TOPIC
Abortion has long been a controversial subject, a war with no end in sight. Both sides have been tirelessly argued with rigid, unchangeable opinions. It is a matter that lacks open-mindedness, a possible reason for the continuing conflict. The discussion of abortion in literature is especially one-sided, with anti-choice opinions often being reflected. Because of this imbalance, it is important to have accurate portrayals of abortion in order to truly understand its nature. Through a close reading of novels set in the mid-20th century, a time when abortion was not spoken of without consequence, the issue of abortion will be explored in order to shed some light on its nature.

BACKGROUND
In the 1950s, about a million illegal abortions were performed annually and over a thousand women died each year as a result. Abortionists often performed abortions without necessary care and often without the knowledge of the women who were undergoing the procedure (Boston, 409). Not all abortions performed were like this—many doctors provided women with abortions under the guise of another procedure. This goes to show how serious the issue was in this time.

In the 1960s, inspired by the civil rights and antiwar movements, women began to fight more actively for their rights. The taboo subject of abortion was taken to the public through demonstrations, marches, rallies and lobbying for abortion on demand. Reform gradually came and on January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court stated, in the Roe v. Wade decision, that the “right of privacy…founded in the Fourteenth Amendment’s concept of a personal liberty…is broad enough to encompass a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.” The court held that through the first trimester, only a pregnant woman and her doctor can make the legal decision about an abortion (Boston, 410).

LITERATURE REVIEW
In various radio interviews conducted by Jennifer Ludden, a reporter for Living on Earth, it became obvious that much of today’s youth is misinformed when it comes to abortion. The interviews suggested that adolescents lack the ability to recognize the consequences of their sexual activity (Banker 56), a problem that could be remedied with education on the subject.

In all the literature reviewed in these articles, abortion is never made commonplace. The difficulties and repercussions of abortion are very clearly talked about but each novel’s treatment of the matter differs. The more predictable novels dealing with abortion skew the idea and perpetuate the portrayal of women as weak and helpless (Banker 21). Premarital sex is vilified and abortion is seen as a punishment, as is the case in Ann Renald’s Promises Are For Keeping (Banker 16). In other novels, the treatment of the matter is still harsh but realistic—the settings of these novels allowed for a critical view of abortion. However, in the more contemporary novels, abortion is still portrayed in a negative light. The most successful portrayals of abortion came from novels in which problems are presented with solutions for the reader to interpret as he or she pleases. In Touchie’s examination of three novels, she found that the writers were “relatively free from biases and premises of science.” She continued to say that the novels offered opportunities to explore the matter of abortion with all the complexities still intact and without being limited to mere observation of the matter (225). Though many of these successful novels are not “perfect” in the sense that they do not have happy endings, they describe the inner struggles of the protagonists and offer insight into the cause of their loneliness, alienation, peer pressures, etc.

It is important to recognize common themes of abortion in literature in order to understand the nature of abortion. In the novels reviewed, some sort of ostracism is often an issue, whether by family, friends, or an entire community. The women dealing with unwanted pregnancies are tossed into various sorts of limbo and have to choose between their desires and the desires of the people around them. Oftentimes, women in these novels are portrayed as lacking the capacity to make their own decisions. They are dependent on others, usually the men in their lives. These portrayals preserve the idea that women are helpless, especially during pregnancy. Overall, the most forthright portrayals of abortion tended to be the most open-minded and therefore the most successful ones. These novels present plot conclusions that allow the reader to effectively mull over the themes presented.

POSSIBLE LITERATURE TO BE REVIEWED

METHODOLOGY
In order to identify common themes of abortion, a close reading of these novels will be conducted. This close reading will consist of careful interpretation of each text in order to extract ideas that could lead to identification of common themes in these novels relating to abortion. Attention will be paid to the settings of these novels and how the characters interact with and are treated by their respective setting. Within each novel key words and phrases, patterns, contradictions, similarities, etc. will be identified and then compared to the other novels. The presentation of abortion in each novel will be critically observed in this way so that a successful comparison of themes can be made.

WORKS CITED

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