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Representing the Reproductive Body

Susan Squier

This past January, I had the following dream: 'My husband is pregnant; it is an abdominal pregnancy, and he is willing to have a Caesarian section. I tell him how wonderful I think he is for making that sacrifice, and he says, "Well, maybe by the time the baby's due, I'll just be able to talk it out."' This dream provides the theoretical horizon for the remarks that follow, in its distinction between the material practices of reproductive technology and their representation. The dream marks the importance of recognizing, rather than repressing, the gap between the material and the discursive or representational, imaged in the opposition between giving birth to the baby by Caesarian section and simply 'talking' it out.

MICHEL FOUCAULT has observed that four figures anchored the nineteenth-century preoccupation with sex as the object of expert knowledge: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult. In our postmodern era, as the separation of sexuality from reproduction aspires to technical completion, we can extend Foucault's formulation to the other term in that copula under erasure. We can identify three images that anchor our contemporary preoccupation with *reproduction* as the site of expert knowledge and power: the extra-uterine foetus, the surrogate mother, and the pregnant man.¹ Each of these images, like the dream with which I began, would be fertile soil for an extended analysis. However, I will make only two observations about them, after which I will leave them as the foundation for the remarks that follow.

First: in each image, *the foetus is separated from the gestating mother-to-be*: whether left to float freely in a bottle, in space, or inside the globe; re-situated in another 'mother'; or (most shockingly) placed in the body of a man. Although this separation is visually graphic in the representations of the foetus and the pregnant man, and only implicit in the figurations of surrogate mothering, the images all have as their common denominator the process of de- and re-contextualization, a process whose postmodern implications are rooted in the Romantic and modern history of reproductive representations, in ways I will explore.

Second: these images all represent different versions of what we now call reproductive technology, versions ranging from the actual to the hypothetical, from the visually graphic to the visually veiled. Yet these images are not the same as the

medical practices they represent. A gap exists between the range of medical practices (actual and hypothetical) known as reproductive technology (such as AID, IVE, Gamete Intrafallopian Transfer, Zygote Intrafallopian Transfer, zona drilling, abdominal pregnancy, and cloning, and so on) and their representations. As material practices that have a low success rate, the potential for iatrogenic (or medically-caused) health damage, and a problematic relationship to a pro-natalist culture and society, reproductive technology has been indicted by feminist social scientists as, in the summary of one scholar: unsuccessful, unsafe, unkind, unnecessary, unwanted, unsisterly, unwise.² Convincing as that critique of the practical uses of reproductive technology is, it does not fully illuminate the images with which I began, for they exist not as material practices, but as representations.

That is not to say that representations are wholly removed from the material world, however. Representations help to construct what we understand as our cultural and social experiences, including our experiences of the body. As Catherine Belsey has argued, literature functions as one of the institutions through which human beings are interpellated, or shaped to the needs of their society, through the process of identity construction that occurs in, and mutually implicates, both the symbolic and the material realms.³ Our task as literary critics is not to intervene in material practices, then, but to investigate the meaning of particular representations: to understand how they came to be as they are, and what they communicate about their specific cultural and historical contexts.⁴

Literary figurations of the reproductive body have always been open to a wide range of meanings. However, I will argue in what follows that they performed three crucial functions in the Romantic and modern periods, all related to the production of power: the creation of a metaphoric break between mother and foetus that made possible their different social positionings; the reconstruction of woman's body to produce or consolidate male power; and the deconstruction of the (male and female) human body to serve industrial production.⁵ I will trace those different ways of producing power as they operate in representations of a range of technological interventions in reproduction, from the hypothetical, to the obstetrical, to the biomedical, from the Romantic era, through the modern, to the postmodern. While reproductive technology shifted from a hypothetical to an actual medical practice during the period under discussion, it is not the break in material practice that concerns me here, but the continuity in representational strategies. Initially reflecting the European context of Romanticism, the range of these reproductive representations expands in the modern industrial era to reflect British and American concerns, and by the postmodern moment, the images reflect and help to consolidate the global power of multinational late capitalism. I will conclude by examining three postmodern fictions of reproductive technology, to tease out how these representations converge, and produce different sorts of power, in the present.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* inaugurates the *Romantic* moment with its image of autonomous male birth. Written at a time when female procreative power was

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being co-opted metaphorically to represent the new, male birth of fraternal contractual democracy, *Frankenstein* figures the monstrosity of a male monopoly on political creation. Shelley's monster, as a social outcast, contests the inclusive, egalitarian pose of the liberal civil state.⁶ Yet the reproductive critique articulated by Shelley's novel coincided with shifts in contemporary medical science that enabled, rather than critiquing, ongoing political changes. Around the time that *Frankenstein* was published, the fields of embryology and obstetrics authorized new representations of the pregnant woman and the foetus harmonizing with the new political arrangements.⁷ Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century embryology affirmed the theory of epigenesis (the notion that an embryo develops from lesser to greater organization in the course of gestation) over the earlier theory of preformation (the notion that the embryo is a static, preformed, miniature entity, somewhat like the homunculus). This shift in scientific knowledge joined Rousseauian notions of child-rearing to produce an individual fitting the needs of bourgeois capitalism. So Andrea Henderson observes:

Early nineteenth century epigenesis sketches us a picture of the Romantic foetus (as) the perfect bourgeois subject—it makes itself, and so is neither simply the inheritor of paternal power nor the commodity-like product of its mother's labor.⁸

Parallel to the victory of epigenicist embryology was a shift in the representation of the gestating and childbearing woman in anatomical engravings and midwifery manuals. Emphasizing the bony structures of the maternal pelvis as objects to be manipulated by equally rigid obstetrical instruments, these illustrations articulated a 'trend. . . to present childbirth as a mechanical process, having affinities with mechanical production, but with the role of the woman . . . in the productive process . . . not as laborer but only as a machine.'⁹ Like *Frankenstein*, these non-literary representations participated in the Romantic (re)construction of human reproductive subjects — man, woman, foetus. They reshaped the foetus as the state's ideal, organically-developing, autonomous individual; they marginalized woman, exiling her from the public realm of the social contract to the private realm of the sexual contract; and they reconstructed man as both father and mother of the new political order.¹⁰

Modern representations of reproductive technology built on the Romantic separation of developing foetus from machine-like mother to serve ends not so much political, as industrial. The rationalization of labor carried on in the early twentieth century in Europe, England and America, aimed at maximum efficiency by fragmenting the work process. These new industrial methods treated the worker's body as a machine, breaking down the labor process into its smallest possible units, using the assembly line to enforce a uniform, external schedule, and carrying on constant surveillance. Modern literature drew metaphorically on this monitored, mechanistic, regulated and fragmented way of life, using it to figure not just in production, but in reproduction.¹¹ Drawing their central metaphor from Taylorism and Fordism, such representations figured a deconstructed human body — male *and* female — available for industrial production.

Just as the self-creating embryo or foetus was central to the Romantic figuration of reproduction (expressing both the power and the critique of the new civil state), so the ectogenetic, or machine-gestated, foetus is central to those modern conceptions of reproduction. In the most familiar literary image of reproductive technology after *Frankenstein*, Aldous Huxley's Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre of *Brave New World*, the 'principle of mass production (is) at last applied to biology'.¹² Following the divine principle of 'Our Ford', each bottled embryo is separated from its maternal context, placed on a conveyor belt, systematically stimulated both chemically and environmentally, monitored and held to a normative timeframe, until the foetuses are not born but 'decanted . . . as socialized human beings'. (Huxley, p. 8)

Six years before Aldous Huxley published *Brave New World*, his older brother Julian took a break from his zoological studies to write 'The Tissue-Culture King'. This science fiction short story, originally published in *The Yale Review* with the subtitle 'A Parable of Modern Science', tells the story of a British medical researcher taken captive by an African tribe. Dr. Hascombe introduces the tribe to Western medical techniques – microscopy, tissue culture – and comes up with a scheme for expanding the power of the king – and coincidentally, his own power. Hascombe persuades the king to donate a sample of his own tissues, which is cultured in the laboratory, and reproduced, enabling the new doctor-priests to give each tribal member a little bit of the king, which, because it is immortal, they may worship endlessly. Hascombe also creates a laboratory to produce deliberately engineered freaks and cross-breeds (chimeras), for the tribal citizens to worship. In its play on the techniques that would become foundational to contemporary reproductive technology, such as microscopy, tissue-culture, and genetic engineering, Julian Huxley's story, like the debate over ectogenesis, embodies the conflicting significations attached to reproductive technology in the early years of the twentieth century, significations obscured in the popular imagination by the dominance of Aldous Huxley's celebrated image of factory produced reproduction.¹³

Yet these reproductive images articulated not just power, but also resistance. Behind Huxley's unified anti-industrial image of bottled babies lay a widespread debate about the social significance of extra-uterine gestation. This debate was catalyzed by the publication in 1923 of J.B.S. Haldane's wildly popular *Daedalus, or Science and the Future*, with its speculative scenario for 'ectogenesis', or gestation in an artificial uterus. In one of the most striking exchanges in response to Haldane's book, a masculinist and a passionate feminist surprisingly agreed that ectogenesis could be put to feminist uses, only to disagree on the implications of that fact.

Nietzschean philosopher Anthony Ludovici gloomily predicted that when extra-uterine gestation became a reality, 'triumphant Feminism will probably reach its zenith. . . . Men will then be frankly regarded as quite superfluous'.¹⁴ In contrast, novelist Vera Brittain saw ectogenesis as just a temporary stage in a process of shaping pregnancy along feminist lines. She predicted that while ectogenesis would be welcomed in cases where 'normal pregnancy was exceptionally inconvenient to the wife, or would involve a long separation from her husband', parents would not

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switch wholly to ectogenetic gestation because children thus produced would be found not to thrive. Rather, parents would find means to make 'childbirth painless and pregnancy definitely pleasurable', leading 'nearly all twenty-first century parents to return to natural methods of reproduction'.¹⁵ The contrast between Brittain's and Ludovici's positions on ectogenesis confirms that reproductive images – like all images that have cultural prominence – serve not so much to articulate a single ideological position, as to provide a site on which different, often conflicting, positions can be contested.¹⁶

Before I move on to discuss the postmodern literary representation of reproductive technology, let me summarize the historical narrative I have sketched out. I have argued that in the *Romantic period* technological intervention in reproduction provided a metaphor for political subject construction – and the related process of constructing political 'objects', as well. The *modern period*, under the influence of growing industrial capitalism, used reproductive technology to represent, and to contest, the material and psychological reshaping of the human demanded by industrial production. *Postmodern literature*, in contrast, turns to reproductive technology to represent (and again, to contest) not so much the political, nor the industrial, but the philosophical reconstruction of the human subject – although, of course, that category subsumes the former ones.

The dominant feature of postmodernism is its challenge to the master narratives of Western metaphysics and philosophy, with their bases in binary oppositions: mind/body; male/female; self/other; first world/third world; human/non-human.¹⁷ Depending on the definition of postmodernism to which we subscribe, the notion of an exhaustive, and therefore 'true', narrative is replaced either by an emancipation from narratives that claim to possess universal truth or by a turn to the manipulation and control of information in order to maximize its efficient transfer.¹⁸ While one definition stresses philosophical emancipation and the other technological control, both descriptions of postmodernism have at their centre the process of 'denaturing', or 'depriv[ing] something of its natural qualities'.¹⁹

Postmodern representations of reproductive technology share that strategy of denaturing the human being, yet with implications drastically different, depending on whether they call into question a totalized notion of a human being (body-and-soul, the narrative of a life) in order to affirm other multiple identities and positionalities, or substitute for that totalization an instrumental focus on body fragments as segments of information subject to manipulation: bits of the genetic code, gametes, organs, body parts.

Three postmodern novels, all figuring the contemporary anchoring images for reproduction as a site of knowledge and power – the ectogenetic foetus, the surrogate mother, and the pregnant man – can illustrate the different ways in which images of reproductive technology function to produce, or to contest, power relations: Robin Cook's *Mutation* (1989), Elizabeth Jolley's *The Sugar Mother* (1988), and Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). These novels range from the potboiler to what might be called experimental or art fiction, and their authors

occupy different cultural positions as well: Cook is an American mass-market product; Jolley a highly acclaimed but still marked and therefore marginal Australian writer; and Carter a nearly canonical, prize-winning British postmodernist.²⁰ They also differ in the reader they explicitly solicit, ranging from Cook's thrill-seeking commodified reader, to Jolley's linguistically inclined lover of a 'compelling piece of storytelling', to Carter's intertextually adept antihumanist reader. I will discuss them in reverse chronological order, because I want to move from the least to the most challenging representations of reproductive technology.

But before I do so, I want to map out two analytic axes, partially overlapping, that can illuminate the denaturing process central to their postmodern representations of reproductive technology. Although these axes occupy different positions, they are also interrelated, for they measure the extent of *resistance or capitulation* to the operations of power. On the first axis, *theoretical* postmodernism aims at emancipation from all master narratives, through a constant process of undermining totalizing statements, while its opposite pole, *technological* postmodernism, works toward ever greater control of information through a process of continual mapping of chaotic systems. Utopian postmodernism, on the second axis, critiques the process of commodification that is central to, and produces, its opposite pole, *co-opted* postmodernism. To summarize, then, the first axis gauges the extent to which knowledge production aims at emancipation or control, while the second axis measures the extent to which material and political practices are critical of, or complicit with, existing institutionalized power relations.²¹

Robin Cook's *Mutation* stands at one end of the continuum between cultural complicity and cultural critique. Dedicated to Mary Shelley, and taking for its epigraph her question, 'How dare you sport thus with life?', Cook's mass market thriller *Mutation* (1989) tells the story of Dr. Victor Frank, a researcher turned endocrinologist, who uses *in vitro* fertilization, cloning, gene therapy, and surrogacy to produce a genetically-engineered genius baby – his own son, VJ.²² Then, in a recapitulation and conservative recuperation of Shelley's radical narrative, the monstrous son becomes a monstrous scientist, who himself creates a race of genetically-engineered ectogenetic foetuses in his secret basement laboratory.

In a central scene, the ectogenetic foetuses are discovered in the monster-scientist's laboratory by – and this is a crucial twist – the monster's *mother*:

On a long bench built of rough-hewn lumber sat four fifty-gallon glass tanks. . . Inside each one and enveloped in transparent membranes were four foetuses, each perhaps eight months old, who were swimming about in their artificial wombs. . . They gestured, smiled, and even yawned. . . Marsha timidly approached one of the tanks and peered in at a boy-child from closer range. The child looked back at her as if he wanted her; he put a tiny palm up against the glass. Marsha reached out with her own and laid her hand over the child's with just the thickness of the glass separating them. But then she drew her hand back, revolted. 'Their heads!' she cried. . . Marsha stared at the tiny boy-child with his prominent brow and flattened head. It was as if human evolution had stepped back five hundred thousand years. How could VJ deliberately make his own brothers and sisters – such as they were – retarded? His Machiavellian rationale made her shudder. (Cook, p. 318, p. 320)

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This image of ectogenetic fetuses purports to represent a technological breakthrough that threatens Western civilization.²³ Yet the real subject is the production of political, rather than technological power: the scene yokes the unscrupulous methods of Machiavelli to the purportedly more legitimate methods of Rousseauian contractual democracy, and reinscribes the forces that consolidated the liberal state through the metaphoric construction of the autonomous civil subject. In Marsha's encounter with the ectogenetic fetuses we see dramatized: the separation of fetus and mother (as Marsha and the fetuses are both kept apart by the see-through walls of the machine womb); the construction of the fetus as a miniature individual (possessed of agency and intentionality; able to watch, gesture, smile, even yawn); the construction of the mother as marginalized machine (split into Marsha-as-observer, and the gestational tanks); the appropriation of evolutionary thinking to the ends of social reconstruction (embodied most fully in H.G. Wells's late nineteenth-century *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, and recapitulated here in the Neanderthal brows of the deliberately retarded fetuses); and finally, the distinction between family ties and contractual or public relations.²⁴ This last is figured when Marsha, explicitly framed as a caring woman in contrast to her son, an instrumental, rational man, wonders: 'How could VJ deliberately retard his own brothers and sisters?'

Although Cook's thriller dramatizes a scientific decontextualization or denaturing process in its plot of ectogenetic fetuses, it does so not to challenge existing categories of what is 'natural', but to reinscribe them. Marsha deduces the following moral from the horrible sight of those ectogenetic babies, 'Science runs amok when it shakes loose from the bonds of morality and consequence', And VJ rebuts her, 'Morality cannot rule science because morality is relative and therefore variable. Science is not. . . . The only thing that is immutable in this world are the laws of nature that govern the present universe. Reason is the ultimate arbiter, not moralistic whims'. (Cook, p. 326)

Neither Marsha nor VJ is right here, because their debate is marred by its falsely exhaustive binary opposition between (relativistic) morality and (neutral) science. As Londa Schiebinger has shown in her study of gender and early modern science, the construction of scientific truth is itself variable: 'asymmetries in social power have given great authority to the voice of science . . . science cannot be considered neutral so long as systematic exclusions from its enterprise generate systematic neglect (or marginalization) of certain subject matters and problematics.'²⁵ Accepting the notion of a neutral science capable of representing reality objectively, Cook's vision of reproductive technology ends by colluding with the asymmetrical power relations structuring that science: hence it is not utopian and critical, but co-opted.

Cook's novel embodies technological rather than theoretical postmodernism, because it argues for greater, rather than less, control over the medical scientific processes that make up reproductive technology, explicitly valorizing the goal of attaining greater control over the human body. Although the ideological state apparatus are represented in force in the novel – including modern medical science, computer networking systems, industrial production, the public school system,

religion, and psychoanalysis—Cook's reproductive plot does not question the *human* institutions that enforce ideologies and so limit freedom. Rather, *Mutation* projects those objectifying ideologies into a non-human enemy: the monstrously brilliant chimera created by Dr. Victor Frank.

While Robin Cook accepts the notion of a natural world that science can document objectively, Elizabeth Jolley uses the theme of surrogacy in *The Sugar Mother* to attack the notion that there is a natural world existing before or beyond representation. Jolley's novel thus articulates the more challenging perspectives of theoretical and utopian postmodernism. This perversely comic tale of how a young girl uses the ruse of becoming a surrogate mother to gain housing, succour, and financial assistance from a historian left alone by his obstetrician wife who is on overseas study leave, immerses us in a post-Heisenbergian world in which scientific 'facts' are shaped by the very epistemological and representational processes by which they are discovered and reported.

Jolley's novel dramatizes Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar's influential analysis of scientific knowledge production as 'a system of literary inscription, an outcome of which is the occasional conviction of others that something is a fact'.²⁶ Arguing that 'Scientific activity is not "about nature", it is a fierce fight to *construct* reality' and therefore 'science is not objective, it is projective', Latour and Woolgar describe the process by which science arrives at knowledge as follows: initial intellectual and material investment in a set of technologies and approaches; resulting competitive struggle over the representations created; (and ultimately) collective agreement that the circumstantial and agonistic nature of the representation be banished, in order for them now to be objectively constituted as scientific fact.

Instances of reality under construction proliferate in Jolley's novel. The titular theme of surrogacy is the dominant example of the representational construction of reality. However, another striking parallel to Latour and Woolgar's inscription theory of scientific knowledge production is the body diary kept by Edwin, in order to manage what appears to be a full-blown case of hypochondria:

The books were the external, the internal and the intangible. The book of the skin (the external) had separate pages for different places on the body. He planned at some stage to have a series of maps like ordnance survey maps (in sections) of the human body, his body, with special methods of marking wrinkles, hair, moles, bruises, dry patches and the rather more unusual blemishes. Every page had its own legend and scale and he hoped, ultimately, to make an accurate index. . . He often imagined Cecilia's pleasure at receiving the copies, handsomely bound, at some time in the future after he was dead. (Jolley, p. 8)

Edwin's books of the body are more than merely obsessive intellectualization and sexual displacement, though they *are* that. Helen Daniel's observation that the entire novel takes place in Edwin's 'notebook of the intangible' suggests that the use of inscription to gain control over the body links the novel's themes of literature, religion, and surrogacy.²⁷

As Jolley portrays it, surrogate mothering joins two epistemological systems — the religious and the scientific — only to collapse them into a third, the discursive.

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Jolley's ironic representation of contemporary surrogate mothering links it to the medieval belief in the Virgin Birth; in each case a 'fact' (whether scientific or religious) is revealed to be not naturally-given, but socially-constructed. Jolley suggests that we invented the myth of the Virgin Mary, and the new scientifically-mediated role of surrogate mother, in order to cope with a set of indeterminacies and ungovernabilities: the crucial indeterminacy at the heart of fatherhood (that paternity is always invisible, maternity visible), and the ungovernable nature of female desire and procreative power. Although both religion and science claim the authority to ascertain natural reality before or behind socially constructed appearances, in actual practice they manifest the shaping power of representation.

Denaturing is fundamental to Jolley's strategies for character creation in *The Sugar Mother*. The central couple in the novel are professionally involved in the process of fact creation and deployment: Edwin as an historian and Cecilia as a physician specializing in obstetrics, gynaecology and infertility. Yet Jolley's narrative continually undermines the authority of the facts that they manipulate professionally, as well as the facts about themselves and others that they rely on daily. Physical appearance, gender identification, sexual orientation, even their reproductive capacities and roles, are all undercut.

The stability of bodily identity is shaken in this world; not only does Edwin obsessively chart in his three books of the body every physical change, inside and out, but both Edwin and Cecilia wear wigs, 'for those occasions demanding change', and attend 'parties . . . (that) consisted often of people who were not being themselves'. (Jolley, p. 42) Sexual identity poses problems for both characters: ambivalent and fumbling, Edwin generalizes from his own experience when he wonders about Cecilia's work on infertility, 'how many of them would be fertile if they did the thing properly'. (Jolley, p. 14) And Cecilia's status as the faithful wife is complicated not just by her twelve-month study leave, but by her longstanding lesbian relationship with her colleague Vorwickl with whom she is travelling while on leave. Even the dog, Prince, who belongs to their friend Daphne (deputized to look after Edwin in Cecilia's absence) is other than he seems; in the course of the novel, 'he' is revealed to be both female and pregnant.

All of these slyly de-authorized facts point to the central 'fact' that the novel calls into question: that the young girl Leila is a 'sugar', or surrogate, mother for Edwin and Cecilia's child. The doubt about the child's parentage, and the desire that doubt produces for a sugar-sweet illusion of paternal centrality, resonates throughout the novel: in allusions to the Virgin Birth, to the Joseph and Mary maternity wing of the hospital where Cecilia works, and to the 'pensive and gentle faces of the Madonna' by Hans Memling, Durer, and Van Eyck.²⁸

When *The Sugar Mother* ends, Leila has absconded, not merely with the surrogacy payment, and the fur coats extorted from a naive Edwin, but with the baby too – the son she had earlier turned over to Edwin as specified in her surrogacy contract. Edwin has come to question both his paternity and Leila's self-declared status as surrogate mother:

He saw again in Leila, as she sat resting, the Madonna-like quality, the tenderness in the tilt of the head and the possibilities of silence, patience and endurance. The gray-haired Joseph, he recalled, had a wan starved look which he felt he could match immediately with his own reflection in the bathroom mirror. Like Joseph, perhaps he was not the father of this child. . . He thought he would write something, a parable. A suburban parable for an entirely new bible. (Jolley, p. 193)

Writing her own ironic 'suburban parable', Jolley emphasizes the male desire for control that connects the biblical notion of immaculate conception to the contemporary notion of surrogate mothering. In so doing, of course, she calls into question not just the miraculous singularity of the Virgin Birth, but also the medical-scientific distinction between a 'natural' and a surrogate mother. Yet Jolley does not reinscribe the former by critiquing the latter. Rather, she reveals that all such oppositions, whether scientific or religious, are the product of social negotiations. Like the Bible, Edwin's books of the body and Cecelia's obstetrics convention papers, Leila's invention of herself as a surrogate mother exemplifies the human use of systems of representation to shape, control, and gain power in our world. Intentionality is revealed to be as central to surrogacy as in ancient times the idea of fathering was to paternity.²⁹

While Elizabeth Jolley's *The Sugar Mother* juxtaposes surrogate to natural mothering, and thus illuminates the masculine anxiety produced by the invisibility of paternity, Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* responds to that male anxiety at the loss of control over the seed and the products of conception by imagining a reconstruction of the male that gives him access to woman's biological and sociocultural position and powers. Jolley's drama unrolls on the purely personal level (shifting only by analogy to a mythic or religious register), but Carter explicitly uses the image of male transsexual pregnancy to connect the private realm of personal sexual relations to the public realm of the liberal civil state. With its epigraph gesturing to the social contract ('In the beginning all the world was America.' – John Locke), Carter's novel traces a journey to the centre of the sexual contract as well, exploring how private sexual difference is mapped onto the space of an America whose public, social sphere is undergoing an apocalyptic unravelling.

The protagonist, a British man named Evelyn, is kidnapped and brought to the desert center of America by Mama, 'the Great Parricide, . . . Castratrix of the Phallogentric Universe', in order to be made into a surgically created woman, 'the new Eve'. As the plan is explained to him:

Myth is more instructive than history, Evelyn; Mother proposes to reactivate the parthenogenesis archetype, using a new formula. She's going to castrate you, Evelyn, and then excavate what we call the 'fructifying female space' inside you and make you a perfect specimen of womanhood. Then, as soon as you're ready, she's going to impregnate you with your own sperm, which I collected from you after you copulated with her and took away to store in the deep freeze.³⁰

We can situate this novel on the theoretical and utopian extremes of the two critical axes I discussed earlier. The novel's emancipatory narrative challenges the identity stories fundamental to the construction of sex and gender in contemporary

America, and the world: from the macho front to the tale of sexual dreams – the new Eve discovered, naked, and her lifelong account making it not only in so wonder Tri an unbegotten Shelley's un unbegotten beginnings image of its

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America, and, because of America's cultural dominance, to much of the rest of the world: from the Hollywood movie goddess, to the black inner-city hooker, to the macho frontiersman. Carter's tale of reproductive (re)construction is paralleled by a tale of sexual (re)construction, for Evelyn is on a sexual quest for the woman of his dreams – the film star, Tristessa. This quest culminates when the surgically created new Eve discovers her new Adam: the celebrated femme fatale Tristessa, stripped naked, and unambiguously male. The secret sexual reversal that has been Tristessa's lifelong accomplishment illuminates how desire is implicated in sexual identity, making it not natural, but profoundly constructed. 'If a woman is indeed beautiful only in so far as she incarnates most completely the secret aspirations of man, no wonder Tristessa had been able to become the most beautiful woman in the world, an unbegotten woman who made no concessions to humanity'. (Carter, pp. 128–9) Shelley's unbegotten man – Frankenstein's monster – is joined now by Carter's unbegotten woman, as Carter's novel rounds back on the liberal civil state whose beginnings Mary Shelley plumbed in her nightmare vision, to give us a nightmare image of its apocalyptic demise.

Passion of the New Eve not only recalls *Frankenstein*, but anticipates Robin Cook's pulp rewrite of it, in linking the themes of single creation and surgical 'birth' to cryogenics, *in vitro* fertilization and artificial insemination. However, Carter's novel insistently deconstructs all the binary distinctions on which Cook's plot is based: male/female; public/private; science/magic; natural/cultural. Rather than preaching greater scientific control over conception and conceptive technologies, as Cook does, Carter urges us to interrogate 'the beginning' whether we construct it biologically (as the moment of fertilization and conception or as the origin of sexual difference) or politically (as the moment of the social contract). However we define that point of origin, Carter's novel suggests, it is not naturally given, but only *naturalized*.

Carter's narrator announces the novel's theme in a phrase that articulates not only how reproductive technology functions in this postmodern narrative, but its role in literature in general: as a central site for interrogating what Gayatri Spivak has described as the relation between 'sexual reproduction and human [sexed] subject-production': 'Our external symbols must always express the life within us with absolute precision; how could they do otherwise, since that life has generated them? . . . A critique of these symbols is a critique of our lives'.³¹ Carter's representation of reproductive technology opens out from the biological to the social and political in a way that exemplifies the most challenging and powerful literary treatments of the theme.

As I observed at the outset, our role as critics analyzing the literary representation of reproductive technology is not to intervene in material practices (though when we are *not* working as representational critics we may indeed decide to do so) but to investigate the significance of those representations: to discover how they came to be as they are; what meanings they seem to want to communicate, and what

meanings (and processes) they repress. In my discussion of these three postmodern novels, I have argued that they attach a broad range of meanings to the denaturing processes figured in reproductive technology. Yet though the range of meanings is broad, their trajectory is clear once we restore them to chronological order: from Carter to Jolley to Cook, we move from the emancipatory to the repressive, from the utopian to the co-opted. As a way of resisting that negative trajectory, let me conclude by considering (briefly and necessarily partially) what is obscured by the dominance in these contemporary literary texts of those three anchoring images of reproduction as the site of expert knowledge and power: the ectogenetic foetus, the surrogate mother, and the pregnant man. In other words, let me ask what these contemporary representations *repress*.

By their prominence in a representational tradition extending back to Shelley's *Frankenstein*, these three images marginalize, overshadow, or repress the pregnant female body, in all its messy, boundary-defying contingent subjectivity. Although Cook's *Mutation* begins with a dramatic birth scene, the novel's focus soon shifts to VJ's ectogenetic laboratory, and for the rest of the novel only ectogenesis is given extended visual representation. Similarly, although the plot of Jolley's *The Sugar Mother* turns on Leila's identity as surrogate mother for Edwin and Cecilia, her actual delivery of the child whose provenance and destination is under dispute occurs offstage and is given no narrative time or space.³²

We can see the implications of the marginalization or repression of the pregnant female body if we return to Angela Carter's *Passion of the New Eve*, which I have discussed so far as imaging the pregnant man. A second look at the novel reveals, however, that although her plot might be said to concern a man who gets pregnant, Carter represents pregnancy as occurring in, and linked to, the female body. Many contemporary representations of male pregnancy, such as fictions like Geoff Ryman's award-winning *Child Garden* (1989) and Stephen Gray's gay romance *Born of Man* (1989), or the White Paper on 'Abdominal Pregnancy' of The National Bioethics Consultative Committee (April 1990), figure elaborate schemas for abdominal gestation in a male.³³ In contrast, Carter's rewriting of the original narrative of Western culture (the myth of the Garden of Eden) refuses to explore the possibilities of male gestation. Despite the novel's resolute deconstruction of binary categories, it preserves the connection between pregnancy and the female body.

This is not to say that Carter represents that link as unquestioned and natural, however, but rather that she reinscribes it. Her protagonist, Evelyn, only becomes pregnant after he/she has been *surgically reconstructed as a woman*. Carter uses the creation of a 'new Eve' to gloss the creation of the old Eve. In addition to the standard indoctrination into femininity, her socially-defined role, Eve must also learn 'how to make water in the way a woman does and the right way to perform one or two other biologically determined acts'. For a while Eve resists her new sex, mentally protesting 'You'll have to put in more work on the programming techniques, Sophia; it takes more than identifying with Raphael's Madonna to make a real woman!'. But this resistance fades away with her first menstrual period:

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I could scarcely believe it dribbled out of me but there was no way of staunching it, the source lay deep inside me, beyond my own volition, the emblem of my function. Then I knew for certain that my change was absolute and I must climb inside the skin of the girl willy nilly, whether I liked it or not, and learn, somehow, to live there. (Carter, p. 80)

Given Carter's insistent deconstruction of all seemingly natural categories, we might well ask why she maintains the link between pregnancy and a woman's body in a novel representing the denaturing power of reproductive technology. I see Carter's reinscription of the connection between the female body and pregnancy as crucial to her critique of the narrative of Western political/cultural/sociosexual arrangements. The brief history I sketched out earlier demonstrated some of the ways in which the occluded, repressed, objectified or co-opted pregnant female body has functioned, in representation, to help consolidate a fraternal political, industrial, and finally global state based on hierarchized distinctions between public and private, subject and object, centre and margin, male and female. Such representations, as I have said, produced new subjects and new objects: a bourgeois foetus, a machine-mother, and a mothering father who is represented as having, alone, conceived and given birth to fraternal democracy.

Having begun with my dream of a pregnant man, I close with Angela Carter's image of a surgically- and socially-constructed pregnant woman. What makes Carter's vision the most challenging of these three contemporary representations of reproductive technology? And what issues does it raise for us, as critics? Judith Butler has observed that 'the subject. . . is constituted by the law as the fictive foundation of its claim to legitimacy'.³⁴ Carter's novel uses the representation of reproductive technology to challenge a parallel process of subject-constitution-as-institutional-legitimation. From Carter's retelling of the story of Eve, we are made to understand how the female subject has been constructed so as to authorize the bourgeois civil state's claim to legitimacy, with woman's capacity (or vulnerability) to pregnancy serving as the foundation for its sociopolitical structures. Carter reminds us that the female subject has, at least since the late eighteenth century, been constructed in and through reproduction: as politically legitimating site of deep subjectivity, as object of medical scientific knowledge and power, as machine, as monitored industrial producer, as co-opted passive consumer. Moreover, that constructed female subject has been put to the service of the state, of industry, of science, of global commodification. By drawing attention to the political, industrial and philosophical deployment of female procreative power to masculine ends, *Passion of the New Eve* asserts both the discursive and material significance of the repressed relationship between the foetus and the female body.

Notes

- 1 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction* [Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1976], New York, Vintage Books, 1980, p. 105.
- 2 Michelle Stanworth, 'Birth Pangs: Conceptive Technologies and the Threat to Motherhood', *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 288-304, pp. 290-291.

3 As Belsey observes:

The argument is not only that literature represents the myths and imaginary versions of real social relationships which constitute ideology, but also that . . . literature as one of the most persuasive uses of language may have an important influence on the ways in which people grasp themselves and their relation to the real relations in which they live.

Catherine Belsey, 'Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text', in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*, ed. J. Newton and D. Rosenfelt, London, Methuen, 1985; rpt. in *Feminisms*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1991, pp. 593-609, 593, 598.

4 I am grateful to E. Ann Kaplan for helping me formulate this approach, and to both Helen Cooper and Ann Kaplan for their perceptive comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

5 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*; Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*, New York, Routledge, 1991.6 Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1988, pp. 95-96.7 My use of the term 'literature' is not a specialized one here; I mean it to indicate fictional representations covering the range of discursive communities, from the popular to the canonical. However, a fascinating parallel process exists between the modern surge of interest in embryology and evolution, and the development of a modern notion of the 'literary' as comprising that which focuses on an individual subject undergoing experiences that lead to growth. See Andrea Henderson, 'Doll-Machines and Butcher-Shop Meat: Models of Childbirth in the Early Stages of Industrial Capitalism', *Genders*, 12, Winter 1991, pp. 100-119, and Clifford Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988, especially chapter 5.8 Andrea Henderson, 'Doll-Machines and Butcher-Shop Meat: Models of Childbirth in the Early Stages of Industrial Capitalism', *Genders*, 12, Winter 1991, pp. 100-119, 112-113.

9 Henderson, p. 103. Henderson suggests that the anxiety aroused by such mechanistic constructions of the woman in childbirth may have led William Hunter to offer a compromise in his obstetrical atlas: to figure the woman no longer as a machine, but rather as a fleshly, but not definably human, animal. (p. 100)

10 'Men appropriate to themselves women's natural creativity, their capacity physically to give birth - but they also do more than that. Men's generative power extends into another realm; they transmute what they have appropriated into another form of generation, the ability to create new political life, or to give birth to political right.' Pateman, p. 88.

11 See Bernard Doray, *From Taylorism to Fordism: A Rational Madness*, translated by David Macey London, Free Association Books, 1988, Edward Yoxen, *The Gene Business: Who Should Control Biotechnology* London, Pan Books, 1983, rpt. Free Association Books, 1986, and Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* Boston, Beacon Press, 1987, especially Chapter Two.12 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, London, 1932; rpt., New York, Harper & Row, 1969, p.4.

13 I discuss this short story at greater length in a chapter of my book in progress, 'Babies in Bottles: The Representational Origins of Reproductive Technology'.

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- 14 Anthony Ludovici, *Lysistrata, or Woman's Future and Future Woman*, London, Kegan Paul, 1924, p. 93.
- 15 Vera Brittain, *Halcyon, or the Future of Monogamy*, London, Kegan Paul, 1929, p. 77-78.
- 16 Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p.9.
- 17 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [Paris, 1979], Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984. See also Lisa Appignanesi, *Postmodernism: ICA Documents*, London, Free Association Books, 1989.
- 18 As Fredric Jameson has summarized the latter process (critically):
 (there is a) radical differentiation between the consumption of the past in narrative and its storage, hoarding, and capitalization in 'science' and scientific thought: (this is) a mode of understanding that . . . will little by little determine a whole range of ever more complex and extensive institutional objectifications – first in writing; then in libraries, universities, museums; with the breakthrough in our own period to microstorage, computerized data, and data banks of hitherto unimaginable proportions, whose control or even ownership is . . . one of the crucial *political* issues of our own time.
 Fredric Jameson, 'Foreword,' *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, by Jean-Francois Lyotard, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi [1979], Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1987, pp. xii-xiii.
- 19 As N. Katherine Hayles analyzes it, denaturing has operated in the postmodern period first on language, to reveal that 'signification is a construction rather than a natural effect of speaking and writing'; then on context, with the result that 'contexts are increasingly seen as constructions rather than as givens'; and finally on time, which is perceived no longer as a continuum, but rather as a set of discrete and interchangeable present moments. The ultimate conclusion of this denaturing process will be the denaturing of the human, Hayles predicts, with either liberating or repressive results. Developments in both genetic engineering and reproductive technology suggest that such a denatured human being is not far in the future. N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 266-282.
- 20 I base these characterizations on these facts: Cook's name and image replace the customary jacket 'blurbs' as incentives to purchase the novel; Carter's jacket copy invokes T.S. Eliot's Tiresias, Nietzsche, and her receipt of the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and the Somerset Maugham and Cheltenham Festival of Literature awards for her fiction; Jolley's jacket blurbs emphasize her comic wit and originality, while situating her explicitly among 'Australian writers'.
- 21 Let's begin with the first axis: according to Katherine Hayles, 'In its *theoretical* guises, cultural postmodernism champions the disruption of globalized forms and rationalized structures. In its *technological* guises, it continues to erect networks of increasing scope and power.' (Hayles, p. 291) To turn to the second axis: 'utopian postmodernism' as E. Ann Kaplan has defined it, is 'a movement of culture and texts beyond oppressive binary categories'. In contrast, commercial, or 'co-opted' postmodernism:
 is linked to the new stage of multinational, multi-conglomerate consumer capitalism, and to all the new technologies this stage has spawned. This postmodernism is

described as radically transforming the subject through its blanketing of culture. . . . Technologies, marketing and consumption have created a new, unidimensional universe from which there is no escape and inside which no critical position is possible. (Kaplan, p. 3)

- E. Ann Kaplan, 'Introduction', *Postmodernism and Its Discontents: Theories, Practices*, London, Verso, 1988, pp. 3,4. Kaplan associates 'utopian' postmodernism with Derridean deconstruction, and 'co-opted' or commercial postmodernism with the theories of Jean Baudrillard.
- 22 Robin Cook, *Mutation*, New York, G.P Putnam's Sons, 1989.
 - 23 As Dr. Victor Frank marvels, 'The feat represented a quantum leap in biotechnology'. (Cook, p. 320)
 - 24 H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* [London, 1896], New York, Signet Classic, 1988.
 - 25 Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 266.
 - 26 As the passage continues, 'Such conviction entails the perception that a fact is something which is simply recorded in an article and that it has neither been socially constructed nor possesses its own history of construction'. Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* [1976], Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 105.
 - 27 Helen Daniel, *Liars: Australian New Novelists*, Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1988, p. 297. Daniel reads *The Sugar Mother* somewhat differently than I do. She sees Leila and her 'sinister, sly, superbly awful' mother as manifestations of Edwin's own 'intangible world', as 'surrogate beings of his innermost self'. (Daniel, 297) But we agree in our assessments of the philosophical world of Jolley's novel: 'In *The Sugar Mother*, there are no absolute lines, no final line between fantasy and truth, which in the end participate in each other'. (p. 299)
 - 28 As Edwin muses, 'This contemplation of the representation of the human individual as a naked, plump, contented child, the subject of countless acts of adoration and contrition, never ceased to fill him with indescribable longings'. (Jolley, pp. 26-27)
 - 29 As Thomas Laqueur observes, 'The association of fatherhood with ideas . . . is ancient. . . Conceiving a child . . . is a man's sparking of an idea in the uterus which contains . . . a form waiting to be liberated'. Thomas Laqueur, 'The Facts of Fatherhood,' *Conflicts in Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 205-221, 209.
 - 30 Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, London, Virago, 1977; rpt. 1985, p. 68.
 - 31 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', *Critical Inquiry*, 12, Autumn 1985; rpt. *Feminisms*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1991, pp. 593-609, p. 808; Carter, p. 6.
 - 32 The birth takes place in an interval between chapters, and is given no specific mention. Instead, we learn that Edwin has decided not to fly to meet Cecilia in England for Christmas. (Jolley, pp. 173-5).
 - 33 Compare the following passages, the first from Ryman's *The Child Garden*, and the second from the NBCC Discussion Paper:

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“That’s my idea,” said Mike Stone. “I thought that since you’re busy and don’t like sex, you could donate an ovum, and I could donate a sperm cell and we could affix the result to the wall of my bowel.” (Ryman, p. 304)

‘It follows that if an abdominal pregnancy were to be successful in a biological female it might also be successful in a biological male or in a biological male who has been reassigned as a female. . . . It is envisaged that the embryo could be placed in a pocket of peritoneum in the omentum where it could be retained in position by suturing a flap of peritoneum over it. (NBCC, C-19 to C-20). Geoff Ryman, *The Child Garden*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1989; Professor William A. W. Walters, ‘Transsexualism and Abdominal Pregnancy,’ *Developments in the Health Field With Bioethical Implications Vol. II*, National Bioethics Consultative Committee, April 1990, C-11 to C-20; Stephen Gray, *Born of Man*, London, GMP, 1989.

- 34 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London, Routledge, 1990, pp. 2-3.