

Case Study of Contemporary Abortion Fiction:  
Applying Right-to-Life Literary Theory to Lisabeth Posthuma's *Baby & Solo*

Abstract: This study examines Lisabeth Posthuma's *Baby & Solo*, a contemporary abortion novel (2021) geared for the young adult audience. After applying principles of some of the major literary theories used to explicate literature, the five questions of right-to-life literary theory are used to evaluate the life-affirming content of the work.

Many contemporary abortion novels geared for the young adult audience are written by authors who openly profess their support of the anti-life movement, particularly the abortion enterprise Planned Parenthood. One thinks, for example, of Christine Heppermann's *Ask Me How I Got Here* (Greenwillow Books, 2016) or Bonnie Pipkin's *Aftercare Instructions* (Flatiron Books, 2017). Absent an explicit affirmation of abortion in her author's biographical statement either on the book jacket or following the text, however, Lisabeth Posthuma's *Baby & Solo* (Candlewick Press, 2021) may be an exception to the rule.

Posthuma's *Baby & Solo* is a well-written, complex work of fiction which follows a template which authors have used for decades to structure their abortion plots, consisting of a mother who wishes to abort and a young man who joins her in the journey motif of locating an abortionist willing to do the killing. Posthuma's novel, however, alters the template by describing the odyssey of a male teen, Joel Teague, who presents to the reader a possible case of a gender identity problem; this young man befriends a teen mother, Nicole Parker, who seems to accede to the abortion killing at first, but who ultimately rejects it.

Posthuma's rendition of the standard abortion plot has achieved some popularity. **[slide 3]** Amazon shows that Posthuma's novel has earned a rating of 4.8 out of 5 with 59 customer reviews. Although the novel ranks #835,186 in the best sellers category, it occupies spot #1,486 in the "Teen & Young Adult LGBTQ+ Fiction" category, #1,052 in "Teen & Young Adult Fiction about Death & Dying", and #507 in the category "Teen & Young Adult Fiction on Depression & Mental Health"—all respectable numbers for a novel published in May 2021 ("Baby and Solo"). Moreover, Goodreads.com gives the book a 4.38 rating from a wider field of 504 ratings ("Baby & Solo").<sup>1</sup>

The above brief summary of Posthuma's work does not, nor should it, satisfy contemporary readers living in a fast-paced culture as ours who want to spend their time wisely. That is, readers want to spend time on reading contemporary fiction to accommodate the ancient principles not only of entertaining them, but also of educating them. Thus, contemporary literary theories can expand readers' appreciation of a given literary work by offering different perspectives from which the work can be viewed.

**[slide 4]** This study will consider some aspects of twelve of the more common literary theories used in the academy to help students appreciate

---

<sup>1</sup> Statistics for both services are current as of 8 June 2022.

contemporary fiction: archetypal or Jungian criticism, biographical criticism, critical disability studies, critical race theory, deconstruction, feminist literary criticism, formalist criticism, gender criticism (gay and lesbian or queer studies), historical criticism, Marxist literary criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, and reader-response criticism.<sup>2</sup>

### Archetypal or Jungian criticism

An archetypal or Jungian critic could focus on the age, religious, and employment stereotypes of Posthuma's characters: young people who are seemingly irreligious and who work in a 1990s video store. The archetypal elements of the novel are enhanced by the unique naming strategy of the store's employees; instead of using their real names when dealing with customers, the workers must identify themselves by names of movie characters whom they admire. Thus, Joel Teague is known as the *Star Wars* hero Han Solo throughout the novel. The young woman whom he befriends, Nicole Parker, becomes Baby; it is ambiguous whether she is named because she was admonished not to be a "baby" about associating herself with a film character or whether she is named after the character Baby in the film *Dirty Dancing* (which, appropriately, further alludes to the abortion element in that iconic film's plot).

This unique naming strategy demonstrates a cross-fertilization of literary theories at work in the novel. Joel's identity as Han Solo suggests the personality of the hero character of the *Star Wars* film, which further suggests the psychological component of a human being identifying himself more with a fictional character than his own ordinary humanity. Similarly, that Nicole becomes Baby indicates not only the archetypal standard of an infant (helpless, reliant on parents, and ostensibly the object of love from those parents), but also a key principle of anti-life feminist literary criticism (that a woman's life is subordinate to the life of an unborn child, especially if that child is unwanted).

### Biographical criticism

A biographical critic would wonder what connection the plot has with Lisabeth Posthuma's life. The author's website contains two biographies

---

<sup>2</sup> Several other literary theories could be applied to Posthuma's novel, but doing so would expand the scope of this paper from a conference presentation to a dissertation topic. Besides, contemporary readers (and I am thinking not only of ordinary students of literature but also of readers who consume novels like Posthuma's for some didactic value certainly, but more for entertainment) would slide into somniferous boredom if any professor, lecturer, or television personality began applying postcolonial literary criticism, post-Structuralism, Structuralism, or semiotics to the work. It is not that these theories are passé, especially now that newer and "sexier" theories like critical disability studies have emerged on the academic scene. It is the case, however, that some literary theories serve no benefit or practical use for students who still approach literature with the formalist questions of what the literary work means before they can enjoy it, which are themselves formulations of the ancient principles that literature has a didactic and an entertainment value.

written for “the press”, both of which may appeal to the young adult audience for whom she writes, but, for biographical literary critics, present significant obstacles since the humor of the biographies obscures the facts of the author’s life. **[slide 5]** For example, “Press Bio 1” succinctly conveys only the author’s likes:

Lisabeth Posthuma is a devotee of obscure documentaries about drive-ins, a lover of rotary telephones, and a trophy-winning champion of TV trivia. She lives in Michigan with her two parakeets, Tiki Bon Jovi and Alaska Riggins. Her favorite story is probably Frankenstein. (“Media”)

**[slide 6]** “Press Bio 2” provides more biographical information, some of which justifies a one-to-one correspondence with the novel under examination:

Lisabeth Posthuma was a high school teacher, a photographer, and most importantly, a video rental clerk before becoming a writer. She holds an English degree from one of those really expensive private liberal arts colleges that no one can afford (including her). She grew up obsessed with teen soaps, which her therapist says explains a lot, and likes to brag about that one time she attended the cast party for *The OC*. Orange is her favorite color because in first grade no one chose it, and she felt sorry for it. She currently lives in Michigan where the winters are too long.<sup>3</sup> (“Media”)

Readers who like to determine whether aspects of an author’s life informed his or her work would find the above entries challenging.

Even more challenging for the abortion-minded (either anti- or pro-life) biographical critic, determining Posthuma’s position on the first right-to-life issue is difficult. Some bloggers, like Kelly Jensen, have jumped to the conclusion that Posthuma is promoting an anti-life perspective.<sup>4</sup> However, the excerpt which Jensen includes on her blog post wherein Posthuma discusses abortion as a topic in young adult fiction is ambiguous.

**[slide 7]** Knowing abortion affects so many people who make up the young adult demographic, it’s a disservice not to acknowledge the subject’s necessary place in YA media. Though public discourse about abortion continues to be divisive and heated, young adult content creators can provide our audiences with low-stakes avenues through which to wrestle with their difficult feelings about difficult subjects. Realistic fiction is a valuable gateway to rediscovering the lost art of uncertainty, for recognizing the gray within the false narrative of a black-and-white world. In fact, it might be the most fertile soil for empathy to grow in.

---

<sup>3</sup> Both biographies were obtained from the author’s website on 8 June 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Jensen concludes her excerpt of Posthuma’s discussion by saying, “Whether or not abortion is a choice they agree with for themselves or others, the reality is abortion is healthcare and should not be outlawed.” Such a conclusion cannot be obtained from Posthuma’s remarks.

**[slide 8]** I'm learning that the hypothetical is the safest space to feel unsure. It's seemingly the only place where there's no urgency to form the "right" opinion. It's where people can privately challenge their own thoughts, explore nuances, and ultimately grow in their understanding about the issues that affect them. I wish that at thirteen I'd had more safe places to contemplate issues like abortion, but I didn't. As an adult, however, I'm grateful that I can join with other writers who want [to] change things for this generation's YA audience. I am hopeful that as abortion continues to be a relevant subject, even more authors will seize the opportunity to create these spaces for teens, too.

Posthuma's language affirms neither the anti- nor the pro-life sides of the controversy, but reads merely as a defense of freedom of speech, arguing for the inclusion of controversial issues in literature for young adults so that they can explore those issues freely. In fact, one can argue that Posthuma's argument would benefit anti-lifers more than pro-lifers. Since pro-abortion persons have blocked themselves from a life-affirming choice, anti-lifers can use works which have a life-affirming content as sites "where [they] can privately challenge their own thoughts, explore nuances, and ultimately grow in their understanding about the issues that affect them."

### Critical Disability Studies

Those who use critical disability studies would offer much to enhance readers' appreciation of Posthuma's characters. Although no character has a physical disability, all suffer from emotional and psychological trauma. Joel's supervisor at the video store, Scarlet, suffers from post-abortion syndrome, which most likely accounts for her being so angry later in the novel that Baby is giving birth to her unborn child. Joel's psychological trouble, documented throughout the novel, is sometimes described in language which suggests that emotional trauma has a physical effect. **[slide 9]** When he describes the impact that his brother's suicide at age sixteen had on him, Joel's language conveys more physical disability than psychological: "It wrecked me. It broke me in half. And it ruined my fucking life" (368).

Moreover, it is interesting that there are many instances where a character's psychological problems are described with religious imagery. For example, when he confides his mental illness to Baby, Joel compares the disclosure of such personal information to a key sacrament: "I ended my confession" (226). The confusion between psychotherapy and religion is repeated when Joel mentions that his mother brought him to a priest for an exorcism regarding his mental illness. Joel's father spends Sundays "at the nearest AA meeting" (unpaginated 83).

### Critical Race Theory

Proponents of critical race theory would face a severe challenge in applying their literary theory to Posthuma's novel, except for one crucial

element: all the characters are white, which could be construed either as white oppression of minorities or, a particularly egregious form of oppression, a perception that abortion does not concern minority groups. Pro-life activists, of course, know otherwise and have been alarmed at the abortion rates of African-American and Latina mothers, so critical race theory could offer much to draw the reading public's attention to the genocide against minorities which is legalized abortion. However, since most critical race theory proponents are politically leftist and since a prime political strategy of the leftist movement is to secure the abortion policies of the Democratic Party, one fails to see how critical race theory could abandon its pro-abortion focus and recognize that abortion is significantly reducing minority populations.

### Deconstruction

A deconstruction literary critic could delve into several statements which demonstrate the essential concern of the theory, the instability of language. When he realizes that he is a *tabula rasa* at the video store, Joel implicitly affirms the idea that language is not an essential element of being human; he enters his employment at the video store and, by extension, his life, without language, without any markers common to all humans, without the vocabulary necessary for human beings to function in the world.

The word play which deconstructionist critics delight in can be further evidenced even when the characters use the language common to all English speakers. When Indiana Jones, the father of Baby's unborn child, gives an envelope to Joel to forward to Baby, saying that Baby is "expecting something" (34), the reader is uncertain to what the term "something" refers. (The pun on "expecting" adds further delight to the expression.) It is only later that the reader understands that the "something" is not a thing at all, but an unborn human being, Baby's child. It would be interesting for a pro-abortion deconstructionist critic to consider the pro-life implications of this passage on the further erosion of language, an effort to which deconstructionists have contributed, since the goal of destabilizing the language affects the human relationships which the language denotes.

### Feminist Literary Criticism

Applying feminist literary criticism to the novel seems obvious, given the plot details; this novel does, after all, concern abortion, the quintessential political issue for a feminism which is fast becoming irrelevant because of its refusal to recognize the right to life. Besides that, the traditional concerns of anti-life feminist literary criticism (the oppression of women, the dominance of patriarchy putting women in a "subject" position, and even newer phrases of feminist theory such as heteropatriarchal oppression) become feeble concerns, given the independent women depicted in the novel and the men who are either weak because they accede to the women's desires or have same-sex attraction. For example, Joel does not question Baby's request to drive her to an abortion

clinic, and his father is obviously not “the man” in the house; Joel’s mother has significantly more dialogue and controls the family more than his father.

However, whatever attention a feminist literary critic could give the novel must face the many life-affirming statements from women characters, which will be discussed in the section on right-to-life literary theory below.

### Formalist Criticism

Formalist critics would appreciate the irony, let alone ignorance, of several characters’ statements, which manifest their attitude towards religious values. For example, responding to Baby’s claim that he could have objections to abortion, Joel asks, “What kind of morals would I have if I made a girl take a cab to her own abortion?” (59). While non-religious contemporary readers may not see the irony in such a statement, educated readers would immediately understand that the rhetorical question which Joel offers indicates his warped values; not driving a mother to an abortion clinic is not a moral concern of greater priority than stopping that mother from having her child killed in an abortion clinic.

Since they are intensely aware of the unity of a literary work, formalist literary critics would revel in the progression of the novel from its exposition; to several crises; to climax moments not only regarding the relationship between Joel and Baby, but also Joel and the integration of his seemingly fragmented self; and ultimately to the denouement, where all the remaining issues in the novel are resolved as neatly (and happily) as a compact mystery novel.

### Gender Criticism (Gay and Lesbian or Queer Studies)

Gender criticism, also called gay and lesbian or queer studies, would focus on a variety of elements evident in Posthuma’s work. For example, from the beginning of the novel, Joel expresses his desire to be “Normal” (5; capitalization in original). Even though the novel is set in 1996, contemporary readers must deal with the connotations of the word signifying not merely the mean of opposing standards, but also the possibility of characters having same-sex attraction which was emerging as a force against heterosexual normativity in the 1990s and which, for the contemporary reader in 2022 and beyond, is the dominant social construct, forcing people against their moral principles to accept gay and lesbian sexual activity as equivalent with heterosexual activity.

### Historical Criticism

A reader aware of the tenets of historical criticism would have much to say regarding the setting of Posthuma’s novel. Why Posthuma would place her characters in the 1990s in an outdated technological industry with characters who have no ambition and, apparently, no transferrable skills once technological advances destroy their livelihoods are matters which a historical literary critic could resolve. Posthuma herself explains that she set the novel in

the 1990s for two reasons: first, doing so helps us understand the history behind social issues which began in that decade and which persist today, and, second, she happens to like this period of twentieth-century literature; she states that she is “obsessed with twentieth-century pop culture” (*Author*).

Absent the expressed opinions of the author, of course, a historical literary critic might conjecture that Posthuma places the action in August 1996 because that time may have been the “golden age” of pro-abortion history. Clinton had been in the White House for a disastrous four years, trying to force his pro-abortion policies on the nation and the world, rolling back the pro-life advances of Presidents Reagan and Bush. In a few months, he would be reelected, and the pro-life community would suffer through four more years of a virulently pro-abortion president. Abortion businesses like Planned Parenthood were receiving federal tax dollars. A vibrant anti-life activism was emerging in academia as professors and the media became more strident in their support of abortion. No wonder some abortion-minded writers chose the decade of the 1990s as the setting for their works.

### Marxist Literary Criticism

If they are not blinded by support for abortion, Marxist literary critics could isolate the financial transactions in the novel as evidence of underlying power structures at work in the characters’ lives. One such passage of the display of economic power is especially telling in terse prose. While Joel seems oblivious to the meaning behind the money in the envelope that Joel received from Indiana Jones, Baby immediately realizes that the money is meant not to assist her in giving birth to the unborn child, but to procure an abortion. Joel stupidly remarks not in irony but in bland reportage that “Somehow this was enough information for Baby to figure out the answer, because a few seconds later she said, ‘Oh’” (44). Baby’s single-term interjection demonstrates that she has more wherewithal than Joel in perceiving the choices available to her.

Furthermore, a Marxist literary critic would also point out the competing ideologies at work in the unstated conversation(s) which must have occurred between Baby and Indiana Jones, the father of the unborn child. Unlike other abortion novels, where the mother confronts the father with news about her pregnancy and engages in a dialogue about options for or against abortion, Posthuma’s novel contains no such encounter. In Marxist terminology, Baby must have tendered her ideology to Indiana Jones, who must then have countered her belief about the possibility of raising the unborn child with him with his own worldview of being single and unfettered by the responsibility of caring for a child or the child’s mother. Indiana Jones’ proffer of a packet of money to be used for the abortion closes any option other than his desire to maintain his ideology, the single life and its economic status that he wishes to maintain. The absence of the exchange between the ideologies can thus be construed in Marxist terms as one economic power struggle dominating another, Indiana Jones’ ideology winning the struggle.

### Psychoanalytic Criticism

The repertoire of concepts from psychoanalytic criticism would generate much interesting, albeit contorted reading. The reader quickly becomes aware that the character Crystal may be Joel's alter ego, and, if so, the disintegration of personality can be appreciated by a study of psychological concepts inherent in the theory.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Joel's stipulative definition of "the girl you sometimes hallucinate is more in line with a schizoaffective disorder" (45) is a small bit of literary evidence that Freud's ideas have continued force in contemporary literature.

Of course, as the common knowledge perception renders it, psychoanalytic literary criticism is heavily based on Freudian theories and is often reduced to (in the classroom, certainly) an analysis of phallic and yonic imagery evident in a literary work. The novel does not disappoint the more salacious aspects of this theory by providing some instances of phallic imagery which should titillate, if not educate, the eager young minds reading the novel for intellectual pleasure. For example, when Joel says, "After a few minutes outside in subzero temperatures, my balls retracted into my body, and I was able to think about what had just happened with my brain instead of my dick" (unpaginated 260), an adult reader might guffaw at the adolescent use of vulgarisms, while a young adult reader, the novel's target audience, may think that the passage demonstrates how relevant and "hip" the character and the author are.

### Reader-Response Criticism

Reader-response critics can use one key concept of the theory to assist contemporary readers to appreciate the novel more: the idea of the competent reader. Unless they are active members of pro-life groups, readers in 2022 may be unaware of the long history not only of abortion in the United States, but also of the pro-life efforts to restore the first civil right to life. Perhaps this accounts for Baby's complete ignorance of pregnancy support groups which flourished during the anti-life Clinton administration to assist mothers like herself who are unmarried and abandoned by their lovers because of untimely pregnancies. Similarly, contemporary 2022 readers may be ignorant of the large body of literature which, by 1996, had already countered anti-life claims. The absence of any pro-life entity in the novel makes it seem as though the pro-life movement was non-existent.<sup>6</sup> Whether this lack of knowledge is

---

<sup>5</sup> The disintegration of Joel's character becomes more apparent to the reader and, accordingly, a plot feature when Joel is visited by Crystal and when Joel's mother discovers a dress in his closet; shortly after that, Crystal manifests herself to Joel.

<sup>6</sup> Baby's query to Joel, "Did they not show you the *Miracle of Life* video in homeschool?" (275) cannot be cited as evidence of a pro-life group's educational effort since no such group is identified. Besides that, Baby makes it clear that the 1983 documentary (a publication not of a pro-life group, but of NOVA) was offered not in a school setting, but at home.



deliberate on the author's part to show the ignorance of the characters or whether the ignorance is an effort by the author to ignore the pro-life movement's effects on anti-life culture are research questions proper to a detailed biographical literary critic's study.

### Right-to-Life Literary Theory

Even the above applications of contemporary literary theories should not suffice for readers who want to learn more about Posthuma's novel, however, since all contemporary literary theories are deficient in two areas: first, they focus only on one aspect of human life; second, they fail to address several key questions which precede any literary discussion, all of which concern the value of human life.

The archetypes that archetypal or Jungian criticism stresses are not the paramount concern of human life, nor are the details about an author's life, the focus of biographical criticism. Whether one is able-bodied or differently abled as Critical Disability Studies suggests is important, but not the essential criterion of being human. Nor is the race of a human being as Critical Race Theory demands, or the stability of the language that deconstruction is concerned with, or the gender of a human being as feminist literary criticism or gender criticism demands. The milieu in which a human being lives, the focus of historical criticism, is important but not a defining element of human life, nor is the economic status of a human being as Marxist literary criticism suggests, nor is the psychological state of that human being as psychoanalytic criticism asserts. Finally, neither formalism nor reader-response criticism, both of which focus on the literary work itself, either by examining the words themselves or the reader's understanding of those words, falter as comprehensive literary theories since reading and writing, albeit key markers of human activities, are not essential for the existence of human life.

**[slide 10]** Since these literary theories are all deficient, applying right-to-life literary theory should enhance discussion of Posthuma's novel because the five questions which the theory asks address foundational matters about human life before any written work can be produced which illustrates some aspect of that life.

### The Pricelessness of Human Life

First, does the literary work support the perspective that human life is, in the philosophical sense, a good, some "thing" which is priceless? There is overwhelming evidence in the novel that this first question of right-to-life literary theory can be answered affirmatively. (This sets aside the principle that whether the author herself is anti- or pro-life is beside the point; she has written a work which *per se* is a life-affirming artifact.) Joel's wish at the beginning of the novel to be "Normal" (5; capitalization in original) is itself an affirmation of human life. So, too, is Baby's response to receiving the envelope of cash from Indiana Jones for an abortion. Her simple interjection "Oh" (44)

implies sadness obviously that the father of the child does not want to help her either give birth to the baby and release him or her for adoption or give birth and help her raise the child; her simple interjection, therefore, is a further testament to her valuing human life as priceless.

#### Respect for the Individual's Paramount Right to Life

Second, does the literary work respect the individual as a being with inherent rights, the paramount one being the right to life? This question can be answered affirmatively, thanks to the gender dysphoria topic which the novel includes as a subplot, but which is not crucial for this discussion of the first life issue of abortion. The gender confusion which Joel's brother, Brian, experienced at a young age until his suicide at sixteen illustrates a philosophical position which the pro-life community has adopted since its inception: that one's right to life is not predicated on age (whether at the moment of fertilization or beyond birth), location (in or out of the womb), condition of dependency (able-bodied or not), or sex (whether the unborn child is male or female). Posthuma's novel, then, comports with the pro-life perspective that, even though he committed suicide as a teenager, it was correct for Brian to have been born, if only to try to resolve his gender dysphoria. The novel further shows that Brian's life, although brief, had a severe effect on someone who loved him deeply, his brother Joel, who declared that Brian's suicide "wrecked me. It broke me in half. And it ruined my fucking life" (368).

#### Heterosexual Normativity and the Integrity of the Family

Third, if the literary work covers the actions of a family, does it do so respecting heterosexual normativity and the integrity of the family? Answering this question of right-to-life literary theory involves a pro-life interpretation of quotes and passages which would be overlooked by many other critics, whose perspectives are restricted to certain aspects. For example, soon after Baby decides not to abort, about halfway through the novel (243), a passage illustrates the burgeoning affection, if not love, between Joel and Baby. **[slide 11]** Before she gives birth, Baby implicitly acknowledges the emotional bond inherent in the heterosexual family when she says, "I think I'm going to feel lonely afterward, once it's gone" (275).

The emergence of the heterosexual family unit works to restore the love which should exist between its members. About three-fourths of the way into the novel, there is a long (seven page) and touching scene between Joel and his father (319-25). The pain of giving her child up for adoption is lightened for Baby when Joel's psychiatrist, Dr. Schwartz, and his wife agree to adopt the child, and the adoption scene makes it clear that Baby would remain active in the child's life (341-4). To signify further that a helpless newborn baby can bring more joy than anxiety to an unmarried mother and her circle of friends,

even Scarlet, Joel's supervisor who aborted the child fathered by her live-in boyfriend, reacts lovingly to Baby's child.

#### The Inherent Right to Exist of Unborn, Newborn, and Mature Human Life

Fourth, does the literary work comport with the view that unborn, newborn, and mature human life has an inherent right to exist? Scattered throughout the second half of the novel are numerous references to Baby's unborn child, and these remarks are dominantly life affirming instead of the dehumanizing language used by explicitly anti-life authors. The respect which Baby shows the unborn child begins early in this second half of the novel (page 244) when she gives Joel an envelope that contains a notation about the sex of her unborn child; she does not want to know the child's sex (the baby is a girl). Showing a character who is unwilling to know the sex of an unborn child may be bizarre for contemporary readers, familiar with gender-reveal parties, a practice which began in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In this instance, however, Baby is following the practice of previous generations, and her decision not to know can be interpreted as acquiescence that there is something more important than knowing the sex of the unborn child: letting him or her develop in the womb.

The life-affirming statements continue in rapid succession. Referring to her eventual labor pains, Baby remarks that "the godawful amount of pain will be all the clue I need that the person inside of me is trying to break out" (264). Unlike fiction written by anti-life authors, the unborn child is personalized as the following passage between Joel and Baby indicates:

"Was that a kick?"

"Or an elbow. I can never tell."

I was completely amazed. "It has elbows?" I looked down at Baby's stomach and then back at her face. "There are elbows in there?" (274)

It is after this brief conversation that Baby asks the rhetorical question "Did they not show you the *Miracle of Life* video in homeschool?" (275). After she gives birth, the newborn is not denoted as a burden to Baby, the single mother, or as a non-human entity in dehumanizing legal terms, but respectfully; the baby, now named Daphne, is described as "an impossibly small human" (341) and a page later "such a small person" (342).

#### The Divine Presence in the World

Fifth, when they are faced with their mortality, do the characters come to a realization that there is a divine presence in the world which justifies a life-affirming perspective? Answering this last question of right-to-life literary theory is especially challenging since religious references are scarce in the novel. When he realizes that he "really *did* have a blank slate at this job" (24; italics in original), Joel does indeed seem to be bereft of any religious or moral institution which could ground his biological beliefs about abortion or other

aspects of human life. Although Joel's mother is ostensibly Catholic, it is obvious that Joel's parents are cultural Catholics if anything; remember that his father spends Sundays "at the nearest AA meeting" (unpaginated 83). Furthermore, when characters reference God, the noun is always lower case.

How, then, can an answer be supplied to this last question of right-to-life literary theory? Throughout the novel, Joel engages with "Crystal" who, to the reader, seems as though she is his alter ego or a manifestation of his fragmented, perhaps schizophrenic personality. [Recall that Joel himself suggests the possibility of such a mental disorder when he declared that "the girl you sometimes hallucinate is more in line with a schizoaffective disorder" (45).] It is only towards the novel's conclusion that it is clear that Crystal is truly a manifestation of Joel's brother Brian, who committed suicide at age sixteen, most likely because of his conflict over his gender dysphoria. It is significant that, at novel's end, Joel concludes that his own life is "Normal: (380; capitalization in original) only after he was able to visit Brian's grave and experience a final appearance of Crystal.

Other than this episode, the characters—young, rejoicing over the birth of Daphne, and blissfully unaware of the collapse of their employment because of technological innovations soon to come—do not address the larger existential questions of human life. It would take another novel, perhaps, to demonstrate their maturity.

Anti-lifers who think that Lisabeth Posthuma's novel *Baby & Solo* could be used as a literary artifact to advance an anti-life, specifically pro-abortion, agenda on the cultural scene would be seriously mistaken. Using the many literary theories to which students have been exposed for decades (some theories, like formalism, for nearly a century) and the newer principles of right-to-life literary theory, an objective reader must conclude that the novel has a stronger life-affirming perspective than an anti-life one. This conclusion is remarkable, given the characters' secular outlook (no character is either grounded in religious teachings or expresses any piety) and seeming obliviousness to the pro-life movement which, by the time of the novel's setting, had established itself as a political force in the nation despite anti-life political victories.

Since the customary logical arguments for and against abortion are not presented in this work of fiction in passages of dreary didacticism (a feature which makes most anti-life fiction propaganda pieces for the pro-abortion movement), Posthuma's novel, therefore, can be a site where both anti- and pro-life readers can explore the controversial issue of abortion in a fictional environment, bordering on fantasy, where, as the author herself hopes, "people can privately challenge their own thoughts, explore nuances, and ultimately grow in their understanding about the issues that affect them." Her novel could be the means by which anti-life readers are able to challenge their ideology that unborn human life is worthless, explore the ways in which an

approach to life which affirms and does not destroy it is most satisfactory, and ultimately mature in their understanding about how abortion affects mothers, unborn babies, and fathers.

**[slide 12]** Works Cited

- “Baby & Solo by Lisabeth Posthuma.” *Goodreads.com*,  
[www.goodreads.com/book/show/44084731-baby-solo](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/44084731-baby-solo). Accessed 8 June 2022.
- “Baby and Solo Hardcover – May 11, 2021: Product Details.” *Amazon*,  
[www.amazon.com/Baby-Solo-Lisabeth-Posthuma/dp/1536213039](http://www.amazon.com/Baby-Solo-Lisabeth-Posthuma/dp/1536213039).  
Accessed 8 June 2022.
- Heppermann, Christine. *Ask Me How I Got Here*. Greenwillow Books, 2016.
- Jensen, Kelly. “‘The Hypothetical Is the Safest Space to Feel Unsure’: Lisabeth Posthuma on Abortion in YA Lit.” *Newsletters Dev: Getting It Done!*, 2022,  
<https://newsletterdev.riotnewmedia.com/2021/10/18/the-hypothetical-is-the-safest-space-to-feel-unsure-lisabeth-posthuma-on-abortion-in-ya-lit/>.
- Pipkin, Bonnie. *Aftercare Instructions*. Flatiron Books, 2017.
- Posthuma, Lisabeth. *Author Lisabeth Posthuma Discusses Her Book Baby & Solo*. *Vimeo*, uploaded by Candlewick Press, 14 October 2020,  
<https://vimeo.com/468304935>.
- . *Baby & Solo*. Candlewick Press, 2021.
- . “Media Kit.” *Lisabethposthuma.com*, 2021,  
<https://www.lisabethposthuma.com/media-kit>.