

Gender Inequality and the Pro-Choice vs. Pro-Life Problematics in Dystopian Setting

Philip K. Dick: "The Pre-Persons" (1974)

Dytopian world

Problems:

- ◆ over-population (cf. Brian Aldiss: "Super-toys Last All Summer Long")

Solution:

- ◆ extending the possibility of "abortion" to children up to 12 years old
 - ◆ LAW: decides that once you are twelve you have a soul (a legal matter)
 - ◆ the ability to master algebra proves you have a soul

Abortion

Who is aborted?

- ◆ Everyone who is reported as unwanted by his or her parents
- ◆ Everyone who has no "Desirability Card" (D-card) to prove that their parents want them
- ◆ Financial issue: the card costs \$90 (now \$500)

What can save you from abortion: adaption

- ◆ "pre-persons" at the Country Facility have thirty days to be adopted

Cultural-Political Context:

1) Malthusianism

- ◆ Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus
- ◆ 1798: *An Essay on the Principle of Population*
- ◆ theory: population growth is potentially exponential while the growth of the food supply is linear

2) *Roe v. Wade* (1973)

- ◆ landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court: the US Constitution protects a pregnant woman's liberty to choose to have an abortion without excessive government restriction → struck state abortion laws
- ◆ national debates, pro-life and pro-choice camps

Themes:

Institutionalized Ageism

- ◆ systematic punishment of children for the sins of the older generations (cf. *The Hunger Games*)
- ◆ "There is [. . .] in the land, a hatred by the old for the youth, a hatred and a fear."
- ◆ irresponsible adults
- ◆ community: zero growth population

Dehumanization

- ◆ abortion system: modeled on the collection and killing of stray animals

Gender War for Power

Gender War

- ◆ a war against anything that grows
- ◆ roots: abortion rights
- ◆ now: demand for a total power over life and death of all weaker people
 - ◆ system seems to be based oppression by the state
 - ◆ system turns out to rely on the oppression by women

Monstrous Feminine

"Where did the motherly virtues go to? he asked himself. When mothers especially protected what was small and weak and defenseless? Our competitive society, he decided. The survival of the strong. Not the fit, he thought; just those who hold the **power**. And are not going to surrender it to the next generation: it is the powerful and evil old against the helpless and gentle new."

- ◆ Fearing "castrating females"

Monstrous Feminine (Theory)

- ◆ Theory on monstrous feminine by Barbara Creed
- ◆ Various manifestations, one of them: the castrating female
- ◆ *vagina dentata* (the female sexual organ with teeth) threat on men
- ◆ vampiristic features (sucking life out)
 - in story:
 - ◆ life (breath) is sucked out of children to abort them
 - ◆ metaphorical level: life is sucked away from men; they are not free,
 - ◆ oppressed, not free to step out of the system either
 - ◆ Monstrous female: Cynthia Best

Why is there a renaissance of these dystopias?P

Heartbeat bill:

- ◆ a controversial form of abortion restriction legislation in the US
- ◆ makes abortions illegal as soon as the embryonic or fetal heartbeat can be detected
- ◆ heartbeat: detectable at about six to seven weeks of pregnancy; BUT not detectable until 12 weeks' gestation when a Doppler fetal monitor is used
- ◆ many women: unaware of their pregnancy at six weeks from their last
- ◆ fetal heartbeat bills are *de facto* bans on abortion in the majority of cases
- 2013: North Dakota as first
- 2019: Alabama:
 - outlawed abortion at any stage of pregnancy with no exceptions for pregnancy resulting from rape or incest
 - 2019 November 20, Ohio: new bill proposed:
 - would completely outlaw abortion in the state
 - would define a fertilized egg as a person
 - doctors performing this medical procedure could be found guilty of abortion murder
 - “Takes all possible steps to preserve the life of the unborn child, while preserving the life of the woman. Such steps include, if applicable, attempting to **re-implant an ectopic pregnancy** into the woman's uterus,”
 - medically NOT possible

Neal Bushmaster: *Unwind* (2007)

Setting:

- ◆ Heartland War (Second Civil War)
- ◆ pro-life vs pro-choice
- ◆ To end war: compromising agreement : Bill of Life

Bill of Life

Pro-life:

- ◆ outlaws abortion
- ◆ human life may not be touched from the moment of conception until a child reaches the age of thirteen

Pro-choice:

- ◆ makes it legal to "retroactively 'abort' a child" between the ages of 13 and 18

Abortion = Unwinding

- ◆ unwinding (or **harvesting** or **summary division**):
- ◆ dissecting a human's (mostly teenagers) body parts to be transplanted into different recipients
- ◆ 99.44 percent of an Unwind is kept alive (→ then it is not murder but unwinding)
- ◆ Ideology: life doesn't technically end because the unwound child's body parts would still live on with the recipient/s (**divided state**)

Reasons for unwinding:

- 1) Parents not satisfied with their children
- 2) Homes have to take in the babies
- 3) Tithe
 - ◆ tithe generally= “one tenth of annual produce or earnings, formerly taken as a tax for the support of the Church and clergy”
 - ◆ tithe in *Unwind* = a child given to the unwinding process as a religious sacrifice (the tenth child, e.g. Lev)
 - ◆ prepares for becoming unwound for all his life

Unwinding

Unwind order: final

- ◆ method: parents may tell their children or just let him find out when they are taken

Harvest camps / unwinding facilities / the Chop Shop

"Tithes" and "Terribles"

average stay: 3 weeks (depends on need for supply)

kid-conscious and user-friendly

Daily exercise, monitoring actions, taking notes on eye-hand coordination, gauging the strengths of various muscle groups (for further purposes)

Storking

- ◆ leaving one's own infant on someone's else's doorstep
- ◆ If parent is not caught on act, the new family has to keep the stork
- ◆ if they do get caught, they are obliged to take the baby back (keep or send to State Homes to be wards)
- ◆ Practice: storked family puts the infant to another family's doorstep → illegal and shows that the law does not manage the situation of unwanted children (example: baby goes around, no one cares for it, it dies)

Themes:

Inequality, Injustice, and the Law

- ◆ laws: ineffective, corrupt, and predatory
- ◆ laws to solve injustice create new ones and are cruel
- ◆ ageism
- ◆ social injustice between classes
 - ◆ the poor in need of transplants or medical attention can't afford the help they need
 - ◆ the rich can use these resources to fulfill superficial desires (cosmetical surgeries)

Violence and radicalization

- ◆ Connor: maturation from angry teenager to responsible leader
- ◆ Lev: from religious tithe to terrorist against the establishment

Leni Zumas: *Red Clocks* (2018)

Dystopian setting: near future

- ◆ no science fiction component
- ◆ the US banned abortion and in vitro fertilization two years ago, and made it so that only married couples can adopt children
- ◆ time: just a little time before the law would come in effect
- ◆ place: coastal Oregon town
- ◆ realistic extrapolation

Structure

5 (women's) perspectives

Characters

Ro "The Biographer"

42, single

taking fertility medicine in order to conceive a child
has no real chance for a child of her own
has no real chance for adopting a baby because of the new law

Susan "The wife"

ruined marriage, demanding husband
has 2 children, no work, no life of her own
shows suicidal tendencies at times
At the end tells she wants separation

Mattie "The daughter"

herself was adopted
becomes pregnant but boyfriend leaves her
wants abortion: tries Canada first
finds an underground termination house
asks Ro to go with her to get an abortion
Ro's situation would be solved if Mattie gave her the child for adoption
Ro hesitates but finally respects Mattie's confidence and decision
she gives support for Mattie (accompanies)

Gin “The mender”

lesbian (love affair with the wife of the school principal)

witch hunt

Eivor Minervudottir: 19th century story

(subject of the Biographer's research)

pretends to be a man; becomes arctic explorer

writes article on arctic sea ice

Royal Society does not believe a woman could have written it

has her old tutor publish her article under his name so that her research should be known

joins another ship bound for the arctic

Eivor's body is found trapped under ice in the arctic, and is not recovered by the crew

Narrative strategy supporting theme

Various forms of oppressions

Caused by specifically the abortion law

Leading to tragic situations

Connected to other forms of gender-biased oppression historically