

THE LANGUAGE OF ABORTION AND STIGMA IN AMERICAN LITERATURE BEFORE AND AFTER *ROE V. WADE*

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A Masters Thesis presented to the Faculty of Humanities
Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages

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Abstract

This thesis reviews a selection of American works of fiction dating from 1927 to 2017 in order to discuss changes in the way abortion has been written about in American literature before and after *Roe v. Wade*. The thesis takes aim at exploring the effects of legalization of abortion on the language of abortion and descriptions of abortion stigma in American literature in the 20th and 21st century. A feminist close reading of short stories by Ernest Hemingway, Alice Walker, David Foster Wallace and novels by Richard Yates, Richard Brautigan, Ruth Ozeki and Joyce Carol Oates reveals the presence of abortion stigma, both experienced and felt by the characters that are faced with abortion. This finding supports the argument posed by scholars that the 1973 landmark US Supreme Court decision did not entirely grant women the right to choose. The language of the law does not settle upon a definition of personhood, which leaves the rights of the fetus and the woman open to interpretation. The thesis analyses the linguistic and narrative structures applied to address the issue of personhood in the literary texts, and connects the inability to define the notion in the law, debate and literature to the perpetuation of abortion stigma. Finally, the thesis suggests that despite the prevalence of abortion stigma and the patriarchal structures it reflects, the abortion trope in literature conveys female agency and defiance of gender stereotypes.

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Kasper, I could truly not have done this without your love and patience. Mum, thank you, as always, for your loving support.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO ABORTION NARRATIVES IN THE AMERICAN PUBLIC DEBATE AND LITERARY FICTION

“Debate about abortion may begin with reasons, proceed to statistics, but it always comes down, really, to stories” (Wilt 3)

1.1 Introductory Remarks and Thesis Aim

When I first began to think about abortion as a possible thesis topic, I was inspired by events in Poland - my home country, where the nationalist conservative government has repeatedly attempted to pass laws that would prohibit abortion. Observing the efforts to sharpen the already extremely conservative abortion laws in the country in which I was born, and the attack on Polish women many perceived this to be felt personal and it felt important to pay attention. And so I became familiar with the black and white rhetoric used by both the liberal pro-Choice and conservative pro-Life protesters and the media. The events in Poland were a reminder of the fact that women’s reproductive rights are a recurring topic in politics, not only in my home country. The relevance of the topic became more urgent with the election of Donald Trump as president and the new administration targeting women’s reproductive rights; cutting funding for Planned Parenthood and state legislature attempts at passing conservative “fetal heartbeat” bills and even attempts at criminalizing abortion so that it could be punished the death penalty. Consumed by the issue and struck by the lack of nuance in much of the rhetoric I became interested in exploring how abortion is represented in literature, especially in American literature, as the debate in the US has been, and still is fierce.

Scholars who have investigated abortion in literature believe as I do, that literature is a space where such a topic is handled in a much more nuanced way than on the political scene. Judith Wilt’s words quoted above illustrate that there is a close connection between the debate about abortion and fiction about the topic – namely that both types of discourse are essentially stories. There is a consensus among scholars that representations of abortion in literature can be a valuable addition to an often emotional and essentialist political debate. In her book *Splitting The Baby: The Culture Of Abortion In Literature and Law, Rhetoric and Cartoons* Linda Myrsiades optimistically states that fiction can help soften the entrenched debate (Myrsiades x, xi), and even though I agree with this notion to some extent, I adopt a

slightly more negative approach to the topic of abortion in literature, as I propose a feminist interpretation of the novels and short stories, and examine the language to show that despite the changes in legislature, the stigma, and gender discrimination prevail even in the literary realm. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to explore the language of abortion in American literature in the context of this argument. In my analysis I will focus on the notion of stigma, and discuss how the construction of social stigma around abortion appears in the literary works. In addition, a guiding question in the thesis will be: has there been any significant change in the language of abortion since the legalization of abortion after the *Roe v. Wade* case in 1973?

I will discuss the development of discourse and how it has changed after the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1973. Kieran Dolin argues for the close connection between literature and language by the way of their similar “worldmaking” powers. The argument rests on the notions of Pierre Bourdieu who claims that law is “the quintessential form of the symbolic power of naming that creates the thing named and creates social groups in particular “ (Bourdieu qtd. in Dolin 12) and ascribes the same symbolic power of “naming and bringing forth new visions for society” to literature in the modern world (Dolin 12). Bourdieu does not however overstate the power of the artist – he knows where power resides; literature is as much a product of the existing social discourses, of discourses of power, as is its creator and re-creator, and so are judicial practices embedded in judicial texts. Law, as Dolin sums up, is not independent from social narratives (13). Both literature and law’s capacities in structuring reality are limited and Dolin states that “the symbolic acts of the law tend to reinforce the same status quo, or to announce changes already emerging in society” (13). Kumar, Hessini and Mitchell extend this notion to include how stigma is often reproduced by the way of laws in a society; “Policy and law are reflections of ideologies and thus norms that fuel abortion stigma are enshrined in the core structures of many societies” (631). They also argue that criminalization of abortion is an example of gender discrimination enshrined in policy and law and that constant attempts at making abortion law stricter are an expression of gender inequality (631).

As society develops and undergoes changes; judicial, technological and ideological, so will the cultural artifacts of a society change. Consequently any shifts in discourses about abortion will be reflected in the American literature. At the same time many believe that literature has been a “free space” away from the abortion debate, a place of less violent pro-choice or pro-life rhetoric. Although I agree with this notion, I would like to challenge it in this thesis by investigating the language of abortion and stigma more closely and in depth

than the existing body of literature about abortion in fiction does. Even though the discourses change and shape the cultural artifacts of a society such as novels and short stories accordingly, I suggest that there is a variation in the difference between the rhetoric of the public and the rhetoric of fiction, and that the narratives from the pre-*Roe* era I examine differ from the abortion narratives that dominated the early public debate by being more subtle in language and restrained in their judgment. On the other hand, I find that texts from the post-*Roe* decades up until today reflect much of the existing debate, often mimicking the language of pro-Life and pro-Choice activists.

Linda Myrsiades observes that poetry, fiction and even cartoons about abortion tend to do something that “goes well beyond the rank oppositionality of the political battles over abortion to remind us of the common ground that exists at the local level of human concerns” (Myrsiades x) thus describing abortion as being able to carry a multitude of meanings. There is a unique universality to be found in exploring the topic of abortion in the American debate and literary fiction, I propose. Abortion is never an easy choice, and the circumstances under which such a choice is contemplated or taken widely differs, from where in the world you are, or even where in America you reside, and at what point in history the choice is made. Most of the existing scholarship about abortion in fiction has been devoted to analyzing the actions and reproductive choices of characters in novels and short stories, but not much has been done in the direction of forming an overview of *how* abortion is written about and described. In other words, little attention has been devoted to the language of abortion, and especially not in the context of comparing it to the time before and after 1973, which is where this thesis can contribute a fresh perspective, in connecting the changes in both language and metaphorical power of the abortion trope. As questions of womanhood, motherhood, female liberties and agency are closely connected to the issue of abortion, it is natural to discuss the issues at hand from a feminist perspective. This has been done by other scholars as well, but I will apply a feminist viewpoint to the investigation of language and abortion stigma, as I believe a closer examination of the language is of importance when investigating the existing power structures and the patriarchy at work in many of these works of fiction that reflect the power structures that have dominated and still dominate the abortion debate.

1.2 Presentation of the Literary Works and Chapter Outline

There are plenty of American novels and short stories in which abortion is a more or less significant part of the plot. The selection of which works to investigate in this thesis has not been an easy process, and although the choices might seem random at first, there is a rationale behind each choice that I will explain shortly in order to show how each work of literature fits into the equation and serves the aim of the thesis in different ways. Naturally, there are limits to the number of works of fiction I could fit into the format of a thesis. However, I have attempted to provide a wide selection of different abortion experiences, and have chosen texts that I believe provide a solid foundation for a discussion of how the language of abortion and shame has evolved over a period of 90 years in American literature. Many of the novels I will be discussing have not yet been explored in the context of abortion discourse. There is an extensive amount of scholarship about “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway or “The Abortion” by Alice Walker that will lend support to my analysis, but most of the novels and short stories discussed in the thesis have not yet been subject to academic analysis – this I wish to correct. Even with the two aforementioned popular abortion narratives I suggest a slightly different approach when discussing the texts within the context of this thesis that looks at the connection between the abortion debate in the US and the way abortion is written about in American literature.

The earliest abortion narrative is Ernest Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants”, first published in 1927. The short story is heavy with metaphors about pregnancy and abortion. The discussion of the American couple, which find themselves at a crossroads in life, is full of allusions to the procedure itself. Hemingway subtly describes abortion as “letting the air in” (53) and uses vague and elusive language to approach the choices the prospect of abortion forces not only about the issue of personhood, but also the kind of life one wishes to lead. Jig and the American clearly want different things and their conversation with its frequent use of indefinite pronouns and repetitions of key words reveals a power struggle between the man and the woman. Their vague dialogue is an attempt at distancing themselves from the issue of abortion and what might be aborted by addressing neither the fetus nor the procedure in a straightforward manner, I argue.

Revolutionary Road by Richard Yates was published in 1961 and is set back in 1955. The novel is an intensive portrayal of the Wheelers, a young married couple and the disillusioned life they lead in the suburbs of New York. Their desperate attempt to break out of what they view as a life that is beneath the people they consider themselves to be and move to Paris is

interrupted by April Wheelers pregnancy. The following discussion over whether or not to abort contains both the rhetoric of courtship and a war, revealing like in “Hills Like White Elephants” a battle between the sexes. The way in which the abortion trope is used in the novel carries visible traces of the “good girl” narratives that according to Celeste Michelle Condit dominated the early stages of the abortion debate (25). April’s wish to abort can be seen as a stark contrast to what was acceptable as a justifiable abortion back then, she is not in a desperate situation therefore her wish can be argued to be an abortion of convenience (Abrams 302). This term and the implications it has for the autonomy of the woman will be discussed in the subsequent chapters. The novel raises interesting questions about gender and language, especially the fact that the only time April Wheeler has her own voice in the novel, is at the very end, at the time she is actually making the choice to perform an illegal abortion on herself. She takes charge of her own body in a dramatic manner, and it is only in such a manner it seems a woman could be heard. April’s choice is an example of how abortion in literature can be a powerful metaphor for agency, I argue.

I suggest that Richard Brautigan’s novel *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* published in 1971 – a love story interrupted by an unwanted pregnancy, is an example of how the literary realm differs from the abrasiveness of the American public abortion debate. Set in San Francisco in the 1960’s the language of the novel is quite the opposite of the language of the debate, leveled and compassionate as it conveys the experience of abortion in an almost positive manner. The narrator and his girlfriend Vida travel to Mexico to have an abortion as having a child at this point in their life is not something either of them wants. As the narrator sits in the abortionist’s office in Mexico awaiting the end of Vida’s procedure, he observes other women at the clinic who are in the same situation as his beloved. I propose that the situation is not represented in a way that promotes stigma and that the novel can ultimately be read as an attempt at normalizing abortion. This I argue, is enforced by the fact that the male protagonist observes several women coming in and out of the abortionists office without judging or moralizing about abortion.

The short story “The Abortion” by Alice Walker from the collection *You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down* published in 1971 describes two different abortions had by the same female narrator - Imani. One of her abortions is illegal and the other one legal, performed at a clinic in New York, which was one of four states where abortions on request were legal from 1970. New York was however the only state that did not require women seeking abortions to be a resident of the state for at least 30 days prior to the abortion procedure as was the case in Alaska, Hawaii and Washington (Gold 10). Thus traveling to New York was an option for

women in America before 1973, however, as Gold argues, this was an option available to few women who could afford the travel, lodgings, and the procedure itself (11). I argue that even though “The Abortion” was written before *Roe v. Wade* Walker describes a post-legalization abortion setting. It will therefore be treated together with post-*Roe* narratives in some parts of the thesis as I argue that it confirms the point that a liberalization of abortion laws does not necessarily have a significant effect when it comes to changing the stigma and shame women who have abortions feel or experience. Imani’s two abortions are described as two vastly different experiences. The first one is intimate – a rite of passage, while the second, legal one is described as mechanical and impersonal. This contrast is interesting in the context of the implied judicial reality that separates the two abortions showing, and supports the argument that legal circumstances, do not necessarily affect personal experiences. Another interesting aspect in Walker’s story is the fact that Imani resides in the south and must travel to the northern states to have the abortion, which supports Kumar, Hessini and Mitchell’s claim that abortion stigma is often a local product (628). Imani’s southern life has strong presence of religion, and male authority, and thus in just a couple of pages Walker tackles issues that divide America such as abortion, race and religion.

Ruth Ozeki’s 1998 novel *My Year of Meats* is a complex story about Jane, a Japanese-American female documentary maker, who engages in a quest of exploring the shady sides of the American meat industry while directing *My American Wife* – a commercial disguised as a documentary reality show aiming to promote beef for Japanese consumers. Jane becomes pregnant with her lover and contemplates an abortion, decides to keep the child, but then miscarries. A parallel story in *My Year of Meats* is that of the Japanese housewife Akiko who, trapped in a violent marriage, struggles with an eating disorder and is unable to get pregnant. The novel raises interesting questions about multiculturalism, the ethics behind eating meat and interfering in the natural reproductive cycles of both women and cattle. In addition, Ozeki’s androgynous heroine Jane clearly does not fit into American or Japanese ideals of womanhood. *My American Wife* is a stark contrast to her own life, and I argue that her inability to fit into the set patterns of what a woman should be is underlined by her contemplation of an abortion. Jane’s consideration of abortion is interesting in terms of what words and descriptions are applied when she thinks about the unborn child as she wavers between abortion and motherhood.

David Foster Wallace’s short story “Good People” was first published in *The New Yorker* in 2007. The story is structured as a train of thought of a young Christian man – Lane A. Dean Jr., who ponders his relationship to his pregnant girlfriend Sheri, the unborn child,

and to God. The story was later published as a chapter in Foster Wallace's unfinished, posthumously published novel *The Pale King* where in later chapters Lane and Sheri are in fact married with children. As the short story was deemed ready by Foster Wallace to be published on its own in 2007, I choose to treat it as such – an independent piece of literary work, in which the topic of abortion fits perfectly into the discussion in this thesis. Lane struggles with feelings of hypocrisy, as he wants Sheri to have an abortion because he does not love her, and he weighs the dilemma against his Christian beliefs, describing this struggle as a standstill between two opposing armies.

A Book of American Martyrs by Joyce Carol Oates published in 2017 is the most recent abortion narrative discussed in the thesis, and is therefore interesting to explore in the context of abortion discourse as much of the existing scholarship on abortion in literature analyzes older fiction from the 19th and 20th centuries. Like in "Good People" religion plays a big role in this monumental saga of two American families, connected by abortion. Abortion serves as a backdrop for the stories of two families where one of the patriarchs is a religious fundamentalist and pro-Life activist who fatally shoots the other head of the family – a doctor who performs abortions. Interesting parallels can be drawn between the language of pro-Life activists and both the protagonist in David Foster Wallace's short story, and the way that abortion is treated in *A Book of American Martyrs*. I would argue that both Foster Wallace's short story and Oates' and Ozeki's novels show that abortion discourse is still heavily influenced by the stigma that surrounds the act of abortion, even decades after the liberalization of the abortion laws showing that perhaps, contrary to Myrsiades' claim, literature is not as powerful a transformer of discourse as one would wish it to be.

I have presented the literary works in a chronological order above, but throughout the thesis the pre- and post-*Roe* narratives will be discussed together, and the division will function as a red thread for the comparison of language from the narratives before and after liberalization of abortion laws. Yet I propose a division into themes, rather than chronological close readings, will better serve the purpose of the thesis. I will discuss passages most relevant to the topic of the thesis and focus on language and shame in order to address the aims of the thesis and discuss if, and if so – how the language of abortion in American literature has changed after 1973, and whether the decriminalization of abortion has changed literary representations of abortion stigma.

In this first chapter I lay out the theoretical foundation for the close readings of the novels and short stories in chapters two and three. I will present the abortion debate in the US with a focus of the development of abortion discourse, introduce the main voices in the

academic debate about abortion in American literature, and introduce theories of stigma creation and how it relates to abortion. In the second chapter I will discuss the very words, metaphors and grammatical constructions used to describe abortion – the procedure itself and what is aborted, in other words, I will investigate how literary narratives before and after *Roe* relate to the issue of personhood. I argue that the newer abortion narratives are more precise, direct and sometimes more graphic than the pre-*Roe* works of fiction which mostly operate with allusions to abortion and a vague language to describe the fetus, but then again the close readings reveal that there are exceptions on both sides of *Roe*. The third and last chapter is devoted to representations of abortion stigma in the novels and short stories, and I propose that the landmark US Supreme Court decision seems not to have influenced the shame the characters feel after abortion became legal, supporting Paula Abrams' stance that the vagueness of the language of *Roe v Wade* did not secure a woman's right to choose and thus opened up for perpetuation of abortion stigma. The discussion of abortion stigma will also include a discussion of womanhood as the choice to terminate a pregnancy has throughout the decades been interpreted as a departure from ideals set for women to live up to, especially the ideal woman as synonymous with *mother*. I propose that in most of the novels and short stories abortion is to some extent a vehicle for female agency and emancipation. Lastly, it can not be ignored that all the literary works give the male a significant voice in the abortion, and I argue that the presence of the male voices in each of these narratives, conveyed directly by male narrators and characters or filtered through the female perspective is noteworthy. I propose that it can either be interpreted in favor of the abortions trope's universality in conveying all human experiences – both female and male, or as an expression of patriarchy.

1.3 Theoretical background

The theoretical background for this thesis will include texts from the fields of rhetoric, sociology and discourse analysis. The close readings of the text will be done through a feminist lens. As abortion is an inherently feminist topic, and as feminist thinkers have greatly contributed to the debate about abortion, and expanded its range to include the pregnant woman, her body and motherhood (Saul 110), such a theoretical lens is a natural one, I argue. In order to answer the questions set forth in the introductory remarks, this section will first provide an overview of the abortion debate in the United States. It will not only serve as a historical background, but will give the reader a closer look at the political and cultural discourse itself, which I argue is reflected in a large part of the literary selection

of this thesis. Such an introductory overview will be a useful tool in the subsequent analysis of the abortion discourse in American fiction written before and after the legalization of abortion, and certain notions mentioned in this section will be further developed in the analysis of the literary works. As the body of research on the American abortion debate is quite extensive, I chose to focus on the research done by Celeste Michelle Condit as she focuses on how the different arguments in the American abortion debate have been constructed. The second part of the theoretical background sums up the academic debate on abortion in literature, with a focus on Judith Wilt, Karen Weingarten, Linda Myrsiades and Barbara Johnson's work. The third and final section proposes tools of discourse analysis, and definitions of abortion stigma that will point in the direction of how abortion language will be examined in the thesis.

1.3.1 The Changing Discourses of the Abortion Debate in the US

The abortion debate as Condit describes it in *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* is a prime example of the power that lies in the framing of a discourse: from the ways in which narratives are constructed, to the imagery and words that are being emphasized. Therefore her research is useful for the purpose of this thesis, not only by way of providing a backdrop for the topic of abortion debate in the US, as I intend to investigate the language in the literary works before and after *Roe v. Wade*. Condit examines the development of the abortion debate in the US in particular how certain vocabularies have been "integrated into the public repertoire" (6) and have led to accepting given policies on abortion. Condit argues that "meanings are reflected, reproduced, and revised throughout the social formation at various levels – in the law, in cultural artifacts, in social and economic practices, and in individual lives" (7), underlining both the personal experience of abortion and its political significance. In order to describe the debate, Condit defines public argument as "the process through which the underlying interests of rhetorically organized and differently empowered groups or classes contest against and with each other for particular policies and practices through the negotiation of persuasive meanings" (8), showing how such groups apply rhetorical devices to express their views. At some point, the terms applied by such groups, in this case pro-Life and pro-Choice activists, will achieve dominance over the vocabulary of the other group and this, Condit explains, is the mechanism behind changing public discourse (7). Each group seeks to influence public opinion through language mainly by repetition and effective expression, Condit claims (9), and such effects

can be achieved through metaphors, images, powerful language and clever ways of constructing narratives in order to get the pro- or anti-abortion message across.

Condit identifies narratives as the basic discursive unit applied by the pro-abortion movement in the early stages of the debate. These narratives were used to break with the refusal to articulate abortion that characterized “the century of silence” a period lasting from 1880 when abortion was criminalized in the US, until the 1950’s when the first discussions of abortion emerged in the public space (Gilette 664). In the 1950’s the discussion was dominated by doctors who had been in legal control of abortion decisions for decades, and who now expressed concern about the legal ambiguities around abortion, in particular the health risks associated with illegal abortions (Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* 23). The discussion of abortion was thus primarily ongoing within the professional medical realm and it was towards the end of the decade that the law expanded from “risk to mother’s life” to cases of incest, rape, threat to the mother’s health and fetal deformity (23). At this point however, women’s voices were still not prominent in the discussion, abortion was treated as “a disease with no name” (23), but stories of women turning up at hospitals after complications from illegal abortions forced the discussion of their rights.

In the 1960’s there was a shift of the abortion problem from the professional, medical sphere to the public, and this shift demanded a new, clear articulation of the problem, now that issues concerning sex, abortion and motherhood came into the light, Condit suggests (23). With the entry of abortion into the public debate both sides were attempting not to touch the rhetoric of “values” and therefore narratives became the suited rhetorical form (Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* 24). In other words, the American public did not immediately engage in a debate about whether abortion was morally right or wrong; instead stories about women who had undergone risky illegal abortions proliferated in magazines. The stories included detailed recounts of the illegal abortion “underworld” without advocating for a change in legislature (Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* 24). But even though it did not advocate a change of law, it undoubtedly described a problem deriving from the law that targeted women. These tales focused on the human suffering: “translating the private experiences of individual women into an argument for social change”, and slowly advocacy for judicial reform emerged (Condit 24).

However, these narratives were loaded with stereotypes of women and motherhood, and there was still little room for women to stray away from the ideals of womanhood. The

women in the narratives were introduced to the public in a sympathetic manner – as good and unable to control their destinies (Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* 25). Since motherhood was the definition of goodness in women in the 60's, narratives about abortion were based on portrayals of married happy mothers who were seeking abortions. The narratives were not subtle, but rather extreme worst case scenarios. They included women raped, abused, ill, extremely young or extremely poor and thus, Condit claims, one avoided challenging values because good women who sought abortion in such cases were actually making choices against situations that violated motherhood, and not against motherhood itself. This point was strengthened by sickening descriptions of the illegal procedures; using random instruments, dangerous methods, in dirty locations, performed by shady “doctors”. This created a contrast between the good woman and the evil world of illegal abortion, providing an incentive for change (27).

From the 1960's the abortion discourse evolved from narratives limited to drastic cases, not representative of the majority of women having abortions, to an attack on the cultural presumption that abortion is wrong. A need for a new vocabulary arose as one saw that narratives about illegal abortions were insufficient in order for social and legal action to be taken; they too had to be placed within a value framework. If women's right to choose was to be recognized it had to be on the grounds of “equality”. As an opposition to discrimination the word became the basis for the claim to a right to abortion (Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* 63). As there was a lot of public emphasis on equality in the sixties, disparities in the abortion narratives due to socio-economic status of women who got abortions became visible – different classes received different abortions and the laws discriminated against minorities and the poor (64). Simultaneously anti-abortion activists argued for a restoration of the “American heritage” in which they claimed abortion was always abhorred, likening it to murder (43, 45). “Life” became the key word of those fighting against abortion, implying that the fetus was human and the argument that “preservation of life was of such preeminence that it automatically preempted conflicting values and interests” rose to prominence (60).

At this stage of the debate the pro-abortion side was influenced by second wave feminist discourse of the woman's right to control her body. The term “equality” became a way to introduce feminist discourse into the debate vocabulary and the issue was framed around property and justice; this signified a shift from a narratively based argument to an ideological one. It went from desire to end illegal abortion to a demand for the repeal of all abortion laws (Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* 64).

Voices calling for a woman's right to choose were now present in the debate, but it was not until the 70's that they became prominent (67). In 1967 many states reformed their abortion laws, but it was still only allowed when approved by a committee for reasons that did not challenge traditional motherhood. The pro-Life side campaigned for a ban on all abortion due to the right to Life (62). They employed selected arguments from science, genetics and biology, all supported with visual proof provided by the technological advances that now allowed for the fetus to be seen rather than imagined. The pro-Life stance borrowed from the pro-abortion vocabulary and transformed the argument from "sanctity of life" to "Right to life" and gathered force as the arguments highlighted the human features of the fetus making it difficult to dismiss the relevance of the "Life" argument (63).

On the other end of the spectrum feminists were at this point still cautious of the word "choice" as it could be interpreted as permitting only political and not economical rights. Since most women did not have economic freedom to choose, so feminists preferred the concept of Reproductive Freedom (Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* 68). Yet the term "choice" was key to the feminist argument; it was necessary in order to experience equality and freedom and the horrors women experienced in the early abortion narratives were due to the lack of choice. The rise of "women's choice" was partly due to changes in women's occupational choices in the seventies and "the general inclusion of women in the constitutive value Equality was thus virtually completed by the early seventies" (71). People now wanted fewer children and the ideas of the perfect family size changed by the 1970's. As access to birth control methods increased, abortion was no longer the ultimate way of controlling childbearing, and became an increasingly socially complex choice because it happened after conception. With different views on family challenges to motherhoods preeminence in the hierarchy of values arose. Some feminists claimed compulsory motherhood was a form of oppression, and now motherhood itself became just one of many choices (Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* 71, 72). Women were no longer to be subjects to biological predispositions and to male whims - these ideas were radical and brought about change and were not fully contested until the 1980's.

Condit describes the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 1973 as a symbolic landmark, a strong signal that reshaped the public meaning of "choice" and that restricted the character of fetal life (71). However, like Dolin's claims about the limited transformative power of laws, Condit and other scholars like Myrsiades and Abrams are careful in assigning too much importance to the effects of the *Roe v. Wade*, and some feminists argue that a right to choose

does not necessarily provide women with reproductive freedom (Saul 130). Condit argues that *Roe* redefined the right to choice because it prevented active government interference in choices one might economically socially and personally have (116). This right to privacy – a freedom from interference, did not however satisfy the substantial demand for a real freedom of choice for women. The vocabularies of both the pro-Choice and pro-Life groups are entrenched in the law – the ruling mirrors the popular mass discourse (Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* 117). Such a vague compromise that the language of *Roe v. Wade* reveals has led to many state legislatures limiting abortion rights after 1973 by cutting public funding for abortions for instance; making them unavailable for many women (Saul 130). Feminists have disputed the phrasing of the right to abortion, not as a “right to Liberty” but a right to privacy, arguing that not granting women such liberty in a direct manner opened for the discrimination and abuse of women within the “privacy” of their lives dominated by patriarchal family members or partners. Pro-Life supporters on the other hand, continued to argue that a right to privacy did not inherently mean a right to abortion (Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* 105). Thus, as Myrsiades puts it; abortion remains “an open question capable of tugging at the national psyche” (30).

1.3.2 Perspectives on Abortion in American Literature

Scholars who write about abortion in literature tend to focus on motherhood, claiming that the traditional notions of motherhood, and therefore womanhood in general are being challenged. The notion of motherhood will be a central one in this thesis as well, as it is at the core of the issue of abortion stigma. The challenges posed by the advances of the women’s movement have led to what some call the “crisis” (Hansen) or “Armageddon” (Wilt) of motherhood, and scholars have tended to focus on analyzing the actions and reproductive choices of characters in novels and short stories, but have in my opinion overlooked the language used to describe abortion and how abortion shame is conveyed in literary narratives. Judith Wilt, Linda Myrsiades, Barbara Johnson and Karen Weingarten offer some of the most comprehensive studies of the topic and they devote a lot of attention to the metaphorical power of the abortion trope, what it means to women and men, and what it means for the discussion of other topics, such as race and class as well. Other scholars and their work will also be discussed in connection to particular works in the two subsequent chapters.

Weingarten explores the ties between abortion and eugenics by examining two novels that depict anxiety around race and immigration and present abortion as a measure to secure the reproduction of the white race (Weingarten 87). Weingarten does not however devote much attention to the texts themselves; only a couple of crucial passages are read more closely, and her focus is on the social context and the issue of race and abortion as population control. Weingarten comments upon the way in which the literary narratives emphasize an anti-abortion position to underscore her point that “circulating discourses of abortion – as shameful, as trashy, as sinful – become a mechanism for regulating bodies” and controlling populations by “disciplining the body into normative behaviors, the kind of discipline that results in (...) thinking that abortion is a shameful sin, entire populations can be managed and produced through difference” (Weingarten 90). Weingarten also subtly comments on the differences between legal and illegal abortion situations arguing that “even if abortion is legal or accessible, its inscription as a despicable practice sought by irresponsible women regulates the very populations that seek it” (90). This is not only relevant to the issues of eugenics that Weingarten discusses, but is also applicable to the central argument in the thesis that despite the changes in the dominating legal and social discourses and the effects on literary description of the abortion experience, the feeling of shame in women who make that choice lingers even after decriminalization of abortion.

Myrsiades explores the rhetoric of abortion, the abortion law and the different cultural expressions of abortion, with special attention to the last quarter of the twentieth century in *Splitting the Baby. The Culture of Abortion in Literature and Law, Rhetoric and Cartoons*. Myrsiades emphasizes the role of literature as not only the reflection of culture but also a tool to understand the cultural terms and other products of culture such as the abortion laws. Myrsiades points out what she sees as an incoherence in the existing abortion laws, that it is rather an “unresolved body of law” (7). This incoherence can be paralleled to the multitude of different literary narratives describing a variety of abortion experiences, and I argue that the literary representations of abortion are more nuanced and “incoherent” than the fixed narratives of the pro-Life and pro-Choice sides in the debate, which had to be coherent and consistent in order to get the message across.

Myrsiades concentrates on poetry and the short story genre in her review of abortion in literature. Her selection of texts is quite broad (60 works of poetry and 150 works of short fiction), allowing her to comment briefly on recurring motifs in literature about abortion. Myrsiades gives a thematic overview of these works, and due to the large selection, the readings are perhaps slightly superficial as she gives brief summaries of short stories and how

they fit into different categories such as relationships and race. I propose a closer reading of fewer texts, as I believe in the benefit of looking even more closely at the link between the abortion debate and literature. Myrsiades' research provides useful insight - especially her argument that legal metaphors have given rise to almost mythic metaphors about women that pervade the debate on both sides. Myrsiades has extracted these stereotypes and proposes the 3 following constructions of women when speaking about abortion: the good/bad Samaritan, slave/slave master and the good/bad mother (40). In the first dichotomy – the good and bad Samaritan considers the woman who chooses to keep a child a good Samaritan, but she who “detaches herself” would be considered a bad Samaritan, a murderer even. The second dichotomy compares the woman to a slave master, who has legal control over the fetus, and but on the other hand this dichotomy can also serve to argue that a woman can be a slave to her reproductive role. The third stereotype is one that can be found in many of the literary representations of abortion: the good and the bad mother. This echoes the early abortion narratives of “good mothers” that Condit describes; and this notion and how it is presented in literature will be further discussed in chapter three, as I consider the language used to describe the agency of the female characters who terminate pregnancies.

Myrsiades extends this notion to how women carry a societal responsibility as the ones able to reproduce it. Women “owe” society a new member and those who deny society this are rendered bad, and those who do not refuse and do their duty are considered good mothers. These notions do not only exist in public discourse but their equivalents are found in literature as well. Myrsiades claims that these dichotomies “do not provide us with a variety of maternities (but) rather they constrain us to the singularity of one tyrannical notion” (43). The way in which women who abort are rhetorically framed is therefore an expression of a society's denial for a woman to have agency over her own body; “Her insistence on “her” right to “her own” fetus is made the equivalent of asserting her right to social destruction and chaos” (Myrsiades 43), highlighting the importance of language in creating stigma around abortion.

The notion of good and bad mothers in connection to abortion is at the center of Judith Wilt's research in her book *Abortion, Choice and Contemporary Fiction: The Armageddon of Maternal Instinct*. Wilt investigates how contemporary writers write about abortion, showing that this is a topic that has been present in a large part of contemporary fiction. With psychoanalysis as a theoretical backdrop, Wilt's discussion focuses on the changing nature of motherhood in relation to abortion and argues that there has been a shift from the realm of instinct to the realm of choice (2-3). According to Wilt, there are two

aspects of the maternal: the realm of the unconscious, the primal - the mirror stage, and the hyperconscious discourses of medicine, law, psychology, economics, religion, and politics which structure choice (2). Wilt suggests that the pro-Life worldview can be likened to Lacan's imaginary and the pro-Choice stance can be likened to the symbolic order. This she claims can explain the fervor of the pro-Life side and the "subtle unease" of the pro-Choice side because "consciousness itself implies loss" and she argues that even if a pregnancy is not consciously terminated choice will always inherently be abortion; "In this respect every pregnancy precipitates a loss, not just those that end in abortion" (Wilt 3). In line with Julia Kristeva's notion that maternity is something not completely dominated by the patriarchy but has retained "an edge of its original nature" (2) Wilt examines stories about abortion that in some way dismiss the notion of "patriarchally constructed heterosexuality, maternity, choice and abortion or birth" (2), and the same can be said for the works of literature discussed in this thesis.

Wilt points out that the nature of the abortion debate consist of overlapping narratives of pregnancy/birth, and claims that these are often abstract scientific or religious narratives where the drama of individuals is a subplot. In her examination of abortion in literature, it is the plot structure that is at the center of discussion. She claims that abortion narratives are predominantly "shadow narratives" – stories of fallen women that include seduction, rape and abandonment and adultery with a focus on the departure from maternity as a socially constructed arrangement, moving towards infanticide and abortion. Wilt claims that such "shadow narratives" tend to be organized towards endings – marriage, death, abortion or birth – a conclusion that does not offer a resolve but is only meant to highlight "what is amiss between woman and man, or between woman and maternity" (23). I find that this applies to most of the literary narratives discussed in the thesis, *Revolutionary Road* and "The Abortion" in particular – they too are stories that breach with the social rules of marriage and motherhood, but I argue that these narratives do not only highlight what is lost, but on the contrary show that there is much to be gained; freedom of choice not only over one's body, but also one's life.

Wilt argues for an Armageddon of the maternal instinct by analyzing the texts through a psychoanalytical perspective and she comments upon language, in particular how it was taboo to use words to describe the death of a child by a woman, not only because desire for a child is something inherent in women. She draws a distinction between abortion narratives from the 19th century and those from the 20th century. The 19th century narratives are more clear and explicit in depicting the "irrevocable" (Wilt 29) inherent in abortion, while she

finds the 20th century narratives to be much more ambiguous, and she argues that the plots of abortion narratives have moved away from dramatic narratives of adultery and rape to a more subdued narrative (29) exploring perhaps in a more subtle way the psychological intricacies of maternal choice. As I study both 20th and 21st century narratives I find Wilt's claim to be true for the pre-*Roe* narratives, which approach the topic of abortion in a metaphorical, vague manner, I argue. On the other hand, I also notice a change to the more explicit, even grotesque in the language of abortion after *Roe*, as I demonstrate through the close readings in the subsequent chapters.

Interestingly, Wilt is one of the very few scholars who even make the distinction between pre- and post-legalization narratives. She argues that stories before abortion was legalized in the US "complexify the law's or the church's rigid posture", while the stories after legalization "complexify the law's or feminism's supposed airy meliorism" (Wilt 10). The essence of her argument is that literary narratives both before and after legalization set out to complicate and challenge the arguments of the opponents and proponents of legalization of abortion, and that there was a shift regarding who is being challenged; the pro-Life side before, and the pro-Choice side after *Roe v. Wade*, to put it simply. I agree with Wilt's notion that both pre- and post-*Roe* narratives challenge the established abortion discourse, but I am of two minds when it comes to the distinctions she draws regarding who's arguments are being challenged at different points in time. I propose that this thesis offers a slightly more nuanced picture as I find that all the literary works, from Hemingway to Oates, challenge both sides of the debate, no matter what decade they were written in.

Part of Judith Wilt's research includes an article by Barbara Johnson "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion" in which Johnson explores the links between the use of apostrophe in poems about abortion to the abortion debate. Judith links Johnson's work to her own focus on the conscious and unconscious. Yet Johnson's analysis of the poetic language and grammar in the poem is more specific and therefore useful to the analysis of language of pre- and post legalization fiction in America. Johnson underlines the importance of exploring the link between political rhetoric and literary language and imagery, and focuses on the poem and the apostrophe - a rhetorical device she likens to the lyric voice (Johnson 29). Apostrophe addresses something absent; a person, a thing or an abstract idea, which then becomes present, alive (Johnson 30). The poems Johnson analyzes all deal with the loss of a child and the essence of her argument is that in these poems apostrophe is used to foreground the question of motherhood and lost children, as what is absent could be the child or the mother that never was. I explore the notion of the apostrophe in the second chapter in my

discussion of what, for some, the core of the abortion debate is about – fetal personhood, and how it is represented in American short stories and novels before and after 1973.

1.3.3 Analyzing abortion discourse, stigma and shame

There is a vast body of academic research on discourse analysis, and here I present a few works and perspectives I have chosen that I argue fit the purpose of my thesis. Critical discourse analysis is, I believe, suitable as it “highlights the social, ideological and political dimension of discourse” (Cameron and Panovic 66) and will serve as a guideline in the investigation of the language of abortion and abortion stigma in American fiction. In the close reading of the literary texts I will pay attention to the vocabulary, the adjectives and adverbs used to describe the different abortion situations, as well as how the text is organized and what patterns emerge or recur in the pre- and post-Roe narratives. In order to examine representations of abortion even more closely I will take a closer look at the grammar as grammatical choices “contribute to the construction of a stance by (...) directing attention towards or away from particular actors, and assigning responsibility or blame to them” (Cameron and Panovic 68). Therefore the placement of the subjects and objects in a sentence and the use of the passive voice will be of utmost importance when discussing both how fetal personhood and female agency is written about. These are all devices that have been taken in use by the pro-Life and pro-Choice activists as Condit shows in her examination of the abortion debate, but have mostly been left unexamined in the literary realm, I argue, as most scholars have paid attention to the larger meanings of abortion and the changes in representations of motherhood in society and literature. These notions will not be ignored in this thesis, but the close readings and the analysis of the literary language of abortion will provide a firm base for the discussion of the larger changes in the abortion narratives as well.

Mary Bucholtz states in *The Handbook of Language and Gender*: “The beliefs that are put forth in the texts of greatest interest to critical discourse analysts are those that encourage the acceptance of unequal arrangements of power as natural and inevitable, perhaps even as right and good” (57) She argues essentially that words matter – discourse is not only symbolic but has a “material effect on the lives of human beings” (Bucholtz 57). Such unequal arrangements of power are without a doubt present in the discussion of abortion, and in the literary texts at hand as well. If women who abort are seen as women betraying their gender, the gendering of discourse in the context of abortion discourse in literature deserves a closer look. Anna Livia argues for instance that “actions performed by female characters are of a different quality from those performed by the male” (Livia 144)

simply in the sense that women are not truly the agents behind these actions, and this is why it is interesting to consider the language of the female action of abortion - it is a breach with the passive female character. In her explanation of the passive female characters Livia emphasizes the role of gender concord in the creation of stylistic effects such as focalization, empathy, and textual cohesion (148). I suggest that applying a similar approach in the analysis of the literary texts, will shed a light on the most subtle expressions of patriarchal control over women's reproductive choices, even after the abortion laws were liberalized.

In the discussion of the changes in abortion discourse I propose a closer look at the inevitable, but in my opinion overlooked, connection between abortion, stigma and shame. As Condit's research on the public American discourse of abortion proves; the American public has almost always considered abortion as something deviant. One of the guiding questions of this thesis is how abortion stigma is reproduced in American fiction about abortion? In the article "Conceptualizing Abortion Stigma" Kumar, Hessini and Mitchell discuss factors such as popular and medical discourses, government and political structures, institutions, communities and personal interactions and their role in producing abortion stigma. Their findings can shed a light upon how abortion has been written about in American fiction in the decades before and after the Supreme Court ruling in 1973. Kumar et.al. consider abortion stigma as a product of power structures in societies (Kumar, Hessini and Mitchell 634). They emphasize the issue of abortion stigma through statistical facts that show the frequency of abortions worldwide, thus enforcing the argument that abortion is a highly proliferated action all over the world, making the contrast between it's "normality" and it's stigma even greater.

To discuss the literary texts from such a perspective a definition of stigma is in order. Kumar et.al. rely on the definition of stigma suggested by the sociologist Erving Goffman; stigma is an attribute that reduces "in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman 3). Stigma exist in asocial context; "an attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another", a person who possesses a stigma has, Goffman argues "an undesired differentness from what we have anticipated" (Goffman 5). Kumar et.al. define abortion stigma as "a negative attribute ascribed to women who seek to terminate pregnancy, that marks them internally or externally, as inferior to ideals of womanhood" (628). Since definitions of womanhood vary from time to time, from society to society, the abortion stigma will vary accordingly they argue. Yet there are several common assumptions held about women and their "essential nature" and not only is abortion a challenge to such pre-constructed notions of womanhood, but it is also a challenge to

women's moral capacity to make judgments about life or death, as Kumar et.al state: "Power dynamics that underline abortion are part of an ideological struggle about the meaning of family, motherhood and sexuality" (628). The works of fiction in this thesis show how such an essentialist approach to womanhood is challenged by way of the abortion trope, I argue.

Yet abortion, unlike many other issues connected to the body, is most often something invisible and private, something that does not bring stigma and shame to the individual unless others discover it. Women risk judgment only in the case of confession or being caught red handed. According Goffman's definition of stigma visibility is key to the process of stigmatization, and this process is therefore complicated in the case of abortion, as it is not something that is immediately evident in a social interaction (50)— in other words, the stigma does not have to be visible in order to exist. This notion — that the stigmatized individuals, in this case women who have abortions, attempt to hide the stigma echoes Foucault's notion of self-policing. I argue that in many of the works chosen for discussion in this thesis, especially in *Revolutionary Road*, "The Abortion" and "Good People" there is a noteworthy element of such self-policing on the part of the women and men who either consider or go through with an abortion. No matter how private the experience is there is an element of shame felt by the woman - the protagonist in "The Abortion" for instance, a woman who is already a mother, but who feels the need to justify even the legal act of abortion to herself due to the dominant discourses of what constitutes a "good woman", or the male protagonist in David Foster Wallace's short story who proves how forceful religious convictions can contribute to self-stigmatization in the context of abortion.

Kumar et.al. claim first of all that stigma is created by over-simplifying complex situations, especially in the first stages of stigma production (629) — the first step, as Goffman points out, is to mark out human differences. As already mentioned, there are a multitude of factors at play in the stigma creation process — the determination of how acceptable an abortion is, such as individual characteristics, socio-economic situation, race, age, ethnicity and larger social regulation forces such as medicine, politics and economy. All these factors are somehow at play in the abortion narratives discussed in this thesis, for example the larger social regulation forces such as the ideals of femininity in America and Japan in *My Year of Meats* by Ruth Ozeki. Condit's research on abortion rhetoric can be aligned with Kumar et.al. findings especially when it comes to the earliest abortion narratives of the "good woman" — the aborting woman had to be in a certain socio-economic situation in order for the abortion to be tolerated by the public. The different factors considered in the creation of abortion stigma also show that the decision to terminate a pregnancy is contextual —not only the

culture the woman lives in but also the particular life that particular woman leads is an important aspect of that choice, the same woman can even find herself in two different life-situations, like Imani, the protagonist in Alice Walker's short story.

Kumar et.al propose a set of specific claims about how of how stigma is produced, that will illuminate how the stigma of abortion is still being reproduced in American narratives about abortion, even after the liberalization of the abortion laws in 1973. One is that the language of abortion is often used in a way that either does, or does not imply agency or responsibility to those involved in an abortion (Kumar, Hessini and Mitchell 631). Such autonomy can again be connected to the issue of fetal personhood. Kumar et.al point out that there has been a widespread use of anthropomorphism in the description of the fetus (631), a rhetorical device that strengthens the assumption that abortion is nothing but an act of violence upon an innocent life. As a result such notions are followed by metaphors of purity and innocence and then naturally their opposites – metaphors of brutality and sin (Kumar, Hessini and Mitchell 631). Like Judith Wilt, Kumar et.al consider the individual aspect, namely how abortion stigma penetrates the psyche of the woman, and how it affects their process in which they interpret, rationalize and make sense of their abortion.

Kumar et.al. attribute some of the changes in the construction of abortion stigma to the use of fetal imagery (emerged in the 1960's/70's) in the abortion debate, and thus attaching personhood to the fetus. They explain how this strategy has contributed greatly to the stigmatization of women who have had, or considered having an abortion. In my research I have come across several instances of literary imagery that evokes the strategies of the anti-abortion movement, but perhaps not to the same effect –among the few attempts of imagining the fetus in literature, none have the same effect as the picture of a fetus. With technology now able to provide a clear image of the fetus, making it something physical, and not only something that has to be imagined causes a change from the fetus being something ambiguous, an "Other", to being something that claims space in the woman's body. This is a prime example of the vocabulary of the public debate, being deeply entrenched in literature as well, and in the following chapter I will pay close attention to see whether the shifts described by Kumar et. al., Barbara Johnson and Celeste Michelle Condit, regarding the description of fetus are materialized in the language of abortion in the literary works in the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

WRITING PERSONHOOD AND ABORTION: AN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE IN LITERARY NARRATIVES ABOUT ABORTION

“Name is very first thing. Name is face to all the world.” (Ozeki 13)

“Can the very essence of a political issue – an issue like, say, abortion – hinge on the structure of a figure? Is there any inherent connection between figurative language and questions of life and death, of who will wield and who will receive violence in a given human society?” (Johnson 29)

2.1 Introductory remarks

The quote from Ruth Ozeki’s novel *My Year of Meats* illustrates the importance of words chosen to name not only people but also concepts such as prenatal life and abortion. Barbara Johnson’s questions above underline the importance of exploring the link between political rhetoric and literary language and imagery. The following chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the language of abortion; an in-depth examination of the rhetorical figures, the very words and grammatical constructions involved in the description of abortion and what is aborted. Based on such analysis and my interpretation I argue that the language used to talk and write about abortion has not been much affected by the liberalization of the abortion laws in 1973. It could be argued that the inability to evolve the language of the debate since the 1990’s has perhaps led to the stalemate that seems to characterize the abortion debate in the US today. In 2002 Linda Myrsiades described the situation as a “gentle semantic stalemate” indicating that in the latter years the mainstream debate has become more neutral, and even employs the same language although to achieve very different ends, as demonstrated through the pro-Life slogan: “Life, what a beautiful choice” and the pro-Choice slogan: “Choice, what a beautiful life” (Myrsiades 54). On the other hand, as I mention in the introduction, despite the literary narratives at hand echoing the pro-Life and pro-Choice language of the debate, there is considerable evidence of the narratives going beyond the rhetoric of the debate and they consequently contribute, I argue, to an attempt at decreasing tensions.

The discussion in this chapter revolves around a selection of literary works pre- and post 1973: “Hills Like White Elephants” (1927), *Revolutionary Road* (1966), *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* (1971), “The Abortion” (1971), *My Year of Meats* (1998), “Good People” (2007) and *A Book of American Martyrs* (2017). Attention will be directed to the passages in which abortion is contemplated, as the importance of definition becomes most

apparent there. An initial observation upon reading these texts was that the pre-*Roe* narratives about abortion are more metaphorical, almost poetic in their descriptions of abortion. Furthermore there is a reluctance to use precise definitions, as if the discourse of public opinion was not yet settled upon what defines a person in the years before *Roe*. In most of the literary works the term “fetus” is applied by medical professionals, or characters echoing professional language in order to achieve different rhetorical goals: coldness, distance or even irony. Narratives depicting abortion as a legal act, such as the second abortion described in Alice Walker’s short story “The Abortion” or the many mentions of abortion and vivid descriptions of its horrors as imagined by the Christian fundamentalist Luther Dunphy in *A Book of American Martyrs* are true to the vocabulary of the pro-Life side of the abortion debate, I propose. Legalization of abortion seems to have emboldened authors writing about the topic after abortion was no longer illegal, going beyond similes such as “let the air in” (Hemingway 53) or evasions such as “doing this thing” (Yates 218) to more graphic descriptions of the procedure. This, I argue, is a natural reflection of the time in which the narratives were written – during the aftermath of *Roe*. These narratives bring more attention to the public opinion on abortion and the conservative backlash following the Supreme Court ruling.

Another reality that the literary shift from metaphor to vivid imagery can be attributed to is the emergence of fetal imagery in the late 1950s and the ultrasound becoming a part of prenatal exams in the 1960s and the 1970s. My observation is supported by Kumar, Hessini and Mitchell’s research on the construction of abortion stigma, in which they attribute some of the changes in abortion stigma to the use of fetal imagery in the abortion debate and thus attaching personhood to the fetus (627). In my research I have come across several instances of literary imagery that evokes the strategies of the anti-abortion movement, not only by the religious fundamentalist Luther Dunphy in Joyce Carol Oates’ *A Book of American Martyrs*. This literary echo of the debate and its images does not however have the same effect – among the few attempts of imagining the fetus in literature, and furthermore, none have the same impact as the picture of a fetus, especially an aborted one. With technology now able to provide a clear image of the fetus, making it something physical, and not only something that has to be imagined, causes a change from the fetus being something abstract and ambiguous, an “Other”, to being something visible and physical that claims space in the woman’s body.

Condit examines the rhetoric of abortion in popular culture between 1973-85, namely abortion narratives told through television shows. She observes how “television portrayed a compromise of both vocabularies, but the practical, cultural compromise was somewhat

different from the legal-political one” (Condit 141). Like the images of the fetus, the television medium “helped translate the abstractions of political discourse into terms of real life practices” (Condit 141) but the TV-shows included both pro-Choice and pro-Life influences. Unlike vivid images of the fetus, the TV shows stayed away from a visual confrontation, in fact they stayed away from “articulating the grounds supporting the claims” of the pro-Life and pro-Choice side of the debate, as well as “philosophical or scientific arguments about the status of the fetus, or even coverage of the experience of having an abortion” (140). I claim that literature is partly similar, but also different from these TV shows. It is bolder, and through intricate grammatical constructions and careful word choices and metaphors, there is much more depth in the representations of this divisive issue. None of the narratives discussed here take a clear stand on one or the other side of the debate, but there is at least, I claim, an attempt at deepening and diversifying the discussion by addressing the question of the status of the fetus and personhood, thus making literary narratives an all the more important addition to the discourse about abortion in the US.

Barbara Johnson’s analysis of the language and grammar in poems about abortion is useful for the investigation of the changes in the very words used to describe the fetus or the abortion procedure itself. Johnson explores the notion of apostrophe in poetry – a literary device used to address a person or a thing that is absent, or an abstract idea. The one addressing the absent is giving it life, and by being addressed the absent is “made present, animate and anthropomorphic” Johnson writes, calling it a form of literary ventriloquism (30). I argue that when dealing with the topic of abortion in literature, the notion of apostrophe offers an interesting base for interpretation, as the absent may be an unborn child, the idea of the child born, its physical form that was, the fetus or the imagined form that will never be. The absent may be the mother herself, by aborting she alienates a part of herself, the absent may even be the abstract idea of motherhood. Johnson asks: “if apostrophe is said to involve language’s capacity to give life and human form to something dead or inanimate, what happens when those questions are literalized?” (33). She further asks “What is the debate over abortion about, indeed, if not the question of when, precisely, a being assumes a human form?” (33). As such she connects the issue of addressing the absent in poetry and in literature, to the issue of personhood.

A leading claim in this thesis is that the language of *Roe v. Wade* is vague and open to an interpretation that could benefit both the pro-Life and the pro-Choice argument. In the 1973 landmark Supreme Court decision the language is seemingly neutral, but scholars like Paula Abrams claim that the Court’s descriptions of prenatal life are tainted by moral

judgment (Abrams 318). The abortion debate has to a great extent been not only a clash of very different moral, religious and political stances; the abortion war is very much a war about the power of definition. The words that have been chosen to define not only “fetal personhood” but also “woman” are of main importance here. Abrams claims for instance that one way in which the language of the law reduces women to a “disembodied womb” is the Court’s use of the viability standard” – viability is defined in Roe as the point at which the fetus is “potentially able to live outside the mother’s womb” (311). This is interpreted by Abrams as a focus on the womb at the expense of the woman. She asserts that such a phrasing of the viability standard produces an image where the fetus is “disengaged” from the female body, rendering the woman whose womb it is irrelevant (311), or in other words relevant only as serving to nurture the potential life. Abrams states that “the woman is thus depicted as the grammatical and physical addendum to the fetus and reduced to terminology that denies her essential personhood” (312) exemplifying the impact that “grammatical packaging” of information about who did what to whom” (Cameron and Panovic 70) has on framing the issue of personhood that will be explored in this chapter.

The issue of personhood is a central one in the abortion debate and there is a strong disagreement among many as to what constitutes “life” and which life – the mother or the child – is the one with rights, and the battle between the opposing views is visible in the Supreme Court ruling. Abrams claims that The Court’s use of the term fetus defuses the conflict of rights when prenatal life is described as a “child” (318). Through the viability standard the Court marks the point where the state’s interests can take precedence over those of the woman (Abrams 627), and one could therefore say that when the fetus gains rights, the woman loses some of hers. There is, in other words, a separation between *the self* and *the other* expressed in the law and not only is this an ethical issue, but a linguistic one. I begin this chapter by addressing this issue in more depth through exploring the sections of the literary works that describe the process of considering an abortion. My aim is to shed a light on how abortion is talked about within the selected literature, in particular how the potential life is being addressed and how it is written –as the object or a subject of a sentence and whether or not it is presented as the agent, and ultimately a person who has rights.

2.2 Considering “it” – Deliberating Abortion and the Problem of Definition

Johnson states that “Even if the question of defining nature of “persons” is restricted to the question of understanding what is meant by the word “person” in the United States Constitution (...) there is not at present, and probably never will be a stable legal definition” (34), emphasizing that the issue of definition and fetal personhood is so profound that it most likely will remain unresolved. In the realm of literature there is no pressure to resolve this issue, allowing for variation in the imagination and definition of prenatal life. As I demonstrate below, the descriptions of prenatal life in some of the literary works range from “little shrimp” to “product of conception” (Ozeki 187, 351), and while some of the narratives do not mention prenatal life in any such way, this lack of address also carries a lot of meaning, I argue. What for example is the effect of referring to potential life as “it” as is done by the couple in Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” or referred to in the same manner by the protagonist of Alice Walker’s “The Abortion”? Does such a referential “it” function as an apostrophe when it addresses something absent in this minimalistic way? Does the “it” like an apostrophe give life to something abstract, something not yet materialized? Or is the referential “it” an attempt at distancing from reality? I propose that the “it” does all of the above. On one hand, it can be argued that the simplicity of the pronoun “it” with its neutrality, its avoidance of any sort of definition, not mentioning gender and not even quite implying humanity, provides a certain freedom for the writer – a freedom from making a moral judgment or being judged for taking a pro-Choice or pro-Life stance. On the other hand, “it” can provide freedom of interpretation to the reader in the context of abortion by treating it as a gap to be filled in by the readers’ imagination.

I would like to start the discussion by talking about Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” – the oldest abortion narrative discussed in this thesis and, I argue, the one that is linguistically most complex and interesting with regard to the discussion of personhood. A discussion of the language in Hemingway’s short story will also function as a springboard into the discussion of language in the other works and thus serve as a point of comparison. The ambiguous ending of Hemingway’s short story about an American couple that discusses an abortion has had readers filling in gaps for decades. It is also the only text discussed in the thesis that does not mention words such as *abortion*, *child* or *fetus*. Hemingway’s economical style makes the story a good starting point when addressing language, as every word is carefully weighed. Many scholars have discussed the symbolic meanings behind the details; the drinks they drink, the beads the girl touches, the setting; a train station in Spain with a

view of different landscapes on each side of the valley; one side barren, the other lush and fertile, looking like white elephants. I would like to focus on the way Jig and the American avoid using words connected to abortion.

“Hills Like White Elephants” is set in Spain - a strongly Catholic country, decades before abortion became legal in America. However, their being abroad does not make them at liberty to speak of abortion in a less covert manner. As Alex Link argues, the referent of the frequently used exophoric “it” in the text is usually the abortion and it suggests “both the intimacy of the couple’s relationship” and the unspeakability of that information (Link 72). In addition, as I discuss in chapter three, they have internalized the American society’s way of treating abortion as something taboo since they avoid saying the word even at a train junction in Spain, where they probably are the only two English speakers and unlikely to be understood. However, despite them being in a Catholic country and abortion being unlawful back home there is not much stopping them from terminating the pregnancy other than the fact that the procedure is illegal and taboo. The abortion is within their reach both practically and economically, but not, I argue, emotionally. This point aligns with Meg Gilette’s view on the matter as she argues that the problem the couple in “Hills Like White Elephants” faces is “not a material one, but a rhetorical one” (56). Gilette characterizes their discussion of whether or not to have the abortion as a “rhetorical competition and discursive negotiation” (Gilette 56). I propose that this is manifested in their inability to name the issue and thus put their relation to each other into words.

The title of the story itself is a simile and in the dialogue that makes up most of the text Jig likens the surrounding inanimate hills to the animate, yet metaphorical white elephants – the expression signifying something burdensome and unwanted. Like an apostrophe this likening serves to give life to the absent, most often interpreted as the unborn child, and I argue that her preoccupation with the hills suggests her wish for the two of them to become three. Alex Link’s analysis of the language pattern in “Hills Like White Elephants” confirms such an interpretation. He claims that the fact that the hills *are* like white elephants in the title, and not only *look like* them, indicates a comparison based on value rather than appearance (Link 67). However, I suggest that as Jig says that they “*look like* white elephants” (Hemingway 51, emphasis added) she does so because she wants to keep a distance from a “value based comparison” because the American could interpret it as a wish to have the child. This would be too bold a move as at this stage in their conversation Jig and the American are still tip-toeing around the subject as demonstrated through the plentiful repetitions of words and phrases.

The couple's dialogue is full of evasions as they attempt to keep the conversation superficial in order to "have a fine time" (Hemingway 52). Link suggests for instance that the frequent repetition of the lexical set describing drinking and liquor ("That's all we do, isn't it – look at things and try new drinks?" (52) is representative of their reluctance to discuss the subject (Link 70). I would argue, however, that even their use of pronouns shows that there potentially is more meaning to their elusive utterances. The very function of an indefinite pronoun is to refer to a noun that is not known, yet despite the pregnancy or the child never being mentioned in any other way than by way of indefinite pronouns and the pronoun "it", it is very much present in their conversation. Link views this in a similar way, as he maintains that it is the unborn child that may be the "possible referent for the substitutions "everything" and "anything" (71). I propose that by stressing the "*thing*" Link brings to attention that it is not "*anybody*" and therefore I argue that even though the idea of a child is present, there is still a reluctance to make it a substantial human presence in the conversation. Furthermore, the child or pregnancy is also described as "the only *thing* that bothers us" or the "only *thing* that's made us unhappy" (Hemingway 53, emphasis added) and by referring to a *thing* rather than a *body*, a *person* the couple avoid giving even grammatical life to the child.

However, there is agency and power given to the inanimate *thing* through the grammatical construct of the abovementioned quotes. Not present yet not quite absent either, the *thing* has the ability to make Jig and the American unhappy. In her analysis of poetry about abortion Johnson makes a similar point about apostrophe and claims that the fact that apostrophe allows one to animate the inanimate, the dead, or the absent implies that something is apostrophized, it is thereby animated, anthropomorphized, personified (Johnson 30). In the poem "The Mother" by Gwendolyn Brook, Johnson interestingly observes how in the very first line: "Abortions will not let you forget" Brook places "abortions" as a subject. Johnson argues that the syntax implies the anthropomorphic ability of the abortions to treat people like objects and creates a diffuse relationship between subject and object, or agent and victim, as "abortions" are being placed grammatically in control (32). Similarly in "Hills Like White Elephants" it is the unnamed *thing* that is put in the place of the subject, able to exercise influence over the lives of its potential parents.

While neither pregnancy nor any potential child is mentioned, there is mention of abortion. The use of indefinite pronouns and metaphors can be read as an attempt on the characters' part at shielding themselves from the impact the naming of the situation could have for their relationship, as they clearly do not agree whether to terminate the pregnancy or not. The American dares only to approach the subject by way of elusive descriptions. The

pronoun “anything” is frequently used in the text, most often by the man, with the effect of a negative connotation Link argues; “anything” being that which is neither wanted nor cared about, proving that he does not want a child. The American uses the pronoun “anything” to describe the abortion: “It’s really not anything. It’s just to let the air in.” and then proceeds to assure Jig that “It’s all perfectly natural” (Hemingway 53). At first it looks as if the American tries to reduce the abortion’s status of importance in order to defuse the tension between them. However, if one is to follow Link’s take on the use of the pronoun “anything” as something undesirable the American basically says the abortion is in fact the desirable outcome. This, I argue, is a covert but clear articulation of the American’s desire for the abortion to happen. The third person narrator describes Jig’s response after the man’s attempt at influencing the outcome of their talk in a breezy way; “The girl did not say anything” (53). I propose that this is not just a simple description of her silence; her unwillingness to “say anything” is her unwillingness to even say the word “abortion”, communicating quite strongly her reluctance to go through with it in an equally powerful way as the American expresses his wish for the opposite.

The American is unsuccessful in swaying Jig over to his side despite his knowledge about how the “awfully simple operation” is carried out. I suggest this is because she is not scared of the procedure itself, but what the termination of their pregnancy will do to them as a couple. This is evident as the large portion of the text is dedicated to them talking about what their life together would look like after the abortion, showing that they apply different meanings to the pronouns they use. The procedure itself is only ever referred to as “it” by Jig for example when she says towards the end “Then I’ll do it. Because I don’t care about me” (Hemingway 54) repeating the American’s “it” that for him is clearly synonymous with the abortion. On the other hand Jig is the only one of them who applies “it” to the potential child; “once they take it away, you never get it back” (55) she says, contradicting his reassurances that after the abortion they still can have “everything” (54). Also it is Jig who uses the more positively sounding *everything* most liberally in the text, for instance when she says; “And we could have everything and everyday we make it more impossible” (54). *Everything* is all that actually exists and is at stake for her; the child is everything, and it is what might be lost, along with their future as a couple.

Link notices that Jig says they can have everything while looking at the landscape she earlier likened to the white elephants, which in turn can signify the unborn child (Link 72). This particular placement of the character within the symbolic setting strengthens her counterargument following the man’s monologue about the safety of the abortion - she puts a

different outcome on the table. This is also confirmed by Link who points out that the moment she looks at “the white elephants” is also the point in the text in which the girl uses both “it” and “everything” most often and, I argue, most unambiguously. This, I propose, is the clearest example of the weight and magnitude both indefinite pronouns and the tiny pronoun “it” can carry and as Link puts it: “The text’s liberal use of an ambiguous, if not exophoric “it” allows the substitution to tie together such disparate ideas as the abortion, fetus, landscape, carriage of the pregnancy to term, white elephants and “having everything” into a cohesive text” (73). Even when the “it” is absent it is meaningful. Link points out that the “it” is not present in the last ten paragraphs of the story, and suggests that this indicates a resolution or at least a successful evasion without offering any suggestion as to which it might be (73). There are many interpretations of what is the result of the conversation, but if we accept that the child is “it” then the absence of it in the last part of the text may mean that an abortion is the outcome and that Jig meant what she said about not caring about herself, and therefore goes along with the man’s desire. If the “it” that is absent in the text signifies abortion however, the ending might be interpreted as the one favored by Jig, meaning that the American actually means it when he says he would do “anything” for her.

“Good People” (2007) by David Foster Wallace can be read as a modern version of “Hills Like White Elephants”. Wallace’s short story can be seen as a parallel to its 1927 counterpart as the lack of precise naming of either the procedure or the potential life in “Good People” shows that the literary language in newer abortion narratives does not necessarily mimic the debate. Nor does the ability to visualize the fetus in prenatal exams make post-1973 literature about abortion bound to describe the abortion with vivid imagery. I argue that both Hemingway’s and Foster Wallace’s style is a powerful conveyor of the magnitude of the issue of abortion and personhood, despite the words not being present in either of these texts. There are many likenesses between the short stories; the plot for instance is similar. In “Good People” we follow a couple - Lane and Sheri – sitting on a secluded picnic table in a park, and similarly to Hemingway’s story their surroundings do much of the talking. “Good People” is not as dialogue-heavy, however, as most of the conversation is indirect speech conveyed by a third person narrator. We also follow Lane’s inner monologue around the prospect of an abortion, his relationship to God and his feelings towards Sheri. The first indication of abortion appears when Lane reassures Sheri that “he’d go with her and be there with her” to which she responds that he would be in the waiting room, thinking about her but he “couldn’t be in there” with her (Wallace). Whether he cannot be there physically with her during the procedure due to some restriction set by the medical facility, or

whether it is his emotional inability to truly support her she is referring to, this exchange confirms the distance between them.

Abortion is only referred to as the “the appointment”, indicating that a decision has already been made and that a procedure has been scheduled. The decision has apparently been thought through:

“All the different angles and ways they had come at the decision together did not ever include it—the word—for had he once said it, avowed that he did love her, loved Sheri Fisher, then it all would have been transformed. It would not be a different stance or angle, but a difference in the very thing they were praying and deciding on together.” (Wallace)

This quote indicates that the process leading up to the decision does not include “it – the word” and what is absent here is love, I suggest. Had Lane loved Sheri and had he told her, they would perhaps not be discussing an abortion at all. This, I argue is a parallel to the lack of love and affection between Jig and the American. Neither Hemingway’s nor Foster Wallace’s couple is on the same page regarding the abortion or their relationship, nor are they able to communicate and describe their situation and emotions.

As I have argued earlier, the time and place in which Jig and the American discuss their situation renders the topic of their discussion taboo and so I propose, does Lane and Sheri’s religion. Their decision-making has been a secret: “Sometimes they had prayed together over the phone, in a kind of half code in case anybody accidentally picked up the extension.” (Wallace). Lane worries what might be if anyone found out about their situation. However, it is not clear whether he worries more about what people might think if they did go through with the abortion or if they had a child before marriage. The thing that they pray for is not specified and as already mentioned Lane believes that had he confirmed that he loved Sheri, they would be praying for something else – a healthy pregnancy and child. However, as they have decided to terminate the pregnancy what they pray for now is perhaps that the abortion remains a secret and that the sin will be forgiven.

I propose that Lane and Sheri seem to share the same language unlike Jig and the American, for whom the different use of pronouns and the different meanings of “it” is an obstacle. Besides “the appointment” the abortion is also referred to as “it”; “he knew if he was the salesman of it and forced it upon her that was awful and wrong” (Wallace) Lane tells Sheri. This shows that even though a decision has been made there is lingering doubt; “the appointment could get moved back” as “it was still so early in it” (Wallace) – “it” here signifying the secret pregnancy. Lane says he can understand if she is scared now that the

appointment is near and that “if she just said the word they could call and push it back to take more time to be sure in the decision” (Wallace). Yet for the majority of the text Sheri does not say any word, leaving Lane “waiting for whatever she might say to unfreeze him” (Wallace). However, Sheri is not the only one withholding words. Lane admits to himself that he is lying “*by omission*” (Wallace) - he is withholding information that might be crucial in the process of rethinking the abortion. The fact that he does not love her is significant for “were he to look right at her and tell her he didn’t, she would keep the appointment and go” (Wallace) - telling her so would make sure the abortion happened, thus the word “love” is equally taboo as “abortion”.

When Sheri breaks her silence, it is through the lens of Lane’s “moment of grace” in which he believes he sees himself and Sheri as Jesus saw them and describes what happens as Sheri finally speaks:

“This down-to-earth girl (...) would take and hold one of his hands in both of hers to unfreeze him and make him look at her, and she would say that she cannot do it. That she is sorry she did not know this sooner, that she hadn’t meant to lie—she agreed because she’d wanted to believe that she could, but she cannot. That she will carry this and have it; she has to.” (Wallace)

The switch from the use of present tense to the use of past tense is significant, I argue. The way in which “would” is used here gives the description of Sheri’s decision to keep the child a hypothetical or even prophetic overtone. The change of tense in the description of Lane’s “vision” therefore makes the ending ambiguous – even though Sheri seems certain at first, the tense undermines the finality of the decision as “would” can be used to describe something possible, but not necessarily real (“Would”). I propose that this grammatical shift creates a similar vagueness in the story’s ending, as the absence of “it” does in “Hills Like White Elephants”.

In the abovementioned quote Sheri also employs “it” twice – once referring to abortion and once to the child she wants to have. But she also says “this” - a determinative pronoun referring to things and ideas, sometimes used to indicate emotional distance. Conversely, it is also used when speaking of something that is near (as opposed to “that”) and I propose that the use of “this” in this case signals that for Sheri “this” is no longer just an idea or a thing. When we compare these two short stories there seems to be a shift from the more abstract “it” and “everything” used in “Hills Like White Elephants” to speak of the child to a more intimate address through the pronoun “this” in “Good people”, and it could be argued that this shift from the abstract to the close and substantial can be attributed to the

technology that allows Sheri to clearly see “this” child. For Jig the child seems to be as far away as the hills looking like white elephants. Her inability to envision the fetus within her leaves her only with metaphors and pronouns. For Sheri, on the other hand, the child is as near as can be - it is in her body – and even though she does not speak of it in any more direct way than Jig, it can be argued that Sheri’s use of “this” creates a stronger grammatical proximity between the woman and the fetus, which thus becomes not only a potential life, but an actual person.

2.3 “Doing this thing” - Potential Parents and Experiences of Abortion

“Good People” echoes many of the elements of “Hills Like White Elephants” including the absence of the word “abortion” and the prominence of pronouns as substitutes for all things taboo. David Foster Wallace’s story is an example of the way in which omissions in language continue after *Roe* – showing that despite legalization even the word “abortion” itself is not a necessary element of a narrative about abortion, thus contradicting the claim by Jeff Koloze that in American literary narratives after 1973 step-by-step descriptions of abortions have become routine (216). Nevertheless, in narratives written when abortion was illegal such as *Revolutionary Road* by Richard Yates and *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* by Richard Brautigan, the word “abortion” as well as the act, experience and aftermath of the abortion do appear in the novel. I argue that despite the presence of these elements these narratives are not meant to depict the horrors of abortion – even with April Wheeler’s abortion resulting in her death in *Revolutionary Road*. In case of Brautigan’s novel it can in fact be suggested that the abortion sets in motion a positive change for the characters involved. In chapter three I discuss the abortion aftermath – an element in abortion narratives that I propose is important when it comes to the discussion of personhood and the effects of the choices made when it comes to naming and personification of the fetus. For now, however, I turn to the decision-making parts as well as the descriptions of the experience of abortion in *Revolutionary Road*, *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*, “The Abortion” and *My Year of Meats* in which, I argue, the subject of abortion is written in a much more descriptive way, both before and after *Roe*, but the issue of personhood is still treated in an ambiguous manner.

April and Frank Wheeler in Richard Yates’ *Revolutionary Road* are thrown into an existential crisis as they ponder how they ended up as part of the suburban “strange little dream world of the Donaldsons and the Cramers and the Wingates” (Yates 111). Unhappy

with the turn their life took April and Frank plan a move to Paris to fulfill their dream of Frank becoming “somebody”, but the plan is interrupted by their third pregnancy. During the discussion of whether or not to terminate it, that makes up a large portion of the novel, they both refer to abortion as “doing this thing” (218) or “this abortion business” (231). This casual way of describing abortion is a peculiar contrast to the rhetoric they otherwise apply in their private abortion war. Believing he is “on the side of the angels” (217) Frank tries to convince his wife to have a third child despite her reluctance to be a mother of three, and as I discuss in the third chapter, her mixed emotions around motherhood in general. Yet Frank’s anti-abortion campaign seems to work as April begins to have “a slight embarrassed hesitation in her voice, and a distinct averting of her eyes whenever he spoke of the abortion as “doing this thing” (218). I propose that by denying the potential abortion a name they avoid tapping into what they are really panicking about, and they refuse to see that both terminating the pregnancy and having another child will change their plans for Paris.

The first time the word abortion is actually mentioned in *Revolutionary Road* is when April speaks to Frank about the first time she contemplated an abortion; “It was when I first got pregnant with Jennifer and told you I was going to- you know abort *it*, abort *her*.” (Yates 111, emphasis added). April speaks of wanting to abort a pregnancy that she ended up having and corrects the “it” to the object pronoun “her” as if she suddenly realizes that that particular pregnancy resulted in their daughter Jennifer. With the child born, it proves difficult to refer to the result of the pregnancy as “it”, their daughter’s existence forces the change of pronoun to specify that what April is talking about is a person, a girl – their daughter. However, when it comes to this third pregnancy there is no such address made by April, not even an “it”. This I argue is a tactic employed by April in order to convince Frank that it really is only a “thing” to be done before their departure for Paris, just like getting the plane tickets, and that it is not as he says “a criminal mutilation” (218) she would be committing. Frank’s language here is a stark contrast to that employed by the American who tries to convince Jig to have the abortion by assuring her that it is “simple”. Interestingly the roles are reversed in *Revolutionary Road* – it is April who wants the abortion and she makes an argument similar to that of the American describing the potential abortion as “the safest thing in the world” (218). The response her husband gives is “frowning and shaking his head, as if he’d been asked to agree than an ethical justification could be found for genocide” (218). Frank’s abortion stance echoes arguments made by pro-Life advocates (Myrsiades 44, 61) showing that even before *Roe v. Wade* the strong language of the debate found its way into literary narratives.

April cannot grammatically remove the attachment she has to the daughter she gave birth to, but she can distance herself from the pregnancy she carries now by not addressing the potential child. I propose that female characters contemplating ending their pregnancy in narratives when abortion was still illegal and after the Supreme Court legalized abortion employ similar tactics of distancing. April is already a mother of two and clearly does not want another child and neither does the protagonist in “The Abortion” by Alice Walker. Despite the singular form of the noun in the title the protagonist Imani, a mother of one, has two abortions; one she looks back on and one carried out during the course of the story. The contrast between these two abortions will be discussed thoroughly in the third chapter shedding light on the aspect of shame surrounding abortion. What is interesting to notice for the purpose of this chapter, is the lack of address and mention of any kind of a “child” or a “fetus” when speaking about the first abortion, which is described as a positive experience despite her passing out on the bus, having “hemorrhaged steadily for six weeks” (Walker 68) and not being well for a long time after. This lack of mention of any fetus or child, and sole focus on the experience of the woman is, I propose, the strongest of the juxtapositions between Imani’s first and second abortion.

After her second abortion Imani creates morbid images in her mind while she rests at the doctor’s office after her procedure. After the abortion is carried out to its “horrific end” (Walker 69) Imani thinks about how “Somewhere her child (...) was being flushed down a sewer” and how her actions have affected this *person*: “Gone all her or his chances to see sunlight, savor a fig” (70) thinking basically how she has stripped a boy or a girl the chance at enjoying a life. Even though Imani admits never to have used “the language of “fetuses” and “amorphous growths” (70) it is striking how far she goes in that vulnerable state in imagining, naming, and addressing the child, as if to punish herself. Still, she seems to be aware of her self-torment and says; “it was you or me, Kiddo, and I chose me” (70) in an attempt to justify the abortion. This direct address of the child as “Kiddo” – a playful, loving and intimate address, seems however to undermine this justification, proving how complicated the issue of abortion and personhood is for the mother, even though the decision is right for her.

In the same manner as an apostrophe functions in poems “Kiddo” addresses something absent, at the same time clearly establishing personhood, I argue. The direct address seems to settle the question of personhood in Imani’s case; she is aware that what was flushed down the sewer was a person. Johnson asserts that “Because the incredible tendency of language to animate whatever it addresses, rhetoric itself can always have

already answered “yes” to the question of whether a fetus is a human being” (Johnson 34). Thus, I propose, abortion is not represented as unproblematic in Walker’s short story as is seen in the protagonists’ negotiation of the situation in her mind; do her or her child’s rights weigh heavier? Imani mentions an earlier miscarriage and a tough pregnancy that “assaulted” her body (Walker 66) and concludes that having another child would kill her (65). Imani’s decision for a second abortion can thus be read, I suggest, as a feminist argument for abortion, based on the notion of self-defense. Some feminist scholars like Jane English argue that even if the fetus is considered a person it may pose a threat to a woman’s life, health and well being (English 237). She further claims that the self-defense argument supports the point that “the woman has a right only to be freed from the fetus” (English 238) in cases her life and health is threatened. It could thus be argued that anthropomorphizing and addressing the fetus, making it a person with rights, does not necessarily mean that this person’s rights are above those of the woman.

In Johnson’s discussion of abortion in poetry, the poems she analyzes all deal with abortion or miscarriage and in these poems apostrophe is used to foreground the question of motherhood and lost children (Johnson 32). On one hand Imani’s direct address of the aborted fetus, already physically detached from her body can signify an attempt at coming to terms with the abortion. Viewed from another angle, one where motherhood is regarded as a woman’s ultimate goal, this address of the child after the abortion can indeed be an act of self-punishment. Although she differs from Imani, the element of self-torment can also be found in Ruth Ozeki’s protagonist Jane Takagi Little in *My Year of Meats*. Jane becomes pregnant while directing a show called *My American Wife!* aimed at promoting American meat in Japan. As she creates images of perfect American families to be consumed by Japanese housewives she uncovers the unsavory side of the American meat industry. During her “year of meats” Jane considers both abortion and motherhood and towards its end she has a miscarriage, making this novel the only one in the selection alongside “Good People” where there is contemplation of abortion but the woman decides to keep the child.

Jane decides on motherhood even after some initial doubts about her body’s ability to carry a pregnancy to term, and about the relationship to the father of the child. The first mention of pregnancy occurs when Jane visits her mother in Minnesota. The mother confronts her bluntly about the pregnancy after seeing Jane vomiting; “Is the baby” Jane’s Japanese mother says and the protagonist comments; “She has never learned to speak English well and is particularly awkward with her articles and prepositions” (Ozeki 186). Yet Jane’s use of article is equally awkward when she confirms; “Yeah, it’s *a* baby” (186, emphasis

added) as if this was any baby and not the one inside her. She confesses to her mother that she is not sure whether she can “keep the baby” (188) and promises her mother; “Before I abort, I will tell” the father – Sloan, “just to see what he says” (193). The pronoun “I” as the subject of the action “to abort” here is significant, as I argue below.

The verb “to abort” occurs both in Ozeki’s post-Roe novel, Walker’s pre- *Roe* short story about both an illegal and a legal procedure, as well as in Yates’s pre-*Roe* novel. In the heat of the debate Frank claims April has a reluctance to bear children and attacks her with statistics; “you’ve had three pregnancies and you’ve wanted to abort two of them” (Yates 225). In this utterance Frank makes April the would-be agent of two abortions. In Jane’s case abortion appears as a verb with the “I” as the subject of the clause again making the woman the agent. Frank’s comment is meant to shame April, while Jane’s comment about wanting to see what Sloan says about the pregnancy indicates her insecurity about the situation even though she leads with the claim that she will abort. By saying “before I abort”, and not “if I abort” Jane suggests that the father’s opinion is not going to influence her agency in this matter. By reminding April of having wanted to abort two of his children Frank too addresses the issue of abortion as a woman’s choice over her own body. Walker’s protagonist Imani also applies the verb: “if she had wanted the baby more than she did not want it, she would not have planned to abort it” (Walker 66). Using the verb is a strong move in all of these cases, I argue, as it almost eliminates the doctor as a middleman, making the woman even more in control of the abortion. Frank Wheeler realizes that the situation is ultimately not under his control, long before April aborts their child alone in the bathroom. This example illustrates that the notion of a woman as agent and the sole decision-maker over her uterus, does not only occur after *Roe v. Wade*. April is determined not to become a mother for the third time and her case is an example that a woman does not need to be in a desperate financial or familial situation in order to be desperate for an abortion.

It is noteworthy that Jane’s utterance “Before I abort” lacks a grammatical object. It can be argued that this omission is intentional; as if she does not quite know *what* she intends to abort. However, the verb itself implies an object even if it is something absent, and thus it can be argued that the nature of the verb “to abort” itself makes the fetus the object. The grammatical structure Jane chooses shows her attempt to regain control of the situation. Until this point Jane has believed she is infertile; she and her ex-husband tried to conceive without success. Her uterus is deformed and she has a high risk of cancer; “That’s the thing about involuntary fertility – it kills your sense of a future, so you hide out in the here and now” (Ozeki 191) she says, and this quote explains her fear of attachment to the pregnancy or to

the child's father, prompting her to create an emotional barrier using words. Yet Jane is unsuccessful in detaching herself entirely from the pregnancy while she considers an abortion, and she is the only character in the works discussed here who actively imagines the fetus inside her womb: "the baby, a small bean by now, clinging by a slender root hair to such insubstantial soil" (Ozeki 199) even though she does not want to be thinking about it. "My baby" (213) she thinks to herself, suddenly owning the child, and then an abrupt turn occurs a few lines later as she thinks about not having told Sloan yet; "Why make a big deal about it when the problem would surely go away by itself?" (213) she asks, taking a similar approach to "it" - the pregnancy or the child - as "problem" as is done in *Revolutionary Road* or "Hills Like White Elephants". She believes that both her uterus and her life are "too unstable to support a child" (213) and despite all the tests showing that the pregnancy is going well Jane is certain that "the fetus would realize that its mooting was defective and just quietly slip away". Here, like in "Hills Like White Elephants" the fetus is given a certain amount of agency, yet Jane is still reluctant to give the fetus personhood as she compares it to a "little nut, like a cashew, with translucent, threadlike limbs" (213).

As she pushes the deadline for safe abortion she thinks about the fact that she has avoided to tell Sloan because she expected she "would abort, either spontaneously or deliberately" (Ozeki 225) even after an ultrasound, when she sees the fetus present in her womb. She fears telling Sloan: "I knew he would want me to abort, and I just didn't want to hear him say the words "You'll have an abortion, of course"", but as it turns out it is not about not wanting to hear the words, it is the fact that she realizes that her pregnancy "was no longer contingent upon him" (226) because the desire for a child from her past has been awakened by her "American wives and their brimming, child-filled lives" (226). It is only after this realization, that no matter what Sloan's reaction will be she will have the child that she dares to give the fetus personhood. While walking around a graveyard she reads names on graves and whispers them "testing them for sound, invoking their identities, trying them on the nascent son or daughter who had settled inside me" (230), allowing herself to look into the future far enough to see not only a human being, but a person, an individual with his or her own name.

Despite Jane's initial attempts at detachment thoughts of personhood prompt her to settle on motherhood; "I could have aborted a fetus without an identity, but once the fetus had punched through its own anonymity and made its small self known, abortion was no longer an option" (Ozeki 273) she admits, proving that names and definitions can be crucial for the outcome of the decision of whether to abort or not. As demonstrated above, not only does

Jane give the fetus personhood she also gives it free will – it is the fetus that “punches through”, it is the fetus that has the power to “go” or “slip away”. In the end, it is the fetus that enacts her fears and she has a miscarriage after an accident in a slaughterhouse. Jane is knocked unconscious by a freshly slaughtered cow on the kill floor and ends up in the hospital. Jane guesses what has happened; “It’s the *baby*” (345, emphasis added) she asks and Bunny, the American Wife who Jane is working with at the time of the accident, explains that “the *fetus* had... well, it had stopped growing. The miscarriage woulda happened sooner or later” (346, emphasis added) indicating that the miscarriage was not Jane’s fault - “it” had stopped growing.

Jane cries over her “thwarted progeny”, her “dead baby” (Ozeki 346-347) and in her anguish the language of pro-Life activists strengthens her self-torment. When Jane finds out the child would have been a boy the address of that child becomes more specific she now addresses what was lost as her son. The doctor says “It was ... would be a boy” – would, indicating something hypothetical, no longer in existence, gone. Jane blames herself for having exposed herself to toxic chemicals in the slaughterhouses and feedlots she has been filming in: “I didn’t care enough (...) I even thought about having an abortion” (347) and she goes even further in placing the blame on herself as she attempts to determine “the exact moment – *When did it happen, when did I let it die?*” (349). I propose that by placing herself as the agent the miscarriage is redefined and becomes a deliberate act – an abortion. By putting herself grammatically in control of the miscarriage Jane adopts the anti-abortion rhetoric in which “letting it die” is not far from murder.

Richard Brautigan’s novel *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* stands out among the novels discussed here as one with a more “gentle” representation of abortion, and it reads as a voice of solidarity with a woman’s right to choose. First of all, the openness with which the subject is approached, and the placement of a man as the narrator makes this a slightly subversive abortion narrative. Here, the potential father experiences the abortion of his potential child – an abortion decided and agreed upon by him and his girlfriend Vida. Where some of the male and female characters discussed earlier in this chapter distance themselves from the action through language, the male protagonist in Brautigan’s narrative takes an active part in the abortion, even though he does not accompany Vida into the room where the procedure itself is carried out and does not actually witness the abortion of his child. He waits outside the room closely observing other women coming in for the same procedure in the part of the novel entitled “My three abortions”. The title suggests that not

only does he not distance himself from the abortion, but he actively places himself in them through the possessive pronoun; he owns them - these experiences are now also his.

The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966 does not include a discussion of personhood or any address of the child as in “The Abortion” or in *My Year of Meats*. There is not even much of a debate around the abortion which “was arrived at without bitterness”, there is no hurried, dramatic necessity. They talk about having children in general, but never directly about the one inside her. Vida explains she is not ready for motherhood, although she wants children at a later point in life, but that “If you can’t give them the maximum of yourself, then it’s best to wait” (Brautigan 55). She concludes that for them “An abortion is the only answer” (55), thus making their pregnancy a problem, but not of the dramatic kind. Vida asks the narrator: “Do you know anything about this kind of business?” (55), using a similar language as April and Frank who do it to reduce the impact of abortion. However Vida’s use of the word “business” as a substitute for “abortion” seems to be less loaded with meaning than it is for the couple in *Revolutionary Road*. Vida continues to speak about her knowledge about how to obtain an abortion in which she actually uses the “a” word three times in a short paragraph (55). Treating the topic of abortion in such a manner, with the word out in the open and so frequently repeated does not however have the effect of trivializing abortion, I suggest.

There is a rhythm to the entire part of the novel entitled “My Three Abortions”; women see the doctor, are ensured they will be in “no pain”, they change clothes, they are put under anesthesia, metallic and surgical sounds follow, and then the young helpers of the doctor clean up the operation room. After each woman is finished a bucket is carried to the toilet, emptied and the toilet is flushed. In the chapter “My Third Abortion” we find the first and only use of the word “foetus”: “The boy came into the room carrying the bucket and he went into the toilet and flushed the foetus and the abortion leftovers down the toilet” (Brautigan 143). This abortion takes place after Vida’s and is described as being performed “automatically”, “like a machine”. During this last abortion the narrator witnesses the doctor is no longer talkative and there is a definite coldness to this abortion experience, much like they way in which Imani describes her second abortion, and she too imagines her child flushed down the sewer. I propose that similarly to Yates, Ozeki and Walker, Brautigan does not attempt to romanticize the act of abortion - whatever the reason behind it. As I discuss more thoroughly in chapter three, these are narratives in which abortion is a fact of life. I would argue that abortion is neither romanticized nor demonized, despite the fetus being personified to some extent in all these works of literature, either through direct address (“The

Abortion”, *My Year of Meats*), metaphorical references and descriptions (*My Year of Meats*) or meaningful evasions (*Revolutionary Road*).

We see in both pre- and post- legalization works that the language of the debate is present in the narratives, much of it echoing the pro-Life rhetoric. However, based on the works discussed here, I find that more often than not literature departs from the established discourse of the public debate as it was when the literary works were written, despite applying the harshest arguments of the debate. *My Year of Meats* for instance was written during a conservative backlash after legalization of abortion, when the language became more neutral and balanced (Myrsiades 54). Ozeki defies this neutrality and approaches the subject of female fertility and abortion with a bloody analogy of the meat industry. The fact that Richard Brautigan boldly puts the word “abortion” in the title of his pre-*Roe* novel *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* also supports this claim. Brautigan’s novel was written at a time where abortion narratives on the pro-Choice side of the debate were about abortion out of necessity – access was limited, and only in extreme cases (Myrsiades 47). Many scholars looking into abortion in literature discuss such narratives, yet I find that the instances of the not-so-extreme cases that I discuss here have been overlooked.

Neither the situation in “Hills Like White Elephants” or *Revolutionary Road* is an extreme case; neither Jig nor April is an “unfortunate” woman “victimized” by quacks and unlicensed butchers” (Myrsiades 47). In *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* the protagonist speaks of the decision as such: “The decision to have the abortion was arrived at without bitterness and was calmly guided by gentle necessity” (Brautigan 55), he even applies the 1950’s- 1960’s pro-Choice language of necessity, yet the necessity does not arise from difficult or tragic circumstances. Even with April’s illegal abortion at home that results in her death (and thus can be read as an argument for legalizing safe abortion) I propose that Hemingway’s, Yates’, Walker’s and Brautigan’s pre-*Roe* narratives are not depicting horrors of abortion, but rather they convey the complexity of the issue of abortion, choice and personhood through the complexity of language. As I argue in the following section, there is a change in the post-*Roe* narratives when it comes to the literary envisioning of the fetus in a post- legalization setting. Ozeki, Foster Wallace and Joyce Carol Oates prove that even with the U.S Supreme Court legalizing abortion and the new technology enabling to see the potential life, the issue of personhood is still difficult to grasp at and becomes perhaps an even more complex one to convey in literary narratives.

2.4 Fetuses, Doctors and Fanatics – Imagery and Language in Narratives About Abortion

As I mention in the introductory part of this chapter, the change in legislature was preceded by a development of technology that enabled doctors and potential parents to see the fetus within the womb. This affected the public debate to a great extent and, I propose, the way in which personhood has been constructed in literary narratives about abortion. Condit discusses the power of the visual aids for the public debate and claims that the combination of rhetoric and image gave the pro-Life advocates impetus and accelerated complex rhetorical tactics without which the pro-Life side of the debate would only have had an abstract argument – ultrasound footage provided concrete enactments of abstract values (Condit 81). There was now not only a verbal linkage between fetus and life but also a visual linkage that, I suggest, enabled those writing about abortion to explore the effects of the visual linkage on literary language.

Joyce Carol Oates closely examines the force of these images in her 2017 novel *A Book of American Martyrs*. Images of abortion are engraved in the mind of Luther Dunphy, a working class man struggling to support his family, who grieves his daughter with Downs Syndrome who died as a result of a car crash he feels responsible for. A devout Christian and a member of a group calling itself Army of God, Luther believes that abortion is the worst of sins. The 2017 novel is set in the early 1990's a time at which the mainstream debate became more muted but the "fringe elements" became more radical and pro-Life activism underwent a shift "away from the civil disobedience of clinic protests, sit- ins, lay- downs (...) and moved to clinic bombings and arson, and from there to the murder of abortion doctors and clinic workers" (Myrsiades 53). This shift is portrayed in Oates' novel that revolves around the family of Gus Vorhees - a doctor who works at a clinic that among other things provides safe abortions and is the target of such anti-abortion activism and the family of Luther Dunphy – Gus Vorhees' killer.

The sections of *A Book of American Martyrs* narrated by Luther Dunphy include graphic images of abortion and a rhetoric adopted through his church and his fellow Soldiers of God. Luther explains his motivation for the murder of Gus Vorhees as such; "as I hammered nails each blow of the hammer was a strike to the heart – *A baby is being hammered to death, a baby is being sucked out of its mother's womb, a baby is denied birth, a baby will die*" (Oates 13). The repetition of the word baby to the rhythm of each strike transforms these images into his mantra that ultimately inspires him to commit "justifiable

homicide” in what he considers to be a war - a necessary evil in order to defend the unborn (16). Here, Luther’s beliefs of what goes on at the time of abortion are enforced by images of fetuses in the womb. He does not seem to contemplate when a fetus ends and a *baby* begins, for him personhood is unquestionable and thus Oates’ character is an example of how such images “help envision material impacts of abstract policy arguments” (Condit 81) – for Luther and other stark abortion opponents the strength of the image overshadows any discussion of rights other than those of the unborn baby.

For Luther Dunphy personhood is a given due to the resemblance of the unborn fetus to a child that has been born. Luther describes his first encounter with such an image on the first page of a pamphlet in church; “a picture of a *little hand* you could see had to be the hand of an infant so small it had only just been born; or had not yet been born” (Oates 19). The photo illustrates the story of the Little Hand; in the middle of an abortion a tiny hand grabbed the doctor’s finger “and squeezed as if to cry I AM ALIVE! I AM ALIVE! DON’T KILL ME, I AM ALIVE!” (20). The mother kept the child and the “miracle of the Little Hand” (20) turned the abortion doctor and Luther Dunphy into a defender of the “defenseless” (21). The fetus is called Little Hand – it is given a name through the capitalization of the letters describing the parts of the body visible on the image that is crucial for the story. In this pro-Life argument the agency of the fetus is highlighted – the doctors’ “bloody instruments” (21) are nothing against the child’s will to live.

The imagined exclamation of the Little Hand is meant to signify the self-consciousness of the fetus, a criteria for personhood according to scholars such as Michael Tooley, who argues that if self-consciousness means that a creature is aware of itself as a “continuing subject of experiences and other mental states” (Tooley 67) then the fetus is not a person as it does not possess such an awareness. Pro-Life arguments such as the story of the Little Hand clearly disagree with this notion. Furthermore as technology provides images and “the “child” is introduced in a presentation that “shows” the baby already autonomous” (Myrsiades 70) pro-Life activists can go beyond simply addressing something abstract; the fetus is no longer only imagined and can more easily be anthropomorphized and given a voice of its own, making the anti-abortion argument all the more persuasive.

An attempt by pro-Choice activists to reverse this development of the debate is to hold on to the term “fetus”. Gus Vorhees’ daughter Naomi remembers how during their childhood, she and her siblings were introduced to a variety of complex concepts such as adoption and abortion, in a neutral, politically correct fashion by their parents. Oates addresses this when Gus’s daughter recalls a childhood conversation with her brother about

what their father does for a living. She asks whether “Daddy kills babies” and her older brother laughs at this and says that “that wasn’t what they called them” (Oates 143). Naomi does not understand who “them” or “they” are. Her older brother is clearly already more aware of the two sides of the abortion war, and what the proper definition “they” on the pro-Choice side – the side of their father should apply: “They call them *feet-ussers*, stupid” (143), he explains to his sister. Here Oates shows how deeply rooted abortion rhetoric is rooted in the American consciousness; even children are aware of the distinction that is made between these two concepts. However, Naomi as a very young child does not fully grasp the difference as she wonders “what was “them” (143), unconsciously pondering personhood. Gus Vorhees instructed his children “never to read anti-abortion propaganda” (Oates 238). His son, Darren, asks him why, but does not get a satisfying answer from his father who tries to spare his children from seeing their father’s name on the top of a “Wanted: Baby Killers Among Us”- list (240). “*The enemy. Anti-abortion activists. Threats. Ugly images. Just ignore*” (239) – the words of his father seem to be like a mantra to Darren. The exposure of children to the issue of abortion in *A Book of American Martyrs* is, I suggest, an interesting way to shed a light on the tactics of the pro-Choice side, that despite attempts at depersonalization of the fetus, is ultimately unable to escape the issue of personhood, especially after exposure to images of fetuses in the womb.

Ultrasound images make two ways of framing anti-abortion arguments possible; one is “the desecrated fetus, the fetus of dismembered or reassembled fetal parts” (Myrsiades 70) – an image meant to shock, and the image of the fetus intact meant to “inspire reverence or awe” (70) with its resemblance to a born child, such as the Little Hand. In the literary narratives discussed here there are only a few instances of the fetus imagined. In his mind Luther Dunphy clearly evokes the anti-abortion movements’ use of fetal imagery, but I propose that there are other instances in literature that demonstrate that one does not need to be a Soldier of God in order to have the two abovementioned images etched into ones consciousness.

After her miscarriage, Jane in *My Year of Meats* asks to see her “baby” and the doctor answers; “The fetus was removed yesterday” and “All the products of conception are immediately incinerated” (Ozeki 351). This exchange displays an almost darkly comical contrast between the grieving would-be mother and the medical professional. The situation is not made better by the doctor assuring Jane in an unprofessional fashion that it is “all spick-and-span inside and nothing got left behind -- ” (351). The doctor’s emotionless professional language, and his comical attempt to lighten the mood, has the purpose of avoiding both the

image of the desecrated fetus and the whole child. Yet the use of the indefinite pronoun nothing implies that there was a *something*. Jane, on the other hand, immerses herself in both these images and asks the doctor; “You mean, like an arm or something?” (351). I propose that in referring to a specific limb Jane performs a verbal partition of her baby, speaking of parts she implies a whole entity, an intact fetus. At the same time she is evoking the images of a slaughterhouse and butchered animals – images and language often applied by pro-Lifers such as Luther who refers to abortion as a “slaughter of the innocent” (Oates 88).

Furthermore, there is an image that evokes this phrase in *My Year of Meats*; in one of the slaughterhouses she films the documentary in, Jane sees an aborted calf fetus on the floor. The image is vivid; the calf with “tiny hoofs” like “little hands” is lying there, forlorn, with maggots in its eyes (Ozeki 314). It has been aborted due to Lutalyse a chemical toxic to humans, that enhances growth in cattle, and that also has the effect of abortion in a pregnant cow. As Jane realizes she has been exposed to the Lutalyse a direct connection is formed between the fetus inside her and the calf; in her subconsciousness the two unite, and in a dream Jane gives birth to a dead calf. Throughout the novel Ozeki uses a language that likens women to cattle. This I argue can be connected to the de-humanizing language that Abrams argues is to be found in *Roe v. Wade* (311): women and cattle are reduced to their body parts – pieces of meat. One must not think about the whole animal in order to consume meat with good conscience. In the same way it can be argued that by reducing woman to a “mere body” (Bordo 76) making women carry children even though they have no wish of becoming mothers becomes easier. Like the desecrated fetus is used to visualize the gruesomeness of abortion, and is therefore avoided by the pro-Choice side, the parted animal is the preferred way of approaching consumption of meat, as the image and the idea of an animal – for some inspiring awe and reverence like the wholesome fetus – would be harder to swallow. Thus, even though there is no abortion in *My Year of Meats* this brutal metaphor of the aborted calf fetus lends support to the argument that the language of a post-*Roe* narrative that deals with the choices between motherhood and abortion, the imagery is more vivid, yet still hesitant to actually write an abortion.

The notion of the “desecrated fetus” (Myrsiades 70) is also implied in *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*. There is mention of a “nothing left” in the “vacant stomach” of Vida, implying that there was a something, the adjective “vacant” hints at an occupant that is now gone (“Vacant”). The word “empty” is frequently repeated in the chapter entitled “My First Abortion” in which it is Vida and the narrator’s child aborted, and the presence of the absent is stressed through this repetition, I argue. Before the “excellent” (Brautigan

137)procedure is carried out the Mexican doctor assures the couple: “No pain, no pain and clean, all clean, no pain. Don’t worry. No pain and clean. Nothing left. I’m a doctor” (133). The repetition of these phrases reminds the narrator of a nursery rhyme. Dr. Garcia repeats the phrase to the other women at the clinic, and the repetition of the word “pain” makes the word almost lose meaning, or at least prompts the question whether it is physical pain or emotional pain the doctor speaks about, and perhaps even, who experiences the pain and who does not.

The issue of personhood and how it is expressed through images and slogans of the debate, as well as the thoughts and actions of the literary characters discussed here, is a crucial part of how the discourse of abortion is conducted in the public and the literary realm, I argue. Even the female characters in narratives after legalization of abortion are to a certain extent affected by the imagery of the pro-Life argument, despite the advancement of the woman’s right to choose, represented through the new federal law. Imani is aware that “There were people who thought she had no right to choose herself” (Walker 70) and seems to punish herself with the image of her child flushed down the sewer. It can be questioned whether these women believe in their own right to choose or whether the images of fetuses and dead babies have rendered them incapable of fully getting behind their choice. It is also interesting to ask then why the children of Gus Vorhees are instructed not to pay attention to what “the enemy” says? Consequently, it can be argued that the power of the image and descriptive imagery creates a strong, emotional argument, making it hard to explain and justify an abortion even if it is a lawful one. Combined with the language of the 1973 Supreme Court ruling that does not entirely support a woman’s right to make choices about her body is, as I discuss in the following chapter, a problematic tendency that continues in the American society and is reflected in literature even after *Roe v. Wade*.

2.5 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter I set out to find differences between the pre and post *Roe v. Wade* narratives when it comes to the descriptions of abortion and to see whether there are any differences in how the issue of personhood is approached. I ask whether it is the change in legislation that has allowed writers to be bolder in their descriptions? Or perhaps the fact that there is no need to imagine the fetus inside the womb anymore has enabled writers to be bolder in writing about abortion? I propose that both the legalization of abortion in 1973 as well as the development of ultrasound technology has helped lawmakers, the public and

fiction writers alike, to move into the symbolic realm of language (Wilt 6) when it comes to the topic of abortion.

The 1973 Supreme Court decision is unclear on the issue of personhood and the legal status of the fetus. As I discuss in this chapter, this unwillingness or inability to define can also be found in the literary narratives, both before and after *Roe v. Wade*. The purpose of the literary works discussed in this thesis is not to resolve the issue of personhood. However, as abortion is a part of all these narratives in one way or the other, all these works do address the issue of personhood to some extent. In addition, I would argue that after 1973 it seems more difficult not to address the absent with the prenatal images so readily available, and therefore there is a shift to more vivid imagery after *Roe v. Wade*, I suggest. The images used as arguments in the abortion debate, especially by the pro-Life side, have clearly seeped into the imagination of the American public, as is represented by several of the characters in the literary works discussed in the chapter. Consequently, one can say that there has been a move from the imagined to the symbolic – from “letting the air in” to “criminal mutilation” or the analogy of the aborted calf.

Koloze claims that American abortion narratives are far more detailed than their Canadian counterparts, and that by the mid- 1980’s abortion depiction becomes not merely routine, but a moment of philosophical speculation (216). There is undoubtedly an aspect of such “philosophical speculation” – the nature of the issue of personhood almost demands such a speculation, and many of the characters discussed here engage in such speculation. However, I disagree with Koloze in that abortion depiction is routine, at least in the level of detail of that depiction. *A Book of American Martyrs* goes furthest in describing an actual abortion procedure, interestingly always in the imagination of a troubled man who regards abortion as the worst of sins and who’s beliefs rely on this kind of imagery. However, as I have demonstrated, there is much evidence to the contrary. Abortion is only considered in “Good People” and like Luther, Lane considers it a sin, but does not embrace such imagery. The work with the highest amount of abortions actually happening in the novel is *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*, here Brautigan truly describes abortion as a routine. “The Abortion” the description of a legal procedure is not that detailed either, even though its aftermath is described as painful for the woman. There is no abortion but a miscarriage in *My Year of Meats* and the only abortion happening is not human but a calf fetus. The analogy and the image of the calf is detailed and grotesque, but it serves a different purpose than to convince about the horror of abortion. It is rather to shock the reader by sidelining the treatment of women and cattle and to emphasize the patriarchal approach to female fertility.

Myrsiades argues that the “unwillingness to use the “A” word” in the public debate in the 1990’s “created doubt and raised questions about the word’s potential “unspeakability” (Myrsiades 52). The absence of the key word is peculiar, however it can be seen as part of the “neutralization” of the debate and its language. There is a slight difference in the literary narratives before and after *Roe*. The word “abortion”, even the verb “to abort” is a more integral part of the discourse after 1973, and used more freely by Oates and Ozeki. Furthermore, there are also examples of the word “abortion” used in narratives before *Roe*. Walker describes a legal abortion experience before *Roe*, and in *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* the narrator uses the word frequently, treating the word as a natural part of his vocabulary, and the act itself as a natural part other life. Conversely, Frank Wheeler in *Revolutionary Road* uses the word almost like an insult, suggesting at the unspeakability of abortion. The same is suggested by the omission of the word in “Good People”, where the narrator’s religious beliefs render the use of the word taboo. All these examples imply that the unspeakability of the words connected to abortion is something that carries on throughout the decades both before and after *Roe*. Even though the literary narratives often depart from the path of the established discourse, they demonstrate, as I discuss in the following chapter, that the changes in technology, law and public discourse have not much altered the situation of the woman when it comes to her experience of abortion and shame.

CHAPTER THREE

ABORTION STIGMA IN AMERICAN LITERATURE BEFORE AND AFTER *ROE V. WADE*

“The 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision synthesized the pro-choice and pro-life perspectives in a ruling that rhetorically accepted the principle of the life potential of the fetus but not its humanity, or personhood, and accepted the characterization of motherhood as a potentially oppressive social role for women but without accepting a woman’s absolute right to choice” (Myrsiades 48).

3.1 Introductory Remarks and Theoretical Perspectives

The quote by Myrsiades points out how the 1973 Supreme Court ruling avoids settling the matter on personhood but also on the woman’s right to choose. By comparing literary narratives before and after *Roe v. Wade* I intend to demonstrate that this compromise between the pro-Life and pro-Choice stances did little to reduce the stigmatization of women who seek abortion in the US. The representations of abortion stigma in literature, and the notion of stigma will thus be discussed in light of the changes in legislation in 1973. I rely on the interpretation of *Roe v. Wade* that scholars like Linda Myrsiades, Paula Abrams and Celeste Michelle Condit adapt, namely that the Court did not fully acknowledge a woman’s right to choose. Abrams argues like I do, that the legalization of abortion did not eliminate the stigma surrounding abortion and claims that “the backlash against legalized abortion suggests an enduring legacy of stigma” (300). It can be argued that the language of abortion in *Roe v. Wade* and subsequent rulings on abortion continue to express deeply entrenched stereotypes that are essentially misogynist and patriarchal, stereotypes that “allow female sexuality only for procreation, identify women as mothers, and expect nurturing and self-sacrificing behavior” (Abrams 299). Such set ideas result in the shaming of women who become pregnant outside the socially acceptable framework of marriage, and to abortion being associated with promiscuity, criminality and prostitution.

In the previous chapter I explored the very words used to describe abortion and the linguistics of defining personhood in the literary works. In this chapter however, I would like to bring attention to the way in which the narratives are constructed; the setting, imagery and structure. I propose that it is particularly interesting to investigate the way in which the aftermath of abortion is described and how this particular part of the narratives affects the perpetuation of abortion stigma. Wilt argues that “no novelist can resist the insistent pressure to provide some kind of aftermath for an abortion” (Wilt 4). Is this choice of how to end

literary narratives about abortion influenced by the changes in the abortion debate that again is influenced by the changes in legislation? Wilt states: “If the pregnancy narrative ends before birth, even by accident but especially by choice, it leaves two ghosts in its wake: the ghost of the child (...) and the ghost of the self” (5), echoing the argument of the pro-Life movement; being haunted is the price for the choice that is made. I argue that this implies a need for a text in which abortion and choice is present, to provide some sort of closure to make up for what is “lost” in the sense that every maternal choice implies some sort of psychological loss as Wilt claims. In Ruth Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats* for instance, the aftermath of Jane’s miscarriage reads almost as if it is supposed to make the reader feel better about the loss of the child the protagonist was insecure about having at first, and then ended up wanting. After miscarrying Jane does not lose the affection of the child’s father and she ends up contemplating adoption; thus motherhood is not off the table. Such an aftermath can be read as reaffirming the patriarchal view of motherhood. Wilt essentially argues, that no matter what side of the debate, the debate about abortion itself originates in the search for the “lost territory” of the mother (7). If we apply this argument to the discussion of abortion does it not pave the way for women who seek or have abortions to feel ashamed?

If the landmark decision on abortion only barely protects women’s right to choose through a language that pays homage to both sides of the fierce debate, there would seem to be little hope of literature being able to serve as a bridge between the entrenched camps on each side of the debate as Myrsiades claims it can (Myrsiades x, xi). I explore whether there has been a significant change in the way women and men in “Hills Like White Elephants”, *Revolutionary Road*, *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*, “The Abortion” and “Good People” relate to their situation. These works of literature demonstrate how the legislation did little to lift the burden off the shoulders of women who chose to abort. Even though the public discourse around abortion has undergone some changes due to the liberalization of abortion laws, I argue that the description of stigma felt by the characters in these literary narratives remains pretty much the same. I propose that it is the internal, felt stigma in particular, experienced by the female characters that remains unchanged, and furthermore, that it is magnified in the post-*Roe v. Wade* narratives. Such a shift is slightly ironic, as while the public stigmatization arguably diminished, the women who abort seem to become their own worst critics. Such an interpretation strengthens the theory that internal stigma is a strong force and it prompts the question whether illegal abortion had one slight advantage; being allowed to remain hidden – from the law, social scrutiny, and one’s own self-judgment.

Kumar et.al. define abortion stigma as “a negative attribute ascribed to women who seek to terminate pregnancy, that marks them internally or externally as inferior to ideals of womanhood” (628). Since definitions of womanhood vary from epoch to epoch and society to society, abortion stigma varies accordingly, they argue, and are expressed differently in cultural artifacts such as literary narratives. There are several common assumptions held about women and their “essential nature” and not only is abortion a challenge to such pre-constructed notions of womanhood but it is also a challenge to the assumptions about a woman’s moral capacity to make judgments about life or death. As Kumar et.al state: “Power dynamics that underline abortion are part of an ideological struggle about the meaning of family, motherhood and sexuality” (628), and that the literary texts at hand demonstrate how such an essentialist approach to womanhood is challenged by the abortion trope.

According to Goffman’s definition of stigma visibility is key to the process of stigmatization - a process complicated in the case of abortion, as abortion is not immediately evident (Goffman 50). However, stigma does not have to be visible in order to exist, as is demonstrated in both pre- and post-*Roe* narratives. The notion that the stigmatized individuals, in this case women who have abortions, attempt to hide the stigma echoes Foucault’s notion of self-policing. The internal/external stigma dichotomy is a way to further nuance the main argument of the chapter that shame remains the same, even after liberalization of abortion laws in the US. A central point in the analysis of the literary narratives will therefore be the language in the parts of the narratives in which women who consider, or go through with abortions are shamed or practice self-policing. Instances of both internal and external stigma and the language used to describe it will be discussed in light of the so-called landmark US Supreme Court decision of 1973. I say “so-called” as some scholars are unwilling to assign *Roe v. Wade* a “worldmaking” power (Dolin 12), and I argue that the fact that abortion stigma is unaffected by changes in the legal foundations of society in the works of literature confirms this very point.

Benyon-Jones applies discursive psychology in order to show how women describe their own experiences of abortion, and some of her findings are relevant for the discussion of abortion stigma in literature. She grounds her analysis in a post-structuralist approach to the discussion of abortion and stigma, and claims that such an approach facilitates an understanding of stigmatization as “reproducing social relations of power that depend on the differentiation of “normal” from “deviant” identities through discourse” (Benyon-Jones 227). Identities are created through the speaker’s use of language but such a creation, which is a continuous process, is also dependent upon the context it evolves in. Such an approach can

facilitate a better understanding of how the articulation of the abortion experience as represented in fiction has changed when the context – the law, changed in the US in 1973.

Because of the biological incapacity of men to bear children, many feel that the issue of terminating a pregnancy should be decision made by a woman about her own body, yet the short stories and novels discussed here demonstrate that in reality it rarely is solely a female issue. The selection of primary literature therefore includes texts that offer a male perspective on abortion. Regardless the gender of the focalizer, abortion is to some degree negotiated between the sexes in all these narratives. Myrsiades ponders “whether the male perspective of abortion is gendered” and finds in her examination of poetry about abortion that there is “considerable differentiation” among the views of male poets and male characters (Myrsiades 136). In my discussion of two male narrators written by two male authors in the last section of this thesis, I find this to be true. I argue that both male and female perspectives reveal the entrenchment of norms associated with both genders, and that abortion as a trope highlights the inequality between the sexes. The discussion of abortion stigma in this chapter will consequently touch upon a discussion of femininity and masculinity. A similar point is made by scholars such as Kumar et.al who stress how gendered the issue of abortion stigma is, and Siân M. Benyon-Jones whose research on how women speak of their abortions portrays the gendered nature of the issue.

Several scholars focus on the notion of “good women” when discussing the way in which abortion debate has been conducted in the US. Celeste Michelle Condit’s research on abortion rhetoric can be aligned with Kumar et.al. findings when it comes to the earliest abortion narratives of the good woman. In the decades before the legalization of abortion, a good woman was the equivalent of a good mother and in order for an abortion to be socially acceptable and “for a broad public to feel sorry for the agent” of abortion a woman had to be depicted as ““good”, or, at the least unable to control her own destiny” (Condit 25). The different factors considered in the creation of abortion stigma also show that the decision to terminate a pregnancy is contextual –not only the time and culture the woman lives in, but also the particular life that particular woman leads is an important aspect of that choice. The same woman can even find herself in two different life-situations like Imani, the protagonist in Alice Walker’s “The Abortion”. I propose that when speaking about abortion, the notion of “good women” is closely connected to the stigmatization of abortion and women who consider or go through with it, because when they abort they stop being “good”.

The 1950’s prochoice rhetoric constructed abortion in fairly limited and extreme terms; as a horrible experience that happened on limited occasions, only when it was utterly necessary

and due to socioeconomic distress (Myrsiades 47). These arguments for legal abortions were presented as narratives in which happily married women were making a choice for and not against motherhood by aborting. Their abortions were justified, but the brutality of the abortion world was not. The narratives were constructed around innocent women who were incredibly unlucky - by little fault of their own, and the world of illegal abortion - where the women fell prey to evil abortionists, was demonized through images of disease and death. Such narratives constituted the base of the argument for legalizing abortion, but did not reflect reality as “90 percent of illegal abortions involved married women and were conducted by doctors using sterile procedures” (Myrsiades 47).

The prominent pro-abortion narrative in the 1960’s was reshaped from desperate “good women” and away from extreme cases to justify the action. The argument now made was for a woman’s general right to abortion. With second wave feminism and the campaign for equality between men and women, also regarding reproductive rights, the argument for legal abortion shifted from the comfortable “family value”-reasons to demanding a woman’s right to choose. In the early 1970’s this pro-Choice argument went further and rejected the dominant role of women as mothers in addition to a call for a woman’s right to control her own body (Myrsiades 48), directly challenging social conventions and values based on family. At the same time the pro-Life side used the technology of fetal imagery to their advantage, strengthening their argument by likening the fetus to a child and generating abortion stigma by equating abortion with murder (Abrams 318).

As I mention above scholars argue that the US Supreme Court decision in 1973 is not much else than a compromise between the opposing sides of the abortion debate (Myrsiades 48, Condit 103-105 and Abrams 294). *Roe v. Wade* by no means ended the abortion wars in the US. In the years after *Roe* there was a call for moderation and a more complex approach to the issue of abortion. Moderate pro-Life activists used an ambiguous language of “reducing the number of abortions”, saying nothing about women’s rights while the pro-Choice camp experienced difficulty as it alienated some women by advocating for a departure from traditional motherhood. Arguably the weakness of the pro-Choice argument compared to the visual arguments of the pro-Life side contributed to the perpetuated abortion stigma as “millions of Americans who want to support abortion as a legal right (...) still need to condemn it a moral iniquity” (Myrsiades 53). Nevertheless, extremist pro-Life actions and war-like pro-Choice rhetoric are still present (53) despite the debate language being less confrontational, suggesting that the views of the opposing sides are as entrenched as ever.

The evolvement of abortion language of the American debate goes to show, that even though abortion was liberalized and the discourse became more moderate, abortion stigma has prevailed, aided by the rhetoric of both sides. Paula Abrams shows how the abortion debate is reflected in the language of decisions of the US Supreme Court, and argues that the language of *Roe* is an important part of the dominant discourses that perpetuate abortion stigma, discourses that I argue the works of fiction explored in this chapter both reflect and challenge. Abrams' claim that decisions subsequent to the 1973 ruling have become more and more "ambivalent about a woman's right to choose" or express "clear efforts to de-constitutionalize the right" (294) underlines the point made earlier; that the fight for women's right to choose was not nearly over with *Roe* and is contested up to this very day.

Abrams focuses on the connection between the vocabulary and narratives in the Supreme Court rulings on abortion, and the decisive role language plays in social movements where the battle of opposing views is a battle for terminology and dominance over the forming of public opinion. Some narratives have been successful due to their persuasive value; such as the 1950's movement that promoted the narrative of illegal abortions and the "good" victim of the abortion underworld (Abrams 297). When it comes to vocabulary, both pro-Life and pro-Choice arguments reduce the complex issue of abortion into clear cut paradigms such as "choice/life, woman/mother, fetus/baby, abortionist/physician, dignity/murder" (Abrams 297) these so-called "ultimate terms", "hysterical terms" immediately provoke emotional responses in the public, and become parts of official documents that perpetuate these emotions.

A closer look at the rhetoric of *Roe v. Wade* reveals that the Court did not stress the woman's right to choose but rather stated that the right to privacy, meaning freedom from unwarranted government intrusion into significant personal decisions such as a woman's decision to terminate her pregnancy (Abrams 323). Yet, the right to terminate a pregnancy is different from other privacy rights because the Court separates abortion from other privacy rights due to the presence of prenatal life in the form of an embryo and later a fetus, and this difference restricts the meaning of the right to choose (324). It is through phrases such as "the pregnant woman cannot be isolated in her privacy" that the woman becomes passive due to the state and the physician being given prominence and authority (324). Furthermore the fact that even during the first trimester, that supposedly private time prior to state interference, the decision "must be left to the medical judgment of the pregnant woman's attending physician" (303), exemplifies how the law presents the woman primarily as a passive recipient of medical judgment.

The choices in language in the Supreme Court rulings such as *Roe v. Wade* make them not only a legal judgment, but also “a moral assessment that in turn shapes public discourse”. Specific roles are being created in the language of the law, and in these narratives it is either *the woman* or *the baby* who plays “the leading role”. The woman is sometimes just that – a woman, or is sometimes addressed as *the mother*, which is often followed by the less neutral use of *child* and *baby*. The naming is significant: if the woman who seeks an abortion is a *mother* such a narrative conveys an anti-choice stance (Abrams 302). The *woman*-narrative is more complicated Abrams states, because a *woman* can be an active figure; she has autonomy and deserves dignity. On the other hand, the *woman* can become a “pursuer of convenience” when compared to the *mother* (302). The active woman is thus either autonomous or selfish, but she can also be made a passive figure, incapable of making her own decisions as a “vulnerable social being”. Yet, such a description is still preferable to dehumanizing language that reduces the woman to mere body parts such as “womb” and “uterus” (302). Such a blatant reduction of women to what Susan Bordo refers to as “mere body” (Bordo 76) makes the woman a passive object in the language of the law.

In the following close reading of the works of fiction I argue that most of the novels reflect the abortion stigma’s unchanged predominance in society, as seen in the law and public debate. However I also propose that the works of fiction discussed in the thesis contest the stigma through a vocabulary and narrative elements that create abortion stories that are not in accordance with the language of the public narratives. The view of the passive woman as expressed in *Roe* is to some extent debunked in the texts, and I propose that despite the rhetoric of the debate and the law, the characters in “Hills Like White Elephants”, *Revolutionary Road*, *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*, “The Abortion” and “Good People” challenge the stereotype of a passive woman in situations involving abortion. On the other hand these stereotypes and the language of public debate and key legal narratives regarding abortion have contributed to the perpetuation of stigma – an internal, felt stigma that lingers in these characters despite their autonomous actions.

3.2 The “Good Woman”, Agency and the Aftermath of Abortion

“The psychological thing behind this abortion business. Is that what women are supposed to be expressing when they don’t want to have children? That they’re not really women, or don’t want to be women, or something?” (Yates 231)

The abortion trope raises important questions about gender roles, especially the expectations women face as potential mothers. April Wheeler's quote from *Revolutionary Road* is an example of how the female characters in the literary narratives, both before and after *Roe*, all challenge expectations of womanhood and motherhood. Abrams views "legislation regulating abortion (...) as the most overt example of how women seeking abortions are judged for their deviance from the role of mother" (299) and she claims that these laws, through exceptions such as cases of rape, incest or the risk to the life or health of the woman, draw up clear lines between women as subjects and women as objects. It is with the use of the word *mother* that the Court identifies woman as mother and thus reinforces the stigma that women who abort are unable to meet the standards for womanhood (Abrams 299). I propose that not much changes in the way that the personal abortion experiences of the female characters are written about in literature after 1973. However the character of the stigma changes; after *Roe* there is a shift towards more descriptions of internal stigma, and the diminished presence of external stigma. I argue that this is conveyed through the language in which abortion and consideration of abortion is described, especially as seen through the female point of view – the instances where the female characters and their experience of abortion or their attitude towards it is in focus, and how they present their views and how they think about it for themselves.

Benyon-Jones lists three ways in which abortion stigma is manifested in the manners in which women speak about abortion. Some female speakers convey an internalized stigma; they seem to accept the negative views on abortion that are inherent in the context they find themselves in (Benyon-Jones 227). Another manifestation is the felt stigma where it is clear that a woman who terminates a pregnancy expects "unsupportive reactions" (227). The third is the enacted stigma where women speak about experiences of either subtle or clear actions of prejudice (227). All the types of abortion stigma are to some extent present in each work of fiction discussed below, and in the examination of how language of abortion and stigma changed after liberalization of abortion laws these notions are useful in order to see which managing strategies are employed by the characters, and to what effect. Benyon-Jones claims that strategies to manage abortion stigma may have an unwanted effect; perpetuating stigma by making it invisible (227), but I propose that some of the works of fiction discussed in this chapter do otherwise as many go against the dominant discourses and show a different face of abortion, one where the reason is not necessarily exceptional, but nevertheless human.

April Wheeler in *Revolutionary Road* or Imani, the protagonist of "The Abortion" could be described as "good women" yet, I argue that even in the decades before legalization

of abortion on a federal level, American literature includes female characters who contrast the early abortion narratives. April and Imani are actually not “good women” because their motivation for abortion can be considered selfish rather than a sacrifice made by a good mother for the best of her family (Myrsiades 51, Condit 31). By deciding to terminate their pregnancies, both Imani and April become “bad mothers” even though they already have children to care for. Imani, an African-American woman who feels trapped by both motherhood and marriage terminates her pregnancies twice in this 1971 short story, once illegally and once legally in New York. April on the other hand is a good suburban wife and mother on paper. Everything about the Wheelers is beautiful and perfect from the outside, making April’s wish for abortion seem even more selfish and unacceptable to her husband and to society.

The fact that both April and Imani are “good women” makes the stigma they experience clearer perhaps than if their circumstances were different and they were not married and with children, seemingly happy. I propose that *Revolutionary Road*, published in 1961, demonstrates two manifestations of stigma listed by Benyon-Jones; felt and enacted. Even though the discussion of abortion is private between a married couple, I propose that April experiences enacted stigma through “subtle actions that reveal prejudice” (Benyon-Jones 227) from her husband Frank, who’s arguments are the embodiment of pro-Life rhetoric as he asserts a moral high ground in their conversations and heated arguments. Her stigma is also felt: her husband does not support her wish to terminate the pregnancy, and channels the views of a society that keeps women in their roles as caretakers. Alice Walker’s Imani, on the other hand, mainly experiences internalized stigma, I argue. A comparison of these to narratives demonstrates the move from an external stigma before legalization of abortion to internal stigma after.

Revolutionary Road, set in 1955 in the American suburbs, tells the story of the Wheelers, a young married couple leading a disillusioned life. Their desperate attempt to break out of what they view as a life that is beneath the people they believe themselves to be, is interrupted by April’s third pregnancy. The following battle over whether or not to terminate it carries traces of the “good woman” narrative that dominated the early stages of the abortion debate and April’s wish to abort is a stark contrast to what was acceptable as a justifiable abortion in the 1950’s. The novel raises questions about gender and language. It is noteworthy how much of the novel is dedicated to Frank’s point of view on the matter of abortion, which ultimately is a pondering of his own self. April is reduced to the object of his desire and his dislike, and for most of the novel she functions as a mirror for his masculinity.

The only time April Wheeler has her own voice in the novel is at the very end when she actually makes the choice to perform an abortion on herself. She takes charge of her own body in a dramatic manner, and it seems that it is only in such a manner a woman could be heard.

A large portion of *Revolutionary Road* is essentially a debate about whether or not to have an abortion, and the language of the debate is full of gender stereotypes. The debate that the Wheelers engage in is described like a courtship – the word seems outdated today, sounding official and devoid of passion. Yet the emotions and passion that come to the surface as a result make the description both ironic and fitting. The reader participates in the debate through Frank's point of view as he tries to convince his wife not to terminate the pregnancy. His attempts at persuasion resemble a sales pitch and Frank is absolutely certain about the product: "The idea he had to sell, after all, was clearly on the side of the angels. It was unselfish, mature and (though he tried to avoid moralizing) morally unassailable. The other idea, however she might try to romanticize its bravery, was repugnant" (Yates 217). The juxtaposition of their respective stances in Frank's mind is very polarized, almost comically black and white. He avoids moralizing yet sees his stance as morally unassailable, better yet: he is on the side of the angels. The contrast is deepened by the representation of Frank's character throughout the novel: above all else Frank likes to think about himself as a tolerant, modern and intellectual man. Yet he considers himself the guardian of morality, and at every stage of the discussion Frank patronizes April "from his fortress of conviction" (217). Frank's pitch makes April doubt her knowledge and understanding of words such as "convention", "morality" and "mature"; "It's all just *words* to me, Frank" (223) she says, thus challenging and questioning these established, grown-up words in a truly feminist fashion. April's comment about morality and conventionality being two sides of the same coin is a slap in the face to Frank's ideas about his own morality, and the worst insult to his ideas about himself. Being called conventional makes Frank want to "hit her in the face" (222) in an imaginary crack down at April's subtle attempt at distorting the patriarchal order.

As a contrast to the soft notion of a courtship the discussion between Frank and April is also described in military terms and their battle of wills echoes the war-like rhetoric of pro-Life and pro-Choice activists. I propose that the employment of such a language highlights external stigma that April Wheeler experiences. She is in a sense attacked and accused of lack of morals by her own husband to the extent that she begins to doubt her own stance on whether to abort the pregnancy. Frank, who fancies his military past - the time when he felt most alive - parallels the discussion of having another child with a military battle. I propose

that the metaphor of this masculine concept reveals Frank's need to affirm his own masculinity, which April threatens with her wish to abort his child. The possible outcomes of the argument are described in terms of winning; it is a matter of tactics and victory. April explains her wish to have an abortion as something she would be doing *for* Frank, for the sake of his happiness and self-fulfillment and reading between the lines; for the sake of his manhood. Frank's vocabulary on the other hand echoes the popular "abortion is murder" argument of the pro-Life activists; "How much (...) would his prime of manhood be worth if it had to be made conditional on *allowing* her to *commit a criminal mutilation of herself*?" (Yates 218, emphasis added). Talking about abortion as a "criminal mutilation" and as something that he will not allow her to do, makes Frank's argument a deliberate act of stigmatization that in turn contributes to the stigma felt by April. Frank's language also underlines the inequality of the genders; April's body is not her choice, a "mutilation" is something that only Frank can allow. The following quote underscores this point: "You'd be committing a crime against your own substance. And mine" (217-218). Frank will not allow an abortion because April's body and the fetus within it serve as extensions of his being.

Paula Abrams argues that judicial narratives about abortion portray women as objects and simultaneously convey the image of a "woman who acts but whose judgment cannot be trusted" (304). I argue that it is especially in the framing of the abortion issue together with the insanity-script that this is visible. Frank Wheeler's arguments to keep the child echo the public rhetoric that victimize and render women helpless and unable to make their own sound decisions. This narrative is strengthened by Frank's likening of his wife to John Givings, the son of their real estate agent who is a patient at a mental institution; "Here after all, was a full-fledged mental case for April to observe and contemplate. Could she still say, after this, that she didn't care if she was crazy too?" (227). The parallel between John and April, insanity and abortion, shows how women who wanted abortions were by some put in the same category as the insane, a parallel highlighted further by John's inquiries about whether patients at mental institutions had any legal rights, implying I argue, that like April, John lacks fundamental rights to decide about his body. By giving attention to a seemingly peripheral character like John, Yates creates an abortion narrative that plays upon the abortion narratives of the 50s and 60s, while criticizing and subverting them at the same time. I propose that by placing John Givings at a crucial time in the abortion discussion, the character functions as a critical voice proving that a "woman's departure from the careful social (...) track marked out for the channeling of her sexuality towards motherhood is the measure of her madness" (Wilt 22). Frank's framing of his wife as mad strengthens the

argument that women like April and the insane were considered as the Other – diverging from established social expectations – and consequently stigmatized.

Revolutionary Road can qualify as a “shadow narrative” - a category of abortion fiction defined by Wilt. Such stories breach with the social rules of marriage and fidelity and tend to be organized towards endings – marriage, death, abortion or birth – conclusions that do not offer a resolve but are meant to highlight “what is amiss between woman and man, or between woman and maternity” (23). In her fervent wish to protect the integrity of her husband and to play a supporting part in his path towards finally realizing his brilliance, April seems to hide from the fact that she is not keen on motherhood. She fights for his happiness and believes that the key is moving to Paris, where they would lead an unconventional life. I propose that April’s attempts at protecting Frank’s masculinity are meant as distractions from the felt stigma of not wanting another child. As the battle of wills goes on, April realizes that she feels unsuited for motherhood. An abortion then, is ultimately for her self; it is necessary in order to find her own voice that has been drowned by the conventions of femininity. Here it is interesting to discuss the comment John Givings makes about April being a female, not feminine (Yates 190). The distinction he makes between these two can be connected to April’s choice to terminate her pregnancy, I propose. In her choice she seems to take into account both her biology (her being female) and her femininity, or rather her ability to play the role she is expected to play as a woman and mother. April’s bad performance in an amateur theatre play at the beginning of the novel serves to highlight her inability to play the role of a content wife and mother in a convincing way. Knowing deep down that she will never be happy with such a life, and having no real prospects for change, the abortion is in fact April’s emancipation, I argue. Unable to pretend any longer she gives one last “performance” with a tragic finale.

Revolutionary Road and the description of April’s abortion is an example of how the abortion trope in pre-*Roe* years expresses gender relations and female agency. Other literary narratives that are discussed in this thesis do so as well, but I argue that it is especially April and Imani who, despite stigma, act against the roles they are expected to play. Alice Walker’s heroine in “The Abortion” has two abortions – one illegal and one legal. Both April and Imani’s actions these two protagonists show that it is not safe to assume that most women want to become mothers, contrary to what Abrams argues is insinuated in abortion laws (Abrams 315). As long as the law equates “woman” with “mother” it imposes judgment on her decision to abort (Abrams 316). “Mother” is the recipient of abortion and such a description “evokes traditional stereotypes of woman as passive object”, Abrams states (317).

With the word “mother” follows the word “child” and it can be argued that such a terminology contributes to abortion stigma by furthering the narrative of the “bad” mother.

Both Imani and April are “bad” women and mothers and they both experience stigma connected to their reproductive choices. We never find out whether April regrets the abortion or not, but her shame about being an inadequate woman due to her being an unwilling mother is present in the decision process leading up to her tragic end. Imani has two abortions and seems to be ashamed of one. The comparison of her two abortion experiences is useful in order to comment upon the internal/external stigma dichotomy, as the author of the short story conveys two completely different worlds of legal and illegal abortions, where paradoxically the illegal kind is the one that seems to be stigma-free, or at least *feels* stigma-free to the protagonist. The abortions are described as vastly different experiences – the first one intimate, almost as a rite of passage, and the second – legal, but mechanical and impersonal. This contrast is interesting in the context of the judicial reality that separates the two abortions, showing, that the legal circumstances, do not necessarily affect the personal experiences. The fact that the abortions are so different is conveyed through the singular noun in the title – “The Abortion”, not the abortions – as if only one of them truly matters.

Imani and her husband Clarence have discussed this pregnancy but not “deeply”. Clarence encourages her to think about the abortion, asserting a neutral position, seemingly leaving the choice entirely up to Imani. She however, seems to interpret his words and actions as pressure; “As he praised the child they already had (...) Imani sensed subterfuge and hardened her heart” (Walker 65) indicating that the stigma she feels is internalized and she expect him to judge her for wanting the abortion. Like April Imani feels trapped in the role of the “good woman”: “She had known after a year of marriage that it bored her. “The Experience of Having a Child”” was to distract her from this fact” (67). The quotation marks and the capitalized letters of the slightly sarcastic phrasing indicates that “The Experience of Having a Child” is something she is supposed to enjoy, but doesn’t. Imani has a daughter and she has had a miscarriage after her mother died of lung cancer. Now she finds herself pregnant again, but she can not imagine life with two children, in fact she feels this might kill her as she is “chronically anemic and run down” (66). She makes the case for herself to have the abortion on the grounds of “risk to the mother’s life or health”, on the other hand she admits: “if she had wanted the baby more than she did not want it, she would not have planned to abort it” (66), grounding the argument in *want* rather than *necessity*, thus becoming a “pursuer of convenience” (Abrams 302).

As the story does not reveal much of Clarence's point of view regarding the abortion, the reader follows Imani's inner monologue as she remembers her first abortion and how she experiences her second. "Her first abortion, when she was still in college, she frequently remembered as wonderful, bearing as it had all the marks of a supreme coming of age and a seizing of the direction of her own life" (Walker 67) - by recalling her first abortion as a rite of passage, *wonderful* and *supreme*, Imani's independence and need for autonomy is established. The abortionist was "delightful", "kind" (68) and not at all a shady criminal targeting vulnerable women. The procedure was not painful and she felt well walking out the nice doctors' office. Still the tale of the first abortion, despite the positive adjectives used to describe it, ends with Imani hemorrhaging "steadily for six weeks" (68) and not being well again for a year. I propose that the lack of proper medical attention after the illegal procedure devalues the positive experience, as does the abortionists' wife's request that Imani would to "walk out as if nothing is wrong" (68). By hinting at the danger of illegal procedures and the external stigma Imani could meet outside the nice abortionists office, this illegal abortion narrative, however positive and divergent from the public discourse, speaks in favor of legal access to abortion for all women.

Seven years later "an abortion law made it possible to make an appointment at a clinic, and for seventy-five dollars a safe quick, painless abortion was yours" (Walker 69). Sounding like an advertisement for a cleaning product, the description of these new legal circumstances Imani finds herself in hint at a new era of easily accessible legal abortions that is to come. As she is about to have another abortion Imani remembers the time she was living in New York. She recalls the Margaret Sanger clinic where she found both birth control and an understanding "about young women as alone and ignorant as she" (69). Being back for a second abortion she feels as if she has not changed much: "still not in control of her sensuality, and only through violence and with money (...) in control of her body" (69). This choice of words in particular; describing Imani's act of autonomy as violent I argue, discloses her inner battle, her self-justification and her self-policing. Her feeling around the second abortion are described as such: "She found that abortion had entered the age of the assembly line" and at this time in her life she is "grateful for the lack of distinction between herself and the other women" (69). At this time in her life, already a mother and a grown woman who should have known better, she appreciates the anonymity in the process. However, she experiences that the new efficiency has its cost and as the anesthesia fails she reflects; "assembly lines don't stop because the product on them has a complaint" (69).

Her second abortion is described in negative terms; there is no “fatherly” doctor to watch over her as the procedure is carried through to “the horrific end” (Walker 69). Moreover by placing Imani in a room reminding of a nursery after the second abortion, the author enhances the felt stigma of her female protagonist by creating a cruel irony as she just had her pregnancy terminated. Perhaps the primary colors make Imani feel guilty as they remind her of a woman’s supposed primary nature as a nurturer. She is lying there thinking of the child that would never be, imagines it being flushed down the sewer, engaging not even in self-policing but self-torment. Despite justifying her action: “it was you or me, Kiddo, and I chose me” (70) she is keenly aware that “there were people who thought she had no right to choose herself, but Imani knew better than to think of those people now” (70), indicating, that the external stigma is integrated in her thoughts. Imani battles against both the felt and internalized stigma: she has actively chosen away the child and she also actively chooses not to let those thoughts affect her.

I propose that in “The Abortion” the feeling of entrapment and oppression is conveyed through the mention of bright colors that surround the female protagonist: her sunny child, her bright house. The author creates a cheerful setting that contrasts Imani’s inner struggle. The symbolism of the primary color yellow, associated with happiness and joy is subverted as the teapot full of tea that makes her nauseous is yellow, and as she vomits bitter yellowish stuff on the plane to New York (Walker 67). The use of the color yellow serves to highlight the difference between the bright abortion, and the yellow, bitter one. Imani is not to be free from the thoughts from the nursery like room in New York when she is back South. She discloses the painful details of the procedure to her husband who claims he cannot handle to hear about violence implying that he considers her abortion as an act of violence. As Imani sits down with their daughter in her lap, Clarence sits down in front of her and puts his head against her knees. The action reveals his true feelings about the abortion; he needs to be consoled. This triggers Imani: “she felt he was asking for nurture when she needed it herself, she felt the two of them, Clarence and Clarice, clinging to her, using her” (71). The fact that Clarence and his daughter Clarice have almost identical names is suggestive of a stronger bond between father and daughter than between the mother and the child – emphasizing Imani’s inability to perform the “good mother” role adequately, just like April. I propose that there is a parallel between Frank Wheeler and Clarence here; Clarence’s reaction to hearing about how the abortion went is reminiscent of Frank believing that it is the very essence of him April wants to abort. Perhaps Clarence too feels like a part of him is gone now that the pregnancy has been terminated.

An important aspect of Walker's short story is the fact that Imani lives in the south and must travel to New York to have the abortion. The short story is set only a few years prior to *Roe v. Wade*, when abortion was only legal in a four states and not yet on a federal level. This supports Kumar et.al's claim that abortion stigma is often a local product. Her southern life includes religion, and there is a strong presence of authority embedded in the men who surround her – her husband who works for the mayor and the mayor himself. Clarence is the legal adviser of the first black mayor of their town, a man who is described as a leader of the black struggles in the South. Interestingly, the leader of the black struggle is also the embodiment of patriarchy in Imani's life: "Mayor Cresswell would never look at her directly (...). He assumed that as a woman she would not be interested in, or even understand politics." (Walker 66). She admits that he commented upon her "cooking or her clothes", but she accepts the misogynist behavior "because for the present she must believe in Mayor Cresswell, even as he could not believe in her" (66). She seems to actively choose not to challenge the patriarchy for the sake of the "security and advancement of them all" (66).

However, Imani's patience is tested at an event at their local church. The community is holding a memorial service for a black girl who was killed, but who the white authorities say provoked the assassination. During this event that has become symbolic to their Afro-American community, the mayor and Clarence talk loudly about board meetings and city councils, not participating in the memorial. Imani is provoked by the hypocrisy of men in power, and tells them to lower their voices, but he two men leave the church entirely. Imani reacts strongly to their disrespectful behavior because she likens herself to the deceased girl; "Holly Monroe was herself. Herself shot down, aborted on the eve of becoming herself" (Walker 74). With that realization the interlocking of race, identity and abortion is complete. Holly is described as an infant after birth would be; "Holly Monroe was five feet, three inches tall and weighed one hundred and eleven pounds" (74) but she too was in a sense aborted – a child that would never be. Linda Myrsiades claims that "abortions became the occasion of reexamining family units, personal identities, and generational perspectives, and of considering the parallel worlds, political and personal, that coexist without converging in black communities" (Myrsiades 163) thus ascribing the abortion metaphor a multitude of meanings. As is seen here Walker manages in just a couple of pages to address several issues that divide America such as race and religion by way of the abortion trope.

Like *Revolutionary Road* "The Abortion" is a shadow narrative (Wilt 23) because the short story's ending is organized towards the end of Imani and Clarence's marriage. After her abortion Imani resents Clarence, thinking how she only intended to have lovers and never to

marry, and feels increasingly trapped. Sex is safe now as Clarence has a vasectomy, which Imani is tempted to liken to an abortion, yet her unwillingness to become pregnant again costs him his masculinity, he feels like a eunuch and blames her. Imani remembers “the moment she had left the marriage, the exact second” (Walker 76) when Clarence behaved disrespectfully during the abovementioned memorial service. Imani stays with Clarence for two years, but it was in that moment that she decides to leave him –aborting herself from him. They both admit that another child would not help when they both “recalled out loud that about this time of the year their aborted child would have been a troublesome, “terrible” two-year old, a great burden on its mother whose health was now in excellent shape and each wanted to think aloud that the marriage would have deteriorated anyway because of that” (76).

The investigation of representations of stigma in the texts this section reveals that abortion can function as a vehicle for emancipation from the constraints of patriarchy. Despite the aftermaths of abortion being so different for Imani and April, they are both in a sense liberated through their choice, I argue. Imani states that: “the only way she could claim herself, feel herself distinct from them, was by doing something painful, self-defining, but self-destructive” (Walker 71). Unlike April, Imani survives her abortion, which in turn triggers another act of agency: leaving her husband. However, despite Imani’s emancipation, I would argue that both texts demonstrate the entrenched patriarchal views by way of the abortion trope. Consequently, I agree with Wilt in her assertion that abortion does not only function as “a sentimental climax” in the narratives, but that it represents all the complexity of human sexuality and maternity (32). Regardless of the time these characters were written in, April and Imani are examples of women who are trapped in their roles and thus active in upholding the patriarchy, I argue. Both women are stigmatized by society and they stigmatize themselves. April’s concern with her husband’s self-worth overshadows her own for a long time in *Revolutionary Road* until she takes charge of her own body and decides not to become a mother the third time. Imani on the other hand lets the mayor treat her as if she was invisible and she admits to wanting her husband to take care of her. Furthermore, she realizes “how desperately she needed this (...) “fatherly” smile” (Walker 68) of the abortionist when she had her first abortion. She thanks him for her life, indicating that even though she did have a legal abortion and made that choice herself, her life and her freedom were still dependent upon a man, and arguably she is rendered passive just like the woman in the language of *Roe v. Wade*.

3.3 Choosing the Child

Both the pre-*Roe* and the post-*Roe* narratives discussed above end in abortion. There is no clear culmination or choice made about abortion in Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants", although I argue in the previous chapter that Jig conveys a desire for motherhood. The metaphors about pregnancy and choice, the dialogue and the setting reveal the dissonance between the two lovers who are now, both literally and metaphorically, at a crossroads, in their travels and in their relationship. I argue that stigma surrounding abortion plays a big part in the inability of the couple to reach consensus upon the question of abortion. As I discuss in chapter two the story is full of allusions to the procedure, but the word abortion is never mentioned suggesting the stigma surrounding the illegal procedure. The fact that Jig and the American are lovers and not married suggests a modern life style, and perhaps an unwillingness to settle down in the traditional sense. The fact that Jig becomes pregnant within this framework may be a cause for shame for the both of them.

I argue that the female character in Hemingway's short story experiences both felt and external stigma, but in my interpretation Jig struggles less with the stigma of abortion than the two female characters discussed earlier in this chapter. The external stigma is largely present through the descriptions of the landscape surrounding the train station. The author also makes subtle hints about religion; abortion stigma is enhanced by the catholic traditions in Spain, which are emphasized by Jig's reaching for the beads that might be associated with a rosary. Perhaps this act, conscious or not, suggests her own religious beliefs, and in such an interpretation of her touching the rosary-like beads, one could argue that she feels shame that originates from her own faith. I propose that Jig's inability to articulate her feelings about the pregnancy and abortion stems from an imbalance of power between her and the American.

The abortion trope in "Hills Like White Elephants" highlights the couple's inability to communicate. As Gillette describes it, it happens through a series of reversals: "when he says yes to the abortion, she says no; when she says yes to the abortion, he says no" (Hemingway 52). The "rhetorical competition and discursive negotiation" (56) is similar to that between Frank and April Wheeler; in both cases the male and female characters want different things. The dialogue between the American and Jig dominates the short story, but for all the talking they do, they fail to communicate their true feelings about the pregnancy and its possible termination. Meg Gillette attributes the crisis of communication to the modernist era's disapproval of sentimentalism and claims that the lovers in Hemingway's

story attempt to regulate their emotions – and fail (Gillette 54). The failure of communication is aided by the general stigma that surrounded illegal abortion.

In the previous chapter I presented arguments for the reading of “Hills Like White Elephants” as Jig wanting to keep the child. Here it is the male who wants the abortion. Unlike Frank’s pro-Life campaign, and Clarence’s “neutral” position, the American advocates for the simple and natural procedure, which could by some be seen as an attempt at normalization of abortion. Gillette’s remarks about the American offer a different interpretation of his motives; “The presumption of his conviction (...) betrays a patriarchal bias toward male certitude and evacuates Jig’s agency in producing his reproductive subjectivity” (59) and it can thus be argued that the American represents the lack of choice for the female. He does not force Jig, but he tries to impose his will on her, to trigger her internalized stigma. He wants her to get an abortion and I argue that she, like April and Imani, struggles with the oppression by the male will. I propose that this makes “Hills Like White Elephants” an example of pre- *Roe* literature that suggests the importance of a woman’s right to choose.

According to Gillette, Jig embodies the characteristics of the “New Woman” of the modernist era; with her “easy drinking and sexual freedom” (Gillette 58) she is defying the standards set for proper women. She is not playing along with the role of mother and wife that is expected from her, but travels in Europe with her lover instead. This defiance is also indicated by her unusual, androgynous name (59), which according to Stanley Renner carries sexual connotations; the name sounding like a “jerky “jigging” motion” (38) hinting at the female sexuality, but also what Jig truly means to the American – a sexual plaything, he argues. Unlike April or Imani, Jig is not a “good” woman. Upon closer inspection however, Jig is not as liberated from social conventions as one might think. I propose that the author creates a more traditional woman beneath the surface through her preoccupation with the hills, for instance, which could suggest the outcome she wants: to become a mother. When they taste a new drink “Anis del Toro” Jig comments that it tastes like licorice and puts the glass down (Hemingway 52). Since licorice used to be considered an abortion-inducing substance her act could indicate that she does not want an abortion. I would also argue that, through the seemingly casual dialogue Jig is attributed maternal instincts despite the traits of a modern woman, and this argument is lent support by Gillette who claims that the story actually “tames her sexual threat and privileges her maternal potential, imaginatively restoring her to a conservative sexual politics” (59) in which shame and stigma play a great role.

Meg Gillette proposes 4 possible outcomes for the American and Jig: 1) an abortion and a breakup, 2) an abortion and staying together, 3) having the child and breaking up, and 4) having the child and staying together (57). She further argues that the first two alternatives are undesirable for Jig, revealed by her sarcastic comment about all the people she knows who have had abortions who were “all so happy” afterwards. Abortion seems to be equated with unhappiness in the story; if they do terminate the pregnancy they will be unhappy and probably break up, if they have it and stay together, they will probably be unhappy as “antagonism is inherent in abortion” (Gillette 58). The third option - being a single mother, represents potential shame for Jig. The only valid option then is the fourth, synonymous with a traditional happy ending: a man and a woman raising a child together. Following such an interpretation one could argue that a set up that makes the reader root for a baby rather than an abortion is contributing to the perpetuation of abortion stigma.

For the major part of the story Jig is a passive female while the American is the leader in the relationship; he knows about Spain, he speaks the language, he orders the drinks and takes care of the luggage. Renner argues that “Hemingway makes him the expert even on abortion, a uniquely female issue” (29), and based on the twelve uses of the verb “know” in the text, seven of which describe what the man knows Link argues that: “the American monopolizes the authority of knowledge” (Link 69). The American knows how the abortion is done, how “all perfectly natural” and un-dramatic it is. His expertise is supposed to reassure his pregnant lover, but it seems ironic and selfish, as the reader already has received clues about Jig’s feelings about it and his feelings for her. By creating an unsympathetic leading man Hemingway expresses sympathy towards the predicament the girl finds herself in, Renner claims. Under the American’s leadership, and influenced by his clear stance on abortion, the girl is unable to make up her mind at first, and she lacks the mechanism to assert her feelings and express them properly (Renner 29). Yet her emotions are coming up from underneath the surface and she becomes sarcastic. The first hint at Jig’s true feelings about the child is her looking at the hills on the “barren” side of the valley and her comment about the hills looking like white elephants. The proverbial white elephant is something to be thrown away, unnecessary. At this stage of Jig’s emotional development in the story she is still under the American’s spell and accordingly she thinks of her pregnancy as inconvenient.

The landscape in “Hills Like White Elephants” expresses the magnitude of the dilemma the couple faces, arguably far stronger than the dialogue does. The rails indicate the opposite directions the two lovers are about to go. The hills resemble pregnant bellies, round and gentle in their shape they stand for fertility and a future. On the other side of the tracks the

landscape is dramatically different, barren and treeless, suggesting a life without child. Renner highlights how the entire story is structured around the two sides of the valley it and by analyzing the placement of the characters within the setting he argues that they represent stages of Jig's move towards autonomy. Renner proposes that shifts in Jig's emotions are marked with "a descriptive paragraph that positions the characters pointedly within the highly symbolic setting" (33). As Jig gets up from the table, physically distancing herself from the man, and looks towards the fertile, green landscape it becomes clear that she wants the child, I argue.

When she returns to the table and faces the barren hills, the American says he is "perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you" (Hemingway 55), attempting to disguise the fact that a child does not mean anything to him by claiming that he does not want anybody but her. His insincere offer to be a father, followed by another assurance that the abortion procedure is "perfectly simple" sends Jig over the edge and she begs the American to be quiet in a unique emotional outburst: "Would you please please please please please please stop talking?" (55). Renner comments upon the effect of the repetition; "The point behind the seven repetitions of "please" is to show, not tell, the real intensity of her resistance both to what he wants for their relationship and to the hypocrisy of his efforts to persuade her" (33). Jig must insist intensely for him to stop talking creating a climax in the story in which it becomes clear, I argue, that the couple will go their separate ways and she will become free.

Such an interpretation of the ambiguous ending of "Hills Like White Elephants" is in accordance with Wilt's theory that most abortion narratives are organized towards an ending that implies loss, although it may seem as if there is no apparent loss at the end of the narrative, like the loss of April and her child's life, or the loss of child and spouse for Imani. If one assumes that Jig does have the child it can be argued that she does not lose anything at all, despite it not being the fourth, traditional family outcome that Gillette proposes, because for Jig the child is "everything". Renner argues that in the movement of the luggage over to "the girl's side" of the tracks the author signals that the abortion will not happen; "the whole weight of the story's figurative logic comes down on the conclusion that he is accepting her side of the issue" (35). That does not necessarily mean that the couple stays together, and I argue that there is evidence in the text that suggests that she opts for single motherhood – an option that also involves stigmatization. If that is the case, it can be argued that Jig fights against the stigma surrounding having children out of wedlock. If her choice of motherhood (and single motherhood at that) is her own, she truly becomes a modern woman.

Jig has not only triumphed, but according to Renner she also has matured and this is indicated by the shift in how the narrator describes her, from “girl” to “she” (40). Only the American calls her Jig, while the narrator calls her “girl”. Thus “Hemingway scrupulously dissociates his narrative voice from the American’s sexual instrumentalization of his female companion” Renner argues (39). This condescending way of referring to a pregnant, sexually active woman as if she were a child serves, in my interpretation, to underline the imbalance of power between them. I propose that the shift towards “she” that happens when the American moves the luggage to “her” side, indicates that she has won her independence. It can thus be argued, that in this 1927 abortion narrative, an abortion signifies imprisonment in an unwanted life for the female character, and keeping the child, is the prospect of a fulfilled life. Wilt argues that there is always something inherently “lost” in an abortion narrative; here there is only the potential loss of a romantic partner - there is no loss of child or self because abortion is unwanted. Still, even in this early abortion narrative the abortion trope brings about the emancipation of the woman from the will of the man, as abortion or motherhood becomes truly her choice. I propose that Hemingway’s story can be read as a stance similar to modern pro-Choice slogans; if you don’t want an abortion – don’t have it.

3.4 Female Issue, Male Shame

The shame of not fulfilling one’s expected gender role does not only apply to female characters in the abortions narratives discussed in this chapter. Representations of male perspectives on abortions have received some scholarly attention; Judith Wilt and Linda Myrsiades both write of the loss of control on the part of the man in the abortion equation, and the latter argues that men become “peripheralized emotionally while still expected to function as economic centers of social, interpersonal and family units” (Myrsiades 162). The ever-present male perspective can either be interpreted in favor of the abortions trope’s universality in conveying all human experiences – both male and female, or as an expression of patriarchy, I argue. When it comes to “Hills Like White Elephants” for instance, Gillette says, “critics often acknowledge the complexity and dynamism of Jig’s feelings about the pregnancy, while dismissing the American’s reversals as manipulations rather than his own uncertainty” (59). The American’s reluctance towards fatherhood is unclear, unlike Frank Wheelers’ anxiety around it, but I propose that both are triggered by feelings of endangered masculinity. In Frank’s case, an abortion would be an assault on his masculinity, and in the American’s case, perhaps keeping the child would in a sense mean giving up the lead in the

relationship. Jig as a mother could, like the female elephants, become a matriarch and the natural leader. By calling the man “the American,” Gillette argues that his expatriate status is underlined and it is “expatriates – not patriots” who “question the reproductive imperative” implying that a true patriot would never encourage or even consider an abortion. Naming him the American and setting the story in Spain and not the USA allows the story to comment upon abortion “without compromising the mythology of the All-American Dad” (Gillette 58), suggesting that the expected parental role of men is also strongly entrenched in the American society. The role of the American Father is a recurring topic both in literature before and after *Roe*. In the last part of this chapter, I will therefore examine the male perspectives of the narrators in Richard Brautigan’s *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* from 1971 in which I argue, shame and stigma of abortion play a much less significant role than in the 2007 short story “Good People” by David Foster Wallace.

I suggest that the shame of not being able to respond to the issue of abortion as a man adequately is at the center of David Foster Wallace’s short story “Good People” published in *The New Yorker* in 2007. As I mention in chapter one, the story was later published as a chapter in the novel *The Pale King* where in later chapters Lane and Sheri are in fact married with children. However, as it was originally published as a short story, I choose to treat it as such. The story is structured as a train of thought of a young Christian man – Lane A. Dean Jr., who ponders his relationship to his pregnant girlfriend Sheri, the unborn child, and to God. The situation is similar to that of Jig and the American, the couple is not married, and a child out of wedlock is against their Christian beliefs and therefore a source of shame. They are faced not only with a potential loss or stigma because no matter the outcome – abortion, child out of wedlock or single motherhood – they are also faced with potential sin.

There is a lot of evidence in the text that Lane’s religious conscience enhances his felt stigma. There are heavily symbolic images of nature, the fallen trees and the hole in the ground that it leaves – an allusion to abortion, and the loss it implies. But these descriptions of their surroundings affected by the forces of nature can also be read as an emphasis of the significance an unplanned pregnancy has for Lane – it is a natural disaster. Lane looks at “the downed tree in the shallows and its ball of exposed roots going all directions and the tree’s cloud of branches all half in the water” (Wallace) – this image literally suggesting the uprooting of his existence by this unwanted pregnancy. Furthermore, if one takes into account the fact that he considers abortion a sin, the image of the fallen tree brings to mind imagery depicting abortion as a violent ending of a life. There is mention of a storm earlier and the “black” week of doubt and then the decision that follows. The story is full of biblical

references and I propose that the nature around them creates an almost serene and church-like atmosphere of prayer that contrasts his inner storm of thoughts about hypocrisy and hell. These juxtapositions, the silence and the storm, draw attention to not only the external stigma but also the internal stigma.

Sheri, Lane's pregnant girlfriend, is a nice Christian girl; she smells nice and is "good people" as his mother said (Wallace). Lane's feelings towards her are more complicated however; "She was serious in her faith and values in a way that Lane had liked and now, sitting here with her on the table, found himself afraid of. This was an awful thing. He was starting to believe that he might not be serious in his faith. He might be somewhat of a hypocrite" (Wallace). Lane is clearly conflicted about the situation that makes him view Sheri and himself in a different light. Even though they had "prayed on it" and decided to have the abortion together, it seems Lane knows deep down that the decision is ultimately not entirely his, as Sheri has the right to decide over her own body. He describes Sheri as "the kind of girl who knows what she wants" (Wallace), a modern "good woman," which frightens Lane and he begins to feel weak in his indecision and doubt about the prospect of both abortion and fatherhood. I propose that this abortion narrative shows how the pressure to be a good man can be an oppressive role as well.

Lane's feelings of insecurity towards Sheri and the decision they have made are fueled by the thoughts of hell he admits he rarely has had before, proving that he was not as serious in his faith as Sheri. But now he is "desperate to be good people, to still be able to feel he was good" (Wallace). The felt stigma pushes him to punish himself with thoughts of damnation, much like Imani punishes herself after her second abortion. He practices what his religion has preached about abortion; "He felt like he knew now why it was a true sin and not just a leftover rule from past society. He felt like he had been brought low by it and humbled and now did believe that the rules were there for a reason. That the rules were concerned with him personally, as an individual" (Wallace). Lane believes abortion is a sin and actively perpetuates the stigma; by shaming himself he hopes to become a better man I argue that Lane and Luther's example in *A Book of American Martyrs* shows that changes in legislation and views on abortion are often unable to penetrate and alter religious beliefs.

I argue that the topic of abortion in "Good People" comments upon the argument about hypocrisy of religious beliefs by displaying the mechanisms of internal and external stigma in the male character. Lane feels like "somewhat of a hypocrite" (Wallace) for wishing for an abortion because he does not love the woman who is pregnant with his child. He considers both this hypocrisy and the abortion itself as sins he is guilty of, yet he does not seek

guidance from any of the members of his religious community, suggesting the stigma around abortion and the inadequacy of religion to provide guidance in such a complex issue. Lane is too ashamed to talk to a pastor, yet he expresses incredulity at the fact that Sheri has not spoken to anyone either, as if he expects her to feel shame too. This reveals a double standard, I argue, suggesting that most of the responsibility is on her – both to the responsibility for making the decision, and the responsibility for spiritual atonement for the sin they are about to commit. Such an interpretation is supported by Myrsiades' conclusion about male voices in abortion poetry that "some men attribute to women the responsibility for the 'sin' of abortion, regarding it as an unnatural act that turns the life-giving woman's womb into a place of death" (136). I propose that the fact that they only have spoken about the abortion to each other is a clear demonstration of the effects of the external stigma they both are dealing with, but Lane is also enacting abortion stigma by expecting shame and remorse from Sheri.

The story ends with Sheri telling Lane that she will not have the abortion. She wants the child and she wants to make it clear that he does not need to be involved. At this moment in the text, the shift to the verb "would" occurs and Lane interprets the things Sheri would say to him as insincere. When she says she can have the child alone, he claims the ability to look into her soul and in a way – like the American – he monopolizes knowledge. He interprets her reassurances that she does not want anything from him and that she has always known that he did not love her as lies; a "last-ditch gamble born out of the desperation in Sheri Fisher's soul, the knowledge that she can neither do this thing today nor carry a child alone and shame her family" (Wallace). The values he believes her to possess also make him believe that she has no other options than to lie, yet this "lie" she tells is "not a sin" he argues. Lane then claims to see himself and Sheri as Jesus does, and in taking on such an omnipotent role, he also grants himself redemption: "He was not a hypocrite, just broken and split off like all men" (Wallace), allowing himself to escape both sins – hypocrisy and abortion.

It can be argued that Lane, in his faith and his moment of grace, stigmatizes her further. Despite there being a clear outcome in *The Pale King*, where Lane supports Sheri in her decision and marries her, as an isolated work "Good People" has an ambiguous ending and lacks "comfort and closure" (Wouters 453), I argue. Notwithstanding his moment of grace, the final parts of Lane's inner monologue are a continuation of the battle between the opposing armies inside him. I argue that Sheri does know what she wants, and it is he who out of desperation asks, "why is he so sure he doesn't love her? Why is one kind of love any

different? What if he has no earthly idea what love is? What would even Jesus do?” Kirsch argues that “with this question, Wallace is daring you to roll your eyes” (Kirsch qtd. in Wouters 453). I propose that there is a hint of patronization of Sheri on Lane’s part; she is unable to do this on her own and he takes pity on her, agreeing to a loveless marriage, in order to be a good man. To fulfill this role he dismisses her decision as a ploy to play upon his conscience and make him do what he ultimately ends up doing – staying with her. I argue that, like Jig, with her insistence “that Lane should please please sweetie let her finish” (Wallace), Sheri makes an honest decision about her own body, and life, quite independent from her partner and her religion, but that even in choosing the child, the abortion plot shows how even a modern, good woman struggles with being heard.

Richard Brautigan’s *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* is a love story interrupted by an unwanted pregnancy and is another example of how the literary realm differs from the abrasiveness of the public abortion debate in the US. I argue that it does quite the opposite, as it conveys the experience of abortion in a way that does not present abortion as a drastic and dramatic choice, as is the case in some of the narratives mentioned earlier in the chapter. Unlike the war-like rhetoric of Frank and April or the internal stigma felt by Imani and Lane, this novel goes a long way in attempting to neutralize abortion in the US at a time when one had to go to Mexico to get it. The male narrator and his girlfriend Vida travel to Mexico for the abortion and the attention is on the journey itself and not the goal. Stigma is present as a looming opinion of the world outside the confines of a quirky San Francisco library, which is the home of the narrator. The novel acknowledges the existence of external stigma and I propose that the abortion situation is not represented in a way that perpetuates stigma due to the fact that the male protagonist observes women coming in and out of the abortionists office in Mexico without moralizing or judging them.

The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966 is the second work of fiction in this selection to include the word “abortion” in the title. Like Alice Walker’s short story it is the singular form of the noun despite the presence of several abortions in both Walker’s “The Abortion” and Brautigan’s novel in which three abortions are described. Besides the title, abortion is first mentioned in the third chapter, where the narrator lists the number of curious books he has received into his library where he stores all written works people bring in. The long list ends with the title *The Need for Legalized Abortion* authored by Dr. O. The book has no title on the cover and the doctor is anonymous, which makes it clear that to make a case for legalized abortion is risky. The “neatly typed” contents of the book hint at the doctors’ professionalism and the rationality of his case for legal abortion, I suggest. The custom in the

narrator's library is to let the authors pick out the shelf space for their books themselves, but the author – “doctor and very nervous” – declines the offer. “You can take care of that yourself. There's nothing else that I can do. It's all a God-damn shame” (Brautigan 26). Dr. O seems to have given up on the fight for legal abortion, and his resigned attitude represents the peculiar position of many medical professionals who also have been subjected to stigmatization as murderers by the fiercest anti-abortion activists such as Luther Dunphy in *A Book of American Martyrs*. I propose that here is a similarity in the function of Dr. O and Yates' John Givings; both are seemingly insignificant characters acting like the voice of reason in the abortion debate, yet both are stigmatized and silenced.

A large part of the novel depicts the narrator's relationship with Vida, who like Jig is a modern pre-*Roe*, but unlike Jig, Vida does not seem to harbor traditional dreams of children and family at this point in her life. What is interesting about this female character is that she is the epitome of femininity. Vida is described as the ideal woman, not in the “good woman” sense but rather a goddess, a mythical creature almost. Such descriptions suggest that her sexuality is dangerous; with face and body so beautiful, that a man even died when he crashed the car he was driving because he could not take his eyes off her. Her womanhood is her prison. She wants to get away from the body that she feels is a curse, and that is why she is comfortable and safe with the narrator in his library. When Vida becomes pregnant, there is little focus on motherhood, a potential child, or the prospect of becoming parents. I argue that the contrast between Vida's extreme womanhood and her rejection of motherhood at this point in life suggest that she, like Imani and April, takes charge of something she otherwise feels is out of control by deciding to have an abortion.

There is almost no discussion of abortion compared to the narratives discussed earlier. The magnitude of such a drastic change in their quiet library life is not expressed neither by the narrator or Vida. As this is what they need to do in order to maintain the status quo in their lives, there is little doubt that an abortion is the right choice for them. The only challenge is of a financial nature, but this is easily solved as they are helped by a friend of the narrator who lends them money and makes all the arrangements at a clinic in Mexico. It can be argued that the narrator experiences the abortion in an “in the moment” sort of way; he does not contemplate being a father, but rather what is going on around him as they make their journey to Mexico. For the purpose of the analysis of abortion stigma in this particular novel, I will discuss the observations made by the narrator in the abortionists' office, which reveal traces of external and to some extent internal stigma.

When they arrive in Mexico there are children outside the abortion clinic, they are “ill-dressed and dirty” with “strange undernourished bodies and faces” (Brautigan 131) The observation carries a trace of an argument of the pro-Choice camp; not having children unless you can afford to feed them. It could also be interpreted as the narrator’s subtle justification of their choice, confirming that it is the right thing to do as they had to borrow money in order to afford the procedure, and did not afford raising a child. This confirmation of doing the right thing is balanced out by the looks they receive from “some Mexican mother women” (131) who seem to know exactly why the young American couple has come. The couple, or at least Vida, seems not to be bothered by the looks, but referring to them as “mother women” suggests an emphasis on Vida’s rejection of motherhood.

Inside the clinic they are safe from public scrutiny. The abortionist’s office turns out to be spacious, cool and modern, with furniture as “you see in the offices of American doctors” (Brautigan 132) and certificates and degrees hung on the walls – the impression inspires confidence in the narrator. However, now that there are no looks there to judge them, the author’s train of thought reveals an increasingly ambivalent attitude towards abortion. He observes an American family; a mother, a father and their daughter, who is described as “pretty and obviously intelligent” (132) and should therefore have known better than to get into a situation that landed her in this office. He compares the girl to Vida thinking they both look “too young to have an abortion” (132). The narrator does not himself experience shame, but he observes as other people do; especially the young girls’ parents; “They were acting as if she had got drunk at a family reunion and they were trying to cover up her drunkenness” (149) he notes as he watches them dress her and get her out of the clinic before she is fully conscious. This proves, I argue, that rather than judging these women, the narrator feels compassion towards them.

His emotional engagement in the situation is evident. He is nervous despite seeing the equipment sterilized and the doctors repeated reassurances that there will be “No pain and clean” (133). The narrator finds these repetitions disquieting. He declines the offer to watch and stays in the room next to the operation room. Yet despite the physical distance he participates as he can hear the procedure, and he focuses on the sounds of the procedure; “Everything was either quiet or metallic and surgical in there for a while” (136), trying to overcome his emotions. The repetition of the adjectives *metallic* and *surgical* could indicate an effort on the part of the narrator to distance himself from the abortion. The use of such cold adjectives reminds of Imani’s second abortion experience. The resemblance of the abortion process to that of an assembly line is evident as the narrator notes about the third

abortion he witnesses; “This abortion was done automatically like a machine. There was very little conversation between the doctor and his helpers” (144). The mechanics of the procedure and the quantity of women seem to upset the narrator. During Vida’s abortion, ambivalent feelings seem to overwhelm the narrator; being aware of what is being flushed, what is done to his girlfriend and his potential child, and still believing that this is the right thing to do are emotions that seem to be difficult for him to reconcile.

The narrator’s fluctuating emotions could be caused by the realization of the magnitude of the situation as he observes women who come and go in the clinic and the people who work there. Still listening to the sounds of abortion he notes; “Just after the toilet flushed, I heard the flash of the instruments being sterilized by fire. It was the ancient ritual of fire and water all over again to be all over again and again in Mexico today” (Brautigan 143), considering abortion as an almost spiritual ritual. He continues to reflect; “What were we all doing here? (...) Alas, the innocence of love was merely an escalating physical condition and not a thing shaped like our kisses” (132), and with this the narrator seems to walk a fine line between shame and acceptance. I would however argue that the narrator is not ashamed of what he is taking part in and that his reflections are simply part of acknowledging the complicated nature of the situation. He is not an outsider in what might be seen as a female problem, and this is indicated by the use of the pronoun “we”. In the doctor’s office he feels as a part of not only Vida’s procedure but also the experiences of the other women whom he observes coming in to have an abortion, and he is aware of his part in the abortion. As the title of the last and fifth part of the novel indicates he feels as if these are “My three abortions” (Brautigan 129) and thus, whether passing judgment or not, he is not distancing himself from them. Most important; he does not single out the women as “the others”, which is a crucial step in the stigma-creation process (Goffman 5).

The significance of setting and placement of characters within it is crucial in *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*. The open doors between the doctor’s office, the operation room and the post-operation room in which the women rest after their procedure are yet another indicator of an acceptance of abortion as something that need not happen behind closed doors. Such an interpretation is reinforced by this description; “The room had two beds in it and the other bed where the girl had lain a short while before was now empty and there was an empty chair beside the bed, as this bed would be empty soon and the chair I was sitting in: to be empty” (Brautigan 137), again expressing an acceptance of abortion as a part of the circle of life. Even though it involves the loss of a potential life, it need not be a source of shame. As I mentioned, external abortion stigma is present in the narrative, but

neither the narrator nor Vida seem to be ashamed. They leave the clinic “slowly, carefully, abortively” (151) yet they talk about it openly between each other: “How do you feel?” he asks, “Like I just had an abortion” she answers and jokes about being the biggest fan of The Pill from now on. They even are honest with the taxi driver who asks what they did in Tijuana; “We had an abortion” they answer, and the cabdriver bursts out in laughter (152).

Wilt’s argument about the inherent loss in abortion narratives still applies here though. Brautigan underlines what is lost to the couple through phrasings such as “the metal stirrups of this horse of no children” (Brautigan 139) to describe the gynecological chair, or Vida lying there with her stomach “vacant.” When they face the Mexican children on the street again after the procedure, one cannot help but feel that they represent the child that is now lost for the American couple (148). The literal mention of “The Mother Ghost” referring to an imagined ghost in their hotel room after the abortion lends support to Wilt’s argument that a pregnancy ended by choice leaves two ghosts in its wake – the child and the self (Wilt 5)– here arguably it is the ghost of Vida as a mother, the unrealized part of her womanhood. It is the narrator who imagines the ghost present in their room and tells it to go away. This can be read as an act of solidarity with the woman, I argue. He does not wish for a ghost to linger in Vida, for her to feel as an unfulfilled woman, and he wants her to be free from any felt stigma. Vida and the narrator are marked by a loss, nevertheless they do not regret the abortion, and when they leave the hotel room they both say goodbye to the ghost, leaving any trace of shame behind.

The consequence of the abortion is that the narrator loses his job at his beloved library, the only life he has ever known, again supporting Wilt’s argument that abortion narratives are structured towards a loss. I propose that this narrative flips the script when it comes to the abortion aftermath; despite the loss of a child and a job, the aftermath in Brautigan’s novel reads rather like a rebirth. The way they leave the clinic; through the labyrinth-like office and its cool corridors and exit into the warm Mexican day, is almost a metaphorical birth. Thus even in this largely “untroubled” abortion narrative, the abortion inevitably becomes the catalyst for change – it pushes the author out of the safe womb of his library of books no one will ever read, and offers both of them a new beginning. I do not claim that *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* is a glorification of abortion, but that it presents a balanced outlook at what abortion is: a reality. The descriptions of the abortion experience as something bodily and painstakingly real contribute to the interpretation that abortion in this novel represents the loss of childlike innocence for the characters. The narrator’s inner monologue towards the end of the novel supports the anonymous Dr. O’s stance on abortion and the need for it to be

legal. The narrator experiences the challenges and stigma that immediately follow an illegal act, yet this is balanced by the experienced “normalcy” of the abortion in the Mexican clinic. I suggest that the novel can thus be considered a sober voice in the debate about the legalization of abortion in the US, proving that literature can indeed serve the function Myrsiades claims it can: closing the gap between the opposite sides of the abortion debate.

3.5 Chapter conclusion

“Where abortion is not simply a sentimental climax but a part of the choice raised by contemplating the whole vexed process of human sexuality and maternity, contemporary writers are as conflicted as feminism itself, no less so after choice is legal than when it was an outlaw choice” (Wilt 32)

Wilt’s quote describes the complexity of the issue of abortion and how “vexing” it can be as a topic of literary analysis, since any discussion of the topic requires reflection upon the notions of sexuality, motherhood and, as I argue, gender roles and stigma creation. In this chapter I set out to investigate how the stigma aspect of abortion has been written about in literature before and after *Roe v. Wade* and I have found that on the whole, the prevalence of shame and stigma connected to abortion is heavily present “no less so after choice is legal than when it was an outlaw choice” (Wilt 32). Yet, some nuance must be added. A closer look at these narratives reveals that there has been a shift towards an emphasis on internal stigma in the post-legalization narratives. In some of the abortion narratives written at a time the procedure was illegal in the US there is less representation of stigma; the pressures of society are hinted at and there is, I argue, a more balanced outlook on the issue of abortion. Shame and stigmatization based on ideals of womanhood is present in all of these narratives, and continues in most of the post-legalization narratives where the external forces prompt many of the female characters, able to have a legal abortion, to punish themselves mentally. I propose that the narratives where the characters judge themselves for even considering an abortion reflect and are critical of the conservative backlash after *Roe* and the fact that the language of the law did little to prevent perpetuation of abortion stigma.

Most of the pre-*Roe* narratives hint at the fact that abortion is illegal and taboo. In “Hills Like White Elephants” the setting and its details remind of the religious opposition to abortion, as well as the lack of naming the procedure itself. In Imani’s first abortion, she is asked to act like nothing is wrong when she leaves the doctor’s office on a Saturday – the abortion experience is a positive one, but the circumstances still imply the illegality of the

procedure. In *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* external stigma is present as well—the narrator sees its effect on the other women and their families who are at the abortion clinic in Tijuana. Most prominent is the example of the parents of the teenage girl who are clearly ashamed of their daughters' abortion, and they treat her accordingly. The narrator and Vida do not experience any direct stigmatization other than what is hinted at by the Mexican children and mothers who they meet outside the abortion clinic, implying what is lost in an abortion – both a potential child and a potential mother. On the other hand, Frank Wheeler in *Revolutionary Road* embodies the stigmatization tactics and rhetoric of anti-abortion activists, and Yates' novel is a clear example of the mechanisms of stigma creation; April is made out to be “the Other” – an unfeminine female for her rejection of motherhood.

Most post-legalization narratives discussed here describe shame connected to abortion felt by the characters. Imani is the only protagonist who actually terminates a pregnancy legally and safely, yet her second abortion experience is a negative one. Imani is arguably the female character who is most affected by internal stigma, even though she is firm in the belief that her abortion was the right, necessary choice. In both “Good People” and *My Year of Meats* there is contemplation of abortion, and both Lane's and Jane's processes reveal how the notion of abortion brings out their most profound insecurities. There is a heavy presence of external stigma in “Good People” as both Lane and Sheri are under the pressure of their religious beliefs that tell them that their planned abortion is a sin. Jane on the other hand is insecure whether her unstable lifestyle and her unstable body can sustain a child. The self-torment after her miscarriage exposes Jane's shame for not wanting the child immediately, having considered an abortion and blaming herself for being careless during the pregnancy – in other words her shame for being an unrealized, bad mother.

In the previous chapter I presented how personhood has been approached in the pre- and post-*Roe* narratives. Whether there is a direct address of a fetus or whether distance is created by omissions and evasions in language, the absent – the child is almost always present. The language of the law stresses the mother/child and woman/fetus dichotomies and Abrams claims that “the depiction of prenatal life as a child creates the strongest narrative for woman as inevitable mother” (321), thus more closely connecting abortion to shame as it becomes equated to the rejection of motherhood. If there is a mother, there must be a child. Therefore, even though rhetorically absent in the text, it can be argued that a child is present in all the literary narratives discussed in this thesis. This looming presence is, I argue, a strong stigma-creating factor because when a woman chooses to abort it constitutes a

rejection of a child, or even worse – the murder of a child, since “personification of the fetus functions to associate abortion with murder” (Abrams 322).

I argue that to some extent, all these narratives about abortion are about female choice – not only when it comes becoming a mother or not, but how to live their lives in general. As I propose in this chapter, both April, Imani and Jig achieve an emancipation of sorts. April decides to perform an abortion on herself and dies. Imani has a legal abortion and her marriage ends. I suggest that Jig chooses to keep the child even though the American tries to persuade her to have an abortion. Despite the different outcomes, these female characters have in common the fact that abortion to some extent serves as a catalyst for their agency. Once abortion is on the table these women are faced with a choice, and they all choose to act in a way that liberates them from the expectations of their male partners and of society. No matter if abortion is legal or not these women take matters into their own hands, and still need to do so after the Supreme Court ruling as it does not grant women a clear right to decide over their own bodies.

For Frank, Lane, Clarence, and Brautigan’s narrator the notion of abortion is closely connected to their masculinity and identity, which seems to be threatened by the prospect of abortion. Frank Wheeler has always been told by everybody that he can be whatever he wants to be, but he leads a life of unrealized potential and feels that April’s wish to abort “his” child is an indirect wish to abort him. Clarence is an important part of the community, working with the first Afro-American mayor in their town. Despite being high up on the patriarchal ladder of power he is emasculated by Imani’s rejection of motherhood, as she demands that Clarence has a vasectomy – a castration of sorts. Lane A. Dean Jr. wants desperately to be considered one of the “good people” (an incredibly vague category) – and what does the wish of being “good people” mean if not the fulfillment of a role set forth by religious communities and society. Anxiety and insecurity arise from these men’s inability to satisfyingly play their assigned roles and this, I argue, demonstrates the adequacy of the abortion trope to address the inability to fulfill roles that are “given” in a society or a community, and how this is a mechanism for stigmatization.

The stigma in all its forms hinders communication between the couples as it is closely connected to gender roles and the shame of doing something wrong; of not being a good woman, man or “good people”. Much of the honesty that could have been crucial in these abortion scenarios is therefore lost. In the miscommunications between the couples in the abortion narratives there are mechanisms of stigmatization. Frank shames April for wanting an abortion, Clarence’s silent plea to be consoled by Imani’s after she has had the abortion, or

Lane's expectation that Sheri will need religious guidance are all enactments of stigma that affect the women involved negatively, I argue.

I propose that Oates' *A Book of American Martyrs* stands out among these abortion narratives, as it is structured around two families, rather than a couple. Oates shows that there is no innocence on either side of the abortion war. Jenna Vorhees and her children receive death-threats ("*You will be next following the Baby Killer Doctors, you & yours will not be spared*" (Oates 265)) and they have to endure hateful talk; "*Abortionist's kids. Well, they all got what they deserved didn't they*" (319). During the trial of Luther Dunphy Jenna wants to confront the anti-abortionists who want him freed; "*You are dangerous fanatics – religious lunatics! Your wrathful God does not exist, you are brainwashed and absurd.*" (266) but knows such an argument would be futile. Oates describes how Luther Dunphy's family suffers as well. They are ostracized from their community, and are haunted by the actions of their husband and father – everyone knows they are "*Luther Dunphy's family (...) that crazy guy who killed people in Muskegee Falls with a shotgun*" (340). I argue that there is a balance in this abortion narrative; both the pro-Life and pro-Choice stigmatize and are stigmatized. This point is confirmed when Jenna Vorhees sees Luther Dunphy during his trial; "Their eyes would lock. The murderer and the widow of the murdered man. *Are you ashamed, are you shattered in your soul? For what you have done?*" (268). It is unclear who's thoughts – the murderer's or the widow's are italicized. I suggest that this is representative of the compassion that is extended to both sides of the abortion debate in *A Book of American Martyrs* and thus, I argue that through giving voice to the most extreme opinions Oates skillfully captures just how "vexing" the issue of abortion really is.

THESIS CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

“The literary (...) venues offer an entrée into the world of abortion that roots it more appropriately in the culture of which it is a part. Culture gives us distance from the hysteria of abortion politics, exchanging for it something that is at once both less intense and more deeply felt” (Myrsiades xi)

4.1 Concluding remarks

I believe that the discussion of the literary works in this thesis proves Myrsiades’ point above and confirms the importance of continuing the research upon the topic of abortion and its complex portrayal in literature, since the right to safe and legal abortions are not universal and are being contested not only in the US, but in other countries as well. I propose that as cultural artifacts, reflective and critical of the discourses in society, the works of fiction discussed in this thesis dive deeper than the often bombastic, yet shallow slogans of a debate that has been named, and has at its most extreme in fact been, a “war.”

The aim of this thesis has been to examine the language of abortion and representations of abortion stigma in American literature before and after *Roe v. Wade*. I have explored the connection between the language of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that legalized abortion in 1973, the rhetoric of the abortion debate before and after this landmark decision, and taken into account the emergence of ultrasound technology in order to see what changes were brought about in the literary representation of abortion in American literature. I have attempted to provide a comparative approach to the pre- and post-legalization works of literature and I do not claim this to be an exhaustive or representative study of American fiction about abortion. However, I find that looking at texts written before and after legalization of abortion is an angle that has been overlooked in the existing body of academic debate about abortion as a literary trope.

In the first chapter, I have provided a theoretical background for the discussion of abortion in literature – both a historical backdrop, provided mostly by Condit’s work about the rhetoric of abortion in the American abortion debate, and my research on the existing scholarship on the topic of abortion in literature. Since little of the existing scholarship offers a study of how abortion is actually written about in literature, I address this issue in the second chapter. As a leading claim in the thesis has been that the language of *Roe v. Wade*

incorporates both the pro-Life and pro-Choice rhetoric and is therefore quite vague and open to interpretation, I have suggested that legalization of abortion in 1973 has not dramatically altered the way in which abortion has been written about in American fiction. Across the 90 years the selection of literary works in the thesis covers, there are many similarities in what words are used to describe abortion and what is aborted, and many of the works both pre- and post-*Roe* mimic the language of the debate. Nevertheless, there are subtle changes in the language of abortion. Through close readings of both pre-and post-*Roe* narratives about abortion I have found that narratives written before abortion became legal are much more elusive and metaphorical in their descriptions of the fetus and abortion. This change can be attributed to a combination of two factors: the liberalization of abortion laws and the advancement of ultrasound technology. The images of the fetus in the womb opened the possibility to actually describe rather than just imagine the fetus. The fact that abortion was no longer an illegal topic seems to have prompted writers to move from the metaphors, evasions and lack of proper naming of anything that has to do with abortion, to more detailed descriptions of the procedure, and even more graphic descriptions of the fetus.

In chapter two, I discuss the many ways in which the notion of personhood is approached by the authors, and I argue that it is treated in an ambiguous manner. In my analysis of the language of abortion, I have focused on the notion of personhood and how the ability to see the fetus has affected the literary language. I have found that abortion – the procedure and the word itself – is quite frequently addressed by the characters, but that there is a reluctance to put personhood into words, both before and after *Roe*. I have found Barbara Johnson's notion of apostrophe useful in the discussion of the approach to personhood in the texts. The apostrophe makes something absent and abstract present and alive when addressed, and thus I argue that with the fetus visualized through ultrasound technology there has been a shift to more vivid imagery in the literary narratives after *Roe v. Wade*. The fetus itself, however, continues not to be addressed or talked about directly by the potential parents in all the narratives, with the exception of *A Book of American Martyrs* that mirrors the way in which the abortion debate has made use of fetal imagery.

The multitude of omissions, metaphors, similes, and descriptions designed not to approach the question of whether the fetus is a person are in line with the sentiment expressed by Justice Harry A. Blackmun in the majority opinion of *Roe v. Wade*: "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in (...) disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the

answer.” (Blackmun 159). I argue that the trouble with personhood, how it is talked about and written about in law and in fiction is that as long as the status of the fetus is not settled upon, neither will the role and rights of the woman be clear, and will continue to be contested. If it is not up to the judiciary to decide whether a fetus is a person, neither is it up to writers of fiction. However, I would propose that this sentiment stresses the need to continue the discourse in other realms than public debate and political quarrel. In other words, it stresses the need for fiction, and a debate about that fiction, due to literature’s unique abilities to problematize and nuance the issue of personhood, abortion and women’s rights.

Throughout the thesis, I argue that the literary narratives mostly stray away from the set discourses of the abortion debate in the media, outside abortion clinics, or in political debates. Even though these discourses change and shape the cultural artifacts of a society such as literary works, I suggest that there is a variation in the difference between the rhetoric of the public and the rhetoric of fiction. Most of the pre-*Roe* narratives differ from the abortion narratives that dominated the early public debate, in that they do not describe abortion as horrific and the women who need them as desperate victims, as was the established narrative of abortion in the fifties and sixties (Condit 22-25). On the other hand, I argue, post-*Roe* texts reflect much of the existing debate, often mimicking the language of pro-Life and pro-Choice activists.

Through close readings of both pre-and post-*Roe* narratives about abortion, I have found that many elements such as setting, and narrative order – especially the abortion aftermath – have been skillfully used by writers to convey that abortion stigma is present in all the works of fiction, regardless of when the novel or short story was written. Much of the scholarship on abortion in fiction focuses on the issue of motherhood and how that notion relates to abortion. Paula Abrams argues that *Roe v Wade* did little to reduce the stigma surrounding abortion due to the court’s identification of women primarily as mothers (Abrams 329). In the third chapter I argue that the literary texts discussed in the thesis demonstrate that a continued focus on motherhood as womanhood fulfilled contributes to the perpetuation of abortion stigma. The fact that the language of the law does not give women more than a right to privacy contributes to the continued shaming of women who choose abortion, and this, I argue, is evident in both the pre- and post-legalization narratives. The stereotypes of women based on the mother/child dichotomy are entrenched in the law and represented in fiction, yet I have found that the women in the abortion narratives at hand challenge and defy these narrow definitions of womanhood. “Hills like White Elephants”,

Revolutionary Road and “The Abortion” in particular are texts where abortion is closely connected to the liberation project of Jig, April and Imani – be it from their male partners or the roles they are expected to play as women. Such a reading counters Judith Wilt’s argument that in an abortion narrative something is always lost because motherhood is rejected and it is why literary texts about abortion are usually structured towards a loss or death (Wilt 23). I partly agree with Wilt as my analysis shows that the structuring towards an ending like that applies to the majority of the novels discussed in the thesis. However, as I argue above – not all is lost, and arguably, even with a tragic ending these texts make the case for female choice. When the female characters assert their agency and exert power over their bodies they become emancipated from the uneven power structures in their relationships and in society.

A close reading and discussion of the linguistic elements in descriptions of abortion and personhood reveals an imbalance of power between the genders. In chapter three, I discuss the male perspective in the abortion narratives and argue that they too suffer from expectations created by the fixed gender roles. I propose that this anxiety, connected to the feeling of endangered masculinity, is highlighted by the prospect of abortion these male characters face. By taking into account the male perspectives on abortion it becomes clear that the helplessness in the inability to articulate feelings of shame and inadequacy connected to one’s own gender is common for both men and women when it comes to abortion and potential parenthood.

My investigation of how abortion stigma has been written about has led me to the conclusion that stigma is heavily present in all the texts I examine in the thesis. However, I have found that despite this presence of abortion stigma, there has been a subtle shift towards an emphasis on an internal stigma, one felt privately by the characters, in the post-*Roe* narratives. Interestingly, the earliest abortion narratives; “Hills Like White Elephants” and *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* are the ones that treat the subject of abortion with a minimal amount of stigma, and a balanced, unmoralizing outlook on the topic, despite the illegality of the procedure. As I discuss in the third chapter, shame and stigmatization that are rooted in the stereotypes of women as mothers and nurturers is to some extent represented in all the narratives, but I would argue that it is most prominent in the post-legalization narratives, where the long-endured pressures of society prompt many of the female characters who even consider abortion to punish themselves mentally, despite the procedure being legal. However, the abortion shame and self-policing these characters engage in can be interpreted as a criticism of the conservative backlash after 1973, which many scholars attribute to the fact that the language of *Roe* did little to prevent perpetuation of abortion stigma.

Still, the language of *Roe v. Wade* was landmark because even though it does not absolutely confirm a woman's right to choose, it did recognize the fact that it was not the state's place to interfere with a woman's decision between abortion and childbirth (Abrams 325). However, the weakness of the language of the decision has made the right to choose vulnerable in many subsequent decisions, Abrams argues. Thus, the right is still contested today, not only in the public debate but also in the courts. The failure of language to address the issue of personhood and abortion in a non-divisive way is a recognition of the complex nature of abortion and an admittance that it probably will remain a contested issue. I would argue that all the works of fiction discussed in the thesis, with their strong female characters, can be read as a voice for legalization of abortion in the pre-*Roe* novels and as a call for a continued fight for women's rights in the post-*Roe* novels, particularly a woman's right to choose and a right to access safe abortions. The emancipation of female characters through the abortion trope is an encouragement to not settle for a weak law that only partially recognizes woman as an autonomous decision maker.

4.2 Suggestions for further research: From Personal to Political in American Literature about Abortion

In this thesis I have focused on the language of the law, debate rhetoric and the notion of personhood and abortion stigma, and I have discussed how these are connected and represented in the seven works of literature. The discussion of the language of abortion and its stigma opens up for a further discussion of how abortion as a literary trope is used in American fiction, and I suggest that as an incredibly complex issue in itself, abortion as a literary device is able to carry even heavier loads. In chapter three I discuss briefly how abortion and other societal concerns such as race and patriarchy are weaved together in "The Abortion" by Alice Walker, and I would argue that the most recent abortion narratives, written after *Roe*, show that abortion functions as a "gateway" issue to other socio-political dilemmas in the American society. I would argue that there is a noteworthy shift from the personal to the political in the novels and short stories discussed in the thesis, in the sense that the narratives about abortion have moved out of the private domain: the confines of the American suburbs in *Revolutionary Road*, or the private conversation between lovers in "Hills Like White Elephants" and *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*. I propose that in the post-*Roe* narratives in which abortion is a part of the plot, there is a tendency to combine abortion with other socio-political issues in order to send a powerful message. I

would argue that the more recent abortion narratives prove that the notion could be extended to include other notions such as multiculturalism, religion and issues concerning the environment or the pervasion of violence in the American society.

Destruction of the environment and the murky morals of the American meat industry are at the center of Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*, where the fertility of women is closely connected to the fertility of the animals we consume, and as such, the novel problematizes human interference with nature. The effect of religion on society and individuals in "Good People" and *A Book of American Martyrs* is another example of the considerable metaphorical power of the abortion trope. Two out of three texts written in the decades after *Roe v. Wade* deal with abortion and violence in a larger sense. As already mentioned, Walker's "The Abortion" brings up racial issues and connects them to both abortion and the murder of a young Afro-American girl. In Oates's *A Book of American Martyrs*, the abortion debate serves as an explosive catalyst for the discussion of all sorts of issues troubling America; class distinctions, guns, violence, and the death penalty. Ozeki makes a similar connection in *My Year of Meats*: "guns, race, meat, and Manifest Destiny all collided in a single explosion of violent, dehumanized activity" (Ozeki 107).

Consequently, I propose that there is a subtle shift from the personal to the political in the texts written before and after the legalization of abortion, a shift that I believe is worth further academic scrutiny. I would argue that the way in which abortion is used as a literary trope reveals the hypocrisy of other human activities. Abortion is a potent vehicle to carry the magnitude of such issues, as it is in itself such a complex and contested issue. It can be beneficial to investigate the connection between abortion and topics such as consumption of meat, destruction of the environment and other devastating consequences of capitalism, gun violence, death penalty, and the stigmatization and discrimination of fellow human beings. This can facilitate a more differentiated discussion of abortion and other difficult issues and perhaps contribute to a loosening up of the rhetorical deadlock that characterizes the abortion debate.

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