

# Fiction of the New Killers: Girls, Teenagers, and Other Misguided Female Feminists in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction on Abortion, Infanticide, and Euthanasia

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ABSTRACT: This project evaluates abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia in novels by contemporary feminist authors (Elizabeth Keenan, Carrie Mesrobian, Margaret Owen, Dianne Touchell, and Sharon Biggs Waller) according to the principles of right-to-life literary theory and provides further general commentary on those novels to assist pro-life readers in their own work of critiquing anti-life literature.

**B**EFORE ABORTION WAS LEGALIZED throughout the nine months of pregnancy for any reason whatsoever in 1973, some anti-life authors who had written work which seemed to promote abortion, infanticide, or euthanasia may have been reticent about their support for those three life issues. The presumption may have been that the reading public would not purchase their works if it were known that the

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author supports a practice, such as abortion, which harms mothers, kills unborn babies, and alienates fathers; or infanticide, which kills handicapped newborns; or euthanasia, which kills the elderly or the medically vulnerable.

In contrast, other authors have openly voiced their support for the abortion movement and, particularly, their support for the largest provider of abortions, Planned Parenthood. One thinks, for example, of John Irving, author of *The Cider House Rules*, whose support for the abortion business galvanized both anti- and pro-life movements to the point that buying the book or patronizing the film indicated the strengths and, more importantly, purchasing power of activists in both movements.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary authors continue to support abortion groups (activist non-profits like NARAL) and organizations that are more accurately designated as businesses by the international pro-life community (for example, Planned Parenthood), but there is a noticeable difference separating current authors from their pre-*Roe* counterparts. Contemporary authors in the second decade of the twenty-first century are not only more explicit in their support of abortion organizations and businesses, but also activist in encouraging their readers to work with those abortion groups for the express purpose of defeating pro-life initiatives and life-affirming laws and stifling pro-life free speech rights. Moreover, contemporary anti-life authors increasingly advocate support for the remaining two life issues, infanticide and euthanasia.

The positions of the authors studied here on the life issues are not easy to locate; trying to determine their positions on the life issues involves a torturous hunt from one website to another, or from one tweet to a retweet,

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<sup>1</sup> In "My Dinner at the White House," Irving admits that he "gave a rousing speech in favor of abortion rights, and lambasting [President] George Bush—from an exclusively Planned Parenthood perspective, mind you." John Irving, *Trying to Save Piggy Sneed*. (Arcade, 1996, p. 166).

I have argued in "Cinematic Treatment of Abortion: *Alfie* (1965) and *The Cider House Rules* (1999)" that, although *The Cider House Rules* is an abortion novel whose ideological message is that that life-denying practice must remain legal, both the novel and film can be used as evidence affirming the pro-life principle that abortion destroys lives more than it liberates women.

or from emails to the author, all of which remain unanswered. Since this is not a biographical study of the authors themselves but a literary analysis of their works, ascertaining whether the authors support the three types of killing known as abortion, infanticide, or euthanasia may be unnecessary. It must be relegated to future research to determine the extent to which these authors are able to separate their personal biases against human life from writing fiction which merely uses the life issues as subject matter.

Often, however, the novels themselves will have concluding endnotes, essays, or, as in the case of Keenan's *Rebel Girls*, an "Historical Note" which declare the authors' anti-life beliefs.<sup>2</sup> For example, while Keenan's claim that she chose Baton Rouge in 1992 as the setting for her novel because "I wanted a setting parallel to today's politics—something close, but not identical, to today" seems innocuous and merely an effort to attain historical credibility, her declaration two pages later that "Like Athena [her protagonist], I went to a Catholic high school, and was pretty much the only pro-choice student in the school" makes her pro-abortion position clear.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Sharon Biggs Waller confesses in the "Author's Note" in her *Girls on the Verge* that, although she "still feel[s] a small bite of shame" after her abortion, "It follows me to Planned Parenthood, where I work as a volunteer escort."<sup>4</sup>

Whether the authors' explicit positions on the life issues can be ascertained or not, this study examines five recent novels (all written within the past six years) on the life issues by emerging feminist writers: Elizabeth Keenan's abortion novel *Rebel Girls*; Carrie Mesrobian's abortion novel *The Whitsun Daughters*<sup>5</sup>; Margaret Owen's euthanasia novel *The Merciful Crow*<sup>6</sup>; Dianne Touchell's infanticide novel *A Small Madness*<sup>7</sup>; and Sharon Biggs Waller's abortion novel *Girls on the Verge*. All of these items are catalogued for the children's and young adult reading audience.

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Keenan, *Rebel Girls* (New York: Inkyard Press, 2019), pp. 415-22.

<sup>3</sup> Keenan, p. 415, 417.

<sup>4</sup> Sharon Biggs Waller, *Girls on the Verge* (New York: Henry Holt, 2019), p. 223.

<sup>5</sup> Carrie Mesrobian, *The Whitsun Daughters* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Owen, *The Merciful Crow* (New York: Henry Holt, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Dianne Touchell, *A Small Madness* (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2015).

*I. Popular Criticism of the Novels*

Although scholarly criticism is virtually nonexistent, reviews of the novels are provided in the customary periodicals for librarians working with the children's or young adult demographic, such as *Booklist*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *School Library Journal*. These reviews, which are available on databases such as Academic Search Premier, show that the reviewers may be more concerned about the political correctness of the novels and whether they meet anti-life feminist or LGBTQ standards rather than whether the novels constitute literature which exemplifies the traditional transcendentals of the true, the beautiful, and the good. Since scholarly review of these five titles is rare, this study hopes to fill the gap necessary for evaluation of novels which, while they may not be well written, are popular.<sup>8</sup> The following collates the reviews of the five novels according to their years of publication.

*A. Dianne Touchell's A Small Madness*

Critics of Touchell's *A Small Madness* seem to have more problems with the author's writing style than the issue of abortion. For example, Briana Shemroske's evaluation of the novel soars rhetorically, but misses the essential fact that the novel concerns the abortion of a human being:

Taut family dynamics, crippled relationships, and oppressive insecurities are depicted with painfully palpable candor. Rife with secrets and impossible burdens, this is a striking story about the mistakes we make, the stigmas we face, and the intangible redemption that comes with honesty. Tender, terse, and utterly unforgettable.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, Elizabeth Saxton avoids the usual paltry criticism of young adult novels by excoriating Touchell's style and avoidance (or inability) to write about the life-destroying practices of abortion and infanticide, resulting in the final "verdict" which is the customary ending for any novel reviewed in *School Library Journal*:

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<sup>8</sup> As of July 2021, all five novels are held by 2,008 library systems, with Owen's *The Merciful Crow* having the highest count of 754 libraries. Amazon's Best Sellers Rank ranges from the low of Touchell's *A Small Madness* (3,528,291) to the high of Owen's *The Merciful Crow* (54,049).

<sup>9</sup> Briana Shemroske, *Booklist*, vol. 112, no. 19/20, 1 June 2016, p. 106.

Unfortunately, an interesting story is overtaken by shallow characterization, teen voices that do not ring true, and needless and sometimes digressive point-of-view changes. Readers know only token things about the protagonists beyond the pregnancy, to the point where it is unclear whether Rose has an intellectual disability or is simply an unbelievably naive 17-year-old. This work reads like a dated Beatrice Sparks–style cautionary tale where teen sex has the worst consequences imaginable, and no male character misses a chance to label a girl a slut. Despite a frustrating lack of detail at the book’s crucial moment, the omniscient narrator’s description is frequently substituted for elements that should be shown through characters’ actions. VERDICT Not recommended, because of poor narrative style and stock characterizations.<sup>10</sup>

A *Kirkus Reviews* analysis supports the problem in writing style that Saxton suggests:

Part cautionary tale, part exploration of the madness bred by desperation, this is a difficult but powerful narrative inspired by a true story. Although it ends in frustrating ambiguity, the story is riveting enough to read in one sitting.

Told with compassion and empathy, a conversation-starting look at the dangers of keeping a pregnancy secret.<sup>11</sup>

#### B. Elizabeth Keenan’s *Rebel Girls*

Keenan’s *Rebel Girls* has received little scholarly attention since its publication in 2019. *Kirkus Reviews* offers a flaccid evaluation of the novel:

Beyond the abortion debate, this provides a necessary focus on the importance of young women supporting one another across differences. Echoing the punk-rock feminist movement of the early '90s, debut author Keenan creates a timely narrative that will challenge teens to reflect on their personal values and engage in respectful discourse.<sup>12</sup>

Alex Graves’ brief critique of the novel in *School Library Journal* is much more trenchant:

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Saxton, Review of *A Small Madness*, *School Library Journal*, vol. 62, no. 5, May 2016, p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> *A Small Madness* [book review], *Kirkus Reviews*, vol. 84, no. 7, 1 April 2016, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> *Rebel Girls* [book review], *Kirkus Reviews*, vol. 87, no. 15, 1 August 2019.

Stock characters fill most roles, all of whom start and end this politically charged story with the same viewpoints. Athena handles her relationships with sufficient complexity, but politically she just says the term “riot grrrl” a lot, rather than exemplifying, or even struggling with, its principles. Though she asks “What would Kathleen Hanna do?” her answers are often superficial.<sup>13</sup>

*C. Margaret Owen’s The Merciful Crow*

Owen’s *The Merciful Crow* has received more critical attention, although that attention often scrupulously avoids the right-to-life issue of euthanasia by using the euphemism “showing mercy,” as is the case with Erin Downey, who writes that the main character’s “small band of Crows are tasked with visiting stricken households, disposing of the dead victims, and showing mercy to those near their end.”<sup>14</sup> An even more egregious deflection from the euthanasia intent of the novel is Downey’s emphasis of LGBTQ elements in the work:

One especially nice touch is the baseline assumption that queer characters are so normal in this world as to be a nonissue—one background character, for example, uses they/them pronouns with no fanfare or explanation. Many readers wouldn’t notice this detail, but queer readers and their allies likely will appreciate it.<sup>15</sup>

While a *Publisher’s Weekly* review also comments on the LGBTQ element, saying the novel is “filled with diverse characters with fluid sexualities and identities,” it comes closer to the subject matter of euthanasia, although using a euphemism and misleading language usually associated with euthanasia: the Crows “alone can safely dispose of plague victims and grant mercy killings to them when appropriate,” a review which leaves the reader further wondering what conditions would satisfy the nebulous “when appropriate” language.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Alex Graves, [Review of *Rebel Girls*], *School Library Journal*, vol. 65, no. 8, Sept. 2019, p. 123.

<sup>14</sup> Erin Downey, [Review of *The Merciful Crow*], *School Library Journal*, vol. 65, no 6, July 2019, p. 52.

<sup>15</sup> Downey, pp. 52-3.

<sup>16</sup> *The Merciful Crow* [book review], *Publishers Weekly*, vol. 266, no. 21, 27 May 2019, p. 94.

Similarly, a *Kirkus Reviews* summary of the novel highlights what it considers positive aspects of the work and the politically correct axioms of the LGBTQ agenda, but omits the negative subject of euthanasia:

Debut author Owen offers well-balanced worldbuilding and a propulsive plot and excels at tender, intimate moments and complicated, realistic romantic and familial relationships. Lacking an overt historical or geographic parallel, the tale instead features a cast spectacularly diverse in class, gender, sexual orientation, and race.... Rich, harrowing, and unafraid to tackle discrimination ....<sup>17</sup>

M. J. Franklin uses the common euphemism for euthanasia in a *New York Times Book Review* critique, but having the phrase in the title of the review clearly identifies for the reader that the subject matter is not “fluid sexualities” or “worldbuilding”: “A teenage mercy killer is out to restore the rightful prince of her plague-ravaged land in this thriller.”<sup>18</sup>

#### D. Sharon Biggs Waller’s *Girls on the Verge*

Criticism of Waller’s *Girls on the Verge* shares some of the attributes of the feeble reviews already mentioned, but, since the novel responds to anti-life Texas Democrat Wendy Davis, who opposes Texas’ pro-life laws, the political tone of the pro-abortion movement becomes evident in many of the reviews. The earliest, from *Kirkus Reviews*, sounds as though it was written as a public relations piece for a pro-abortion organization:

While readers will come to care about the characters and their relationships to some degree, the important informational content takes precedence overall. Meant to “sound an alarm,” Waller’s . . . book is highly informative, filled with frank, detailed descriptions of our nation’s restrictions on reproductive health as well as the emotional and physical experiences of abortion.

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<sup>17</sup> *The Merciful Crow* [book review], *Kirkus Reviews*, vol. 87, no. 11, 1 June 2019.

<sup>18</sup> M. J. Franklin, “A Teenage Mercy Killer Is out to Restore the Rightful Prince of Her Plague-Ravaged Land in This Thriller,” *New York Times Book Review*, 25 August 2019, p. 22.

A *Forever*-esque story for reproductive justice, this is a timely and vital book.<sup>19</sup>

Betsy Fraser continues the critique-as-pro-abortion-communicative in her review of the book:

This compelling novel opens with a stark and timely reminder of a woman's right to choose in June 2014, when there were only 19 abortion clinics left in Texas, a state which included five million women of reproductive age. Waller realistically depicts the 17-year-old's struggles to get an abortion, from ending up at a clinic where she's prayed over, with a doctor who won't do anything without parental consent, to facing a judge who won't bypass parental consent as he's sure he's doing what's best for her. This title offers realistic viewpoints on teenage pregnancy, along with what it is like to have the right to choose, wanting that right, and living knowing that you will be judged for having exercised it.<sup>20</sup>

Maggie Reagan continues the attack on Texas' pro-life laws thus:

Complicating the situation are Texas' prohibitive abortion laws: it's a year after Senator Wendy Davis' filibuster and Governor Rick Perry's restrictive bill. ... The story occasionally has the unnerving feel of a dystopia, despite taking place in the recent past: Camille travels hundreds of miles, crosses into dangerous border towns, and faces the judgment of legal and medical professionals as well as people she knows. The narrative sometimes treads into the expository, but Camille's story is absolutely essential.<sup>21</sup>

The only other review of Waller's novel is an extremely brief entry in *School Library Journal* that reads as a plot summary more than a critique. The item does, however, identify the unborn child to be killed as a "baby": "Camille . . . is horrified to find herself pregnant from her first and only

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<sup>19</sup> *Girls on the Verge* [book review], *Kirkus Reviews*, vol. 87, no. 4, 15 February 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Betsy Fraser, [Review of *Girls on the Verge*], *School Library Journal*, vol. 65, no. 1, February 2019, p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> Maggie Reagan, [Review of *Girls on the Verge*], *Booklist*, vol. 115, no. 15, 1 April 2019, p. 70.

sexual encounter, and unwilling to give her future up for a baby with a boy she's never spoken to again."<sup>22</sup>

#### *E. Carrie Mesrobian's The Whitsun Daughters*

Abby Hargreaves' critique of Mesrobian's *The Whitsun Daughters* is nebulous, if not rhapsodic: "With touches of magic and a firm hold on the details that make reality real, this balances a historical story alongside something decidedly of today's era, while making both feel timeless."<sup>23</sup> This review suffers from the same flaccidity as the *Kirkus* review of Keenan's work, with a crucial difference: it omits the essential fact that Mesrobian's novel concerns abortion:

Emphasis is placed on the parallels between Jane's life and the lives of the Whitsun girls: the complexities and joys of love and sex, unplanned pregnancies, mental illness, and the trials that women and girls often endure at the expense of their minds and bodies.<sup>24</sup>

#### *II. Pro-Life Literary Criticism of the Five Novels*

The five novels studied here could be critiqued from a variety of literary theories used in colleges and universities, but doing so would reduce the commentary to simplistic affirmations or negations of those theories. For example, all the novels could claim their support for anti-life feminist acceptance and promotion of abortion as empowerment of women, liberation of girls and young women from oppressive patriarchy, or some other formulation of the novels meeting standard and trite feminist literary theory criteria. Justifying these feminist terms is best illustrated by the persistent emphasis on "commitment to the riot grrrl revolution's feminist message" in Keenan's *Rebel Girls*.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, all the novels could be examined from a Marxist perspective, and a politically leftist academic or reader would have no

<sup>22</sup> *Girls on the Verge* [book review], *School Library Journal*, vol. 65, no. 12, winter 2020, p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> Abby Hargreaves, [Review of *The Whitsun Daughters*], *Booklist*, vol. 116, no. 21, 1 July 2020, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> *The Whitsun Daughters* [book review], *Kirkus Reviews*, vol. 88, no. 12, 15 June 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Keenan, p. 13.

problem in determining that the novels are solidly in the camp of the ideological resister of oppressive capitalist forces in society. Waller's *Girls on the Verge* best justifies the application of Marxist literary theory; the novel's reviewers note that it is a novel supporting Wendy Davis's claim that Texas pro-life laws are somehow oppressive and not protective, especially of young women who lack the means for the "empowerment" which is supposedly gained when an unborn child is killed in an abortion.

These are only two examples to illustrate how applying the standard literary theories to these novels becomes a simple reduction of whether or not the novels comport with feminist, Marxist, or other literary theories. Much more interesting and productive would be determining whether the five novels can be evaluated from a right-to-life perspective.

I have proposed elsewhere five questions that are designed to stimulate discussion of controversial literature on the life issues much more comprehensively.<sup>26</sup> Briefly, the questions concern whether the literary work argues for the pricelessness of human life, whether the work respects the individual as someone who has an inherent right to life, whether the work respects heterosexual normativity, how the work depicts human life at various stages, and whether characters realize the divine presence in the world as they face their mortality. Each of these questions will now be asked of the five novels under discussion.

#### *A. The Pricelessness of Human Life*

One would find it difficult to determine if any passage in any of the five novels supports the idea that human life is priceless. Certainly, the life of the unborn or newborn child is not valued, so the reader must conclude that the born characters must find their own lives worth living. This is not the case, however, since no character seems to rejoice in being alive. Rather, life is more drudgery than opportunity to make a positive contribution in the world.

Two aspects which affect the ability to determine if the five novels evaluate human life as priceless complicate the matter: first, the ambiguity and

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<sup>26</sup> See my "Right-to-Life Issues in Contemporary Gay and Lesbian Literature" in *Life and Learning XXVIII: Proceedings of the University Faculty for Life* (New York: 2018). [http://www.ufl.org/pdfs/vol28/UFL\\_2018\\_Koloze.pdf](http://www.ufl.org/pdfs/vol28/UFL_2018_Koloze.pdf).

distortion of the feminist agenda, as in Keenan's *Rebel Girls*; and second, the aggressive personalities of characters (such as Fie, the main character in Owen's *The Merciful Crow*) which obscure whether they are capable of experiencing genuine love.

Answering this question with Keenan's *Rebel Girls* in mind is more complex than a simple affirmation or negation. Athena, the narrator, says that she has a "commitment to the riot grrrl revolution's feminist message."<sup>27</sup> Even though her response is an example of the begging the question logical fallacy, the illogicality of her statement can be resolved here.

First, of course, a character who explicitly argues that anything other than declaring that human life is a priceless good has already disavowed the pricelessness of human life. Granted, affirming the "riot grrrl revolution's feminist message" does not exclude affirming human life as a priceless good in the philosophical sense. Given the context, though, the educated reader knows that the "feminist message" that Athena stipulates is contrary to a life-affirming respect for human life. Readers know that, absent being clearly identified as pro-life feminism, contemporary feminism supports abortion and rejects the role of the father in any abortion decision.

Even Athena's litany of riot grrrl beliefs is either naïve or dishonest, since she does not mention abortion or the customary euphemism used by anti-life feminists, "reproductive rights", when the only item in the litany which comes close to the topic of abortion is listed. "I knew what the riot grrrl ideals were," she declares; "Claiming your sexuality, no matter what that meant to you, was a good thing. And the revolution was open to anyone."<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, readers should understand that those characters who support "the riot grrrl revolution's feminist message" place themselves in positions of power over the unborn child. In essence, the characters who support abortion decide that they are superior human beings. Their rejection of unborn human life based on their position of privilege and power over the unborn makes them contemporary eugenicists, like the eugenicists of the early twentieth century who subordinated African Americans and immigrants from southern Europe as inferior beings—the same positions that Margaret Sanger, founder of the abortion business Planned Parenthood, held. Thus, affirming the

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<sup>27</sup> Keenan, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Keenan, p. 19.

pricelessness of human life is impossible for anybody who commits to the grrl revolution version of feminist philosophy.<sup>29</sup>

Understanding the view that the main character Fie, the lead character in Owen's *The Merciful Crow*, has towards human life is challenging since she is a belligerent, angry, and often dour sixteen-year-old teenager. (How appropriately, then, is this character named!) Fie is often sarcastic, arrogant, and belligerent, especially toward "pretty boys": "Half of her wanted to slap him."<sup>30</sup> While these personality traits may be the author's effort to depict Fie as a strong young woman, able to maneuver in a male world (a standard feminist trope), they may instead obscure her belief that some human lives (particularly, male ones) are not as valuable as hers. Certainly, the antagonism between her "nation" (the Crows who kill people afflicted with the plague) and the monarchy and its supporting aristocracy suggests not merely distrust between social castes, but also a deeper belief of the inequality of human beings.

More profoundly, Owen's setting is a pagan fantasy world of indeterminate chronology where traditional ideas long established in the West are no longer valid. Where contemporary society does not consider disease the result of sin, characters in Owens' novel identify plague victims as "sinners"; in fact, the causal relationship is replaced with the equation

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<sup>29</sup> The possible exception is that one can subscribe to the music generated by grrrl bands without necessarily accepting the anti-life positions of the lyrics of grrrl band songs—this, despite the fact that such bands are no longer part of the music scene, just as rap is giving way to trap as a dominant music genre. Appreciating grrrl band music is consistent with the idea that a literary artifact, even an anti-life one, can be studied and appreciated for its intrinsic merits.

Moreover, like other anti-life feminist movements, the rabid pro-abortion positions of the "riot grrrl" blip in feminist history can be found only on sites which use the euphemism "reproductive rights" for the killing procedure called abortion. See, for example, Equality Archive's mention of "bands and fans [who] rallied together at reproductive rights benefits and demonstrations and held lively discussions, refusing to be left out of the larger political conversation." ("The Riot Grrrl Revolution," *Equality Archive*, 2021, <https://equalityarchive.com/issues/riot-grrrl-revolution/>).

<sup>30</sup> Owen, p. 105.

that disease (such as the plague) equals sin: “the Crows had true sinners to burn.”<sup>31</sup>

*B. Respect for the Individual’s Right to Life*

Like other anti-life fiction, all of the novels considered here respect only those individuals who are born and either ignore or devalue the lives of unborn human beings. Moreover, the violence evident in some of the works suggests that the respect for born characters is tenuous. This is most evident in Owen’s *The Merciful Crow*, where the killings of plague victims indicate that palliative care is unheard of for those suffering with the disease and where constant antagonism between the nation of Crows (the euthanasia killers) led by Fie and aristocratic forces often leads to warfare.

In fact, a distorted sense of “nationalism” in the novel controls most moral actions, exemplified by the refrain that runs throughout the text of serving “the nation” first.<sup>32</sup> Thus, human lives are subordinate to the state, a political position in Owen’s fantasy world approximating the anti-life ideologies of communism or Nazism, which claimed millions of lives in our real world.

*C. Heterosexual Normativity and Integrity of the Family*

As is typical of most young adult novels aimed to hook teens into reading (an admittedly difficult task, as every secondary teacher and college faculty can attest) by titillating them with sexuality in fiction, sex is just an activity, not the sexual union of a husband and wife for the purposes of obtaining pleasure and being open to reproduction. For example, Touchell’s *A Small Madness* exemplifies the characteristics of all of these young adult attitudes about sex. After the first sexual activity scene, Rose’s friend Liv offers the controlling perspective in the novel that Rose “should have had sex by now [...] everyone else had had sex.”<sup>33</sup> Although Michael, Rose’s lover, has a brother, Tim, who concedes that men must obtain permission from girls before having sex with them, the young people’s thinking about sex is further

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<sup>31</sup> Owen, p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> Owen, p. 318.

<sup>33</sup> Touchell, p. 9, p. 12.

muddled when Tim thinks that Michael should first have sex with a “slut.”<sup>34</sup> To reinforce the characters’ myopic views about sex, Liv is “happy” about Rose’s fornication and thinks that condoms are the answer to avoiding pregnancy and enjoying sexual activity.<sup>35</sup> Given such negative and hedonistic views about sex, it is no wonder, then, that Michael thinks that pregnancy is a “mistake.”<sup>36</sup>

The related matter of this question (the integrity of the family) is further challenged in these novels. The heterosexual normativity of Athena’s, the main character’s, family in Keenan’s *Rebel Girls* is typical. While Athena subscribes to “the riot grrrl revolution’s feminist message” (see above), Athena’s sister Helen is pro-life, and her mother is anti-life. The ideologies of her divorced parents are exemplified by the following: her father is a social justice Catholic (“We didn’t go to church on Sunday or anything”), and Athena’s mother’s reaction to her having a boyfriend is to send her “a box of condoms or another copy of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.”<sup>37</sup>

Despite the myopic feminism which surrounds most female characters in these five novels, heterosexual normativity cannot be avoided. For example, Athena acts like a stereotypical girl around a young man who fascinates her: “I seemed to forget everything about being a feminist when I was around him.”<sup>38</sup> When Kyle, the teenaged boy whom Athena falls for, kisses her, they go “to the rec room’s aging leather couch” where they were “making out.”<sup>39</sup> Athena’s angst for seeming to abandon her misandrist feminism occurs throughout the novel. “I felt like a bad feminist for caring that people saw I was on a date with a hot guy”, she says.<sup>40</sup> Later she asks, “Was it supposed to make me feel better to be validated by a guy’s agreement?”, a situation which she concludes is a “patriarchal conspiracy.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Touchell, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Touchell, pp. 34-5.

<sup>36</sup> Touchell, p. 79.

<sup>37</sup> Keenan, p. 33, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Keenan, p. 77.

<sup>39</sup> Keenan, p. 115, p. 117.

<sup>40</sup> Keenan, p. [198].

<sup>41</sup> Keenan, p. 215, p. 216.

*D. The Inherent Right to Exist of the Unborn, Newborn, and Mature Adults*

Most of the novels studied here engage in standard dehumanization, notably the use of the third-person pronoun singular “it” to refer to the unborn child. A few examples will illustrate how pervasive this dehumanization is.

While one use of “it” in Touchell’s *A Small Madness* is ambiguous (whether the term refers to the teens’ reactions about the pregnancy in general or to the unborn child him- or herself; see page 64), the uses of “it” to refer to the unborn child are extensive, closely followed by “thing” as another term to demean the unborn child.

Liv, the best friend of Rose, the aborted mother, suggests that she “get rid of it.”<sup>42</sup> Rose thinks the baby is not already, but “would [...] become a real thing.”<sup>43</sup> Michael, Rose’s lover and father of the child, also queries, “Could they get rid of it?”<sup>44</sup> Rose thinks of the baby as “the thing” and “it.”<sup>45</sup> Michael calls the unborn child an “it” who is now “like a manatee in his spinal fluid.”<sup>46</sup> When she thinks she is not pregnant but just has a delayed period, Rose declares that “I just created this thing in my mind.”<sup>47</sup> After she miscarries, Rose simply states that “It went away.”<sup>48</sup> When Michael and she reflect on what to do with the child’s body, Rose commands Michael, “Bring it to me”; “‘It *must* be buried,’ Rose said again.”<sup>49</sup> Looking at the corpse of the child, Rose calls her “the tiny gray thing.”<sup>50</sup> Even when he is drunk, Michael obsesses over the child’s burial, saying, “We buried it.”<sup>51</sup>

Two of Touchell’s items of dehumanizing language towards the unborn child are certainly unique: snot and virus. Michael compares having an abortion to “picking your nose.”<sup>52</sup> Certainly, likening his own unborn child (daughter) to snot says a great deal about this wayward young man.

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<sup>42</sup> Touchell, p. 56.

<sup>43</sup> Touchell, p. 56.

<sup>44</sup> Touchell, p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> Touchell, p. 67.

<sup>46</sup> Touchell, p. 85.

<sup>47</sup> Touchell, p. 115.

<sup>48</sup> Touchell, p. 124.

<sup>49</sup> Touchell, p. 126; italics in original.

<sup>50</sup> Touchell, p. 128.

<sup>51</sup> Touchell, p. 159.

<sup>52</sup> Touchell, p. 58.

Equating the unborn child to a virus continues a long-established trend in the fictional anti-life lexicon. Michael concludes that his father's disappointment in him is "just as much a virus as this thing inside of Rose."<sup>53</sup> He repeats the metaphor later, referring to "this virus inside her."<sup>54</sup> Rose herself uses this metaphor often, as when she says, "I have a virus in me" during pregnancy and "The virus had gone away" after she miscarries.<sup>55</sup>

Athena in Keenan's *Rebel Girls* makes her ethical stance clear regarding the right to life of the unborn child when she states, "There wasn't anything wrong with having an abortion."<sup>56</sup> Later, she will lapse into a euphemism when she tells a classmate who was an abortion clinic escort that it must be "rewarding to help everyone," "help" neutralizing and replacing the killing which occurs in every abortion.<sup>57</sup>

Given her strong pro-abortion position, it is out of character, then, for the reader to see that Athena is shocked at seeing pictures of fetuses looking like babies: "Fetuses that didn't look like the nebulous tadpole creatures I was used to seeing in biology books, but baby-like. Even the tiniest of fetuses looked like a chubby newborn."<sup>58</sup>

Waller's *Girls on the Verge* continues the dehumanization of the unborn child to be aborted, where Camille directly states that she wants to "get rid of it."<sup>59</sup> She further shows her ignorance of biology when she asserts, with two more rapid uses of the depersonalized pronoun, "Stop saying *baby!* It's not a baby; and it never will be."<sup>60</sup> Camille's stammer regarding how an abortifacient would affect her is a stylistic feature the author uses to denote the hesitation that anyone should experience over this moral issue: "I need to be near a toilet because... because."<sup>61</sup>

As is typical of most abortion novels, especially those written for the young adult audience, the killing of the child in Waller's novel occurs in a

<sup>53</sup> Touchell, p. 62.

<sup>54</sup> Touchell, p. 82.

<sup>55</sup> Touchell, p. 97, p. 172.

<sup>56</sup> Keenan, p. 95.

<sup>57</sup> Keenan, p. 238.

<sup>58</sup> Keenan, p. 139.

<sup>59</sup> Waller, p. 22.

<sup>60</sup> Waller, p. 28; italics in original.

<sup>61</sup> Waller, p. 78; ellipsis in original.

brief paragraph which, although it attempts to suggest that abortion is easy, defies the truth of any abortion and attempts to nullify the post-abortion syndrome trauma that mothers who have aborted experience:

Dr. Maria inserts something in me. I feel a pressure in my stomach followed by a pain that feels like the worst period cramps I've ever had. But the pain only lasts a few seconds. My paper drape rustles, and I feel the doctor's hands as she helps me put my legs down.

"You're all done now, Camille."<sup>62</sup>

Note how the painful killing of the unborn child is obscured behind "the pain" that the mother herself feels, the verb "feel" repeated several times.

Disrespect for mature human life is obvious in Owen's *The Merciful Crow*. The euthanasia killings of plague victims begins as the first sentence on the first page ("Pa was taking too long to cut the boys' throats"), continues to an instance where a plague victim's throat was cut ("There was a savage jerk. The sinner died smiling"), and advances to another instance where cutting someone's throat is euphemistically called having "dealt mercy."<sup>63</sup>

#### *E. Realizing the Divine Presence When Faced with Mortality*

Religious influences are rare to find in the five novels, unless they are used to mock Christians who advocate a pro-life position or to denigrate a character's upbringing. This lack of religious sensibility has always been a common universal aspect of abortion fiction written for adults and has increasingly become a constituent feature of abortion fiction written for children and young adults.

Having established this lack of religious training, the first clause of the question to be asked of the five novels leads to a similarly striking feature: virtually all of the young adult characters in the five novels do not consider their own mortality, not even the mothers who contemplate abortion as a possible risky surgical or chemical abortion procedure. In fact, four of the five

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<sup>62</sup> Waller, p. 213.

<sup>63</sup> Owen, p. 3, p. 65, p. 205.

novels concern teen mothers seeking surgical abortion, which is decreasing as the favored means to abort, being replaced with chemical abortions.

The exception is Mesrobian's *The Whitsun Daughters*, where the chemical abortion spans fifty pages and is depicted contrary to the experience of other mothers who aborted using RU-486 or other abortifacients. Where the aborting mother in Mesrobian's novel simply states, "The cramps are bad"<sup>64</sup> Abby Johnson described the pain involved in her chemical abortion as "sheer agony."<sup>65</sup> That authors would gloss over women's pain in chemical abortions is not only unconscionable, but also fatal to fiction which strives for realism in contemporary abortion decisions.

The religious influences that do exist to help characters perceive a divine presence in the world are superficial. For example, Michael, a character in Touchell's *A Small Madness*, gets his morals from film, even though he was supposedly raised in a religious family.<sup>66</sup> His father, presumably, is depicted as a fundamentalist Christian.<sup>67</sup> On the specific religious matter of life after death, whether those characters believe in an afterlife is not affirmed, but ambiguously suggested. For example, Liv, a character in Touchell's *A Small Madness* declares that "life was just too damn short."<sup>68</sup> However, this statement is ambiguous; calling life brief could indicate either that one appreciates every moment of life before death or that the only life one has is his or her current existence. Similarly, a religious sense is replaced in Keenan's *Rebel Girls* with another means of technology. When Athena "needed some inspiration", she goes to her records.<sup>69</sup>

Although the main characters in Touchell's novel do not perceive any divine presence as a result of the mortality of their dead child, it is interesting that Rose is becoming "disconnected" and "more detached and confused" after the death and burial of the child.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, when the police come to

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<sup>64</sup> Mesrobian, p. 155.

<sup>65</sup> Abby Johnson, *Unplanned: The Dramatic True Story of a Former Planned Parenthood Leader's Eye-Opening Journey Across the Life Line*, (Ignatius Press, 2010, p. 47).

<sup>66</sup> Touchell, p. 17, p. 49.

<sup>67</sup> Touchell, p. 63.

<sup>68</sup> Touchell, p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> Keenan, p. 118.

<sup>70</sup> Touchell, p. 172.

speak with Rose, this thrust into reality is called “this disconnection”; Rose is now a “vacuous caricature.”<sup>71</sup> Whatever personality disintegration has occurred, Rose is sane enough to sense “relief” from Michael after he apparently confessed his part in the child’s burial to police.<sup>72</sup>

If the worldview of Keenan’s novel is difficult to identify, then that of Owen’s *The Merciful Crow* is slightly more identifiable. Religious elements are mentioned throughout the sprawling novel, but none seems to be the controlling religious or ethical force in the characters’ lives. References to “god-grave shrines” and that a “Covenant” was made between the gods and humans, even abbreviated terms like “viatic” (a truncation perhaps of the Latin term “viaticum”), suggest that Owen’s fictional world has some religious foundation.<sup>73</sup> However, since the chronology is uncertain (is the novel set in pre-history or a futuristic society?), the reader is bereft of certainty about the source of the characters’ life-and-death decisions. Not even the ambiguous “Code” casually referenced throughout the novel is explained.

### *III. Further Commentary of the Five Novels*

The following general comments are further reactions to the five novels. They are designed to enhance the above commentary and to assist pro-life readers in their own efforts to critique and publish book reviews of literature which uses the life issues of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia as its subject matter.

#### *A. Dianne Touchell’s A Small Madness*

Touchell’s *A Small Madness* is a well-written novel with both standard and clever dehumanizing language used by abortion supporters. Touchell continues the dehumanizing technique made famous by Ernest Hemingway (calling the unborn child an “it”), and she adds several new twists to the anti-life/pro-abortion dehumanizing lexicon.

What critics have not yet commented on, however, is that Rose clearly manifests post-abortion syndrome (PAS). The novel is not a typical teen

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<sup>71</sup> Touchell, p. 181, p. 186.

<sup>72</sup> Touchell, p. 189.

<sup>73</sup> Owen, p. 21, pp. 49-50, p. 194.

abortion work, where the mother goes to an abortion clinic to have the child killed. Rose is miscarrying the child, so the abortion occurring in this novel is not an elective, but a spontaneous abortion, morally neutral. What may interest the reader more, though, is determining whether Rose's intention and efforts to kill the unborn child herself (by smoking, depriving herself of food, etc.) meet the criteria of moral culpability in the child's killing. What is even more important in supporting the claim of PAS is that Rose follows a trajectory of personality defragmentation after the miscarriage and after the police come to speak with her on finding the baby's body which the teens buried in an empty lot.

*B. Elizabeth Keenan's Rebel Girls*

Keenan's *Rebel Girls* is a chore and a bore, an unconvincing plot which is more a 412-page psychiatric case study of a teen girl suffering from an outdated anti-life version of feminist ideology who discovers her innate heterosexual normativity. Essentially, Athena, the first-person narrator who is anti-life, wants to help her pro-life sister Helen overcome rumors circulating in their high school that Helen had an abortion, which would ban her from being part of the Homecoming.

The essence of this plot was identified on page 95. By page 369, the reader understands that all it took to overcome a teacher's ban preventing Helen from being in the Homecoming was a call from her father to the principal. Towards the end of the novel (page 402), Sr. Catherine, dean of discipline at the high school, vows not to expel another student who had aborted, so there was no issue worth writing about anyway. Why, then, should any pro-lifer read 307 pages of a severely introspective unconvincing plot?

Furthermore, Athena's preaching about abortion is equally unnecessary. Athena mentions "abortion rights", and so, being a typical anti-life feminist, Athena felt the need to talk about a pro-life crisis pregnancy center as a "fake abortion clinic."<sup>74</sup> Worst of all is Athena's claim that "There wasn't anything wrong with having an abortion"—a statement willfully ignoring post-abortion syndrome which, even in the novel's setting of 1992, was obvious for mothers who chose abortion instead of one of several life-affirming options.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Keenan, p. 22, p. 61.

<sup>75</sup> Keenan, p. 95.

Athena may have committed an egregious Freudian slip when she admitted that the novel's entire abortion language is unnecessary to the feeble plot. When she and her friend enter the crisis pregnancy center, Athena lets slip that "none of this was really related to Helen, other than the associated topic of abortion."<sup>76</sup> This novel, then, is not about "abortion stigma" or feminist empowerment of women (which is a pro-life concept).<sup>77</sup> Why, then, talk about abortion at all? The reader would counter that it would have been better just to narrate the story of a teenage girl who addressed rumors which were responsible for preventing her from going to Homecoming.

Of course, the real purpose of Keenan's novel is political. Athena goes into an anti-Republican rant when she claims that "Republicans were priming the nation for a fascist dictatorship."<sup>78</sup> The author herself declares her pro-abortion position. Thus, it is simply typical that a pro-abortion writer must ignore contemporary pro-life achievements and turn to 1992 (nearly thirty years ago) to force abortion into a novel merely concerned with a vapid Homecoming.

### C. Margaret Owen's *The Merciful Crow*

The 369 pages of Owen's *The Merciful Crow* are difficult to plow through. Although the plot is tedious and implausible, and the text could be rewritten in detailed paragraphs instead of one-liners, readers can use some ideas from this novel to promote pro-life views about the sanctity of human life and the importance of heterosexual normativity.

The semantic distortion in the novel is obvious. Just as euthanasia supporters try to rename the killing of the elderly and the medically vulnerable as "death with dignity" or some other euphemism, the main characters in Owen's novel give "mercy" to persons either suffering from illness or dying. The Crows do not provide mercy, of course; they kill the people. Pro-lifers can use this novel as an example of the linguistic distortion used to kill humans in an ancient pagan, albeit fantasy, world.

A major problem of the novel is conceptual. If Fie, the main character, has the power to create magic to make herself and others invisible to her

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<sup>76</sup> Keenan, p. 135.

<sup>77</sup> Keenan, p. [419].

<sup>78</sup> Keenan, p. 53.

enemies or to heal wounds obtained in battles, then why could she not use her magic skills to provide palliative care for or outright cure those who are terminally ill?

Moreover, Fie's knowledge of herbal sources used as either contraceptives or menstrual aids indicates that even the pagan world in which Fie lives has great knowledge of natural remedies.<sup>79</sup> Why, then, could her society not have discovered a natural palliative to relieve the pain of those in a terminal condition?

Furthermore, perhaps the reason why Fie is so belligerent and angry throughout the novel is that she is stuck in the caste of being a killer. Her character comports with the contemporary view that abortionists and euthanasia supporters are incredibly unhappy people.

On the lighter side, the sex scene between Fie and Tavin is comedy at its best, thunder and all.<sup>80</sup> Yes, it is supposed to be titillating and probably is for young adult readers; mature persons, of course, would read these pages and laugh.

Besides being humorous, this sex scene reinforces heterosexual normativity. Fie and Tavin are not moral exemplars; they are typical teens who think that sex is just an activity to generate pleasure instead of the expression of love between married persons. It is extremely interesting, therefore, to see how the ever-snotty Fie has softened under the influence of having sex with a male.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, heterosexual normativity transforms Tavin's idea about his purpose in life from a negative to a more positive one.<sup>82</sup>

Whether promoting these pro-life ideas and heterosexual normativity was the author's purposes or not (the book jacket identifies Owen as someone who raises "money for social justice nonprofits"), pro-life readers can find much in the novel to show how humans who are in pain or afflicted with disease should not be killed. Rather, their pain should be alleviated and their illnesses cured.

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<sup>79</sup> Owen, p. 171.

<sup>80</sup> Owen, pp. 241-3.

<sup>81</sup> Owen, p. 254.

<sup>82</sup> Owen, p. 243.

*D. Sharon Biggs Waller's Girls on the Verge*

If she reduced her 221-page *Girls on the Verge* teen abortion novel 90%, Waller would have matched Ernest Hemingway's famous abortion short story "Hills Like White Elephants." Unfortunately, the reduction would not have improved the work; it would still be tedious and trite.

Educated readers have read stories like this before, and the plot is getting tedious. Camille is a pregnant teen mother who wants to kill the unborn baby using abortifacients and corrals her friends into helping her buy the drugs. When the abortifacients fail to kill the child, she succeeds in having an office of the abortion business Planned Parenthood kill the unborn child. Not even the anti-male bias of the characters, or their angry feminism, or their "situation" (Camille lives in Texas, which has protective legislation to stop abortion as far as constitutionally permitted) changes the fact that this is just another teen abortion story.

Fortunately for the pro-life movement, however, Waller's novel shows how distortion of language is absolutely necessary to promote an anti-life narrative from an anti-life author. (Waller states that she is a volunteer for the abortion business Planned Parenthood.)<sup>83</sup> The distortion of language is something pro-lifers can use as teachable moments to persuade mothers to reject abortion.

A significant stylistic feature is that the novel uses pauses and ellipses to show that even an anti-life author like Waller has her characters hesitate using the word "abortion" or any word referring to the unborn child, usually called a "fetus." Waller uses the technique of literary "stuttering" or "stammering" in several places. Camille's abortifacients would have her deliver the child: "I need to be near a toilet because...because."<sup>84</sup> Camille's friend Bea asks, "How big will it be? [...]" "The...you know."<sup>85</sup> Bea's hesitancy in talking about the unborn child to be killed by abortifacients continues: "to cover the, uh, you know—"<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Waller, p. [223].

<sup>84</sup> Waller, p. 78; ellipsis in original; the sentence ends with terminal punctuation after the repeated subordinating conjunction.

<sup>85</sup> Waller, p. 78; ellipsis in original.

<sup>86</sup> Waller, p. 197.

An egregious linguistic slip occurs when Camille comments on a time “when you can feel the baby kick.”<sup>87</sup> Was this deliberate, a Freudian slip, or an error on the part of the virulently pro-abortion author?

If the author’s stated intention is to help mothers and young women boast about the abortion killings, then these characters have far to go to force themselves into thinking that the medical assault called abortion is a good thing. Moreover, the characters of this anti-life work must, of course, utter the standard canards of ignorance of bodily difference and that abortion is something which affects only the mother’s body. For example, Camille’s friend Annabelle (a stridently anti-male feminist who volunteers for the abortion business Planned Parenthood) utters her ignorance when she says, “It’s none of my business what you do with your body.”<sup>88</sup>

Even Camille, rabid teen anti-life feminist that she is, cannot escape post-abortion syndrome (PAS), as is evident when she rhetorically asks, “How do you deal with awful things that happen? How do you forget them?”<sup>89</sup> It is obvious, then, that she will never “forget” the abortion killing which she arranges.

Pro-lifers who are more activist, such as protesters outside the offices of the abortion business Planned Parenthood, will be greatly encouraged by two statements in the “Author’s Note” about the effectiveness of pro-life picketing. “Despite our best efforts to shield patients,” Waller writes, “they can’t help but notice the protesters.”<sup>90</sup> Waller testifies to the effectiveness of pro-life protesters again when she writes that “the political anti-choice [pro-life] movement is strong. There are protesters at nearly every abortion clinic.”<sup>91</sup>

While the novel can be read in several hours, it is still a feeble plot and may lead to the conclusion that it is not worth the time. Pro-life activists, however, can use it as further evidence that anti-life authors continue to use the same standard and tiresome literary strategies to dehumanize the unborn child. They can also be encouraged that their witnessing outside abortion

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<sup>87</sup> Waller, p. 178.

<sup>88</sup> Waller, p. 105.

<sup>89</sup> Waller, p. 199.

<sup>90</sup> Waller, p. 224.

<sup>91</sup> Waller, p. 225.

clinics accomplishes the great effect of saving lives, both the mother's and the unborn child's.

*E. Carrie Mesrobian's The Whitsun Daughters*

The masturbation scenes in Mesrobian's *The Whitsun Daughters* are titillating but not as remarkable as the euphemisms hiding the chemical abortion plot. Of course, the scenes which abuse male sexual power are meant for the sexually immature (teens or young adult readers). Serious readers (everybody else) can use Mesrobian's fiction as yet more evidence of the linguistic gymnastics, if not duplicity, which pro-abortion characters use to promote a practice which harms mothers, kills unborn children (whether surgically or, as in this case, chemically with abortifacients), and alienates fathers.

The euphemisms to refer to the killing practice called "abortion" are numerous. Daisy, a main character, expresses surprise that "the things required to unmake a pregnancy would be sold someplace as ordinary as Walmart."<sup>92</sup> "Unmake a pregnancy" is a novel euphemism containing not only one logical fallacy, being the question. (Exactly how was that pregnancy made in the first place and what or who was made in that pregnancy?) The phrase also contains a negation which should provoke the reader to ask, if a pregnancy can be unmade, then the pregnancy existed before being unmade, and, if it existed, then an unborn child existed in that pregnancy.

Daisy's claim that her aunt "knows someone who—" with the dash indicating that the sentence is unfinished is a literary technique other writers have used to hide the fact that characters are talking about, yet again, abortion.<sup>93</sup>

The chemical killing of Lilah's unborn child is discussed with the usual impersonal third-person pronouns and deceptive language. "It's starting", Poppy says, using "it" to refer to the abortion.<sup>94</sup> Poppy "explained [...] that it would be slowly happening now, the lining shedding

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<sup>92</sup> Mesrobian, p. 84.

<sup>93</sup> Mesrobian, p. 87.

<sup>94</sup> Mesrobian, p. 155.

in layers of blood and tissue.”<sup>95</sup> “It”, of course, refers to the abortion, and “the lining shedding” obscures the fact that it is not only “the lining” which is “shedding” but the unborn child him- or herself who is being killed by “shedding” along with the “lining” and “tissue.”

Daisy’s boyfriend Hugh asks if her sister is “not-pregnant.”<sup>96</sup> The narrator records Daisy’s reactions that “whatever lived inside in Lilah began its descent.”<sup>97</sup> Translation: the dead body of the unborn child, now separated from his or her warm and life-giving uterus and therefore dead, is being passed out of that uterus, thanks to an abortifacient drug which his or her aunt gave to his or her mother.

One character’s Freudian slip—“to get rid of the baby”—is quickly covered by deceptive abortion language a page later when Lilah talks about what some mothers did to “expel the contents of the uterus.”<sup>98</sup>

Just like other abortion novels, whether written for teens or adults, post-abortion syndrome is obvious even here, in a novel whose characters clearly do not advance pro-life ideas and are hostile to religious persons who are pro-life. Typical of mothers who have aborted, Lilah seems happy after her abortion, but Jane’s last reminiscence, which closes the novel, suggests that Lilah suffers from post-abortion syndrome: “She thinks of the babe she did not have; she ponders names late at night in bed, her eyes on the once-fractured seam in the ceiling. When I watch her, I find myself remembering what I cannot reclaim. It is the closest I can come to human pain now.”<sup>99</sup> This is not literary evidence of abortion which is supposed to make a woman happy. It is, obviously, literary evidence of post-abortion syndrome.

Overall, Mesrobian’s work could suggest a fascinating paper for a pro-life student to write about the dishonest language which abortion-minded characters and authors use to dehumanize the unborn child, to suppress evidence of post-abortion syndrome, and to ignore the role of the father.

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<sup>95</sup> Mesrobian, p. 157.

<sup>96</sup> Mesrobian, p. 160.

<sup>97</sup> Mesrobian, p. 162.

<sup>98</sup> Mesrobian, p. 174, p. 175.

<sup>99</sup> Mesrobian, p. 197, p. 208.

*IV. Final Comments*

Self-righteous, oblivious to diversity of ideas (such as there being a pro-life perspective on ethical issues), and trying yet failing to use the tired tropes of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia narratives to a twenty-first century readership, contemporary feminist authors have generated some novels which induce somnolence more than lively interest in their narratives. Moreover, contrary to some of their expressed goals, their novels generate respect for life instead of activism for the three categories of killing which affect millions of human beings.

When society recognizes that support for abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia belongs in the trash bin of history as much as slavery of Africans or the aggressive LGBTQ agenda which distorts heterosexual normativity, the anti-life feminist novels studied here will be added to the long list of literary works whose dehumanizing ideology results in the deaths of millions of human beings. While these novels seem to bolster the fabricated “right” to abort an unborn baby, to kill a newborn child, or to deny palliative care to a terminally-ill or medically vulnerable person, one hopes that contemporary readers can identify the dehumanization in the novels and reject it.