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Confronting the Subject: Women and Dead Babies in Modern English Fiction

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Bakhtin tells us that a key image in “grotesque realism” (*Rabelais* 3) is that of the dying mother giving birth: “One of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born” (*Rabelais* 26). Indeed, the mother’s death enables the infant’s birth: “Every blow dealt to the old helps the new to be born. The caesarean operation kills the mother but delivers the child” (206). However, there is no place in grotesque realism for that other operation which kills the child but delivers the mother. Miscarriage is inimical to carnival — dead babies disrupt its life-death-rebirth schema — and induced abortions are antithetical to it.

All other in-and-outpourings are celebrated as testament to the corporeal openness by which the body transgresses the boundaries between itself and the world (*Rabelais* 26). These challenge the sealed, smooth and completed “classical” body of official culture which isolates the individual. Grotesque realism presents the individual body as one part of a common social body which is endlessly regenerating itself. “The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed” (19). This view of death as continuing re-birth, of the death of the individual body as being subsumed into the larger and ever-continuing “collective ancestral body of all the people” (19), hides its face from the stark actuality of dead babies. The induced abortion, then, is not narratable in *Gargantua* or any other carnivalesque fiction. However, it becomes so in the twentieth century novel.

To write an academic article about the fictional representation of abortion requires some delicacy. Perhaps even to write about it at all might seem to reduce its gravity to the purely academic. However, this was certainly not the case for the novelists of the 1930s and 1950s/1960s who took the brave step of representing abortion at a time when it was (for the 30s writers) a taboo subject or (for the 50s/60s writers) still outside the law and seen as morally reprehensible. Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and Aldous Huxley’s *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) were groundbreaking in that they represented illegal abortions openly and recognizably with no apparent disapprobation. Without a tradition of representation to draw on — abortion having been necessarily invisible in nineteenth century fiction — both writers found new ways of writing to represent the experience of abortion and, in doing so, drew it inexorably to the attention of a significant readership. Alan Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) and Nell Dunn’s *Up the Junction* (1963) — now at least with some antecedents — pushed the limits further, placing abortion at the imaginative center of their novels and thus forcing the reader to engage with the woman’s experience, while working within a predominantly realist genre that did not spare harsh details. In spite of the relentlessness of some of those details, these later writers seem to have been able to invest abortion with a normality absent from the overheated, almost gothic depictions of their 30s forerunners. And within this normalization it is possible for them sometimes to be playful, even comic, in their language and in their modes of representation in a way that can carry readers far beyond the stark specifics of realism and so place them outside the reductive restrictions of the polarized abortion debate.

Insofar as one of the central achievements of the twentieth century novel was its exploration of areas of human experience hitherto deemed unsuitable for artistic and imaginative transformation (a process begun cataclysmically by Joyce’s *Ulysses* and developed powerfully by D.H. Lawrence), these writers were in the mainstream of that revolution, bit by bit forming a tradition until even the Obscene Publications Act, a powerful force for censorship, was subjugated to it following the *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* court case.¹ It is in the spirit of these writers that we approach their fictional representations of abortion, not as a catalogue of grim tableaux, but as part of the continuum of the novel tradition in its representation of the full range of human experience.

It is likely that these writers played some part in changing social attitudes as well as changing the novel itself and here class becomes an influential factor, given the different historical and cultural contexts of the two groups of writers. The writers of the 50s and 60s were the first generation of their century to make working class life their central subject, and to reach a mass market and thus a genuine working class audience. Sillitoe was himself working class and Dunn, though she was not, lived with, and lived the life of, the Battersea working class women she refigures in *Up the Junction* before writing the novel. We shall consider to what extent their class situation and consciousness altered the way in which they wrote about abortion, in comparison to Huxley (who was both of and writing about upper middle class society) and Rhys (writing about a *demi-monde* but as someone who interacts with the upper echelons of society through sexual relationships). In making this comparison, we shall invoke Bakhtin's concepts of the carnivalesque and of grotesque realism to suggest that the earlier texts challenge and modify Bakhtin's cyclical theory of the body, while a more optimistic, regenerative spirit prevails in the 50s and 60s depictions of abortion.

The representation of abortion in 30s fiction — bodily, but grim — resonates with Bakhtin's argument that modernity can sustain only a denigrated version of the grotesque, a faint echo of the carnivalesque humour of Rabelais, in which laughter is superseded by fear:

Bakhtin says that the ambivalence of grotesque realism is no longer properly understood. [...] [A]ny contemporary version of the grotesque will feature only its downward, not its regenerative, aspect. The reason Bakhtin gives for the current absence of the grotesque is the onset of capitalism and privatized, individual life. (Vice 162-63)

Sue Vice equates this corrupted grotesque with Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject. Kristeva sees experiences of maternity and death, which reiterate the messy openness of the body, as moments of horror for women. This horror, she argues, is imposed on women by the patriarchal "symbolic," once they progress out of the "grotesquely oriented semiotic" (Vice 169). Vice argues that "abjection is the grotesque of modernity, its darker version: it is equivalent not to the classical, which turns its back on the organic, but to a frightening grotesque" (175).

This can serve as a precise description of the elements of the grotesque which appear in the crucial abortion scenes in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Eyeless in Gaza*. These scenes are deeply disturbing — in each case, a young woman character who carries an illegitimate baby faces grim combat with official notions of morality. Rhys and Huxley locate the distress of their female protagonists in the inner consciousness — both characters' responses to their abortions take the form of delirious dreams or visions. The emphasis on consciousness, arising out of modernism, presents the individual as being isolated from the common social body, trapped in her own angst. And yet, these representations of abortion function subversively. Huxley and Rhys challenge an official culture that attaches shame to unsanctioned motherhood and forces women to make desperate choices. The illegal, life-threatening abortion is the result of an official morality that imposes oppressive rules as to who can legitimately give birth. Rhys and Huxley provide no carnival laughter, but there is defiance.

Voyage in the Dark and *Eyeless in Gaza* have little in common as novels other than the fact that each features an abortion. Yet the way in which the actual abortion is written about in both is strikingly similar. Rhys's abortionist is Swiss-French, Huxley's is French (and Helen's abortion takes place in Paris). This may reflect the actuality of the time, but in both cases it lends an alienating context, through the foreign language, in which both Anna and Helen suffer disturbing dreams or visions which involve grotesque images.

Official society in these novels prohibits abortion. It claims to do this because of a concern for the unborn child. However, if this were a primary concern, single women would be encouraged to give birth and helped in the task of caring for their child — and illegitimate birth would be divested of its shameful status. In practice, unsanctioned sexual pleasure is punished either by the shame attached to illegitimate babies or by the imprisonment of

mothers who seek an illegal abortion. Abortion, then, is a site of contest between official culture and the carnivalesque. Anna and Helen are forced to choose between the public shame of unmarried motherhood and the private pain of abortion, and they choose the latter.

When Anna, an impoverished chorus girl who has slid into prostitution, realizes that she is pregnant, she is completely isolated. Sent from the Caribbean by her step-mother to be schooled in England following her father's death, she is alien to, and alone in, London. After the abortion, she embraces this isolation. Looking at the fetus, she says: "I lay and watched it. I thought, 'I'm glad it happened when nobody was here because I hate people'" (155). This is the antithesis of a carnivalesque birth in which the mother's corpse nourishes the soil while the baby arises as one part of the communal body. The baby is dead and the mother survives in isolation. As Mary Lou Emery, speaking of this scene, puts it:

Grotesque realism depends upon the body and bodily life, but as collectively, not individually, experienced. It represents the cycles of fertility, pregnancy, deterioration, dismemberment and decay [...] This collectively experienced cycle of life is opposed to the European realistic convention of "character". (79)

Bakhtin speaks pejoratively of "degenerate, petty realism" (*Rabelais* 53) in which the grotesque is corrupted, but a medieval worldview cannot be expected or possible, let alone desirable, in fiction written in the twentieth century. Rhys is responding creatively to the structures of authority of her time.

Thus, whereas the bodily outpourings of carnival debunk and ridicule official notions of propriety through laughter, Anna's hemorrhaging, which continues for six hours, serves as an indictment of them through its horror. Further, whereas carnival insists on explicit description in place of polite euphemism, Anna's blood cannot be explicitly named. Like the fetus, it is referred to as *it*. Anna's landlady says, "it come on at two o'clock and it's nearly eight now," and Laurie replies, "It's bound to stop in a minute" (155).

And yet, Anna's experience of abortion is punctuated by her memories of her Caribbean childhood. For example, when she is first terrified by the possibility that she is pregnant ("It can't be that, it can't be that. Oh, it can't be that. Pull yourself together; it can't be that." [139]), she puts herself to bed and recalls a woman called Miss Jackson, who used to let her play in her garden.

Colonel Jackson's illegitimate daughter — yes illegitimate poor thing but such a charming woman really and she speaks French so beautifully she really is worth what she charges for her lessons of course her mother was — (139)

The unfinished sentence suggests, perhaps, that her mother was black. In this memory, Anna seeks comfort by remembering less censorious attitudes to illegitimacy. Emery rightly suggests that Anna summons these memories to "shield her from what is happening in the present" (75), but when the events in the bedroom where she is bleeding, possibly to death, are intertwined with her curious dream about a Caribbean masquerade she witnessed as a girl, this is more than simply a protective "shield." Horner and Zlosnik argue that:

the conflation of the masquerade with Anna's experience of abortion allows her to half perceive the parallel between the hierarchical and oppressive social system of the West Indies, based in colour and deriving from a slave society, with that of England in the years 1912-14 in which women are exploited and constrained. (160)

The masquerade presents easy laughter, the openness of the body, the parodic up-ending of hierarchies — in short, carnival. The black participants dance, their bodies sweat, they wear masks that parody the pious whites — through which they stick their tongues. Bakhtin says

that the carnival mask “reveals the essence of the grotesque” — it is “connected with the joy of change and reincarnation [...] with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. [...] It contains the playful element of life” (*Rabelais* 39-40). Further, “the masks of the carnival bring about temporary freedom and dislocation from cultural hierarchies” (Horner and Zlosnik 159). These masks, with an aperture for the outthrust, ridiculing tongue, oppose and overturn the sorts of mask bourgeois society forces women to wear in order to appear “ladylike.”²

In recalling the masquerade, Anna remembers herself as one of many performers who are also their own audience. For a chorus girl, used to appearing on a public stage — that is, as an object of the male gaze — there is defiance in this vision. Bakhtin reminds us that carnival “does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. [...] [it] is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it” (*Rabelais* 7). Carnival spurns hierarchies and its audience does not watch it, they *are* it.

Edward Braithwaite explains that Caribbean masquerades of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century grew out of African celebrations and had a political function, “to dramatize or satirize aspects of slave society — their and their masters’ condition” (qtd. in Horner and Zlosnik 159). Horner and Zlosnik rightly see the masquerade in Rhys’s novel as a descendant of such events, conveying the same sense of being “threatening to, and subversive of, white European values” (160).

However, Anna is caught in between two positions. She is white and, as such, an object of ridicule by the masqueraders (“Like that time at home with Meta, when it was Masquerade and she came to see me and put out her tongue at me through the slit in her mask” [151]) but she wishes she were black, and taking part. She is initially separated from the festivities by the slatted blind, and her family’s disapproval. But, Horner and Zlosnik suggest that Anna “glimpses through the slats of the blind a critique of the cultural assumptions in whose terms she is defined” (160) and, defying the opinions of her elders, she goes out to join the dance. Her ability to do this arises from her mixed upbringing. On the one hand, her step-mother, Hester, has imposed bourgeois propriety but, on the other, she has a black confidant in Francine and the example of her profligate Uncle Bo. Hester attempts to counteract the influence of both these figures. She tells Anna, “I tried to get you to talk like a lady [...] That awful sing-song voice you had! Exactly like a nigger you talked — and still do. Exactly like that dreadful Francine” (55). Uncle Bo (also known as Ramsay) horrifies Hester because, not only has he fathered several illegitimate children but “they are called by his name if you please.” Anna remembers Hester’s tirade:

And you being told they were your cousins and giving them presents every Christmas [...] I gave Ramsay a piece of my mind one day I spoke out I said, “My idea of a gentleman an English gentleman doesn’t have illegitimate children and if he does he doesn’t flaunt them.” “No, I bet he doesn’t,” he said, laughing in that greasy way — exactly the laugh of a Negro he had — “I should think being flaunted is the last thing that happens to the poor little devils.” (55-56)

Uncle Bo shows Anna that one may do other things with illegitimate children than conceal them — or abort them. Caught between these influences, (and with an apparently indecisive father), Anna occupies a dual position. When she steps out to join the dancing, she bravely chooses the identity that embraces carnival laughter and, in Bakhtin’s terms, true grotesque.

It is highly significant that this is the memory that comes to her as she lies bleeding in a London bed-sit, following her abortion. Rhys sets up a number of echoes between the two intertwined scenes that creates a strong sense of irony. In her dream somebody says of the masquerade, “it ought to be stopped [...] it’s not a decent and respectable way to go on it ought to be stopped” (156). The words “it ought to be stopped” are then repeated by the landlady, Mrs Polo, referring to the flow of Anna’s blood. “It ought to be stopped” becomes an ironic comment on the way bourgeois society has constrained, controlled, and oppressed

young women like Anna. The comment works like one of the carnival masks which parody white faces, appropriating a phrase which has been used to condemn carnival and to refer to Anna's blood.

Anna replies to Mrs Polo by saying, "I'm giddy [...] I'm awfully giddy." This is the result of blood loss and, perhaps, the gin she has drunk. But when she repeats the phrase in her dream, her giddiness is due to "dancing forwards and backwards backwards and forwards whirling round and round" (157). Again, this is ironic: carnival merriment is a preferable cause of giddiness. The phrase "I'm awfully giddy" also carries a connotation of self-censure, anticipating the doctor's criticisms, but while Anna may be cajoled into self-censure, the reader recognizes that she is a victim of official culture.

The way the grim reality and the carnivalesque dream play off each other reaches a powerful (and powerfully ambiguous) climax in the last half-page of the novel. The doctor speaks sarcastically about Anna's promiscuity, laughing cynically with Laurie. Anna says, "I listened to them both laughing and their voices going up and down" (159). This echoes Anna's earlier description of Hester and Uncle Bo arguing, in her dream, about the masquerade: "their voices were going up and down" (157). Thus, as Emery points out, Anna "joins together two discussions of moral decency — that of the doctor and Laurie, who are laughing at Anna's (and Laurie's) moral condition, and that of her relatives, who are debating the decency of carnival" (81). Anna, however, has chosen to join the dance — she becomes, in her imagination at least, one of "a community of satirical revellers" (Emery 81). This imagined belonging is an act of defiance against her imposed isolation. She chooses the satirical laughter of the masquerade over the cynical laughter of Laurie and the doctor. Emery interprets this optimistically:

Unable to give birth, she refuses the doctor's interpretation of her body as following a socially illicit pattern and, instead, returns to her island home as a participant in its carnival culture. Through her imagined return, she enacts another kind of cycle, beginning again and perhaps changing the meaning of the abortion into an event that regenerates her own life. (81)

This may be too positive a reading for Rhys's ambiguous ending, but the fact that it becomes one possibility, alongside less uplifting ones, suggests that the distant masquerade may have the power to temper the abject with the grotesque.

The doctor assures Anna wryly that she'll soon be able to "start all over again," meaning that she will soon recommence prostituting herself, but Anna appropriates the phrase and repeats it, imagining a new life of fresh, misty (Caribbean) mornings. This vision of renewal, a kind of rebirth, is coupled with the image of her miscarriage and outpouring blood. It is as if carnival itself, so adept in turning norms on their head, has itself been upended, flipped over, to produce an ambiguous concoction of abject horror and carnival laughter which responds defiantly to modern, rather than medieval, structures of authority.

Anna's delirium shows defiance in the unconscious of a character who, in her conscious life, is passive and unassertive. In Huxley's character, Helen, the situation is reversed: she is a strong and defiant woman in her conscious life, but during the delirium she suffers in the aftermath of her abortion, the societal pressures she has fended off for years crash out of her unconscious and overwhelm her.

Helen is seduced by her mother's lover, Gerry Watchett, and left to cope with her pregnancy alone. In contrast to Anna's desperate cry, "It can't be that, it can't be that," Helen's response is to look up the word abortion in an encyclopedia. To her annoyance, the entry contains no information about how terminations are effected, but rather focuses on the illegality of abortion and the likely punishment.

"If a woman," Helen was reading in the encyclopaedia, "administers to herself any poison or other noxious thing, or unlawfully uses any instrument or other means to procure her own miscarriage ... she is guilty of felony. The

punishment for this offence is penal servitude for life, or not less than three years, or imprisonment for not more than two years. If the child is born alive [...]” But they didn’t say which the proper poisons were, not what sort of instruments you had to use, and how. Only this stupid nonsense about penal servitude. Yet another loophole of escape had closed against her. It was as though the whole world had conspired to shut her in with her own impossibly appalling secret. (291-92)

Where Anna Morgan is dreamy, vague and unassertive, Helen is practical and decisive, but the official culture which makes it impossible for her to contemplate motherhood in her situation would also criminalize her for seeking to avoid it. (Gerry, of course, gets off scot-free).

Helen risks punishment, arranging an abortion in Paris. Here she is forced to confront, in extreme circumstances, the horror of corporeality with which she has battled throughout the novel. Whereas, in grotesque realism, “the bodily element is deeply positive” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 19), Helen experiences, in her delirium following the termination, a nightmarish vision of a crowd of strangers discussing the possibility that her own body will balloon to Rabelaisian proportions.

The possibility of Helen with enormous breasts, of Helen with thick rolls of fat round her hips, of Helen with creases in her thighs, of Helen with rows and rows of children — howling all the time; and that disgusting smell of curdled milk; and their diapers. (318)

Helen has been conditioned by the elevated image of the sealed classical body presented by official culture (she has been named for the classical icon of female beauty). She is horrified by her body’s potential for openness, for outpourings of milk and babies and, by extension, babies’ feces.⁴ This is the abject.

Throughout her life, Helen has been caught between the “Rabelaisian” influence of her profligate mother, Mary, and the pressures of male adoration which impose upon her notions of purity and beauty. Mary takes lovers, talks openly of sexual matters and delights in shocking polite company. The novel’s chief protagonist, Anthony Beavis, finds this a refreshing relief from stuffy propriety.

To be able to talk freely about anything (*anything*, mind you) with a woman [...] casually mentioning beds, water-closets, the physiology of what (for the Saxon words still remained unpronounceable) they were constrained to call *l’amour* — for Anthony the experience was [...] an intoxicating mixture of liberation and forbidden fruit, of relief and titillation. In his father’s universe, [...] such things were simply not there —but not there with a painfully, glaringly conspicuous absence. (247-48)

Conversely, characters like Hugh Ledwidge demonstrate the attitudes of official culture to the body which would see it as sealed, pure and statuesque (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 29). Hugh idealizes Helen as a fragile and precious angel of “bright purity” (320). He recoils from the idea of sex as this would breach the sealed body, wanting only “to touch [her] as though she were a statue.” He imagines her crawling into his arms to be “comforted and made warm” where she would lie “a picture, virginal, ideal, but melting, melting” (340) and repeatedly imagines her as a work of art to be gazed upon.

He wanted her to be like Ariel, like the delicate creature in his own manuscript, a being of another order, beyond good and evil. [...] Like Ariel, he repeated to himself, like those Watteaus at Dresden, like Debussy. (341)

He is horrified by the capacity of women's bodies for outpouring. When Helen is ill, her vomit rudely imposes her corporeality on him and he cannot conceal his disgust. He is repulsed by her periods, which "each month [...] renewed his secret horror of her body" (258).

Helen is caught between these two attitudes. She is first introduced to the reader as a rebellious teenager (her mother's daughter) who delights in shocking her conformist and conservative sister, Joyce. To Joyce's horror, Helen announces she is going to steal something from every shop in the high street, and she does this with ease until they reach the butcher's. With much difficulty, but as a matter of pride, Helen steals some raw kidneys, but the feeling of triumph she desired is undercut by her revulsion:

The thing slithered obscenely between her gloved fingers — a slug, a squid. In the end she had to grab it with her whole hand. Thank heaven, she thought, for gloves! As she dropped it into the basket, the idea came to her that for some reason she might have to take the horrible thing in her mouth, raw as it was and oozy with some unspeakable slime, take it in her mouth, bite, taste, swallow. Another shudder of disgust ran through her, so violent this time that it seemed to tear something at the centre of her body. (33)

That last sentence seems grimly to foretell her illegal abortion. When she emerges from the butcher's, Joyce's criticism is forestalled by Helen's distress: "'Oh, too filthy, *too* filthy,' she repeated, looking at her fingers" (34).

In a second incident, seven months later, she holds a dying kitten in her hands. Its eyes are "gummy with a yellow discharge," its running nose has "slimed the beautifully patterned fur of the face." The limp creature in her hands reminds her of the raw kidneys and she automatically recoils from it. Immediately, she is ashamed of herself — "How beastly I am!" (222) — but she cannot overcome her disgust: "she [...] couldn't bear to touch him, as though he were one of those filthy kidneys — she, who had pretended to love him, who did love him, she insisted to herself" (222-23).

Later on, when she is married to Hugh, she is self-assured enough to see his evident horror of her body as "an intolerable insult," but his disgust echoes her own reaction to the dying kitten. Helen, too, has a horror of the body's capacity for messiness and these two experiences — stolen kidneys and dying kitten — foreshadow her experience of pregnancy and termination. Following her abortion, they enter her dreams. She imagines bending down to kiss the "adorable little fingers" of her sister's baby, but the baby suddenly transforms itself:

the thing she held in her arms was the dying kitten, was those kidneys at the butcher's, was that horrible thing which she had opened her eyes to see Mme Bonifay nonchalantly picking up and carrying away in a tin basin to the kitchen. (318-19)

The "horrible thing" in the tin basin is, of course, the aborted fetus, which she associates with the kitten and the kidneys. To punish herself for this thought, she goes on to make a connection between all three — kitten, kidneys and fetus — and her own body.

Turning her head, she could see herself reflected in the wardrobe mirror. [...] she preferred her sick pallor and dishevelment. "Like the kitten," she kept thinking. Reduced to a dirty little rag of limp flesh, transformed from a bright living creature into something repellent, into the likeness of kidneys, of that unspeakable thing that Mme Bonifay [...] She shuddered. (319)

There is a piling up of metaphors or equivalences here. Helen likens the dying kitten to the kidneys, she likens the fetus to both kitten and kidneys, and finally likens herself to kitten, kidneys and fetus. From her initial, practical defiance which recognized the injustice of

official notions of the female body (that corner women into illegal abortions and then impose penal servitude) she has come to a state of self-loathing.

All this may seem to illustrate Bakhtin's critique of the deleterious effect of modernist individualism on grotesque realism (*Rabelais* 321) but Helen is engaged with a specific oppressive discourse unknown to medieval women. Her strategies following her abortion show her struggling heroically to find a path to recovery and survival. Her first idea is to conform to official culture's view of what a woman should be. She proposes marriage to Hugh Ledwidge believing that she can reject her sensuous nature. She writes to him from Paris: "You probably think I'm a fool, and flighty and irresponsible; and it's true, I have been up till now. [...] Now I want to be something else. And I know I *can* be something else. *Sérieuse*. A good wife and all that" (341).

The oppressive and repressed nature of Hugh's adoration leads Helen into an affair with the sensuous aesthete, Anthony Beavis. He insists on emotional detachment and refuses her the possibility of love, telling her: "I'm always perfectly frank about its being nothing. I never pretend it's a Grand Passion. [...] Just a bit of fun" (4). Helen accuses him of "getting something for nothing" (5) but puts up with this initially because, unlike the inept Hugh, "he knew how to give her at least a physical satisfaction."⁵

This situation provides no solution to Helen's pain, though she is seemingly trapped by the partial relief it provides. It takes the novel's most bizarre and gothic moment to force a crisis: while Helen and Anthony sunbathe naked on a rooftop, a dog falls out of a plane and smashes onto the roof, splattering them with blood.

With a violent but dull and muddy impact the thing struck the flat roof a yard or two from where they were lying. [...] From head to foot both of them were splashed with blood. In a red pool at their feet lay the almost shapeless carcass of a fox-terrier. (98)

Anthony tries to make light of it, but Helen enters a state of shock. She stares "with wide-open eyes at the horribly shattered carcass," her face, with a streak of blood across it, is "very pale" before she covers it with her hands and begins to sob (99). This is a moment of epiphany for both characters. Anthony realizes that he does in fact love Helen and tries to tell her so, but he is too late. Her epiphany is a negative one: she sees that her affair with Anthony has been no solution and resolves to leave him. In his ignorance of her abortion, he is bewildered by her departure. He tells himself the dog's death, while unpleasant, was "not unpleasant enough to justify Helen in behaving as though she were acting Ibsen" (103).⁶

The beginnings of her recovery are finally effected through her affair with a German communist, Ekki Giesebrecht. She thinks it is because he has provided her with a political cause, but it seems more likely that the reason is that she has experienced intimacy and love for the first time. After Ekki is captured and murdered by the Nazis, she meets with (a reformed) Anthony, who describes the encounter in his diary:

[Helen said,] "I thought I could never see you again because of that dog. Then Ekki came and the dog was quite irrelevant. And now he's gone, it's still irrelevant. For another reason. Everything's irrelevant for that matter. Except Communism." But that was an afterthought — an expression of piety, uttered by force of habit. (212)

Anthony perceives the curative value of love and, by a different route (via the guru-like Dr. Miller), has come to understand this for himself. The novel ends ambiguously, but with a possibility of hope for Anthony and Helen.

Huxley's narrative presents a woman who is seduced, seeks an illegal and life-endangering abortion for want of other options, and struggles to overcome the experience. The abortion scene itself is revolutionary in that, in place of disapproval, it carries a sense of sympathy with Helen's suffering. It is true that Huxley shows the horror of the object in place of the

laughter of grotesque realism, but in doing so, he makes a powerful critique of current structures of oppression.

Rhys and Huxley sought to give an accurate picture of society as it acted upon the individual at that time. Here, class is certainly a factor, since it is quite possible that a working class woman of the same era wouldn't have experienced the alienation from her social community in the act of abortion as it is experienced by Anna and Helen. Her distress might have been similar, but the sense of separation that amounts to alienation in the depiction of Helen's and Anna's abortions might not have arisen in a working class context. But we have no British working class fictional depictions of abortion of the period to test this against.⁷ Certainly when we do begin to see such depictions, in the post-war novels of Sillitoe and Dunn, it is in a still-ambiguous but potentially optimistic context in which there is space for defiant laughter. These authors and their characters were distanced by their class from the bourgeois structures of authority that oppress the 30s authors and characters; they are more closely associated with the carnivalesque tradition that survived in certain forms of working class entertainment and recreation. These novels, in their alignment against "official culture" (*Rabelais* 166) and in their celebration of "the life of the belly and the reproductive organs [...] acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth" (*Rabelais* 21), do reinstitute a Rabelaisian voice into the novel. Of course, there can be no simple return to the grotesque realism of the medieval period. Instead, these texts can be read as positive, laughter-full responses to the modern denigration of the grotesque identified by Bakhtin, which at the same time engage with the ideological pressures on the modern individual human subject.

Key to these novels is their realist aesthetic, since it is this which makes their representations of working class reality socially and culturally significant; as we have argued elsewhere it is an elastic realism which allows plenty of room for the Bakhtinian grotesque (Minogue and Palmer). The depictions of abortion within such an aesthetic are necessarily specific to lived human experience and so present a special test for our putative reinstatement of the Rabelaisian within modernity, since for the contemporary reader those images which are closest to a Bakhtinian model may in their particularity carry negative meanings that directly contradict the larger positive meanings such images carry metaphorically. This inherent contradiction may not matter in comparatively trivial incidents as when in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* Arthur Seaton vomits on the couple in the pub. Here the comic momentum of the scene, and our narrative allegiance to Arthur at this point, carries the reader away from thoughts of what it might actually be like to be vomited on. It matters much more, however, in the abortion scene in that novel, where the narrative point of view shifts the reader's sympathy from Arthur to Brenda, and where, though it is in part represented through a comic consciousness, the gravity of what we are observing always lurks below the surface. In Dunn's *Up the Junction*, where the grotesque is less overt, and where the consequences of abortion are made graphic on the page, including a description of the dead fetus, the reader is brought up hard against the physical reality of the body, both the woman's and that of the dead baby. Nonetheless, Rabelaisian cheerfulness will keep breaking through in a form which we might call the modern grotesque.

The fullest expression of this comes in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* in the chapter dealing with Brenda's gin-and-hot bath abortion. Remarkably, the tenor of this chapter is comedic, mock heroic. Brenda lolls in her bath, a latter-day goddess worshipped by the acolyte Em'ler in "the ceremony of 'bringing it off,'" while Arthur waits in attendance, the obedient but sulky servant (Sillitoe 85). Here not class but gender roles are reversed, and Brenda can bid Arthur to do her service, even if it is only to stand and watch. Alternate libations of hot water and gin are poured, as Brenda's pink body is wreathed in steam. Something akin to pleasure permeates the room, its source Brenda herself whose eyes "turned good-naturedly on the room around her" (88). She brings both Arthur and Em'ler, in their different ways cross and concerned as she is not, under the benevolent spell of her fatalistic warmth. The anxiety of the earlier chapter in which, just before she tells him she is pregnant,

“he felt the agony of her worry clinging about them, thick and tangible” (67) and where her “laugh went echoing bitterly along the empty road” when he suggests she might have the baby, is here dissolved in clouds of steam until “Arthur could not worry any more” (89). As Em’ler supports her step by step up the stairs, in an ironic reversal of Arthur’s earlier drunken fall down the stairs of the White Horse pub, “A clear laugh came out of Brenda’s drunkenness: ‘I don’t care whether it comes off or not. I don’t care now’” (91). She has taken over the irresponsibility of Arthur’s earlier “Couldn’t care less, couldn’t care less, couldn’t care less” (17) and for once, though only momentarily, it is Arthur who is made to feel the burden of care, paradoxically heavier as Brenda generously absolves him: “You’re a good-hearted lad, Arthur” (88).

The resonant echoes of Arthur’s headlong drunken fall at the start of the novel take us back to the way Sillitoe pictures Arthur at this defining first moment as deliberately splurging his bodily energy. His excesses reflect and magnify those of his community, and to the extent that his disruptiveness mirrors a potentially uncontainable class energy (present in the room around him), his body mirrors the social body. Now, at a time when one might expect a downward turn into gloom, the abortion scene is used to elevate Brenda in turn to the embodiment of the mass of her people, to empower her as she decides what will happen to her own body, and to touch her with a generous beauty as she rises before Arthur and the reader, “her pink steaming body unfolding [...] like a rose in bloom” (90). The repeated motifs of abandonment, helplessness, and liberation, and the linguistic echoes of rolling, swaying, and laughing in this chapter recall Chapter One, not to link Arthur’s original carelessness with Brenda’s fate, but rather to eschew blame and to celebrate their final blissful unconcern. Both are reduced to helpless bodies, and just as Arthur has been earlier figured as “a fully-dressed and giant foetus curled up at the bottom of the stairs” (12) now Brenda, hauled up to bed by Em’ler, “fell back and lay perfectly still, giving a sigh and going immediately back to sleep” (91). There is a narrative equality between them here that outweighs either censure for the one or pity for the other. Sleeping like a baby in the bed where she conceived, Brenda will finish off what she had begun there, in a way that seems, in this narrative, perfectly natural. When Arthur next sees Brenda she has emerged looking “fresh and innocent, red-cheeked and relaxed,” and praising Em’ler for her help “that night,” signaling to Arthur that they can both “close their eyes” over it (121). In Sillitoe’s representing the abortion in the same comic spirit as the first chapter, even as he sacrifices the terrible actuality of the dead fetus, the mock heroic ritual of “the ceremony of ‘bringing it off’” combines with the routine ordinariness of the event to produce a mood of celebration representative and symbolic of a deeper reality than the surface events depicted.

The abortion chapter stands, like the Goose Fair chapter, at a key point in the first longer section of the novel, “Saturday Night.” Both chapters are emblematic of abandonment and misrule, and both contain powerful elements of the carnivalesque and its celebration of the grotesque body. But they are underpinned by the novel’s predominantly realist mode, and they must stand by the measures of realism at some level. Readers might feel that in these terms Arthur gets off scot-free and Brenda is represented as a mindless body, careless of actions which at best make a mockery of decent hard-working Jack (whom the hapless Em’ler is told is the father) and at worst show her as utterly callous about the fetus she aborts (by her casual mention that she hopes the wallpaper won’t peel off like “the last time” [86] she reveals this isn’t her first self-induced abortion). However, Brenda’s attitude can be seen as accurately pragmatic for her time. As she points out to Arthur when he suggests she keep the baby, “What do you think having a kid means? You’re doped for nine months. Your breasts get big, and suddenly you’re swelling. Then one fine day you’re yelling out and you’ve got a kid. That’s easy enough though. Nowt wrong wi’ that. The thing is, you’ve got ter look after it every minute for fifteen years. You want to try it sometimes!” (70). “Not me,” is Arthur’s reply, and indeed it is not he nor any of the other men depicted in the novel who have the care of the children. Brenda’s practical attitude, strengthened for us by her direct Northern-accented speech, in no way undermines the fact that she is a loving mother, as we see from her treatment of little Jacky. But she knows the real world, and for her the choice is simple: to

sacrifice an unborn child at an early stage by a non-dangerous method is far preferable to having to reveal her infidelity to her husband and saddle him with bringing up Arthur's child. Ada's attitude to abortion is similarly unsentimental, her perfunctory moralizing ("He'll just have to face the music" [76]) cancelled out by her advice to try the gin and hot bath method. Similarly the women's attitude to sex in the novel is as free and easy as the men's, and this is not seen as a cause for blame unless one is foolish enough to be found out. The woman is shown, however briefly, taking power to herself within what is otherwise very much a man's world and doing so in a way that proudly celebrates the female body and allows the pleasure of the sexual act to suffuse the act that deals with its consequences. Sillitoe's treatment of the abortion via the mock heroic grotesque is perfectly of a piece with the actual morality of the world he depicts.

If *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* manages this difficult balance, it does so, however, by sparing the reader one particular sort of body, that of the dead baby. Characteristically of a novel whose focus is dominantly masculine, while Arthur vomits twice, noisily, and over two innocent people, we never see the blood on Brenda's sheets. Dunn's *Up the Junction* redresses the balance in the other direction. This novel is both less Rabelaisian than *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and more graphic in its depiction of the dead fetus. In that respect it is braver, more testing of the reader — and of our Bakhtinian analysis. Nonetheless, there remains a sense of liberation, though the scenes depicting still birth and abortion put considerable pressure on that liberation. *Up the Junction*, even more than *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, shows a world in which pregnancy is a trial rather than a joy, where illegal abortion is a natural part of the culture, enabling girls to return to the source of true joy, sex (that the latter may lead to the former is seen as a little local difficulty). Even when girls go through with their pregnancy, as in the chapter "Sunday Morning" set in a home for single teenage mothers, there is no pleasure expressed at the thought of the coming child, perhaps because they will all be likely to give the babies up for adoption. Most of them have already tried to get rid of the baby and are going to full term only because that failed. Their conversation drifts laconically through the chapter, between those plodding to church and those left behind (Marion and Sonia) to look after the new babies. The topics alternate between the sexual encounters that led to their pregnancies, the attempts to get rid of the baby, and the desire to be slim and attractive once more and thus to start the process all over again. Here perhaps the nasty irony of the remark made by Anna Morgan's doctor would be a fair comment — but it would no longer be likely to be made, because in the world of these girls the irony has been flattened out into normality. Marion recounts that "I was having a good time till I started to get fat at about four months. Then I tried to get rid of it, but it was too late — I never thought I might not be able to get rid of it" (Dunn 45). Sonia's Dad had gone "up the chemist and tried to get a stick of something they used before the war [...]" (47) — the fact that her Dad participates somehow marking the pragmatism of attitude to abortion more than if it had been the mother, abortion traditionally being, and being represented as, an area of female knowledge, and Dads being more characteristically seen as protectors of their girl children. These reminiscences are interleaved with wistful memories of sex and hopes for more in the future: "Here — it'll be nice to be looked at again, won't it? I'm going to make myself a new dress — tighter than tight, like a second skin" (45-46) (pregnancy is primarily associated with being fat); "But they say it's marvellous when you're naked" (47). The babies "wrapped tight in their calico slings" are merely a backdrop to all this, until Marion's and Sonia's increasingly idealizing musings ("If you love a boy and you want to give him the best thing in the world there's only one thing, isn't there?") are cruelly interrupted by the screams of black Moira "standing by the bed bare-footed on the glazed tile floor, screaming while the baby's head emerged" (47). We are given to understand that Moira's baby is born dead ("she stood stiff and screaming till the black baby slipped out with a soft thud onto the stone floor") though even if it had been alive the Matron makes no move to tend to it. The implication is that it is better dead. The story is closed over (as Brenda and Arthur "close their eyes" over what might have been): "nobody ever saw black Moira again" (48).

The impact of Moira's dead baby and the image of it hitting the floor may stand as far stronger than anything else in this story, and its narrative placing, with the shrill screams of the reality of pregnancy piercing the rainbow bubble Sonia and Marion have been blowing between them, may be seen to contain a moral judgment. But the narrative technique of *Up the Junction*, as the many direct speech quotes above indicate, utterly eschews authorial comment. Nell Dunn herself, talking about the novel retrospectively over a distance of forty years, remembers vividly that in the Battersea world she lived in and depicted there was a "tremendous sort of liveliness [...] I had a sense of, almost of celebration of the liveliness." Her own aim as a writer was "witnessing, without any judgement, what it was like" (*Still Angry*). If the fictional seems to disappear in these statements, the formal qualities of narrative, dialogue, and structure work strongly in favor of capturing the liveliness and celebration, and contribute to the lack of judgment she aimed for. Violent injuries and deaths at work or on motorbikes jostle with scenes at the washhouse, where the women tumble together in a happy collaboration of youth and age, while smells from the cow cake factory mingle with the soap suds; easy pleasure is taken from a walk up the junction, buying the latest fashion at the "Pay-As-You-Wear" shop, brown ales in the local pub, a stolen swim, a dangerous motorbike ride, while pain comes with getting caught (by the police or by falling pregnant), getting married (the chapter entitled "Wedding Anniversary" shows a couple laying into one another in fury), and getting old. But the pain and pleasure are placed almost indifferently side by side, suggesting perhaps the simple inevitability of their juxtaposition. Work, for the women, is often a communal activity, in the sweet factory or the washhouse, where play and teasing are in the air. And over and through all of it there are drifts and layers of talk. The young working class girls who are the central characters live a reckless life not unlike that of Arthur Seaton, with sexual pleasure their uppermost concern. While that pleasure itself is not directly shown, it emerges in the constant and often cacophonous and contrapuntal dialogue which is the book's characteristic mode. The free play of language, including the representation of accent, and the lack of an authorial commentary, makes this more like a drama than a novel, and that impression is reinforced by the short often disconnected chapters, vignettes from the lives led "up the junction." The sense of disconnection thus produced might give the reader a moral view on these lives as ultimately dislocated and alienated, meaningless except for a certain hedonism. However, the girls themselves seem not to share this view, living their lives for the moment, enjoying their youth and freedom since they have before them in their worn and weary mothers the specters of what comes with age. Like Brenda, they see life for what it is, and where opportunity is limited and money is short, why not head for what pleasure there is? Like Arthur, they turn from pain when it appears and replace it with as much of its opposite as they can.

When the girls do reflect on their lives, rather than this leading them to look ahead and plan for a different kind of life, it reinforces their philosophy of the hedonistic present. One of the pregnant girls on her way to church determines: "Well, one thing's for sure. I'm not going steady no more. I'm going to sort meself out some one-night fellas with plenty of money" (44), while the worldly wise Marion ("I'm not like you. I've always had worries, so I'm used to it" [45]) concludes "Thing is one can't always be scheming. Them what are always planning and scheming don't live, do they?" (47). True, these comments come before the girls have experienced the death of the baby, and in a further poignant irony Moira is never given a voice — except to scream. But the contrapuntal, dialogic mode which has built up to this chapter and continues from it leaves little room for judgment. Readers who fancy they know better than Marion about the importance of planning, and who privilege the brutal moment of Moira's baby's death over the other moments of the story, may have got it wrong. As the old scrubber, Mrs. Hardy, says, giving her earrings to one of the young girls, "Here, love, you wear these. Go on. Yer a long time dead, girl! Get out and enjoy yourself" (102). As the chapter is entitled "Death of an Old Scrubber," we know what is coming. But crucial to many of the unexpected juxtapositions in this novel is that, while there is irony aplenty, it is not intended to produce a knowing or moralistic response. Similarly, while there is much bathos in this novel, there is so much that it ceases to be bathos. Rather, Dunn is laying before us the

constant juxtapositions of an ordinary world, where a woman's epitaph can — with dignity, and without irony — be a note pinned to the laundry door: "Owing to the passing of Mrs. Hardy the bagwash won't be ready till Wednesday" (105).

Rube's abortion and subsequent delivery of her dead five-month old fetus is set precisely within this world. In the briefest of chapters (six pages), sandwiched between the near-prostitution of "The Clipjoint" and the female domesticity of "Wash Night," Rube goes through seven visits to the abortionist, Winny. There is a go-between, Annie, who makes the progression to the actual abortion easier ("Rube was cheerful now the first move had been made" [68]). Rube is accompanied by two friends in an act of female solidarity that is all the more solid for not having any such theoretical idea behind it. And this support continues throughout — unconsidered, natural, pragmatic: "But that wasn't the last time Rube and I trailed up to Wimbledon. She had to go seven times before anything happened [...] Later I'd cart Rube home weak-kneed and trembling on the bus" (69). The abortionist, like those in the 30s novels, is a suspect figure: "Winny was about forty-five. She wore a red dress above her knees showing her varicose-vein legs, ankle socks and gym shoes" (68). "Winny didn't eat anything all day. She was always on the bottle" (69). Dunn's democratic world is not quite forgiving enough to forgive the abortionist; but here again, perhaps, she simply reflects reality. The tough part of the representation comes in the later part of the chapter, when Rube eventually "brings it off." The narrator's suggestion that a doctor should be called is rejected because "they might try to save the baby" (70). In a page and a half Dunn lays Rube's agony, which could be life-threatening, against the Sunday dinner: "The smell of Sunday dinner cooking floated up the stairs. Rube bent up tight with pain. [...] Sylvie came in. 'I'll hold her now, Mum, if you want to go and have yer dinner'" (70). Rube's shrieks echo Moira's screams, while diverse threats are uttered against the baby's father Terry; the family eats their dinner, Ben E. King sings "Oh yes, she said, yes," and the narrator rings the doctor, finally. "When I came back from ringing, Rube was shrieking, a long, high, animal shriek. The baby was born alive, five months old. It moved, it breathed, its heart beat" (71).

There are elements of the comic in these bathetic juxtapositions — or there would be if it weren't for the inherently distressing subject matter. But this is surely the key to Dunn's style. As we have learnt from previous chapters, Sunday dinner may be as important as anything else — even an abortion. Rube is simply "relieved" to have the business over, while Sylvie and her mum peer in wonderment at the "tiny baby still joined by the cord" — a wonderment that has absolutely no consequence for their subsequent actions: "Later Sylvie took him, wrapped in the Daily Mirror, and threw him down the toilet" (71).

As with Sillitoe, representation may do something more here than the experience of the lived reality would. If we found ourselves in the room with Rube — as the narrating Dunn presumably did — we might be appalled. But Dunn seeks to represent the prevailing attitude as she observed it, and to valorize it, in the sense of showing where it comes from. The compassion lies precisely in the lack of judgment.⁸ As with Sillitoe, Dunn's "celebration of the liveliness" — her phrase, ostensibly at odds with the abortion scenes described above — seems to rise above specific grimnesses and permeate the work as a whole. Central to this dynamic is the interplay of language we have discussed. And while Dunn's work seems almost relentlessly heteroglossic in the way it intercuts voices, relies so strongly on direct speech (and the narrative present tense), and allows full play to the democratization of language Bakhtin lauds, it is rather the way she represents a particular stratum of language that gives force to this novel as a challenge to official culture. "The speaking person in the novel is always, to one degree or another, an ideologue [...] A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 333). From the speaking persons in Dunn's novel comes a flood of language, but one which is made up of many small streams flowing into and out of each other. There is a richness and diversity in this back-and-forth of voices, but there is also a genuine equality. Not even the narrator's voice dominates, indeed her voice is carefully, politely, but clearly delineated as different from this "other" mainstream. When the girls are working in the sweet factory, the narrator calls Ruby: "Could you come over here a minute

please?" The reply is "Listen to that. We've got to take her in hand — teach her how to speak. You say, 'Rube, fuck you, get over here, mate!'"(26). Elsewhere, off with a boy after the illegal dip in the swimming pool, he says to her "You must think I'm slow. I don't know what to say to a decent girl. If you was an old slag, I'd just say, 'Come 'ere [...]" (13-14). This placing of Dunn within the social group but slightly outside their language adds authenticity to the representation of that language as expressive of a particular class and culture. It does not force her out but flows around her.

Clair Wills, acknowledging and extending a critique made originally by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, argues:

[I]t appears a mostly compensatory gesture when critics enthuse about the "carnavalesque" they find in the latest (post-)modernist novel. Surely they can't really confuse reading a good book with the experience of carnival grounded in the collective activity of the people? What seems to be lacking in this textual carnival is any link with a genuine social force. (85)

Similarly, objections can be raised to Bakhtin's stress on the importance of heteroglossia; Gramsci for example argues that this emphasis on difference inevitably disempowers the "lower" speaker, holding him and his class back from the power that official language confers, and from the unity implicit in revolutionary struggle (183-87).

Up the Junction and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* provide counter-examples to Gramsci's analysis. For in these novels we see communities and the individuals within them using their own language with the confidence of its being complex and rich enough to challenge orthodoxy and thus make the transition into a fully literary language. But the question remains as to whether any of these novels has a link "with a genuine social force," or whether indeed the literary assumption of features of carnival into the carnivalesque weakens rather than strengthens any opposition it might have made to official culture, by subsuming it, through the process of reading, into that official culture. In the novels of the 50s and 60s, an inherent difficulty arises from their predominantly realist mode, which assumes a close connection between representation and reality, and which depends in part on readers seeing a relation between their own lived reality and that which the words on the page seek to represent. When elements of a different, though related, tradition — grotesque realism — are introduced, there is a break in that relation. So though the texts themselves may be illuminated by the Bakhtinian concepts of the carnivalesque and the grotesque body, and thus may stand against his relegation of the modern novel to the sphere of the privatized consciousness, it may be that as modern readers we are wedded to the individually human as opposed to the social body. The depiction of abortion, where we inevitably associate our own individuality both with that of the woman and by extension with that of the dead (but potentially alive) fetus, may be a step too far even for grotesque realism. Bakhtin's mantra that "the material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual [...] but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed" (Rabelais 19) is, taken politically, an inspiring ideal. But his concept of the grotesque body depends heavily on fleshly actuality — protuberances, orifices, and all that goes in and comes out of them, are vital to his analysis that at these margins "the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome" (Rabelais 317). The contemporary reader enjoys the benefits of making choices about the body and the self in distinction from the "cosmic whole"; she might celebrate her own privatization rather than regret it. Bakhtin's ideal, taken metaphorically, is wonderfully optimistic; but applied to the actuality of people's material selves and individual lives, it places the life and the death of the body on the same level. In the end this may come to seem annihilating rather than liberating.

But these texts, and the realities they represent, remain. Rhys's and Huxley's brave women undergo a bodily horror that is underwritten as appropriate by society, but they still, in their consciousness, put their tongue out at that society and that notion of propriety. Sillitoe's and Dunn's women are much more pragmatic about the necessity of abortion, and in that they

have achieved a female independence and confidence in their place in society which seems to be a function of their class. For once the working class woman has a position of power, to decide without sentimentality or, indeed, society's opprobrium, the fate of her unborn child. But the bodily messiness — and the carry-over of that into consciousness — remains. However, in the 50s and 60s texts these are displaced into modes of representation which are on the one hand relieved of the grimness of the 30s novels and on the other do not need to pay lip service to concepts of the abject. Brenda is the mock-heroic heroine of her own abortion; Moira and Rube have a far harder time, yet they float away from their dead babies, borne on the happy tide of sexual fulfillment. As members of society we may have learned to disapprove of such amoral liberation; as readers we may be carried along by their pleasure. If we think of the fetuses, we may be shocked by their laconic fate in the narrative; if we think like Bakhtin, we may see a resolving theory. But if we look at these 30s and 50s/60s texts together and as a whole, we see a careful, human, imaginative, non-judgmental attempt to understand the experience of any woman who chooses to abort her pregnancy. As with all fiction, what survives is a representation of something central to human experience.

Notes

1. All the novels we discuss were written when abortion was still illegal (though in the case of the 50s/60s novel the debate about the rightness of this was beginning to open up in the lead-up to the Abortion Act of 1967).
2. Anna has resisted Hester's attempts to make her "behave like a lady" (56) and says of the word lady itself: "some words have a long, thin neck that you'd like to strangle" (120).
3. Compare grotesque realism's emphasis on genitals, buttocks, belly, nose, and mouth (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 318).
4. Her horror is intensified by the presence of the abortionist, Mme. Bonifay, whom Huxley describes as a woman of "Rabelaisian good humour" (319). Helen is disgusted by her stink of "garlic and dirty linen" (316). "She loathed the beastly woman but at the same time was glad that she was so awful. That cheerful, gross vulgarity was somehow appropriate" (319).
5. Due to Huxley's extreme disruption of chronology, the reader shares Anthony's ignorance of Helen's abortion at this point. The reader may feel that Helen's unhappiness is explained by Anthony's heartlessness. Only with hindsight can the reader reinterpret the true reason for her "resentful sadness" (3) and her "ordinary hell of emptiness and drought and discontent" (13). Similarly, Anthony is oblivious to the significance of her comments when they discuss his war wound.

Helen shuddered. "It must have been awful!" Then, with a sudden vehemence, "How I hate pain!" she cried, and her tone was one of passionate, deeply personal resentment. [...]

"One can't remember pain," he said aloud.
 "I can." (57)

6. If the reader has remembered the single passing reference to Helen's abortion (57), he will understand the source of Helen's horror, but it is more likely that the significance of the scene will become apparent only when the reader reaches the abortion scene itself much later in the novel's disordered time-scheme.
7. Nicole Moore points out that, by contrast, "many abortion narratives featured prominently in Australian realist novels of the '30s and '40s" (70).
8. K. J. Shepherdson shows that Tony Garnett's television play version of the novel took a far more judgmental view, foregrounding the abortion scene with perhaps the specific intention of contributing to a change in the law. Though Dunn later proclaimed her pride in the fact that "I helped to change the law" (*Still Angry*), her aesthetic remained one of witness, which was subverted by Garnett's more polemical aesthetic. (Shepherdson 64-71).

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