her choice to the point of committing suicide.

of the *other* and applying it on one's self to the point of identifying with the oppressor. This psychological experience is pointed out in the works of W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X. As three of the most influential figures on the Black Power movement, the three wrote, or spoke in Malcolm X's case, about identifying with other's perceptions of one's race to the point of self/race-hate.

The earliest of the theorization of the concept of adoption of an inferiorizing perspective is suggested by W. E. B. Du Bois. His theorization of this phenomenon was not a call for resistance or a separatist ideology. It was more of a diagnosis of the struggle of forming a black consciousness that contains conflicting ideologies in the United States. In *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), Du Bois proposes a unified consciousness that *includes* blackness rather than perceives it as the other. In his analysis of the ideological struggle of the African-American in the United States, Du Bois suggests that African-Americans struggle within the racializing political structures in the United States. He writes:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.
>
> The History of the American Negro is the history of this strife,--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism. [10]

For African-Americans to be American, according to Du Bois, is to view themselves through racializing perspectives. What he describes as a 'double-consciousness' is a

[10] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1973) pp. 3-4.

utilizing of the other's perspective to view the self. The doubled perspective is the sign of an internalized *othering*. To adopt the other's perspective to view the self, when the other is racist, is to be racist towards one's self. It is to be conditioned to deserve to be racialized and discriminated against. And like the case of the mother in *God Help the Child*, to hate, despise and be ashamed of one's own race. In his proposal of a unified American consciousness that prevents the struggles of the 'double-consciousness' and harmonises conflicting ideologies, he points out the 'double-consciousness' as a bleaching of the soul of the African-American. This bleaching is saturated with the hate and shame of any sign of being black.

The duality of black consciousness that stems from a racialized perspective of one's self resulting in what is described as a an 'internalization' of the 'inferiority complex' is theorized by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952).[11] Fanon's book revolves around drawing a map for the consciousness of educated colonized people. What he perceives as the internalization of inferiority is experienced when the colonized internalize the inferiorization of their race by adopting the other's racial discourse of one's self. He takes the residents of the Antilles islands colonized by the French as a case in point when he discusses how the Antillean Black boy reads stories about African 'savages' written from a racist perspective. Fanon suggests that

> [t]here is identification-that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man's attitude. He invests the hero, who is white, with all his own aggression-at that age closely linked to sacrificial dedication… Little by little, one can observe in the young Antillean the formation and crystallization of an attitude and way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white. When in school he has to read stories of slaves told by white men, he always thinks of the Senegalese.[12]

[11] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 13.
[12] Fanon, pp. 147-8.

What Du Bois describes as a *bleaching* of the soul is the process that takes place in the subjective formation of the colonized Antillean black boy, who internalizes identification with whiteness and the inferiorization of blackness. For the black boy who identifies with racist perspectives, savagery is blackness, and blackness is the *other*. This internalization of the other's perspective of one's self is the double-consciousness theorized by Du Bois. The duality within the black boy's perspective is evident according to Fanon when he suggests that:

> The Negro is comparison. There is the first truth. He is comparison: that is, he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego ideal. Whenever he comes in contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises. The Antilleans have no inherent values of their own, they are always contingent on the presence of The Other. The question is always whether he is less intelligent than I, blacker than I, less respectable than I… It is the wreckage of what surrounds me that provides the foundation of my virility.[13]

The duality of comparison invades the consciousness of the conditioned African-American as much as the colonized African in Fanon's work. His value is mirrored by the other because he assumes the attitude and standard of the other and identifies with him. Like Fanon's colonized subject, the African-American mother in *God Help the Child* asks herself is my daughter 'blacker than I'?[14] She evaluates her self-worth according to a racialized perspective where colour is the scale. Her daughter's worth is determined by that scale and because of her mother's identification with the other, the daughter fails the comparison test.

Malcolm X draws a vivid picture of what he sees as the identification with the oppressor's perspective. He used a metaphor to describe this duality of consciousness in his speech in Michigan State University on the 23rd of January 1963. Malcolm X used

[13] Fanon, p. 211.
[14] Ibid.

the metaphor of two kinds of slaves and the potential to identify with the oppressor, the colonizer, the inferiorizing other. The self is dissolved and seen through the eyes of the other:

> during slavery you had two Negroes. You had the house Negro and the field Negro.
>
> The house Negro usually lived close to his master. He dressed like his master. He wore his master's second-hand clothes. He ate food that his master left on the table. And he lived in his master's house--probably in the basement or the attic--but he still lived in the master's house.
>
> So whenever that house Negro identified himself, he always identified himself in the same sense that his master identified himself. When his master said, "We have good food," the house Negro would say, "Yes, we have plenty of good food." "We" have plenty of good food. When the master said that "we have a fine home here," the house Negro said, "Yes, we have a fine home here." When the master would be sick, the house Negro identified himself so much with his master he'd say, "What's the matter boss, we sick?" His master's pain was his pain. And it hurt him more for his master to be sick than for him to be sick himself. When the house started burning down, that type of Negro would fight harder to put the master's house out than the master himself would.[15]

When Malcom X speaks about the 'Field Negro', he identifies himself with that model of resistance.[16] He is the one who fights back and sees himself as inherently different from the master, referring to his call for the militarized and the separatist approach to resistance. The duality of consciousness within what Malcolm X describes as the house Negro mentality is the incorporation of two perspectives in one consciousness; one is condescending to the other. It is the paradox of self-love and self-hate in a person who identifies with the other to the point of discriminating against one's own race.

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[15] Malcolm X, 'Malcolm describes the difference between the "house Negro" and the "field Negro."', Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. (23 January 1963), Audio and Transcription, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: Speeches and Interviews*, < http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/mxp/speeches/mxa17.html>[Accessed 5 February 2017].
[16] Ibid.

The representation of the mother's discrimination in *God Help the Child* is a reflection of a *double-consciousness* that is conscious of one's race but is dismissive of it as inferior because of identification with the other. It is the discrimination against her own race, her own skin colour, her own DNA, her dark daughter. The reversal of her maternal subjectivity is metaphor of race-hate that is epitomized through the paradox of self-hate. Like Malcolm X's metaphor of the *house Negro*, the conditioned mother adopts a racializing perspective of her dark daughter. She others her and banishes her to a space where she is no longer her daughter but the Black other. Ironically, she also perceives this as a form of protection.

> I wasn't a bad mother, you have to know that, but I may have done some hurtful things to my only child because I had to protect her. Had to. All because of skin privileges. At first I couldn't see past all that black to know who she was and just plain love her. But I do. I really do. I think she understands now. I think so.[17]

Protection for the mother is taming her daughter. It is to make her more submissive because she does not have 'skin privileges'.[18] This representation hints at the discourse of institutional racism, specifically the state of welfare that pressures women and controls their decisions in managing their family life and their bodies. The governmental institutional racism in the United States posing as a protective force is suggested through the mother's claims of protecting her daughter through abusing her. Exposing these claims of discipline and protection as abuse is at the heart of the representation of the mother's racist perspective of her daughter.

Morrison draws on the larger social fabric in the United States. The mother's identification with a superior perspective that abhors blackness and its association with the political structures in the country is linked to social progression/regression about

[17] Morrison, *God Help the Child*, p. 43.
[18] Ibid.

issues of race. At the end of the novel Sweetness, the mother, contemplates the possibility that her *method* in raising her daughter is misguided. The mother's words do not reflect a tone of self-blame as much as they shift the blame to the social and political structures in the country that influence perceptions of race and mothering. After she hears that her daughter is going to have a child of her own she says:

> Now she's pregnant. Good move, Lula Ann. If you think mothering is all cooing, booties and diapers you're in for a big shock. Big. […] OOOH! A baby! Kitchee kitchee koo!
>
> Listen to me. You are about to find out what it takes, how the world is, how it works and how it changes when you are a parent.
>
> Good luck and God help the child.[19]

The mother's sarcasm reflects her detachment from the maternal ideal. To her, mothering is not what is expected of the mother. Shifting from her sarcasm about the maternal ideal to a more serious tone, she orders her daughter to listen to her. Mothering is bigger than the ideal. According to Sweetness, motherhood is part of a bigger social fabric that shapes the maternal experience. To Sweetness, how the mother pays attention when she is part of a racist world shapes her experience. She responds to it. Being a mother of a dark-skinned girl for Sweetness *is* change because she has to respond to the world in a different way from what she is used to as a light-skinned woman who does not experience the same level of racism as her dark daughter. Change for Sweetness is to be swallowed into the world of racial discrimination, to adjust to a racist world and assume its standards as one's own. She is not to blame for not loving the maternal ideal; her racist world is to blame.

Although the mother in the *God Help the Child* is convinced that blackness is a sign of inferiority and shame, her ambivalence about motherhood is revealed when she

[19] Morrison, *God Help the Child*, p.178.

accepts her daughter when she becomes a tool for revenge of racial discrimination. The daughter witnesses an incident of sexual abuse of a boy, committed by her landlord. When he discovers that the young Bride is watching from a window, he calls her a 'little nigger cunt' and orders her to close the window.[20] By dismissing her on the basis of her race and gender he dismisses her ability to pose a threat to his authority. He orders her to close the window, hiding the site of his crime and her ability to expose him. As a landlord, his authority is declared superior to hers and her mother's. She contemplates his power over them because 'standing up to Mr Leigh meant having to look for another apartment. And that it would be hard finding another location in another safe, meaning mixed neighbourhood'.[21] The landlord is a metaphor of ownership of their space, their world. Controlling them and financially manipulating them with fear is suggestive of the institutional racism. Women are powerless in his state (property). His crimes are ignored and his injustice is accepted as a fact of life. To stand up to Mr Leigh is to resist the state: the powerless women will only be faced with defeat and dislocation. They rent a house in his estate; they don't belong either in Mr. Leigh's house or his country.

The mother's monstrosity however is revealed when she assumes the same power of manipulation utilized by institutional racism. The mother uses her daughter for revenge. She manipulates her daughter to lie to implicate an innocent teacher in a sexual abuse case. While she encourages her daughter to be a witness, she uses her to empower herself against what she views as an oppressive race:

> [a]fter Lula Ann's performance in that court and on the stand I was so proud of her, we walked the streets hand in hand. It's not often you see a little black girl take down some evil whites. I

[20] Morrison, *God Help the Child*, p. 55.
[21] Morrison, *God Help the Child*, p. 54.

> wanted her to know how pleased I was so I had her ears pierced and bought her a pair of earrings.[22]

The earrings and their association to that particular incident become a lesson that is continually repeated in her ear. Racism, reversed, is wedged in the child's flesh. Her earrings are the sign of an oppression that is adopted by the mother against the innocent teacher because she despises another race. The injustice of the manipulation and the lie makes her a reproducer of the same oppressive system rather than a resistor of oppression. Reproducing racial injustices rather revising them strips the mother's actions in the novel from representing resistance. Instead, they represent the monstrosity of oppression adopted by the mother's character who adopts the racial discrimination of institutional racism and applies it to her daughter.

The reversal of the mother's subjectivity suggests empowerment, not for the mother figure, but for the child who grows out of abusive racist structures as a more empowered subject. Resistance in this novel revolves around the idea of rebirth out of the wreckage of an old self.[23] Morrison employs the technique of magical realism to suggest the potential of surviving racial abuse. After she admits to lying to implicate her teacher in the sexual abuse of minors to gain her mother's affection, Bride experiences a series of physical changes which start with the disappearance of the holes in her earlobes.[24] This marks her mother's manipulation of her when she buys her first earrings as a reward for lying. The disappearance of the piercing is the disappearance of the conditioning of both the mother and the racist structures that she identifies with. The incident of Bride's physical regression into a child continues when she notices that her

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[22] Morrison, *God Help the Child*, p. 42.
[23] Published in 2016, *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead alludes to similar themes about the rejecting mother within a racialized environment and the potential of rebirth out of this experience. Triggered by hate for her mother who she thinks has abandoned her and escaped from a Georgia plantation to Canada, the main character, Cora, escapes and reinvents herself along the escape route to freedom.
[24] Morrison, *God Help the Child,* p. 57.

pubic hair and breasts are disappearing. As if no longer an adult, Bride is given a chance to redirect herself towards a more empowering path. When Bride finds her boyfriend and confesses to him what she did and why she did it, she regains her physical maturity. This signifies a rebirth that is free from the toxicity of racial associations. Out of the reversal of her mother's subjectivity, Bride's reversal of physical development suggests the potential to survive racial abuse as a new more empowered person. This representation of resistance in Morrison's work is based on the aggression of racial structures. As well as highlighting that aggression through racial identification with the other, it highlights the potential of surviving that aggression. However, it does not suggest a resistance of racist structures through the reversal of these power hierarchies as Morrison's depiction of infanticide does.

Gendered Suffering in African-American Literature

The role of Morrison's work in expressing and restructuring race and gender hierarchies that influence the feminine experience is significant. Sandy Alexandre in 'From the Same Tree: Gender and Iconography in Representations of Violence in *Beloved*' suggests that Morrison tried to create a balance between the violent symbolic significance of 'the sycamore trees of lynching violence' directed towards black men and 'the chokecherry tree of sexual violence' towards black women.[25] She suggests that *Beloved* 'capitalizes on the simultaneous gender neutrality and semantic multiplicity of the tree images associated with both forms of victimage in order to eschew any assumed hierarchy of black oppression'.[26] Alexandre alludes to the idea that Morrison's writing is

[25] Sandy Alexandre,'From the Same Tree: Gender and Iconography in Representations of Violence in *Beloved*', *Signs*, 36 (2011) 915-940, <https://dspace.mit.edu/openaccess-disseminate/1721.1/72362> [accessed 18 January 2017], p. 935.
[26] Alexandre, p. 916.

influenced by her 'correlative thinking […] For Morrison, different subjects should not be thought of separately but mutually. The plight of black women should not be in competition for attention with the plight of black men, nor should it be relegated to the lower frequencies'.[27] A focus on women's suffering is a way of bringing it forward to provide a balance of representation of both male and female suffering in African-American literature.

However, women's suffering is not 'relegated to lower frequencies' in the writing of other African-American authors as Alexandre implies. Female suffering in both a slave/master hierarchy during slavery and gender hierarchy after emancipation is expressed throughout African-American literary history. Fredrick Douglass's narrative relates the suffering of his female cousin and the sexual objectification of women when he states that beauty is a source of misfortune in a plantation. He also relates how another woman is beaten in front of her children to break her spirit.[28] Female suffering is also represented in the fictional narratives of slavery as in Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976). Haley draws attention to the intensity of female suffering during slavery. He draws an image of female captives being stripped naked and beaten by their kidnappers to break their spirits prior to being shipped as slaves to America. Haley sheds the light on female suffering when he writes 'the girls were crying out, one about dead loved ones in a burned village; another, bitterly weeping, rocked back and forth cooing endearment to an imaginary infant in her cradled arms'.[29] This description delineates how female slaves are destined to more suffering as helpless mothers and wives.[30]

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[27] Alexandre, p. 935.
[28] Douglass, Fredrick, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglas* (New York: Millennium Publications, 1945), p. 16.
[29] Haley, Alex, *Roots* (London: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 153.
[30] Langston Hughes's 'Song for a Dark Girl' also draws attention to female suffering during slavery. The poem shows that lynching does not only plague male slaves. Lynching is also a part of the suffering of enslaved women. The poem describes the 'bruised…naked' body of a female slave who is hung high to

Morrison does not limit the representation of suffering to female characters crushed by slavery but creates the balance suggested by Alexandre. Morrison sheds light on the suffering of both genders of enslaved people. *Beloved* reflects a balance between genders when it comes to the representation of suffering. For instance, the contents of Paul D's 'tobacco tin lodged in his chest' filled with his horrific experience in slavery.[31] The reader is left to fill in the blank when it comes to the extent of Halle's suffering when presented with the image of his devastating madness. The absence of Halle's perspective alludes to the depth of this suffering.

The representation of rape in Morrison's work interrogates the gender and race hierarchies that influence how feminine/maternal subjectivity could be expressed during slavery. Rape as a form of sexual violence against African-American women is addressed in Morrison's work. Slave women are at the mercy of their master because they belong to his private space. They are visible only to him, inferior to him, and owned by him. When she compares rape to other atrocities, Sethe sees rape as a bigger offense. Sethe does not mind if her oppressor would 'work, kill or maim' her.[32] She fears rape the most because it would '[d]irty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up'.[33] The act of rape of the slave is not motivated by a search of carnal pleasure as it is fed by the pleasure embodied by the display of power.[34] The master experiences 'incomparable pleasure' when he 'is imposing himself and making others the instruments of his will'.[35] This specific kind of pleasure is unpacked by Frederick Douglass in his

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show her vulnerability to everyone. *See* Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), p. 172.

[31] Morrison, Toni, *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1987), p. 113.

[32] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 251.

[33] Ibid

[34] Diamond, Irene and Lee Quinby ed., *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections of Resistance* (Boston: Northeastern Press, 1988), p. 170.

[35] Arendt, Hannah, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1979), p. 36. The imagery of the master's claim of his female slave's body is represented in works like *Cane* when the narrator relates how the master's character 'went in like a master should and took her'. See Jean Toomer, *Cane* (New York: Liverlight, 1993), p. 31.

Autobiography when he suspects that Covey perceived beating him as a homoerotic experience. The pain of rape is not only physical. It stems from a sense of impurity imposed by the rapist.[36] Rape marks the woman physically and emotionally as the territory of the rapist.

Restructuring the Maternal Enslaved subject

Morrison's novel does not avoid hierarchies of suffering as much as it reverses these hierarchies in its representation of male and female resistance. Any balance of gendered suffering revealed in *Beloved* does not indicate a balance of gendered resistance. *Beloved* reverses the hierarchy of gendered resistance. The novel presents less powerful imagery of male resistance when contrasted with female resistance. Halle's attempt at resistance by flight fails when he is broken by the violation of his wife's body. Sethe is shocked by Halle's reaction or lack of action when he sees what happens to her. Sethe's disappointment is revealed when she says '[a]dd my husband to it, watching, above me in the loft- hiding close by- the one place he thought no one would look for him… and not stopping them- looking and letting it happen'.[37] Halle does not only fail to react and protect her. Sethe stigmatizes him with cowardice when she suggests he was hiding. The choice of Halle's hiding place is particularly important because it adds an extra layer to the reversal of the gendered hierarchy of resistance. The attic as a hiding place might be an allusion to a specific historic incident. In that incident Harriet Jacobs escaped to an attic and stayed there for seven years watching over her children because of her fear of slavecatchers.[38] The similarity between Halle's

[36] Diamond, Irene and Lee Quinby ed., *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections of Resistance*, p.171.
[37] Morrison, *Beloved*, p.70.
[38] Mary P. Ryan, *Mysteries of Sex: Tracing Women and Men Through American History*, (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009)

hiding place and Harriet Jacobs's hiding place suggests a reversal of the preconceptions about gender roles and the helplessness of women. Resorting to hiding in the attic where one watches but never reacts is reflective of a helplessness and weakness that is stereotypically attributed to women. It is contrasted by powerful imagery of female resistance in *Beloved*.

The representation of the maternal experience within a racialized environment emphasizes the relations that shape resistance to gender and racial ideals of the docile motherly slave woman. The reversal of the hierarchies attached to enslaved woman in African-American fiction about slavery relies on drawing a vivid image of their suffering. It represents a woman who is potentially vulnerable. However, when this slave woman defies sovereign power, she defies the assumption that her body is not hers. It is the master's. Any act of resistance is an act of reclaiming sovereign power from the slave master and re-claiming it as the slave's.

The negotiation of sovereignty over the female enslaved body is represented specifically through the act of infanticide in *Beloved*. In *Beloved* (1987), Morrison rewrites an incident that took place in 1855. Morrison relates the story of Margaret Garner who escapes slavery only to resort to killing her child when the slave master reclaims her and her children.[39] The novel offers an extreme context for infanticide and investigates dimensions of maternal subjectivity and suffering in the shadows of slavery. The novel suggests that the intersection between gender and racial hierarchies leads to the rejection of motherhood manifested in infanticide.

<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/stable/pdf/10.5149/9780807876688_ryan.6?acceptTC=true&jpdConfirm=true >[Accessed 28 November 2014] p. 123.

[39] Although the theme of Infanticide committed by African-American women is represented in two of Morrison's novels, an earlier short story written by Angelina Grimke in 1919 represents the same theme when the mother's character smothers her child before he is killed by white mobs in Mississippi. See Grimke, 'The Closing Door', *Birth Control Review* (1919).

The delineation of infanticide through the perspective of several characters in the novel revises notions of maternal ideals as well as racial ideals of master and slave hierarchies. In the aftermath of the murder of one daughter and attempted murder of two sons Sethe, the mother, on her way to the wagon taking her to jail, Sethe, is observed by her neighbours. Instead of a mother who is broken by the death of her children, they see 'a profile that shocked them with its clarity. Was her head a bit too high? Her back a little too straight? Probably'.[40] Their observation of her physical reaction in the aftermath of murdering her children is suggestive of an empowered rather than a broken mother. It is of a brave rather than a broken slave. The narrator comments on what her master observes in the murder scene and Schoolteacher concludes that 'it was clear…there was nothing there to claim'.[41] Both Sethe's neighbours and her master, at opposite ends of the hierarchy of power, declare seeing something clearly. The mother is empowered by murdering her children. While the neighbours see it in her physique, her master sees it in her action. His words suggest that she wins over him by murdering her children. What he came to claim as his is taken by her. Infanticide revises the image of the doting mother and submissive slave. Sovereignty over the enslaved body is confiscated from the master by the mother's act of murdering her own children. Infanticide becomes a part of Sethe's reversed subjectivity that highlights the slave's potential to reinvent a more powerful self through resistance of gender and race hierarchies.

Resistance of the Ideal

[40] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 152.
[41] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 149.

Resistance can take violent forms revealed in *Beloved*. Sovereign power in this context is the right to decide the life and death of another. Sethe is physically violated as a mark of the violence of the sovereign. Schoolteacher's nephews milk her like a cow to claim her animality in contrast to their humanness. When she objects to the violation it signals the first sign of resistance to the sovereign and his claim over her body. However, the series of violence assumes an augmented form in order to further its authority over her body. Sethe is brutally beaten when she objects to the violation. A scar that looks like a Chokeberry tree on her back marks the territory of the sovereign power of Schoolteacher. Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* (1998) describes the circumstances of violent resistance when he analyses the shifting nature of sovereign power as a:

> dialectic oscillation between the violence that posits law and the violence that preserves it …all law- preserving violence, in its duration, indirectly weakens the law-making violence represented by it, through the suppression of hostile counterviolence. This lasts until either new forces or those earlier suppressed triumph.[42]

If Schoolteacher is the producer of the violence that 'preserves the law', Sethe will consequently be the producer of 'the violence that posits law'. Schoolteacher preserves an older law of the sovereignty of the master over the slave. It is the law to decide life and death. The new law that is posited by Sethe's act is the law to reclaim her body as her own. If Schoolteacher will use violence to suppress her, he weakens his sovereign position by producing an excess of violence, as these two forces run counter to each other. Eventually, the suppressed power might 'triumph' in setting itself as the sovereign power over life and death. The violent nature of Sethe's crime is suggested to be a result of the sovereign system suppressing her and echoes the master's violence as an act of empowerment. Sethe's character increases the extent of her resistance in order to extend

[42] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller Roazen (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 63.

the reach of her power over her body. Her flight is the first attempt to gain sovereignty over her body. When her attempt to escape fails and the slave master follows her to Ohio, she is forced to increase the extent of her sovereignty over her body. She kills her daughter to declare that *she* assumes the sovereign power of life and death, not the slave master.

Subjugation to the slave master results in the rejection of motherhood by two other mothers in *Beloved*. Rape as a result of this subjugation is a main reason for this rejection of motherhood. The novel delineates the atrocities of rape and their powerful effect on three mothers. Sethe's mother is raped by the crew on the ship that brought her to America. She does not 'put her arms around' her rapist because she does not surrender to rape.[43] However, she 'put[s]her arms around' the 'black man' or Sethe's father and decides to keep his child because it is not a by-product of racial domination.[44] Sethe's mother throws all her other children away and never gives them names.[45] Although Nan does not directly mention that the mother killed her children the fact that she does not give them names suggests that she rejects any connection to them. The rejection of motherhood in *Beloved* due to the subjugation of slavery and its claim over a female's body is revealed through Ella, who 'delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by ‘the lowest yet'.[46] Ella's child lives for only five days.

Sethe's mother and Ella both reject their children because they are a symbolic embodiment of the appropriation of the mothers' bodies by the masters. A sense of alienation arises that ruptures the connection to the child. Both characters are struggling out from the experience of objectification by surrendering their bodies to the master. Mothering the child of the master or mothering a child that is property of the master

[43] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 62.
[44] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 62.
[45] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 62.
[46] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 258.

represents the essence of their subjugation. They resist the ideal of the slave mother by rejecting motherhood within slavery. Infanticide, in that sense, becomes an emblem of power when written within the context of slavery. It represents a maternal/enslaved subject who rejects a subjugated state of mothering. The maternal ideal and the submissive slave ideal are dismantled by infanticide producing the image of the resisting slave-woman.

Sethe's model of the rejection of motherhood is also dependent on resistance to the physical subordination enacted by the slave master. But, the uniqueness in her representation stems from the fact that of the three mothers, Sethe's character is the only mother who develops a sense of wholeness and oneness with her child. Sethe lactates even when she is pregnant. The milk crusts on her breast when she is separated from her child because she continues to produce milk as if her child is still with her. Her consciousness of her child's needs is revealed in her body's effort to maintain a connection, in spite of being separated from her child. When Sethe resolves on sending her children ahead to save them from Schoolteacher, she tries to maintain a connection by telling the women to soak a cloth in sweetened water. The cloth in this case is an imitation of her breast. Sethe, thus, maintains that breastfeeding process even if she is separated from her child. This process is described by Chodorow as a 'primary identification' when the mother develops a conviction that a child is an extension of herself in order to better predict his biological needs.[47] Jean Wyatt, however, refers to Sethe's sense of oneness with the child as a reversal of the Lacanian imaginary wholeness with the mother.[48] According to Wyatt's reading, the sense of oneness between child and mother does not merely define the child's perspective but also

[47] Nancy Chodorow, p. 85.
[48] Jean Wyatt, 'Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's Beloved', *PMLA, Modern Language Association*, 108 (1993), pp. 475-7.
URL: http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/stable/10.2307/462616?origin=crossref

extends to the mother's perspective as psychological inevitability. The wholeness with the child is not limited to the child's psyche, but extends to the mother as well.

Both Chodorow's and Wyatt's conceptualizations of the sense of the mother's oneness with her child are essentializing, the representation in Morrison's novel utilizes the maternal ideal to highlight the extent of maternal ethics. This raises questions about the character's authority as a mother, suggested by the maternal ideal and questions the limits of that authority. If there is oneness with the child, how far is the mother allowed to act upon that sense? Is self-mutilation a part of the license granted by the mother's sense of oneness with her child?

While I draw on the imagery of breastfeeding in the novel to suggest that maternal subjectivity can be represented by different forms of attachment, including the representation of a sense of oneness with the child, this does not mean that maternal subjectivity is a fixed essence. It is rather a fluid subjectivity that shifts and changes according to the subjective experience. Another reading of the imagery of breastfeeding in *Beloved* suggests this idea of fluid subjectivity. Rebecca Stone suggests that the idea of representing the breastfeeding mother as an object in psychoanalysis is revised in the representation of the breastfeeding mother in *Beloved*. She suggests that the novel reflects an analogy between slavery and motherhood to suggest similar structures of gender and racial repression. Women in that analogy are recognized as 'bodies'.[49] The analogy is most clear when the milk produced by her body has the potential to be taken by both her children and her masters. Stone suggests that this structure whereby the mother is an object is revised in the novel through Sethe's separation from her child. Stone suggests that when Sethe escapes after her children, she is introduced to a

[49] Rebecca Stone, 'Can the Breast Feed the Mother Too? Tracing Maternal Subjectivity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 31 (2015) (298–310), < http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/bjp.12162/full >[accessed 6 January 2017], p. 300.

subjective perspective on herself that is different from the maternal one. She suggests that like the child who recognizes subjectivity through separation, in Kristeva's theorization of subject formation, the mother also goes through a shift in her subjectivity when separated from the child in the novel. Away from her child, Sethe experiences during her journey to freedom the birth of a new subjectivity: 'experiencing her own maternal body through her transition from slavery to freedom, Sethe comes to own her body for the first time'.[50] Imagery of breastfeeding in *Beloved* also offers other layers to feminine/maternal subjectivity. These images reflect both the ideal and the paradoxes within the ideal, when attachment and separation through the breast produce new subjectivities beyond the structures of the ideal. In the act of breastfeeding, the mother is both an object and subject and has the potential to harness what is perceived as oneness with the child. This metaphorical oneness suggests that the mother's character has a licence to treat her child's life as an extension of her own.

The representation of breastfeeding in *Beloved* suggests that Sethe assumes a sense of wholeness with her child that dictates an ethical license to commit her violent crime. Her authority over her own life is extended onto her child's. The representation of the maternal ideal in the biological claim of a mother's sense of oneness with her child enters into the political realm of resistance. Resistance to the sovereign power by suppressing her maternal subjectivity suggests a counterforce that asserts the reversal of that maternal subjectivity.

Power instigates the 'sovereignty of man over his own existence'.[51] Although Agamben's gendered language does not include women, Morrison's characterization of Sethe resists political structures of gender and race. Her character is granted with a powerful ethical licence. This license is provided by two aspects of her right as a

[50] Stone, p. 301.
[51] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 137.

maternal subject. The first one is the right over her own body. She manipulates the same body used to subjugate her into a life of labour, to resist by flight and finally euthanasia. If the mother identifies with the child, then she considers the child as an extension of herself. Its body is an extension of her body. This same body is considered to be a property by a slave master. However, it is not 'property' according to her. Her resistance is unique in the sense that she rejects the entirety of the discourse of the slave master by her style of rejection of motherhood. The slave master's discourse entails that the 'menial' nature of the slave's work degrades his humanity and brings him closer to the state of the animal.[52] This illusionary discourse is resisted by Sethe when she rejects mothering her child within a system that assesses her worth and her children's worth according to their biological function as renewable resources of labour. For instance, Schoolteacher describes her offspring as a 'foal'. She is a 'property that reproduced itself without cost'.[53]

The second aspect of her licence as a mother suggested in the representation is the right to protect her child. Sethe rejects the notion of mothering a daughter who will be an object of the brutal system of slavery. The life of the daughter in this case is life that does not deserve to be lived. The concept is very similar to euthanasia. The illness is not in the child itself but is in the system of life in which she is located. The mother is trying to protect the child from being crushed by slavery's social system. By killing her child, she stops the functioning of the system and renders it void and terminated. She protects her child from being valued as property because her child is *not* property. She places herself as an equal if not a more effective power than the slave master.

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[52] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 84.
[53] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 228.

Naomi Morgenstern describes the situation when a mother explores the limitations of her power as the 'plight of the powerless sovereign'.[54] The mother in this case is in a 'wilderness' of 'ethics' in which she has to take decisions of life and death.[55] But, it is not a *wilderness* as this choice of word entails the animality of the slave which is a part of the discourse of the slave master. *Wilderness* suggests operating outside the boundaries of the laws of slavery. Sethe's model of resistance is not lawless, because it represents 'the violence that posits law'.[56] One law of the wilderness suggested by Morgenstern is the law of Sethe's power to decide life and death. This model of sovereignty is a specific reaction to a systematic oppression of slavery. The violent reaction stems from the slave master's model of sovereignty and power of right to decide life and death. That reactional violence 'deposes' the slave master's sovereignty.[57]

Sethe perceives herself as a higher power in the face of oppression to the extent of having the right over life and death. Puspa Damai, in his article 'Terror, Hospitality and the Gift of Death in Morrison's *Beloved'* (2014) cites Derrida's concept of 'the gift of death'. According to this concept a prophet is granted by God the right to kill his son so that he might join God in heaven, He is giving him death as a gift. He is drawing his authority to murder his child from God's authority. Damai compares the voice within the prophet with the voice within Sethe that tells her she is so powerful. She is more powerful than the slave master. She is as powerful as a God who grants 'the gift of Death'.[58]

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[54] Naomi Morgenstern, 'Maternal Love/Maternal Violence: Inventing Ethics in Toni Morrison's A Mercy', *MELUS*, 39 (2014) <http://melus.oxfordjournals.org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/content/39/1/7.full.pdf+html>, p. 13.
[55] Naomi Morgenstern, p. 13.
[56] Ibid
[57] Agamben, p. 64.
[58] Damai, Puspa, 'Terror, Hospitality and the gift of death in Morrison's *Beloved*', *Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry*, 1 (2014) < :http://sanglap-journal.in/terror-and-the-literary-vol-1-no-1/contents/terror-hospitality-and-the-gift-of-death-in-morrisons-beloved-and-bio-note-for-puspa-damai/terror-hospitality-and-the-gift-of-death-in-Morrisons-beloved/>

The concept of 'the gift of death' extends further when analysed through Agamben's philosophy of the Homo Sacer. The theory provides further justification of murder as a gift. One of the characteristics of the Homo Sacer is that he is able to 'participate in public life'.[59] As a result he 'immediately finds himself in a state of virtually being able to be killed'. This life that is 'exposed to death' is 'bare life'.[60] By exposing her daughter's life to death, Sethe brings her into the public sphere. She lifts her daughter from the private realm into the ‘public' realm. She is no longer hidden but visible. She claims death rather than fears it. Death is not a fear, it is a *gift*.

Biopolitics as a field is established on what Alexander G. Weheliye suggests is a discourse that marginalizes the experience of subjugated classes. He identifies the problematic aspect of the politics of the body as based on a racist approach to human relations. In *Habeas Viscus* (2014), Weheliye unpacks the concept of *bare life* as a category of the human:

> The barring of subjects that belong to the Homo sapiens species from the jurisdiction of humanity depends upon the workings of racialization (differentiation) and racism (hierarchization and exclusion); in fact the two are often indistinguishable. Bare life and biopolitics are but alternative terms for racism, though a designation that attempts to conjure a sphere more fundamental to the human than race.[61]

This critique of Agamben’s categorization that marginalizes some classes in favour of others suggests race as a category of creating difference. Although gender can be included in that specification as a point of difference that relegates the other to a lower class, race is another characteristic of the process of subjugation. Weheliye insists that the biopolitical perspective is based on the Western concept of ‘Man’. This perspective

[59] Agamben, p. 88.
[60] Agamben, pp. 88-9
[61] Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), pp.72-3.

stipulates that what he calls the 'flesh' that represents the subjugated body has the potential to be rendered sub-human.

> [The] nonhuman give rise to the universe of Man. That is to say, the flesh engulfs not only Man's visually marked others via instruments of torture and the intergenerational transmission of hieroglyphics but emanates rays of potential enfleshment throughout the far-flung corners of Being in the world of Man.[62]

A biopolitical reading of Morrison's work can be problematic. The discourse of *racializing assemblage* according to Weheliye not only classifies and questions the humanity of some classes, it rather poses the potential of more classes to fall under that categorization. Every human in that sense can potentially be available for this racializing political perspective of the human.

Morrison's *Beloved* serves to restructure these hierarchies outside of the realm of laws of slavery, but extends to revise institutional slavery in the United States. The potential for a way of reversing these structures, and also for the chance of survival and healing outside these hierarchies, suggests that these forms of living exist outside the racial structures. A character like Sethe grows outside the structures and ideals set by Western patriarchal authority. Morrison in that sense revises this perspective of marginalized classes. Weheliye emphasizes the potential of freedom, pleasure and survival of the marginalized classes. He comments on Agamben's theorization of the Muselmann as a modern form of *bare life* to be a prejudiced perspective as it denies the potential and hope of freedom.[63] The possibility of freedom and survival are suggested in various forms. Although these representations are perceived to be radical like infanticide, still, the possibility of freedom is revealed even in these extreme scenarios

[62] Weheliye. p. 127.
[63] Weheliye, p. 130.

of survival. The representation of a fluid subject is sign of the potential of freedom and survival of the rigid rules and hierarchies of race and gender.

When Death Gives Birth

Infanticide has the potential in *Beloved* to give birth to a different subject that confiscates the power of the sovereign through death. The revised master/slave hierarchy in that sense produces new liberating images of the subjugated classes. The confiscation of the master's power to *take life* by the slave reflects the fundamental difference between the perception of the experience of emancipation by the master and slave. In a reading of Fredrick Douglass's encounter with his master, Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) offers an alternative to the Hegelian assumption of the slave's fear of death as a tool utilized by the master to control his slaves. Gilroy reflects on Douglass's sense of liberation when he no longer was afraid to die:

> Douglass's tale can be used to reveal a great deal about the difference between the *male* slave's and master's views of modern civilization. In Hegel's allegory, which correctly places slavery at the natal core of modern sociality, we see that one solipsistic combatant in the elemental struggle prefers his conqueror's version of reality to death and submit. He becomes the slave while the other achieves mastery. Douglass's version is quite different. For him, the slave actively prefers the possibility of death to the continuing condition of in humanity on which plantation slavery depends.[64]

While Gilroy acknowledges the impact of the threat of death on some slaves, he points out the empowering impact of removing the fear of death from the subjective experience of the slave.

[64] Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 63.

A Hegelian conceptualization of a fixed subjectivity of the slave and master that does not allow for a revision of the hierarchy is deconstructed when the fear of death, is removed. Death becomes another form of liberation rather than a form of control. It is not a reversal in that regard, but a rather a restructuring of two experiences that cannot be interchangeable. With death comes a space where the enslaved subject is liberated by either dying or surviving and thriving. 'It is the slave rather than the master who emerges from Douglass's account possessed of a "consciousness that exists for itself," while his master becomes the representative of a 'consciousness that is repressed within itself".[65] Death as a form of emancipation for the enslaved subject grants the power to transform the subjectivity of the enslaved subject. Ironically, the master's subjective experience is repressed by the threat of the death of the slave as it challenges the political economical foundations of his power over the slave.

Gilroy may be suggesting that the potential of having the power to take life is gendered, ascribed to men rather than women. His work on Douglass's psychological emancipation by the lack of the fear of death assigns this subjective transition to the 'male slave'.[66] He makes another gendered assumption about the potential to gain power through death when he distinguishes Margret Garner's style of resistance as opposed to that of her husband. Through his reading of the historical account of an abolitionist Quaker named Levi Coffin and newspaper accounts about Garner and her husband's last moments of resistance of the masters that came to claim them, Gilroy points up the different styles of resistance, associating them to gender differences:

> Hopelessly surrounded by a posse of slave catchers ... Margret's husband, Simon Garner, Jr., fired serval shots from a revolver at the pursuers…one marshal had two fingers shot from his hand and lost several teeth from a ricocheting bullet …"the slave men were armed and fought bravely"…In

[65] Gilroy, p. 60.
[66] Gilroy, p. 63.

> this account Margret's assault on the children takes place between two attacks on the house ... it is only *after* Margret has appreciated the hopelessness of the slave's besieged position and seen her husband overpowered that she begins her emancipatory assault on her children ...What are we to make of these contrasting forms of violence, one coded as male and outward, directed towards the oppressor, and the other, coded as female, somehow internal, channelled toward a parent's most precious and intimate objects of love, pride and desire? [67]

Associating typically masculine tropes with Garner's husband, like shooting and weapons, as well as explicitly stating that the mother's style of resistance is a result of her femininity suggests a gendered account of her resistance. Gilroy's question distinguishes this gender difference explicitly. It suggests that femininity leads to an internal form of resistance, where liberation through death is directed towards the self in a form of self-mutilation. A masculine form of resistance on the other hand is directed towards the oppressor, when the emancipation from the fear of death leads to attacking the oppressor, even if it means sacrificing the self.

The gendered association of violence with masculinity rather than femininity in his reading is revised by the representation of infanticide in Morrison's work. Infanticide and confiscating the power to take life in *Beloved* suggests that it is not exclusive to masculinity. Death, infanticide and violence are associated with the figure of the mother to challenge both gender and race ideals about the feminine/maternal subject.

In *Sula* (1973), for example, of death dominates the novel from the beginning, to highlight how assumptions of the maternal ideal interfere in defining the racialized body. Itis another representation of the resistance of racist structures through the reversal of maternal subjectivity, through the character of Eva and her experience as a mother, who struggles to survive with her family after her husband left her. Having

[67] Gilroy, p. 66.

beaten the odds by earning enough money to build an inn where people rent rooms from her, Eva sets herself as the matriarch of her family. This blissful success, however, is disturbed when her son returns from First World War and becomes an addict. Unable to envision a recovery for her son, Eva sets him on fire in his bed and closes the door on her burning son. The reversal of the transformation into a maternal subject in this novel reflects important issues about motherhood in a racialized environment, social injustices in the United States and modes of resistance through the rejection of motherhood. Infanticide in this novel becomes a canvas where vivid images of gender, race and social injustice are drawn.

In *Sula*, Shadrack, a World War I veteran, marches every January Third to celebrate what he calls 'National Suicide Day'.[68] Turning death into a celebration and embracing it and dedicating a day to acknowledge it is suggestive of what Douglass noted as the liberation within shedding the fear of death. Shadrack's march through town on National Suicide Day celebrates not death, but suicide, the ability to face death. Suicide represents the epitome of confronting death. This theme feeds into the motif of infanticide. When what is represented as the ideal of the mother's body is an extension of her child, infanticide becomes suicide and self-mutilation. The emancipating power of facing death is harnessed in the image of celebrating suicide at the beginning of the year. Life becomes empowered by the celebration of death.

The overshadowing of infanticide in *Sula* is supported by a theme that runs parallel to death and the perishable body which is the mother's contact with the biological aspect of her child's body. The representation of the mother's contact to both nutrition and excretion of another's body reflects her contact with the abject. Eva directly deals with the biological aspect of her child's body; she manoeuvres the child

[68] Toni Morrison, *Sula* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 7.

away from that abjection by feeding and cleaning its body. Biological functions and death when they do not function properly becomes the mission of the mother. Confrontation with another's abjection is her gateway to a knowledge and power that is unavailable to another. She can grant the power of life and survival. Imagery reflecting Eva's power in that regard is shown when shortly after her husband leaves her, she is faced with the potential starvation of her children. After her daughter asks her why she never played with them, Eva tells her:

> What would I look like leapin' 'round the room playing' with youngens with three beets to my name?...Ain't that love? You want me to tinkle you under the jaw and forget 'bout them sores in your mouth? Pearl was shittin' worms and I was supposed to play rang-around-the rosie?"

The mother's confrontation with the biological aspect of her children's existence due to hunger and disease defines her mothering as a journey of survival. Escaping death and being in constant contact with the biological aspect of her children's existence becomes her reality. The mother goes through a race with death, and battles disease and hunger to insure her children's survival.

The representation of Eva's contact with the biological aspect of her children's survival is shown at the peak of her poverty before she decided to leave to seek her fortune:

> Plum, stopped having bowel movements…He cried and fought so they couldn't get much down his throat anyway… she ... ran her fingers around the crevices and sides of the lard can ... shoved the last bit of food she had in the world (besides three beets) up his ass... to loosen his bowels…Eva squatted there wondering why she had come all the way out there to free his stools…She shook her head as though to juggle her brains around, then said aloud, "Uh uh. Nooo."…two days later she left.[69]

[69] Morrison, *Sula*, pp. 33-4.

The passage depicts the desperate mother's confrontation with the abject of the other. The death of her child because of malnutrition and disease is a constant threat. This confrontation conflates nutrition and defecation when the last bit of lard she has is shoved in her son's anus rather than his mouth. The impact of poverty and social injustice marks the first reversal of her maternal subjectivity where the fear of death is blocked by the confrontation of the perishable body. Embracing the potential of death to her or her children, Eva leaves and only returns after 18 months.[70] Telling herself 'Nooo', Eva refuses to die by accepting death.[71]

Morrison's representation of Eva as the matriarch of her family, as the one who saves them and leads them, is suggestive of issues relating to perceptions of matriarchy. Angela Davis in *Women, Race and Class* (1981), points out a number of perceptions of black masculinity and what is perceived as the tendency of African-American families to adopt matriarchal structures. She insists that these perceptions are a misrepresentation of historical circumstances that formed the fundamental difference between Black and White American families. African-American women, she writes:

> [u]nlike their white counterparts, they could never be treated as mere 'housewives.' But to go further and maintain that they consequently dominated their men is to fundamentally distort the reality of slave life… She was thrust into the centre of the slave community. She was, therefore, essential to the *survival* of the community.[72]

This contrast that produced misguided perceptions about African-American women as the controller rather than leader of the family stems from a privileged social perspective of labour division in the family. Originating during slavery, the mother does not repeat the oppression of domination but facilitates *survival*. In her analysis of the role of an early motto of an African-American women's movement, Davis suggests that having a

[70] Morrison, *Sula*, p. 34.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (London: The Women's Press, 1981), p. 17.

sense of responsibility to the survival of the community as a whole stands regardless of gender. She writes 'when we as Afro-American women, when we as women of color, proceed to ascend towards empowerment, we lift up with us our brothers of color'.[73] This revises what is perceived as a hierarchal matriarchal structure of the African-American community as a system of equality rather than an oppressive one. It is redefined as a system of care rather than control. Eva's investment towards her family's survival is inspired by this theme. Her matriarchy lifts her family rather than oppresses them.

The representation of the reversed maternal subjectivity when Eva resorts to infanticide is revealed when she burns her son. The scene is suggestive of a force that makes her sacrifice her son, the one whose survival she maintained for a very long time. Having seen the spoon in which Plum cooks his heroin, and a copy of *Liberty* magazine all in one frame, the mother douses her son in kerosene and sets him on fire.[74] What the mother says to her daughter after she closes the door on him is suggestive of the reversal of her maternal subjectivity. It is associated with her son's maturity. Only when he fails her as son when he grows up, she ceases to perform within the maternal ideal. Eva asks her daughter after she sets Plum on fire, 'Is? My baby? Burning?'[75] In her mind, her sacrificed son is regressed to being a child. Only when she perceives him as her child again does Eva feel the pain of losing a child. Her deliberate act of murder is specifically related to his state of being an adult and a veteran that failed her perceptions of masculinity.

The tensions between Eva and her son are suggestive of a sacrificial act of survival that is congruent with Eva's actions to maintain the survival of her family. Her

[73] Angela Davis, *Women, Culture and Politics* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), p.13.
[74] Morrison, *Sula*, pp. 46-7.
[75] Morrison, *Sula*, p. 48.

son, the veteran turned addict, fails to fulfil what she sees as the epitome of man who lifts his community. His addiction is essentializing a stereotype that the mother sees as a hurdle in her goal of her family's survival. Burning in that sense becomes the purging of his attempt to pull his community back. Before his death the son is aware of his mother's attempt to purify him with kerosene, when he perceives it as '[s]ome kind of baptism, some kind of blessing'.[76] By burning her son, Eva's character manages to salvage what she perceives as the best of him, the image of her son, the veteran, the war hero.

Rejecting his regression into vulnerability like a child, Eva justifies her actions with preserving the natural order leading to survival. Death becomes the resort when the order is reversed:

> After all that carrying on, just getting' him out and keeping him alive, he wanted to crawl back in my womb and well… I ain't got the room no more even if he could do it … I couldn't birth him twice … I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn't and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man.[77]

Eva's perceptions of masculinity are closely associated with notions of personal liberty. What is represented as her son's regression into her womb which is his vulnerability and dependence on her is not congruent with her ideals of emancipation. The confinement of the womb is not different for her from the confinement of slavery to one's own weakness. For Eva, the survival expert, death becomes the solution for regression that defies the natural order where a man must seek emancipation. Death becomes the last resort for survival, the survival of memory. As a result of infanticide, her son will die a hero rather than a prisoner of his vulnerability and his mother's

[76] Morrison, *Sula*, p. 47.
[77] Morrison, *Sula*, pp.71-2.

shadows. This representation suggests the crippling effect of addiction on African-American masculinity that leads to the mass incarceration of young African-American men. The confining womb becomes the womb of history where the political injustice of slavery is continued through mass incarceration and drug related crimes.

Revisionist Narratives, Radical Politics

The representation of infanticide in *Beloved* and *Sula* commemorates the Black Power Movement's radical approach to the empowerment and the civil rights of African-Americans in the United States. The extremity of the mother's act of resistance pays homage to the politics of Malcolm X in his speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of African-American Unity in 1964. Malcolm X's revolutionary politics called for radical change in the attitudes towards institutional racism in order to advance the circumstances of African-Americans in the United States. In this speech, Malcolm X calls for the mobilization of the African-American community into establishing an African-American nationalist party and an army to protect their civil liberties. What marks this speech is the same radical approach to empowerment and liberation represented in *Beloved*. Change, according to Malcolm X, could be achieved if African-Americans adopted one motto:

> That's our motto. We want freedom by any means necessary. We want justice by any means necessary. We want equality by any means necessary…we want it now or we don't think anybody should have it.[78]

As well as exposing the double standards in government attitudes towards U.S. citizens, the speech, particularly in this part, suggests opposition as the only solution to counter

[78] Malcolm X, 'Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of African-American Unity (1964)', *By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews, and a Letter by Malcolm X* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 37.

injustices and civil rights violations. Violent action as the only solution for change is suggested when he states that if freedom is restricted it should be restricted for all. This call for equality achieved through destruction is suggested in *Beloved,* when the violence of infanticide restricts the mother from having her child and restricts the master from having his slave. Equality is achieved through lack, and destruction. No one has the child according to Sethe and no one has civil rights according to Malcolm X. *By any means necessary* is the attitude of Sethe the slave-mother. Spilling her child's blood is seen as the only path left towards empowerment and freedom.

The imagery associated with empowerment, including infanticide, is suggestive of the search for a more empowered self by radically rejecting unjust institutional ideals. The transformational aspect of the Sethe's character suggests the need to radically revise the self in order to revise the structures to which one is a subject. The power of *transformation* stands as a sign of empowerment in Malcolm X's path into leadership as a Black Power symbol. The shift in identity from a convicted felon to a leader in Malcolm X marks his transformation into an empowered and empowering figure who influences and forces change on racist political structures. The power contained within identity transformation is represented by the reversal of maternal subjectivity in Morrison's work. How the subject reviews the world and transform accordingly, in an empowering manner, is a major factor of the Black Power Movement that inspires the representation of black motherhood in Morrison's work.

Rewriting to Heal the Wounds of History

Beloved contains a number of instances that serve as beginnings of new stages in Sethe's life. These stages stand as a representation of the fluidity of feminine/maternal subjectivity within the context of the maternal experience in a racialized environment.

Any transition from one phase of her character's life to the other must be started by a clear sign marking the beginning of the new period. These instances illustrate Sethe's need to assert her power and capability to choose as a powerful subject because of her commitment to the rites of passage at the beginning of each event. For instance, Sethe refuses to get married without a 'ceremony… [a] preacher, some dancing, a party'.[79] She refuses to start her marriage without a wedding. Foucault maintains in *Society Must Be Defended* (1997) that 'historical discourse or the discourse of historians' consists of recounting 'rituals' and 'ceremonies'.[80] This 'memorialization function' serves to reveal power in reporting these rituals to reveal 'the luster of glory'.[81] Sethe in her commitment to rituals attempts to preserve her history to gain sovereign power. Important events in her life need to be immortalized by rituals and ceremonies. Two of these instances that start with ritualistic actions are intertwined by the suggestion that Beloved's death is merely a journey. It starts with an apocalyptic event and ends with another.

This idea of the journey supports my argument of the rejection of motherhood in *Beloved* as a process of healing in maternal ambivalence. The journey has a start and an end as well as Sethe's journey of rejection of the motherhood of her daughter. Sethe perceives her daughter's separation from her as a journey. Like her marriage, it should start with a ritual which is killing her to make the necessary transition for her to start that journey and is implied when Beloved returns to 124 'as though she has crossed a desert' because of her thirst.[82] It begins with the shocking rite of infanticide ends with the reaction of the mother that marks the moment as an apocalyptic event. Sethe feels a desperate urge to urinate which replicates the gush of amniotic fluid. The daughter's return is acknowledged by the mother in an imitation of a rebirth.

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[79] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 26.
[80] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, trans. by David Macey (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 66.
[81] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 67.
[82] *Beloved*, p, 51.

What qualifies as an aspect of healing in *Beloved* is the potential in the novel to rewrite and revise race and gender structures. The element of magical realism in the novel serves to compensate for the gendered historical perspective on Margret Garner's resistance. Because of the element of magical realism, the representation of Sethe's resistance in *Beloved* revises Gilroy's perspective of Garner's resistance as only being internal because of her gender. The dead daughter's return stands as another chance to heal the wound of this family's history in order for the reader to understand that the mother's resistance is internal and self-mutilating.

When Sethe sees Mr. Bodwin, the landlord coming to her house, she runs to attack him thinking he is a slave-catcher who has come to take her and her daughters. 'And if she thinks anything, it is no. No no. Nonono. She flies. The ice pick is not in her hand; it is her hand'.[83] This scene of aggression revises the historical account that describes Garner's resistance as self-mutilating because of her gender. The return of the dead provides the mother in the novel with a chance to re-experience motherhood and reverse her maternal subjectivity through healing. What is perceived as gendered resistance is revised when the character directs her aggression toward the aggressor rather than only her own self. While this element provides a nuance to feminine resistance, it also challenges the stereotypes that confines it and fixes it as only self-mutilating.

Another generic technique in revising perspective of women's resistance in Morrison's novels is related to the historical novel as a genre. The reader notices that Morrison's representation of motherhood during slavery goes through a shift by the publication of *A Mercy* in 2008. While one mother, in *Beloved*, rejects mothering a child by killing her to remove her from the system of slavery, the mother in *A Mercy* rejects

[83] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 262.

mothering her child by voluntarily abandoning her into the hands of a slave master. The mother narrates in *A Mercy* how she had to abandon her daughter to protect her. Vaark initially plans to exchange the mother and her daughter to settle a debt with D'Ortega. She approaches him and begs him to take her daughter instead so that she can stay with her infant son because she is still breastfeeding him.

This model of rejection of motherhood by abandoning one child into the hands of a slave owner marks a number of changes in Morrison's representation of mothering during slavery. The first change is that a child as a product of rape does not stand as a symbol of that rape and pain for the mother. She does not alienate the child as the model of mothering delineated in *Beloved*. Florens' mother does not reject her children but declares that the rape had 'been alright. It would have been good both times, because the results were you and your brother'.[84] This suggests that she adopts the maternal ideal of the slave under these circumstances. This contrasts with the mothers in *Beloved* who alienate children reproduced by rape.

A clearer sign of the shift in Morrison's representation of the rejection of mothering during slavery is the restrained energy of resistance compared to *Beloved*. The characters of Sethe and Florens's mother muster the strength to resist slavery by protecting their children, even if that protection means rejecting them. However, the tone of this resistance is considerably weaker in *A Mercy*. The gory image of the mother murdering her child contrasts with a mother begging a man to take her child. Again, the fear of rape reveals itself as the main instigator for the rejection of motherhood in *A Mercy*. The Mother views the budding femininity of her daughter as an emergency because it will invite the attention of men who will appropriate her body. She tries to cover her breasts, away from the gazes of D'Ortega and his men, and loathes her

[84]Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (London: Vintage, 2009), p.164.

daughter's attraction to shoes because it reveals her 'prettify ways'.[85] For the mother, this is an invitation for rape and physical appropriation, but she believes that Vaark's care stands as a better chance for her daughter than a life with her as a mother. The mother is urgently concerned with the 'protection' of her daughter even if it means being separated from her child forever.[86]

Sethe's representation of resistance is more powerful than in *A Mercy*. Both mothers separate themselves from their children. One aims for this separation to be a *gift* and the other to be 'a mercy'. The attitude of Florens's mother can be compared to the Sweet Home men in *Beloved*. Both perceive a peaceful form of slavery as a source of safety. The Sweet Home Men are proud to be enslaved by Mr. Garner because he brags about raising them to be 'men' when slaves in other farms were 'boys…picky boys, stroppin boys'.[87] This sense of pride in their humanity is sufficient to keep them satisfied as slaves. They sense that this perception raises them in a hierarchy of slavery. When Florens's mother sees goodness in Vaark's eyes, she insists that he takes her daughter. She chooses him only on the grounds that he sees her daughter as a 'human child'.[88] The attitudes of the Sweet Home men and Florens's mother reflect passivity rather than resistance. Both are content to be perceived as humans. But they do not conceive trying to change that perception to something more powerful.

Sethe's model of resistance is more powerful because she is not satisfied with being perceived as human. By giving her daughter the gift of death, she lifts herself to the status of a deity because she is like the prophet who takes the power, to give the gift of life and death. On the other hand, Vaark, the slave holder, is lifted to the status of a deity in *A Mercy*. Steve H. Monk in 'What is the literary function of the motherhood

[85] Morrison, *A Mercy*, p. 2.
[86] Morrison, *A Mercy*, p.159.
[87] Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 10.
[88] Morrison, *A Mercy*, p.164.

motif in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*' (2013) suggests that when Florens' mother thinks that Vaark's acceptance of taking her child as 'a mercy', she lifts him to the status of a God who bestows his mercy on her.[89] Sethe sets herself as a sovereign who uses the same appropriated body to resist power. She uses that body to resist by flight and then by death. Florens' mother, on the other hand, replaces one term of sovereignty with another. She replaces one form of slavery with another only to spare her daughter from the sexual exploitation and perversion in D'Ortega's plantation.

The setting of *A Mercy* in 1690 justifies the restrained version of the rejection of mothering as a form of resistance to slavery. This representation suggests that the earlier stages of slavery had been more peaceful compared the later stages marked by the essentialization of racial hierarchy. Mina Karavanta discusses *A Mercy* as a 'postnational' novel because it is set in the earlier stages of the United States as a nation. The setting revises the civil rights violations during slavery in the history of the United States through imagining a more homogenous national identity. This revised social identity in the setting of *A Mercy* is more inclusive of the white, the black and the Indian, whether they were rich or poor. Vaark's farm represents that inclusiveness in its residents. Karavanta defines the postnational novel as

> a form of counterwriting that relates these traces to the history that the narrated stories symptomatically reveal by attempting an imaginary restoration of their context before its accommodation in the dominant discourses of national history…the postnational novel blurs the distance between the discovery of the events and their invention as facts … to articulate the event

[89] Steve H. Monk, 'What is the literary function of the motherhood motif in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy'*. *Vanderbilt Undergraduate Research Journal*, 9 (2013), 1-6, p.3.

> before it is translated into fact by national discourses. The postnational novel thus writes counter to the act of forgetting involved in the invention of fact. [90]

This reading deconstructs national attitudes that have veered into racism. A *postnational* representation entails the elimination of *racist* national policies accumulated throughout American history with African-Americans. It is as if they never existed. The representation of slavery in *A Mercy* is thus a rewriting of history that has been deformed by national ideologies and the history that has been written by the victors. By going back to the roots Morrison reinvents the history of the United States and the experience of mothering. The novel reveals that the experience of mothering during slavery could have been less violent as is shown by the contrast in the representation of violence in the rejection of motherhood in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. Morrison's writing reveals a revisionist representation of the rejection of motherhood due to the circumstances of slavery. The shift in tone between *Beloved* and *A Mercy* serves to allow more complexity in the understanding of the experience of motherhood during slavery. The violent gory model of the rejection of motherhood in *Beloved* is contrasted by the more peaceful model in *A Mercy* to suggest that slavery could have had a different aftermath. In both, slavery is still portrayed as a viable reason for a mother to reject her child because of its highly unusual circumstances as a condition in which humans are required to live.

Rewriting history as a way of healing misconceptions and revealing the complexities that emerge through reliving it in fiction is a significant tool of revised political structures in Morrison's work. Ranging from resistance to revision to healing, the representation of reversed maternal subjectivity in her novels serves to create a

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[90] Mina Karavanta,'Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and the Counterwriting of Negative Communities: A Postnational Novel', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 58 (2012)723-746 <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/article/493627> p. 726.

sphere where the reversal exposes social injustices. This exposure also speaks to the current political forms that control the experience of mothering in the United States. While some of her work takes a radical form of resistance through violence, this uncovers the hidden structures that govern the experience of mothering and generate the processes within that experience. The radical concept of the murderous mother becomes a metaphor for the resisting subjugating political structures in the United States. Such narratives gain more urgency in the political/social environment in the United States due to debates about the legitimacy and cause of the *Black Lives Matter* movement. The representation of resistance to maternal subjectivity poses questions about the value of life and reproduction in a racialized setting. It revises stereotypes of mothering in a racially discriminatory environment like the image of the doting Mammy or the Welfare Queen.[91] Morrison's rewriting women's perceptions of mothering in these texts offers a new reading of how Black Lives Matter by representing the value of life from the point of view of the rejecting mother.

[91] A pejorative stereotypically attached (although not specific) to African-American mothers who rely on financial government assistance to care for their children.

Conclusion

The exploration and refusal of maternal ideals in contemporary American fiction does not reject the concept of motherhood itself, but insists on transforming the meanings attached to it. The representation of various modes of interruption to maternal subjectivity, whether it is representing the blocked or reversed transformation into the maternal subject, brings with it a problematisation of gender ideals. The internalized subjective experience represented in these narratives, where the transformation into a mother is interrupted, disrupts traditional perspectives on every woman's potential to be a mother. Narratives about abortion, voluntary childlessness, postpartum depression, abuse and infanticide disrupt the idealised maternal role and revise it through generating new perspectives on the possibility of the rejection of that role.

The revision of gender ideals in narratives about the rejection of motherhood, however, is not the only focus of this thesis. Discourse of motherhood in fictional and nonfictional representations comprise a dynamic area of research that is not limited to straightforward explorations of gender. A wide range of factors can impact and be impacted by writing motherhood, revealing economic, social and political aspects within the narrative or its context. I have sought to construct an analysis of how the representation of the rejection of maternal ideals in the representative novels shapes, and is shaped by, the social and political context of post-war America. The politics of violence, justice and retribution in the United States are critiqued through narratives about the rejection of maternal ideals. Toni Morrison's novels, for instance, redefine the ideal of maternal love through infanticide in a racist context. The maternal

experience is reshaped by racism and writing about it redefines issues of childcare within a racially discriminatory setting.

The analysis of contemporary narratives that reject maternal ideals suggests that these fictional works impact and are impacted by their context. For instance, in the second chapter of this thesis, focusing on the stigmatization of abortion, the analysis detects how abortion narratives are impacted by their context. The social and political shifts in the United States leading up to decisions like *Roe v. Wade* (1973) are played out in many Young Adult narratives around that time like Paul Zindel's *My Darling, My Hamburger* (1969) and *Bonnie Jo, Go Home* (1972) by Janette Eyerly. These narratives, however, contributed to the shaping of debates about abortion and voluntary childlessness in its time by introducing more complex, nuanced and ambivalent perspectives on the experience of teenaged pregnancy and voluntary childlessness.

When the flow and range of writing about the interrogation and rejection of maternal ideals in the novels is understood as a part of broader political debates and formations, its impact is suggestive of what can be described as political regression. This can be detected in the flux of writing about women's rights and abortion around the time of *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Texts that represent this wave like YA novels about abortion and feminist utopias suggest that the 1970s offered more freedom of expression when it came to controversial ideas compared to the following years. The flow of fictional writing about women's rights has slowed, in spite of the endurance of debate. Even with the erosion of the rights granted through *Roe v. Wade*, only one novel directly addressing abortion was published in 2011, suggesting that the expression of voluntary childlessness is exposed to more censorship in the early twentieth century than in the 1970s. However, novels published in the 1980s, 1990s

and early twenty-first century represent the rejection of motherhood in more complex if indirect ways through issues like postpartum depression, grieving or racism. This suggests that the rejection of motherhood is seen as legitimate only when a reason is given, like depression, grieving or racism.

The range and diversity of texts covered in this thesis suggests that motherhood should not be perceived monolithically. Feminist utopias, dystopias, realistic novels, YA novels, novels about voluntary childlessness and infanticide, mothering while experiencing postpartum depression and grieving or racism are all forms and themes that allow for the reimagination of through the rejection of its traditional ideals. Although the texts in this thesis are extremely different in their forms, contexts and even the gender of their creators, they are united by their willingness to question and remake the modes and meanings of motherhood in postwar America. This wide range of texts suggests that maternal ideals can be critiqued in many different voices, narratives and contexts. This diversity of texts highlights the potential to explore further narratives that reject or reform motherhood in world literatures in order to investigate and better understand what circumstances permit, produce or make problematic the rejection of maternal ideals, and to evaluate how similar or different these are from American fiction. Writing that creatively resists the idealization of mothers in fiction is a rich field for research and it would be interesting to read how the maternal ideal is imagined (or debated) in the literatures of other cultures to observe how perceptions of gender develop and interact on a global level.

The disruption of the maternal role generates an image of a fluid subjectivity that allows for new nuances of motherhood, embracing a more gender-fluid subjectivity that exists outside the limits of cultural ideals. It opens up the possibilities

of unfamiliar perceptions of femininity, including the ways that women perceive themselves as subjects. These American narratives interrupt the discourse of idealized femininity that was critiqued in second-wave feminist writing, and in third-wave feminist writing that continues to revise these ideals by rejecting the rigid paradigms of feminine and masculine identity. The fictional space where this takes place interacts with its contemporary and future social space to claim new and creative territories of maternal subjectivity that do not adhere to rules of gender and race. Representing interrupted maternal subjectivity interrupts the patriarchal discourse of feminine and maternal ideals. It creatively recreates the image of the mother. By interrupting the ideal through the images of monstrosity and rejection of motherhood, mothering and femininity are both deconstructed and also reconstructed into more creative and less restrictive formations.

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