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'I AM NOT YOUR JUSTIFICATION FOR EXISTENCE:' MOURNING, FASCISM,
FEMINISM AND THE AMPUTATION OF MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN
ATWOOD, ZIERVOGEL, AND OZICK.

by

Mitchell Christopher Hobza

A THESIS

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‘I AM NOT YOUR JUSTIFICATION FOR EXISTENCE:’ MOURNING, FASCISM,
FEMINISM AND THE AMPUTATION OF MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN
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University of Nebraska, 2015.

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This thesis examines the complexities of mother-daughter relationships in twentieth-century women’s literature that includes themes about fascism and totalitarianism. Of central concern is how mothers and daughters are separated, both physically and psychically, in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Meike Ziervogel’s *Magda* and Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl*. Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born* provides the theoretical framework for considering maternity and the institution of motherhood. These separations occur through two modes: physical separation by political force; and psychical separation through ideological difference and what Rich terms as “Matrophobia.” The physical separation is analyzed through a synthesis of Rich’s theory and historical analysis of Nazi policy on maternity. The psychical separation occurs through the mothers attempts to transmit ideologies (fascism, feminism and classism) to their daughters and the disruptions of the transmissions *vis á vis* Matrophobia. These ideological transmissions will be analyzed through a synthesis of Rich and Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed*. These two forms of separation and amputation erupt into acts of mourning for the loss of matrilineage, which will be analyzed with Rich and Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life*. From mourning arises the justification for these failed transmissions, and justifications for maternity—which will

incorporate Sandoval's work on "love." The complications of the relationships of mothers and daughters not only show how the relationship can explore the constraints of maternity in literature, but also serve as a guide to thinking critically about how motherhood is socially constructed as an institution. In short—by examining maternity and fascist regimes, the intersections of race, class and gender show that maternity, and motherhood, while constrained, was also a privilege, as the state rigidly defined who could be a mother, and who could not.

This thesis is dedicated to my Lithuanian matrilineage—to those who left after the Nazi occupation, after the Berlin Wall; and to those who stayed.

To my Great-Aunt Irene—keeper of the stories, keeper of our histories.

Su Meilė

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Introduction

We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom.

We lived in the gaps between the stories.

—Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

In her groundbreaking 1976 work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* Adrienne Rich writes that the “cathexis between mother and daughter—essential, distorted, misused—is the great unwritten story” (Rich 225). In the almost forty years since that sentence was published numerous writers,¹ including feminist literary scholars, have set out to uncover that “great unwritten story”—a story that may, returning to Atwood’s quotation, have been in “the gaps between the stories.” In an effort to decipher what Rich’s “cathexis” is, we must turn to Freudian psychoanalysis. In *The Language of Psychoanalysis* Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis define Freud’s “cathexis” as an “economic concept: the fact that a certain amount of psychical energy is attached to an idea or a group of ideas, to a part of the body, to an object, etc” (62). Rich embellishes on what the “cathexis between mother and daughter” means, precisely, as a psychic investment: “there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which labored to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement” (225-26). Literary critic Joyce Pettis focuses on this place of contradiction—between “mutuality”

¹ In her introduction to the revised edition of *Of Woman Born* in 1986, Rich reconsiders this sentence and writes that “relying on ready-to-hand Greek mythology, I was led to generalize that ‘the cathexis between mother and daughter’ was endangered always and everywhere. A consideration of American Indian, African, and Afro-American myth and philosophy might have suggested other patterns” (Rich xxv). Rich’s considerations of the works of Morrison, Marshall, Moraga and Lorde, among others, reexamine and reassess this statement—showing that women of color have been attending to “the great unwritten story” for quite some time.

and “estrangement”—in her own exploration of this cathexis in Toni Morrison’s work: “The relationship between mothers and daughters, having the potential of being rewarding and destructive for both mother and daughter, makes it an attractive subject in fiction” (26). If this cathexis, or psychic investment, is built between “mutuality” and “estrangement” and can be simultaneously “rewarding” and “destructive,” then it is from within these “gaps” that an analysis of mother and daughter relationships arises—and the flourishing field of maternity studies points to this.

All three of the works selected for my analysis contain, in some shape or form, radical mothers. Not necessarily radical in the revolutionary sense, but instead mothers who exude some form of radical ideology or who exist in a radical political state. The radical state, although there is fluctuation between each work, is a state that is inherently fascist or totalitarian in its nature. It is within the confines of these individual fascist states that the mothers and daughters in these novels tangle with their “mutuality” and “estrangement” in a multiplicity of ways. My analysis is particularly concerned with the transmission of ideologies between mothers and daughters within these states, how those transmissions are disrupted, and the resulting amputation of the matrilineage, which is severed in all three works by violent force. This force, usually exerted by the radical state, is either in opposition to these mothers—thus making the mother radical in opposition—or in alignment with the mother. This amputation of the mother/daughter relationship can be thought of as the severance of the umbilical cord—the separation of mother and child. Yet, as the state is involved, it itself becomes a sort of malevolent “maternal” entity; citizen-subjects cannot be severed from the state. I argue that from these severed relationships and the failed transmissions of ideologies that the “cathexis

between mother and daughter” is erupted—and from this eruption comes mourning for the amputation of the matrilineal. It is through this mourning that “justification” for the transmission of ideologies arises. Thus “love,” where it may have been unable to find voice, becomes the justificatory vehicle for transmitting ideologies such as fascism, feminism and the reproductions of dominant constructions of race, gender and class.

The Literature

I will examine three works in the course of my analysis: Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl* and Meike Ziervogel’s *Magda*. Atwood’s 1986 dystopic novel is told entirely in the first-person by Offred, a Handmaiden in the nation of Gilead, formerly the United States of America. Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson identify Gilead as “a distinctive dystopia” founded on a “right-wing fundamentalist reading of the Bible” and is a regime “devoted to reproduction—white, Christian, misogynist, stratified reproduction” that functions in response to threats of “widespread sterility” by having “fertile women” i.e. Handmaidens assigned to government officials in order to continue human production as defined by the state (71). Offred has been forcibly separated by the regime from her mother, a second-wave feminist, and her daughter. Throughout the novel, Offred revisits these matrilineal relationships through memories, and explores her resistance to her mother’s radical feminism.

Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl* is a “two-part novella”² (Sivan 42) that contains the 1980 short-story “The Shawl” and the 1983 novella *Rosa*. Told through free indirect discourse, both stories center on Rosa Lublin, a Polish Jew who lives through the Holocaust. “The Shawl” begins with Rosa, her infant daughter Magda L. and her niece

² For the purposes of my analysis, both works are considered as one collection.

Stella proceeding on a death march to a concentration camp, and ends with Rosa witnessing the violent death of the infant Magda L. at the hands of an S.S. guard. *Rosa* occurs decades later, in which “Rosa Lublin, a madwoman and scavenger” (Ozick 13) lives isolated in Miami; writing letters to her dead daughter Magda L. and eventually imagining her daughter as a specter that visits her.

Meike Ziervogel’s 2013 debut novel, *Magda*,³ is a work of historical fiction that centers on Magda Goebbels, wife of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. Magda Goebbels is notoriously remembered for poisoning their six children with cyanide⁴ before her and Joseph’s joint-suicide as the Third Reich collapsed in 1945. Meike Ziervogel states that the novel “blends fact and fiction to draw a psychological portrait of a leading Nazi woman. On a second level, the story focuses on a destructive mother-daughter relationship over three generations. Ultimately *Magda* is a story about how without love our lives become distorted and how such a distortion in the worst case can lead to crime” (*Writing Magda*). The novel alternates between three distinct narratives: that of Magda Goebbels⁵ which is told in the third person; her daughter Helga, who writes in her diary in the first-person; and Magda G.’s mother, Auguste, who is interviewed by a Russian Commissar after the collapse of the regime.

Theoretical Framework and Analysis

The theoretical framework from which my analysis is built largely comes from the last half-century’s developments in feminist theory and politics, both inside and

³ As *Magda* is a rather recent novel, there has been little to no critical work devoted to it. Hence, *Magda* is central in my analysis in order to incorporate it into feminist literary criticism and into the canon of literary work on mothers and daughters.

⁴ In recent popular cinema, this scene was chillingly rendered in Oliver Hirschbiegel’s 2004 German film *Der Untergang* (Downfall).

⁵ For simplicity’s sake, Magda Goebbels, of Ziervogel’s *Magda*, will be referred to as Magda G. Rosa Lublin’s daughter Magda, of Ozick’s *The Shawl*, will be referred to as Magda L.

outside of the field of literature. Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* will serve as the basis for analyzing, as the subtitle states, "motherhood as experience and institution." Rich revised her original 1976 theoretical exploration of motherhood in 1986, and, as Andrea O'Reilly notes in her introduction to *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born*, Rich's work remains "arguably . . . the best feminist book on mothering and motherhood" (1). In addition to the theoretical work on motherhood, I will also incorporate Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* into my overarching analysis. Sandoval's work, a theoretical synthesis or "theory uprising" of the work of "Fredric Jameson, Donna Haraway, Michel Foucault . . . Frantz Fanon, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde . . . Roland Barthes, among others" theorizes and imagines the "underlayer of oppositional consciousness" which becomes a "rhetoric of resistance, an apparatus for countering neocolonizing postmodern global formations" through the "methodology of the oppressed" (Sandoval 1-2).

The first stage of my analysis will draw from the work of Rich and various historians to frame the entity of the state, and how it shapes and defines the institution of motherhood. The historical background will largely draw from the recent body of work examining women within the Nazi state. Nazi policy and propaganda about motherhood is necessary in understanding Ziervogel's historical-fiction novella about Magda Goebbels and Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*, but also serves as the basis for many aspects of the Gilead regime in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The synthesis of Rich's theory and the history of the Nazi state will build a foundation from which to examine how the institution of motherhood in all three novels was shaped and constructed by the state.

Whereas Sandoval's work is focused on resistance to dominant "formations" and how "love" can be "understood as a technology for social transformation" (2), the second stage of my analysis will focus less on "successful" resistance. Instead, I use Sandoval's "Rhetoric of Supremacism," drawn from the work of Barthes and Fanon, to uncover and examine how mothers embody and attempt to transmit supremacist ideologies to their daughters in the selected texts. The disruptions of these transmissions (along with the entity of the "state") contribute to the amputations⁶ of their matrilineage or the obstruction of the mother/daughter cathexis. Yet it is important to keep in mind that the desire to transmit these supremacist rhetorics generates from a problematic understanding of "love" or from their misplaced vision of a safer world.

The third stage of my analysis will examine the mourning erupting from the severance of the matrilineage. The analysis for mourning will draw from Judith Butler's *Precarious Life*, and how each mother and/or child mourns for the loss of the matrilineage. This analysis will demonstrate the complex nature of the mother daughter cathexis—and how that cathexis has been disrupted by external and internal forces.

The fourth stage, which will build to the conclusion, by utilizing Sandoval's conception of "love" as a revolutionary tool—and how this "love" provides the basis for the justification of the transmissions of ideologies—if anything, these mothers are enacting some form of "love," whether it be an internal force or an enactment of the socially constructed ideals of maternal love.

⁶ The use of the word "amputation" is derived from Offred's own language in *The Handmaid's Tale*. For more on Offred's use of "mutilation...language" (105) see Rubenstein.

Section 1: Motherhood as Institution: State Control of Reproduction

Mother has a heart of gold. How proudly she used to show us off. Mother of the Nation, Mother of the German Nation!

—Meike Ziervogel, *Magda*

Framing motherhood as a cultural institution, as opposed to an ambiguous and individual state of being, is essential to uncovering how these narratives interrogate the cultural beliefs and political practices that create such a narrow narrative framework for what it means to be a mother and a daughter. Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* and its exploration of "Motherhood as Experience and Institution" will be the map from which this work will gain its direction. Rich writes that "Motherhood—unmentioned in the histories of conquest and serfdom, wars and treaties, exploration and imperialism—has a history, it is an ideology, it is more fundamental than tribalism or nationalism" (33). Rich emphasizes the intersection of motherhood and nation: "the regulation of women's reproductive power in every totalitarian system and every socialist revolution, the legal and technical control by men of contraception, fertility, abortion, obstetrics, gynecology, and extrauterine reproductive experiments—all are essential to the patriarchal system, as is the negative or suspect status of women who are not mothers" (34). The intense focus on reproduction is a central part of my analysis, but reproduction is not the only means through which motherhood has been formed as an institution. Rich argues that she tries "to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (13). Andrea O'Reilly aptly summarizes Rich's approach to the institution of motherhood: "The reality of patriarchal motherhood thus must be

distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of gynocentric or feminist mothering. In other words, while motherhood, as an institution, is a male-defined site of oppression, women's own experiences of mothering can nonetheless be a source of power" (2). Motherhood, then, becomes a source of power that the state seeks to control, as it is the means by which it can best police its current (and future) inhabitants. Yet, these novels do not demonstrate an either/or between power and oppression, but instead a hybrid of the two: motherhood is both a "source of power" and a "site of oppression" in all three novels.

Motherhood is not simply a relationship to one's own body and children, but also one's relationship to the nation and state in which one resides. For the purposes of this analysis, that nation-state will be National Socialist Germany. Ziervogel's *Magda* and Ozick's *The Shawl* are historical fictions that are based in/on the Nazi State. While Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* imagines a dystopic future in America, Gilead is a regime that, according to Angela Laflen, "draws on the history of the Third Reich" (84). Additionally, the fictional *Historical Notes* at the novel's end inform the audience that "there was little that was truly original with or indigenous to Gilead: its genius was synthesis" (Atwood 307). While Gilead draws from the fascist and totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, it is also uniquely American largely in part because of its foundations in Puritanism. This "synthesis" can be better explored after we examine how, exactly, Nazi politics configured their own institution of motherhood.

Historian Robert O. Paxton, in his essay "The Five Stages of Fascism" notes the difficulty of defining fascism, as "there was no 'Fascist Manifesto,' no founding fascist thinker" (4) and pushes historians to study fascism through "comparison," "since every

western society has contained at least some marginal example” (10). One of these commonalities that Paxton identifies about fascist movements is that, “their only moral yardstick is the prowess of the race, of the nation, of the community. They claim legitimacy by no universal standard except a Darwinian⁷ triumph of the strongest community” (5). It should be rather unsurprising then that women, as possible producers of both the triumphed nation, and, conversely, its enemies, figure largely into fascist politics as potential mothers.

Of Nazi policy and propaganda targeted at women, historian Jill Stephenson writes, “The Nazi message to women was: be a mother, first, foremost and always, preferably a mother of several children,” but specifies that this message was exclusively broadcasted to “valuable Aryan” women while “worthless” women were to be prevented from reproducing” (16). The Nazi regime’s obsession with race has been historically well-documented and Stephenson breaks it down succinctly:

Humankind, they believed, was divided into different races with varying degrees of value, and they supported pseudo-scientific theories of racial development which were fashionable from c. 1900. The ‘Aryan race’, to which, they believed, most ethnic Germans as well as ‘nordic’ peoples like the Dutch and Scandinavians belonged, was utterly ‘superior’, but equally it was ‘threatened’ by inferior races like Slavs and, particularly, Jews [but also included] Roma and Sinti ‘Gypsies’, as well as others considered ‘inferior’ to the ‘Aryan race’, including Blacks like African-Americans. (12)

The regime’s intense focus on race (and how racial enemies were created) forged an institution of motherhood that was unique to National Socialist Germany. Motherhood

⁷ For analysis regarding totalitarianism, social Darwinism (118), Nazi Germany and Gilead, see Davidson.

was, in essence, how a woman served and participated in the creation of a new state—if she was allowed to do so. The distinction between “valuable” and “worthless” women is key in this analysis: it is inside and between these distinctions that these mothers and daughters fluctuate.

Fluctuating between spaces almost seems antithetical to the identity of a “fixed citizen-subject,” in Sandoval’s terms, that fascism and totalitarianism created Sandoval identifies “the generation of totalitarian political regimes (unique to the twentieth century)” as one of the “transformative forces” that “Euro-U.S. societies became subject to” and that this, among many other factors, “was symptomatic of the overwhelming recognition by many peoples that they were no longer capable of making sense of or giving meaning to the practices that life in ‘advanced’ industrialized societies required its members to observe” (8-9). This postmodern crisis, as identified by Jameson, is split for Sandoval into a crux. While the “disoriented first world citizen-subject [...] longs for the solidity of identity possible only—if at all—under previous eras” there are also the “subordinated, marginalized, or colonized Western citizen-subjects who have forced to experience the so-called aesthetics of ‘postmodern’ globalization as a precondition of survival” (9). It is this survival, the “methodology” of survival, that informs Sandoval’s work: survival in the “third-world” required the creation of “effective forms of resistance” to this global change—in effect, the oppressed, due to their oppression, have the tools to resist the postmodern world order. The characters in the selected novels fluctuate between these two spaces, that of “disoriented first world citizen-subject” and the “survival” methods of the oppressed.

These fluctuations occur between the intersections of race, power and gender. As noted before, the Nazi regime was one that was obsessed with race, and gender and class intersected with this power structure as well. In her 2012 introduction to the Folio Society edition of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood dismisses the novel's classification as a "feminist dystopia" because that would mean that "pure and simple, all of the men would have greater rights than all of the women" (2012 xii). While Atwood's interpretation of what *feminist* means as a label and modifier in this context is incredibly simplistic, Atwood invites us to think of Gilead's power structure as "the usual kind of dictatorship: shaped like a pyramid, the men generally outranking the women at the same level; then descending levels of power and status with men and women in each, all the way down to the bottom" (xii-xiii). This pyramid structure, with the caveat of specifically attending to issues of class, race and gender and how they shape and form power structures, can help visualize the immense space between Sandoval's distinctions of the "first world" and "third world" and how the characters in these works navigate these spaces of power.

If these characters are considered as occupying this kind of pyramid-like structure, then Ziervogel's Magda Goebbels in *Magda* would occupy its "apex." Magda Goebbels, wife of Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels, was considered "the First Lady of the Reich" (Meissner) as Hitler himself was unmarried. In the novel's final scene, after the deaths of her children and before Magda G. leaves the bunker to commit suicide with her husband, she finds herself at a loss to move forward with their plan: "Oh, my Führer, help me. Why have you forsaken me? Why am I so weak? I am a courageous mother. The Mother of the Nation" (Ziervogel 105). Magda G.'s association of her devotion to National Socialism with her status as a mother is not incidental. Historian

Matthew Stibbe states that “the development of a ‘cult of motherhood’ was itself a key feature of Nazi propaganda. . . the ‘German mother’ [sic], to be distinguished from the ‘racially valueless’ mother, was given an exalted place in Nazi imagery. Paintings, sculptures and posters frequently depicted the breast-feeding German mother⁸ surrounded by her healthy children in traditional rural settings, thus invoking the Nazi fantasy of ideal family life” (41). This exaltation was not just limited to mere rhetoric and imagery though. As Magda G. is mired in her crisis of faith, because her now deceased Führer cannot guide her after she poisoned her children, she struggles to find direction: “Her fingers fondle the gold medal that the Führer has fastened with His⁹ own hands to the collar of her jacket. He knew she would follow Him. She will follow Him” (Ziervogel 105). Helga writes in her diary that: “she proudly showed us a decoration that the Führer had awarded her. She hugged each one of us and kissed us and said that without us she would never have attained such honour in the eyes of the Führer” (71). While I initially mistook this medal for one of the “Mother’s Honour Crosses,¹⁰” biographer Hans-Otto Meissner reveals that in their actual final interaction, Hitler “removed the gold Party badge from his . . . coat and fastened it to the lapels of Magda’s jacket” and this badge “signified for her the highest honour any woman could receive” (266). Magda G.’s gold

⁸For an example, see the April 1936 cover of Nazi propaganda magazine, *Neues Volk*, which can be found in the “Holocaust Encyclopedia” at the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. For actual footage of Magda Goebbels serving a meal to her children, see Fisher.

⁹ In Magda G.’s narrative sections Hitler is always referred to as Him and He, just as a Judeo-Christian religious text would refer to Christ or Yahweh.

¹⁰ Stibbe notes that: “The Mother’s Honour Crosses were awarded for the first time on Mother’s Day 1939, when 3 million women, mostly older women with four children or more, were solemnly granted the title of ‘mother of the Reich’ in special national ceremonies. The crosses came in three grades: bronze for four children, silver for six, and gold for eight or more. Recipients of the gold cross were honoured by Hitler himself” (42).

medal is a significant artifact in regards to her status as mother—as “no war hero...had ever been so uniquely decorated as Magda Goebbels” (266).

While her status and privilege in the Reich was undoubtedly because of her being in the Nazi inner-circle, her recognized locus of power, what sustains her in her last hours is the physical representation of these ideals. Magda Goebbels was the ideological Mother of the Nation, a position of power acquired through her bearing Aryan children, and her identity was built around those ideals and the power that came with them because instead of women “existing for the satisfaction of men” they were now “essential to the rebirth of the nation” (Ziervogel 109).

Magda G. is the embodiment of what Jill Stephenson identified as the “valuable Aryan” woman (16). Magda G’s maternal status was a political badge of honor, and with it came the form of her identity as a National Socialist and as a mother. Her negotiations with this ideology will be further explored in the second section, but framing her in the specific context of being a “valuable” woman is key, as it gives a basis under which to examine the figure of Ozick’s Rosa in *The Shawl*. As these characters are on opposite sides of the Nazi political spectrum, through comparison they can illuminate how the Nazi institution of motherhood not only defined who *could* be a mother, but conversely who *could not* be a mother.

If Magda G. is at the top of the pyramid, then Jewish Holocaust survivor Rosa Lublin must be somewhere at the bottom. Yet Rosa resists the classification of a survivor in her response to being invited to be part of a “clinical social pathology” study on “current conditions in survivors” of the Holocaust (Ozick 35-6). “Consider also the special word they used: *survivor*. Something new. As long as they didn’t have to say

human being . . . they didn't call you a woman anyhow. *Survivor*. Even when your bones get melted into the grains of the earth, still they'll forget *human being*" (36-7). Rosa resists this label as she feels it robs her of her humanity—and puts her into yet another fixed and limited identity. "A name like a number—counted apart from the ordinary swarm. Blue digits on the arm, what difference?" (36). Through Rosa, Ozick raises a sharp concern over the American academy's approach to the Holocaust as "an excitement over other people's suffering" (36). It is within this gray space of not survivor but "human being" that Rosa negotiates her position as a being in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Yet as much as Rosa's status as a human being is erased by Holocaust studies, her status as a mother was likewise erased by the Nazi regime. *The Shawl* opens with Rosa, her infant Magda L., and Rosa's niece Stella proceeding on a death march through "the coldness of hell" (3). Magda L. is carried, and hidden, in a shawl "between sore breasts" (3) and when Rosa's breasts were both "cracked" with "not a sniff of milk" like "a dead volcano, blind eye, chill hole." Magda L. relies on the shawl instead for her sustenance. "She sucked and sucked, flooding the threads with wetness. The shawl's good flavor, milk of linen" (4-5). On arriving at the concentration camp, Rosa is aware that "Magda was going to die very soon" and "hid her in the barracks, under the shawl" and the infant remained undetected as she "was mute. She never cried" (6). Rosa fears that "Stella was waiting for Magda to die so she could put her teeth into the little thighs" (5) and these fears are realized when "Stella took the shawl away and made Magda die" (6). Magda L. leaves the barracks "with her little pencil legs scribbling this way and that, in search of the shawl" (7) and Rosa becomes paralyzed with a "fearful joy" (7). Rosa goes inside the

barrack to retrieve the shawl from Stella but returns too late to retrieve Magda L. The infant is “high up, elevated, riding someone’s shoulder . . . below the helmet a black body like a domino and a pair of black boots hurled themselves into the direction of the electric fence” (9) and Magda L. is thrown into the fence by the camp guard. Magda L.’s death is the impetus for Rosa’s “madness” that is explored in *Rosa*, the second part of *The Shawl*—which will reveal further complications about Rosa’s maternal identity.

The violence and depravity that Rosa suffers is vastly different than the violence Magda G. brings upon her own children—as Magda G. was a “valuable Aryan” she had the power to make the choice to take her children’s lives, whereas Rosa’s child is taken from her by the regime. In her groundbreaking 1983 article “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” Gisela Bock¹¹ reflects on “race hygiene discourse” or “eugenics” as it “deals with women much more than do most other political or social theories, since women have been hailed as ‘mothers of the race,’ or, in stark contrast, vilified, as the ones guilty of ‘racial degeneration.’” (401). Through exploring Nazi propaganda regarding mothers, Bock determines that “eugenic racism was able to bring to reality a bureaucratic, scientific, and faultlessly efficient genocide on the scale of the Holocaust” (416). For Bock, then, this propaganda and its impact on early eugenic practices such as sterilization were fully realized within the concentration camp. Gisela Perl’s testimony on her experiences in Auschwitz coincide with Bock’s findings, particularly when she describes how “one of the S.S. chiefs would address the women, encouraging the pregnant women to step forward, because they

¹¹ In her introduction to the 1986 revised *Of Woman Born*, Rich references Bock’s article when arguing that sterilization illuminates “how race and class make a difference of even the most basic shared experiences among women—the experience of having our reproductive choices made for us by male-dominated institutions” (xvi).

would be taken to another camp where living conditions were better” but the reality of what occurred to these women was horrific: “beaten with clubs and whips, torn by dogs. . . when they collapsed, they were thrown into the crematory—alive” (113). Both Bock’s research and Perl’s testimony point to how Jewish mothers, and other “unvaluable” women were to be negated as mothers within this regime. The Nazi institution of motherhood had no place for these women, and acted accordingly to remove them.

Through comparison, *Magda* and *The Shawl* position two women within the same political spheres into vastly different experiences of motherhood, and this illustrates not only how the state constructs motherhood as an institution, but the state also determines who can participate in that institution. Like National Socialist Germany, Atwood’s Gilead constructs a rigid institution of motherhood. To return to Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson, “Gilead is devoted to reproduction—white, Christian, misogynist, stratified reproduction” and while all women are required to participate (or be negated) in this rigid system of maternity, it is the “fertile” women who are placed as Handmaids with government officials in order to reproduce for the state (71). Critical readings on Offred the Handmaid differ from critic to critic. Some critics view Offred as “a sympathetic narrator, an everywoman” (Stillman and Johnson 71) “with a college degree, a husband, a daughter, a job” (Stimpson, qtd. in Stillman and Johnson 71). Others, like Elaine Tuttle Hansen, note that “the Handmaid is a white, well-educated, and still relatively privileged woman” (159) and that because of this she is “genetically acceptable for the elite position of Handmaid” (170). Janet J. Montelaro generalizes that in Gilead “every young woman has an obligation to produce offspring” (234 emphasis added), which is patently untrue—as will be shown. Exploring *The Handmaid’s Tale* as a narrative of white privilege, as

opposed to simply one in which Offred is an “everywoman” victimized by a regime, is key to unweaving the complexities of motherhood as an institution, and its relationship to the state.

Tracing back to the discussion of race that occurred between *Magda* and *The Shawl*, race is also an important factor in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, even if it may not be explicitly stated. Or as Ruth McElroy writes: “although *The Handmaid’s Tale* does not explicitly announce itself as a narrative *about* racial politics, without the category of ‘race’ it would be unintelligible” (338). While Gilead parallels Nazi Germany in many ways: its propaganda, state-sanctioned violence and maternity politics, it is also distinctly American. If we return to Gisela Bock’s argument that eugenics was only a precursor to the Holocaust, then Bock’s rough estimate that “under comparable laws in thirty states of the United States, 11,000 persons were sterilized between 1907 and 1930, and 53,000 more by 1964” (413) suggests that eugenics, considered in the context of Atwood’s fictional Gilead, could be viewed as a precursor as well. Robert O. Paxton argues that the Ku Klux Klan is one of “the earliest phenomenon that seems functionally related to fascism” as their racist politics and fears motivated “an alternate civic authority, parallel to the legal state” (12). Of course, the K.K.K didn’t gain the same political power as the Nazi party, but of American fascism, Paxton argues that “an authentically popular fascism in the United States would be pious and anti-Black” (22). Piety¹² and racism are the backbone of Gilead, although racism is not directly seen in Offred’s narrative.

One of the only times race is mentioned is when Offred is allowed to watch the news, of which she doubts if “any of it is true” (Atwood 82). After witnessing scenes of a

¹² For analysis on how religion and state became intrinsically tied together in the twentieth century, see Kruse.

bombed out city that “used to be Detroit” the broadcast shows that the “‘Resettlement of the Children of Ham is continuing on schedule,’ says the reassuring pink face...’Three thousand have arrived this week in National Homeland One, with another two-thousand in transit” (83). Offred clarifies that “National Homeland One” is in “North Dakota” yet “Lord knows what they’re supposed to do, once they get there. Farm, is the theory” (84). “Children of Ham” is a scriptural turn-of-phrase that refers to Black Americans, as Ham was “marked” by Noah after revealing his drunken nakedness in Genesis. This marked difference was often used to justify slavery with a Biblical context, and the “theory” that they would “farm” in North Dakota suggests that Gilead has reinstated the slavery of Black Americans.¹³

That this is one of the only mentions of race in Offred’s narrative points to the efficiency with which Gilead built a white supremacist society and/or the ease that the architecture of America’s white, male supremacist history has provided them. It also points to Offred’s racial blindness—while she provides the reader with many penetrative insights into Gilead’s policies towards women, she notices nothing of her racial surroundings. Aside from the women who serve the commanders—Handmaids (reproduction), Wives (marital status) and Marthas (housework), there are two other positions publically open to women. That of Econo-wife—the women married to lower ranking members who are a combination of all three female occupations (Atwood 24). And the Unwomen—“old women . . . Handmaids who’ve screwed up their three chances and incorrigibles” who work in the Colonies, cleaning “toxic dumps and radiation spills”

¹³ Many critics, such as Ruth McElroy, have noted that *The Handmaids Tale* stylistically resembles “African American slave narratives” (338). It may be interesting to consider critical responses that read Offred as an “every woman” and as a pure victim of the regime in conversation with late nineteenth century and early twentieth century feminists who were concerned with prostitution, or what they called “White Women’s Slavery.”

until they die (248). Rita, one of the Marthas Offred resides with, points out the colonies are a “choice” (10) and Offred even concedes that “there wasn’t a lot of choice but there was some, and I made mine” (94). If the deportation of people of color is considered in context with the Unwomen, then Offred’s “choice” to be a Handmaid is one provided to her by racial privilege. Women of color, by default, are Unwomen—unable to produce for the state.

While Offred’s status as an indentured womb may initially place her closer to the bottom of Atwood’s pyramid, on closer examination of her racial privilege, it becomes clear that she is higher in the regime’s pyramid. She is still allowed to reproduce, unlike the Unwomen, and her children are considered valuable, unlike Ozick’s Rosa. Conversely, her actual daughter has been abducted by the regime, and thus Offred is, as Hansen so aptly states, “a woman who has mothered and may mother but does not mother now” (175-6). Bringing Rich’s “two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control” (13) into dialogue with these three novels shows that motherhood, and maternity, is not fixed but instead fluid—even though all three characters were part of a rigid institution, because of their race and class they had radically alternative experiences as mothers. Rich writes that “it is not simply that woman in her full meaning and capacity is domesticated and confined within strictly defined limits. Even safely caged in a single aspect of her being—the maternal—she remains an object of mistrust, suspicion, misogyny in both overt and insidious forms” (127). The state, in these cases, is not just invested in determining the *how* of motherhood, but is

explicitly invested in *who* can be a mother—or, as Rich concludes, “the female generative organs, the matrix of human life, have become a prime target of patriarchal technology” (127). These fluctuating limitations, and privileges, shaped each characters’ experiences as a mother and subsequently shape and inform their actions as mothers and daughters—which will be explored in the following sections.

Section 2: Transmissions of Ideology

Motherhood—I’ve always known this—is a profound distraction from philosophy, and all philosophy is rooted in suffering over the passage of time.

—Cynthia Ozick, *The Shawl*.

On considering how ideology can shape the institution of motherhood, each of the selected novels also contains transmissions of certain ideologies between mothers and daughters. The respective ideologies can be broken up, for simplicity’s sake, into three distinct categories: fascism, feminism and class ideologies. Mothers in these novels serve as the locus point from which their individual ideologies—which are part of a larger ideology—are transmitted to their daughters. Yet these transmissions are often disrupted, either by not configuring the daughter’s autonomy, or by an outside force, such as the state. Rich writes that “daughters have been nullified by silence” and that this silence, caused by a long history of female infanticide, is why “a woman dreaded giving birth to a female like herself. While the father might see himself as ‘twice-born’ in his son, such a ‘second birth’ was denied the mothers of daughters” (227). Yet the distance between mother and daughters is not just limited to these silences. Adrienne Rich, in reference to poet Lynn Sukenick, gives us the idea of “Matrophobia” or “the fear not of one’s mother or motherhood but of *becoming one’s mother*” (Rich 235). Rich embellishes on this notion, writing that “thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a

compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce *transmitted*. Easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her” (235, emphasis added) and that “Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free” (236). The silences and disruptions caused both by outside forces and by Matrophobia to the mother/daughter cathexis are part of “the materials...for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement” (226) and can be witnessed in the failed transmissions of ideology between mother and daughter.

The mother’s articulations and representations of these various ideologies are vast and diverse and also enfold their own silences: what is untold, unmentioned and unacknowledged. In negotiating their individuated rhetorics of their ideologies, they must also negotiate the silences of Matrophobia in their attempts at ideological transmission. Defining these rhetorical practices, and silences, is crucial in determining how the disrupted transmissions contribute to the amputations of matrilineage. Chela Sandoval draws from the work of Roland Barthes and Frantz Fanon to define what she terms as the “Rhetoric of Supremacism” (117). Sandoval breaks down supremacist rhetoric by utilizing Barthes’ seven “‘figures’ or ‘poses’” which “when enacted by their practitioners . . . are experienced as natural, normal, and neutral categories of being” (117). As Toni Morrison so aptly stated: “one of the functions of political ideology is to pass itself off as immutable, natural, and ‘innocent’” (Morrison) and the immutability of the respective ideology is embodied by the mother, yet may be disrupted upon her attempt to transmit her values to her daughter, either by force or Matrophobia. Returning to Sandoval, I will

explore the mothers (and their ideologies) in these novels through her seven “poses,” and through these explorations I will suggest connections between seemingly disparate ideologies.

Sandoval identifies each of the seven “rhetorical figures” or “poses” of supremacy as being a “paradox” because “what hails this rhetoric into the real is difference” yet “once enacted, each figure becomes a machine—a deputy for the real that works to erase difference” (119). While this erasure obliterates difference between subject (the supremacist) and object (the “other”) it is important to consider that these erasures of difference also occur in the juncture of the mother/daughter relationship—causing disruption and amputation. The mother’s values and ideologies are the “natural” state of thinking, and thus the daughter’s differences are negated.

The primary “pose” that will be used as an analytical tool and borrowed from Barthes by way of Sandoval will be the rhetorical “pose” of “Identification,” as it most strongly ties in with Rich’s concept of Matrophobia. Sandoval identifies the “third pose” of supremacy as that of “Identification” in which “consciousness draws itself up, comforts itself, and identifies itself . . . through a comparing and weighing operation that seeks to equate all differences with itself” (121). Both mothers and daughters enact and perform the rhetoric of “Identification” in the three selected novels, yet the primary focus will be how this “pose” is enacted by mothers, in an effort to engage with their individual commitments to their own ideologies. Sandoval writes: that “should the good citizen-subject inadvertently find itself face-to-face with what is sublimely and horrifically other, Barthes predicts one of the four following responses: citizen-subjects will (1) blind themselves, (2) ignore the differences, (3) deny the other, or (4) transform the other into

themselves” and then the “possibilities for confrontation are thus undone and sabotaged, while perceptions of difference are reduced to sameness” (121). The four responses of this rhetorical “pose” of supremacy are utilized by various characters and will be examined to better understand how their ideologies are understood to be the supreme ideologies, and how we can uncover their desires to transmit these ideologies to their daughters.

Rosa, in Ozick’s *The Shawl*, is a woman deeply invested in her pre-Holocaust class values and she attempts to transmit them to the specter of her deceased daughter Magda L. After her relocation to Florida, Rosa encounters a Yiddish man named Simon who emigrated from Warsaw in 1920 (18), and he identifies her as a fellow “refugee” (18). Rosa blusters at his attempt to claim they originated from a similar past by repeatedly reminding Simon that “My Warsaw isn’t your Warsaw” (19), which becomes a mantra for Rosa’s interactions with Simon. Rosa’s lack of identification with Simon as a fellow “refugee” initially appears to be one that centers around her being a victim/survivor of the Holocaust—and this separates them as two Jewish people both born in Warsaw; he left Warsaw almost 20 years before the occupation of Poland by the Nazis (18).

This lack of recognition leads Rosa to “deny the other” in Simon’s attempt to clump their Jewish identities together, indeed Simon as a “citizen-subject” when “face-to-face” with the “sublimely and horrifically other” Holocaust survivor Rosa also embodies the pose of identification—he attempts to “transform the other into [himself]”—both are Polish Jews living in Florida, yet only Rosa experienced the horrors of the Holocaust. Yet, their exchange of supremacist rhetorics are not that simplistic. Before Simon

introduces himself at the laundromat, Rosa notices that the newspaper he is reading is “all in Yiddish” (17), and Simon asks her later if she speaks Yiddish (19). Rosa firmly responds in the negative and has a stream-of-conscious flashback: “My Warsaw isn’t your Warsaw. But she remembered her grandmother’s cradle-croonings: her grandmother was from Minsk. *Unter Reyzls vigele shteyt a klorvays tsigle.*¹⁴ How Rosa’s mother despised those sounds!” (19). This matrilineal knowledge, the rejection of the Yiddish language, is entirely informed by Rosa’s class consciousness. As Hana Wirth-Nesher notes “Rosa’s denial of any knowledge of Yiddish is her badge of honor in terms of social class” (319). Rosa’s class identity begins to reveal itself as she reflects on their differences in language:

“oh, lost and kidnapped Polish!—and now she wrote and spoke English as helplessly as this old immigrant. From Warsaw! Born 1906! She imagined what bitter ancient alley, dense with stalls, cheap clothes strung on outdoor racks, signs in jargoned Yiddish. Anyhow they called her refugee” (20).

Rosa’s “deny[ing] the other” is informed by her upbringing in “the house of her girlhood laden with a thousand books. Polish, German, French; her father’s Latin books” and memories of ‘her Warsaw’—“Cultivation, old civilization, beauty, history!” which could not be found in what Rosa imagines to be ‘Simon’s Warsaw.’ Rosa’s rejection of the Yiddish tongue (her grandmother’s tongue) was informed by her parents: “Her father, like her mother, mocked at Yiddish; there was not a particle of ghetto left in him, not a grain of rot” (21). When Rosa describes later, in a letter to Magda L., that her family was sent to the Warsaw ghetto, she is indignant at her families placement there: “imagine confining *us* with teeming Mockowiczes and Rabinowiczes and Perskys and Finkelsteins,

¹⁴ Hana Wirth-Nesher notes that this is Yiddish (320).

with all their bad-smelling grandfathers and their hordes of feeble children!” (66) and her family was “furious because we had to be billeted with such a class, with these old Jew peasants” (67). Rosa’s “deny[ing] the other” points to her ideologies of class superiority—she did not deserve to be in the Warsaw Ghetto, but those that lived there had always deserved to be there. It is these class ideologies that she imposes on her daughter Magda L. when she writes letters to her, and they help create the specter of Magda L. in her imagination.

Rosa’s letters to her daughter are written in her “lost and kidnapped Polish” (20), in fact, her “most excellent literary Polish” (14). The specter of Magda L. is crafted through these letters—“her healthy daughter . . . her daughter who was a professor of Greek philosophy at Columbia University in New York City” (39). Yet there is not a singular imagined identity for Magda L.—as shown when she appears as ghost for Rosa. “Rosa was enraptured by Magda’s healthy forearms. She would have given everything to set her before an easel, to see whether she could paint in watercolors; or to have her seize a violin, or a chess queen” and these ranges of artistic pursuits are difficult to fix because Rosa “knew little about Magda’s mind at this age, or whether she had any talents; even what her intelligence tended toward” (65). In response to Magda L.’s apparition, Rosa composes Magda L. a mental letter that tells of her family’s confinement to the Warsaw ghetto, their rage at being confined to such a place, and describes the lost opulence her family once had (68). It is after this mental letter, written “inside a blazing current” (69) that Magda L. begins to vanish from Rosa’s room: “Already she was turning away. Away . . . she behaved at these moments as if she were ashamed. . . . Magda, my beloved, don’t be ashamed!” (69). What, precisely, Magda L. is ashamed of is a narrative silence—Rosa

never attempts to guess what the cause of shame could be. Instead, Rosa appears to try to comfort the fleeting ghost: “I am not ashamed of your presence: only come to me, come to me again, if no longer now, then always later, always come” yet Rosa remains silent, “stoic, tamed; she did not say them aloud to Magda” (70). While Rosa imposes the dreams and desires of her former life on Magda L., it is difficult to determine what, exactly, causes Magda L. to flee—what internal anxieties about her current life or her past life, what shames, is Rosa projecting onto Magda L.? The dreams of her being an artist stem from Rosa’s class values, but is this what Magda L. rejects, or is it Rosa’s loss of this livelihood—she is now an old woman trapped in a decrepit hotel in Florida. As Magda L. is nothing but a ghost, Rosa attempts to “transform the other into [herself]” (Sandoval 120), yet it is not a full approximation of the self, but a fantasy of what life could have been, both for mother and daughter. Still, the specter of her daughter doesn’t validate these projections—instead she vanishes, possibly signifying Rosa’s fear of Matrophobia, even if it is in this case a purely psychic rejection.

Like Rosa’s investment in her class values, Magda G.’s mother, Auguste, attempts to transmit her own class values to her daughter. Auguste’s narrative is a monologue-style interview with a Russian Commissar after the end of World War II. Auguste’s interview with the Commissar doesn’t reveal, as the Commissar notes, much about Magda’s involvement in the Nazi party, how active she was and what knowledge she had of the regime’s atrocities (29). Instead, Auguste gives the Commissar a detailed account of her personal relationship with her daughter and the struggles she faced while raising her. Auguste also reveals no knowledge, or perhaps it is a refusal of any

knowledge, of the fate of her daughter or her grandchildren but instead reveals a strained relationship between mother and daughter.

Auguste begins the interview with her disapproval of her daughter's marriage to Joseph Goebbels: "My daughter had always wanted to be something special. When she first met that Herr Doktor Goebbels, I told her straight away she should keep her hands off him. I was dead set against her getting involved with someone in politics" (Ziervogel 19). Auguste never reveals why, exactly, she was opposed to Goebbels's involvement in politics but she stresses multiple times throughout the interview that she only wanted the best for her daughter. Class and gendered expectations both played a crucial role in forming what Auguste envisioned as the "best" for her daughter. Auguste reveals that she has worked all her life as a maid and that this has been an often solitary experience, as her first husband, Herr Ritschel, lived and worked in a separate city while they were married, eventually leaving her completely. Auguste's account is filled with regret: "I was desperate for her to have a better life than me, her own mother" (21). She states that "one of the loveliest moments of my life was when Magda came to me and said she wanted to train for domestic service rather than continue studying. I'd had my doubts she'd ever be a respectable person" (29) and that "At last we'd left all that Jewish intellectual stuff behind us" (31). Auguste's fears for Magda's future stem from not only an adherence to gender roles, and what roles were proper for women, but also from the undercurrents of Anti-Semitism and what jobs were "respectable" for the working class. A fear of uncertainty also fuels her desires for her daughter. Studying (and other forms of "Jewish intellectualism") is frightening because of such uncertainty—that Magda's marriage prospects may be jeopardized by her being educated: "in those days everything

suddenly seemed possible for women. And then what? What would happen after? No one would've wanted her then" (31). These anxieties about education ruining Magda's chances at marriage, and ergo her chance at a "better" life—one in which she is financially beholden to her spouse are certainly based in prescriptive gender roles. Later, when Magda G. comes to Auguste and tells her that "she was dead inside," Auguste tells her that "she should get married again, have more children" (33-4). When Magda G. tells her that "she didn't want children, she wanted to achieve something special . . . she'd been chosen for something special, had a calling, like a man" (34). Auguste rejects Magda G.'s moment of crisis, ponders if he "is ill, sick in the head" and reiterates that "women . . . are there to give birth to children and bring them up" which causes Magda G. to leave without another word to her mother (34). Auguste's enactment of "Identification" is two-fold: being confronted with a daughter without the same aspirations as her, she attempts to "transform the other into themself[f]" and when that does not occur, as Magda G. both rejects childbearing and her mother's class expectations, she "den[ies] the other" by questioning her daughter's mental health. Conversely, Magda G. is enacting Matrophobia by refusing to emulate her mother. Later, she does define herself through childbearing, but it is as a symbol of her allegiance to Nazi ideals.

This theme of tension, and Matrophobia, continues with Magda G. and her daughter Helga. *Magda* begins with this tension, and it defines Magda G. and Helga's strained relationship for the rest of the novel. As the Goebbels family begins to flee their estate for the safety of Hitler's bunker in Berlin, Magda G. disguises the motivations of the trip to her children. "It's an adventure." Magda hesitates, suddenly wondering how

best to explain it to the children. ‘We are going on an adventure just like the white settlers leaving for America. Bound for the Wild West¹⁵’ (3-4). When her children question her about the invading Russians, Magda G. lies and assures them that ‘‘the army has driven them back’’ (4). Helga, who has been missing from this family meeting, abruptly enters the room and denounces her mother: ‘‘That’s not true . . . We’ve lost the war,’ Helga cries. ‘And Uncle Adolf is dead’’ (5). Joseph Goebbels quickly steps in to correct Helga, and Magda G. does not address her daughter challenging her, initially enacting the first response of ‘‘Identification,’’ that of ‘‘blind[ing] themselves’’ (Sandoval 121). Helga’s questioning of the regime, and its fallibility, is clearly disturbing to both parents—even if it is partly incorrect, as Hitler is not deceased at this point.

Helga ruminates on this exchange later in her diaries, stating that after she spoke that day ‘‘an indescribable look of horror came over their faces. I noticed Mother’s twitching left eye’’ (47), and that her questioning the regime, based on a conversation she overheard between two guards at the estate, have caused her to ‘‘have sinned against my parents, the Fürher, my beautiful Fatherland’’ (45). Yet, despite her self-flagellation about her doubts, she is ‘‘very upset with Mother’’ because ‘‘Why doesn’t she tell us the truth? The truth is, we weren’t safe any longer in Schwanenwerder and the only secure place for us is here, in the bunker’’ (50). While these are pragmatic concerns, to doubt victory is to doubt the regime—which Helga expresses when she writes ‘‘I don’t really mind if we win or lose’’ (67). While Magda G. isn’t privy to her daughter’s doubts as written in her diary, her vocalized doubts in the regime must have been unnerving—as they return in Magda G.’s nightmarish vision after she poisons all six children with cyanide.

¹⁵ For insights into the Nazi fascination with American Western films, and the appropriation of Manifest Destiny in Nazi propaganda, see Lower.

In the penultimate chapter of *Magda*, titled “The Vision of Magda Goebbels,” which follows the chapter in which Magda G. poisons her children, Ziervogel presents us not with a narrative of the aftermath of their death, but instead a vision of a future in which Magda G. and her children have survived the fall of the Reich. Poor and destitute, they live in the basement of a building in which Magda G. has been rendered invalid by her medical maladies and her daughter Helga must prostitute herself to Russian and American soldiers in order to support the family and acquire morphine for her mother. This vision, both paranoid and pragmatic, is built on Magda G.’s fears of retribution and being confronted for the crimes of the regime.

She has such a confrontation with Helga, which is curiously the most substantial exchange of dialogue they have throughout the entire novel. Communication between them in scenes outside of Magda’s vision are fraught with silence and miscommunication and while their imagined dialogue offers little resolution between them it provides a site of open conflict—even if it is an exchange that Magda G. has fabricated. Her son Helmut confides in her, in reference to the soldiers occupying Berlin, that “‘Helga told us not to call them our enemies any longer’” because “‘it’s no longer possible that they are our enemies because they are the people we now have to live with’” (98). Magda G. is predictably aghast at Helga’s words and launches a mental tirade against her daughter: “‘These people, these beasts in human shape, had destroyed the work of the Führer. How could Helga—her Helga, the Führer’s Helga . . . how could this girl betray her Führer, National Socialism, her own beliefs, in such a way?’” (98). Magda’s reaction to her daughter’s ‘betrayal’ is understandable, but it is important to remember that Helga’s rebellion is an anxiety that her mother invents.

Magda G.'s imagined riff with her daughter must stem from what Magda G. perceives to be a strained relationship—an anxiety that no matter what values and principles she implanted in her daughter, she will, in time, reject them. Not only does her nightmare scenario involve her daughter selling her body to the enemy but no longer thinking of the enemy as a monolithic villainous force. Helga's imagined rejection of National Socialism and its principles are also a perceived rejection of her mother—she is not emulating 'the mother of the nation' thereby further negating her status as the "daughter of the nation." Helga later confronts Magda G. while she is writing in her diary, an activity that Magda G. assumes can only continue because Helga is also prostituting herself to supply herself with ink and paper. Helga ceases her writing and becomes increasingly volatile, telling her mother: "No, I am not calling them our friends. But they tell me that this is what the German soldiers have done to their women—and much worse. And now I have to pay for it" (100). When Magda G. questions if Helga believes what the soldiers tell her, Helga unleashes a torrent of rage against her mother, violently shaking "the bedridden woman" while confronting her mother with the crimes of the regime: "They exterminated people, human beings. And they built huge gas chambers to do it, all over the place. While we were sitting in Schwanenwerder in the garden underneath a blue sky enjoying our plum cake, Father and the Führer gave orders to exterminate humans. Millions. Do you understand? Millions!" (100-101). When Magda G. tries to defend the actions of the regime by telling Helga, "It's a conspiracy . . . some of our enemies had to be punished," Helga screams at her to "Shut up!" and ends the confrontation by telling her mother that "Enemies don't exist, they never existed. You all just imagined them" (101-2). Magda's imagined confrontation with her daughter not

only self-realizes her anxieties about her daughter's rejection of the regime—and ultimately Magda G. herself—but also her fears of being confronted for her actions and her adherence to the regime. Her nightmarish vision not only expresses her anxiety about her children's future after the fall of the Reich but also how her children would have to answer for the sins of their parents. Because of Magda G.'s previous enactments of "Identification" in "ignor[ing] the differences" and "transform[ing] the other into themselves" in regards to her fears about Helga questioning the regime, the "possibilities for confrontation" were previously "undone and sabotaged" (Sandoval 121). Furthermore Sandoval writes that "Barthes warns . . . what is truly 'other' becomes perceived as 'a scandal which threatens' the very essence of one's being when, under the rhetorical pose of identification, that being has become supremacist in function" (121). Helga's imagined confrontation with Magda G. is the "scandal which threatens" not only her adherence to the Nazi regime, but also her identification as "The Mother of the Nation"—the locus of Matrophobia shifts dynamically here, as this vision expresses the fears that a daughter *will not* replicate her mother.

The parental fear of one's child rejecting their values is also a prevalent theme in *The Handmaid's Tale*, one that Offred visits in the realm of the imagination. Offred's recollections of her lost family—her mother, daughter and husband—are the only glimpses seen of these characters, since the narrative is told entirely from Offred's perspective and she never encounters them physically. Her flashbacks of her mother are fraught with tension because of a generational divide between her second-wave radical feminist mother and the more moderate Offred, who her mother refers to as "a backlash. Flash in the pan" (121). Offred is constantly held in comparison to the radical feminists

who preceded her, whom her mother feels Offred should be grateful for and try to emulate. Her best friend in college, the radical lesbian-feminist Moira, ironically inhabits her mother's vision of a desirable daughter. Offred states of her mother that:

she expected too much from me, I felt. She expected me to me to vindicate her life for her, and the choices she'd made. I didn't want to live my life on her terms. I didn't want to be the model offspring, the incarnation of her ideas. (122)

Unlike the unarticulated conflict between Rosa and Magda L., or the imagined conflicts of Magda G. and Helga, Offred is able to articulate her Matrophobia in her narrative—yet because of their separation she is unable to resolve this internal conflict: “I want her back. I want everything back, the way it was. But there is no point to it, this wanting” (122).

Offred's mother, who states that “history will absolve me” and her dismissal of her daughter's resistance to feminist ideology as a “backlash” is also a case of “Identification” in that she “den[ies] the other” (Sandoval 121). Her feminist ideology is the only way to think, and thus she rejects her daughter's “difference” (122). This ideological rejection is rife with painful conflict: what feminist mother wouldn't desire that her daughter, too, be a feminist? Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson indict Offred for not emulating her mother, as she has “betrayed both her mother and her best friend through her complicity, her ignoring that is not ignorance” because “as the corrupted United States was gradually transformed into Gilead, she committed the ultimate collusion of doing nothing” (81).¹⁶ Their reading is, clearly, one sympathetic with feminist ideology—yet shouldn't feminism afford Offred the agency to not have to fully accept and enact the ideology? Atwood provides no clear answers, and since Offred and her mother are never reunited, their tensions remained unresolved.

¹⁶ For an alternate reading on feminist politics in *The Handmaid's Tale*, see Talen.

In these three novels, it is through the enactment of “Identification” that mothers, and daughters, enact Matrophobia. Through the supremacist rhetorical pose of “Identification” the characters erupt their mother/daughter cathexis when the “possibilities for confrontation are . . . undone and sabotaged” (Sandoval 121) and thus the “deepest mutuality” is not founded, but instead the cathexis becomes the basis for “the most painful estrangement” (Rich 226). Yet, these disruptions are not, typically, the cause of the amputation of the matrilineage. While this is the case for Auguste and Magda G., a radical outside force interferes with the matrilineal relationships of Rosa and Offred, and with Magda G. and Helga as well—causing loss and permanent ruptures between mother and daughter. These ruptures are explored, and possibly reconciled, in the act of mourning.

Section 3: Mourning

I’ve mourned for her already. But I will do it again, and again.

—Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

Adrienne Rich writes “the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy” (237)¹⁷ and Hansen, in conversation with Rich, finds that *The Handmaid’s Tale* is indeed, a “potent contemporary [expression] of the mother daughter story” (176) that explores “mother-daughter passion and rapture” (Rich 237). Building off of Hansen and Rich, I would argue that all three of these novels explore that “passion and rapture” and this is exemplified in each work’s representations of mourning. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* Judith Butler

¹⁷ Rich then delves into the myth of Demeter and Persephone. This thesis is based on a smaller project in which this myth was examined in the context of *The Handmaid’s Tale* and this approach, combined with the work of this thesis, would uncover further layers of the amputations of the matrilineage in these novels. For more on the Demeter/Persephone myth and literary analysis, see Hirsch. For the myth in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, see Wilson.

tangles with, what, precisely, “makes for a grievable life?” (20) and how to define the act of mourning. Instead of providing straight-forward answers, Butler conjectures that:

Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation...the full result of which one cannot know in advance...to what are we tied? And by what are we seized? Freud reminded us that when we lose someone, we do not always know what it is *in* that person that has been lost. So when one loses, one is faced with something enigmatic: something is hiding in the loss, something is lost within the recesses of the loss.” (21)

It is in the spirit of uncertainty that I endeavor to also inquire into the act of mourning in these novels—what, indeed, have these mothers and daughters lost—and in what frameworks may they or may they not be “grievable li[ves]?” What does the act of mourning do: not just for the narrative, but to express the “passion and rapture” of the mother-daughter “tragedy” (Rich 237)?

When Offred finally encounters her friend Moira, who is forced to work in a state-sponsored brothel called Jezebel’s, Offred learns of the fate of her mother since they became separated—she is now in the Colonies, and subsequently declared an Unwoman (Atwood 252). When Offred is relieved to hear her mother is still alive because she thought she had died, Moira tells her “she might as well be . . . you should wish it for her” (252). Offred admits that she can’t remember the last time she saw her mother, that it must have been “some trivial occasion” (252) and finds it hard to imagine her mother, the strong, resolute feminist “sweeping up deadly toxins . . . surely her cockiness, her

optimism and her energy , her pizzazz, will get her out of this. She will think of something. But I know this isn't true. It is just passing the buck, as children do, to mothers" (253). Offred is incapable of resolving her mother's imminent death at the hands of the state, and she concludes that "I have mourned for already. But I will do it again, and again" (253). While this statement occurs towards the narrative's end, reviewing Offred's previous recollections of her mother reveal that she has, indeed, been mourning her through her memories.

Offred's previous recollections of her mother, and her own daughter, are inconsistent on what tense she uses throughout her recollections. "The understatement of the year is a phrase my mother uses" and she emphatically corrects herself: "Used" (138). Similarly with her lost daughter, Offred cannot select a fixed tense. "She comes back to me at different ages. This is how I know she's not really a ghost. If she were a ghost, she would be the same age always" (63). Later, within the same scene, Offred doubts her initial thought and states "maybe I do think of her as a ghost, the ghost of a dead girl, a little girl who died when she was five" and counters it yet again: "I . . . think about a girl who did not die when she was five; who still does exist, I hope, though not for me" (64). She concludes that "it's easier, to think of her as dead" (64) and in a later memory she refers to her daughter as "the little girl who is now dead" (84). These fluctuations between tenses reflect the complexities of mourning. Butler ponders that "maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are" (22). Returning to the use of tense, and pronouns, Butler writes "It is not as if an 'I' exists independently over here and then simply loses a 'you' over there, especially if the

attachment to ‘you’ is part of what composes who ‘I’ am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who ‘am’ I, without you?” (22). The complexities of mourning are expressed in Offred’s loss—she has not just lost her matrilineage, but she has lost valuable identity markers for herself—both those of mother and daughter. In a regime so obsessed with maternity, who is Offred without them? And so, Offred clings to her memories, her senses, with an intense devotion—even shame and anger. Reflecting on her husband’s disappearance, Offred ponders on the notions of mourning: “How long were you supposed to mourn, and what did they say? Make your life a tribute to the loved one. And he was, the loved. One. *Is*, I say. *Is*, *is*, only two letters, you stupid shit, can’t you manage to remember it, even a short word like that?” (227). Without the present tense, Offred must, in Butler’s terms “undergo a transformation” or, in her rewording, “one should say *submitting* to a transformation” (21).

Yet, these “transformations” through mourning go far beyond just language. Rosa’s mourning for her daughter takes the form of not just memories, as Magda L. died as an infant, but in a realm of complete invention. Rosa has created a magnificent vision of the daughter she has lost. This specter has roots in the physical lived world: that of the shawl that enveloped her as an infant. When Rosa thinks she received it in the mail from her reluctant niece, she cannot contain herself. “Magda’s shawl! Magda’s swaddling cloth. Magda’s shroud. The memory of Magda’s smell. The holy smell of the lost babe” (Ozick 31) and this smell is described as “a peculiar smell, of cinnamon and almonds” (5). Yet, when Rosa does finally receive the mythic shawl in the mail: “she was indifferent . . . for some reason it did not instantly restore Magda, as usually happened . . .

the shawl had a faint saliva smell, but it was more nearly imagined than smelled” (62). Rosa’s mourning, the loss of her infant child, is replaced by the shawl: the shawl becomes her daughter, what she clings to for her former self. When Magda L. finally appears, she is “a girl of sixteen . . . she was wearing one of Rosa’s dresses from high school” (64). Hana Wirth-Nesher writes that “Rosa’s letters . . . are primarily elegies for the lost world before the war . . . Magda becomes for her the self that has been stolen from her, the self that she might have become. Rosa grieves as much for herself as lost daughter as she does for herself as lost mother” (317). Rosa is not only mourning the loss of her child, but the loss of her life—her impositions of her class and culture on the specter of Magda L. were not simply motherly expectations, but rather her living vicariously through the ghost of her child—the lives that both of them were deprived of.

In Magda G.’s vision of life after the fall of the Reich, which occurs after their deaths, she imagines a significantly more intimate life with them. In her vision “for Magda nights are the best time . . . perhaps because she is aware of all her children safe and soundly sleeping with her in the same room” (96) and she imagines holding her daughter Heide while she sleeps “and despite the dirt, the lice, the decay, she is still able to smell her child. A warm, soft smell mixed with sweat and even urine. A baby or toddler smell” (96). This intimate act is one that is foreign to Magda, the narrator relates that: “scrubbed down, that’s what the children had to be, every other day, from head to toe. Only then were they allowed to come into her room and give her a kiss on the forehead” (97). Physical intimacy with her children is a fantasy she explores in her vision, yet it never truly occurs in their real lives. This vision serves both as Magda’s reasoning for killing her children—as this was a future she did not want them to live

for—and an internal space for her to mourn both the lives of her children and her actions as a mother while they were living. It is only in abject poverty that she can imagine having such intimacy with her children, and this could be an expression of regret that she wasn't intimate with them while they lived. "But now" she imagines "she is holding this living breathing body in her arms and is simply happy" (97), and it is only through fantasy that she is able to embark upon what she thinks may have made a more substantial connection with her children. It is important, especially for the purposes of this thesis, to not simplify these scenes as redemptive ones: being more physically intimate with her children would not have made Magda G. a "better" mother because what makes a mother a "good" or "bad" one is entirely subjective and built into the institution of motherhood. Magda's ruminations over her interactions with her children, and the possible regrets she may have, are deeply rooted in cultural conceptions in what a mother should and shouldn't be. Since hygiene and cleanliness were part of the concepts of how a mother would raise members of a pure race, Magda's hesitance to be physically intimate with 'unclean' children is mired in the institution of Nazi motherhood.

The descriptions of Magda's children's filth are significant not only because they are representative of a deeper, more intimate connection with her children but because they give voice to an essential component to a mother's relationship with her children that is often unexplored: that of a mother's relationship with her children's bodily functions. Bodily functions, ranging anywhere from urination, defecation, menstruation to general hygiene are often taboo to speak about because they are so wrapped up in the individual's body. Motherhood, as an institution; and particularly in the case of Nazi mothers, presents mothers as producing clean children for the state. Hygiene is not just an

expectation, but a mandate. Magda G. identifying her daughter Heide by the “warm, soft smell mixed with sweat and urine” (96) is an interior maternal knowledge that is ungraspable to any outsider because it is a smell that is particular to that child. Similarly, when Offred is trying to imagine her lost daughter while she takes a bath, she imagines that she puts her “face against the soft hair at the back of her neck and breathe her in, baby powder and child’s washed flesh and shampoo, with an undertone, the faint scent of urine” (Atwood 63). Instead of the scent of urine being interpreted as an unclean smell, in a state of mourning it becomes something radically different—it becomes a maternal knowledge that is only apparent after the child’s absence—a signifier that only functions in the event of loss.

Mourning functions (if that can be an appropriate word) between the loss of others and the loss of self—the loss of a child and parent, and the loss of the identity of being a child or parent. Since mother’s identities are so intrinsically built into their children’s identities, as with Offred and Magda G., or their identities are so radically “Other” that their children are denied by the state, as with Rosa—all of these mothers are intrinsically tied to their respective matrilineage for self-identification. Mourning, in these works, is the eruption of the mother/daughter cathexis—a full expression of the “passion and rapture” of the mother-daughter “tragedy”—where the “deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement” (Rich 225:237) can be psychically experienced.

Section 4: Justification and Love/Resistance

I am not your justification for existence, I said to her once.

—Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

As I move to a conclusion, it almost seems necessary to search through these emotionally explosive and dark stories for something redemptive. Is there resistance on

the part of the mothers and daughters—to the state, to fascism, to genocide? Or must we accept compliance, or worse—duplicity? Yet—how do these mothers justify their actions, and why? Sandoval writes that “to fall in love means that one must submit, however temporarily, to what is ‘intractable’ . . . to a state of being not subject to control or governance” (142). While Sandoval is encouraging the use of “love” to “[provide] one kind of entry to a form of being that breaks the citizen-subject free from the ties that bind being, to thus enter the differential mode of consciousness” (140), I am hesitant to ascribe such “revolutionary” transformations to the mother-daughter relationships in these texts.

Offred’s mother, Magda Goebbels and Rosa Lublin envisioned, and attempted to enforce, the best world they could imagine for their daughters—be it fascist, feminist or otherwise. If their daughters, respectively, followed and fully enacted their mothers’ ideologies, respectively—there would be no conflict, and possibly no story—the mother/daughter cathexis it seems, lays within the conflict. Yet these mothers are, somehow, justified through “love”—while not the love of a “differential consciousness” as Sandoval would define it, but for the love of their daughters living in a “better” world—as defined by their ideologies.

In one of her final letters, the real-life Magda Goebbels wrote to her step-son Harald Quandt: “Our glorious ideals of Nazism have been destroyed and with them everything in my life that has been beautiful, admirable, noble and good. The world which will come after the Führer and National Socialism will not be worth living in” (Meissner 271). This letter is notorious, as it clarifies Magda Goebbels’s motivations for killing her children and her subsequent suicide—and Ziervogel certainly couldn’t have missed it while writing *Magda*. Magda G. couldn’t envision her children in a world

without National Socialism, and Magda G. in the novel imagines herself as “a courageous mother; her angels will one day be worshipped as saints. She is a bringer of symbols, six angels in white tunics who have fallen asleep, slipped away from this world of decay and destruction . . . the cruelty of the enemy has robbed these pure creatures of the air they breathe” (Ziervogel 110). It is in “love” that Magda G. has committed these acts, and transmitted these ideologies to her children—she could not envision a world with National Socialism and so she removed herself, and her children, from that world. Or as the producers of a possibly forthcoming opera, titled *Magda G.*, stated: she was reacting “against a quickly changing political landscape” (Fisher).

Offred’s mother, like Magda Goebbels, was intrinsically reacting to a world she rejected, although this world was the opposite—a world mired in patriarchal control. Through Offred’s mother, Atwood presents the complications of feminist ideologies and mothering. As explored previously, Rosa was living vicariously through her daughter. Through the specter of Magda L., Rosa invents an imagined livelihood for both of them—and through her imagination constructs an alternate life for her and her deceased daughter. All three of these mothers—Magda G., Rosa and Offred’s mother—were attempting to transmit their vision of a better world to their daughters. They either supplied them with the best means, by their definition, to survive in it; or martyred them to their ideology. As mothers, they acted, and transmitted, what they saw fit as the means of survival.

So why fascism? Why do these narratives of mothers and daughters remain on our collective consciousness? In her 2012 introduction, Atwood writes that *The Handmaid’s Tale* “has become sort of a tag for those writing about shifts toward policies aimed at

controlling women, and especially women's bodies and reproductive functions . . . the book has had several dramatic incarnations, a film . . . an opera . . . among them . . . is it entertainment or dire political prophecy?" (ix). As noted before, Magda Goebbels is the subject of a forthcoming opera (Fisher). These narratives are part of our culture—they explore a human history we are often so distanced from, so alienated from, and thus the horrors of the Nazi regime become fetishized as a “supreme evil” that occurred in a vacuum. *The Handmaid's Tale* counters this, and many other, historical narratives—it builds off of American history and contemporary politics to show the ease of slippage into totalitarian regimes.

All three novels show and enact variants of radical motherhood—and how being a mother is rigidly defined by culture. These narratives are key to moving forward toward Sandoval's “differential consciousness.” Or as Gisela Bock so carefully argued in 1983:

As far as the struggle for our reproductive rights—for our sexuality, our children . . . is concerned, the Nazi experience may teach us that a successful struggle must aim at achieving both the rights and the economic means to allow women to choose between having or not having children without becoming economically dependent on other people . . . cutbacks in welfare for single mothers, sterilization abuse, and the attack on free abortion are just different sides of an attack the serves to divide women . . . xenophobic outcries against immigrants ‘breeding like animals’ . . . in the course of the present economic crisis, what will follow from these still seemingly unconnected events is an open question. (421)

What has followed since 1983, in America at least, has been more restrictions on abortion and an increasingly suffocating outrage over the status of Latin-American

immigrants in the United States. As our understandings of queer mothering and LGBTQ parenting have evolved, it is important to consider how motherhood, and maternity, may be also denied to these individuals. These are our current cultural vexations and panics in regards to maternity—who is a mother, and who is not.

These novels, along with the history of the Nazi regime, can open up dialogues about how race is constructed. As Rich so pertinently asked of post-colonial European politics in her essay “Notes toward a Politics of Location:” “is anti-Semitism the model for racism? Or racism for anti-Semitism? Once more, where does the question lead us?” (Rich 1984 236). Valuable dialogues about race can arise from these novels, because as Nazi Racial policy reveals to us: race is not only constructed around *skin pigmentation*, as is often misconstrued in American racial politics. The intersections of race, motherhood and privilege are highlighted between the stark differences of maternal experience in *Magda* and *The Shawl*.

These novels provide us with a central question about the institution of motherhood: who is allowed to be a mother and who, conversely, is *not* allowed to be a mother. The mother-daughter cathexis then is not just a psychological connection that contains “the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement” (Rich 226) but a connection that is also shaped and molded by very particular institutions of motherhood. As demonstrated in these novels, the mother daughter cathexis is not intrinsically fraught, but instead the forces that act upon mothers and daughters can create, and amputate, their relationship. Analysis of this cathexis can reveal forces that act on mothers and daughters, leading to a better understanding of how maternity is constructed as an identity, and allocated as an identity.

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