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Deliver Me: Pregnancy, Birth, and the Body in the British Novel, 1900-1950

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DELIVER ME:
PREGNANCY, BIRTH, AND THE BODY
IN THE BRITISH NOVEL, 1900-1950

BY

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B.A., George Fox University, 2001

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A thesis submitted to the
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Deliver Me: Pregnancy, Birth, and the Body in the British Novel, 1900-1950

written by Erin M. Kingsley

has been approved for the Department of English

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Jane Garrity, Committee Chair

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Date: ________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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ABSTRACT
Kingsley, Erin (Ph.D., English, English Department)
Deliver Me: Pregnancy, Birth, and the Body in the British Novel, 1900-1950
Thesis directed by Associate Professor Jane Garrity

Deliver Me: Pregnancy, Birth, and the Body in the British Novel, 1900-1950 explores three ways British novels engage with the rise of the “culture of pregnancy,” an extreme interest in reproduction occurring during the modernist movement. This culture of pregnancy was intimately facilitated by the joint explosion of dailies and periodicals and the rise of “experts,” ranging from doctors presiding over the birthing chamber to self-help books dictating how women should control their birth-giving.

In response to this culture of pregnancy, some modernist writers portray the feminine reproductive body as a suffering entity that can be saved by an alignment with traditionally-coded masculine aspects of the mind. Analyzing Virginia Woolf’s Orlando (1928), A Room of One’s Own (1929), and Three Guineas (1938); Enid Bagnold’s The Squire (1938); and Naomi Mitchison’s We Have Been Warned (1936), I argue that these writers encoded a “bloodless” model of reproduction in their texts, injecting the feminine body with a healthy dose of masculinity by wresting reproductive processes out of the physical domain and relocating them in the mental.

The second dominant literary response to the culture of pregnancy was concerned with the burgeoning presence of “improper” births by racialized women. Texts like Voyage in the Dark (1934) and Good Morning, Midnight (1939) by Jean Rhys, and Spleen (1930) by Olive Moore are thus highly engaged in issues of reproductive power(lessness) at the intersections of race, class, and cultural displacement.
Finally, the third response occurs in science fiction texts that seek to ameliorate the transgressive female body by repairing it via the masculine scientific gaze. Charlotte Haldane’s *Man’s World* (1926), Susan Ertz’s *Woman Alive* (1936), Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1937), and Katharine Burdekin’s *Swastika Night* (1937) portray scientific reproduction as a critical project to rescue humanity from the female body, rooted as it is in uncontrollable fluctuations.

These modernist novels imagine alternative worlds, yet they remain worlds in which the female reproductive problem is at the center. For these reasons, pregnancy in modernism must be reconceptualized as a primary modality of modernism itself and a central tenet of the movement.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have always seen this part of the dissertation as taking a victory lap of sorts, and I’m still not quite ready to do that. Surely there must be one more edit to make, one more wayward source to plug in. In the spirit of knowing that a work of writing is never complete, I will keep my thanks brief; however, please know that they are heartfelt.

To my dissertation director, Jane Garrity: thank you for your sustained guidance and good humor, insightful comments and helpful questions, timely responses and meticulous revisions. My path here at University of Colorado would be bleak without you.

To my dissertation committee members: Karen Jacobs, Laura Winkiel, Janice Ho, and Deepti Misri. Your graceful inquiries and kind suggestions helped shape this project at a fundamental level. Thanks to Laura for your continued edits that were beyond thorough; Karen, for introducing me to ideas of spatiality and bodies, and always serving as a gracious sounding board; Janice, for your excellent suggestion of including science fiction texts and your detailed revisions; and Deepti, for an introduction to all things feminist.

To the wonderful folks at the Division of Continuing Education, especially Geoffrey Rubenstein and my friend Teresa Nugent. The two-year Digital Pedagogy Grant allowed me precious time at home with my young children, saving me the rigorous commute to campus and affording me enough time and mental capacity to finish this dissertation in a timely manner. There is no way I could have finished this degree so quickly without the gift of teaching online. For that gift, I am grateful to you all beyond words.

To my dear friend Shannon, a sister working in the trenches beside me all these years. God gave me a priceless gift when he threw us together.
To my mom, Arlene, for always believing in me (beyond measure), and to my dad, Randy, for the same. And, oh, the Mini Cooper also helped in the commute to campus. Thank you is not quite sufficient for these extraordinary gifts.

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To my children, Sylvia and Lucas: you have done everything in your power to make sure I did not finish this. No, that’s not entirely true. Sylvia, you have been incredible in giving mommy “space” when she is working. I’m sorry you have had to grow up so quickly in this capacity, but I’m grateful that you both have known at an early age that our little family revolves around 1) Jesus and 2) books. I do it all for you, my littles.

To my husband, Matthew: for delivering coffee to me each morning as I wrote, and for the gazillion hours that you single-parented it, taking the kids to the park and guarding the closed door of our bedroom so I could keep working. This birth belongs to us both.
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INTRODUCTION
THE FEMALE BODY AND THE TEXT

“Whether figured as a death or a heroic rebirth, childbirth is, however, always a turning-point, a narrative crisis that destroys, confirms or creates a woman’s sense of identity.”
~ Tess Cosslett, Women Writing Childbirth

“If one believes, as many feminists do, that the woman as gestating mother is a subject position of peculiar potency, then one must view with alarm any threat to that unique and powerful identity.”
~ Margrit Schildrick, Leaky Bodies and Boundaries

Mina Loy’s “Parturition,” first published in Trend in 1914, is widely considered to be the first poem to explore pregnancy from the pregnant subject’s point of view. This astounding text breaks and molds its form to the contours of the shuddering breath and rending flesh that occurs in the poem’s titular experience, echoing childbirth in form as well as in content and in sound:

I am the centre
Of a circle of pain
Exceeding its boundaries in every direction
...
Locate an irritation without
It is within
Within
It is without
The sensitized area
Is identical with the extensity
Of intension. (1-3; 11-17)

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3 This is a generally-accepted assertion, but for explicit articulation, see Prescott, Tara. “Moths and Mothers: Mina Loy’s ‘Parturition.’” Women’s Studies 39.3 (2010): 194-214.

Throughout the poem, the speaker expressly grapples with what it means, physically and psychologically, to be both a modern (new) and a birthing (old / traditional) woman, and Loy’s exploration of this tension, tied as it is to the splitting of the body in childbirth, is one laced with a cry of frustration and animalistic pain and fear, and a bellow of self-worth and affirmation. It seems that, in the logic of the poem, to be female is to some extent to be hurting, marginal, in pain, at the mercy of one’s own body. And yet, to be specifically a birthing female in “Parturition” is also to finally achieve a corporeal power and voice that “not only promotes women as sexual beings, cultural producers, and philosophical theorists, but also challenges defensive assertions made by leading male modernists” (Peppis 572). The project of birth-giving in Loy finds a certain amount of redemption in this power, a power that modernist writers widely acknowledged. To reproduce, to birth something, is to be powerful and yet, contradictorily, to give birth is often to lose power, to be at the mercy of one’s corporeal condition. The inherent instability of cultural definitions of birth-giving is a puzzle, both to the subject undergoing reproduction (splitting from one into two) and to the audience observing this doubling. In the modernist period, most agreed that to give birth was to take on some modicum of power. The only problem was, how to define and access this power?  

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5 Throughout, I will be employing the somewhat vague term “power” in regards to reproduction to encompass Laura Doyle’s concept of the implicit ability to affect future generations and therefore the thrust of an entire empire through choosing to give, or eschew, birth. Doyle, Laura. Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994. Doyle echoes many critics, including Helen Sterk et al., Julie Tharp et al., Annie Murphy Paul, Tess Cosslett, all of whom assert that whoever holds access to the “kin group mother” holds power—quite literally, some control over other people’s lives (Doyle 26-7). Sterk, Helen, Carla H. Hay, Alice Beck Kehoe, Krista Ratcliffe, and Leona VandeVusse. Who’s Having This Baby?: Perspectives on Birthing. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2002; Tharp, Julie and Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb, eds. This Giving Birth: Pregnancy and Childbirth in American Women's Writing. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 2000; Paul, Annie Murphy. Origins: How the Nine Months before Birth Shape the Rest of our Lives. New York: Free P, 2010. This power to fundamentally shift and order future generations is a power that is inherent in the female body, and a power that masculine writers attempt to lay claim to as they write—or, birth—their transformative texts, an argument that will be furthered in chapter two. Finally, my concept of power is linked to
I begin with Loy’s poem because the body pictured therein does very similar work to the
textual bodies found in many British modernist novels written between 1900-1950: marked by
specific cultural, temporal, racial, and economic conditions, these textual bodies offer covert
commentaries on power. Such narratives of power and control must then be decoded by the
reader, who in turn brings certain conditions to the table when reading. The body in these texts is
not just a body; textual bodies are, rather than flesh and blood, a set of codes, a congealing of ink
and paper, a cloud of signals operating on several different levels at once, a web of competing
discourses jockeying for position yet remaining mostly unseen. Many readers see a pregnant
body in a novel and unquestioningly move on, but the project of this dissertation is to uncover
the subterranean narratives existing in and around the seemingly commonplace gestating figure,
and to compare this narrative to the larger cultural narratives told about this body (for example,
narratives of race, class, and empire). The reason why Loy’s poem represents the project of this
dissertation so well, and why I open with her lines, is because Loy is one of the first writers to
take the time to dig into the female parturitive experience, comparing the function of the
subjective body therein with the cultural space in which this body is couched.

But, the reader may inquire, why pregnancy and reproduction, and why modernism?

Critics such as Susan Squier claim that modernism is a “foundational” era for the study of
reproduction, and, more recently, Michael Davidson has highlighted the importance of pregnant
men in the modernist era, while Bryan S. Turner emphasizes the growing significance of the

Michel Foucault and his hegemonic concept of “confinement,” or the process of labeling, sorting and containing
bodies based on their perceived function and worth. Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of
identifies confinement as “the exercise of power to label a group as abnormal,” marking them “deviant, both morally
and economically” (111). Strickler links the hegemonic process of confinement not only to the disabled body but to
the “female, monstrous, pregnant body” which is “another kind of disability rhetoric” (111). Strickler, Breyan.
“Hemmed In: Place, Disability and Maternity in Animal Dreams and The Poisonwood Bible.” *Seeds of Change:
body in the humanities. My project intercedes in this small but rapidly-growing collection of criticism by emphasizing the importance of the female project of birthgiving. I argue that the overwhelming interest in the birthing body in the modernist period operates both at the “low” level of popular culture and at the level of “higher” art—that of certain novels. I offer the first monograph-length exploration of pregnancy in the modernist era coupled with an in-depth analysis of both canonical writers like Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley to lesser-known writers like Olive Moore and Enid Bagnold. I argue that two cultural shocks—the shock of modernist experimentation, and the shock of a reproductive crisis augmented by significant reproductive advances—are intimately interwoven in many modernist novels, and inform each other on a number of levels. I claim that a consideration of the modernist novel fits very well with a consideration of the permutations of reproduction, for in many ways, pregnancy, childbirth and modernism inform, contain, and mirror each other. As we have already seen in Loy, modernist form follows the workings of the pregnant body: it bends, breaks, explodes, troubles boundaries, and resists explanation or fixing. What is more, in the early years of the century, concerns over sex and reproduction saturated the cultural and artistic spaces of London. The tenets of modernist texts, and their dominant thematic and topical concerns, merely duplicate the era’s larger cultural interest in sexuality and reproduction, an interest clearly manifested in textual scenes of pregnancy and childbirth.

It bears emphasizing that in my consideration of the pregnant and birthing body, I will be exploring the then-dominant model of a gendered division of thinking which divided many

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aspects of British modernist culture into clearly-demarcated realms of masculine versus feminine. This division, rooted in a Western philosophical system reaching back to Plato, is crucial, for not only does it define many of the battles being waged in literature during the modernist era, as both male and female writers sought to map a new space for the reproducing body by interrogating such stifling divisions, but it also informs my three categories of exploration in this dissertation. My chapters explore tensions swirling around modernist fictional representation of pregnancy and childbirth predicated on this binary split, as writers either sought to uphold the division of “proper” realms of behavior for women or undo it. One therefore arrives at my three areas of textual inquiry: texts highlighting the virile male mind, the problematic female body, and the male mind ameliorating the weakness of the female body. A further project of this dissertation is to analyze the ways in which these strictly-policed gendered divisions of modernist British society are linked to the power (or lack thereof) found in birthing narratives and in competing discourses about the female body.

This is not to suggest, however, that the majority of characters in these novels live strictly by such culturally-policed gender divisions, for such divisions are often so culturally-ingrained as to escape notice (much like the binary gender system itself). Alison Jaggar terms such pervasive binaries “normative dualism” – where an “excessive value” is given to the mind and to

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Elizabeth Grosz, in *Volatile Bodies*, explains the historical encoding of such divisions into Western thought, tracing them from Plato and Aristotle through Descartes, Spinoza, and feminist critics like Chodorow and Irigaray. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. For more information about this binary system, see Donna Wilshire, “The Uses of Myth, Image, and the Female Body in Re-Visioning Knowledge.” *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, eds. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1989. 92-114. Finally, while I assert that this male/female binary system was the dominant philosophical one in modernism, many writers, artists, and prominent thinkers were absolutely determined to topple this stifling and problematic construction. See, for example, the gender performances of women like Djuna Barnes and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. For more on the latter, see Gammel, Irene. *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity: A Cultural Biography*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2003. Gammel argues that Freytag-Loringhoven’s “autobiographical self-display,” like wearing a tomato-can bra, for example, “dismantled” binary divisions such as “male/female, active/passive” (201). Therefore, while such figures as Freytag-Loringhoven fought to eradicate gendered binaries during the modernist era, this does not mean that the binary system was not in full operation. It was, and it remains operational in the contemporary period.
“masculine” pursuits at the expense of women and the body (46).\(^8\) She goes on to explain that the resulting notion that women are closer to nature because they produce children, and men are closer to “intellectual” pursuits because they create “culture,” is strengthened by the sexual division of labor which not only assigns women to “physical labor” (domestic duties like cleaning up and caring for children) but significantly undervalues such labor (46). Yet even in the face of such normative conditioning, the women in these modernist fictions often speak of a different experience, one based on blending and subverting these oppressive hierarchical categories. In Olive Moore’s 1930 novel *Spleen*, for example, the protagonist, Ruth, consistently questions the strict gender performance that femininity and motherhood entails, and instead yearns to experience “something else, something different, something new” in her pregnancy and childbirth (122).\(^9\)

A goal of this dissertation, then, is to analyze how British modernist authors, both male and female, represent the gestating body in light of cultural divisions which insist on masculine versus feminine ways of being and knowing. Further, how do these authors grapple with issues of power and control in the face of the burgeoning “culture of pregnancy” – what the culture broadly dictates a pregnant woman should say and do, and the restraints it likewise maps upon her body? Who or what ultimately decides what a pregnant woman is worth, what she represents, and how she will navigate her reproductive years? And what kinds of literary battles are staged around these questions?

It is well-established that the body is much more than just flesh and blood, and, indeed, is instead a marker and container for a variety of racial and political systems, socio-economic

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norms, heterosexual versus homosexual posturings, and the like. While Plato first posited the foundational idea of the male/female binary split undergirding Western philosophical thought, predominantly seen in the male being aligned with the mind and the female with the body, René Descartes explained the difference between reason (or “non-body”) and the body, and conceptualized a model of the body as a mechanical apparatus of nature, under or outside of reason (Grosz, Volatile 6). In direct opposition to the dualism of the Cartesian mind/body split is Baruch Spinoza’s foundational idea of “monism,” or the body and the mind informing each other like a Möbius strip (9-10). Beginning with Spinoza’s intervention, the Cartesian mechanized model of the body continued to be questioned until the third wave of feminism, when feminist attention to the matter exploded. Critics such as Elizabeth Grosz, for example, claimed that rather than explore a body based on divisions, the body must be reimagined as one of different levels and processes, one including and producing “fragmentation, fracturings, dislocations” (13). In Space, Time and Perversion, Grosz continues to explore the problem of recoding the dichotomous body, explaining, “Corporeality can be seen as the material condition of subjectivity, and the subordinated term in the opposition, can move to its rightful place in the very heart of the dominant term, mind” (103). In other words, the mind should no longer be viewed as being somehow superior to the lowly body but, instead, the mind should be understood to be enfleshed in the body as a single entity.

A model of a body based on Groszian flow and process rather than solidity and stasis is tremendously useful, not only for a philosophical reconsideration of bodies but for personal ideologies as well. This model offers an alternative way of seeing and reading and acts as a marker of the fissures in the dominant binary gender system, a system that, according to Susan

Stanford Friedman, is a “key component of Western patriarchal ideology” (52). While I agree with critics including Grosz, Luce Irigaray, Donna Wilshire, Adrienne Rich, Rebecca Kukla, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Christina Mazzoni, who insist on the importance of new languages, new discourses, new bodies, and monistic ways of thinking and being, it is also true that in mainstream Anglophone society, and certainly where the reproducing body is concerned, these alternatives rarely, if ever, exist apart from feminist encampments and textual (even idealistic) representations.

While a non-dualistic body may be beyond the reach of the characters in the novels analyzed in this dissertation, what I want to emphasize throughout is the body as a microcosm of its time, the body holding fast to deeply ingrained (so as to be invisible) notions of Butlerian performance and behavior. The body is never just a body. It is a sign, a cipher, a cultural and temporal manifestation of its surroundings. The female bodies at the center of these birth stories exist in a specific moment and a specific time, operating in specific ways that are either disjunctive or that correspond seamlessly to the larger cultural narrative in which the text is couched. These bodies bear stories of society, of economics, of culture and of race, in addition to

11 Friedman, Susan Stanford. “Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse.” Feminist Studies 13.1 (Spring 1987): 49-82. Further notable critics in the Groszian school of flow and process include Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Rosi Braidotti, and Moira Gatens. Perhaps the founding image in the idea of bodily “process” is that of the rhizome, an organism always changing and becoming, first posited in Deleuze and Guattari’s book A Thousand Plateaus, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987. This rhizome thrives in the “principle of multiplicity” (“There is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject”), and it also “assumes very diverse forms” (7-8). A rhizome always “includes the best and the worst,” and “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be” (7). The emphasis here is on what connects us rather than on what divides us.

12 Here I reference Judith Butler’s seminal argument in Gender Trouble that “[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (43-4). Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1990. Butler insists that Western society comes to think of bodies as a specific gender, when she wants to emphasize that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (33). There is no substance in gender, then, aside from the performance, which is culturally constituted and socially mandated.
speaking directly to issues of hegemonic power systems existing in the fictional and historical narratives in which the novel was created. These bodies and their stories of birth, once exhumed, provide a counter-narrative to the larger apparatus of society, the machinations of mass culture. They offer critical commentary on the ways the body (read: the individual) is treated, the importance of “sub-strata” members of society like women and children, the function of vital periods of bodily and interior change, the origins of life, and the way these stories are either given weight or dismissed wholesale in the face of dominant “masculine” narratives such as war, commerce, country, and empire.

Until the past 10 years, the study of pregnancy and childbirth in literature has largely been relegated to the realm of motherhood studies, which itself has been the grounds of rich critical thought for at least 40 years. While some feminist movements have emphasized gestation and parturition at certain points throughout the twentieth century (specifically the heyday of the French feminist school in the 1970s, and the popularity of the maternal and the mother-daughter plot in the 1980s-90s), critics often focused on the mother figure and not on the narrative workings of gestation and parturition: the bodily transfiguration and the physical rupture of birth. The topic remains largely ignored and unmined, especially in literary studies.

The single notable exception to this broad categorization is Julia Kristeva’s essay “Stabat Mater,” which is entirely predicated upon, and interested in, the function of the female gestational form. In the essay, Kristeva argues that the process of maternity “requires a new notion of identity” (297), and the pregnant woman is the most obvious example of a “subject-in-process” (298). Kristeva, Julia. The Portable Kristeva. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. Notable mother-daughter theorists include the French feminist school, Patricia Moran, Melanie Klein, Michelle Boulous-Walker, Deborah Kloepfer, Ellen Rosenman, Elizabeth Abel, Victoria Burrows, and Anne Simpson (with the last Burrows and Simpson texts appearing more recently, in 2004 and 2005).

To clarify this statement: at least one to two books on pregnancy in literature are published every five years, enough to prove works like these are still getting published, but clearly not enough to categorize them as mainstream. Much of the current maternity work is performed by the Canadian-based MIRCI (Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement). The last book published about specifically pregnancy in literature, to my knowledge, is Marotte’s dissertation-turned-treatise Captive Bodies (published by MIRCI’s Demeter Press in 2008), although a text on reproduction in modernism was published in 2014: Nadine Attewell’s Better Britons: Reproduction, National Identity, and the Afterlife of Empire. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2014. Other notable books include Julie Tharp and Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb, eds., This Giving Birth: Pregnancy and Childbirth in
Additionally, the small but growing body of literary criticism dealing with gestation and parturition published in the last 10 years discusses only contemporary American women’s literature; a volume discussing birth in British modernist literature is distinctly missing from this collection. Body theory, cultural studies, and feminist theory fare better in the frequency of publications, but only by a small margin. It is crucial to add to this existing body of scholarship by performing an extended analysis of the function of gestation and parturition in the novels of twentieth-century British writers, and the intersections of this encoded bodily experience with the larger cultural narratives of the period—including narratives of socio-economic identity, empire, race, and nation.

One must also remember, as indicated above, that this dissertation is really not about the body at all, for it is about texts and the bodies therein: therefore, textual bodies. These are not actual bodies of flesh and blood, of course, but a series of marks on a page, a sign or symbol pointing towards a body. Therefore, in the space between the sign and our translation of it (the

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*American Women’s Writing;* Christina Mazzoni’s *Maternal Impressions: Pregnancy and Childbirth in Literature and Theory.* Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2002; and the (sadly) out of print anthology by Chester, Laura. *Cradle and All: Women Writers on Pregnancy and Birth.* London: Faber & Faber, 1989. It is worth pointing out that the only two books on writing and birth-giving have been couched in contemporary American women’s texts. Part of my dissertation will be to explore how colonial Britishness or Englishness informs a writer’s conception of pregnancy and birth. Finally, while books on pregnancy are few and far between, articles on pregnancy are much more frequent, with over 25 interdisciplinary articles published in the last five years.

15 Here I have in mind Marotte’s *Captive Bodies,* which explores American pregnant works in terms of captivity—being captivated as well as held captive by the process of physical reproduction. Marotte analyzes American authors Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Flannery O’Connor, and Toni Morrison, among others.

essential Derridean slippage) lies a fleeting image or idea of something like a human body, but not human at all, and not body (not tangible flesh and blood). There is “never direct, unmediated access to some ‘pure’ corporeal state,” for “the body is always a discursive construction, marked by environmental process and by power, but given to us only in our texts” (Schildrick 14-15). In other words, bodies in novels are not merely bodies. They are an entire system of weighted binaries, carrying with them overt or subtle messages about the worth of this imagined individual, her place in society, and, most importantly, the meaning of this bodily journey she is undertaking in becoming a mother: physically furthering a specific kind of society and a specific kind of bodily being.

An integral aspect of the idea of birthing to further a specific kind of society is that of “racial motherhood,” Jane Garrity’s idea that the body of the mother needs to be healthy to yield healthy children and populate the right race, and the right nation (Step-Daughters 67). Racial motherhood dovetails with eugenics and the rampant desire during the modernist period to improve the stock of the British nation and therefore bolster empire and the many skirmishes it was constantly fronting. Throughout this dissertation, I will continue to return to the importance and centrality of the mother figure acting as a guardian of a specific race, and therefore producing properly (within her kin group) or improperly (outside of her kin group). One immediately finds in modernist texts that most mothers and birthers therein are inherently sorted into appropriate or inappropriate, docile or deviant, racially acceptable or racially dangerous categories.

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17 Garrity, Jane. Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003. Employing the idea of mothers reproducing empire and being tied to a certain racial status, I also build on Laura Doyle, who in Bordering on the Body writes extensively of the mother, the “boundary marker and reproducer,” who experiences the greatest triumph when her children marry then reproduce in kind to continue replicating national, cultural, and racial boundaries (146-7).
I am also interested in exploring the difference between male and female imaginings of the birthing body. For example, in their anxiety over never fully accessing the female-centric birth process, in their sheer inability to give birth and their lack of control over the process, some men have largely fought back by methodically encoding the entire “natural” birth process in a very “unnatural” system of mechanical and medical “improvements.” Science and technology, as we will see in chapter four, can curtail the power of the female gestating body and significantly hamper its freedom. This is not to suggest, however, that the very real services medicine and technology have done for the birthing process do not exist. As Edward Shorter argues, the road to feminism and the resulting increase in the opportunities for women is paved with the process of liberating the woman from her body.\(^\text{18}\) This liberation is accomplished by birth control, access to medical services before, during, and after birth, and negating the historical horror of the unknown and uncharted depths of the female corporeal so men and women could bond in heretofore unseen ways in the twentieth century. It is crucial to the autonomy of women, Shorter and others argue, that in the twentieth century, a pregnancy and impending birth is no longer a death sentence. And, as Margaret Sanger so famously argued, “the very pivot of civilization” lies in birth control, or a woman’s ability to choose when, and even if, she will bear children (D. Roberts 74).\(^\text{19}\) As feminism increased in size and momentum during the modernist era, it is not by chance that, simultaneously, maternal death rates plummeted.\(^\text{20}\) Medicine and technology do have a very important, even crucial, role to play in the emancipation of women. But, to return


to my previous assertion of the masculine use of technology when writing about the birthing body, it is important to keep in mind that many male authors in the modernist era often portray technology in childbirth in a positive light, while female authors are often more critical of technology and science when applied to the female body.

Further, the female author’s relationship to the textual birthing body carries with it additional issues. While I will explore these issues in detail in chapter three, briefly, Renée Dickinson argues in her 2009 book, *Female Embodiment and Subjectivity in the Modernist Novel*, that female modernist writers in particular sought to express authority through the bodies of the women encoded in their texts. Women are therefore torn when expressing the body in ways men are not, for while women seek to express the truth of their bodily conditions, they also are aware that Western philosophical thought has traditionally conscribed them to the body (versus the mind for men), and therefore, writing too much about the body can be a death sentence for their mind and their dreams of a cerebral life. As Margrit Schildrick explains, the physical body “positions women as both morally deficient and existentially disabled. Even the ‘whole’ body of phenomenology is intrinsically masculine, and women, by that token, are never in full existential health” (14). One especially sees tension surrounding the female body operating in Virginia Woolf’s oeuvre. Beginning in modernism and moving through the twentieth century, then, the reader can see conflicting reactions to the body when it is encoded by women versus men, and I have sorted these reactions into the three overarching positions of inquiry explored in this dissertation.

The reader may question why in chapter one I discuss the historical reality of pregnancy and childbirth in the modernist era, or why I study both textual and actual, anthropological, or

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“real” birthing bodies in this dissertation. The answer is not so easy as the question. One will readily understand the textual body, similar to the linguistic body, is very much based on the “lived body” and linked to it in extricable ways. Further, the body theory I employ throughout this dissertation is vast and varied, and I do not align myself with only one critical school when it comes to bodies and birthgiving. Rather, I find different critical paradigms useful for different areas of inquiry; I do not find schools of feminist thought and body theory mutually exclusive. While this dissertation will attempt to separate the textual body and the lived body as much as possible, I urge the reader to remember that the blurring between the two is a key aspect of the work both bodies are doing, and should not be considered a shortcoming of this dissertation, but rather an additional layer to the significance of birth as a transformative process.

Additionally, I seek to uncover how larger hegemonic cultural narratives become entwined in fictional narratives—or, how these fictions begin to display the overarching narratives of the culture, be these narratives of war, of empire, of race, or of anxiety about the body’s status. For example, narratives of empire appear throughout this dissertation and throughout the texts I analyze because, quite simply, British reproduction at the turn of the century was empire. As previously mentioned, either women were acting as proper guardians of the race or they were not; therefore if they were not the entire future of empire was called into question in one seemingly innocuous instance of birth-giving. In this project, I seek to question

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22 The linguistic body is posited by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, while the “lived body” is Toril Moi’s idea of a body rooted in embodiment, a phenomenological body that knows itself and its world through a process of emphasizing the body-in-the-world experience (Young 19). Moi especially wants to distinguish the importance of the “body as a situation,” a “concrete body experienced as meaningful, and socially and historically situated,” versus the performative Butlerian body that Moi claims “loses touch” with the lived body (Moi 74). For more on the “lived body,” see Moi’s seminal article, “What is a Woman?” in *What is a Woman?: And Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. I find the work that Butler does particularly in insisting on the artificiality of the gendered body just as useful as Moi’s idea of the lived body, and indeed, the two paradigms are not mutually exclusive but are instead both necessary to a well-conceived understanding of the corporeal condition.
the function of the textual body as a sign of cultural disruption, of national anxiety, and of racial relations.

To these ends, I have chosen novels by both men and women, ranging from early (pre-war) modernism to late (post-war) modernism. I chose to focus on the novel rather than on poetry because the length and plot of the novel is necessary to develop the themes—such as the interplay of empire and birth, pregnancy and technology, the female body and fascism—that I explore. The myriad aspects of twentieth-century gestational practices and the underlying theoretical and social narratives can only be fully explored in longer works. The wonderful poem by Mina Loy that begins this dissertation is a excellent introduction to issues of reproduction found in modernism, but it is a snapshot only. This project requires longer, more complex narratives.

Further, I chose the British novel or the novel authored by colonized British subjects because issues of colonialism, empire, race, and conquest are interwoven with the birthing woman’s body and reflected in literature that similarly seeks to challenge the hierarchical boundaries of black/white, proper/improper, and civilized/uncivilized. These challenges dovetail with my larger inquiry about the function of pregnancy and childbirth in the modernist era—what I deem “gestational modernism”—because not only is reproduction a primary modality of empire but also because the modernist period itself is a time that undercuts boundaries. The horror that Kurtz attests to in Joseph Conrad’s novel *Heart of Darkness* is mirrored in the horrors of the shifting landscape of the pregnant body: confronted with one’s innermost being, often besmirched by years of “immoral” activity, the birthgiving woman in the modernist novel routinely fears that she will give birth to nothing but deformity and monstrosity, therefore betraying her true position as an improper guardian of the British race and empire. For such a
woman, the journey into birthgiving is aligned with the journey into the Conradian darkness. Nothing short of the entire future of the British empire is at stake as she reproduces, and the enormous pressure this exerts on her corporeal often results in disaster, either for her or for her unborn child.

Put simply, the tangles of individuality and subjectivity, bodily existence, and racial awareness (mind, body, race, and country) cannot be undone. The pregnant and metamorphosing body in the modernist novel simply cannot be thought of apart from the shifting landscape of growing then collapsing empire, the burgeoning anxiety over the Hitler problem, the seething undercurrent of Socialist, Communist, and Marxist agitation (literally, the birth of a new world order), the emergence of the volatile and misunderstood New Woman (seeking a space where there was none), the birth of the modern feminist movement and of women’s suffrage, the dawn of the modern age of convenience in birth control and abortion rights, and the approaching rending of the insular curtain surrounding London, a division which struggled to keep the metropole “white” and the “dark masses” elsewhere. With the beginning of the postcolonial age, when the colonized wrote back to the colonizers (an era briefly explored in the Coda), one can similarly see the dawning of bodily awareness in the narratives of othered women. The story and the voice that they write is truly the woman situated in her body, writing back to herself and for herself. What are concerns of empire, after all, in light of a woman’s unified being? But it is only after the British empire has been largely dismantled that women find the power to write gestation in such a manner, and even then, there are fissures in their narratives, as we shall see.

This dissertation is organized into the following divisions: in chapter one, I offer an in-depth discussion of the socio-economic and cultural reality a white, middle-class pregnant woman faced at the turn of the twentieth century (to choose only one “normative” model to
map). This discussion is a foundational aspect of the project, because, in echoing Susan Squier, the modernist era was a turning-point for thought surrounding women’s rights, the family, sex, reproduction, and science (*Babies* 10).\(^{23}\) Modern concerns about reproductive technologies, a woman’s place, and the status of the gestating body are firmly rooted in events during 1890-1920, when new disciplines such as eugenics and sexology and new reproductive technologies appeared. No single study currently in existence charts the cultural conditions surrounding pregnancy (what I deem the “culture of pregnancy”), the larger cultural and heteronormative narratives of pregnancy, and the literary landscape of twentieth-century British fiction, as this dissertation attempts to do.

The remaining three chapters of the dissertation explore pregnancy in British fiction published in the years 1900-1950, employing a scaffolding of gender division to anticipate and reflect the cultural struggle and political resistance that these texts offer under the totem of the pregnant form. In chapter two, I present a discussion of fictional conceptions of birth predicated on a masculinized rhetorical system which strongly favors “masculine” philosophic categories like the mind and written systems of learning. I argue that while writers such as Virginia Woolf, Enid Bagnold, and Naomi Mitchison claimed to interrogate the specious construct of masculinity and of British empire in their texts, these very texts ironically end up bolstering such concepts with their employment of masculine forms of birthgiving. Woolf transmutes her acts of reproduction into the space of the mind and the masculine realm, while Bagnold figures her strong birthgiving character, the Squire, as birthing like a man. Finally, Mitchison cannot

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\(^{23}\) Squier goes on to claim that “both modernism and modern science have been defined in and through the repression of the birthing woman’s body—its powers and pleasures” (“Invisible Assistants” 314). “Invisible Assistants or Lab Partners? Female Modernism and the Culture(s) of Modern Science.” *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism.* Ed. Lisa Rado. New York: Garland Pub., 1994. 299-320. The male literary appropriation of the power of the female birthing body is explored in the second chapter.
imagine proper reproduction outside of the strict confines of the patriarchal family unit. All three authors, I claim, eventually succeed in transmuting the female, physical act of giving birth into the realm of the male and of the mental (according to the gendered binary division of male versus female, mind versus body), therefore removing the vital power of feminine birthgiving and placing it in the “enemy camp”—that of men and of empire.

In chapter three, I analyze the reverse situation: birth figured as a strongly “feminine” category and experience, emphasizing touch, emotion, communication, feminine-transmitted knowledge systems, and the centrality of the racialized body. I claim that due to the extreme corporeal experience of the racial outsider (because when one stands outside of the normative bodily condition, one’s body is at the fore), the physical aspect of childbirth is much more overpowering than the mental aspect of birth discussed in chapter two. I analyze novels by Jean Rhys and Olive Moore, finding that the otherness encoded in flesh when giving birth is mirrored in and bolstered by the racial otherness experienced by the heroines in Good Morning, Midnight, Voyage in the Dark, and Spleen. Both conditions—that of giving birth and that of being a stranger in a foreign land—produce disorientation, fragmentation, and an extreme shifting of boundaries. The conditions are therefore importantly synonymous, for they require a reorientation of the self at the most foundational level.

In chapter four, I consider texts which emphasize a combination of masculine and feminine but present the masculine mind as a panacea to cure the ills of the female body through the rhetoric of science and technology. Considering science fiction and dystopian novels by Charlotte Haldane, Susan Ertz, Aldous Huxley, and Katharine Burdekin, I claim their texts not only illustrate the techno-scientific aspirations of the early twentieth century, but also carry with them a warning about the potentially disastrous results of unchecked power obtained through
these advances. What is more, the female body in these texts is the single element that remains
deviant, the single element that continues to disrupt despite scientific (and masculine) attempts at
complete control.

Finally, in the Coda, I focus on post-1950 fictions that largely dismantle the limiting early
twentieth-century mind/body dichotomy by presenting stories of birth founded on a strongly
feminine mind and a feminine body. Later texts—such as Margaret Drabble’s *The Millstone*,
Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*, Andrea Levy’s *Small Island*, and Zadie Smith’s
*White Teeth*—not only highlight issues of postcolonialism and the necessarily ambiguous
narratives and definitions of power therein, they also explore the diverse avenues of
empowerment available through birthgiving. For the first time, these heroines begin to lay claim
to a certain modicum of power in pushing against the boundaries that scaffold birthgiving,
transforming themselves at the same time, but this transformation still occurs while firmly
enmeshed in hegemonic cultural constraints. It is this later model of ambiguous empowerment, I
argue, which is the foundation for the majority of twenty-first century fictions, and is a good
example of how gestation and parturition is formulated and presented in a post-colonial context.
CHAPTER ONE
THE (HI)STORY OF BRITISH BIRTH
AND THE RISE OF A TWENTIETH CENTURY CULTURE OF PREGNANCY

“We realise at last that empty cradles mean an empty country,
and we would save our civilisation from the disasters that overtook ancient empires.”
~ Amy Barnard, “The Truth About Twilight Sleep”

Writing in 1917, Amy Barnard poetically claims that “empty cradles mean an empty
country,” perfectly linking eugenic reproduction to larger hegemonic issues of state and country.

With this statement, she reflects the predominate cultural narrative of the early twentieth century
that it was woman’s responsibility to reproduce, therefore reproduce British empire and even the
Anglo-Saxon “race” itself.\(^1\) The empire had recently experienced its first shocks of direct
challenges to its power, from the Boer agitation from 1899-1902 to the Irish Home Rule
movement, from the rising women’s suffrage movement to “cyclical economic recessions,
organized labour unrest,” and “socialist revival” (Bland, Beast 223). Due to the high number of
recruits turned away in the Boer War due to “unfitness,” a vast cultural movement began in
Britain to reeducate and train able-bodied men and women, especially mothers and pregnant
women via the “mothercraft” movement (83).\(^2\) Not only did Britain need more bodies, then, they
needed good ones. The epigraph to this chapter is thus a salient example of the confluence of

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2 As Lucy Bland explains, the term “race” was often used at the turn of the century, especially by feminists,
and it carried intentional “slippage between human race, white race, and Anglo-Saxon race, and the assumption of
white superiority and supremacy” (70). I therefore use “race” in much the same way, as an indicator of the
hegemonic manifestations of a specific racial and cultural group. Bland, Lucy. Banishing the Beast: Sexuality and

3 Elleke Boehmer claims the Boer War represents an important shift in British imperialism, as it instigated
a “decade of nationalist and anti-imperialist movements in South Africa, Ireland, Bengal, and Egypt” which
culminated in the Great War, “a war of imperial rivalry between European powers” (4). Boehmer, Elleke. Empire,
various cultural narratives I will attempt to bring together in this chapter—war, empire, public opinion, print representations of reproduction, women’s rights, and, of course, the pregnant female body. While this chapter is by no means an exhaustive exploration of pregnancy and birth in Britain since the dawn of Anglo-Saxon culture, it will be useful to gloss the cultural conditions and historical events which conspired to create an entirely new culture of pregnancy at the turn of the twentieth century in Britain, a cultural movement which in turn informed modernism itself.

I define a “culture of pregnancy” as a publicly-moderated and tacit ideological and hegemonic construction of reproduction, or, pregnancy and childbirth (including its cultural function, proper versus improper choices and manifestations therein, and its “natural” place and role in a woman’s life) which operated more broadly at the national level versus operating strictly at the familial or regional level, as such localized conceptions largely did before the twentieth century. This burgeoning culture of pregnancy, in turn, was both fueled by and elicited responses from writers in record numbers, writers grappling with the meaning and representation of pregnancy in light of the heightened nationalized interest in reproduction. Because pregnancy and childbirth were integral to new conversations about the relations between the sexes, and integral to the rise of first-wave feminism and the plunging birth rates, as we shall

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4 Throughout, I use “reproduction,” “pregnancy” and “childbirth” somewhat interchangeably, because they are all steps in a large process that contribute to the production of new physical bodies for society. I use “hegemony” to signify “a situation in which a provisional alliance of certain social groups can exert ‘total social authority’ over other subordinate groups,” not merely through the exertion of force, but by the construction of certain behaviors and ideas as “both legitimate and natural” (Hebdige 16, qting Hall). By “ideology,” I use Hebdige’s definition of a thought process so ingrained and accepted that it becomes “unconscious” and is therefore duplicated unquestioningly by a particular society (12, 14). One can see that the concepts of hegemony and ideology, then, are intimately linked to one another. Hebdige, Dick. Subculture: The Meaning of Style. London and New York: Methuen, 1979.

5 As I will explain, the heightened national interest in reproduction is intimately tied to new developments in pre- and post-natal care, medical developments surrounding the childbirth experience itself, and the cultural narrative of alarm surrounding the rising maternal death rates and the falling birth rates in the early twentieth century.
see, a heightened concern over reproduction began to manifest itself specifically in the British media, appearing in publications authored by men and women alike. These publications ranged from monographs exploring scientific reproduction to “self-help” handbooks directing a pregnant wife’s behaviors, but, importantly, many appeared in the cheap and quick print media of newspapers, journals, and circulars. Thus, a new conversation about the “now” of reproduction was created—a conversation happening in real-time about real-time issues.\(^6\) This “real-time” conversation coupled with the new appearance of the pregnant female body in public spaces as mass-produced maternity clothes became available is a crucial aspect of the culture of pregnancy in the early years of the twentieth century, and is a protean precursor to the full-fledged “pop culture” craze surrounding pregnancy which exists at the present moment.

Crucially, the rise of the culture of pregnancy coincides with the extreme experimentation of literary modernism, for as the female body became public, so too did pregnancy and birth, marking the explosion of mass culture’s relationship with the pregnant form.\(^7\) Both women and narratives began to grapple—publicly, in print—with not only the private, interior aspects of reproduction, but larger public conceptions and larger ideas of where and how the pregnant woman fit into the local, national, and global economies. A consideration of the modernist novel

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\(^6\) Of course, the real-time conversation about reproduction at the turn of the century cannot be separated from the larger conversation about women’s rights and the Woman’s Suffrage movement. Lisa Tickner explains that the “Woman Suffrage Movement,” much like the rise of the culture of pregnancy I am charting here, was “the first to exploit new publicity methods made possible by the rise of national, daily, penny and halfpenny newspapers….“ (xii). Tickner, Lisa. *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1988. While I do not have the space to cover the Women’s Movement in great depth in this dissertation, I am aware that any conversation or struggle around reproduction and women’s bodies is an indelible aspect of this larger conversation about women’s rights. See Tickner for a wonderful gloss of the historical arch of the Women’s Movement and for reprints of the contemporary artwork surrounding the movement.

\(^7\) Prior to the twentieth century, pregnancy and childbirth functioned as a much more private, familial matter. Nonfiction books and print media conversations of this era were predominantly authored by men and followed a expert/novice construction, in which the author enlightened the unknowing reader. The notable difference in the twentieth century is that lay readers of both sexes began to engage in a printed conversation about reproduction and sexuality, and the pregnant female form began to appear in male-centric publications like *The Times*, a point which shall be discussed further.
fits perfectly with a consideration of both the permutations of reproduction and modernist society’s extreme interest in such permutations, for in many ways, pregnancy, childbirth, and modernism inform, contain, and mirror each other. While I am interested in exploring pregnancy as it appears in both experimental and non-experimental modernist texts, it is worth noting that experimental modernist form closely follows the workings of the pregnant body: it bends, breaks, rends, explodes, troubles boundaries, resists explanation or fixing. I will emphasize the importance of form in certain parts of this dissertation, although not all texts explored in these chapters can be considered experimental; therefore, one of the crucial ways I will explore pregnancy and childbirth in these modernist novels will be through the texts’ engagement with the important rise of the culture of pregnancy at the turn of the century.

I am aware of the limitations of the term “culture of pregnancy,” limitations which include the use of the word “culture,” a slippery and amorphous concept, and the single word “pregnancy,” when British society was in fact interested in the entire trajectory of the reproductive process, from preventing births via birth control to pre-natal care. However, I maintain that the term is a good way to earmark a cultural movement in Britain inherently linked to ideological issues of power, control, and reproduction. I use the term to signify the newness of turning the spotlight of interest in and borderline obsession over reproduction onto the woman’s pregnant body, an interest coupled with new developments at the societal level that combined to make the pregnant form much more visible in mainstream British society. While I do not intend to reify the notion of “culture” in my construction of a “culture of pregnancy,” I instead use the term as an indicator of a normative public acceptance of the role of reproduction and pregnancy.8

8 I also use “culture” in the Saidian sense, as he argues, “Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental” (336). In other words, the notion of culture as I see it blends with identity, causes allegiances (both uninterrogated and intentional), and mixes with the larger
I therefore understand the difficulty in speaking of any unified culture of pregnancy at the turn of the century, a time when some prominent writers feared English culture was crumbling at its core (see for example T.S. Eliot), and when the mass infusion of women created what was seen as a problematically feminized culture, disruptive and destructive (Silver 11). I use the word “culture,” then, to gesture towards a series of dominant ideologies operating at the national level with the full understanding that there were also many different subcultures and discourses operating simultaneously. As Dick Hebdige so succinctly points out, the study of culture is “the study of a society’s total way of life” (10), implicating both high and low, dominant and sub-, cultures. With my use of the word “culture,” I also gesture towards the idea of “mass culture” as intimately linked to much of the artistic output of the modernist era, an argument found in many recent critical works. Indeed, as Elizabeth Majerus claims, modernism and mass culture were in national culture. Culture itself often causes people to identify with an exclusive people, racial, or class group, when in reality, “all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic” (xxv). Said, Edward. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.


For example, see Mao, Douglas & Rebecca L. Walkowitz. “Introduction: Modernisms Bad and New.” Bad Modernisms. Eds. Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. 1-17. Mao and Walkowitz claim that no other era is so dependent upon the “relation between itself and dominant aesthetic values, between itself and its audience, between itself and the bourgeoisie, between itself and capitalism, between itself and mass culture, between itself and society in general” (3). For similar arguments about the inseparability of modernism and mass culture, see Daly, Nicolas. “Colonialism and Popular Literature at the Fin de Siècle.” Modernism and...
some ways the same, for each shaped and informed the other (620). Because modernism was crucially aware of the workings of the larger culture in which it found itself, then, so too is the “culture of pregnancy” both founded in larger cultural ideas about gestation and parturition, aware of these ideas, and reflective of these ideas.

It is also important to note that the culture of pregnancy was often masculine (perpetuated by males, to serve a male agenda), and movements such as the first wave of feminism and women’s agitation for accessible maternity clothes sought to fight against this masculine-controlled vision of reproduction. The reader may recall that, historically, the female was aligned with “nature” and the body, while the male was aligned with “culture,” with science, and with the mind, and many early feminists consequently sought to disassociate themselves from the realm of the body, to become more than just a “walking womb” (Bland, *Beast* 53, 91). Issues surrounding reproduction at the turn of the century cannot be separated from the larger overarching bids for power and control of women’s bodies, women’s place, and the future of the British “race.” Because pregnancy and childbirth is tied to almost every aspect of modern Western society—the dominant cultural role and construction of femininity, the reproduction of proper vs. improper bodies, the positioning and education of these bodies in mainstream society, and indeed, the way society would be altered due to the infusion of these new bodies—it is a tremendously important aspect of British society and culture, especially as an indicator of how this society viewed and defined women.

First-wave feminism, which had its roots in the nineteenth century and peaked in the early years of the twentieth century, greatly contributed to the radical reconfiguration of

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woman’s culturally-defined body and place as seen in the culture of pregnancy. Lucy Bland gives an excellent overview of the cultural changes centered around women’s bid for freedom in *Banishing the Beast* (1995). Bland details the rise of the Women’s Movement from its beginnings in the new dialogue between the sexes as seen in the Men and Women’s Club (1885-1889) to the public debate over marriage which waged in the late years of the nineteenth century. This marital debate was rooted in the “defining of male and female sexuality” which was a “crucial site of struggle at the turn of the century” (47). In the nineteenth century, female sexuality was viewed as lacking, even non-existent, or open to dangerous mutations—if a woman had too much sex, for example, it was thought she could metamorphose into a sexually- and morally-debated creature (54). Furthering this instability of woman as a category was the cultural belief that, unlike man, woman was unable to control her body with her mind and was therefore at the mercy of the permutations of her reproductive cycle as rooted in her uterus (63). As Havelock Ellis explains in 1929, “Whenever a woman commits a deed of criminal violence it is likely that she is at her monthly period” (126).

Bland elucidates how early feminists waged a war not only against concrete cultural manifestations of sexism—like access to birth control and women’s safety in the streets—but also against ideological strongholds positioning women as closer to children or “lower” races, physically incapable of ruling themselves or of emerging from patriarchy’s protective wing (64). As the dominant narrative went, both women and lower races required protection by the “white, Western man”; they were both “‘Other’ – ‘terra incognita,’ the ‘dark continent’ – to be

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‘discovered,’ dominated and controlled” (74). Later feminists became concerned with liberating women from a culture that viewed them as sexually base, and feminists began to argue for women’s sexual agency and pleasure—however, still locked within the confines of heterosexual marriage (309). Feminists also argued that men, not women, were closer to “beasts” of nature (due to man’s “sexual excessiveness”), while women, due to their innate morality, would serve as humanity’s civilizing force (91). Employing the idea of sexual selection from Darwin, feminists argued that if women were educated about their own bodies and about sex and sexuality, they would inevitably make superior decisions about whom to marry and how to educate their offspring (84). A legacy of liberating women from sexual slavery, and from patriarchy, would thereby be instigated—a liberation process that would eugenically result in superior reproduction, yielding better bodies and minds to serve the empire (84).

The ideological debate over birth control is another critical facet of the Women’s Movement and of cultural conceptions of sexuality and reproduction at the turn of the century.  

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12 Bland explains how the rise of the Women’s Movement in the 1860s was synchronous with other bids for freedom: the Indian mutiny of 1857, for example, and the Jamaican revolt of 1861. All groups “challenged their subordination” simultaneously (Beast 74). In this argument, Bland reinforces Elleke Boehmer’s argument in Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920: that the period of 1890-1920 was “the beginning of the development of a more global dimension to radical political networking,” with movements such as Irish Home Rule, women’s rights, and the spread of “socialist and Marxist ideas” piggybacking off one another due to the “globalized formations of empire” that both rapidly disseminated ideas across the globe and “paradoxically facilitated the rise of cross- or transnational resistances” (4-5).

13 On women as the purifying force in Britain, see Jane Garrity’s Step-Daughters of England, which explains how women writers deployed “imperial tropes” to write themselves into the national British imaginary and to envision a new and redeeming future for England. On the problem of the sexual double-standard, see Lisa Tickner, The Spectacle of Women. Tickner includes an apt slogan penned by Christabel Pankhurst: “Votes for Women and Chastity for Men” (223).

14 This dissertation unfortunately does not have space nor time to investigate birth control and its relationship to representations of reproduction in the twentieth century. For more information on birth control in the early twentieth century, see Hauck, Christina. “Abortion and the Individual Talent.” ELH 70.1 (Spring 2003): 223-266. Hauck explores the “reproductive crisis” of birth control and abortion in the years 1877-1931, and links the historical and social ramifications of birth control to a lengthy discussion of T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land and its concern with “reproductive failure” (227, 254). Also, see Lucy Bland’s Banishing the Beast, especially chapter five, “Contraception, Feminism and the Malthusian League.” For a discussion of late twentieth-century birth control issues, see Dorothy Roberts, Killing the Black Body. Note that while Roberts’ book is centered on American issues,
At first, feminists were highly ambivalent about birth control, not only believing sex without marriage would lead to increased promiscuity among men but also assuming such behavior would further cement the status of women in marriage as nothing short of being locked in “legal prostitution” (189, 197). Birth control (the term was coined by American feminist Margaret Sanger in 1914 and quickly took hold in Britain thereafter) eventually grew in popularity due to the efforts of doctors like H. Arthur Allbutt, who courageously included a chapter on birth control in his 1886 book, *The Wife’s Handbook*, and due to organizations like the Malthusian League (founded in 1877), which first only broadly sought to educate the public about the necessity of population control (190, 194, 202, 209). It was not until 1913 that the League began to disseminate pamphlets explaining actual birth control methods (209).

Feminists also tackled other societal issues—aside from the war to win the vote (secured in 1918), they were concerned with making the streets acceptable and safe for women to access spaces newly opened to them, such as libraries, museums, theaters, and shops, not to mention places of employment (308, 119). New organizations such as the Fabian Women’s Group (established in 1908) called for “married women’s economic independence, actual or potential” (183), and the Eugenics Education Society (founded in 1907) sought to educate the masses on the dangers of mass overpopulation and the importance of “selective breeding” (227). The early she traces the emergence of the birth control movement and illustrates how it controls black reproductive freedom. Hers is a crucial text to review when considering the intersections of race and the deployment of birth control rhetoric.

15 Bland further explains the reticence to employ manufactured forms of birth control was also linked to their expense, the difficulty in obtaining them, and the cultural narrative linking condoms to prostitution and venereal disease (*Beast* 190). Women instead largely employed “[a]bstinence, withdrawal or coitus interruptus, and various forms of abortifacients” (189), all cheaper and more private solutions.

16 As Lisa Tickner explains, “By conventional criteria, of course, the feminine could not by definition come trooping into public life. That was not the arena for women, and straying there would sully them” (63). See chapter three, “Spectacle,” in Tickner’s *The Spectacle of Women*, for the imagery, political process, and history of women taking to the streets; and see chapter two, “Women’s suffrage melodrama and burlesque” in Laura Winkiel’s *Modernism, Race and Manifestos* for more on the riotous public spectacle of the suffragettes.
years of the twentieth century also witnessed a rise in the cultural interest in divorce, rooted in the 1909 Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, which recommended the liberalization of divorce laws (184). New socially-acceptable avenues for the circulation of ideas surrounding sexuality and reproduction between men and women therefore slowly began to take hold, manifesting in part in the advent of the short-lived *Freewoman* in 1911-1912, a publication invested in providing the first public forum for the discussion of sex and sexuality (266-267).

With a firm foundation in the broader women’s rights movements occurring in the early years of the twentieth century, this chapter will consider additional historical events and cultural narratives which combined to create the culture of pregnancy. I will briefly explore the main movements in the history of childbirth that combined to create such a markedly dominant cultural interest around reproduction, including the introduction of tools, medicalized narratives of scientific birth, and competing discourses surrounding the pain and fear of childbirth. I will gloss a “normative” childbirth experience in the early twentieth century and will consider how larger cultural movements like eugenics and the appearance of maternity clothes and advertisements, the first wave of feminism, and the “proper” education of mothers that appears in the “mothercraft” movement combined to create a heightened awareness of the machinations of reproduction. I also consider the bodily repugnance for women that flourished in part due to the “false modesty” surrounding the female form, and due to a tradition of mothers who were reticent to be honest about the bodily condition of themselves and of their daughters.

While many twentieth-century attitudes about the medicalization of reproduction and the science of birth are firmly rooted in mid-eighteenth century developments, I begin my story one hundred years later for brevity’s sake. To map the escalating British cultural interest in birth in

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17 Foundational developments surrounding reproduction in the eighteenth century include the inauguration of embryology, which “affirmed the theory of epigenesis” (growth progressing from a simple to more complex
In the early twentieth century, I draw on periodicals and advice manuals, especially those garnering a large audience or acquiring several editions, because these were the stories most often being told and were consequently most likely given the most cultural and ideological weight (therefore, power). The few personal narratives I include are meant to be read in relation to the dominant discourses of published texts. A final note: throughout, I adopt the normative model of birth as it would have been articulated at the historical moment of these texts. Therefore, the pregnant woman here is assumed to be middle- to upper-middle-class, married, and white, unless otherwise noted. Certainly, alternative narratives to these are extremely important in any study of birth rhetoric, and I will explore these counter narratives in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. For now, however, I am only seeking to chart one path in a tangle of paths, therefore the “normative” path will have to suffice.

1. The Story of Pre-Twentieth Century British Birthing Practices

The difficulty of mapping a specific and unified body of cultural birthing practices is pronounced, because customs vary by class, race, and even region and family. London, a cultural melting pot by the nineteenth century, was and is a cacophony of birthing practices and ideas;
birth is after all subjective and culturally ingrained. Even if a woman moved to London at a young age, she would no doubt carry with her conceptions of reproduction and the role of the body therein that were firmly rooted in her country, city, and family of origin. But it is possible to point out overall trends and key developments in the story of birth and suggest in this manner that most women, given a modicum of exposure to the machinations of British hegemonic and ideological systems, would likely have come across these narratives and most likely subscribed to them themselves.

Prior to the twentieth century and the rise of the hospitalized, monitored birth, reproduction was predominately viewed as a natural, relatively seamless aspect of a woman’s life. Very little “official” attention was paid to the process. Edward Shorter, Ann Oakley, and Randi Epstein all explain how agrarian societies in pre-industrialized Britain had no established routine for prenatal or postnatal care. While some wealthy women visited doctors or midwives during their pregnancies in the hope of producing a healthy baby and mother, the discourse of reproductive inequality so prevalent in modernist narratives had already taken hold. In the nineteenth century, as in the twentieth, the divide between rich and poor was vast and unbreachable. Most women in Britain before the twentieth century received no outside medical assistance (including help from books or other print material) during the entire stretch of their pregnancy. And even if one was wealthy enough to secure such “help,” prenatal services and advice were usually limited to suggestions about diet (avoiding certain foods), getting enough rest and exercise (walking outside was encouraged throughout the pregnancy), and curtailing excitement, entertainment, and sexual intercourse (Oakley, *The Captured Womb* 16-17). The

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18 For country versus city and modes of individual experience therein, see Raymond Williams, who suggests that “the contrast of country and city is one of the major forms in which we become conscious of a central part of our experience and of the crises of our society” (291). Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.
female body was seen as inextricably linked to the fetus she carried, thus a woman could do great harm to her unborn child if she was not careful to guard her negative influences.

Aside from the lack of established or nationalized medical care, it would have been difficult to ascertain whether a Victorian woman was even pregnant in the first place, as there was no scientific method of testing for a positive pregnancy until 1928. While a pelvic exam in the 1830s was discovered to signify pregnancy due to the “violet color” of the “vaginal skin and cervix,” this invasive and insulting procedure was rarely performed (Jalland 140). The most common means of deducing if a woman was pregnant or not, then, was simply waiting until the nine months were up—although women were of course smart enough to suspect a pregnancy if they were late for their menstrual cycle (Oakley, *The Captured Womb* 17; Jalland 140). The woman’s body was shrouded in mystery, not only due to strict social mores of respectability and privacy but also due to a prevailing cultural narrative placing bodily authority solely with the woman. Doctors or midwives often began their examination of a potentially pregnant woman with the query, “Do you feel pregnant?” (Oakley, *The Captured Womb* 19) A woman was firmly established as the authority on her own body and its bodily experiences; therefore, she was the only one who could reliably provide concrete proof of her pregnancy through subjective testimony, describing to those outside her body when events such as the quickening took place.

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19 The urine test for pregnancy was created by Aschheim and Zondek in 1928 (thus its name, the “A-Z test”), who found urine was “highly oestrogenic” (Oakley, *The Captured Womb* 96). Oakley describes in detail the history of attempts to configure pregnancy tests, mainly based on testing the mother’s urine. One of the first tests, described by Aristotle, was straining the urine through a cloth. If living organisms remained behind, then the woman was deemed pregnant (19). Claire Hanson claims that the A-Z test was the beginning of the “‘technologisation’ of pregnancy” (*Cultural History* 136).


21 This is not to suggest the word of women was accepted wholesale, or that men and the discourses of science and objectivity did not consistently challenge female testimonies. Worldwide, men of science were consistently trying to unveil the secrets of the womb, from Leonardo da Vinci’s anatomical drawings in the early sixteenth century to J. Marion Sim’s horrific experiments on the vaginas and wombs of slave women in 1840s America. As Oakley so aptly puts it, even in the mid-twentieth century one could listen to the fetal heartbeat, use an
Technological forays into and under the woman’s skin did not begin to occur until the X-ray was mistakenly invented in 1895, and even then, such procedures were not routinely employed to peer inside the body until the 1910s (Oakley, *The Captured Womb* 27, 98).\(^{22}\) The X-ray’s sister technology, the ultrasound, was invented in 1916 to spy on submarines during the Great War, and was first used on fetuses in 1957 (Wertz and Wertz 246), becoming a routine part of prenatal care in the 1980s (Epstein 193).\(^{23}\)

Due to the embodied mystery of pregnancy, a culture valuing female modesty almost above all else, and the extreme subjectivity of the pregnant experience, it is extraordinarily difficult if not impossible to ascertain what the average Victorian British woman felt about being pregnant, the advice she received, the cultural messages she fielded, her changing role in the family as she transitioned into motherhood, and her individual experience of pregnancy and

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22 Perhaps the first non-technological foray under a woman’s skin to spy on the unborn occurred with da Vinci’s aforementioned drawings of anatomy in the sixteenth century. In the eighteenth century, with the heightened access to corpses for medical dissection, William Hunter used da Vinci’s drawings as a basis for his book-length work on the fetus in utero, *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus*, published in 1774. Hanson argues this text was groundbreaking in its explanation of the placenta and the development of the fetus (*Cultural History* 14). For more on Hunter and his text, see Alice Adams’ *Reproducing the Womb*, especially pgs. 128-137. Adams explains how Hunter progressively cuts away the body of the mother until even the uterus is removed, “leaving the body an empty shell: the woman has been cored” (132). In this way, “the essential nucleus of the woman” is shown to be “no longer her womb but the fetus itself” (132). Even modern technology, Adams argues, copies this essential move that erases the body of the mother “when the figure of the living fetus arrives in the foreground” (137). For a somewhat different reading of Hunter and his drawings, see Andrea Henderson, who argues that the violence embodied by the mother’s sawed-off, “ham-hock-like” legs represent “an effort to contain female power, the power of mysterious, even wild, flesh” (109). Henderson, Andrea. “Doll-Machines and Butcher Shop Meat: Models of Childbirth in the Early Stages of Industrial Capitalism.” *Genders* 12 (Winter 1991): 100-119. For more information on the history of the X-ray and other key medical developments like the thermometer, see pgs. 118-121 in Maude, Ulrika. “Modernist Bodies: Coming to Our Senses.” *The Body and the Arts*, Eds. Corinne Saunders, Ulrika Maude and Jane Macnaughton. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 116-130. For a detailed history of the X-ray and its relationship to the popular “invisible realities” of the modernist era (including radioactivity, electrons, and Bergsonian time and matter), see Henderson, Linda Dalrymple. “Modernism and Science.” *Modernism, Vol. I*, Eds. Astradur Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2007. 383-404.

23 For a detailed explanation of the history of the ultrasound, see chapter seven, “Getting to Know the Fetus,” in Ann Oakley’s seminal text, *The Captured Womb*. 
childbirth. Here I echo comments by Jane Lewis, who asserts that sexuality and reproduction are “the most difficult aspect of personal life to research historically” due to social taboo about the subject (“Introduction” 15). Studying the few diaries and sources available, Lewis notes, “What is striking is [how even] exceptional women had difficulty both in articulating their ideas within a male framework of beliefs […] and in coming to terms with their ambivalent attitudes towards marriage and sexual freedom” (16). To further complicate research, unearthing these unpublished writings by women is a time-consuming and costly endeavor for most scholars.

Rather than leave behind detailed accounts of their misery—or ecstasy, as the case may be—most Victorians simply suffered in silence throughout their pregnancies, as gestation and parturition was construed as a routine bodily process requiring no specialized intervention. As Pat Jalland relates, “When [women] did suffer from severe pain or a fatal disease, most of them did so stoically” (134). Further, childbirth was seen as Eve’s particular curse, a painful journey women had to overcome in order to prove their mettle and worth as women and mothers. A woman who did not experience the sufferings of childbirth never fully attained womanhood and

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25 Pat Jalland disagrees with this argument, maintaining instead, “It is wrong to assume that all women are ‘hidden from history’ and that women’s history is necessarily the story of the inarticulate. Women of the upper-middle and upper classes sometimes left substantial personal records, which have been largely neglected” (1). It is not due to the difficulty in locating and analyzing these “records,” in Jalland’s view, but neglect on the part of the historian and researcher that such personal writings are still shrouded in mystery.

26 With the use of the word “ecstasy,” I have in mind Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi’s “Preface” to Mother with Child: Transformations Through Childbirth. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994. Rabuzzi describes the “natural” childbirth of her first child: “As my baby crowned, I felt myself expand infinitely outward. This did not exactly hurt; it was on ‘the other side’ of pain, where pain is no longer an appropriate word. Possibly ecstasy will do” (vii; emphasis in original).

27 By referring to “Eve’s curse,” the reader no doubt realizes I am referencing Genesis, where God curses Adam and Eve after they eat the fruit of the forbidden “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” saying to the woman: “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Genesis 3:16. The Student Bible. New International Version. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Pub., 1973.
remained “incomplete” to a certain extent (Judith Lewis 76). This mindset of women earning their womanhood through successful childbirth extended well into the twentieth century: in 1915, one woman in *Maternity: Letters from Working-Women* explained, “At that time it was much more usual to trust to Providence, and if a woman died it only proved her weakness and unfitness for motherhood” (39).

A further reason why many Victorian women suffered in silence throughout their pregnancies was because according to manuals of their day, there was no scaffolding for considering a pregnancy normal or abnormal (Oakley, *The Captured Womb* 15). These terms simply did not exist, as pregnancy was understood to be an unquestioned, ordinary aspect of a woman’s life; it was troublesome, perhaps, but not dangerous (14). In a list of gestational symptoms from an 1834 pregnancy manual, all symptoms fall under the umbrella of normalcy and are treated as being on par with one another, from bleeding to headaches, from toothaches to constipation to lightheadedness, from “[p]alpitations of the heart” to “[d]ischarge from the passage” (Fox 15).

Perhaps this veneer of normalcy is one reason why many women were loathe to seek outside help or medical advice even when their pregnancies were painful or torturous. Not only did these women lack any standardized method of ascertaining whether their pregnancies were healthy or disastrously wrong, the reader will remember women often were forced to suspect


29 *Maternity: Letters from Working-Women. Collected by the Women’s Co-Operative Guild*. London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1915. *Maternity* is a compilation of lower- and working-class mother’s accounts of personal misery as they were subjected to countless pregnancies even as they were forced to continue to work to support their families. It is an invaluable resource.

they were pregnant until the time of childbirth, when their suspicions or fears were confirmed. Most women did not want to talk about their conditions—the overt sense of modesty precluded any honest discussion about any bodily condition, from sex to menstruation to pregnancy. Further, they lacked outlets in which to do so which were recorded for posterity. As Carol Dyhouse points out, even going to the bathroom in the Victorian era was a matter of extreme privacy—how much more pregnancy and childbirth! (“Mothers and Daughters” 35)  

Without official care or a standardized regime to follow, Victorian women relied on advice from their mothers and sisters to navigate their pregnancies and on a system of traditional beliefs and ancient wisdom to guide them. Such a system of thought was embodied: it existed in tandem with the culture of the pregnant woman, enmeshed in her social strata, her familial traditions, and her religion. It was organic, all around her, a web of being both engrained and so conventional as to not be questioned. Such traditions, for the most part, were quite sensible: they mandated the woman not drink too much wine, not go out of the house after dark, rest as much as possible, get at least one hour of exercise outside in the fresh air per day. Other traditions were more idiosyncratic, like advising the woman to be careful where she gazed or what she thought about lest the growing fetus become marked or monstrous by her thoughts. This notion of “maternal impressions” warned, for example, that a woman who saw a bear might birth an especially hairy child, or a woman who ate too many strawberries may mar

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32 Compare this body of knowledge and way of being with later “official” knowledge systems artificially mapped onto a woman’s place and position. Doctoral advice and birthing manuals were disembodied, alienating the woman from her body and her engrained role in society with a “one size fits all” method of information and advice-giving. Emily Martin describes these two models as the nineteenth century “intake-outgo system,” in which the body is interactive with its environment, always changing and therefore always in need of equilibrium and in danger; versus the shift in the twentieth century to a small business model, linked to the rise of science and medicine, “trying to spend, save, or balance its accounts” (36). The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction. Boston: Beacon P, 1987.
her child’s skin with fruit-shaped birthmarks. In this way, as Kiran Toor so aptly surmises, the fetus becomes the “text” upon which the mother’s mental impressions are inscribed (259). Novelists such as Olive Moore employed the idea of maternal impressions as a significant plot point. In her novel Spleen (1930), pregnant Ruth stubbornly brings her “conscious thought to bear on what had always been dismissed as a preordained and unalterable task” (129). With her womb thus relegated to her forehead (128), Ruth’s gestational-thought experiment culminates in a child born deformed in both body and mind. Similar to the advice for the woman to curtail her excitement, impressions theory placed a considerable amount of power with the gestating woman, but it was power in all the wrong ways: power for ill and not for good, a malicious influence unconsciously used by her body and not summoned by her mind.

Maternal impressions theory was credited until the mid- to late-1800s (Oakley, The Captured Womb 24), when the medical consensus among doctors and midwives grew opposed to such “beguiling” stories due to advances in fields of study such as embryology, the study of the growth of fetuses (Hanson, Cultural History 27). Yet even though impressions theory was

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33 For more on impressions theory, see Boucé, Paul-Gabriel. “Imagination, Pregnant Women, and Monsters, in Eighteenth-Century England and France.” Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment. Eds. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988. 86-100. While his study focuses on the eighteenth century, Boucé argues the theory of impressions was much more widespread than just England and France (88), and the “debate about the force of imagination in pregnant women was instrumental in creating, or strengthening, a nexus of stifling interdicts, imperatives and more or less pressing advice” (96). Also see Wilson, Philip K. “Eighteenth-Century ‘Monsters’ and Nineteenth-Century ‘Freaks’: Reading the Maternally Marked Child.” Literature and Medicine 21.1 (Spring 2002): 1-25. Wilson considers select “medical and popular discussion” of maternal imagination in Britain and U.S. from the early eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, and provides a good overview of “how discussion about the origin of ‘marked children’ … changed over time” (2). Finally, for a recent and positive take on impressions theory, see Shainberg, Catherine. DreamBirth: Transforming the Journey of Childbirth Through Imagery. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2014. Shainberg encourages women to dream and imagine successful pregnancies and birth, for such mental exercises “break up entrenched patterns of fear and old belief systems, restore the natural flow of movement in body and mind, boost the immune system, and facilitate an optimum use of natural capabilities” (xii).


35 Hanson further explains how embryology itself was linked to the rising use of the microscope, which was created in the seventeenth century (Cultural History 46). Susan Squier relates how the precepts of embryology
disproved by the modernist era, ripples continue to permeate the literary imagination of modernist writers. Writers as diverse as Virginia Woolf, Olive Moore (as explored above), Jean Rhys, and James Joyce all mention some form of impressions theory in their work. Many female writers additionally grapple with the loss of a pre-twentieth century model of pregnancy and childbirth, a model often quite harmful to the pregnant woman because it mandated her isolation, but a traditional model nonetheless. The modernist period is obsessed with the right tradition, perhaps most famously illustrated in T.S. Eliot’s seminal “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in which Eliot emphasizes the need for writers to maintain a “historical sense,” or a “perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence” (2375). Yet this sense of an adherence to tradition was also highly constructed, for as Anne Fernald explains, “what the modernists shared was a consciousness of the past as a commodity that they could manipulate, construct, use, or abandon” (169). Just as modernist writers sought to “make it new” while retaining key elements of tradition, then, so too did modernist writers gesture back towards both recent and ancient history when representing gestation and parturition. Behind the pregnant body in the modernist novel stands the shadow of her Victorian sister, a whisper of pre-twentieth century conceptions of corporeality.

And no birthing history is recalled quite so often in modernist literature as that of the lost sisterhood of birth. Significant cultural changes in this area had already taken place by the time

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the nineteenth century was in full swing, so we must go further back in time to explain this fundamental shift. Prior to the eighteenth century, birth was notably a realm belonging to women (Sterk et al. 10, 12), a time for women in the community to come together, rally around the birthing woman, celebrate the impending new life, and offer their support. Feasts were often prepared days in advance, and women congregated and conversed while the birthing woman labored in the inner chamber. Most homes were furnished with this specific inner birthing chamber or “borning room,” shrouded like a womb (or a tomb) and located close to the warming central chimney (Sterk 12; Wertz and Wertz 13).

The familiar image of a woman giving birth in bed is itself subjected to a swirl of competing narratives. Some historians claim women, loathe to destroy their bed and linens with the carnage of birth, often birthed on the ground, on a pile of straw, or a birthing stool (a chair with a hole through which the baby could drop), with their skirts long to protect their modesty (Shorter 57; Wertz and Wertz 13). Jacques Gélis argues the shift from the stool or floor to the bed occurred in the eighteenth century with the transition from female to “male-midwives,” the latter being impatient and requiring easy access to the vagina so they could employ their machinery to hurry the birth along (121). Randi Epstein concurs, stating simply, “Doctors did not like stools. They preferred the patient lying in bed where they could use their tools with ease” (18). Judith Lewis, on the other hand, maintains laboring women were encouraged to walk by their male accoucheurs rather than climb right into bed (174), but it is crucial to note her study focuses on aristocratic births.

What is universally agreed upon by critics is that female midwives were the helpers of choice in childbirth until approximately 1750, according to Richard W. Wertz and Dorothy C.

Wertz (6). The subsequent decline of the midwife and the loss of a “sisterhood of birth” as the male obstetrician entered the scene is a well-researched aspect of women’s studies (although, like other areas, it is not without controversy). But during her heyday, the midwife was an ingrained part of the community who spoke the mother’s language, knew the mother’s family, understood rudimentary obstetrics and cultural prayers and rituals, could live with the family while she was needed, and often saw her assistance as a religious calling (Ehrenreich and English, *Good* 84). Interestingly, Hilary Marland and Anne Marie Rafferty maintain it is partially due to this jack-of-all-trades reputation that the midwife was eventually phased out by the more specialized male-midwife or obstetrician, because the midwife’s specific role ultimately became unclear (9).


out the very word “midwife” means “with-woman,” a peer and a helper, while “obstetrician” means “to stand before,” as a removed counselor and authority figure (234). Midwives often employed massage, essential oils, and natural herbal remedies to relax the woman, ease her pain, and speed the birth (Epstein 18; Kitzinger 211). There was also a vast difference in midwives according to region, as some were rigorously trained and subscribed to contemporary recommendations on sanitation and medication while others were not officially trained, and were seen by the urban middle-class as a one-way ticket to death and catastrophe for the poor women who could afford only their services. Among trained midwives, again, the narratives veer into two camps. Irvine Loudon claims “in Britain between 1850 and 1950 the midwife was the safer birth attendant for normal deliveries” (187), while Jane Lewis and Edward Shorter argue home deliveries seemed to be as safe as hospital deliveries by the 1920s and 1930s, and it is “impossible” to decide which was safer (Lewis, Politics 121; Shorter 130).

The births occurring in modernist literature display a wide range of experiences, reflecting the mounting tension between tradition and innovation, region (symbolized by the midwife) and nation (symbolized by the doctor), “nature” and technology. The location and experience of childbirth in these texts is foremost linked to class and race. We shall see Jean Rhys’s heroines grapple with midwife-assisted childbirth in a birthing center in London, with disastrous results, and Olive Moore’s protagonist give birth at home, surrounded by the best help money can buy (again, the results are questionable at best). Mina Purefoy, in James Joyce’s

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43 Two notable benchmarks in the national professionalization and training of midwives are the founding of the Midwives Institute in 1881, which established a protean worker’s union for midwives (Hannam 81-83), and the Midwife Act of 1902, the first government measure of control over midwives, officially placing them under the management of doctors (Mottram 134; Pitt 218). Both measures were passed to monitor the legions of midwives to ensure their adequate skill and training in an effort to stem the rising rate of maternal deaths in childbirth.
*Ulysses*, labors interminably in the hospital in Dublin, assisted by both midwives and a doctor. No matter the location of childbirth in modernist literature or the assistance given therein, the repercussions of birth for both the mother and child are always complex, far-reaching, and above all, ambivalent.

Historically, even if most labors ended safely, childbirth did sometimes go wrong. Before 1901, when Britain’s first hospital (Edinburgh’s Royal Maternity Hospital) had an established maternity bed, options for birthing women in trouble were severely limited (Hanson, *Cultural History* 93). From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, midwives could call for a doctor in case of emergencies, and they did so with increasing regularity, so much so that “male-midwives” were originally used only in extreme cases. Midwives would try everything to deliver the woman, from tugging on anything in their reach to using herbs and drugs, from “versioning” (turning the baby in the womb) to pressing hard on the abdomen (Shorter 78-81). But if all other measures failed, midwives and doctors alike were trained in the gruesome art of embryotomy, removing the fetus piece by piece, collapsing its skull, or otherwise killing the infant to remove it from the mother’s body (86). Unfortunately, such emergency measures often killed the mother as well due to infection, or sepsis, and even if the labor and delivery itself was uncomplicated, there was the constant dread of hemorrhaging, convulsions, and “childbed” or puerperal fever—an infection from unsanitary conditions often appearing the third day after birth and culminating in the mother’s rapid and horrific death (91, 104).

Conditions after birth varied widely by class and by region. Before the nineteenth century, women were often subjected to a prolonged rest period of two weeks during which they were prevented from leaving their bed or sometimes even from sitting up (Jalland 152). The

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44 For an excellent introduction to puerperal fever and the quest to find a cure, see chapter four, “Dying to Give Birth: Maternal Mortality into the Twentieth Century” in Randi Epstein’s *Get Me Out*.
traditional confinement period was about one month, during which upper-class women would be
carried prone from room to room to get fresh air, and social callers simply left their cards and did not see the new mother (156-7). Middle-class women were similarly confined and were usually assisted by a “handywoman” who could deliver the baby and stay to look after the household (Jane Lewis, Politics 20). Of course, this extended resting period did not pertain to working-class women, who were often forced to get back on their feet only hours after giving birth due to the demands of running the household and making a living, and who therefore experienced much less division between maternity and non-maternity time (Jane Lewis, “Introduction” 3). This class-based split in parturitive experience continued into the twentieth century: as one writer in Maternity puts it (writing around 1915), “Before three weeks I had to go out working, washing, and cleaning, and so lost my milk and began with the bottle. Twice I worked to within two or three days of my confinement. I was a particularly strong woman when I married. There is not much strength left” (111).

2. Modernism and the Competing Discourses of Pregnancy

Many of these pre-twentieth-century traditions and practices surrounding pregnancy and childbirth were radically reconfigured with the advent of the twentieth century, marking an epoch that, as Susan Squier argues, is a foundational era for contemporary British attitudes about reproduction and the female body (Babies 10).45 New attitudes about the body, the dismantling

45 Note that while I focus on the twentieth century when many of the movements and discourses surrounding reproduction were at their peak, their roots lie in late-Victorian discussions surrounding gender, sexuality, women’s rights, and marriage. As previously mentioned, one example of such discussions is the Men and Women’s Club, an elite gathering of scientific men and women, “freethinkers” who met to discuss social and cultural issues of the time. While the aim of the group was to encourage the free sharing of ideas between the sexes, thereby coming to some common ground, the men in the group rapidly began to display overt anti-feminist agendas, causing most female members to quit (Bland, Beast 7, 41). The group ran from 1885-1889, and while short-lived, it was an important first attempt at gathering both men and women together in some modicum of social equality, if only in name. For more on this club, see chapter one, “The Men and Women’s Club,” in Lucy Bland’s Banishing the Beast; and Brandon, Ruth. The New Women and the Old Men: Love, Sex, and the Woman Question. New York and
of the old Victorian housebound culture, the rise of the respected (male) doctor, and the mass circulation of new ideas of women’s place in tandem with her bid for new freedoms in first wave feminism all conspired to create an entirely new culture of pregnancy predicated on nationalized institutions of maternity care and new synchronous systems of communication.

Communication was an integral aspect of the rise of a culture of pregnancy because, for the first time in history, ideas and information were rapidly circulated throughout the British empire and, indeed, the world. The trans-Atlantic telegraph could transmit “120 words per minute” in the early years of the century—up from only eight words per minute in 1866, when it was first laid (“Transatlantic telegraph cable”)—and the new trans-Pacific cable was laid in 1902 (Begam and Moses 2).\(^{46}\) The rapid exchange of information afforded by such new technologies led to the shrinking of the globe, and was a critical aspect of the burgeoning culture of pregnancy, as this culture of pregnancy was rooted in the hegemonic and ideological construction of reproduction that operated at the national, versus local, level. National and international forms of communication, then, were integral to the dissemination of new ideas surrounding pregnancy and, I argue, helped form the historical precursor to the contemporary media-frenzy around pregnant bodies which exists in the twenty-first century.

New forms of communication were not the only critical changes at the turn of the century that underpinned the culture of pregnancy. New “scientific” fields such as sexology—an exploration of, among other things, women’s sexual pleasure, the option of birth control, and homosexuality (Squier, Babies 68)—eugenics (a theory of proper versus improper breeding),

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Darwinism, and psychoanalysis combined to create a fresh cultural atmosphere that questioned traditional conceptions of the body, the mind, femininity, masculinity, and the role of sex and reproduction. As Susan Squier claims, modernism is therefore a pivotal era in both the study of science and the study of reproduction, as both are similarly “forged … through the devaluation of the feminine” (Babies 116). This dissertation takes Squier’s premise one step further, arguing that the concerns of reproduction, both old forms and new, were so prevalent in the dominant cultural narratives of Britain and its writers that many novels began to “write” the pregnant female form. Specifically, experimental modernist form was invested in the birth of the new while it reproduced the birthing process in its shifts and permutations, its rending of borders and boundaries, its tearings and transgressions. While experimental modernism displays its relationship to the culture of pregnancy most overtly, I argue that the majority of modernist texts were in some way affected by the dominant cultural preoccupation over reproduction occurring during the modernist era.

New models of the body, especially the reproducing body, were additionally highlighted in the modernist era. These models were not predicated on pre-twentieth century ideas of bodily harmony between a fetus and a mother, or on a notion of the mystery of the female form together with a woman’s bodily authority over pregnancy. The new models of gestation and parturition in the modernist era can be categorized into three main areas: reproduction itself is questioned, leading to sterility or other breakdowns in the normative model of reproduction between a parent and child (McLeod 17); reproduction is figured in light of machinery, and childbirth takes on a factory model as human bodies are moved quickly through hospitals on a conveyor belt; or, the female body is seen as a dysfunctional mechanical apparatus which requires assistance from
medicine and technology to function properly. All three of these models can be grouped under the umbrella categorization of pregnancy as an illness, the fetus as a parasite, and the entire reproductive experience as a life-threatening hardship (Hanson, *Cultural History* 9).

A further crucial aspect of pregnancy and birth in the modernist era is the appearance of competing discourses and narratives in mass media. With the onslaught of periodicals and magazines offering an outlet for the everyman to publish his or her views, the opinions surrounding reproduction necessarily grew thick and fast. Scores of writers sought to define the cultural ramifications of reproduction and the woman’s place and rights therein, thereby helping to control the inherent power of pregnancy at the cultural level. Book-length treatments of reproduction, while still crucial and influential, quickly became only one voice among a panoply of voices.

One example of such competing discourses is that of fear of childbirth, which predominately fall into one of two camps concerning maternal fears. Appearing in the early years

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48 Lucy Bland emphasizes that in the late 1880s, writers of both sexes were engaged in producing “of the moment” narratives surrounding women’s place, especially in the debates over marriage (*Beast* 154). What is crucially different about the twentieth century, however, is the public spaces it afforded for the discussion of specifically sex and sexuality in tandem with reproductive issues, and a new cultural acceptance of public displays of pregnancy in the rise of mass culture. Victorian-era conversations about marriage and male and female relations thus served to pave the way for these new twentieth-century discussions. The short-lived publication *Freewoman* (1911-1912) is one example of such a new space devoted to the discussion of sexuality, prompting one writer to proclaim its advent as a “phenomenal” new opportunity (267). For more on the rise of specifically female mass culture in modernist small magazines, see Elizabeth Majerus, “Determined and Bigoted Feminists: Women, Magazines, and Popular Modernism.” While Majerus focuses on American publications like *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker*, she importantly explores how “modernist-oriented glossy magazines presented modernism as a movement created by men and women” (622), concluding that “these magazines affirmed that modernity was to a great extent about women’s large-scale entrance into public life and culture” (623).
of the twentieth century, the first camp includes narratives emphasizing the fear inherent in giving birth, and arguing modern technology has significantly decreased this natural, inherent fear. The power here is of course awarded to men and their machines. The alternative narrative, strong in the 1930s-1950s and continuing in the present moment, argues that women never historically had such fear; instead, the dread of childbirth has been created and augmented by the camps wishing to conscribe birth into an unnatural dichotomy of safe (modern, hospitalized birth attended by doctors) vs. unsafe (home births attended by midwives). These voices champion the power of the “natural” reproducing body, and argue that most women, surrounded by their female helpers, weathered the storm of birth just fine without the masculine, medicalized machine of twentieth-century hospitalized birth.

An example of the first body of narratives appears in Amy Barnard’s article in a 1917 edition of The Quiver (a British periodical that was published 1861-1926). Writing around the first World War when plunging birth rates were alarming the country, Barnard argues that the modern woman, sensitive to pain as she is, must have access to the technology that transmutes the fear and pain of childbirth into nothing but a “dream,” because “empty cradles mean an empty country” (438). An example of the alternative body of narratives, those arguing against technology, appears in an article by Dr. Meyrick Booth in 1931. He claims maternity death rates continue to rise despite the advances of modern technology, and therefore British culture needs to revert back to a previous model of “organic” reproduction, trusting the woman and the workings of her body (81-2, 89).49

Among critics and historians, the consensus is no better. Pat Jalland claims the advent of twentieth-century medicine and technology helped to relieve a fearful and death-ridden

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experience for women, and women expressed general fears to one another in their letters, as most women knew someone who had experienced a difficult birth (159). Some women even wrote wills before giving birth (159). Jalland describes the history of childbirth as “a heritage of women’s anxiety, suffering, and sometimes their death” that is, even in the present moment, seared into the collective “social memory,” and argues this fear did not markedly decrease until the Edwardian period, when three great innovations in reducing maternal death became widespread: cesarean-sections, inducements, and blood transfusions (185). Edward Shorter agrees, claiming there is “no doubt” women used to be afraid to give birth before the technological advances of the twentieth century (69). Adrian Wilson, on the other hand, challenges the notion that historically women were terrified to give birth (what she calls the “fear thesis”), arguing instead that the issue of fear is much more complex and multivalent. She explains readers must separate the fear of pain from the fear of death, and claims cheerful reports of birth by women in 1650-1750 outnumber fearful ones “by more than two to one” (138, 143).

Indeed, in the diaries and correspondence of Victorian and Edwardian women, few personal accounts of birth speak to fear outright. Perhaps due to the aforementioned stoicism women adopted when pregnant and a latent desire to retain a modicum of power and control over their experience, women instead spoke pragmatically of the travails of reproduction. While one letter-writer in Maternity (1915) reports that upon finding one is to be a new mother, the first thing one feels is “fear” (39), many more writers in Maternity speak to specific working-class

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ills, such as the “complete misery” of “nursing or expecting babies” for twenty years (19), or the lack of much-needed rest before and after labor which leads to a “broken-down motherhood, and a race of future parents who start in life very often with a constitution enfeebled…” (25).

Women’s fears were (and are) incredibly diverse and extremely dependent on race, class, and age; the overarching category of “fear of childbirth” is thus a specious and misleading one. There is fear, to be sure, but there is also dread, concern, and ambivalence multiplied by the fatigue and physical discomfort found in almost every pregnancy. Further, there are different categories of what women fear or dread: fear of work or fatigue, losing their figure or the rigors of motherhood, nursing or childbirth itself, death or the certainty of subsequent pregnancies.

Certainly, when one reads of “fear of childbirth,” the “fear” most likely refers to the physical pain of giving birth (which I will discuss shortly). Indeed, this fear comprised the dominant narrative of birth at the turn of the twentieth century, so much so that the decrease in population after WWI caused the British government to suspect the plunging birth rates were partially due to women fearing pain and death in childbirth. A 1937 government ad tried to reassure women: “The young married woman can be told with confidence that if she is in normal health and will take ordinary and sensible precautions […] the risk she will run in childbirth need be no matter of anxiety” (Circular 1622; qted in Jane Lewis, Politics 40). A popular early twentieth century magazine, Women’s Own, also sought to reassure women that the majority of births were safe; no less than nine different articles on the topic appeared in 1936 (40). Outright debates over whether the fear of childbirth was founded on actual pain frequently appeared in small magazines and publications as diverse as The Freewoman, Everybody’s Magazine, The Little Review, and The New Age.51

51 See Booth, “Woman and Maternity”; W.B.E. “Letter,” “Once More—Woman’s Sphere!” Everybody’s Magazine 24.3 (03-1911): 423-424; “Genesis, or the first book in the Bible (‘Subject to Authority’).” The Little
Fear-based narratives of pregnancy and childbirth were also rooted in the hugely popular idea of the “hysteric” woman in the Victorian era. Because a woman’s body was viewed as beyond the control of her mind, her “capriciousness and instability” only increasing with her menstruation cycle, womanhood itself was “on the borders of pathology” (Bland, Beast 64). The narrative of hysteria portrayed the woman as extremely child-like, and her hysterical symptoms as manifestations of exaggerated femininity: “[i]mitative, lacking willpower, acting on impulse and confusing fantasy and reality” (64). This narrative of hysteria was reinforced in the early years of the twentieth century as suffragettes (women agitating for political rights) were quickly recast by their political detractors as merely “hysterical” (64). As Laura Winkiel aptly surmises, the suffragette was classified paradoxically as both “a symbolic marker of order and stability and a real subject of disorder and change” (46). The modern, fearful woman clamoring for pain relief, frozen in her ability to reproduce without technological and masculine assistance, was closely related to her late Victorian and suffragette hysteric sisters, women who required the control and guidance of masculine assistance due to inherent hereditary and biological constraints.

This brings us to the second area of widely competing discourses intimately linked to childbirth: that of pain. The stories told about pain in childbirth, in sources as diverse as newspapers and magazines to novels and poems, to medical texts and “authoritative” self-help texts, are multiple enough that they deserve their own book-length study (and indeed, there are

\[\text{Review} \ 5.7 \ (10-1914): \ 56; \ \text{Allinson, Dr. “A Book for Married Women.” \ The Freewoman: A Weekly Feminist Review 1.5 (12-21-1911): 99; Tina, Beatrice. “Woman as State Creditor.” \ The New Age 3.9 (June 27, 1908): 169.}\]

\[52 \text{ For more on suffragettes as hysterical, see chapter four, “Representation,” in Lisa Tickner’s The Spectacle of Women, especially the section titled “The Hysterical Woman and the Shrieking Sisterhood” therein. Tickner explains the suffragette as hysteric carried much cultural weight because it was “spread across common parlance as well as its increasingly specialised articulation within the developing disciplines of medicine and psychiatry. In the light of it feminism became a species of sexual disorder” (194).}\]
several books exploring the historical account of pain and its management). What is worth mentioning here, however, is that public opinion is and always has been sharply divided about the topic of pain. Stories told over the course of the modernist period range from the pain of childbirth being dramatically overstated and something the woman can manage “naturally” to the belief that trying to assuage such pain will only cause more problems for the woman (the rocky road of “increased intervention”), or even significant harm to the fetus. Alternative narratives maintain that medicine and technology have provided this gift of pain relief and women are foolish not to avail themselves of its benefits. These pro-medicine narratives insist births are actually easier in a quiet, relaxed atmosphere where the woman has been able to rest instead of panting her way through excruciating contractions.

An example of such a debate appears in 1931 when Dr. Meyrick Booth promotes the popular idea of the native woman who is closer to the earth and therefore experiences a far less painful birth:

Amongst people of a primitive way of life, childbirth often takes place with surprisingly little difficulty or pain. It is not uncommon in Poland for a peasant woman to be delivered of her baby, and the next day resume her turnip-hoeing as if nothing had happened. A medical friend tells me he can remember the time when such cases were not unusual in Wales. (“Woman” 81)

This narrative of the pain-free native or “natural” woman has a long and complex history, as she often directly resurfaces throughout the modernist era in texts as diverse as Grantly Dick-Read’s

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54 The father of the “natural childbirth” movement is Grantly Dick-Read, who in the 1930 and 1940s swept Britain and subsequently America with his emphasis on unmedicated birth, jointly spiritual and physical and modeled on the lower-class or “primitive” person who experienced less pain and therefore had better births due to being closer to the earth (Hanson, *Cultural History* 140, 138). See Dick-Read’s foundational *Childbirth Without Fear*, first published in 1942. Dick-Read, Grantly. *Childbirth Without Fear*. London: Pollinger in Print, 2006.
promotions of “natural” childbirth in *Childbirth Without Fear* (1942) to Doris Lessing’s *A Proper Marriage* (1954), in which the pregnant Martha wishes she were like the native woman, kicking out a baby easily once a year (42). But in Booth’s approximation in 1931, as in so many other narratives swirling around the female body, the modern woman had appropriated so many false airs and detrimental social graces that she had completely removed herself from nature, thus increasing the pain of her childbirth. Much like Eve, this curse of painful childbirth was predominately her own doing. Because the woman was “nearer to nature than man,” to educate her and thus remove her from her humble origins was to bring disastrous cultural results. As Booth concludes, “It is the woman divorced from nature, the city-dweller and the highly-strung brain-worker, who suffers the most” (“Woman” 83).

Despite the split opinions over whether pain existed or not, women at the turn of the twentieth century certainly seemed to think it did, and agitated for appropriate and accessible methods of pain relief. Such pain-relief options were for the most part limited to chloroform, laughing gas, or “twilight sleep”—techniques hazardous at best, but offering a modicum of relief from what Beatrice Tina termed the “waves of flame” experienced in labor (“Woman as State Creditor” 169), even if this relief was only achieved through memory loss. Newspapers and magazines in the early twentieth century began to publish a slew of articles on twilight sleep, which had been introduced in the first few years of the century and was rapidly growing in popularity as women began to demand birth on their own terms—a proto-feminist move, according to Judith Leavitt (137). The always-controversial procedure was at first a huge hit

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55 Lessing, Doris. *A Proper Marriage*. New York: New American Library, 1970. My thanks to Laura Winkiel for pointing out that such a picture of the native woman is intimately tied up in racist narratives about certain people being more “fit” to work. I engage with the broader theme of the primitive woman and racially-inflicted birth more broadly in chapter three, considering how texts by Jean Rhys and Olive Moore grapple with conflicting models of birth that hegemonic British culture ascribes to them based on their racial status.
because the dominant national narrative in England was if women did not dread the pain of childbirth so much, they would be more likely to sign up for the experience, therefore increasing Britain’s birth rate in a time when new bodies for the Empire’s battles were sorely needed. As Amy Barnard argues in her 1917 article, “The Truth About ‘Twilight Sleep’: An Unbiased Investigation,” the “dream” of a painless birth is an “urgent” matter in light of the “decreasing birthrate and the high rate of infant mortality” (437). She claims that female reticence to sign up for the pain of childbirth in addition to the loss of lives in the war will mean the “extinction of the race” (437).

Wertz and Wertz argue the “twilight sleep” method ensured the woman experienced every bit of the pain of unmedicated childbirth, she just forgot this pain due to the amnesiac drug scopolamine (150). Similarly, Epstein claims twilight sleep “induced analgesia and amnesia, not anesthesia. The distinction is crucial. Anesthesia provides complete pain relief and unconsciousness. Analgesia offers partial pain relief. The added amnesia meant that women felt pain but forgot about it…” (79). The story of twilight birth was horrific: the woman was strapped in a padded, crib-like contraption to prevent injury as she thrashed about, and then was drugged to erase the experience from memory (87). While it is indeed questionable to sell women the idea of a pain-free birth and then simply take away their memory of the excruciating experience, such forgetting is an integral part of almost every birth, unmedicated or not. Women everywhere will claim the memory of the birth experience becomes hazy once the baby is placed in their arms—the body’s way of incorporating scopolamine-like effects into the birthing experience, and insuring the birth of future generations.

In 1915, a telling exchange over the merits of “twilight sleep” takes place in *Athenaeum*. In the April 24th edition, an anonymous male reviews a persuasive and influential book, *Painless
Childbirth in Twilight Sleep by Hannah Rion, a major proponent of the pain relief method whose many publications advocating its use were extremely influential among women (Leavitt 137). The reviewer argues doctors and professionals are opposed to the use of drugs in childbirth, and claims Rion is “slenderly equipped” to discuss the history of twilight sleep because she only has experience with her herd of goats (“Review of Painless Childbirth” 385). Rion soon writes back, publishing her letter in the May 8th edition of the publication. She claims that rather than having no experience, she instead studied the topic for “nine months,” and the drugs she advocates are not deadly when administered properly (“Painless” 431). She insists the reviewer has not engaged in “fair play,” as he has written only one side of the story (431). The reviewer, getting in the last word, merely responds: “I took the trouble before I wrote the review to consult friends who are obstetric physicians” (“Reviewer” 451). This small battle in the pages of Athenaeum is just one example of the much larger ideological struggle over reproduction waging in the early years of the century, and, as I shall argue in the next section, is a significant marker of the rise of a culture of pregnancy. It is also an indicator that men continued to have the most control over narratives explaining the cultural ramifications of childbirth practices, as women were allowed to share their opinions but these opinions were often derided by male “experts” as uneducated and therefore worthless.

In fiction the debates continued, with writers presenting their characters in diverse positions. Ruth, Olive Moore’s protagonist in Spleen (1930), fears not the pain of childbirth but the social construction and constriction of both her body and her role in childbirth and


mothering; her fear is nothing but revulsion (124, 129). Ruth goes on to critique “Civilisation” and its removal of the body from nature, claiming that birthing indoors, constricted by four walls, brings nothing but “fear and shame” (150). Other characters, such as Sasha Jensen in Jean Rhys’ Good Morning, Midnight (1939), are so fearful of society at large that the fear of specifically childbirth does not occur to them. And in Enid Bagnold’s The Squire (1938), the main female character is created as a vehicle to demonstrate the kind of “natural” birth available to all upper-class white women, a birth without fear and without pain. Her strong body is “thickened now, vigorous, leonine” (16), and she drifts towards birth enchanted “like a bride” (45). 59

These instances of the war of words over the meaning of the pregnant body and its proper handling during the British modernist period combine to create a burgeoning culture of “mainstream” pregnancy—an ideology dictating what reproduction entails, how it should be enacted, and how it fits into the larger landscape of society—largely assisted by new avenues of communication provided by mass media. And in the early years of the modernist period, the culture of pregnancy looked something like this: an average, middle-class, white pregnant woman could expect to find snippets of pregnancy-related issues in mass media (like The Times), but no in-depth or subjective resource fully exploring pregnancy from a woman’s point of view. She was most likely married, as only 5% of births were illegitimate in the early twentieth century (Brookes 151). 60 Her main source of information about gestation and parturition was the other women in her life, especially her mother or an older sister, but lacking this, she may have picked up a book similar to The Wife’s Handbook: how a Woman Should Order Herself During Pregnancy, in the Lying-in Room, and After Delivery: With Hints on the Management of the

Baby, and on Other Matters of Importance, Necessary to be Known by Married Women, first published by H. Arthur Allbutt in 1886. This book was affordable (costing only 6d) and was a bestseller, running 35 editions in only 12 years, remaining popular well into the 1920s (Busby 97). In the book, Allbutt cautions that all women may be good wives, but some may not be physically fit to become mothers, and he reminds the female parturient reader that when in active labor, she should not become “fluttered” when the doctor appears, and must not rebuff his request to perform an “examination,” as this is “necessary” (3, 15).

The average woman most likely kept her pregnancy a secret as long as possible out of a prevailing sense of modesty, and did not talk about it outside of her immediate circle of close family and friends. Prenatal care most likely did not exist for her, as it didn’t take off as a panacea for all ills of pregnancy until the 1920s and 30s (Oakley, The Captured Womb 131). She was most likely concerned about the declining birth rate, the pain of childbirth, and the high infant and maternal mortality rates. She would have been blamed repeatedly for any aberration in her pregnancy, as the rhetoric of the time focused on the ignorance of the mother and the great need to help her through proper education (Oakley, The Captured Womb 38). But as a middle-

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62 Allbutt, H. Arthur. The Wife’s Handbook. London: W.J. Ramsey, 1886. The book also includes sections on how to recognize the signs of pregnancy, maintaining one’s health during pregnancy, the stages of labor, what to do with the baby once it arrives, “complaints” of pregnancy, and preventing subsequent pregnancies through the use of contraception. Throughout, Allbutt insists on strict protocol during labor, maintaining the woman “must refrain from crying out,” and attempts to comfort the reader with the reassurance that “[a] few minutes’ sleep between the pains often gives renewed strength” (17). As previously mentioned, Allbutt was very brave in writing about contraception—this decision unfortunately resulted in his name being struck off the Medical Register in 1888 (Busby 96). Lucy Bland notes Allbutt was also one of the first to explicitly warn women about the dangers of venereal disease, and after he was removed from the Register, sales of his book skyrocketed: by 1907, it had sold 390,000 copies (Beast 236, 195).

63 Numbers vary according to source, but, roughly, the birth rate fell from 36 per thousand in 1876 to 24 per thousand by WWI (Brookes 152). The infant mortality rate in 1900 was 154 per 1000 births (Oakley, The Captured Womb 37), and the maternal mortality rate was about 3000 women every year (62). Death in childbirth was the second leading cause of death among women at the time, second only to tuberculosis (Brookes 153).
class woman, she would have most likely been the one helping those lower than herself, as educational programs were mostly aimed at working-class women (a point I will discuss shortly).

For the birth itself, she probably hired a reputable nurse, birthed at home in bed, and was assisted by a doctor when the active labor began. She most likely did not receive any medicine to help alleviate her pain, although she may have been delivered by forceps or other tools as these were very popular at the turn of the century. The help she received after the birth varied greatly by income level and would have ranged from the nurse leaving immediately to the nurse staying anywhere from seven to thirty days after the birth—the aforementioned “handywoman” was well-known for staying quite long, and was a direct competitor with the midwife (Jane Lewis, *Politics* 20). Specific forms of post-natal care were not routine (35).

Legislation affecting the average gestating woman’s life was plentiful. The National Insurance Act of 1911, passed partially due to the agitation efforts of the Women’s Cooperative Guild, provided maternity benefits including a 30 shilling bonus paid directly to the mother (Hanson, *Cultural History* 99), while the Factory Act of 1891 ensured if she was a worker, she would not return to work until at least one month after giving birth (Brookes 154). Unfortunately, this one month period was without pay, which was why the paid maternity benefits recommended by the Women’s Cooperative Guild were so crucial. The Midwives’ Act

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64 The exact numbers to back up these claims vary by source. According to Ehrenreich and English, by 1900, 50% of babies delivered were to midwives but this was among the lower classes only (*For Her Own Good* 84). Jane Lewis claims hospital births remained at 0% from 1905-1909, and the home was the “usual place of delivery” through the 1930s (*Politics* 120, 135). Wertz and Wertz claim the major shift “from home to hospital, from suffering to painlessness” occurred after 1900 (128), and Shorter cites the 1920s-30s as the pivotal years for this home to hospital transition (159).

65 Jane Garrity’s *Step-Daughters of England* is a treasure trove of information on legislation and other aspects of daily life in the modernist period in Britain. For example, she points out that in the interwar period, women were strapped with the inability to work after dark; women 21 and older did not get the vote until 1928; and women were forced to give up employment after marriage (45). Garrity claims the legal reforms of the interwar period (including the right to divorce due to adultery and raising the age of consent from 12 to 16) furthered women’s rights but also reinforced motherhood as the only role available to women (56).
of 1902 guaranteed that the midwife who attended the average woman had received at least a
modicum of training. This “unmarried, professional, educated ‘new midwife,’ a near relative of
the ‘New Woman’” came to represent, after 1902, the complete opposite of the “Gamp-like
lower-class midwife” and her outdated methodology (Mottram 138). 66 And, finally, the
Maternity and Child Welfare Act in 1918 established committees to monitor health, properly pay
midwives, cover health visits, and provide “infant-welfare centres, day nurseries, and food
supplements” for the needy (Brookes 157). 67

3. Mass Culture of Pregnancy and the Transition From Private to Public Pregnancy

The prominent aspects of birth detailed in the previous two sections comprise a fair
introduction to the myriad complexities of the politics of British reproduction in the years 1900-
1950, but there are additionally two notable shifts in the realm of birth integral in changing the
control of birth from the feminine, private space of the home to the masculine, public space of
the hospital. This shift from private to public, feminine to masculine, has its roots in the Western
philosophical system’s mind/body split, and, like every other aspect of socially-constructed
behavior, is intimately linked to stories and discourses, power and control. The fictional
narratives I will analyze in subsequent chapters are all intimately tied up with such narratives of

66 Mottram, Joan. “State Control in Local Context: Public health and midwife-regulation in Manchester,
1900-1914.” Midwives, Society and Childbirth: Debates and controversies in the modern period. Eds. Hilary
Marland and Anne Marie Rafferty. London and New York: Routledge, 1997. 134-152. The “New Woman” is, in
Ruth Brandon’s definition, “but one manifestation of that passion for fresh thinking, that search for new ways of
approaching life, which swept the whole of the western world between 1880 and 1914” (3). See Brandon’s The New
Women and the Old Men for wonderful but often tragic biographies of some of these New Women, including the
formidable Olive Schreiner, Edith Ellis and Margaret Sanger. The book is a portrait of the search for the “New Man”
by the “New Woman,” a search often ending in misery for the woman (91).

67 For an excellent introduction to the national establishment of care for mothers, see Jane Lewis, The
Politics of Motherhood. For the “facts” of giving birth (everything from the median age of marriage to specific acts
of parliament passed), see Barbara Brookes, “Women and Reproduction, 1860-1939,” in Labour and Love:
Women’s Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940.
power, and are extremely aware of the hidden political agendas swirling around the issue of the private or public pregnant body. Yet it is important to remember that one of the main reasons such modernist authors were able to write so freely and openly about the female body is due to this very shift from private to public, a shift which had its roots in the seventeenth century. By the dawn of the twentieth century, the female form had largely made the leap from the home to the marketplace, from the bedroom to the arena, and from the diary to the novel, a leap that would be reconsidered throughout the fiction of the time.68

The shift from private to public, then, is integral to this dissertation because such a shift provides the fundamental backdrop to new discussions of proper or improper reproduction occurring in the modernist novel. Further, such a shift paves the way for the rise of a culture of

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68 By “female form” here, I mean the subjective and straightforward account of women’s bodily experience. Of course, women and their bodies have appeared throughout literature, but their bodies—and their subjective experiences of their bodily conditions—were always cloaked or curtailed due to prevailing cultural norms of modesty. For example, reproduction is at the fore of Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein* (1818), but it is masculine, scientific reproduction only, with the body of the female, and of her experience in gestation, occluded. Similarly, novels from Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) to Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) to George Moore’s *Esther Waters* (1894) all figure pregnancy as a life-changing experience for a woman, but the actual space of pregnancy and childbirth, including the mother’s experience, is shadowed by the larger social, political, and legal ramifications of reproduction. Only in the twentieth century do accounts of specifically *female bodily experience* begin to appear, linked to discontentment with sex and marriage that began to surface in the New Woman figure in the fiction of the 1890s. By the 1900s, the rumbling of dissatisfaction appears as facts, with feminists speaking out about sexual abuse, prostitutes, and sexual double-standards (Bland, Lucy. “Marriage Laid Bare: Middle-Class Women and Marital Sex 1880s-1914.” *Labour and Love*. Ed. Jane Lewis. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986. 123-146; p. 124). While Mary Marotte claims the inaugural text in this new “pregnant genre” is Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), I argue that the pregnant body therein is yet too protean and unsure. Marotte, Mary Ruth. *Captive Bodies: American Women Writers Redefine Pregnancy and Childbirth*. Toronto: Demeter P, 2008. Olive Moore’s *Spleen* (1930) and Enid Bagnold’s *The Squire* (1938) offer far more revealing portrayals of the pregnant female body and of the subjective experience of childbirth. For more on Victorian representations of reproduction, see Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*; Matus, Jill. *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity*. Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1995; Homans, Margaret. *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986; and Michie, Helena. *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women’s Bodies*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987. Michie explains how “the female body as it is represented in Victorian texts [is] a straw woman, a wispy, insubstantial outline that it is the task of feminism to flesh out” (127). Note that much Victorian-era criticism additionally focuses on the mother figure and on maternity versus the physical space of gestation and parturition. Notably, Tracy Lemaster offers a reading of *Jane Eyre* centering on Bronte’s “consistent exploitation of children” as indicative of Jane’s “fear[,] of pregnancy and motherhood, two roles she partially occupies as governess and infantilized woman” (n.p.). Lemaster, Tracy. “M/Othering the Children: Pregnancy and Motherhood as Obstacle to Self-Actualization in *Jane Eyre.*” *Genders Online Journal* 47 (2008).
pregnancy which I have been explaining in this chapter. But before I explain further, I must go back a little in history, for the two notable movements that assisted in cementing birth’s shift from private to public, as I said before, have their roots in much earlier centuries.

The machinery of childbirth, predicated by the forceps or “Chamberlen device,” is one of the most significant stories of power and control, private versus public, in the western history of birth. Conceived by the Chamberlen family in the late sixteenth century and a key to the family’s multi-generational wealth, the forceps were a closely-guarded secret for the next 200 years (Epstein 17). The male-midwife (Edward Smellie is perhaps the most famous example) would wear long robes like a woman with the tool enclosed about his body, and bring it out only at the time when it was needed, quickly concealing it again so the birthing woman would not become alarmed (23). As rumors of the success of the device spread, and as the use of similar tools grew, the discourse of scientific advances aiding the imperfect, ailing female body took root. The tide slowly shifted from women acting as the helpers of choice in the birthing chamber to men; as Adrienne Rich argues, midwives were hesitant to use such “tools of force,” even to stay at the fore of their profession (150).

Indeed, this argument of midwives succumbing to men and their tools is a common one, echoed in the writings of Wertz and Wertz, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, and Sheila Kitzinger, among others. Yet even in the face of a narrative this expansive, counter-narratives appear. For example, Randi Epstein claims the representation of the issue of forceps as a mere male-versus-female war is blatant over-simplification. Not only did men genuinely believe they were helping women and babies successfully navigate the treacherous waters of birth (and in

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many instances, they were) (34), Judith Lewis points out the birthing women themselves continuously chose men, who successfully marketed themselves based on the demands of their clientele (4). In this symbiotic relationship, then, both men and women won: men carved out a profession specializing in pregnancy and birth, and women had more varied forms of care as their demands as consumers were met in the medical marketplace.

The introduction of forceps is also linked to narratives of control as encoded in “official” forms of knowledge—those taught in textbooks and universities rather than handed down orally. As Jan Williams argues, the teaching of forceps in the eighteenth century instigated the “prophylactic treatment of childbirth, the ‘as if’ or ‘in case’ syndrome, the ability to view childbirth as ‘normal’ only in retrospect” (235). In this model, every pregnancy carried with it the ghost of what could go wrong, the worst-case scenario. Faced with such a horrific prospect of what could happen, the lowly female midwife would no longer suffice. Masculine forms of “expert” knowledge as taught and certified in the universities were the only recourse to the threat of unmanageability. Masculine control and masculine knowledge were therefore quickly linked: the more you know, the more you control; and the more you control, the more you know (236). This model of joint masculine authority and control over the unruly feminine body slowly gathers steam and is finally firmly ensconced in the national and cultural British imagery in the modernist period.

A second seismic innovation in birthing linked to issues of hegemonic power and control and the shift from private to public is the discovery and implementation of medicine, namely chloroform, which was the first in a series of groundbreaking discoveries to combat pain in childbirth. Chloroform was first administered in Britain in 1847, and importantly was conspicuously used by Queen Victoria for the birth of her son, Leopold, in 1853 (Jalland 147).
Despite this tacit endorsement from the royalty, however, the majority of women not only lacked access to such medicine, but they believed it was only to be used in dire circumstances as a last resort (147). This Victorian mindset of the acceptance of pain in childbirth rapidly changed in the twentieth century, however, as women began agitating for the right to choose a pain-free birth—or, indeed, the right to choose whether to give birth at all. In tandem with the larger Women’s Movement and the first wave of feminism, British women in large numbers began to demand fewer births (using birth control to plan families), and less-painful births. As previously discussed, twilight sleep briefly became popular in the early years of the century, quickly becoming a lightening rod for debates over the implications of subjecting even “normal” births to the interference of science and medicine.

The fundamental shift in popular thinking repositioning the gestating body in the realm of abnormality and of pathology occurred as tools and medicine became increasingly relied upon in the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, the realm of reproduction inexorably shifted from female-centered knowing positioned in the body to a masculine realm of commerce and technology learned in universities and then applied to the prone and often mute female form. There is also no denying that, in Britain, such a shift had its merits: infant and maternal death rates began to drop by the end of WWII (Hanson, *Cultural History* 131), and most women had access to much more information about their bodies due to the explosion of conversations about reproduction in print.

To argue, then, that women simply lost the control of childbirth and the power inherent therein over the years is misleading and over-simplistic. The shift from private to public pregnancy carried with it critical ramifications, it is true, and meant that in many ways, the birthing woman lost the ability to define her own experience and decide for herself, as she was
now awash in a panoply of critical and expert decisions and “truths” about her body. Yet, the upswing to this new public pregnancy is that women had much more free and easy access to information. For the first time, she did not have to rely solely on a network of intrafeminine knowledge about pregnancy and childbirth (a faulty network that was rapidly breaking down, as we shall see), but she could instead access books, magazine articles, and other print materials circulated as a direct result of the unveiling of the female form.  

The critical discourses about the birthing body spawned as a result of the cultural private to public shift can be sorted into one of two camps: the narrative figures birth as a healthy and natural aspect of a woman’s life that has been corrupted by the intrusion of technology, or the narrative describes birth as a truly dangerous event that has been significantly assisted by the various medical developments rendering its claws not so sharp. Edward Shorter, in *A History of Women’s Bodies*, belongs to the latter camp: he argues traditional birth was never considered natural by any society at any time, but was instead always a highly-mediated event including intercessions at every turn (48-9). Indeed, many critical analyses of birth seek to dismantle the false dichotomy of natural versus unnatural birth erected by proponents of “natural” birth. Authors such as Christina Mazzoni explain there never was a golden age of birth, where women simply squatted in a field and then continued untroubled about their day, and, in fact, women used to die “frequently” in childbirth (155). Susan Squier even goes so far as to assert that new

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70 This is not to argue all books on sex were freely disseminated to the British public. Many texts were banned due to their questionable and controversial subject matter. The writings of sexologists in particular were either banned outright or were very difficult to obtain; their full impact was therefore not felt until the 1920s and 30s (Bland, *Beast* 257). Works of fiction often suffered this same fate: James Joyce’s *Ulysses* famously faced a number of censorship trials, both in Britain and in the U.S., where the Society for the Prevention of Vice attacked the novel in the 1920s (Potter 153-4). Radclyffe Hall’s lesbian text, *The Well of Loneliness*, was also put on obscenity trial in 1928 (Marcus, Laura. “Woolf’s Feminism and Feminism’s Woolf.” *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Eds. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. 209-244. Pg. 217). As Jill Benton argues, texts hit hardest by the censors were those containing “class insurrection, or of liberated female sexuality, or of the two mixing, as in […] *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*” (92). Benton, Jill. *Naomi Mitchison: A Biography*. London: Pandora, 1990.
ideologies of birth—ideologies arguing all medicalization is an affront to the power inherent in birth—do a greater disservice to women than the very machines such discourses seek to liberate female bodies from.

I have detailed two fundamental movements—tools and medicine—which scaffold early twentieth-century British conceptions of gestation and parturition. Both tools and medicine, or masculine concepts of power and control, were crucial to the largest shift of all: the shift in the private versus public model of the reproducing body. The reader will recall, prior to the twentieth century, the reproducing female form operated on an axis of extreme privacy and mystery. Only the pregnant woman could speak of and know of her pregnancy, the birth was witnessed by only a few key people, and she did not resume interactions with larger society until weeks after the birth. This narrative of the mystery encoded in the female flesh is a prevailing one, and is intimately connected to conceptions of the female as pure and the female body as unknowable, and because unknowable, ultimately deviant and unruly. Even menstruation inspires secrecy.

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71 The specter of female purity and chastity represented a substantial aspect of the Women’s Movement and of writing about women during the modernist era, one with a long and complex history I cannot fully detail here. Virginia Woolf mocks the contrived notion of female purity in her short story, “A Society” (1920), in which women form a society to investigate sexual inequality. One woman, Poll, argues “chastity is nothing but ignorance – a most discreditable state of mind. We should admit only the unchaste to our society” (130). Woolf, Virginia. “A Society.” The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf. Second ed. Ed. Susan Dick. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1989. As Jane Garrity points out, “A Society” “denounces female virtue as a ‘fictitious value’ and a ‘man made bogey,’” and illustrates “that women’s corporeality is at war with their desire to penetrate the public sphere” (Step-Daughters 55). Certainly, controlling the reproduction of bodies and ensuring one’s heir was truly one’s rightful heir was an important aspect of British patriarchal society, and intimately linked to the eugenic reproduction of empire. As Ellen Rosenman and Claudia Klaver argue, “Imperial conquest invoked an idealized white, middle-class femininity to justify imperial missions. [These women] were sanctified as the source of racial purity … while their imputed vulnerability authorized British violence against native men” (1). Rosenman, Ellen Bayuk and Claudia C. Klaver. “Introduction.” Other Mothers: Beyond the Maternal Ideal. Eds. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman and Claudia C. Klaver. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2008. 1-22. Critics such as Kathy Phillips echo Rosenman and Klaver’s argument—the ideology of empire was founded on the “chaste mother,” “helpless baby” and “virgin young woman,” all requiring the protection of the white man to keep them “from sexual contact with colonized men” (228). Phillips, Kathy J. Virginia Woolf Against Empire. Knoxville: The U of Tennessee P, 1994. In all cases, the horrific reproduction outside of specified kinship groups was the ultimate insult, as we will see in Jean Rhys’s texts. For more on purity and femininity, see chapter three, “Purifying’ the Public World: Feminist Vigilantes, Prostitution and ‘Protective Surveillance,’” in Lucy Bland’s Banishing the Beast; chapter two, “Women’s suffrage melodrama and burlesque” in Laura Winkiel’s Modernism, Race and Manifestos; Brody, Jennifer. Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1998; and Bland, Lucy. “Purity, Motherhood, Pleasures or Threat?
and fear in women; for, as Iris Marion Young argues, the cultural treatment of menstruation as “just another form of dirt to be disposed of” predisposes women to experience menstruation (or indeed, any deviation from the normative masculine body) as shameful, abnormal (104).72

But in the late nineteenth century, as periodicals and books aimed at the bodily condition of women began to increase in never before seen numbers, the pregnant form began to make the leap from the private to the public imaginary, a leap solidified into a new culture of pregnancy in the twentieth century. While it is true the first official book on pregnancy appeared centuries earlier, the early years of the twentieth century harbor the first published discussions surrounding multiple aspects of pregnancy and reproduction (or the lack thereof, as birth control entered the debates).73 Importantly, the woman’s body became more than just a figurehead for the state as it

72 Julia Kristeva, in “From Filth to Defilement,” also writes that bodily pollutants fall into two categories, “excremental and menstrual,” and that menstrual “blood […] stands for the danger [to society] issuing from within the identity (social or sexual)…” (260). For more on menstruation, see chapter six, “Menstrual Meditations,” in Iris Marion Young’s On Female Body Experience. For one glimpse of a cultural construction of menstruation in turn-of-the-century Britain, see Havelock Ellis, Man and Woman, in which he figures menstruation as the key to understanding women’s “fearful feminine biological instability” (Moran, Virginia Woolf 37). For a fascinating look at biological textbooks and their engagement with weighted descriptors regarding masculine vs. feminine physiology, including the menstruation process, see Martin, Emily. “Body Narratives, Body Boundaries.” Cultural Studies. Eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler. New York and London: Routledge, 1992. 409-423. Martin explains that textbooks describe male biology, like sperm, with words like “remarkable,” “sheer magnitude,” and “amazing,” while female processes, especially menstruation, are described with words like “debris,” “wasted,” “scrap,” and “a chaotic disintegration” (411). She concludes, “[I]t is astounding how […] ‘femininely’ the egg behaves and how ‘masculinely’ the sperm” (412). She makes a similar argument that medical discourses shape women’s bodies to be machines and factories that break down or otherwise go awry in her book, The Woman in the Body. For a more recent study, see Metoyer, Andrea Bertotti and Regina Rust. “The Egg, Sperm, and Beyond: Gendered Assumptions in Gynecology Textbooks.” Women’s Studies 40:2 (2011): 177-205. Metoyer and Rust find that contemporary textbooks consistently “underestimate the ability and worth of the egg, cervix, and cervical mucus, while overemphasizing the agency and potency of sperm and semen in spite of decades of accumulated findings to the contrary” (178).

73 The first official pregnancy book was the 1513 German publication of The Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives by Eucharis Rösslin—better known by the name of its English translation, The Byrth of Mankynde, by Thomas Raynalde. This book was a best-seller for the next 200 years even though it was arguably “obsolete” the minute it was written (Epstein 15). For an excellent recent edition, see Hobby, Elaine, ed. The Birth of Mankind: Otherwise Named The Woman’s Book. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. This edition
was in the age of Rousseau, when the female body first took on a larger national symbolic status. And one manifestation of this national symbolic status hugely popular during the modernist era was the “science of improving stock”—or, eugenics (Bland, Beast 222).

The multiple narratives of eugenics are by now a much-scrutinized area of criticism. The term was coined in 1883 by the cousin of Darwin, Francis Galton, and was taken from the Greek for “good in birth” (D. Roberts 59). Due to the cultural tension stemming from the need to provide such good “stock” to furnish two world wars, a shrinking globe caused by imperial conquest, and plunging birth rates, the white inhabitants of England were keen to increase the “race” by proper breeding (Bradford 192). As Laura Doyle notes, “By the lights of eugenics, the human foundations of empire were racial foundations, and these were shrinking or deteriorating” (14). The national interest in eugenics prompted and undergirded such additional movements as birth control (especially seen in negative eugenics), the “mothercraft” movement (to be explored shortly), the founding of the Boy Scouts (Woollacott 75), and a fundamental interest in reproduction seen in the new culture of pregnancy.

When considering how maternity dovetails with nation-making systems, especially as eugenics, race, and literature are concerned, two important critics to consider are Laura Doyle and Jane Garrity. Doyle, in Bordering on the Body, explains that the mother “ambivalently” signifies “a bodily and collective past” due to her alignment with the body and with kinship.

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includes not only the full text of the historical book, but a commentary on the publication history, the authors, and the widespread medical beliefs of the medieval period.

74 Noteworthy discussions of eugenics include Jane Garrity’s Step-Daughters of England; Laura Doyle’s Bordering on the Body; Childs, Donald J. Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001; Hanson, Clare. “Save the Mothers? Representations of Pregnancy in the 1930s.” Literature and History 12.2 (Fall 2003): 51-61; Jane Lewis, The Politics of Motherhood; Susan Squier, Babies in Bottles; and Clare Hanson, A Cultural History of Pregnancy.

groups. The mother is a “reproducer of borders,” and such borders are in part maintained and
controlled by controlling this mother figure (6). Therefore, eugenics ultimately shapes “the
meaning of motherhood” within racial boundaries (5). Similarly, Jane Garrity, in *Step-Daughters
of England*, argues that women in the modernist period were seen as eugenical protectors of the
boundaries of race and progenitors of Englishness (“potential mothers of the British race”),
therefore this racial construction should inform any discussion of women as British subjects one
might have (1). Garrity explains how women writers grappled with the British notion that
“motherhood is women’s racial responsibility” (68) by seeking to disassociate the physical body
from this stifling cultural prison. Because the “white, middle-class, procreative female body was
regarded as integral to the well-being of the nation and central to empire-building” (2), Garrity
claims, many women writers sought to jettison this eugenical body to find freedom of individual
expression—or, indeed, any freedom at all.

While Doyle, Garrity, and other critics consider the role of the mother in government,
empire, and racial configurations, I am interested in how the pregnant or “becoming mother”
figure was perceived by mass culture, and how the media at the turn of the century jointly
displayed and judged her pregnant form in the overarching scaffolding of a culture of pregnancy.
To fix a date range for the beginning of this culture of pregnancy, I argue it was 1910-1920,
when advertisements for maternity clothes began to appear in major British publications like *The
Times* (London’s preeminent newspaper publication).76 The “masculine” realm of advertising

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76 The first “maternity clothes” ad I could locate in *The Times* appears in 1916 and states, “If you need
maternity clothes we can help you to appear smartly and becomingly clothed during the entire period, and to be, at
Feb. 2012). See Appendix B for a copy of this ad. In America, movement surrounding maternity clothes began a
little earlier, with the first ad for Lane Bryant maternity clothes appearing in the *New York Times* in 1911. Bryant
had repeatedly sought to advertise maternity clothes but advertisers were squeamish to print such content. Once
Bryant’s ad appeared, however, her inventory promptly sold out the next day (Epstein 80). See Wertz and Wertz for
a copy of one such Lane Bryant ad, which asks the expectant mother, “Sunshine or shadow? Which do you choose?
and commerce finally taking note of the massive world of women with purchasing power is a tremendous indicator of the growing acceptability of public displays of the female body. Fashion is arguably seen as frivolous to patriarchal culture, and therefore maternity fashions doubly so. Yet for women, maternity clothes were vital not only because they lacked widely accessible ways to clothe their growing bodies, but because in their new public personas and careers, the ability to appear in public looking professional, even when pregnant, was critical. As Lori Kelly explains, “wearing fashionable dress allowed pregnant women to […] escape exclusive consignment to the narrow private sphere of home and hearth” (8).\textsuperscript{77} The lowly little maternity clothes ad, then, signifies the important and concrete breakthroughs of the feminist movement, a new reality of a public woman who was no longer confined to the home, and a broader cultural acceptance of women’s particular “feminine” needs. The power and control of the meaning of pregnancy, and how it would be experienced, was in part being decided by the manufacturers of such maternity clothes.

The historical discourses of maternity fashion and “respectability” are given far too little attention and are still, for the most part, buried in larger historical texts about pregnancy and childbirth.\textsuperscript{78} Often, the pregnant body appearing in public is mentioned in passing in these larger texts, tantalizingly, and is never fully lingered on. This is a crucial area in which more research needs to be done, as a book-length study of various avenues of donning the pregnant form for


\textsuperscript{78} There are two notable articles representing an exception to the scant information available on early pregnancy fashions: Lori Duin Kelly’s article, cited above, and Waterhouse, Harriet. “A Fashionable Confinement: Whaleboned Stays and the Pregnant Woman.” \textit{Costume} 41 (2007): 53-65.
ocular public consumption and of navigating the treacherous social waters of pregnant display is much-needed.79

For now, historians agree maternity clothes were not mass produced until the early part of the twentieth century, when a Lithuanian immigrant named Lina Himmelstein designed a “tea gown” with expanding pleats and stretch-waist dresses, freeing women from the confining corsets which hid their growing bellies but harmed the women and the fetus in the process (Epstein 79).80 This gown proved to be so popular it soon established the Lane Bryant clothing line, and by 1910, maternity clothes for street wear became available (Wertz and Wertz 148).

Before 1910, the lack of sartorial options when pregnant is a “remarkable” aspect of Victorian society, “a period in which dress codes were explicit, extensive, and exhaustive” (Kelly 1). Lacking other options, upper-class women in Victorian England ordered their dressmakers to let out their dresses, or to design and create specific clothes for the pregnancy, such as roomy capes and opera cloaks (Jalland 143). Letters between these women mention their dismay at having to

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79 Even a study of contemporary maternity fashions is missing from the existing literature. A February 2012 periodical search of “maternity clothes” reveals articles in popular American magazines like People and Newsweek with titles such as “Dressing for Two” (People, 7/12/2006), “Pregnant, Or Just Plain Hip?” (Newsweek, 12/3/2007), “Bellies Are Beautiful” (Time, 5/31/1971), “Stylish Mom-To-Be” (Working Mother, Jul/Aug 2005), and “Once Again, Why is This Woman Smiling?” (Newsweek, 10/9/2006). The discourses here are ones of fitting into a prescribed stereotypical and fashionable pregnancy experience, one defining the woman as much as her appearance does, and one placing the wardrobe as importantly contributing to pregnancy as an essential part of a woman’s life and personhood. The public persona of the pregnant woman is as much—if not more so—defined by her huge belly as by what she chooses to cover this belly with. Lisa O’Malley argues that maternity in advertising illustrates the historical shift from “understanding that pregnant bodies can be beautiful to a demand for beautiful pregnant bodies” (n.p.), while Katie Arosteguy claims such publications illustrate the “inability to envision alternative styles of mothering” and “the stark reality of just how intensely the dominant ideology of motherhood is policed” (412, 429). O’Malley, Lisa. “Does My Bump Look Big in This?” Advertising & Society Review 7.3 (2006): n.p.; Arosteguy, Katie. “The Politics of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Contemporary American Mommy Lit.” Women’s Studies 39.5 (2010): 409-429.

80 Again, even around a small detail like the wearing of corsets in pregnancy, the competing discourses come thick and fast. For example, Wertz and Wertz argue wearing corsets caused permanent disfigurement and increased pain in childbirth (110), and Waterhouse explains the literature “since corseting began” voices concerns about tight corsetting leading to miscarriage (55). Will Shorter conversely claims corsets were not too damaging and did not cause the problems they were reputed to (30). All sources tend to agree the corset was an important status symbol signaling a woman of the middle- to upper-classes, and when the British society moved beyond requiring a corset to restrain the feminine body and its appetites, it was a significant step in the right direction for the freedom of women.
tell their secret to their dressmakers, in a time when keeping the news of an impending pregnancy to oneself was the utmost standard in female modesty (143).

It is often assumed a pregnant woman hid herself away for the last months of her pregnancy, which is true to a certain extent, but Pat Jalland and Harriet Waterhouse reveal narratives of carefully concealing the pregnant body while it appears in specific public situations. The memoirs and letters of upper-class women in their texts mention appearing in the street or at a party or performance, clearly pregnant, while lower-class women tried to hide their pregnancies with corsets, large shawls, and baggy clothing (Jalland 138-9; Hanson, *Cultural History* 80). Upper-class and royal women celebrated a new birth because it heralded the possibility of a male heir, and to a landed family the securing of familial resources was essential. As Laura Doyle reminds us, reproduction never occurs in a “social vacuum but for either a dominant or subordinate group”; therefore, a woman is always reproducing either inside (“endogamy”) or outside (“exogamy”) her kin group (5, 24). Endogamy offered a reason to publicly celebrate.

The inauguration of the maternity ad is also crucial in assuring women that they belonged to a sisterhood of sorts, as there were enough pregnant women to warrant an advertisement in a major publication. This pseudo-community of birthers wielded enough power—albeit latent power—to provoke manufacturers to change their ways and begin to cater to a female clientele. In this regard, the power of the Women’s Movement cannot be understated, especially as woman’s new bid for freedom manifested in a demand for the freedom to appear in public. The appearance of maternity clothes and their corresponding advertisements are therefore intimately linked to the rise of the first-wave feminist movement, as women seized more power and control over their bodies and over the situations in which their bodies could appear. As Lucy Bland
argues, “Women were demanding that it was their interests and their freedom which needed guaranteeing on the streets; it was a basic civil liberty” (Beast 120). This growing demand for change at the “profoundly superficial level of appearance: that is, at the level of style” belies a fundamental challenge to hegemonic constructions that would curtail and contain women’s free movement and expression of bodily conditions (Hebdige 17). Popular maternity advertisements also indicate pregnancy was increasingly becoming a condition to be monitored by the state, for if large companies were beginning to take notice of collective groups of pregnant women, then the government was soon to follow.81

A second clear indicator of the growth of a publicly-moderated culture of pregnancy appears in the number of published conversations about reproduction that began appearing in the twentieth century. Fictional narratives began to figure pregnancy as a central aspect of the plot and characterization with more and more frequency, and the advice books available to the public exploded.82 In newspapers like The Times, pregnancy often did not register apart from new scientific advances, the legislation governing such advances, and—the larger concern—legislation governing the rights and freedoms of women in general as the wider feminist movement took hold. The Times rarely reported on reproduction, keeping its brief comments to articles such as “The Midwives Act” (1907), “Infant And Child Mortality” (1910), and “The Declining Birth-Rate” (1913). Smaller publications, such as English Review, Everybody’s

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81 One of the first notable instances of pregnancy and the state appears with Rousseau, in eighteenth century France, who was the first writer to explicitly link the role of the mother with the role of the state. In Émile: or, On Education (1762), he argues a mother’s milk is of vast importance, because it communicates the ideals of the country to the infant citizen. Mothers must therefore be closely monitored to ensure they are raising adequate citizens and not giving their children to wet nurses, lower women who could communicate all the wrong things and thus create a nation of monsters (Kukla 41-49).

82 Notable popular advice books on marriage and motherhood at the turn of the century include Motherhood by Charles Gleeson (1901); Feminology by Dr. Florence Dressler (1903); A Handbook for Mothers: Being Simple Hints to Women on the Management of Their Health during Pregnancy and Confinement by Jane H. Walker (1893); Expectant Motherhood by J.W. Ballantyne (1914); and The Expectant Mother: A Complete Guide to the Care of Her Health and the Preparations for the Infant by Ada S. Ballin (1904).
Magazine, and The New Age branched out much more than the larger, featuring multiple articles and letters debating the nature of woman and femininity in the new women’s rights era, in addition to covering legislation matters of the day, new ideas of psychology and childbirth, eugenics, and the alarming infant and maternal death rates. These articles and letters contribute to the burgeoning existence of a public culture of pregnancy, for prior to the twentieth century and its explosion of niche publications, there simply was not a public apparatus to support such myriad and focused investigations into these aspects of womanhood and reproduction.  

For example, in a 1908 edition of The New Age, W.R. Titterton writes of the titillating and controversial naked statues on The Strand, one of which is pregnant (190). With dripping sarcasm, he reminds the readers that images of the Madonna are not considered indecent, and even his “immoral friends” agree “there is nothing provocative about a naked figure…. The mere thought of birth, too, they say is anti-provocative” (190). The narrative here is one of desensitizing the inherent Victorian prudishness manifested in the larger British population, reminding the public while the body is just a body, pregnant or not, the body is also treated differently based upon culturally-ingrained notions of its sacredness and social acceptability. Here, pregnancy is represented as a great equalizer among women, a mundane bodily event occurring in the lives of all women: to the mother of Jesus and to the woman in the street alike.

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83 It bears repeating that conversations between men and women did occur in mass media in the late nineteenth century, but such conversations were centered around definitions of masculinity, femininity, and especially marriage. Lucy Bland relates that in 1888, the Daily Telegraph, “London’s best-selling newspaper, requested its readers’ response to the question: ‘Is Marriage a Failure?’” In the next month, the newspaper was shocked to receive over 27,000 replies to this query (Beast 124). The differences I focus on in the conversations of the twentieth century are centered in the amount of venues in which debates were taking place, the amount of responses, and the topics, which were much more controversial and founded in sexuality and reproduction, not just marriage.

A further example of the myriad published conversations about birth in the early twentieth century appears in a 1911 letter printed in *Everybody’s Magazine* under the subsection “Once More—Woman’s Sphere!” The letter-writer, W.B.E., who states he is a doctor, claims women must realize two important facts: she exists solely to reproduce, and she alone is responsible for the “moral character” of her children, and thus the entire British race (423). Such letters attempting to remind the modern working woman of her bodily duty to reproduce as birth rates plunged alarmingly are quite common in the early years of the century, and illustrate the great extent to which the new public conception of pregnancy and childbirth went hand in hand with eugenic sentiments and with the first wave of feminism. As women began to jettison traditional routes like marriage and family and entered the workforce, the fear that the birth rate would continue to plunge and the national “stock” would continue to suffer skyrocketed. It was assumed that if a woman was not devoting herself fully to maternity, her child would be somehow lacking. As Dr. Meyrick Booth writes in 1927, “The girl of today has fallen under the spell of masculine life-ideals. […] She over-values all that is masculine, such as sport or politics, and absurdly under-values all that is typically feminine, such as family life, maternity or social duties” (709).\(^8^5\)

In tandem with the women’s rights movement, then, and beginning in the nineteenth century but reaching a fever pitch in the early twentieth century, the idea that women should have a choice between marriage and reproduction versus something else entirely changed the public conception of the pregnant body into an image laden with multiple social ramifications. Everything from careers for women to parental rights to the state of the nation and the “quality” of its citizens was implicated in the burgeoning female form. The war of images and words

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deciding the ultimate meaning of both a woman’s body and of the role of reproduction in British society was understandably laden with hegemonic implications, for he (or she) who had the power to control these meanings could necessarily change and influence many aspects of dominant culture.

In periodicals and “of the moment” print media, conversations surrounding maternity had begun to appear by the late nineteenth century, but they had been previously focused largely on mothering and on running an adequate household. In the early years of the twentieth century, they began to feature the role of reproduction in a woman’s life, and debates and considerations over the choice of motherhood. In “Freewomen and the Birth-Rate” (1911), Charles V. Drysdale argues that the limitation of family sizes isn’t “sexual degradation,” but is instead the mark of a civilized country full of “educated and refined classes” (89). The difficulty of being forced into motherhood repeatedly, he claims, is the “fundamental tyranny from which all others spring” (89). The public conception of pregnancy was beginning to carry political undertones as a pregnant woman’s implied choice to bear a child informed observers with one glance not only of the pregnant woman’s likely class and social standing, but additionally, her habits, her career, and her aspirations (or lack thereof). Pregnancy and childbirth was in some minds becoming anathematical to the suffragette fight for political equality.


87 The argument here was divided into two camps, including a narrative claiming the modern woman agitating for rights would no longer be able to bear children versus a narrative claiming those women who continued to choose motherhood were foregoing any hope of achieving equality with men. For those in the first camp, see Booth, “Woman and Maternity.” For those in the second, see Drysdale, Charles V. “Freewomen and the Birth-Rate.” *The Freewoman: A Weekly Feminist Review* 1.5 (Dec. 21, 1911): 89; and Tina, Beatrice. “Woman as State Creditor.” *The New Age* 3.9 (June 27, 1908): 169.
4. Charitable Women and Maternal vs. Paternal Influence

A final shift integral to the establishment of the culture of pregnancy at the turn of the century is that of the proper education of mothers, or the “mothercraft” movement, and it contained both rhetoric traditionally defined as masculine (insisting on formal education) and feminine (insisting on “mothering” mothers). Here the emphasis on power and control was pronounced, because again, if one could influence the mothers, one could influence future generations and change an entire empire. The “mothercraft” craze was also intimately tied up with the Women’s Movement and the new cultural emphasis on Darwinism, as women claimed that if women were adequately equipped to teach their own children, this education would necessarily affect the choice of future husbands, and affect the morality of those husbands: “Sexual selection would again come to the fore […] with the female playing the leading role as her ancestors had done” (Bland, *Beast* 84).

One of the primary sources of assistance and education to lower-class women in the early twentieth century was the invaluable Women’s Cooperative Guild, which founded several programs attempting to aid working-class mothers in “mothercraft”: areas as diverse as diet, lifestyle, care of infants and children, and proper management of the household. But perhaps the most important historical contribution was the work by the Guild in collecting and publishing the voices of women themselves. In 1915, the Guild published *Maternity*, a book of written interviews of working-class women affiliated with the Guild. The women were asked to share what they had “felt about the difficulty of taking care, the ignorance that has prevailed on the conditions of pregnancy, and how these conditions result in lack of health and energy, meaning that a woman cannot do justice to herself or give her best to her husband and children”

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88 For more information on mothercraft, see Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood*. 
(Maternity 191). The women’s written responses were printed without revision, except for some censoring of a “few medical details” (2). The contemporary reader wonders strongly what sort of “medical details” were too off-putting to publish in a text almost wholly devoted to the body, as the text is full of stories of pregnancy and childbirth and is meant to illustrate the difficulty of surviving as a reproducing and working female body in a masculine world.

According to the introduction by the Postmaster General, Herbert Samuel, Maternity seeks to show the larger British society the suffering occurring in the working-class, to ensure such maternal ills might be ameliorated. Written when the Great War was raging, the introduction contains extreme racial and eugenical paranoia. The entire nation will be “weakened,” Samuel attests, by these lower-class birthers (vi).\(^8^9\) He goes on to claim, “Numbers are of importance. In the competition and conflict of civilisations it is the mass of the nations that tells” (vi). These statements portray a clear eugenic argument reflecting the fear of losing precious lives in the war and being unable to replace them with adequate citizens due to inadequate mothers.

Samuel’s introduction additionally conforms to the familiar dominant narrative positioning the mother as the foundation of the race, and the belief that to raise up an adequate (read: strong, healthy, educated, racially uniform) supply of citizens, one needed to assist the mothers. If the mother failed in her task, the entire society would fall. As Samuel argues, “The infant cannot, indeed, be saved by the State. It can only be saved by the mother. But the mother can be helped and can be taught by the State” (vii). Thus, organizations like the Women’s Cooperative Guild sprang up all across England, canvassing poor neighborhoods and attempting to intervene on behalf of “civilized” society, entering the homes of the working-class to school

their inhabitants in all areas of mothercraft. Jane Lewis argues this intrusive movement helped to displace maternal systems of care (advice passed down from mother to daughter) by pushing a very specifically middle-class, uniform agenda on whole communities (Politics 20). Indeed, the “mothercraft” movement was another way in which hegemonic British culture attempted to control the power inherent in reproduction and harness such reproduction to the needs and ends of the greater British empire.

The philanthropic push by middle- and upper-class women at the turn of the century to aid those less fortunate was widespread, as it was one of the only areas of public service deemed appropriate for women. Daughters were often trained to serve in the areas in which their mothers served the community (Dyhouse 39-40). A salient example of such community work can be seen in Virginia Woolf’s novel To the Lighthouse (1927), in which even on vacation Mrs. Ramsay is focused on her charity work, knitting socks for the lighthouse boy and “ruminat[ing] the other problem, of rich and poor” (9). Mrs. Ramsay also worries about the state of the national milk supply throughout the novel, in a clear reference to the same concerns about mothers and the state of the nation the Postmaster General expresses. If poor and working-class mothers do not have access to adequate food supplies for their children, the entire nation will suffer because it will be comprised of individuals who are weak, sickly, and were not mothered or raised well. This belief also smacks of positive eugenics, or encouraging the “right” people to breed, for Mrs. Ramsay and women like her are not trying to halt the reproduction of the lower classes. Since these classes belong to the master race of England and are furthering the sort of Englishness that is circling and conquering the globe, they must be encouraged to reproduce, and reproduce well—by mimicking those higher up on the social chain.

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Fictional women like Mrs. Ramsay (and like Woolf’s Clarissa Dalloway) represent historical reality, where women were in fact focused not only on their charity work but on their social standing in their community. As Carol Dyhouse explains, the wife’s ability to throw parties, connect with the right people, and serve in the right manner had a tremendous impact not only on their home life and their husband’s career but on the status of their family in general and on the marital prospects for their daughters. Aside from the husband’s job and income, it was almost equally dependent upon the wife’s “social values, knowledge, taste and organizing skills” to help determine social rank (27). Therefore, it was not just men or patriarchy limiting the “proper” activities of women in such ways. Women were key contributors in passing down to their daughters notions of what they could and could not do. Virginia Woolf was right in her famous quote: “we think back through our mothers if we are women” (Room 76). In Woolf’s novels and in many novels of the early twentieth century, there is extreme anxiety over maternal and female heritage. Fictional young women, much like their fleshly counterparts existing in the world, struggle with the ways they choose to express their burgeoning femininity and rights, or, indeed, if they will express it at all or simply follow in the footsteps of their silent mothers.

The breakdown between generations when it comes to women has a further dire consequence: in matters of the body, like menstruation and most certainly pregnancy and childbirth, the guidance given to daughters by their mothers was often scant. Such issues simply were not talked about. This “false modesty,” as so many women in Maternity put it, “did real harm. Girls suffered terrible mental torture and shock; I know I did…” (Dyhouse 36; qting Beryl Lee Booker). And men were also subjected to harmful secrecy: for example, Naomi Mitchison’s husband, Dick, “did not know that females menstruated” when he married Naomi

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(Benton 33). Instead, he assumed women merely “had headaches once a month. When Dick had asked his regiment doctor for information before marriage, he was brushed off, told he would soon know” (33). The pain of this secrecy cannot be understated. Vera Brittain writes she felt “repugnance at being brought too closely into contact with physical ‘open secrets.’ Alas! sometimes it feels sad to be a woman!” (Dyhouse 37; qting Brittain). I focus on this topic of the perceived monstrosity of the female body in chapter three, in which I analyze fictional accounts of the reproducing female body rooted in a “feminine” model (including touch, emotion, and body over mind) and, as a result, containing heroines faced with significant struggles as they seek to survive their life of the body in a “masculine” world dominated by the mind.

This bodily repugnance was encoded in the social strata and cultural output of modernist Britain and is reflected in texts as diverse as F.T. Marinetti’s Futurist proclamations (which consistently try to replace the problematic fleshy female body with a controllable, masculine body of steel) and the novels of Jean Rhys (which feature protagonists who constantly lament their bodily condition as women). The focus on pregnant embodiment at the turn of the twentieth century, then, was not all positive. Critics such as Laura Doyle describe the difference between “brainworkers” (intellectual, disembodied men) and “handworkers” (laboring, bodily women), and concludes even “[d]isembodiment seems preferable to mastered embodiment” (33). Similarly, Sarah Ruddick asserts “a woman’s birthing body – bloody, swollen out of shape, exposed in its pain, its otherwise concealed parts broken open – is repellent” to Western culture (190).  

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However, what is notable about the turn of the century is that so many women began to write about their lack of maternal heritage in preparing them for the demands of childbirth and childrearing, and to demand help—if not from their mothers, then from elsewhere. The cry for help escalated as organizations like the Guild began to proliferate across the nation, an ambivalent beginning rooted in larger issues of the control of the power of reproduction to be sure, but a beginning serving as the foundation for later women’s rights movements. Both second- and third-wave feminism were situated in the growing demand for education of women about their bodies, and for increasing help from society for specifically female bodily experiences. Further, literary movements focusing on mothers and daughters are rooted in this agitation for help in maternity, most notably the French Feminist school in the 1970s-80s and the focus on the “mother/daughter plot” in literary criticism.93

Daughters who in turn became mothers were not the only citizens jockeying for the power to define maternity and influence later generations, however. Men, too, wanted to get a word in, and especially at the turn of the twentieth century, tell women what they could and could not do where their body was concerned. While women theoretically prefer to give advice with a look, a gesture, or a whisper in an ear (thus displaying the importance of the body and of bodily proximity), men prefer the professional and the official: books, the written word (a disembodied and cerebral authority). This dichotomy again calls to mind the split explained by

Iris Marion Young and Luce Irigaray and echoed by many feminist critics: feminine knowledge is predicated on touch and closeness while masculine knowledge is ocular and removed.\(^{94}\)

In literature, too, this split is often seen. Young women following their mothers are often imbued with a specific set of bodily markers: they will stand a certain way or know how to use their hands, or they will be excellent cooks. Young women following their fathers will often display a different set of characteristics. They will immerse themselves in texts and read all they can, for example, acquiring a disembodied, cerebral knowledge. This education or way of being results in them being alienated from their feminine bodies, causing them to turn to “masculine” modes of thought or being, especially when speaking of areas of reproduction—an argument I will explore in depth in chapter two.

If women had a divided relationship to the body, they looked toward the mind, toward books and other knowledge-making systems, to ameliorate the sufferings and weaknesses hegemonic culture encoded into their feminine condition. Both textual women and their fleshly counterparts began to pick up “self-help” books in record numbers in the twentieth century. But originally, the idea that women needed assistance in learning about their own bodily existence was founded upon the notion of professionalism and expertise which Ehrenreich and English claim was integral to the growth of the male-midwife. As doctors struggled to gain authority, power, and clients, disbaring women from the doctors’ “elite” practice was one way to turn doctors into “experts,” and the use of “science” was another (Good 60-62).\(^{95}\)

\(^{94}\) As Young explains, “Irigaray suggests that masculine desire expresses itself through visual metaphors, that the experience of seeing, gazing, is primary in a masculine aesthetic. […] Feminine desire, Irigaray suggests, moves through the medium of touch more than sight. Less concerned with identifying things, comparing them, measuring them in their relation to one another, touch immerses the subject in fluid continuity with the object, and for the touching subject the object touched reciprocates the touching, blurring the border between self and other” (69).

\(^{95}\) This is not to argue there were no female doctors in early twentieth-century Britain. Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell was the first female British physician because she was trained in America and was able to practice in
The tradition of informing women about their own bodies—a predominately masculine system of influence—began in the sixteenth century, and by the twentieth century it was an established arena of information for women’s bodies. Yet the women writing of such phallocentric knowledge systems portray little to no annoyance at these texts being authored by men. Instead, women seem to be relieved that for the first time bodily issues were explained to them. In 1915, one woman extols the virtues of such a book: “Knowing how ignorant I was on matters of motherhood, my husband bought a book for me called ‘Advice to a Wife,’ by Dr. Henry Pye Chavasse. It is a beautifully written book and would be a gift of untold value to any girl about to marry” (Maternity 64-5). If such women could not get information on such “matters of motherhood” from their mothers and the other women in their life, they gladly turned to men and the “official” authorities.

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English argue in For Her Own Good that Western civilization (England, America, and Canada) is roughly divided into two time frames: the old order (agrarian, under men, and before the industrial revolution) versus the new order (modernity, splintered into public and private, oppositional realms). This shift from old to new, from private to public, provoked the famous woman question: what would they do, and who were they in this new order? Women could now choose their fate, to a certain extent, instead of being wholly confined to the home. Yet, this shift also made women indefinable—a mystery and

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96 See Brandon’s The New Women and the Old Men: Love, Sex, and the Woman Question for more on the woman question, and for biographical details on what it was to live as a new woman in a still-changing world. As Brandon relates, one of the key issues in debate over the new woman was her intellectual capacity and her fate in choosing politics and employment versus mothering and domesticity. In the words of Karl Pearson, Professor of Eugenics at University College and the founder of the Men and Women’s Club, “We must face the problem of her being naturally man’s intellectual inferior; her prerogative function of child-bearing may possibly involve this” (51; qting Pearson, “The Woman’s Question”).
an “other” to the masculine hegemony. In this new order, women were romanticized as being part of another, more “natural” world, not truly belonging in the public realm but in the private, in nature and in the home. Scientists in new areas of self-proclaimed specialization (psychologists, “public educators,” sexologists) told women what was right, and women listened to them because traditionally scientific discourses had assisted in bringing citizens and culture out of the dark ages and into the light of modernity (26).

In the modernist period with the dawn of the feminist movement, the New Woman, and increasing access to employment and birth control, self-help books (often outdated through multiple runs of publication) for the first time began to compete with “of the moment” narratives and arguments published in magazines and periodicals geared toward both male and female audiences. Such counter-narratives often sought to disclaim the proclamation of “experts,” and this struggle for public opinion appears in the fictionalized accounts of reproduction. Such texts—including Charlotte Haldane’s *Man’s World* (1926) and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1937)—rapidly began to figure birth as a war between the feminine body and the masculine scientific mind, an argument I will further in chapter four.

And so, whether it be masculine rhetoric stemming predominately from men and seeking to decode the female body and explain it to the masses, or feminine rhetoric coming from women and corresponding to both covert and overt methods of keeping women in their place by training them to take the mantle of culturally-acceptable femininity from their female predecessors, all rhetoric and narratives surrounding the birthing body in the early twentieth century ultimately has its roots in power and control. All rhetoric seeks to define and manage the female body (its function, its expression, its uses, its future), and channel its power through complete exploration and, thus, understanding. Programs which profess to help the birthing women (and to a large
extent *do* help them) additionally channel these women into clear binary categories of helpers and those receiving help, educators and those in need of education, birthers and those who oversee such birth.

As such rhetorical machines—including social programs, legislation, and written debates in periodicals and magazines—began to spew the story of the marketability and cultural relevance of the gestating body, many fictionalized narratives of the modernist period in turn posed a response to these larger cultural narratives, either seeking to agree with them, amend them, or topple them altogether. As Susan Squier argues, fiction is one of the primary ways in which existing social issues first bubble to the surface and find a larger audience (*Babies* 13-15). Catherine Belsey echoes Squier, claiming, “[l]iterature represents the myths and imaginary versions of real social relationships which constitute ideology…” (657). This is why so many historians first look to the fiction of the time, for the historical reality will inevitably be reflected in the literature. I therefore move to a closer consideration of specific fictional texts situated in the twentieth century which will illustrate and build on some of the larger cultural narratives I have taken the time to map out here.

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CHAPTER TWO

BLOODLESS BIRTH: REPRODUCTION AND THE MASCULINE MIND

“At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold.”
~ Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own (4)

“The children of the muse come quicker with less pain and disgust, rest more lightly on the bosom.”
~ Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Unpublished Manuscript

“It has long been the practice among women to conspire to lie about maternity,” Beatrice Tina argues in a 1908 edition of The New Age (169). “The torture of child-birth is the ugliest fact of human life. Women instinctively veil its horrors from that sensitive creature, the husband” (169). Tina’s argument about the “horrors” of giving birth hinges on the claim that the poor, “ignorant” birthing woman is essentially alone as she weatheres the storm of childbirth with only her similarly “ignorant” husband to guide her, and not the sisterhood of past ages, a sisterhood feminists and suffragettes were then working to instigate at the national level. Further, Tina claims, once a woman is allowed to self-govern by winning the vote and other legal benefits, she will necessarily choose freedom and eschew her former state of maternal slavery (169).

In her article, Tina paints a horrific picture of childbirth at the turn of the century. In her view, women receive no help from men or from scientific advancements; instead, women remain subjected to extreme pain and even death. And because these women either have no other choice

1 Quoted in Adrienne Rich’s Of Woman Born (250).

(the option of “self-governance” being unavailable to them) or because they love their husbands, these women conspire to lie about the joys of motherhood to ensure future generations of unassuming and dim-witted women, not knowing what they are in for, will sign up for the same experience and thus unquestioningly further the tide of humanity. Tina also splits childbirth into a dichotomous reality: women who know its truth versus women who don’t, women who are free from its horrors versus women who are still enslaved, and, perhaps most importantly, women who know versus men who don’t. The incredibly complex and historically-engrained battle of the sexes is mapped out in miniature in this one-page article. Men conspire to keep women in check. Women help them by not being truthful about the horrors of giving birth. Women keep other women in check by furthering the system (a method of intrafeminine surveillance and control discussed in chapter one).

The most important aspect of this dichotomous scaffolding, is the split between the unknowing male and the knowing female. This split is noteworthy because it appears throughout modernist literature: the woman understanding the subjective truth of her body and its experiences, and either conspiring to keep it from the man, or the man not understanding because he necessarily belongs to another world entirely, a public, masculine world of disembodied commerce, travel, adventure, empire. In novels as diverse as Enid Bagnold’s The Squire and Virginia Woolf’s The Voyage Out, the protagonist is faced with navigating an othered world, othered particularly because her physical experience as a woman is so vastly different than the normative masculine experience. However, there are notable exceptions to this split, including writers who portray the feminine body (and thus mind) as weak and lacking, a suffering entity vastly helped by her alignment with, or allegiance to, predominately masculine aspects of the mind.
In chapter one, I detailed the latent and overt cultural conflicts over the control of the reproductive body brewing in the early years of the twentieth century, conflicts which grew for centuries but which came to a head with the rise of a culture of pregnancy. It is perhaps due to these conflicting ideas packaged in the pregnant form that many modernist British writers sought to distance themselves from the female body, loaded as it was with subterranean messages. Ironically, just as women were beginning to win their rights both legal and societal, just as they began to have some access to birth control and to the space of the public street, just as the door of sexuality began to creep open, some women clammed up. Perhaps they weren’t sure they wanted to be women, after all, when it seemed as if men had it so much better. Therefore, just as an entirely new female culture began to flourish at the turn of the century when so many diverse new rights took root, so too did a backlash begin: the woman who wasn’t sure she wanted to be a woman, the woman who patterned herself on the man.\(^3\) The woman who, in an effort to distance herself from this damning prison of the female body, turned to masculine rhetoric when considering the female body—for as Rita Felski points out, this woman “could enter modernity only by taking on the attributes traditionally classified as masculine” (18-19).\(^4\) And, because a female body in patriarchal culture signifies nothing so much as the potential for reproduction, these women employed masculine rhetoric never so much as when presenting or contemplating instances of reproduction, where, culturally, the woman is figured as wholly woman.

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\(^{3}\) On the existence of female culture, see footnote nine in chapter one which discusses the problem of the “feminized masses” to the high cultural elite like T.S. Eliot. On women who are patterned after men, I have in mind authors such as Dorothy Richardson, who chipped out new sexual and gendered identities for their textual heroines while simultaneously encoding them as masculine. In Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*, for example, the heroine, Miriam Henderson, is obviously a new woman who eschews traditional forms of femininity like marriage and childbearing, yet instead of simply breaking out of the mold of femininity, she additionally veers into masculinity. She is consistently described as being like a man, or someone who should have been born a man (193, 484); she “sadly” asserts her manhood by subversive activities such as smoking, a masculine space in which she finds “deep freedom” (366). Richardson, Dorothy. *Pilgrimage*. New York: Knopf, 1967.

While the reader may challenge my categorizing the pregnant and birthing woman as “wholly” woman as an essentializing move, I use the term to gesture towards a space of femininity belonging to females alone, for as much as men may want to, they cannot yet physically reproduce. And because women alone can bear children, setting them apart from the other sex, they are “wholly” or “pure” women, women only, when they perform these specifically female bodily acts: pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, breastfeeding. This does not mean they cannot employ traditionally “masculine” notions of strength, endurance, and overcoming physical boundaries in the act of birth; indeed, many women embrace this “masculine” side as they give birth. It only means the reader should be aware of such gendered acts of speech in the written birth act, and should interrogate their meanings, locations, and implications.

Not only female writers grapple with representations of reproduction in early twentieth century texts, however. Male writers, too, have difficulty when faced with the reproducing female form. Before the modernist era, most pregnancies and births in literature occur in the white space of the page, with the narrator’s and the reader’s eyes chastely turned away. Yet with

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5 Michael Davidson maps out the history of pregnant men in literature in “Pregnant Men: Modernism, Disability, and Biofuturity in Djuna Barnes.” Davidson claims the pregnant man (which he finds in *Ulysses*, Pound’s *Cantos*, and Barnes’ *Nightwood*) is a “freak,” and these stories are therefore linked to “disability narratives insofar as they defamiliarize the presumed normalcy of embodied life and display the nightmares of genetic futurity as the lived reality of disabled and dependent people” (208).

6 The history of embracing masculine notions of strength and achievement in childbirth is wonderfully displayed in Sharon Olds’ poem “The Language of the Brag,” in which the physical act of birth becomes “some epic use for my excellent body, / some heroism, some American achievement” similar to the physical achievements of men (7-8). Indeed, feminine birth even outdoes these masculine achievements, for in giving birth, the woman does what no man can yet do (and written metaphors of birthgiving are revealed to be effectively worthless): “I have done what you wanted to do, Walt Whitman, / Allen Ginsberg, I have done this thing…. ” (29-30). Olds, Sharon. “The Language of the Brag.” *Satan Says*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1980. 44-45. Julie Tharp and Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb call Olds’s poem a “watershed” moment for examining childbirth as shaping a woman’s “identity and her imagination” (1).

7 See footnote 68 in chapter one, where I discuss Victorian texts and their engagement (or lack thereof) with issues of reproduction and the female body.
the rise of the culture of pregnancy, as both female and male bodies began to shed their shrouds—in reality and in fiction—writers of both sexes began to grapple with methods of bodily representation. Many modernist writers expressed difficulty, if not downright aversion, in figuring reproduction, turning away from a biological rendering of female birth (otherwise known as “birth from below”) and transmuting birth instead into disembodied rhetoric of ideas, of masculinity, of commerce, and of empire (or, “birth from above”).

Rather than portraying the female body as a uncomplicated vessel of flesh and bone, then, authors such as Virginia Woolf, Enid Bagnold, and Naomi Mitchison mapped complex symbolical systems onto the textual bodies in their writing. Instead of figuring all the processes of a female reproductive life—menstruation, childbirth, breastfeeding—these writers injected the feminine body with a healthy dose of masculinity, often wresting these processes out of the grasp of the physical altogether and relocating them in the realm of the mental. In other words, the physical, female act of pregnancy and childbirth specifically is no longer a physical nor female act in these works. It is instead transmuted into metaphor, into simile, an act taking place in the mind versus in the body and, due to encoded binary divisions of masculine/feminine, I argue these metaphorical and stylized births are therefore relocated into the realm of the masculine. They became masculine births to serve a masculine audience and masculine needs, importantly in the face of the Great War, the shrinking British empire, and the rise of eugenics and fascism.

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8 Throughout, I am indebted to critic Robbie Pfeufer Kahn for elucidating the difference between “birth from above” and “birth from below” in theoretical and literary texts (147). The first instance of the notion of “birth from above” in writing comes from Charles Lee Follen’s theological text *The Birth From Above* (1889), in which he argues “a man must be ‘born from above,’ if he would ‘see,’ or ‘enter into,’ the Kingdom of God” (6). Follen, Charles Lee. *The Birth From Above*. Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1889.

9 Any reader familiar with Olive Moore may be wondering why I do not include her text *Spleen* in my exploration of masculine birth. While *Spleen* does grapple with masculine versus feminine birth, I see the larger issues in the text as an exploration of the problematic female body (problematic because female) and an interrogation of racial reproduction. I further this argument in chapter three.
Woolf, Bagnold, and Mitchison bear a highly conflicted relationship toward the reproducing female body in their works. While it may appear at first glance these authors celebrate the complexities of the female condition through their predominately gynocentric narratives, upon closer reading, the women in their texts at the moment of being “wholly” woman (when entering the female-centric experience of pregnancy and childbirth) merely become a tool for the use of the masculine state and empire machine. For example, in *We Have Been Warned*, Mitchison’s heroine, Dione, portrays borderline militant feminist behavior throughout the narrative, but when she reproduces, it is within the safe confines of the heterosexual family unit and it is with the overt desire to further contribute toward the needs of the larger nation-state. Here, the reproducing body is a vessel for power and politics, ideological domination, national culture, commerce and empire. This intrusion of the masculine into the moment of “pure” femininity, I argue, is the key to unlocking how these works truly feel about the female reproducing body and about woman’s place in the reproduction of citizens, empire and Englishness.

This intrusion of the masculine happens in diverse ways: Woolf employs birthing tropes and metaphors in *A Room of One’s Own*, transmuting birth from a physical act of the female flesh into a mental act of the masculine mind; Bagnold displays a highly detailed female pregnancy and birth in *The Squire* but emphasizes the masculinity of the birthing woman; and Mitchison, in *We Have Been Warned*, couches reproduction firmly in the masculine realm of commerce, empire, and eugenic “science.”

The use of birth rhetoric and imagery in discussions of creativity, writing, and other “non-feminine” activities has a long and complex history. As Susan Stanford Friedman explains, for centuries writers as diverse as “Philip Sidney and Erica Jong, William Shakespeare and Mary
Shelley, Alexander Pope and Denise Levertov have employed childbirth metaphors, and writers often use not only feminine, womb imagery but masculine, phallic imagery when describing creativity (“Creativity” 49). Friedman goes on to argue that throughout literary history, male and female writers employ childbirth tropes differently, with men using them to reenact the divide between disembodied creation and physical procreation and women using them to break down barriers between this divide, in essence arguing they can birth both babies and books (51, 58). While I am not analyzing the difference in the prose of male versus female authors, Friedman has an important point, and her seminal article continues to represent one of the foremost sources in childbirth imagery research.

For centuries, pregnancy and birth-giving were employed as dominant metaphors for writing and artistic production; therefore, the modernist authors I discuss here were tapping into an already-extant cultural and literary motif. Brenda Weber explains that the “complicated disciplinary trope” of bearing textual children functioned as a way to “bolster cultural legitimacy” and “pull women more tightly into hegemonically sanctioned roles” (275). Some of the earliest examples of the trope of feminine birth appear throughout the Bible, as a woman’s labor pains are repeatedly used as an image of masculine travail, hardship, or the troubles of a nation. Similarly, Plato famously uses birth imagery to describe his philosophical questing and mentoring:


For example, Isaiah writes, “Before [the city] goes into labor, / she gives birth; / before the pains come upon her, / she delivers a son. / Who has ever heard of such things? / […] Can a country be born in a day / or a nation be brought forth in a moment? / Yet no sooner is Zion in labor / than she gives birth to her children” (Isaiah 66:7-8). Similarly, Paul in 1 Thessalonians links labor to the travails of a city and its people: “[T]he day of the Lord
[B]ut there are some whose creative desire is of the soul, and who long to beget spiritually, not physically, the progeny which it is the nature of the soul to create and bring to birth. If you ask what that progeny is, it is wisdom and virtue in general. [...] Everyone would prefer children such as these to children after the flesh. (Qtd in Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking* 192-3)

In this famous construction, Plato foreshadows the mind/body split solidified by the writings of Descartes in the seventeenth century, and, further, Plato clearly values “bloodless” work of the mind over bloody work of the body.12 In speaking for “[e]veryone” when he insists offspring of virtue are greater than offspring of flesh and blood, Plato erects a construction predicated on the assumption that his audience (his “[e]veryone”) is male. Such a tacit male-centric thought process has been in place since the dawn of authorship, then, and this tradition relies on the status quo of the male reader, the male body, and the male mind.13 Similarly, the male body is often used in medical constructions as a “normative” model which devalues the “non-normative” female body due to its deviation from the non-noteworthiness of the male.14

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12 For more on Plato’s treatment of the “soul/body distinction,” see Spelman, Elizabeth V. “Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views.” *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader.* Eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick. New York: Routledge, 1999, 32-41. Spelman discusses Plato’s “contempt and ridicule” for the “lives of women” to emphasize that there is “no small difference whether you lead a soul-directed or a bodily-directed life” (40). Similarly, for a detailed account of Aristotelian notions of the passivity of the mother in conception and the active role of the father which held sway throughout the nineteenth century in England, see Margaret Homans’ chapter seven, “Bearing the Word as Nineteenth-Century Ideology,” in *Bearing the Word.*

13 Gilbert and Gubar famously explain the lack of a female authorship tradition in writing in their seminal text *The Madwoman in the Attic,* arguing that this lack of tradition fills the female author with severe anxiety because she is using a masculine tool (the pen) and engaging in a masculine activity (authorship) which has its own long and proud history. Male power is his “creative gift,” to regenerate and rule, to create and control, therefore it only follows that women cannot (and will not) write: it is unnatural, because they are not “made” for art; they have no penis. They are defined by what they lack (3-4, 6). Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* Second Ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.

14 Elizabeth Grosz explains the “hierarchy of bodily emissions” in Western society, a model leaving male bodily emissions “unexamined” while fixing female bodily emissions and thus the female body itself “as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking [...] self-containment [...] a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order” (*Volatile* 195, 198, 203). For more on the construction of femininity and especially the problematic fluidity of the female body, see Theweleit, Klaus. *Male Fantasies. Volume I: Women, Floods, Bodies, History.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987; Elizabeth Grosz,
The modernist author James Joyce is famous for his continued and overt use of birthing tropes, imagery, and metaphors, both in his novels and in his personal correspondence. Joyce writes of his novel as “the child which I have carried for years and years in the womb of the imagination as you carried in your womb the children you love,” a child nourished “day after day out of my brain and my memory…” (202-3). And in Joyce’s seminal text, *Ulysses*, Stephen Daedelus, Buck Mulligan, and their friends have an extended debate about authorship and the birthing of texts in the library which culminates in Buck mimicking Shakespeare’s authorship: “Himself his own father, Sonmulligan told himself. Wait. I am big with child. I have an unborn child in my brain. Pallas Athena! […] Let me parturiate! He clasped his paunchbrow with both birthaiding hands” (208). Much like we will see in Woolf, Bagnold, and Mitchison, female embodiment in Joyce suffers as a result of losing the power inherent in the childbirth act as it is subsumed by the larger patriarchal culture surrounding it. Childbirth for Joyce often is employed to illustrate the female’s lack of power or extreme grounding in the physical realm while the men birth text-babies in a doubly-powerful move. Mapping the physical birth drive onto the


masculine body ultimately complicates the importance of female birth in the text while highlighting the subjectivity and centrality of the male-birther.17

Donna Wilshire explains that in the pre-modern age before Descartes and his division of mind and body, knowledge was founded on a deep belief in the importance of myth and was expressed “in an abundance of inexact, constantly shifting, seemingly illogical metaphors” (99). These myths had “no unbending obligation to logic” but were instead “pattern—overall pattern and ever-reoccurring cycles” resulting in a “special kind of truth and knowledge” (99). Sara Ruddick claims that men, suspicious of the arbitrary and unmappable nature of both women’s knowledge and body knowledge, began to systematically map cerebral metaphors of “a higher creativity” onto images of birthgiving, harnessing the power men craved yet transmuting it into an acceptable (read: controllable) form (Maternal Thinking 192). And thus the tradition of birth imagery was born, instigating centuries of male and female authors alike employing images of gestation and parturition to describe the creative authorship process of their minds. Indeed, the gestational trope had become so ordinary by the modernist period that its use often escapes critical commentary. The trope is taken at face value, no additional critical commentary necessary: a author births texts as a woman births babies.

17 Birth in Ulysses, especially as linked to womb imagery, the image of the maternal, and the episode of the “Oxen of the Sun,” is a well-researched aspect of the novel. In Ulysses, a woman’s birthgiving capacity is often cited directly with her all-consuming nature, her need, and, ultimately, the death of the one who is birthed. In this way, the “womb” and the “tomb” are fused. For notable recent criticism on this topic, see Michael Davidson; De Marco, Nick. “‘Oxen of the Sun’ and the Gestation of the Word.” Joyce in Trieste: An Album of Risky Readings. Eds. Sebastian D. G. Knowles, Geert Lernout and John McCourt. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2007. 78-86; Duffy, Enda. “Interesting States: Birthing and the Nation in ‘Oxen of the Sun.’” Ulysses-En-Gendered Perspectives: Eighteen New Essays on the Episodes. Eds. Kimberly J. Devlin and Marilyn Reizbaum. Cultural Frames, Framing Culture. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1999. 210-28; and Osteen, Mark. “Cribs in the Countinghouse: Plagiarism, Proliferation, and Labor in ‘Oxen of the Sun.’” Joyce in the Hibernian Metropolis: Essays. Ed. Morris Beja. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1996. 237-249. For an excellent introduction to Joyce’s ambivalent employment of women and female voices in Ulysses, see Callow, Heather Cook. “Joyce’s Female Voices in Ulysses.” The Journal of Narrative Technique 22.3 (Fall 1992): 151-163. Callow explains that the novel causes its readers to be suspicious of the voices of women (158) – “we slip easily into the Dublin male perspective” – but it is also important that Joyce gives Molly the “last word” (160). In some ways, then, Molly and the other women of Dublin are the driving and arranging forces in the novel (160).
The authors I discuss in this section—Woolf, Bagnold, and Mitchison—are notable because of the distinctly twentieth-century spin they put on this history of masculine or disembodied appropriation of birth rhetoric. Not only do they each approach this tradition differently, as noted above, but they also fuse traditional birthing imagery with the burgeoning culture of pregnancy in the modernist era, paying specific attention to competing cultural clusters of somatic representation found in areas like fascism, eugenics, the Women’s Movement, and the consolidation and crumbling of the British empire. Thus, the history of disembodied or “bloodless” birth takes a politicized turn in these texts, incorporating critiques of race, class, the body, empire, and politics in new and compelling ways.

1. Virginia Woolf, Reproduction, and the Masculine Mind

By now, Virginia Woolf needs no introduction. A preeminent writer of the modernist era, she is “arguably still the only universally canonized British woman modernist” to date (Garrity, “Found” 807) and has served to largely define the British modernist movement at the expense of other women writers. Her texts are notable to my study due to their employment of a birth from above model, a move I argue shadows the conception of the female body in her texts and makes all instances of this body highly suspect. Granted, Woolf herself was suspicious of the machinations of empire and of rising forces like fascism with its cultural appropriation of the mother figure. Urmila Seshagiri argues that the reader can most see Woolf’s reaction to empire

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18 Garrity, Jane. “Found and Lost: The Politics of Modernist Recovery.” *Modernism/ Modernity* 15.4 (Nov. 2008): 803-12. One example of other modernist writers being undervalued is found in Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* (a series of novels published 1914-1939), which includes extended experiments with stream-of-consciousness, form, narration, subjectivity, and chronology, yet remains underread in comparison to Woolf. Similarly, Katherine Mansfield broke new ground in literature by illuminating the subjective, key moment in her short stories at the expense of traditional, plot-heavy short stories. Her direct, impressionistic texts may seem simple compared to Woolf, but they are equally philosophical. Both Richardson and Mansfield, while written about much more extensively than Olive Moore, are still marginal modernist writers in comparison to the towering specter of Woolf. An October 2010 MLA search brings up 2783 texts written on Woolf, 111 on Dorothy Richardson, and 340 on Mansfield.
in *Three Guineas*, where Woolf writes “against a family legacy of patriarchal nationalism and imperial administration,” as “her grandfather Sir James Stephen […] was a founding figure of queen Victoria’s empire” (*Race* 145).

An illustration of the insidious influence of the British empire and the divisive “us versus them” mentality it creates appears in Woolf’s first novel, *The Voyage Out*, in which non-English characters are perceived only from the point of view of the white, conquering British figure.19 These non-English “Others” appear when the British tourists visit a “native” village in South America, yet even in this utterly foreign landscape the tourists map their Britishness onto their experience: at the outset, they sit on their lawn chairs waiting for the ship to depart, and as the characters stroll, they dream the foliage reminds them of a park in England in an instance of “cultural mimesis” (Friedman “Cultural Parataxis” 46).20 When the tourists finally come face to face with the “Others,” notably it is a woman and child who stares back at them with such brash audacity, the English become embarrassed and “finally turn[] away, rather than stand there looking at her any longer” (285).21 Woolf was well acquainted with the divisions mapped onto humanity through the workings of empire, and she consistently interrogates such dichotomous scaffoldings throughout her writing. As Kathy J. Phillips argues, Woolf also discusses non-white or othered subjects condescendingly (xxxiv), and shows a “coolness derived from her early training to feel ‘superior’” (xxxv). Despite this “insensitivity to colonized people and her lack of

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19 Laura Winkiel, in *Modernism, Race and Manifestos* (2008), pinpoints the importance of non-English characters in modernism when she argues that Woolf’s deconstruction of the rigid gender system allows Woolf to open up a new racial space of modernity in which “the return of the colonized and racially repressed” can appear (193, 204).


first-hand knowledge of the colonies,” Philips claims that Woolf nevertheless “felt strongly that the English civilization […] was not worth exporting” (xxxv). In Philips’s view, Woolf harbored extreme guilt that “her own life-style depended to a certain extent on the fruits of an Empire exposed in her novels as unjustified” (xxxviii).

Just as Woolf was eager to distance herself from the British empire, then, she was additionally eager to jettison contemporary rhetoric limiting the woman to her body and to her reproductive capacity (we have seen some of this rhetoric in chapter one). Renée Dickinson argues that Woolf’s characters try to show themselves as “more than body” as they struggle with representing “the corporeal manifestation of patriarchal ideas of femininity, specifically those of marriage and maternity” (18, 27). Further, Shirley Panken claims Woolf’s “indeterminancy regarding her self-concept and her vacillation concerning sexual and personal identification” stems from “her sense of inadequacy and deviance concerning body-image and sexual identity” (15).

While such bodily ambivalence is often included in Woolf scholarship, what is consistently overlooked is how this ambivalence coupled with her use of masculine (disembodied) births in her texts combines to create a birth paradigm founded on the masculine and the mind, eschewing the bodily feminine and thereby removing critical avenues of power from the woman.

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23 Woolf’s seminal biographer, Hermione Lee, characterizes Woolf’s struggles with the body thusly: her “menstrual cycle […] always made her ill” and “in dreams and jokes, her body’s functions often took control,” usually categorized by barely-disguised or overt disgust (353-4). Lee, Hermione. *Virginia Woolf*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999. Lee also argues “Virginia Woolf was a sane woman who had an illness. […] She endured, periodically, great agony of mind and severe physical pain, with remarkably little self-pity” (171). Alexandra Harris, in her 2011 biography of Woolf, explains Woolf’s corporeal condition was often associated with “the lifelong shame she felt about her body,” a shame Harris links to the physical abuse Woolf purportedly suffered at the hands of her step-brothers, George and Gerald Duckworth (29-31). Harris, Alexandra. *Virginia Woolf*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011. Elizabeth Abel argues Woolf’s fictions make it clear Woolf herself was uncomfortable with “biological maternity” (87), and texts like *A Room of One’s Own* illustrate the weakness of the female body (101). Abel, Elizabeth. *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989. Donald Childs
I argue that Woolf’s texts, especially *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938), *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Orlando* (1928), and “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” (1940) correspond to the “birth from above” model—birth that is figurative, controlled, and clean, not literal, bodily, or messy. It is significant that Woolf chiefly employs “bloodless” models of birth from above, for in her aim to achieve a clean reproduction of the mind, she inevitably aligns herself with the sphere of masculinity and of empire—a sphere which she is blatantly critical of, to be sure, but a sphere which her bloodless texts, doing their own work, nevertheless bolster. Birth in Woolf is patriarchal and disembodied, often has masculine connotations, and seeks to bolster the empire and Englishness (by supplying proper British citizens), to map the mind of the writer, or to explore psychological, ideological, and political systems. Physical birth, when it happens, appears in the margins (literally between the acts) or is artificially truncated (as in *Orlando*) in a narrative or rhetorical technique contemporary critic Rebecca Walkowitz terms Woolf’s “evasion” – her technique of writing about crucial topics while not addressing them directly (124).

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24 While I do not have the time nor space to include it in depth here, Woolf’s short story, “A Society,” deals with reproduction, the creation of ideas vs. bodies, and the specious notion of “chastity” which is placed upon women only. For more on this story, see Dick, Susan. “‘What Fools We Were!’: Virginia Woolf’s ‘A Society.’” *Twentieth Century Literature* 33.1 (Spring 1987): 51-66.

Women in Woolf’s texts are not often key players in British society. They are watchers, supporters—doing their own small part, to be sure (as in Mrs. Dalloway’s party or Mrs. Ramsay’s domestic dramas), but Woolf and the reader are both aware the world of masculine commerce, idea-making, and empire is the more controlling, therefore powerful, sphere. Yet even this approximation is a tricky construction to erect, especially about a writer such as Woolf, who “has a passion for ‘lives of the obscure,’” lives that were “mostly [] women’s” (Lee 13), and such uncovering is most certainly a project Woolf undertakes in her novels, important in its own right and not to be discarded. Woolf’s value system, as any woman’s at the turn of the century, was necessarily split—she felt respect and admiration for great men and her country but also felt disenfranchised as a woman, unable to vote until 1918 and barred from studying at institutions like Oxford until 1920.26 Perhaps due to her being excluded from these echelons of official learning, Woolf refused all markers of worldly power and respect later on in life, and famously mocked the ribbons and metals of learned men in Three Guineas.27

26 While the first women’s colleges at Cambridge were established in 1869 (Girton College) and 1872 (Newnham College), Woolf’s family followed the Victorian model of sending the boys to school and leaving the girls at home to their “lonely self-education” (“University of Cambridge”; Lee 139-141). “University of Cambridge.” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 4 Sept. 2012. Web. 5 Sept. 2012. The admirable difference in the Stephen household was that Virginia had access to her father’s formidable library and was encouraged “from the age of ten or eleven” to take up writing and reading as furthering the family’s literary heritage (Lee 56, 140). For more on Woolf as a reader, see Cuddy-Keane, Melba. Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. Cuddy-Keane argues Woolf was quite revolutionary in proposing an emphasis on a common reader, a “classless, democratic, but intellectual readership,” a “pedagogical Woolf” “concerned about making highbrow intellectual culture available to all” (2).

27 In Three Guineas, Woolf ridicules men for criticizing women’s love of dress when men don robes, wigs, ermine capes, and all manner of ridiculous clothing for public ceremony (23). She links the love of such ceremonial dress to the love of war and the splendid costumes that goad young men on, and claims that another way to prevent war is for “the daughters of educated men” to “refuse all such distinctions and all such uniforms” (27). She also mocks the absurdity of flaunting one’s accomplishments through one’s clothing: “A woman who advertised her motherhood by a tuft of horsehair on the left shoulder would scarcely, you will agree, be a venerable object” (26). Woolf, Virginia. Three Guineas. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1938. Julia Briggs argues Woolf uses fashion and clothing to symbolize ideas of broader social and cultural change (79). Briggs, Julia. “The Novels of the 1930s and the Impact of History.” The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf. Eds. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. 72-90.
Both worlds—the masculine realm of commerce and empire acting over and beyond the heads of the women, who often engage in a subterranean or “othered” world of “intercorporeality” as Laura Doyle calls it—are important to any conception of Woolf’s oeuvre. I nonetheless claim that the world of the masculine and of empire is inherently understood by the reader to be more powerful, more “real” because of the power it holds over the lives of these women. For while, for example, the myriad small mental adjustments of Clarissa Dalloway that result in a fabulous party attended by the Prime Minister are important, there is also importance that the Prime Minister attends her party, that Clarissa’s thoughts and movements are effecting the realm of this “other,” masculine world. As Kathy J. Phillips reads this scene in *Mrs. Dalloway,* “if officials stand revealed as insubstantial or shallow, they do possess power. Governmental opinions and social norms together carry enormous weight, affecting […] all the characters” (3). And Donald Childs puts it this way: in *Room,* the narrator makes it clear a woman should “respect” not only her reproductive capacity, but also what “they” are saying—the experts, the “economists,” and the men (71; qting *Room* 111).

Thoughts and ideas, hopes and wishes, the realm of subjectivity embraced by the women in Woolf’s novels do not build roads and erect empires—granted, suspect activity in itself. Woolf, queen of the complex, multivalent and ambivalent, leaves almost nothing clearly defined in her writing. She instead takes up the modernist project of a profusion of voices, with “[n]o voice of certainty” prevailing (Allen 27). Yet there are unmistakably these two worlds, the

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28 Doyle in *Bordering on the Body* explains “intercorporeality” is an “other-enmeshed shape, structure, and sensibility in living things” (67); it disrupts the race mother’s central position (76), and like other forms of linguistic communication, “initiates an exchange that opens the meaning of space and begins to readjust the orientation of self, object, and Other within that space” (79). In other words, intercorporeality is one of the primary ways Woolf illustrates connection and community within her novels.

masculine and the feminine, often divided, and critiqued by Woolf at some points and lauded at others. “Woolf’s tone is sometimes hard to catch, as she condemns a stupid society yet pities the character who is caught in that society” (Phillips xxv). There is a clear division between the normative or socially-expected activity done by women in Woolf and such activity done by men.  

Men inhabit the realm of ideas, of empire-making and of building roads, while women watch, keeping the home front clean and well-organized. As Clorinda states in “A Society,” “While we have borne the children, [men], we supposed, have borne the books and the pictures. We have populated the world. They have civilised it” (125). The reader understands that while both realms are important to any conception of reality and empire, Western philosophical constructions weighted masculine as they are would value one realm over the other, and it is the realm of action, war, and conquering new realms for the expanding British empire. Throughout her texts, then, Woolf seeks to write a different path—either as an alternative to this realm of empire or as a path into the realm as a way to understand it, and begin to infiltrate and to effect change from the inside out.

Another quite obvious way to earmark these two categories is of public versus private. Hermione Lee claims Woolf was taken with these two divisions, and the “politics of outsiderism” (52): “the conflict between private and public […] will be one of the main subjects of her writing life” (19). But a further problem is encountered in seeking to divide Woolf’s texts into masculine versus feminine, public versus private: if the “real” is partitioned into empire and

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30 Rita Felski’s *The Gender of Modernity* highlights “the dominant sociological theories of masculinity and femininity that profoundly defined the modern era’s sense of itself” (Seshagiri, *Race* 194). It recovers “women’s contributions to modernism” and crucially establishes “that gender is conceptually essential for understanding the movement and its era” (194). Felski takes pains to explain it is the essential notion of “femininity and modernity” operating within the modern, therefore “[g]ender […] reveals itself to be a central organizing metaphor” (Felski 9).
action versus homespace and contemplation, it is interesting that the former, usually linked with the mind, and the latter, usually linked with the body, is not so easily divided. As a result, the mind/body split in Woolf is nowhere near as stable as other divisions—and even these are not stable, as they are constantly critiqued, questioned, dismantled, flipped. As Urmila Seshagiri explains, clear divisions such as white and black, self and other, were “marvelously supple” in many modernist works and in “fast-changing urban landscapes” (Seshagiri, Race 7).

Women in Woolf inhabit female body space, to be sure, but they also think about it a great deal. Woolf illustrates better than no one else the rooting of the mind and the space of subjectivity that a life of the body engenders. In the words of Teresa Fulker, Woolf’s texts demonstrate “somatic input in the construction of reality” (8): Woolf illustrates (quite ironically) the heightened life of the mind a woman is forced to live once this very same woman is conscribed to the realm of the flesh only. A woman who is defined by society as belonging only to the body and to the home will escape into the life of the mind, Woolf argues, and it is this mental life that blurs the essential division between the body and mind throughout Woolf. There is no clear division between this binary—she seeks a “combination, rather than a polarization, of the intellectual and the corporeal”—and it is perhaps due to this instability of the binary that Woolf’s use of birth imagery is at once so significant and so accepted as to escape critical notice (Adolph, “Consumption” 129).


I maintain the reader should approach Woolf’s deployment of “birth from above” with caution, understanding that to remove birth from the female realm, to disembodied it and “masculinize” it as a birth of the mind, is to remove an inherent source of power and purpose from her female characters. Further, to give this birth to the male characters, to uproot it and replant it in the “enemy” camp, is to give even more power to traditional male divisions such as empire, commerce, finances, intelligence, the mind, ideas, and the birth of texts rather than of bodies.

Critics often discuss Woolf’s feminist thrust, her writing style, and her use of the mother. Notable recent studies of Woolf consider her treatment of Jewishness, her use of nature (flowers, horseback riding imagery), and fashion. While there are few book-length studies on specifically the female body in Woolf, it is nevertheless very well-trodden critical ground, as


For Woolf’s feminist thrust, see Laura Marcus, “Woolf’s Feminism and Feminism’s Woolf,” who claims Woolf is explicitly feminist in politics but is also interested in “gender identities and with women's lives, histories and fictions” (209). For Woolf’s writing style, see Pamela Caughie, Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism, who employs postmodernism to highlight Woolf’s writing style, especially where the role of art and characterization is concerned (xii). Caughie, Pamela. Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism: Literature in Quest and Question of Itself. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991. Notable critics writing on the mother in Woolf include Elizabeth Abel; Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, who argues the “need to recover the mother” is a central motif in Woolf (Invisible 15); and Heather Ingram, who discusses the “difficulties of recovering the maternal legacy” (135). Rosenman, Ellen Bayuk. The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1986; Ingram, Heather. Women’s Fiction Between the Wars: Mothers, Daughters, and Writing. New York: St. Martin’s P, 1998. For a more recent critical exploration of Woolf’s relationship with her mother, see Goldberg, Jennifer. “A Mixture of the Madonna and a Woman of the World”: Virginia Woolf’s Assessment of the Mother.” Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering 10.2 (2008): 171-183. Goldberg argues that writing the mother was one way Woolf sought to work through her trauma, therefore Woolf’s mother, Julia, was “in many senses the source of Virginia Woolf’s artistic genius” (171).

almost every book on Woolf mentions the subject, if only in passing. Even so, there are select key works essential to my study. Renée Dickinson, in *Female Embodiment and Subjectivity in the Modernist Novel* (2009), explores how the narrative form employed by experimental modernist writers like Woolf and Moore subverts patriarchal ideology and opens up a new feminine space establishing women as more than just body. At the same time, these women writers seek “textual strategies to replace the fleshy feminine once missing in modernist texts” (15), thereby encoding the body even as they seek to move beyond its confines.

In her 2007 book, *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys and the Aesthetics of Trauma*, Patricia Moran considers the way both Woolf and Rhys write in relation and response to an inner core of body and mind trauma: sexual abuse, mental abuse, loss of the mother. Moran analyzes Woolf’s use of birth imagery and argues Woolf “reconceptualizes the hymen, contesting its patriarchal valuations of chastity […] and rewriting it as the threshold of communication between women” (48). Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, in *The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship* (1986), also considers Woolf’s use of the body and of birth imagery, and, similar to the argument I construct, Rosenman finds Woolf’s connection between pregnancy and death problematic (61). Finally, Jane Maher, in “Prone to Pregnancy: *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf and Sally Potter Represent the Gestating Body” (2007), optimistically argues that *Orlando* offers a positive body space predicated on fruitfulness and multiplicity, one that employs pregnancy to lead to new connections and new avenues of productivity (28).  

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36 Maher, Jane Maree. “Prone to Pregnancy: *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf and Sally Potter Represent the Gestating Body.” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 28 (Jan. 2007): 19-30. For an additional source that argues for the centrality and importance of pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering in *Orlando*, see Preissle, Robert. “Society’s Child: Orlando’s Son.” *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 66 (2004): 15-21. Preissle claims that Orlando’s pregnancy and resulting offspring are “more than a footnote in understanding the novel” but are instead “the logical completion of a work that scrutinizes three of the most conventional roles of women” (21).
In *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration*, Donald Childs details Woolf’s eugenic discourses, both covert and overt, and the way Woolf internalized the Foucauldian notion of “the cultural policing of criminality, insanity, and sexuality” in her texts (53). His work is important in forming a conception of Woolf’s “biological model of creativity,” her heterosexual deployment of reproduction, and her eugenical judgment of the morality of breeding and of birth control (68, 71-73).

In addition to this important work on the body in Woolf, a few texts are so essential to my study that they warrant special mention. Elizabeth Abel, in *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (1989), provides an integral framework of maternal ambivalence, birth, and birthing metaphors in Woolf’s oeuvre, arguing Woolf shifted from a matrilineal concern (following Klein) to a patrilineal (Freud) after fascism appropriated and ruined the image of the mother for her. Similarly, Patricia Moran’s *Word of Mouth: Body Language in Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf* (1996) explores the tensions of the body found in both Mansfield and Woolf, and their use of “textuality and technique as a means of escaping from the confines of the body,” a need for “escape” derived in part from contempt for [the body’s] femaleness” (17). Moran considers birth imagery, biological metaphors, chastity, and sexuality as appetite in Woolf, all of which are a tremendous help to this project. Abel and Moran’s work on birthing metaphors in Woolf is the only extant work of their kind to date, and I am indebted to these important studies.

Shirley Panken’s *Virginia Woolf and the ‘Lust of Creation’: A Psychoanalytic Exploration* (1987) also performs essential work on Woolf’s struggle with her femininity, her bodily ambivalence, her writing of the reproductive drive, and her fixation with “images of fertility” in her texts (265). Panken importantly concludes that Woolf’s “femaleness seemed to
her an unjust disadvantage” (51), and that rather than birth babies, Woolf wrote novels to leave her legacy and to fulfill her dream of creating “afresh” (265).

A final important predecessor to this study is Jane Garrity’s *Step-Daughters of England* (2003), in which Garrity explores the ways that four British interwar women writers—Woolf, Butts, Richardson, and Townsend-Warner—respond to interweaving issues of gender and nationality in their experimental modernist novels. Garrity analyzes “the alliance between femininity and spatial trespass” (76), mapping and spatial tropes, to chart the ways such women writers wrote themselves into the cultural imaginary, wrote themselves as daughters, not mothers, of England, and therefore responded to the prevailing cultural sentiment linking women to their bodies through their potential motherhood—mothers of whiteness, Englishness, and the “superior” race.

My study, while indebted to this foundational work, takes the additional step in arguing that Woolf’s insistence on “bloodless birth,” the birth of ideas instead of babies, aligns her with empire and with “racial-patriarchy” (to employ Doyle’s phrase). While Woolf is highly critical of empire in all its manifestations, she nevertheless (and perhaps unknowingly) bolsters it with her use of reproductive metaphors. The horror of the reproducing female body in Woolf’s oeuvre leads Woolf to a disembodied model of reproduction—masculine minds over female bodies—that ultimately falls within the patriarchal service of empire. No existing analysis pairs a focus on disembodied birth with an analysis of the body and the role of the British empire in Woolf, as I seek to do here.

To begin any study of reproduction and empire, one must turn to the mothers. It is well-established that the mothers in Woolf’s novels ultimately bolster the workings of the British empire on the home front; as Edward Said famously argues, during high imperialism, almost
every British citizen served “the high civilizational and commercial cause of empire” (221).

Further, Jane Garrity cites Ann Kaplan as arguing that there is no longer a clear division between spheres of male and female power in the modernist novel; “domesticity is not removed from the world of politics and culture but is deeply implicated in its relation to nationalism and imperialism” (Step-Daughters 13). The mother figure, reproduction, and empire are inextricably linked because the mother reproduces empire: she literally births the bodies that will become proper British citizens. Laura Doyle analyzes the daughter’s necessity of journeying away both from her matrilineal heritage as founded in the mother’s central body and away from the boundaries of empire linked to national and patriarchal policings in Woolf (142). Similarly, Garrity explains because “the mother is an integral part of England’s social order” and “the home is the cornerstone of the nation,” texts such as The Waves encode “female authorship […] at the sacred core of national culture” in an attempt to “represent the unrepresentable – the mother’s body” (Step-Daughters 242, 249).

Perhaps the most “unrepresentable” aspect of the mother’s body for Woolf was the bodily work of pregnancy and childbirth. Throughout her life, Woolf experienced a vast array of reoccurring physical and mental problems, and even conceded (along with pressure from her husband and her doctor) to never have children, a decision which she “often bitterly regretted” (Lee 328-30; 537). She turned instead to birthing texts, transmuting her ambivalent desires for physical progeny into mental and textual progeny: “I put my life blood into writing, & [Vanessa] had children” (Woolf, Diary V, 30 Nov. 1937, pg. 120; qtd in Lee 329). The tension in this move was never fully worked out, and throughout her life, Woolf continued to vacillate in her diary, one day praising her ability to give mental birth to textual children, the next lamenting

37 For more information on “racial motherhood” and mothers as guardians of the race, see footnote 17 in chapter one.
that, unlike her sister Vanessa, she would never experience physical birth: “Never pretend that children, for instance, can be replaced by other things” (Woolf, Diary II, 2 Jan. 1923, pg. 221; qtd in Lee 329). Woolf was nothing if not ambivalent about reproduction in every form.

Woolf also continuously distanced herself from the female body in both subtle and overt ways, even admitting in “Professions for Women” that she had not “solved” the problem of “telling the truth about my own experiences as a body” (1387). While she fervently loved and admired her mother, Julia, who functioned as an ideal “image of female perfection,” “beauty and goodness incarnate, sacrificing herself in the service of others” (Rosenman, Invisible 5), Woolf was also frustrated Julia gave so much of herself to her family and to charitable organizations, leaving nothing for herself (Woolf, Diary III, 28 Nov. 1928, pg. 208; qtd in Lee 80). Woolf was convinced this over-extension of Julia’s good will was part of the reason why Julia died at such a young age. Thereafter, Woolf attached herself to her father, with whom she always had a complicated relationship; she simultaneously loved his mind and his writing and loathed the way he would consume all women in his path, desiring sympathy and service from them (this is famously illustrated by Mr. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse). She became a great writer herself, in the tradition of her father, shunning the body and the “soft” incarnations of femininity it represented. Some critics even suggest it is when she first experienced menstruation that she had her first nervous breakdown (Showalter 267). Indeed, the shame and secrecy surrounding the female bodily condition that Woolf was raised with (as a product of a Victorian household)


39 Molly Hite categorizes Julia Stephen as creating “an atmosphere of feminine deference and sacrifice that implicitly authorized masculine dominance” (19). Hite argues Julia is one example of the “social body,” a body cramped and thwarted by social conventions, versus the “visionary body” existing in much of Woolf, “the body that experiences without social implications” (9). Hite, Molly. “Woolf’s Two Bodies.” Genders 31 (2000): 1-36.

explains why she would find such female bodily processes difficult to bear. Regardless, Woolf offers one of the more famous instances of pursing the father through writing, and throughout her life, she paid for this allegiance with an extremely strained relationship toward her own body.41

This bodily strain appears throughout Woolf’s novels: motherless Rachel in *A Voyage Out* dies because she cannot properly join the heterosexual coupling the British empire is founded on; Lily in *To the Lighthouse*, the spiritual daughter of Mrs. Ramsay, remains a predominately cerebral presence, largely eschewing the life of the body, represented by marriage, for the solitary artistic life of the mind in homage to Mrs. Ramsay, who sacrificed everything for her family and her husband. The female body simply doesn’t work in Woolf; it must be ameliorated with the (masculine) mind, merging to create a new and androgynous being.42 As Ben O’Dell claims, “Woolf’s bodies have a tendency to bend and break under the world’s pressure” (48).43 To be all woman in Woolf—especially all reproducing woman—is to be lacking and vulnerable. Woolf was smart enough to know it was society mapping this reality onto the bodies of women, yet she consistently reproduced this map herself.

41 Of course, one could also claim that Woolf pursues the mother throughout her writing as well; as Rosenman argues, Woolf took up her mother’s pen, not her father’s (*Invisible* 55). The “passion of the daughter for the mother,” so often displayed in Woolf’s texts, is perhaps most clearly seen in the relationship between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* (Rich 228). See footnote 33 in this chapter, where I list notable mother-centric Woolf critics such as Abel, Rosenman, and Ingram. Finally, to insist Woolf pursued the father in writing is not to argue Woolf did not experience extreme ambivalence in her relationship with him. Hermoine Lee relates how Woolf’s relationship with her father was “complicated” and how Woolf harbored “lifelong rage” against him due to her “helplessness in the face of an egotistical exploitation of power” and due to his “irrational meanness” as the “tyrant” of the household who spent a mere 100 pounds on her education (Lee 146).

42 With the use of “androgyny,” I am gesturing towards Woolf’s famous construction in *A Room of One’s Own*, where she employs Coleridge’s statement that “a great mind is androgynous,” a “fusion” allowing the mind to be “fully fertilized” and to use “all its faculties” (98). See chapter six in *Room* for more on androgyny.

Woolf’s use of the birthing trope, then, is notable for the way it marries a (female) body process with a (masculine) mental one. Perhaps the most famous and critiqued instance of this birthing trope occurring in Woolf’s oeuvre appears in A Room of One’s Own, in which Woolf famously describes the writer’s ideal mind as having both male and female parts, existing in pure androgyny. This mind begets a novel as it “celebrate[s] its nuptials in darkness” (104); “[p]oetry ought to have a mother as well as a father,” the narrator argues, as if the poem itself is offspring of a mental union (103). Patricia Moran labels this passage “heterosexist,” and wonders if it is proof Woolf subscribed to the then-popular field of sexology (Virginia Woolf 44). Further, while Woolf claims “[t]he book has somehow to be adapted to the body” (Room 78), she also argues it is “fatal” to write as either a man or a woman, but instead, to write in the “perfect fullness” of the consummation of this “marriage of opposites” (104). What body is this, then, which is neither male nor female? Does a genderless, sexless body “only repeat[] the suppression of women’s sexual difference” (Dallery 65)? Is it an escape from the body, from society and the sex system, the space of disembodiment and of the “grave” as Elaine Showalter famously contends in A Literature of Their Own? (297) Or, is this Woolf’s way of “breaking the sequence,” writing beyond the conventional romantic ending, emphasizing the female bond, and ushering in new “unconventionally gendered characters” like she will do in Orlando? (DuPlessis 49, 60, 62)

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45 Other critics contend androgyny is Woolf’s illustration of “different ways of talking about identity, different kinds of appropriateness, different functions of language,” culminating in “a failure to choose” (Caughie 81-2). Elizabeth Abel states androgyny is the answer to the stifling “I” of patriarchy (87), while Toril Moi argues androgyny is “the deconstruction of sexual identity and of the duality masculinity-femininity” (L. Marcus 231). Ellen Rosenman claims androgyny is just one more way the female body is “sublimated” in Room: “Androgyny is not inclusive but becomes, ironically, another form of fascism, attempting to suppress the female body and the physical specificity of the woman-centered tradition that the narrator has so painstakingly constructed” (276). Rosenman, Ellen. “A Fish on the Line: Desire, Repression, and the Law of the Father in A Room of One’s Own.” Virginia Woolf: Emerging Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Third Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf.
While I do not have the time or space to fully explore the issue of the androgynous being in *Room*, suffice it to say the text was written at a time when the battle over the woman’s body—its freedoms, control, and definitions—was at its peak. As Susan Squier relates, the 1920s was an era “obsessed with reproductive control and power” (*Babies* 92). From 1910-29, condom use was increasingly publicized due to WWI, and due to high mortality rates for pregnant women, more attention was paid to their hardships. Woolf knew about birth control by 1923, and supported its use among the lower classes by 1930 (Hauck 116). Further, after the 1920s, Britain finally possessed the proper technology to introduce birth control on a large scale (92), increasing the eugenic furor over who was breeding, and whether proper or improper bodies were being produced. *Room* is therefore Woolf’s way of interrogating the reproductive female condition; the text is firmly rooted in a “post-suffrage” vision of feminism, one which emphasized the biological inequalities linked to gestation that women faced (Abel 88).

According to Donald Childs, Woolf admired the “technological sophistication” of limiting gestation through birth control but “deplore[d] the morality”; her fear of sex “without issue” manifested in *Room* was intimately linked to her eugenic fear of bad or monstrous births (71-2).

Importantly, the births in *Room* subscribe to ancient masculine rhetoric, appropriating them into mental acts men can perform as well—indeed, men often perform better than women,


46 Hauck goes on to argue Woolf denied birth control to all her characters – families are either extremely prolific or sterile due to abstinence (with the exception of the Olivers and the Bradshaws) (119). For more on Woolf and birth control, see Donald Childs, Elizabeth Abel, and Hauck, Christina. “‘To Escape the Horror of Family Life’: Virginia Woolf and the British Birth Control Debate.” *New Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Helen Wussow. Dallas: Contemporary Research P, 1995. 15-37. In the latter source, Hauck argues Woolf was “deeply conscious of the limited ability of birth control, even as a widespread practice, to alter fundamentally relations between the sexes” (17).
beating them at their own game. There is tremendous anxiety over female birth and female authorship in *Room* and a fundamental belief one cannot be fully woman and fully author. As Abel states, “Biological motherhood in *Room* disqualifies literary maternity” (88). To birth a text in Woolf’s model is to need both biological systems, the enfolding womb and the impregnating phallus, and the parts the writer lacks, he or she is supposed to conjure irregardless of physical bodily status. Masculinity and femininity may be equal, then (as both are needed to reproduce), but throughout *Room*, it is masculinity shown to be the controlling, powerful side. This control is laughed at—Woolf’s wondering if Sir Archibald Bodkin is “concealed” in the cupboard among the “table-napkins” is one example (111)—but it exists nonetheless. Woolf is very much aware of who holds the reins of society (there’s that Beadle chasing her narrator off the grass again). Women, she argues, instead of holding their own with the womanly sentence, need to meet men in the middle and write a little more like them to be successful.

Woolf shrewdly surmises and advises her readers in *Room* that in order to be more effective in an institutionalized, patriarchal world, women need to turn from the slavery of bodily births to the birth of the mind. Putting aside the female body and focusing on the mind in a time when woman was solely relegated to the realm of the body is certainly an admirable and worthy goal, it is true. It is crucial to recall that Woolf was importantly distancing herself from the body when ruling systems such as fascism sought to confine women to their physical bodies,

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especially where birth was concerned. In this light, Woolf’s revision of a “bloodless” birth can be read as an attempt to free women from the prison of being cast as only “walking wombs” (Bland, *Beast* 91). But what I am also interested in is how, throughout Woolf’s writing, she consistently turns away from specifically female embodiment and thus a celebration of power through femininity. She comes close to celebrating femininity at times, but then either covers the female form, changes the conversation, transmutes the physical into mental, or reiterates the life of the mind, a bloodless model again. Consistently downplaying the physical in light of the mental results in a problematic and recurrent theme of female disembodiment, as we shall see in further instances of her texts.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf returns to reproductive imagery to discuss large forces in the world like patriarchy, fascism, and war, in a move Laura Winkiel terms Woolf’s “racial critique” of modernity (193). Woolf’s main query in this text is if all paths lead to war, how can women specifically form an “Outsider’s Club” and begin to make small but systematic changes in the masculine system, like a computer virus set loose from within? Woolf claims fascist sentiments are breeding in England under the word “Miss,” “the egg of the very same worm”; the “embryo” of the “creature, Dictator” (*Three Guineas* 65). Woolf also attacks “brain prostitution,” in which a woman, Mrs. Oliphant, prostitutes her mind to provide for her children. Selling your brain is worse than your body, Woolf claims, for “its anemic, vicious and diseased progeny are let loose upon the world to infect and corrupt and sow the seeds of disease in others” (112).

There is a certain amount of corporeal disgust in this text, and it shines in passages such as these. Worms are breeding and laying eggs which hatch into more worms, an image usually equated to maggots, which translates to decay of the somatic, and brains are engaging in sexualized behavior for money, out of which their horrific and monstrous zombie-offspring
clamber forth to wreak havoc on the helpless masses. It smacks strongly of Mary Shelley famously bidding her “hideous progeny” to “go forth and prosper” in the Introduction to *Frankenstein* (173). But the corporeal disgust one finds in *Three Guineas* is laced with the specifically female body in a dual manner: not only is it the *female* body that reproduces (a fact which all audiences inherently understand when faced with birth imagery), but Woolf is writing here about specifically women and women’s needs in a masculinized world. It is a *woman* who is committing “brain prostitution,” and it is her progeny which need to be curtailed and controlled. As Elizabeth Abel argues, “The mother’s body […] is the site of both a horrifying excess and a lack; whether disgustingly prolific or castrated—extremes collapsing into each other—it consistently fails to possess positive attributes of its own” (106-7). Out-of-control breeding by the wrong sort of woman poses a eugenic problem for mainstream England, for “hideous progeny” are not what an empire needs to wage the wars that protect its boundaries and territories. But again, I am interested in the barely-controlled disgust with which the (female) reproducing body is handled here. This disgust, coupled with the call for disembodiment and androgynous being in *Room*, begins to give us a clue as to the broader use of birth imagery in Woolf’s oeuvre. It is employed to remove women from their bodies—to free them, to be sure, but also to negate any power they have in specifically feminine modes of being.

Woolf’s continual use of birth as a metaphor or purely rhetorical conceit similarly rips birth from its embodied, feminine form and places it in the masculine realm once again. This action is partly empowering: because women were often culturally aligned with their reproductive, empire-making, kinship-producing abilities, Woolf was reminding her reader of alternate roles for women. For example, in “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” the female

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narrator lies “weaponless” (1) in her bed as she listens to the guns of war, but Woolf claims she can fight with her mind: think peace into existence, create new ideas (2).  

She then likens man’s fighting impulse to the “maternal instinct,” or women’s “glory,” and imagines limiting both fighters and birthers, giving them some other way to express their “creative power” (4-5). Because Woolf mentions limiting birth to a “very small class of specially selected women,” the common reading of this passage is of its overt eugenicist sentiments—you can bet the “small class of specially selected women” would be white, middle- to upper-class, and Anglo-Saxon.

But Woolf is also doing something much more subtle with reproduction here. Even in her hypothetical, borderline sarcastic advocation of removing maternity, she harbors overt ambivalence towards its role in society and in the lives of women. As I have mentioned before, the notion of women as mothers and mothers as proper or improper reproducers of bodies that in turn bolstered empires is fused not only in criticism but was also fused in the minds of women like Woolf. Certainly, Woolf herself did not believe maternity was woman’s “glory,” only that the predominant narrative of the British empire sought to limit women to the birthing body, contain them in one role so the woman remained known and understood (nothing new and scary and protean like the New Woman) and also so the woman remained confined in her reproductive role. Despite the burgeoning Women’s Movement, at the time Woolf wrote “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” the notion of likening birthing babies to women’s wartime effort was very common in the early years of the twentieth century. As J.W. Ballantyne writes in 1914, “In the ultimate issue of things babies are of greater import than battalions, and they are the true dreadnoughts of a nation; if they be well-nourished before they are born, if they are brought into the world with care, and if they are handled afterwards with tenderness and educated with knowledge and foresight, but without fads, they will not only stand to arms if need be for the defence of their land in their manhood, and be apt for the replenishing of her millions in their womanhood, but will also help to maintain her high rank among the nations in science, in literature, in commerce, and in all else that is worthy” (355).

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Peace,” marriage and childbirth was still the prevalent model for women. To suggest removing this model altogether would be controversial at best, subversive at worst.

Just like the pregnant hero(ine) in *Orlando*, who, upon marriage and childbirth, once again reclaims her material, racial and familial heritage (Maher 24-5), women in “Thoughts on Peace” reproduce as a direct entry into the stability of empire. Just like the guns of war, their reproduction is harnessed to the service of the state in myriad and subtle ways. This notion of motherhood tied to state and country belies Woolf’s growing concern over the conscription of maternity by Hitler and the burgeoning fascist movement. In the 1920s, Woolf had begun to display a “latent recognition that the mother ultimately sustains, and is contained by, patriarchy” (Abel 161 fn 30). Because Woolf was skeptical of the role of childbirth in dominant ideologies, then, she necessarily criticized its cultural construction in her rhetorical exercises. But to consign birth to the mental realm only, as I argue Woolf does, removes power from the specifically female body and paradoxically places it back in the realm of the masculine and of the empire. It is as if the move that Woolf tries to take (freeing the woman from the physical confines of her traditional reproductive role) backfires.

The concept of birth in “Thoughts on Peace” and the birth event itself in *Orlando* are both employed by Woolf as chiefly rhetorical devices only. Consider *Orlando*:

But wait! but wait! we are not going, this time, visiting the blind land. Blue, like a match struck right in the ball of the innermost eye, he flys, burns, bursts the seal of sleep; the kingfisher; so that now floods back refluent like a tide, the red, thick stream of life again; bubbling, dripping; and we rise, and our eyes (for how handy a rhyme is to pass us safe over the awkward transition from death to life) fall on—(here the barrel-organ stops playing abruptly).

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51 For more on the fascist movement, especially its treatment of women, see Klaus Theweleit, who studies members of the Freikorps, a volunteer army fighting after WWI against the German working class. Theweleit analyzes visual and written representations of women and femininity therein, concluding that the Freikorpsmen hated or dreaded women: “a dread, ultimately, of dissolution – of being swallowed, engulfed, annihilated. Women’s bodies are the holes, swamps, pits of muck that can engulf” (xiii).
“It’s a very fine boy, M’Lady,” says Mrs. Banting, the midwife. In other words Orlando was safely delivered of a son on Thursday, March the 20th, at three o’clock in the morning. (295)

The predominant tone of this passage is one of disgust, or at the very least, borderline negative events: blindness, striking a match in one’s eye, burning in a bright ball of flame, bursting forth, flooding in a torrent of blood. The liquidity here additionally conforms to the model of femininity Woolf consistently portrayed in her writing: female biology thwarted creativity for Woolf, she recorded in her diary that she could not write when she was menstruating, and she associated a “gushing,” female writing style with the womb and with her friend, Vita Sackville-West (Rosenman, Invisible 59). As Klaus Theweleit explains, fluidity is culturally and intimately linked to femininity itself, as women’s work is historically confined to the household and with the cleaning of bodily fluids: “They stripped off the babies’ wet pants and wiped the shit from their behinds. They cleared black muck out of stopped-up drains and cleaned toilets. […] They wiped the floors and got their hands into liquid manure” (409-10). Rather than the exuberant fluidity of the flowing and freeform female body as seen in Irigaray, Cixous or Kristeva, then, the fluid body in Woolf is often aligned with the primordial mud at the bottom of the lily pond in Between the Acts: a space of creativity, perhaps, but also one of death and of consuming femininity.


53 Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray argue women should write the body and the mother, access the jouissance of the linguistic maternal, and explore the significance of fluidity and multiplicity in women’s pleasure. All are interested in female desire, connection to the mother’s body, and notions of process, flow, and plurality resisting clear definition, yet this hazy, formless rhetoric is now quite dated and not particularly useful. Cixous, Hélène. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 1.4 (Summer 1976): 875-893. Resisting these notions of the woman without boundaries, contemporary critic Rebecca Kukla claims “we need a strongly cohesive self with healthy and robust boundaries before we can care well for ourselves or for others” (226-7).
The emphasis in the above-quoted *Orlando* birth scene is also on the eyes and on vision, an ocular encoding of knowledge perfectly encapsulating the split gender of the hero(ine), for theoretically men operate on ocular knowledge and women on that of touch (Young 69, discussing Irigaray). Yet Orlando’s body is chiefly one of femininity in Young’s approximation, for it is largely a passive object acted upon, not acting (39): Orlando is “delivered of a son,” and the only action of the birth scene lies in the barrel-organ, the roving disembodied eyeball, and the rising tide of blood. Even though Orlando is finally acting as the empire wishes her to act—marrying, returning to her home, birthing a fine English son—this culturally-condoned behavior is hardly worth celebrating here. The work of birthing of bodies that the British empire so longs for its women to do is, here, closer to a horror show.

The relevance, usefulness, and even beauty of the physical act of giving birth are all questioned in the *Orlando* birthing scene (the only “birth from below” scene in all of Woolf’s texts). And certainly this is one project of Woolf’s texts: to question traditional female reproduction and therefore remove it from the status men like Hitler would give it, awarding metals to birthing women for their service to the state. But to consistently figure birth as only rhetorical has a darker underbelly: by denying women the reincarnation of themselves through the transformative and subjective power of birthgiving, Woolf paradoxically places any power found in birth squarely back in the hands of empire. Modernist women writers, in tandem with the Women’s Movement, were struggling to re-write birth-giving as not only the birth of another human being, but a powerful and transformative moment in a woman’s life, a choice that she was

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54 In 1938, Hitler’s Third Reich designed a series of “Medals of Honor” for women to display depending on how many children they birthed for the state: “bronze for more than four children, silver for more than six, gold for more than eight” (Abel 91). Giving birth is thus equated to fighting for the nation-state; Hitler (and fascism) required the “complementary figures of warrior hero and prolific mother” (90-1). In a related note, Julia Briggs cites one of Mussolini’s slogans in fascist Italy as “‘War is to the male what childbearing is to the female!’” (78).
making now that she had the power to choose when and if to give birth due to birth control.

Births in Woolf never reach this transcendent, powerful plane; indeed, most women in Woolf’s texts are denied birth-giving altogether—either they don’t reproduce or the birth happens behind the scenes, an unimportant aspect of a larger story. Either path, Woolf seems to be saying, leads to the bolstering of empire: the feminine birth of physical bodies as fodder for war, or the masculine (because disembodied) birth of ideas. The project of empire consumes all in its path.\(^{55}\)

In other words, if one employs the traditional Western philosophical gendered binary divisions of masculinity versus femininity, rhetorical and “masculine” births in Woolf (bloodless births of roads, births of empires, births of ideas) means that such birth is fundamentally a marker of masculine power, a tool of his state, a project of his empire. Further, the truncated or absent births in Woolf’s texts shift the emphasis and importance from women’s work to men’s work. Woolf was aware who held the power in her patriarchal world, and while her texts appear to push back against this status quo, in the end they merely bolster it. The bloody work of birth-giving may have been woman’s traditional role in the work of empire, but it did not bring the woman the fame or glory brought by the masculine birth of ideas, texts, and projects for the nation-state.

Woolf may have been deeply ambivalent about many things—empire, family, her parents, the body, childbirth, femininity—yet she was perhaps most of all ambivalent about the

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\(^{55}\) With the notion that even ideas circulated in novels could bolster the imperial project, I have in mind Nicolas Daly’s argument that literary production is directly related to the circulation of imperialism (22), and Edward Said’s argument that the novel “almost unnoticeably sustain[ed] the society’s consent in overseas expansion” (12). In Said’s approximation, the novel, “as a cultural artifact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other” (71). Daly, Nicolas. “Colonialism and Popular Literature at the Fin de Siècle.” Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939. Eds. Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. 19-40.
role of women in aiding an empire like the British empire. Her notion of a redeeming, interiorized “Englishness” most notably displayed in *Between the Acts*, her final novel, ultimately overcomes her queasiness towards the scaffolding of empire, while the use of the female body in aiding the duplication of such “Englishness” never reaches such equilibrium. In *Between the Acts*, she finds a solution to the problem of empire by embracing a localized English culture rather than a global British force (Esty 17). But her texts do not find a similar solution for the problem of the reproducing female body. Throughout her oeuvre, women remain rooted either in the domestic, featuring mindless body work, or in the space of ideas—similarly founded upon a rift between mind and body. Ripped from their embodied lives, speaking only “silence about physical experience” (Moran, *Virginia Woolf* 67), they lack the power of redefinition, the control over their corporeal condition. As female thinkers, they do not effect change, and the physical births they perform are clearly at the service of the empire. The empire in Woolf is comprised of words, thoughts, and ideas; each individual takes part, and pregnant female embodiment is the casualty.

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56 For Woolf’s ambivalence towards empire specifically, see Kathy Phillips, who argues Woolf consistently links “Empire making, war making, and gender relations” in her writing (vii), uncovering the ways empire is bolstered by “ideology,” “assumptions,” and the “diverse institutions” of empire and the citizens therein (ix-x). Both at home and abroad, then, citizens in Woolf’s British empire directly participate in reproducing the ideology of empire. Phillips does an excellent job of illustrating Woolf’s links, both overt and covert, between the common English family and the larger British empire.

57 See Jed Esty’s argument in *The Shrinking Empire* that Woolf displays an “anthropological turn” in her novel, *Between the Acts*. Turning to the insular, Esty argues, to the national instead of the empire and to “culturalism” was the “process by which English intellectuals translated the end of empire into a resurgent concept of national culture” (2). *Between the Acts*, then, showcases a “reluctant turn to cultural solidarity,” a shift “away from aggressive Britishness, towards humane Englishness”; a “reorientation of the spatial referent from imperial-infinite to deep-insular” (17); and a focus on “British crisis and English opportunity” (19). Esty, Jed. *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004. Esty’s argument is revised by Rebecca Walkowitz in *Cosmopolitan Style*, where she argues that rather than reject internationalism, Woolf merely re-articulates it by focusing on personal intersections with the international and by describing minority groups (10).
2. Enid Bagnold and the “Female Male” Birther

Enid Bagnold was an early twentieth-century feminist writer who, like Woolf, fought the patriarchal containment of women in her texts by opening up alternative narratives for her characters and emphasizing the importance of women’s work. However, much like Woolf, Bagnold’s ambivalence towards the reproducing woman’s place in empire paradoxically results in the reinscription of the dominant racial-patriarchal model of men versus women, unconsciously trumping empire and masculinity. Her use of masculine birth, birth jubilantly performed by a manly woman and firmly couched in the masculine realm of commerce and empire, overshadows the birthing woman in her novel, *The Squire* (1938). Her heavy-handed class- and race-based arguments fundamentally curtail any narrative agency the female body may have found.

As an example of a late modernist British birthing text, Enid Bagnold’s female squire in *The Squire* is wholly invested in the “proper” body and in birth from below, but, paradoxically, her fleshly birth contains positive, regenerative possibilities for herself and for her nation: she sees herself as a conduit of the future, “a pipe through which the generations pass” (154-55). The eugenic implications of this text are clear: if one is a squire, part of the landed gentry in England, to birth five children is not only cause for celebration, it is one’s duty. The reader cannot help but notice the squire takes on her husband’s title, thus illustrating the use of maternity as a tool of empire and patriarchy. Her personal, given name remains a mystery to the reader: it is not her name that is important, it is her race, her title, her place in the empire. Further, her namelessness, according to Tess Cosslett, allows the squire to function as an archetype (“Childbirth” 271).58

58 Cosslett, Tess. “Childbirth from the Woman’s Point of View in British Women’s Fiction: Enid Bagnold’s *The Squire* and A. S. Byatt’s *Still Life*.” *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 8.2 (Autumn, 1989): 263-286. Anne Sebba locates the importance of the archetypal with Bagnold, stating Bagnold resisted attempts from her publisher to
The Squire was published just as World War II was commencing, and the novel represents Bagnold’s attempt to illustrate “if the conditions of birth were correct, it would be possible to create a healthier race” (Sebba, “Introduction” x). In this eugenic regard, the concerns of Bagnold are in conversation with the concerns of Woolf, who also explored the nuclear English family at the center of the shifting empire (To the Lighthouse; The Years) while, as we have seen, harboring significant reservations about the family’s involvement in the race- and empire-making systems which ultimately created “subconscious Hitlerism” (Woolf, “Thoughts on Peace” 3). But Bagnold seems to harbor no such skepticism toward the category of the heterosexual family unit nor towards the maternal figure; indeed, in her idealism, she gleefully assigns the glory of mothering to the fulfillment of the demands and dreams of the state machine. One could easily imagine Bagnold’s squire displaying Hitler’s birthing medals with pride. Virgins in The Squire not dedicated to mothering are seen as “destructive,” while childless women have “sex-appeal,” but mothers like the squire are “empower[ed]” (Cosslett, Women Writing 79).

Before The Squire was published no other novel so fully described the experience of pregnancy, labor, and childbirth; indeed, it remains difficult to find such detailed descriptions in contemporary literature (“Childbirth” 263). The novel was a watershed moment in the history of the literary genre of pregnancy due to its unparalleled description and its immersion in the pregnant body of the squire, rocked as she is by labor pains. Bagnold’s biographer, Anne Sebba, rename the book “Squire Martha” because she did not want to “spoil the universality of her theme” (135). Sebba, Anne. Enid Bagnold: The Authorized Biography. New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1987.

59 Sebba, Anne. “Introduction.” The Squire. Enid Bagnold. New York: Penguin Books, 1987. Tess Cosslett explains that during 1900-1939, the English government conducted a campaign to “glorify, dignify, and purify” motherhood to produce “a better imperial race” due to the abysmal health of the Boer War recruits (“Childbirth” 268). The suffering health of the population was blamed on “maternal ignorance, which was cheaper to remedy,” and while most educational programs focused on the lower classes, as we have seen in chapter one, the ideology of better mothering affected all classes (268).
explains that Bagnold was frustrated by the lack of extant literature exploring birth, as birth is “the most important story every [sic] told” (“Introduction” xx). Bagnold wanted to “glorify a woman’s actively creative role as a mother which she felt, after four births, uniquely poised to do” (*Enid* 132). Further, Bagnold staunchly believed if birth happened to a man, it would everywhere be written about: “‘If a man had a child and he was also a writer we should have heard a lot about it…. I wanted *The Squire* to be exactly as objective as if a man had had a baby’” (“Introduction” xxi, qting Bagnold). As Tess Cosslett notes, Bagnold “clearly saw herself as the pioneer of a new subject-matter” (“Childbirth” 263).

The project of the novel is therefore twofold: to justify the power of birth in masculine terms and to introduce the power of birth to a masculine world. In Bagnold’s vision, the power inherent in childbirth, a power she staunchly believed in, would remain harnessed to the empire, but the *pregnant work* of women in gestation and parturition, not just their roles as mothers, would be recognized and celebrated by society. Throughout the novel, the squire proudly references her masculine strength, resolve, and courage as she approaches the birth of her fifth child: “But I’m getting older and tougher. […] I’m getting more male, that’s all!” (96) Here, Bagnold mixes the hierarchical divisions of masculinity and femininity, but instead of describing the squire as a strong woman, she instead moves her over into the category of masculinity by the moniker of a “female male”: “We ought to be called ‘wumen’; some different word. Wumen are hard-working, faulty, honest, female males—trudging down life, pushing the future before them in a wheelbarrow. Wumen are petty labourers; with handicaps” (191). In this curious construction, Bagnold posits that perhaps the old kind of woman who spends her “time” and “life” nurturing the masculine idea of femininity, ought to be recast into two kinds of women: those who dream of poetry, and those who labor next to the man to make a nationalist vision
come to fruition (192). The latter kind of “wumen,” although they have a mysterious “handicap” perhaps linked to the cultural conscription of femininity, trudges on in their simple way, laboring like the working class by the sweat of their brow. They are clearly undervalued by their nation, but it is their work that creates the backbone of the empire. In Cosslett’s reading of this passage, “Motherhood is something that empowers a woman […] and paradoxically frees her from her gender and from the humiliations of love for a man” (“Childbirth” 266).

Not only does Bagnold seek to redeem birth, then, but she attempts to rewrite and justify femininity as an aspect of masculinity. Therefore, women’s specific work—childbirth—is a help to the state on par with the war men fight and the scientific advances men discover. The squire, as a “wumen,” is a female soldier doing her part to perpetuate the “race.” Indeed, the squire is thought of as a “soldier” by one of her servants, who distinguishes the “soldier” squire from the squire’s womanly friend (11). In Bagnold’s approximation, female physical existence and birth itself is not enough; both must be recategorized and recast as masculine to lend them authority, in the eyes of Bagnold herself and in the eyes of the empire.

And the British empire is never far from the concerns of the narrative. Much like Woolf, Bagnold anticipates Walkowitz’s notion of “evasion”—not addressing crucial topics directly while giving “indirect attention” to them (“Virginia Woolf’s Evasion” 121-2). The empire is symbolized by the squire’s absent husband whom the reader immediately learns is away on an “annual three months’ visit to Bombay” (Bagnold 1). The wife, “his lady,” is then cast as “the

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60 This passage is curious not only because of the odd neologism, but because of the casting of “wumen” as working-class when the novel portrays extreme class consciousness throughout. Indeed, the majority of scholarship on the novel emphasizes the upper-class snobbery the squire portrays towards the lower-class servants in the home, and the problem the servants continuously pose for the squire. Clare Hanson performs an extended reading of The Squire in “Save the Mothers” (2003), in which she argues Bagnold’s harsh critique of the servant class, “biologically deemed as inferior,” centers on a celebration of the right kind of motherhood only: servants do not give birth and instead support the squire as she births her fifth child (57-8). “The suggestion is that this is how things should be, with the sterile and ‘half-baked’ serving the strong and productive” (58).
Begum of this masterless house” (2) in a double synecdochal move which places the squire as representative of the missing male’s squire and the male squire as representative of the larger British empire. The use of the unusual word “Begum,” too, gestures towards a cosmopolitan worldview, as a begum is a “queen, princess, or lady of high rank in Hindustan” (“begum, n.”). As the male squire does his important work to further the cause of the empire abroad, so too does the female squire do her work at home. Indeed, the two are almost interchangeable, inhabiting the same name for the reader and merging into one male-female being. Indeed, it is impossible to even ascertain whether the book is named after the male squire or the female squire standing in for him.

The difference between the male and female squire, however, is subtle but vast. While the squire’s husband presumably works with his mind, here, the squire works with her body. While the husband works with other adults (presumably), the squire works with children. The husband’s realm is public, the business of the empire; the squire’s work is private, the business of the home. Bagnold may seek to justify the importance of both narratives of the body and of a woman’s place in British empire and in society, yet she ends up painting women into a tightly cramped and confined corner. The squire questions her identity right before the birth:

“What am I?” she whispered into her hands, unable to sleep. “My excitement, imagination, vitality, gift for life—are like a spray that falls again on to the ground and is lost and sopped up. I am lost every day. By every nightfall all is lost.” (194)

The squire’s life force is figured here as a virile spray being spilled and wasted upon the ground, for try as she might to lay claim to the masculinity within, she remains female, conscribed to the

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realm of the home and of the children. Important (read: upper-class) women in The Squire do one important thing with their lives: they reproduce. Their virility remains at the service of the men in their lives; their potent “spray” is but a cheap copy and a ghostly image of the masculine, phallic spray.

Additionally, Bagnold inserts her own brand of feminism into the novel as she subscribes to the pre-twentieth century view of childbirth as a natural and seamless part of a woman’s life, a view which changed with the twentieth century’s introduction of technological innovation and the ancillary assumption that the body was a machine requiring close monitoring. As explained in chapter one, to combat the feminist narrative of freedom for women from domestic confines, an alternative narrative was created, portraying the role of reproduction as severely threatened by the loss of birthing women who, with the help of birth control, were for the first time choosing not to birth. This narrative, reminding women of their God-given role and imploring them not to vacate their “posts,” so to speak, appears frequently throughout the first decades of the century, as we have seen in chapter one. As Dr. Meyrick Booth writes in 1931, “[T]he modern woman, by virtue of her whole upbringing and all her ideas and ideals, is becoming more and more divorced

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62 With the squire’s construction of feminine fertility as a masculine spray, Bagnold echoes Woolf’s famous description of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay’s relationship in To the Lighthouse: “into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare” (37). Molly Hite argues that this scene in Lighthouse is “a linguistically incarnated sexual performance that, in being shared, spends itself. The visionary body experiences rapture. The social body undergoes evacuation and, eventually, death” (11).

63 For example, see J.W. Ballantyne’s argument in “An Address on the Nature of Pregnancy and its Practical Bearings,” in which he argues that pregnancies should be closely monitored “in private and hospital practice” to prevent deaths (353). He explains such a practice will rapidly increase in popularity, for “the more familiar expectant mothers become with the idea of hospital treatment for the diseases of gestation, the more readily the less serious cases will apply for admission” (353). For the female body as machine in modernity, see Rita Felski, who argues that this conception helps to revise woman as positioned firmly on the private vs. public side of the binary, “demystify[ing] the myth of femininity as a last remaining site of redemptive nature” and, to some extent, “destabiliz[ing] the notion of an essential, God-given femaleness” (20). The paradox here is that “woman-as-machine” also reaffirms the “patriarchal desire for technological mastery over woman” (20).
from her racial functions, and less and less willing to make any sacrifice on their behalf” (“Woman” 88).

The picture of birthgiving in *The Squire* subscribes to this call for women to breed for the good of the “race.” In response to the alarming plunging birth rates after WWI, birth in Bagnold’s novel is gentle, placid, almost prelapsarian: the squire strolls around her gardens and patiently waits for her body to do its good and dependable work. There is no need for official prenatal or postnatal care, and indeed, one could not imagine the squire queuing up in a National Maternity Hospital amidst hoards of other women. The novel therefore echoes the arguments found in Grantly Dick-Read’s popular manual of “natural” childbirth, aptly titled *Natural Childbirth* (1933). Clare Hanson, in “Save the Mothers,” agrees that Bagnold wrote in support of Dick-Read’s text, for both argue a woman leaves herself in labor, childbirth isn’t painful or the pain is manageable, and such pain is like the ocean—enveloping, seamless (56).

While the critical output on *The Squire* is miniscule, especially compared to Woolf, extant criticism often highlights this “natural birth” rhetoric in *The Squire*. For example, as Tess Cosslett argues, Bagnold presents birth as “natural and instinctive,” constructing women as having “access to some ancient wisdom of the body during childbirth” (*Women Writing* 24). This reading dovetails nicely with a reading of the workings of empire in the novel, as the contemporary dominant cultural narrative of the British empire sought to contain women by defining them by their birth-giving capacity, and simultaneously bolstered the rhetoric of the “natural” or “native” woman who easily birthed (versus the educated woman removed from her

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64 See Cosslett’s “Childbirth” for more on Bagnold’s use of Dick-Read and for information on Bagnold’s friendship with Harold Waller, who fundamentally changed the birth experience for Bagnold’s last pregnancy in 1923. Cosslett also mentions that the squire corresponds to advice by Sir F. Truby King in the 1930s that one should not “over-spoil” one’s baby by holding him too much. The squire’s newborn is therefore kept in his cot and only removed at allotted intervals for scheduled feeding times (273).
body and thus subjected to intense physical pain). Cosslett additionally posits that women like the squire are not “brainwashed,” only “creating empowering solutions” to the texts of the time which were written and controlled by men (25). And in her full-length article on The Squire, perhaps the most comprehensive source extant on the book, Cosslett argues that while it was “innovation” to structure a novel around childbirth, it was also “transgressive and shocking” to make it the “central subject” (“Childbirth” 65). While Cosslett admits it is “regrettable” Bagnold used “male roles” to “dignify birth as an important and central human action,” she also points out that Bagnold employed conventional romance and adventure plots, recasting the squire as a “soldier” or “boxer” to give “continual surprise” and dismantle “expected connections” (265).

Unmedicated birth to produce the right kinds of citizens is often linked to the novel’s emphasis on eugenics, and to Bagnold’s unfortunate enthusiasm for fascism and for Hitler. Clare Hanson explains that Bagnold was “increasingly sympathetic towards Hitler in the 1930s,” especially in regard to Hitler’s concept of “efficiency,” a term Bagnold shares (“Save the Mothers” 58-9). In A Cultural History of Pregnancy, Hanson claims The Squire is eugenic because the squire makes it clear “servants are defective and/or underdeveloped, and cannot be taught or helped” (117). Hanson argues that the novel plainly illustrates that servants don’t reproduce; they instead support the squire, the proper reproducer (118). Hanson does admit the book is “in some respects radical and pioneering” as when Bagnold describes split subjectivities (116-117).

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65 Sebba explains that while explicit connections between Nazism and The Squire are not “immediately evident,” Bagnold viewed all countries as interwoven, and the “European countries as squabbling children in a nursery … into this nursery comes the newborn baby, Nazi Germany” (“Introduction” xix). Sebba continues: “With hindsight, to see Nazi Germany as such a child appears blindly cruel” (xx). For more on Bagnold’s writings in support of Nazi Germany, see chapter 12, “Birth with its Horrors and its Beauties,” in Enid Bagnold: The Authorized Biography. Also therein, see the Appendix (pgs. 267-269), which reprints Bagnold’s article extolling Germany, “In Germany Today: Hitler’s New Form of Democracy,” published in Sunday Times, Nov. 6, 1938.
These readings of *The Squire* provide an important framework for any scholar when thinking through the novel’s intricacies; however, I want to focus on the way Bagnold claims to further the cause of women with her narrative of trumping women’s work, yet, as I have shown, the text veers and begins to inscribe its own subtle counter-narrative. Just as the unnamed narrator of *A Room of One’s Own* is cramped and confined in poorly-furnished and poorly-lit rooms deemed “rooms for women,” so, too, is Bagnold’s squire confined in a specific normative space, one predicated on her particular class, race, sex, gender, and sexuality. To refute the fate of women locked in the stifling prison of heteronormativity, Bagnold feebly gestures towards a version of Woolf’s androgyny: “She had been female to them then, but now what was left standing at the core was the rock of neutral human stuff, neither male nor female” (20). But the narrative also takes pains to remind the reader of the “androgynous” squire’s true position in life. One of the first times she is introduced to the reader, “squire” is in scare quotes, as if to remind the reader she is not truly the squire (6). The last page of the novel, as does the first page, speaks of the actual male squire and of “his home,” *his* Manor House impatiently waiting his return (1, 270). Even the Butler of the house, Pratt, refuses to assist the squire with her candle, waiting instead for the return of “his master” (1): “Hateful women! Surrounded by gibbering, preening, untruthful, slovenly women. But he liked the squire. He had no tenderness toward her condition and he would not lift a finger to help her, but he liked her” (15). The reader thus understands the female squire is only a temporary stand-in for the “real” squire, watching over an estate that is not hers. Just as Elaine Showalter claims the only freedom in *Room* is the freedom of the grave (297), so it seems the only freedom of *The Squire* is of the patriarchal home and of the birthing chamber.
3. Naomi Mitchison and Birth as a Tool of the Nation

Naomi Mitchison is a twentieth-century author who was much more prolific than either Woolf or Bagnold combined, as she published more than 70 books over the span of her more than one hundred years (Joannou, “Naomi” 293). Unfortunately, much of her work is now out of print, and Maroula Joannou complains Mitchison is now barely known “outside feminist and academic circles” (293). Mitchison was a remarkable woman, “a mixture of extraordinary and potent contradictions,” a woman who was a passionate supporter of birth control but who had seven children, an “upper-class socialist who […] surrounded herself with devoted retainers and purchased vast acres of land” (293). In her 1936 novel, *We Have Been Warned*, Mitchison portrays birth as a masculine-encoded enterprise, and, similar to the eugenic birthing model found in *The Squire*, births in *Warned* subscribe to the birth from below model. Female bodies here are torn, birth (and its twin, abortion) is a deadly and bloody affair, yet both births and abortions carry with them positive and negative possibilities, depending on who is doing the birthing or aborting. Mitchison therefore highlights the new and significant reproductive issues women faced in the early years of the century, including birthgiving techniques, equal access to abortion, and equal access to birth control, all of which began to modify the “social pattern of the British upper middle class” and allow sexual liaisons outside of marriage (Benton 52). However, the important facet of this text, especially in conjunction with the rise of the culture of pregnancy, is her conspicuous use of masculine “tools of the nation”—national and political hegemonic systems and ideology.

*Warned* is the story of an upper-middle-class Scottish couple, Tom and Dione Galston, and of Tom’s campaign for a Socialist seat in the local government while Dione supports him.

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and grows ever more radical about worker’s rights, veering towards Communism. The novel is an extended treatise on socialism and communism, birth control and abortion rights, nationalism and the class struggle—issues pervading Mitchison’s life. These underlying issues pivot around two key scenes for Dione in *Warned*: her witnessing a “beastly” abortion in a Russian birth control clinic (Mitchison 259), and her rape by the hands of a lower-class “filthy Welshman,” an experience which haunts her but which she tries not to take personally, as it is just the lower classes hitting back against their upper-class oppressors: “Oh, poor dears, poor dears, how could one blame them for anything!” (413, 415).

*Warned* was turned down by many respectable publishers due to its “dangerous” and “filthy” descriptions of sexuality, and its socialist content (Joannou, “Naomi” 296; Benton 95). Benton explains, “In no quarter of Labourite socialism were men accepting Naomi’s socialist-feminist tenet that women had a right to possess their own bodies, and to share their bodies with whoever and as many as they might choose or, for that matter, not to share with anyone” (95). Once it was published, *Warned* was a “disaster” for Mitchison, who had established herself as a preeminent and respectable British author by the 1920s (the famous critic Arnold Bennett “wrote that she was the only British novelist who knew a novel from a bon-bon”) (51, 106). The book only had one printing, “received few reviews, none favourable,” caused “continuous embarrassment,” and alienated what remaining readers Mitchison had (106).

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67 Mitchison, Naomi. *We Have Been Warned*. New York: Vanguard P, 1936. The “rape” itself occurs in five dots in the page: “ ‘Yes, Idris,’ she said. . . . . . It was over. He was looking down at her in a curious blank way” (413). The reader presumes it was a rape because the “jerking” continues to go on in her “body and mind,” she feels “sore and bruised,” and she realizes with relief, “she needn’t be afraid of that. He’d been—careful” (414). Presumably, this is one example of censorship of the novel, which Mitchison was asked to do at the last minute (Benton 95). She was forced to cut women’s “sexual assertion and sexual straight talk”—for example, in a scene where a woman unbuttons a man’s pants, the word “button” could stay if “trousers” went—and any “direct mention of contraception, especially the word ‘rubber’” was excised (93).
Even by contemporary standards, the amount of space in the novel given to discussions of sexuality and the problem of reproduction in a modern society is shocking. Sex and reproduction, and the politics thereof, are quite simply the scaffolding of the entire novel. As Mitchison writes, “I began to realize that politics was not a special kind of game for skilled players, but rather a whole aspect of life” (Joannou, “Naomi” 300; qting Mitchison). Mitchison was also directly responding to the new political environment of the 1930s, vastly more anti-feminist due to the splintered focus of the women’s movement after it had achieved suffrage, the skepticism of public opinion categorizing feminism with communism, and the harsh economic downturn (Benton 83). Mitchison writes in 1930: “Apparently, all the feminist battles are gained, or almost all. Actually nothing is settled, and the question of baby or not baby is at the bottom of almost everything” (72). To remind her readers of the reality of women’s issues and the need for continued feminist action, every character in Warned faces almost daily political decisions about sex and reproduction. In one example, Tom counsels an undergraduate student to sleep with his fiancée before marrying her, arguing that he shouldn’t judge her morally for being with many other men before their wedding. Tom concludes the conversation with, “Shall I lend you a volume of Havelock Ellis?” (189).

Mitchison therefore preaches a new kind of

68 Mitchison was extremely interested in contemporary books on sexuality. Benton details how knowledge about sex and reproduction for the newlyweds Naomi and Dick was painfully slight, and their sex life suffered dreadfully as a result (33). It was not until Naomi obtained a copy of Marie Stopes’ popular and influential Married Love that their sex life began to improve (35). Mitchison radically insisted sex was political in the early years of the century. In her idealist and “romantic” socialism, she dreamed of founding a “Just Society – a community of people loyal and nonpossessive, generous and unrepressed” (56). She explains: “I sometimes hoped I was fighting for more freedom, for a whole generation of women. My daughters perhaps? Who, I dreamed, would be able to have children by several chosen fathers, uncensured” (Joannou, “Naomi” 294; qting Mitchison). Mitchison herself enjoyed an open marriage with Dick, and volunteered at one of the first birth control clinics in London beginning in the 1920s (Benton 40). Birth control “profoundly influence[d] her thinking about women” (40), as it allowed them to control their bodies and love when, and whom, they chose. She rightly realized women “could not be politically independent until she had political control over her own body, including the choice of fathers for her children” (41). The breaking of the patriarchal, heterosexual marital contract was intimately linked to her desire to invent “a better, less violent, more communal world” (48). For more information on Stopes’ Married Love, which historian Samuel Hynes listed as “one of three or four texts fundamental to shaping postwar British consciousness,” see Hauck,
reproductive politics in *Warned*, one predicated on the gospel of equal and easy access to information, the eschewing of traditional heterosexual marriage, and the embracing of birth control and abortion rights.

The ancient Galston family legend in *Warned* is of a woman, Jean MacLean (known as “Green Jean”), who was thought to be a witch and whom the Campbell Women left outside to freeze to death with her infant. At the end of the novel, Green Jean comes to visit Dione (who is unexpectedly pregnant with her fifth child by her husband, Tom), and bids her look through a stone with a hole to view a warning of the future. As Jill Benton points out, the two women are linked in their suppression: Green Jean as a witch in seventeenth-century Scotland, and Dione as a “female hero who was adventuring into the world” in 1930s Britain (94, 105). In looking through the stone, Dione sees Tom win the election for the socialist party, then the counter-revolution takes place during which their home is destroyed, her daughter Morag is raped, and Tom is executed for being a socialist. The final words of the novel are: “‘We have been warned,’ Dione said, and it was as through a steel spring had suddenly loosened and vibrated inside her. The baby was coming alive and moving in her for the first time” (553).

While the bulk of the novel purports to show the appeal of a socialist revolution, then, it is rooted in ambivalence, as it also clearly demarcates the differences in the lives of two classes of people, upper and lower. The novel was written in response to the economic depression of the 1930s, a time of instability in Britain so severe that communist Russia, where reproduction and production were both matters of the state, seemed imminently more stable than Britain (Hanson, "Abortion and the Individual Talent" (especially pgs. 245, 263-4 fn 78), and Paul Peppis, “Rewriting Sex: Mina Loy, Marie Stopes, and Sexology.”)
While the lower-class in *Warned* is sometimes romanticized (Tom has an affair with a poor Russian girl whose body is perfect, ruddy, strong, and “brown all over,” unlike the stringy, white, English bodies [305]), their miseries are also clearly portrayed: overrun by too many children, the poor struggle in dirty homes full of misery and squalor; lashing out in desperation as their only recourse, they are hit hard by the strong arm of the law. Dione soon understands that to instigate complete equality for all classes would be to give up the Galstons’ entitled position in society: the above-average health of their children, their beautiful home, their luxurious lifestyle. She tells herself: “I’m afraid you can’t have aesthetic equality, Dione Galston, till you’ve got economic equality. And economic equality will be no fun for you” (62).

As she realizes the importance of the class divide, she simultaneously experiences the quickening of the infant inside her as a physical and industrial movement—the shock of her vision or of the baby moving (the two cannot be separated) is as if a “steel spring” has come loose (553). The movements of the fetus blend with the Green Jean-inspired vision, and Dione’s body, painted as a mechanical apparatus in the language of factories and workers, pops a gasket. This final image is conflicted—is Dione now broken? Has she come to her right mind now that a few mechanical parts have been rewired?—but the importance lies in the pregnancy portrayed in language of masculine commerce. Dione is quite literally a factory of the right sort, producing proper citizens of the empire. Her prolific reproduction (again like the squire, she will have five children) is not the problem *Warned* seeks to solve.

Figuring the woman’s body as a machine echoes the mechanical model of the body in larger twentieth century narratives surrounding reproduction. Rather than subscribing to the

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69 Mitchison was one of the first to become disenchanted with the Russian Revolution, reminding her readers in the foreword of the novel “that she had finished writing this novel in 1933, a full year before she witnesse[d] the decimation of the socialists in Vienna in winter 1934” (Benton 84, 106).
outdated model that pregnancy is a seamless aspect of a woman’s life, as we see in *The Squire*, here we witness the brokenness of the female birthing body and the role of the state in fixing this malfunctioning machine. As Helen Sterk explains, with the introduction of technology in the birthing chamber, the reproducing female body began to be figured as akin to a machine that was broken (18-19). “Labor came to be viewed as a ‘mechanical process that takes place in a machine inherently predisposed to malfunction’ […] females as defective beings” (Sterk 27, qting Davis-Floyd). Rather than the organic imagery of the pastoral *Squire, Warned* engages in the same imagery as its subject matter: techno-science, the worker, and the factory. Even Dione categorizes efficient Russian birth as factory birth, something “pretty uncomfortable: I take it they’re put on one end of a conveyor belt with the babies inside and come out at the other with the babies outside—and standardized” (Mitchison 299).

Critical reception of Mitchison is often centered on technologized birth. Susan Squier explains that several British writers were “central to the rethinking of sexuality and reproduction,” Mitchison among them (*Babies* 13). Such writers, Squier asserts, “assessed the social, cultural, and scientific implications of scientifically mediated conception, gestation, and birth” (13). Squier details how Mitchison and Aldous Huxley worked together on the short-lived journal *Realist: A Journal of Scientific Humanism*, which explored the connections between literature and the novel (17). Donald Childs, in *Modernism and Eugenics* (2001), simply lists Mitchison as a eugenic author in the company of “Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, Shaw, Lawrence, Wells, West,” and others (13). Michael Hallam, in an article exploring the unlikely friendship between the feminists Mitchison and Rebecca West and the vitriolic, offensive Wyndham Lewis, merely

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70 While Squier does not directly address *Warned* in her book, *Babies in Bottles*, she does devote her fifth chapter to Mitchison, in which she explores Mitchison’s “parables of feminist science” that teach a “moral” lesson (169).
states that Warned includes “clear autobiographical parallels” in detailing the “life of an upper-class British woman’s interest in the USSR” (72 fn 64). Hallam goes on to explain how Mitchison adopted “outsider modes of realist discourse – in an attempt to satirize, and frequently offer correctives to, wrongheaded contemporary social mores” (74). Finally, Jill Benton, Mitchison’s biographer, states that Warned was a “brave political novel” that “identified the contradictions which plagued the uneasy upper-middle class alliance of communism, socialism and feminism. It was the only work of its kind” (xv).

Warned displays similar tension as The Squire: even as it seeks to break new ground in exploring the reproductive reality of women with one hand, with the other it places women firmly back into the severe limitations of the heteronormative marriage plot. While the novel maps important new spheres of work for women, especially mothers, it also reminds the reader that the entire apparatus of civilization is malfunctional, including the movements of the women therein, and something drastic must be done to restore order to a system spinning ever more rapidly out of control. As Joannou explains, Mitchison often wrote on the topic of broken, or rampaging, civilization and often chose “a central character who is an unexceptional individual caught in the middle of social and political turmoil, and through whose experiences the impact of social forces can be revealed” (“Naomi” 296).

To properly address these broken “social forces,” Dione, much like the squire, adopts masculine behaviors. Throughout the novel, Dione exhibits her “masculine” freedoms: she canvasses the countryside with Tom working for his campaign; she visits Russia and the abortion

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clinic to view firsthand the horrors of the lower-classes; she leaves her children at home and enters the public world at will. Hers is not the sequestered, matronly, homebound and private life of the Squire. Dione may similarly be a “pipe through which future generations pass” (Bagnold 154-155), as her role in providing for future generations is made quite clear in the novel, but she also works with her husband for a political cause they both believe in. In this way, she is a wife unlike any we have seen before in literature; indeed, Mitchison was “trying to invent a fictional form for the questing woman” (Benton 44) that would be on par with the adventuring male figure. Yet at the end of the novel, as we shall see, Dione is recast as not fully understanding the politics of her society, and the “warning” of the title is partially for her to resume her role as a birther and mother and leave politics behind. Mitchison realized the problem with the female questing figure was reproduction: “With motherhood their freedom to adventure ends. Naomi seems to be concluding that women are biologically rather than culturally restricted” (45-6).

Pregnancy and childbirth lie at the heart of Mitchison’s novel, but in the end, they are subsumed by the larger political system in which they take place. They are clearly couched in the “masculine” realm of commerce, empire, and eugenics. Throughout, pregnant Dione is portrayed as noble but meddling in forces much larger than her grasp and completely out of her comprehension. In one example, at a communist rally that spins out of control, Dione is struck: “You haven’t time to teach her now, said the words; you haven’t time to rape her now, said the tone” (456). Dione will always be chiefly categorized by her female body, and this female body must be corporeally, even sexually, punished by masculine society to keep her in her place. As Dorothy Roberts explains, because all women are socially expected to be mothers, attacking this aspect of her identity (both physically and verbally) is particularly harmful (10).
Further, the reoccurring motif of Green Jean, who belongs to “this other, this oppressed secret society,” casts strong mothers (like Dione) as persecuted to the death (Mitchison 4). But Green Jean is not just a mother; she also represents old Scotland and the lower classes, something essential and of the earth that has been lost in the conquest by England and by the upper-classes. In this way, motherhood is rightly fused with race and with class; for as Dorothy Roberts argues, race (and class) should be central to any discussion of reproduction (311). But I argue what is also going on in Warned is a masculine reinscription and appropriation of reproduction, not through disembodied birthing rhetoric as we have seen in Woolf, but through the calculated and pronounced political placement of the birthing women. Much like Squire, women in Warned have no freedom to reproduce outside the political and patriarchal system. Their race and class dictates how—or indeed, even if—they will reproduce at all. Lower-class women cannot help but stupidly “go and start[] a baby” (Mitchison 518), while middle- to upper-class women, like Dione’s artist sister, Phoebe, have the mental capacity and the economic recourse to avoid this fate: when Phoebe feels like having another child, she paints “a picture instead” (491).

The title of the book, We Have Been Warned, is explicitly echoed numerous times throughout the novel, including Green Jean’s final, politicized race- and class-based warning, but it also represents a “warning” Dione wants to give her daughter, Morag, about marriage. In a conversation with Dione’s sister, Muriel, Muriel admits she wishes Dione would not have married: “…you might have been something on your own, instead of just part of a ‘we,’ and I should like to have seen that” (104). In this same conversation, Dione says of her daughter: “I want [Morag] to have both kinds of life. I want her to be tough enough to live two hours to any man’s one! She will have been warned, anyhow” (105). Later on in the novel, Dione thinks to
herself, “Intelligent women mostly want to share their work with their husbands; intelligent men like marrying cows” (114). Warned therefore harbors a latent critique of the very systems it is engaged in, and this ambivalence—towards marriage, towards class, and towards all kinds of reproduction—lies at the anarchic heart of the novel. Marriage is portrayed as healthy and vital for Tom and Dione, but also an integral aspect of Dione’s lack of freedom. The lower-classes are portrayed as desperately needing saving, yet their ugly and coarse clothing irks Dione’s upper-class sensibilities (85). Foreign working-class travails (for example, the Russian women being forced to work throughout their pregnancies) are downplayed by the feminist character, Nancy Ellis: “she approved of women going on working while pregnant—obviously the women themselves were perfectly pleased; very few of them looked strained or haggard in the way that a pregnant woman in Walworth or Stepney is” (296). Abortion rights are portrayed as vastly important for women to have access to, yet when Dione witnesses one, she realizes their horrific nature: “that’s how it ends logically. That’s a real end. Blood and pain and ugliness. After that you stop fussing about fine points” (260).72

The novel is thus extremely ambivalent about women’s social and cultural advances and women’s place and role in society. While it does important work in beginning to imagine women creating their own spaces in which to live and work and reproduce—in this regard, very similar to the “outsider” work of Dorothy Richardson’s Pilgrimage (a thirteen-volume novel began in 1915), Sylvia Townsend-Warner’s Lolly Willowes: Or the Loving Huntsman (1926), and Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness (1928)—the imaginings of Warned only reach so far.73

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72 Jill Benton claims Mitchison “is brutally forthright about abortion. I can think of no other fiction in the 1920s that is as vivid about the unspeakable” (47).

73 By “outsider work,” I mean these novels begin to imagine spaces for women in which the unwed, unmarried woman is not cast as somehow abnormal or lacking, and in which the married woman steps out of her traditional role as sole caregiver of her children and manager of the home. The heroines of the novels by Richardson, Townsend-Warner, and Hall remain unmarried, and while they struggle with their “normality,” the authors take
The women remain locked in the mechanisms of a society predicated on heterosexual marriage, men who work and women who stay at home, men who are in charge of society and women who merely assist them (or decorate their arm for a time), and women whose primary function is to reproduce for the good of the nation-state. Despite Dione’s best intentions, her political work and stringent socialist beliefs, at the end of the novel she is portrayed as someone who didn’t know exactly what she was doing, someone meddling in forces and systems out of her rightful sphere of influence.

The horrific vision Green Jean provides cures Dione of her political posturings and reminds her of her place: to stay at home, tend her family, and bear children. In the future, Dione realizes, no accomplishments will matter aside from having babies: “did we have children, did we continue mankind” (526). The “warning” of this text, then, is not only about what happens when a Russian socialist revolution is mapped onto a Scottish landscape, but when women become active in the masculine realm of commerce and politics. Both result in a horrific upturning of normalcy and the status quo, lives are lost, and it is predominately the female body (symbolized by Morag’s impending rape and Dione’s actual one) which suffers in the only way it matters in the masculine society: sexually, a construction which is also figured as synecdochal for the woman herself.  

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74 Here I have in mind articles by Sharon Marcus and Carine M. Mardorossian which seek to construct a viable “rape theory” in feminist studies. They refute the cultural construction of a “rape script” which figures the vagina as representative of the “entire female body […] a delicate, perhaps inevitably damaged and pained inner space” (S. Marcus 180), the woman as “always either already raped or already rapeable” (167), and of the raped woman as powerless “victim,” all “wounded” core (Mardorossian 759). Marcus, Sharon. “Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention.” Gender Struggles: Practical Approaches to Contemporary Feminism. Eds. Constance L. Mui and Julien S. Murphy. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., Inc., 2002. 166-185; Mardorossian, Carine M. “Towards a New Feminist Theory of Rape.” Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 27.3 (2002): 743-775. I am indebted to Deepti Misri for bringing these articles to my attention.
As we have seen, one of the ways early twentieth-century authors struggled to portray the meaning inherent in the powerful birthing body and the hegemonic control of this reproducing body was to explore alternative instances of reproduction, thereby distancing the woman from being shackled to her feminine, physical form. Often shown as mental births of the mind, masculine physical births, or as births bolstering the hegemonic realm of empire and commerce, these fictionalized births tried to emphasize woman as more than her corporeal condition. Her feminine, physical birth was not the only important action she could perform. Her mental capacity, her births of the mind, and her physical assistance in reproducing empire were just as relevant as the mental births issuing from the masculine mind. This emphasis on the viability of the woman’s creative, masculine, or disembodied work in turn anticipates the eventual late twentieth-century image of the woman as powerful “double-birther,” birthing both babies and texts.\textsuperscript{75}

Authors like Virginia Woolf, Enid Bagnold, and Naomi Mitchison knew the contemporary cultural reflections of and assumptions about pregnancy and childbirth were somehow wrong, but they were not ready to make the substantial leap to woman as double-birther. Instead, they began to reconfigure birth in their own texts, respectively recasting birth as a key mental process, a masculine feat on par with the work of soldiers in a war, and as a significant issue for society to monitor and amend. I argue that births in their texts were therefore “bloodless,” as they were infused with a healthy dose of the masculine mind to mitigate the shortcomings of purely female, purely bodily birth. While these texts are noteworthy for the groundbreaking ways in which childbirth is either recast (as in Woolf), displayed in all its

\textsuperscript{75} See Friedman, who explains women’s use of the birthing metaphor “establishes a matrix of creativities based on a woman’s doublebirthing potential” (“Creativity” 58); and Tharp and MacCallum-Whitcomb, who cite modernist poet Amy Lowell as insisting on women’s “double-bearing” potential, birthing both art and babies (4).
corporeal splendor (as in Bagnold), or placed within a larger society with its political issues surrounding reproduction (as in Mitchison), they simply cannot yet imagine a future for femininity that is predicated on the ability to successfully birth both babies and texts. The motherhood of these texts is erected on a foundational belief that to give birth physically is to eschew all other forms of creativity, and all other access to the larger masculine realm of commerce, politics, ideas, and empire.

The authors in this chapter sought to harness the power of birth and redefine it for their own ends. They knew the societal struggle over birth in the early years of the twentieth century attested to the social and political significance of the birth act. However, birth proved to be such a culturally-ingrained idea, such a fundamental aspect of Britain that they in the end could not fully extricate it from the larger workings of society, even reaffirming its use as a tool of the state. These fictional representations of childbirth reflected a world in which women continued to be stripped of most legal and social rights men enjoyed, and continued to inhabit a mostly private, housebound role. The debates over childbirth explored in chapter one are recast here in chapter two as questions about every aspect of birth, from proper ways of managing the pregnant body to preferable methods of birthgiving, to the cultural acceptability of abortion and birth control to the proper application of these elements of control.

Yet in the furor over the social, political, cultural, and ideological manifestations of reproduction and the female body to which these novels are inextricably bound, the simple form of the female body continues to lie at the fore. These investigations finally ask what it is to be a reproducing female in early twentieth-century Britain. Their projects were not necessarily unsuccessful, but they did reflect the reality of the day: to be a female was to be less than male, a reflection of a man somehow lacking because the woman lacked the all-important phallus. This
female body was strong when it was masculine, and was successful when it was more than female. The best birth, indeed, was a bloodless birth.
CHAPTER THREE
THE FEMININE BODY: BIRTH-GIVING AND THE RACIALIZED OTHER

“I am brown by my own invention.

One day I will give birth to myself, lonely but possessed.”

~ Patricia Williams, The Alchemy of Race and Rights

In D.H. Lawrence’s novel Women in Love (1920), amidst the louder narrative of heterosexual pairings and homosocial yearnings, a strange image appears not once but twice. The male characters congregating in Julius Halliday’s flat, an otherwise “ordinary London sitting-room,” come face to face with a jarring representation of a racial or “othered” body: “several Negro statues, wood-carvings from West Africa, strange and disturbing” (82). One statue in particular depicts a woman giving birth and “looking tortured,” her black, slick body appearing “almost like the foetus of a human being,” her “strange, transfixed, rudimentary face […] conveying the suggestion of the extreme of physical sensation, beyond the limits of mental consciousness” (83). The main characters, Gerald Crich and Rupert Birkin, are torn when they regard this statue. Gerald asks if it is “obscene” (to which Halliday responds he has never “defined the obscene”), while Birkin, considering his own love affair, remembers it much later in the novel, musing that he thinks of the statues “so often” that they have now become “one of his soul’s intimates,” the grotesque body representing “thousands of years of purely sensual, purely unspiritual knowledge” (83, 288). The tortured female body of the parturient statue exists in the text as a cipher for so much more. Bearing more meaning than it can bear (while also bearing a child in the mix), the statue is laden with subsumed narratives of cultural, heteronormative,

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1 Quoted in D. Roberts, Killing the Black Body (264).

religious, racial, and sexual tensions, all of which exist subterraneously in the novel and surface in the guise of the black, female body giving birth.

I begin with this textual moment of the birthing statue in Lawrence because it is a perfect representation of the argument of this third chapter: that many modernist texts are highly engaged in issues of reproductive power(lessness) at the intersections of race, class, and cultural belonging or displacement. Analyzing texts by Jean Rhys and the little-read Olive Moore, I argue that to be a birthing woman is to be an other, marked and set apart in almost every way, but especially in a racial way. Not only is her status as a racial reproducer of kin at issue, reproducing properly within or without boundaries, but her reproducing body is also a clear sign of the status of her impending birth. Should this birth be celebrated or contained? Is it a joyous new future, or a problem to be dealt with? I argue, therefore, that to be a foreigner, an other, fundamentally echoes the condition of pregnancy. In these texts, the conditions are synonymous with each other, as both are rooted in extreme changeability, dismantling of self, ostracization, fragmentation, and outsiderness.

Birthgiving in these texts is also predominantly codified as only belonging to the female body, unlike the blending of the feminine body and masculine mind explored in chapter two. Such feminine, racialized birth (the two categories dovetail, as I explain below) is often truncated, monstrous, messy, composite, or in-between—grotesque, like Lawrence’s statues. This “messiness,” in turn, signifies the approaching shift for these modernist writers: a shift from modernism to postmodernism, the rise of global decolonization, and the postcolonial intrusion of the racial or black other. As Urmila Seshagiri argues, the shift to the ruins of postmodernism is rooted in late modernism, a shift that is illustrated by the unmoored and wandering female body
in writers such as Rhys and Moore. Female characters often travel or ramble, feebly engage with dominant narratives, and search for an alternative, any alternative, to the hegemonic labeling and fixing of the female body that the British empire systematically erects. These female bodies in exile, adrift in an interracial world and overwhelmed by an onslaught of cosmopolitan codifications, lose any cohesion they may have once held between mind and body. Extremely fragmented, existing under society’s controlling signs of race and class, these birthing characters harbor minds which shrink in light of their overwhelming bodily status. They exist, first and foremost, under the sign of the body.

To return to the birthing statue in Lawrence: like the pregnant characters in the Rhys and Moore texts, this body is clearly understood by the male characters to be other. It is first and foremost a non-white, non-British, non-normative body performing in non-masculine, and therefore irregular, ways. The woman depicted by the statue is defined and controlled by her body and its permutations to such an extent that her mind is subsumed; her self literally lies “beyond the limits of mental consciousness” (Lawrence 83). And yet this heightening of bodily awareness brings with it an additional relief—that of jettisoning false ideological constructions, contrived spirituality, and the trappings of refined English civilization in the novel. The statue is important to Birkin and becomes a sort of totem for him because of the freedom it conversely promises. Away from posturings of culture and extreme restrictions of the “proper” individual acting his part in civilization, this body is free to forget the mind and to exist “naturally.” Such a singular and uncomplicated bodily existence offers a truth to Birkin which cannot be found in the

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3 Seshagiri, Urmila. “Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix: Jean Rhys and the Evolution of the English Novel in the Twentieth Century.” *Modernism/Modernity* 13.3 (2006): 487–505. Seshagiri claims that “pivotal” texts like *Voyage in the Dark* specifically prefigure the “irresolution and placelessness” of postmodern texts because they feature a protagonist with a “many-shaded voice” (488). I extend Seshagiri’s reading of the importance of exile or “contrapuntal geography” (487) by linking this physical unmooring to the unmooring of self and body found in pregnancy. The wandering racial hybrid figure who is also pregnant (or still considering the meaning of her past pregnancy, as in Moore) is therefore doubly indicative of the approaching ruins of postmodernity.
drawing rooms of London or in the coupling required by the heterosexual marriage plot. But what’s more: the statue is importantly pregnant; it is quite literally reproducing itself and its way of life. Therefore, the promise of this racial body is twofold: this simpler being exists, and it can be born again—reproduced—within Birkin and within British white society at large.

Lawrence was famously concerned with the imminent destruction of the white, English race, and throughout his texts, he displays a search for and interest in an alternative mode of being in the world, an alternative consciousness often intimately linked to and represented by the racialized other. The racial body in Lawrence is therefore quite similar to the racial body one finds in many other modernist British texts, including the texts by Rhys and Moore. Predicated on “ambivalent primitivism,” in the words of Mary Lou Emery, the body of the dark other represents an alternate state at once desirable to achieve yet impossible for the civilized man or woman to access completely (286). Artistic representations of “exotic” cultures in British

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5 Emery, Mary Lou. “‘Robbed of meaning’: The Work at the Center of To the Lighthouse.” Virginia Woolf: An MFS Reader. Ed. Maren Linett. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2009. 280-299. A perfect example of such “ambivalent primitivism” appears in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1902), with Marlow’s confrontation of the “distant kinship” natives have with whites (140) and the enormous chasm still separating the races. The embodiment of this chasm is the “wild and gorgeous” yet “savage” woman who paces the banks of the river after Kurtz is removed, a woman “like the wilderness itself” (169)—appealing but unreachable and deadly. Conrad, Joseph. Heart of Darkness. New York: Bantam, 1981. For more on modernism’s use of the racial other, see “Painting the Primitive,” in chapter one, “The Avant-Garde in Modernism,” in Levenson’s Modernism (2011). Levenson astutely claims that Marlow’s engagement with the “savages” of Africa contains “a critique of European complacency and cruelty—and a demand to recognize the continuities that interrupt the contrast” (41).
modernism borderline on caricatures, aping what the writers and painters saw as a beneficial tonic to ameliorate the ills of modern British society. For example, in the famous Omega Workshops founded by Roger Fry (1914-1920), modernist artists such as Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and Wyndham Lewis created pottery, beads, and furniture with a distinctly “othered” flair (Seshagiri 315). These workshops were founded on Fry’s formalist ideas of mixing cultures—always defined as white vs. other, or West vs. Rest (307). In his book *Vision and Design*, Fry praises “instinctual, perceptual African art” instead of “inherently limited,” rational European art (314). As Seshagiri concludes, Fry’s main argument surrounding the Workshops is that the “artistic vision of the Negro or Bushman […] should be wrested from its culturally paralyzed origins and transported to the sophisticated, civilized, white Western world” (315).

For women, the situation surrounding the racial other was even more complex. As mentioned in chapter one, the nineteenth and early twentieth-century British hegemonic culture spun an overarching narrative linking women to the dark races, as both were thought to be “naturally” or biologically less-developed than white men. Lucy Bland explains: “Women, ‘lower races’ and children” were thought to share a “lack of willpower, emotionality, dependence, imitativenss, and little capacity for abstract thought” (*Beast* 74). Darwin’s groundbreaking discoveries in *The Origin of the Species* (1859) additionally supported the new eugenic field of “scientific racism” in the late nineteenth century, a field “in which races were seen as biologically differentiated on a fixed and graded scale of intelligence, moral worth and closeness to animality” (73). Darwin’s notion of the survival of the fittest was used to justify the watchful eye of the white British man under the auspices of empire, for civilization, defined as

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“white, masculine and adult,” needed protection from “its antithesis” – the “primitive, female and childlike” (74).  

Throughout this chapter, I link the bodily condition of being female with the political position of the colonized and the racial condition of the other. As Helen Sterk so aptly puts it, all women exist on a “continuum of colonization” (6). To be a woman or to be “other” in the early twentieth century was to be treated as a lesser citizen of the British empire, one marked by decreased mobility, increased surveillance and outside control, and, quite often, a resulting individual displacement at a physical, cultural, and psychological level. Yet I also understand that white women were not merely “hapless onlookers of empire,” for as Anne McClintock explains, even though their freedom was vastly curtailed, “the rationed privileges of race all too often put white women in positions of decided – if borrowed – power, not only over colonized women but also over colonized men” (6). The issue of power is a complex one, and it is important to remember that these women retain some power in the sheer ability to narrate. In addition to the cultural construction of women and racial others as biologically inferior, the prevalent public concern at the turn of the century was that, as women became educated and left the realm of the private home for the space of the public marketplace, they would become removed from the realm of the “natural,” a realm which included easy and prolific breeding. Forgetting her bodily roots, this modern-day aberration of a woman posed a

7 Laura Doyle explains that another term for such “scientific racism” is paedomorphism, which “aligned all women with the ‘lower races’ by suggesting that both embodied the childhood of humanity,” evolutionary speaking (65). Simply put, woman was thought to be an older and more primitive model of humanity (65).


9 For more on the power of discourse and the importance of ascertaining “who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, [and] the institutions which prompt people to speak […] and which store and distribute the things that are said,” see Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality: An Introduction. Vol. 1. New York: Vintage Books, 1990. 11.
troubling threat to twentieth-century Britain, rocked as it was by plunging birth rates in the face of human casualties from the Great War. In a 1911 article in the *Eugenics Review*, R. Murray Leslie asks if “the new women with their larger outlook on life and its problems [are] better fitted than the older types to become the mothers of a stronger and more virile race, able to keep England in its present proud position among the nations of the world?” (283) Leslie concludes, sadly, that they are not, citing examples of college-educated women who marry later in life, thus negatively affecting their “fecundability,” and women on hockey teams who are too athletic and not able to nurse their children (287). Warning that countries with suffrage have the lowest birth rates (291), Leslie suggests that women wait until after their childbearing years to seek education. He further asks society to curtail women’s physical activity (citing nervous conditions, or “neurasthenia”), and to help her avoid the “double burden” of caring for a household and pursuing a demanding career. He therefore advises that the Eugenics Society draw up a list of acceptable professions “which are most congenial and least interfere with her feminine attractiveness, since charm of personality will ever be a woman’s greatest asset…” (288, 290).

It is little wonder, then, that novelists such as Jean Rhys and Olive Moore display overt ambivalence towards female reproduction and the effacement of individuality that the cultural institution of mothering demanded. Publishing their novels in the 1920s and 1930s, they reflect the violent upheaval in normative sexual relations of the time, and criticize the British empire’s overt use of the mother figure as the guardian of the race, on one hand, and its lack of concern

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11 See Adrienne Rich, who famously divides mothering into the maternal relationship and the patriarchal institution (13). The institution, she claims, is rooted in the “private” sphere of the home (which contains and controls the mother) and is “the foundation of human society as we know it” (39).
for her wellbeing, on the other. After women won the vote in 1918, feminists quickly turned their efforts to other issues, splintering the women’s rights movement and furthering its stagnation after the first world war (Bland, *Beast* 308). Women and their bodies were no longer at the forefront of public opinion or of medical research as the death rate in childbirth began to recover (Jalland 159); the spotlight instead turned to the fetus, and to producing a healthy infant (Shorter 139). To this end, X-rays, prenatal care, and episiotomies (cutting the flesh of the vagina to ease the passage of the infant) became routine in the 1930s (Epstein 190; Jalland 149). In response to this rapid technologization of birthing, the decade witnessed the rise of “natural” birth models like Grantly Dick-Read’s that further glorified the sacred role of motherhood (Wertz and Wertz 183). Finally, the cultural display of eugenic sentiments increased during these years, predicated on a system of “right” versus “wrong” births that was in turn directly linked to the rise of fascism and Hitlerism (Hanson, “Save the Mothers” 58). As Lucy Bland points out, by the 1930s, fascism carried with it a prevailing mood of anti-feminism, situating women as only wives and mothers in the service of the empire (*Beast* 308).

Women, due to their reproductive capacity and the overt workings of their body, were culturally classified with the bodily existence of the racial other versus the civilized, rational existence of the white man transcending mere space of the body. Scientists and researchers (including Dr. Meyrick Booth in the 1930s and Dick-Read in the 1940s) lauded the alluring trope of the native woman who was particularly unfazed by the rigors of childbirth while simultaneously critiquing the modern woman who lived too much in the space of the mind.

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12 For more information on reproduction and the 1930s, see Clare Hanson’s excellent “Save the Mothers? Representations of Pregnancy in the 1930s.” For women writers and the 1930s, see Joannou, Maroula, ed. *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999. Joannou’s book includes articles arguing for the importance of women writers in the 1930s, a time when politics shifted left, many were concerned with rise of fascism, and both feminism and women were occluded in the face of dire economic and political events.
Relocate the modern woman into the body, much like the native, and she would again take up her natural capacity to give birth seamlessly and easily in the natural order of things.13

In Tess Cosslett’s chapter, “Natural Childbirth and the Primitive Woman,” in *Women Writing Childbirth*, she details the emergence of the “childbearing woman as primitive” in twentieth-century literature. Cosslett emphasizes the irony of an early twentieth-century cultural narrative that jointly informed women that labor was “an instinctive” bodily power yet simultaneously dictated that women must acquire this instinct from books and other educational sources (9-10). The narrative of motherhood as a natural role additionally fueled eugenic and fascist rhetoric of the “strength and efficiency of the nation” in the British “campaign to produce a better imperial race by improving childbirth education and facilities” (11-12). The primitive woman squatting in the field and the refined British housewife were therefore inscrutably linked, for the primitive model of following tradition and “nature” informed the housewife, who likewise unquestioningly followed nature in serving her husband and the demands of the household. This housewife did not try to agitate for more rights and a larger world; instead, she peacefully stayed at home, her “natural” habitat. Cosslett concludes, “The primitive woman is easily transformed into the conformist housewife” (19). Doris Lessing’s heroine, Martha Quest, picks up on the primitive as a model for the distraught housewife in *A Proper Marriage* (1954).

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stating that black women are “simple women of the country, who might be women in peace, according to their instincts, without being made to think and disintegrate themselves into fragments” (87).

I therefore turn towards a consideration of the reproducing “racial” body in this chapter, the body marked as other in one or more ways. I argue that in Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*, and *Voyage in the Dark*, Sasha and Anna are understood to be purely female, with no androgynous mixing of the male mind with the female body as we have seen in Woolf, Bagnold, and Mitchison. These birthing bodies are infantilized due to being first and foremost West Indian, and existing outside white dominant English culture. Their mark as “other” subsumes any other defining category: woman, pregnant, or even rich or poor. The figure of Ruth in Olive Moore’s *Spleen* functions a bit differently: as a lower-class English citizen adopted into an upper-class English family by birth, she has the luxury of beginning to imagine a female birth ameliorated by the masculine mind, but she is continually marked as “other” due to her lower-class roots. This text offers an immigration tale in reverse: fleeing to southern Italy, Ruth soon experiences an echo of the racial othering suffered by Anna and Sasha, and this racial othering is mapped onto her post-gestational and maternal body in crucial ways. The status of the birthing woman in these texts by Rhys and Moore closely mirrors and even duplicates and reifies the status of the other so keenly felt by the immigrant and the foreigner. While categories of race are often intimately linked to class, for the characters in these texts, race always comes first. Put simply, to be pregnant here is to be an outsider—often colonized, always alone.

1. **Jean Rhys and the Specter of Outsider Reproduction**

Pregnancy in Rhys is rarely discussed outright, and when it is mentioned, it is usually brief and in the service of something else. For example, Mary Lou Emery explains that childbirth
for Anna in *Voyage in the Dark* crucially fails because motherhood would “only oppress her” by requiring her submission to patriarchal society (*Jean Rhys* 80). Instead, Anna embraces the alternate potential for renewal and regeneration found in the carnival, a dizzying space where she can “envision new life” (81). Urmila Seshagiri, in “Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix,” argues that pregnancy is the only non-ambiguous element of *Voyage*, as it is bound up with nationhood: “Pregnancy intensifies the cultural ambivalence that history has thrust upon Anna, and the baby’s uncertain paternity furthers the mysteries and erasures of Anna’s already-fractured lineage” (498). Nagihan Haliloglu reads the pregnant body in Rhys as monstrous, “an anti-body that enters the social flow of conventional gender relations and upsets them” (35). And Patricia Moran claims that “childbirth and motherhood” are not important in Rhys, as Rhys is much more interested in “[e]rotic domination” and fully rejects maternity (*Virginia Woolf* 108, 112). Pregnancy in Rhys is often read as one more example of the heroine’s fall, an interchangeable facet of her disastrous condition as a colonized other, of the abuse she has suffered at the hands of patriarchy, or even as a final overwhelming sign that she has truly let herself go: she “seems to have abandoned all care for her well-being” and thus displays “sexual recklessness” (Haliloglu 34).

I am interested in reconsidering pregnancy in Rhys as a fundamental and integral mode of being for her colonized subjects. Pregnancy for these characters is not simply a means to an end, but an end in its own right, and a primary marker of the modality of inherent femininity—vulnerability, lack of rights, and social and cultural ostracization—the racial other experiences in

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Pregnancy and childbirth in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) function not only as the heroine’s physical embodiment of modernist form (these bodies rend, tear and transgress, much like the modernist narratives in which they are couched), but also as the primary example of the bodily displacement, lack of control, and hybridity that the colonized and/or racialized subject experiences on a daily basis. In short, pregnancy and childbirth in Rhys is the ultimate embodiment of Mary Lou Emery’s “ambivalent primitivism,” and of Urmila Seshagiri’s “poetics of racial difference” that effaces clear divisions and binaries.\(^{16}\)

Throughout my discussion of the centrality of pregnancy and childbirth in Rhys, I will build on three crucial theoretical arguments from Helen Sterk, Carol H. Poston, and Christina Mazzoni. First, the birthing woman is always treated like a colonized person, “childlike, passive, in need of protection, and [...] desiring the domination of the colonizer” (Sterk, et al. 4). Second, the birthing woman is the ultimate foreigner and outsider, belonging to “a different country” (Poston 28).\(^{17}\) And third, the birthing woman speaks a different language, or does not have access to the phallogocentricism inherent in the patriarchal system of language.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{15}\) For a related argument, see the recent article by Abigail Palko, who similarly posits that maternity is a “key concern” for marginal women writers such as Jean Rhys and Elizabeth Bowen (91). Palko, Abigail. “Colonial Modernism’s Thwarted Maternity: Elizabeth Bowen’s *The House in Paris* and Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark*.” *Textual Practice* 27.1 (2013): 89-108.

\(^{16}\) To elaborate on these three crucial concepts: as previously explained, Mary Lou Emory’s concept of “ambivalent primitivism” means that the body of the other is at once alluring and transgressive to the “civilized” man or woman (“Robbed of meaning” 286). Urmila Seshagiri’s “poetics of racial difference,” elucidated in her *Race and the Modernist Imagination*, implies that modernist experimentation and interest in form was also an interest in “aestheticized forms of race” (6) as a marker of “unreliability” and is the “key to a daring literary horizon that privileged suddenness, autonomy, abstraction, decenteredness, rupture, flux, irresolution, and nonlinearity” (9; emphasis in original). Thus, the appearance of race in modernist texts heralds the cultural “disruptions in the continuity of racial identity” that the lack of clear divisions between black and white, self and other, bred (7-8).


\(^{18}\) The triple effect of pregnancy for the racial other—cultural ostracization, linguistic impasse, and reduction to mere flesh—is further illustrated in Rhys’s little-read short story, “Learning to be a Mother,” first published in *The Left Bank and Other Stories* in 1927. In the story, the first-person narrator describes her inability to
explains, the birthing woman’s “experiences don’t make sense because the language she must use cannot adequately convey them” (175). With this final concept of what I call the “linguistic maternal,” I draw on critics as diverse as the French feminist school to more recent birth theory by Mazzoni and Cosslett. Indeed, most contemporary feminist theory surrounding the birthing body deals with language in some form, frequently concluding that the current phallocentric system of language is insufficient to describe the bodily permutations of pregnancy and birth, and advising that feminists and women coin new words to attempt to access their corporeal experiences in reproduction.¹⁹

Similar to many authors writing in the modernist period, Rhys employed gestation and parturition in a specifically modernist way.²⁰ As I have illustrated throughout this dissertation, the first fifty years of the twentieth century, corresponding roughly with the European modernist movement, sees a growing importance of pregnancy and reproduction. First, the historical time frame witnesses new innovations in the monitoring, care, and cultural construction of pregnancy

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¹⁹ For example, see Julia Kristeva, who in “Stabat Mater” argues that motherhood remains “without a discourse” (332); Michelle Boulous-Walker, who explains how mothers cannot adequately speak in the masculine philosophic tradition (1); Hélène Cixous, who encourages women to write new words, and tell the things about femininity and the body that only they can discern (875); Deborah Kloepfer, who searches for a new vocabulary to adequately represent the mother/daughter dyad; Patti A. Hanlon-Baker, who argues that women need to search for “alternative discourses” that adequately convey women’s voices (214); and Robbie Pfeufer Kahn, who posits that there is “no language of birth” (118) and who coins the neologism “maialogical” to represent “a process of linguistic interaction built upon the maternal body” (92). Boulous-Walker, Michelle. Philosophy and the Maternal Body: Reading Silence. New York: Routledge, 1998; Cixous, Hélène. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 1.4 (Summer 1976): 875-893; Kloepfer, Deborah Kelly. The Unspeakable Mother: Forbidden Discourse in Jean Rhys and H.D. London: Cornell UP, 1989; Hanlon-Baker, Patti A. “Birthing Rhetorics: Interpreting Women’s Use of Pregnancy Discourse(s).” Unpublished dissertation. U of Nevada, Reno. Aug. 2004. Also see works by Christina Mazzoni, Tess Cosslett, Adrienne Rich, Susan Bordo, and Luce Irigaray.

²⁰ I fully realize that to classify Rhys as modernist is to make a critically suspect move. In this chapter, I nevertheless situate Rhys as modernist, although I understand one can also categorize her as postmodernist (as we have seen in Seshagiri), feminist, and/or postcolonialist. Indeed, this slippage between categories and the inability to adhere to clear genre definitions is part of her enduring allure and richness.
alongside burgeoning rights for women. And secondly, the traditional hallmarks of the modernist movement in literature—including ellipses, an inability to say what one means, the broken function of words, linguistic innovation, the lost individual, border crossings, displacement, and violent shifts in subjectivity—perfectly correspond to the pregnant condition.\textsuperscript{21} Much like established definitions of European modernism, then, the physical state of pregnancy and childbirth yields modernist results: a slippage of language, a loss of self that leads to displacement, a wandering or border crossing inside oneself, upheaval of the old to make way for the new. Essentially, the modernist condition is, in many ways, the pregnant condition (and, palimpsestically, the displaced condition of the exile).\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{Voyage in the Dark} was Rhys’s first novel, composed from her “exercise books” and journals but published belatedly as her third novel (Konzett 142). \textit{Voyage} is the story of Anna Morgan, a young expatriate from Dominica who falls from chorus girl to kept woman to “amateur,” or borderline prostitute, drifting from man to man after Walter Jeffries, her first love.

\textsuperscript{21} With the advent of new transnational or “geomodernisms” to pull from Doyle and Winkiel, the modernist playing field has blown so wide open that any attempt at cohesive categorization is problematic. Doyle, Laura and Laura Winkiel, eds. \textit{Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity}. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2005. Yet many critics insist that some working definition of modernism and transnational modernisms is crucial to literary studies. Andreas Huyssen warns of the danger of losing focus amidst the emphasis on knowing everything, everywhere (12). We need clear “conceptual parameters,” he claims, which he then lists, including the abandonment of the high versus low paradigm and the simultaneous remembrance of hierarchy’s importance in alternative modernisms (14). Huyssen, Andreas. “Geographies of Modernism in a Globalizing World.” \textit{Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, cultures, spaces}. Eds. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker. London and New York: Routledge, 2005. 6-18. Similarly, Susan Stanford Friedman claims that some categories and periodization is important in modernist studies, for “[w]ithout historical categories, we would face an infinity of singularities [and] the politics of choice would be driven further underground, rendered even less visible” (509). Friedman, Susan Stanford. “Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism.” \textit{Modernism/modernity} 8.3 (Sept. 2001): 493-513. Finally, Mark Wollaeger argues we must continue to define modernisms, just not narrowly or exclusively, produce “new knowledge,” and “proceed as if we do not already know what modernism is in order to develop a truer account” (12). Wollaeger, Mark. “Introduction.” \textit{The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms}. Eds. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. 3-22.

\textsuperscript{22} Susan Squier links parturition, “modern science,” and modernism, arguing that both modernism and science “have been defined in and through the repression of the birthing woman’s body” (\textit{Babies} 117). Both are interested in defining and unveiling the female body, she claims; and both are “grounded in male envy of female procreative power” (117), as we have seen in chapter two of this dissertation.
leaves her.\textsuperscript{23} The original ending (Anna’s death from a botched abortion) was deemed too depressing by Rhys’s publisher, as the book appeared in the dark war years of the 1930s (Pizzichini 209).\textsuperscript{24} Rhys was therefore forced to amend her original ending to a vague reference to “starting all over again, all over again . . . .” (Rhys 188).\textsuperscript{25} Similar to the majority of the action in the novel, Anna’s fate in this second ending is hazy, and critical consensus is divided over whether she recovers or whether she dies in the end.\textsuperscript{26} The importance of the ending seems to lie in the certainty that, either way, Anna will continue to experience a doomed repetition, “starting all over” towards continued racial and cultural displacement, split identity, and emotional and psychological bankruptcy.

One of the most prevalent aspects of \textit{Voyage} is the significance of the past. In an oft-cited passage, Rhys writes in a personal letter that the “big idea” of the novel is:

\begin{quote}
Something to do with time being an illusion I think. I mean that the past exists – side by side with the present, not behind it; that what was – is. I tried to do it by making the past (the West Indies) very vivid – the present dreamlike (downward career of a girl) – starting of course piano and ending fortissimo.
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{23} Sue Thomas explains that “amateur” was never clearly defined but meant, in part, “women sexually active outside marriage” (4, 67). Such women usually engaged in sexual activity in exchange for evenings out, new clothing, and the like (67). Panic about this figure swirled around the rise of venereal disease during WWI and the joint falling birthrate and crisis of motherhood in the 1920s (67). Thomas, Sue. \textit{The Worlding of Jean Rhys}. Westport, CT and London: Greenwood P, 1999. For more information, see especially chapter four, “Telling of the ‘Amateur’” in Thomas, and Nagihan Haliloglu, \textit{Narrating from the Margins}.
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\textsuperscript{26} The critical conversation around this issue is vast, but for one example, see Nancy Harrison, who argues that Anna dies through language and gives up trying to be heard and understood (107), versus Mary Lou Emery, who claims that the ending is empowering for Anna, as she chooses an “indecent” return to the Caribbean and the space of the carnival (\textit{Jean Rhys} 65-6). Harrison, Nancy R. \textit{Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women’s Text}. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988.
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Perhaps I was simply trying to describe a girl going potty. (Rhys, *Letters* 24)²⁷

Anna’s memories of her childhood in the West Indies continually resurface and shred her narrative, which emerges in halting gasps and ellipses that showcase the unspoken while simultaneously foreshadowing the loss of the self in gestation and parturition.²⁸ For, this loss of self is the most notable marker of the pregnant condition for a social and racial outcast like Anna. In becoming pregnant outside of wedlock, Anna completes the cycle of ostracism that began when she was born. As a colonial mixed-race Creole, she is “both the representative and the victim” of “heightened national anxiety” prompted by war, falling birth rates, and the influx of “others” like Anna (Snaith 79).²⁹ Anna’s pregnant presence in London is the ultimate affront to the semblance of white-washed racial and domestic order that undergirds the British empire.

It could be argued, therefore, that physical reproduction is the most critical aspect of the text, for reproduction is nothing if not the significance of the past. *Voyage* is framed by two births: the first line of the novel, which compares moving to England to “almost like being born again” (Rhys 7), and the end, the previously-mentioned botched birth. The narrative is rooted in both spiritual and physical births, as both enact a violent upheaval in Anna that in many ways lends the only action to the narrative. The heroine is at the mercy of the permutations of her body just as she is at the mercy of society’s judgment of her and of her non-place as a Creole, shuttling

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²⁸ For more on the expansive topic of gaps and speech in Rhys, see Nancy Harrison, *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women’s Text*; Patricia Moran, *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys and the Aesthetics of Trauma*; and Anne B. Simpson, *Territories of the Psyche*. For the broken narrative as an alternative Caribbean aesthetic of “maroonage,” a “resistant and creative aesthetic strategy” highlighting “the importance of movement in the process of creolization” (Emery 181) see Emery, Mary Lou. “The Poetics of Labor in Jean Rhys’s Global Modernism.” *Philological Quarterly* 90.2-3 (Spring-Summer 2011): 167-197.

between the ever-present “now” of England and the “then” of Dominica. Judith R. Raiskin explains this shuttling as a primary example of the othered condition: Rhys’s characters have the double burden of being misplaced, she claims, and of feeling “inauthentic” both “at home” and in England (147). They have to constantly “shift” back and forth within realities (here versus there) and, because “[s]eeing one image necessarily excludes the other,” the character must expend an enormous amount of “mental energy to retain the existence of both simultaneously” (147).

This shuttling or splitting is also a prime example of Anna’s pregnant condition manifesting itself in diverse ways throughout the text. Pregnant Anna consistently shifts between the exterior projection of her appearance to the interior turmoil she is silently experiencing, and she is consistently hyper-aware of her outside physical appearance in juxtaposition to her interior hidden reality. As Veronica Gregg explains, thematically, the Rhysian heroine is one “split by the pressure of difference and exclusion based on binary oppositions: black and white; the West Indies and England; insider and outsider; sanity and insanity; resistance and conformity to the dominant social codes” (197). In *Voyage*, such a split is exemplified in Anna’s always longing for, always needing the right hat, the right coat, the right shade of dyed hair. “Why don’t you cut your hair? You ought; it would suit you. … And false eyelashes, my dear, sticking out yards – you should see them. They know what’s what, I

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31 Julia Kristeva argues in “Women’s Time” that “[p]regnancy is a dramatic ordeal: a splitting of the body, the division and coexistence of self and other, of nature and awareness, of physiology and speech” (366). The split of the pregnant condition is a fundamental and oft-explored aspect of the critical theory surrounding pregnancy, and is linked to the dualistic Cartesian split of mind/body that informs the feminine condition (Grosz, *Volatile* 6). For more on the pregnant split, see Iris Marion Young, “Pregnant Embodiment,” in On Female Body Experience; Cristina Mazzoni, *Maternal Impressions*; and Tess Cosslett, *Women Writing Childbirth*.

tell you” (Rhys 117). Yet appearances, no matter how contrived or well-planned, always seem to fail Anna, who falls back on the inherent stability of her (unstable) bodily condition. No matter what, Rhys seems to be saying, Anna is her body; she is her mixed-race, mixed-class self, and no assertion of will or twist of fate can remove her from the path of the outcast that has been inscribed in her flesh and that manifests itself through the unmistakable physical reality of pregnancy.

As Anna realizes she is pregnant, she focuses on four things: the dead-end of her embodied thoughts (or, an inability to think outside the “circle” of her body); the problem of money; the pressing need to get rid of the fetus and solve her new problem of being an unwed mother; and the fear of birthing a monstrous child:

> And all the time thinking round and round in a circle that it is there inside me, and about all the things I had taken so that if I had it, it would be a monster. The Abbé Sebastian’s Pills, primrose label, one guinea a box, daffodil lable [sic], two guineas, orange label, three guineas. No eyes, perhaps. . . . No arms, perhaps. . . . Pull yourself together. (Rhys, *Voyage* 168, ellipses in original)

Anna’s fear of her monstrous fetus is rooted in what the fetus will be lacking—vision, or the ability to navigate its surroundings, and arms, or the ability to seize, grasp, and manipulate one’s surroundings. The resulting feeble, dependent, and deformed child won’t fit in, will be marked as other, will live as an outcast, is not supposed to exist in the “natural” order of things—all symptoms of the monstrous. Nagihan Haliloglu argues that Anna’s perceived monstrosity of the fetus is linked to her bond “with England: incomplete, a monster” (83). Indeed, it is often theorized that the immigrant or racially-other individual living in a society dominated by another race will fear the monstrosity of his or her offspring. For example, as Urmila Seshagiri explains, Anna’s mixed-race child will be racially “unassimilable” due to its highly “ambiguous lineage”; it will inherit the Caribbean “crisis of filiation” of Anna’s family and the “detotalizing
experience of metropolitan modernity” of the absent father (“Modernist Ashes” 499). However, it is importantly Anna herself who has caused this perceived monstrosity in her fetus due to her repeated and failed abortion attempts. Her actions literally rend the fetus into “unassimilable” body parts (eye, arms) while she, in the midst of this fracturing, attempts to knit herself “together.” Her troubling bodily reality, existing in tandem with the troubling reality of the fetus, overtakes her mind. Her body exerts the ultimate control.

In the passage quoted above, Anna also thinks “round and round in a circle” through her pregnant condition, her thoughts unable to escape the corporeal confinement of her bodily condition. In a way, her thoughts take on her fleshly permutations, leading to Anna’s sinking even further into the mire of her physical state. And even as Anna becomes more body, more somatic flesh, she enacts an abject Kristevian splitting, for the fetus inside her represents another set of splitting boundaries and shattering borders, effecting yet another instance of displacement and unhomeliness at the core of her being. Her pregnancy is a physical manifestation of the symbolic, a function of the colonial mapped in flesh and blood. While it removes her from her body through the process of “abstraction” (leaving oneself due to too much pain), it simultaneously roots her in the space of the flesh, in what Nagihan Haliloglu deems the monstrous zombie or vampire: a staggering, corporeal body, all reeking flesh, wreaking havoc on the very building blocks of the empire—the family unit.\(^{33}\) Unable to link the space of the mind to

\(^{33}\) Haliloglu explains that the zombie motif is popular in traditional Caribbean literature, and in Rhys, the zombie is “mere flesh without agency;” a “‘hollowing out’ […] achieved largely through colonial education as part of the colonial establishment” (56). Several other critics posit the behavior of the zombie as being indicative of the modern condition and/or the female condition. For example, see Mary Lou Emery, who sees the zombie behavior in Rhys’s *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* as symbolic of “the dissolution of female character” and of modernist experimentation (143). Emery, Mary Lou. *Jean Rhys at “World’s End”: Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile.* Austin: U of Texas P, 1990. Judith Raiskin and Nagihan Haliloglu both offer an extended reading of Rhys and the zombie motif, which I will explore in a subsequent section of this paper. Finally, Patricia Waugh reads the zombie as a marker of the battle that patriarchy wages upon a woman’s body, pointing to the profusion of monstrous women from zombies to cyborgs which fill the pages of fiction in the late twentieth century (196).
the space of the corporeal, hers is a space of disjunction, overcome by the overwhelming effects of pregnancy, her body generating “what is new, surprising, unpredictable” and reaching “beyond [her] domains of control” (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* xi).

Through pregnancy, then, Rhys illustrates the impossible agony of the colonial situation. Pregnant Anna experiences a heightened level of displacement, the constant reenactment of existing in no-place, and her extreme physicality, her body always marking her as other and in need of containment and control. The status of her transgressive colonial body is front and center: she waits to feel ill again and again, like the never-ending waves in her dream; she drinks when she should not, knowing it will lead to more sickness (Rhys, *Voyage* 170-1). Rhys illustrates the horror of the pregnant (reproducing) colonial by increasing Anna’s shame as Anna confirms the suspicions of middle-class English citizens like Walter and Vincent. For example, as Vincent meets with Anna to discuss money for the abortion, “the look in his eyes was like a high, smooth, unclimbable wall” (172), and he repeats that he just “can’t understand” her fall into borderline prostitution (173). Vincent seems to have his reservations confirmed that she is *that* kind of girl, something he always suspected. The presence of the “high, smooth, unclimbable wall” further enacts an insurmountable divide between colonized Anna and colonizers like Vincent and Walter, isolating her in her own body, unable to connect with others: “No communication possible” (172).

In the final scene of the novel, Anna lies bleeding in her flat after suffering through an illegal abortion. Her landlady, Mrs Polo, frets to Anna’s friend, Laurie: “‘She told me it come on at two o’clock and it’s nearly eight now. . . . It ought to be stopped” (183, 185; ellipses in original). This final scene of bleeding out which replaces the anticipated birth scene transforms the primary bodily condition for Anna into the torrents of blood she loses. Sue Thomas links this
profuse bleeding to Anna’s infecting and diseased status as an amateur, a “transmitter of corrupt and corrupting blood, which destabilizes boundaries between human and animal, the living and the dead, health and disease” (69). I read bleeding as a physical manifestation of Anna’s repeated daydreams of the sea—for example, as she sings a song she heard in a music hall, “And drift, drift / Legions away from despair,” she muses that rather than “legions,” the proper word must be “Oceans,” which leads her to the conclusion: “it’s the sea . . . [t]he Caribbean Sea” (105; ellipses in original). This sea for Anna is a liminal space between home and England: a messy, uncontrollable and seeping liquidity that undermines the personhood of those within it due to its boundary effacement. To leak is to lose one’s personhood, to transform into an “uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking […] self-containment […] a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order” (Grosz, Volatile 203). To leak is also to seep into another’s space, invading another’s body in an abject crossing of borders and boundaries that “disturbs identity, system, order” and “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva 232). The uncontrollable bleeding signifies the appropriate place for Anna’s muddled bloodline as a mixed-breed individual whose racial heritage is suspect: not tidily poured into another flesh and blood person, but emptied into the gutter, spilled out on the floor. It is waste and refuse incarnate, symbolic of her larger bodily

34 Christina Hauck discusses the presence of abortion in modernist works in “Abortion and the Individual Talent.” Hauck illustrates how modernist poets, both male and female, “treat reproductive failure figuratively and thematically” (224), focusing on “reproductive failure” in Eliot’s The Waste Land, a work she claims represents “the multiple failures of modernism: as a viable literary project and as a means to reconstitute wholeness at either a personal or a general level” (225). This reading could of course be applied to the abortion in Rhys—and indeed, this scene is often read as loss and failure: loss of modernist forms (Seshagiri, “Modernist Ashes” 500), failure to reconnect with the mother and one’s racial and feminine heritage (Kloepfer, “Voyage”), failure to access the “social body” and the isolation of the individual, “trapped in her own angst” (Minogue and Palmer 105). Kloepfer, Deborah. “Voyage in the Dark: Jean Rhys’s Masquerade for the Mother. Contemporary Literature 26.4 (Winter 1985): 443-459; Minogue, Sally and Andrew Palmer. “Confronting the Abject: Women and Dead Babies in Modern English Fiction.” Journal of Modern Literature 29.3 (Spring 2006): 103-125. For more on abortion, see Erin Soros, who claims abortion “signifies a gender that gives death and a death that gives gender” (5), and that abortion is a “castration of the phallocentric order” (24).
status. She, like her aborted fetus, has been and will continue to be thrown away by British society.

In Rhys’s later novel, *Good Morning, Midnight*, the heroine, Sasha, similarly suffers from her corporeal condition as manifested both in her pregnancy and in her status as a colonial or “racialized” other, but her foray into reproduction culminates in a live birth rather than an abortion. The birth, however, proves ultimately unsuccessful, as it yields a “pale” and “silent” infant whom Sasha is unable to nurture or feed (60).³⁵ Many critics have emphasized Sasha’s inability to accept the promises of the mother-child dyad (oft-touted in feminist criticism) due to her deep-seated maternal trauma.³⁶ But what is also important is the specifically linguistic space of her gestation, a space that signifies her displaced status as she is never quite sure of the language. This linguistic gestational space, however, offers Sasha a way out of the stifling confines of the phallogocentric patriarchal system represented by Mr. Blank, and simultaneously promises a community of women speaking a different language and thriving under a different sign.

Like Anna in *Voyage*, Sasha’s uncomfortable relationship with language is highlighted throughout *Good Morning*, and indeed, language in Rhys is an expansive area of critical inquiry.³⁷ The displaced other haunting the streets of the metropole is often at a linguistic loss,

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³⁶ For example, Anne B. Simpson claims in *Territories of the Psyche* that *Good Morning, Midnight* is filled with mother-daughter dyads, but the mother opposes the daughter’s sexuality, while the daughter is abusive and cruel; the birth episode, therefore, “chiefly stresses how little a maternal figure will give to the vulnerable daughter” (104). Jessica Gildersleeve argues that Sasha’s world is “blessed with neither light nor warmth,” for it is “the world of the Other, of lack, the world of the feminine” (232), and Sasha’s denial of her own mother leads to a denial of her own motherhood (241). Gildersleeve, Jessica. “Muddy Death: Fate, Femininity, and Mourning in Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*.” *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women’s Writing*. Eds. Pauline Dodgeson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Rodopi B.V., 2010. 227-244.

³⁷ See Nancy Harrison, who explores the centrality of women’s speech in Rhys, including the inability to communicate through speech and the marking of such an impasse through writing (60, 87); Anne B. Simpson, who argues that Sasha illustrates the connection of individuals “behind the linguistic barrier”—not a Lacanian language
mired in a mental “impasse” that occurs precisely because the Other lacks the ability to say what he means, the ability to use the colonial language of the ruling classes (Dell’Amico 2; GoGwilt 68-9). Language is deficient; it breaks down just when one needs it most. Language is thus a crucial marker of both the colonial condition and the pregnant condition in Good Morning. It gestures towards the inefficiency of the system for both modalities, forever displaying what one experiences but cannot translate into words. Language misdirects, describing the body in insufficient or even pernicious ways; language has a “disembodied quality” which “invites forgetting the body” and “stands apart from the body, yet has power over it” (Kahn 76).

Language is a barrier in pregnancy, for the pregnant subject is unable to adequately describe the experience that she is going through: “Motherhood undermines conventional discourse, threatens its collapse” (Mazzoni 148). And, similarly, the colonized or non-native speaker is also disbarred from the linguistic system. She cannot access the body of cultural wealth that language enacts and symbolizes. She does not fully understand, cannot translate, or forever lives with the ghostly image of the other word, the other linguistic system, hiding behind the new language she is forced to speak. Sasha repeatedly finds herself at the mercy of controlling male linguistic and

rhetorical norms. It is due to Mr. Blank’s mispronunciation of “la caisse” that she loses her job (Rhys, *Good Morning* 26-27), and she consistently cites her confusion when trying to decipher masculine modes of communication. “I can’t whether his smile make out is malicious […] or apologetic […] or only professional” (52), she laments; and later, in response to René’s remark, “Elle n’est pas si bête que ça,” she admits, “Well, that might mean anything” (75).

Sasha’s indeterminate status in relation to language is further highlighted when, while she is laboring under the care of a midwife (or “sage femme”), she is inducted into a solely feminine space for the first and last time in the novel, a space where a different linguistic code rules: “She speaks to me in a language that is no language. But I understand it” (58). The tension that has built in Sasha due to living under the harsh linguistic code of patriarchy dissipates as information is passed between women in a refreshing exchange that is not rife with unknowable (and therefore dangerous) meaning and, consequently, is not obsessively questioned by Sasha. Further proof of the stabilizing effect of the *sage femme* and her maternal language is found when Sasha, much later in the novel, again remembers the midwife and how “when she looks at you the world stops rocking about. The clouds are clouds, trees are trees, people are people, and that’s that. Don’t mix them up again. No, I won’t” (139).

The *sage femme*’s “old, old language of words that are not words” (58) that Sasha instinctively understands hints at Sasha’s potential induction into the timeless annals of motherhood, a feminine community that serves to validate the woman’s role in giving birth, sanction the sacrifice of her pre-gestational body, and empower her by granting her access to new depths of creativity and creation. Looking at Sasha’s pregnancy through such traditional

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39 In reading the *sage femme* as a stabilizing force, a sort of gatekeeper to the community of women, I agree with Deborah Kloepfer, who argues that Sasha’s experience in birth-giving inserts her (briefly) back into language (*The Unspeakable Mother* 82). I disagree with Patricia Moran, who reads the midwife’s speaking of old language as “exemplar of female dereliction” (*Word of Mouth* 154).
lenses, one would expect to see the “resilience and activity of material body” that the pregnant belly signifies and construct a reading of pregnancy as a new form of corporeality, fluid and cohering, where the gestating body expands, develops, encompasses and expels another entity without fragmentation or fracture; where subjectivity is drawn in and changed by embodied experience; where processes of change enhance subjectivity rather than destroy it. (Maher 29)

Yet, for Sasha, such a rejuvenation of subjectivity through the access to the maternal is never realized. The feminine community symbolized by the language of the midwife is only ever promised and never realized – “at every turn, maternal contact is subverted” (Kloepfer, “Voyage” 447). Sasha’s inner monologue of “What, then? This. Always? Yes, always” (Rhys, Good Morning 58) acts not only as a positive link to the ancient and primeval act of birthing but as a decidedly negative assertion that “[t]his,” the pain and confusion of the rending maternal body, has come and will now always be. Through the death of Sasha’s son, Rhys bars Sasha from achieving any empowerment through motherhood. Sasha’s transformative experience with the *sage femme* instead leads nowhere, another dead-end passage.\(^40\) The community of women and mothers manifests itself as nothing more than a hunch that Sasha has that other mothers “can’t [sleep] either. Worrying about the same thing” (59). She remains isolated and alone, only guessing at the experiences of “the others” (59), comparing “other babies” (60) to hers in a nerve-wracking cycle of suspicion and isolation.

Sasha’s story in *Good Morning, Midnight* is, in the words of Elaine Savory, a story of one woman’s continual experience of “hopeless, suffering space,” a “construction of the world

\(^{40}\) Sasha’s defining experience of gestation and female community as yet another dead-end passage is foreshadowed by her opening description of her room, “[w]hat they call an impasse” (9), and the “nightmare” she experiences when she is disbarred from Mr. Blank’s masculine community and rhetorical system: “I walk up stairs, past doors, along passages – all different, all exactly alike. There is something very urgent I must do. But I don’t meet a soul and all the doors are shut” (26).
[...] as hell” (126).\textsuperscript{41} As part of this “hell,” Sasha herself is zombified, acting as mere flesh, an “automaton” who stares in at windows full of “artificial limbs” (Rhys, \textit{Good Morning} 10-11). As Nagihan Haliloglu explains, it is Sasha’s linguistic impasse that turns her into this “zombified colonial,” doomed to operate “unreflexively, engaging little with the world outside and acting merely reactively; in narrative terms, this is betrayed by stock phrases or unintelligible short words. The white colonial is similarly possessed by forces beyond his/her control” (57). Sasha’s parturient glimpse of an alternate maternal linguistic register, therefore, signifies that she is on the threshold of entering another system, switching gears and shifting body space into something more solid and more necessary to British society, more subdued and controllable, circulating in the right ways and in the right spaces (tucked away with her baby, not wandering the streets alone). But the inability to fully access this system means that hers is not the space of motherhood (having acquired one’s child through bodily labor or adoption), but the unsettled and becoming space of pregnancy, a space she returns to again and again in the overt agency of the past. It is a grotesque space of uncomfortable, even painful, growth and change; a space of uncertainty; a space of an undermined and splitting subjectivity; the space of being a passive receptacle of an unknown entity instead of an active shaper of young lives and, thus, the future.\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{42} To distinguish so clearly between pregnant and mothering work, I build upon Sara Ruddick, who figures birth as separate from, yet attached to, mothering. Pregnancy requires “distinctive demands” during its “active, relational waiting” period, Ruddick claims (“Thinking Mothers” 39); while birthgiving is a time of acquisition of new “cognitive and emotional capacities” (40). She concludes that there is not enough “commonality” between “natal thinking” and “maternal thinking” to lump them together into one entity (40). “Thinking Mothers / Conceiving Birth.” \textit{Representations of Motherhood}. Eds. Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan. New Haven: Yale UP, 1994. 29-45. Similarly, Imogen Tyler calls for a distinction between the “categories of mother, maternal and pregnancy” (77-78) as pregnancy is distinct from motherhood: “Motherhood already implies a self/other, mother/child distinction, which does not exist in any simple binary form for the pregnant subject” (78). Tyler, Imogen. “Skin-Tight: Celebrity, Pregnancy and Subjectivity.” \textit{Thinking Through the Skin}. Eds. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. 69-83.
To be pregnant, to be living with the consequences of a past indiscretion, is to be forever at the mercy of the past. Sasha lives under the sign of the past, not the agency of the future.

For Rhys, the colonial condition—that of outcast, wanderer, misunderstood, ill-treated, forgotten by the greater society, never at home—is an apt illustration of the pregnant condition. The breaks and shifts of the pregnant body echo the permutations of the colonized individual’s psychic landscape, and the landscape of so many modernist texts that seek to disrupt, fragment, and make new. The story of pregnancy that Rhys tells, in the end, is a story of submission to the demands of an outside world, a fleshly narrative of exhaustion and of succumbing to one’s physical state. There is no hope for these characters, doomed to repeat their mistakes and re-walk the same streets. These bodies are entirely female: helpless, needing protection, weak, birthing out of improper material conditions and not out of any interior or inherent strength. Given “neither light nor warmth,” Rhys’s characters inhabit “the world of the Other, of lack, the world of the feminine” (Gildersleeve 232). These characters cannot think beyond their physical conditions to imagine a pregnancy ameliorated by an injection of the masculine, as we have seen in Woolf, Bagnold, and Mitchison. For Rhys, pregnancy is an inherently feminine and colonized space of being locked in one’s own flesh, one’s movements and choices dictated by an outsider, a capitalist system beyond the comprehension or grasp of the female character. This pregnancy and birth—all female, all outsider—is nothing but suffering.

2. Olive Moore and the Failure of Female Fleshly Creation

A second prescient illustration of the modernist feminine, bodily, and racially outcast birth appears in the “scandalously under-read” novelist, Olive Moore, the pen-name for Constance Vaughan (Garrity, Step-Daughters 18). Moore’s slim novels—Celestial Seraglio: A Tale of Convent Life (1929), Spleen (1930), Fugue (1932), and a book of fragments, The Apple is
Bitten Again (1934)—all speak to the pernicious effects of outsider female reproduction. For example, in Celestial Seraglio, a coming-of-age story about girls in a French convent that is punctuated by freakish and maimed bodies, the girls circulate a rumor of a monstrous birth: “Something about a baby being born without a head” (5). In Fugue, Lavinia Reede, pregnant outside of wedlock, admits that she “need[s] men” and is a “human cow,” dumbly offering up her body and her “swaying breast” to her child (282), while her friend, Evelyn, a “modern woman,” insists that such women “who desire only to be mothers should be mechanically fertilised. Let them be placed apart and tended and graded like cattle. Let them admit their cow-like vocation” (282-283). And in Apple, Moore, presumably the narrator, acerbically writes: “On Woman. Woman is the vacuum which Nature abhors and must see filled. Consequently woman is always slightly ridiculous unless stretched on a bed or with a child in her arms. All the rest is marking time” (343). Moore’s oeuvre continuously displays extreme ambivalence towards women, pregnancy, the body, mothers, feminism or the “modern woman,” and the family, which she claims is the “enemy of progress” and the “decay of man” (Apple 377). While she seems most disgusted with the bodily sacrifices of the pregnant condition and the self-serving, sacrificial attitude of mothers, she also continually returns to these themes, worrying them, as if she cannot quite pin them down.

Like Rhys, Moore explores the complex problem of racial identity, and in Spleen she highlights a gestation and birth firmly rooted in a specific racial and social standing and narratively surrounded by exile—the shattered chronology of the novel causes the birth to

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literally be wedged between stories of exile. But if Rhys offers her readers one version of the émigré life, Moore offers another, even though as a (presumably) white English woman she was spared the hardships of the split Creole identity and the expatriate life that Rhys experienced. Yet Moore was nevertheless fascinated with the idea of the outcast, and all of her works explore the notion of wandering and of being a specifically female outsider in a male world. Her characters are nothing but displaced. In *Celestial*, European girls (predominately English and German) attend a convent school in France; in *Fugue*, the English Lavinia wanders abroad in Germany; and in *Spleen*, Ruth, the English heroine, chooses exile, fleeing from her husband’s estate in England to the tiny island of Foria, Italy after she births a “monstrous” child. Due to space constraints, this chapter will focus on *Spleen*, the crowning glory of Moore’s little oeuvre and a groundbreaking exploration into the nuances of the fleshly and mental experience of pregnancy.46

Little scholarship surrounds Moore, who quickly became an *enfant terrible* of the modernist literary scene and just as rapidly disappeared.47 What little work that exists primarily considers Moore’s examination of motherhood and her portrayal of femininity and the female body. In *Step-Daughters*, Jane Garrity briefly considers *Spleen*, arguing that the text displays the “deprecation of racial motherhood” with a character that refuses to “equate motherhood with

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46 While I do not have the space to fully explore the resonances of Moore’s fantastic title, *Spleen*, I would direct readers to Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, in which they explore the “Queen of Spleen” (from Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*). Gilbert and Gubar argue that “spleen” signifies female writers engendering only misshapen offspring (33)—a significant reading in light of Ruth’s deformed son, Richard. The spleen is a symbol of the profusion of (female) bodily filth seen as destructive to intelligent life, they claim; it rules over the female sexual cycle and is anti-creation, the failure of female art (32-33). See also Gilbert and Gubar, pgs. 60-2, where they explore Anne Finch’s poem, “The Spleen.” Moore’s contemporary references to the spleen include Havelock Ellis’s *Man and Woman* (1929), in which Ellis explains that the spleen is “absolutely larger in the female” but the function of the organ is “not very clear” (107-8).

47 For more information on Moore’s slim biography, see the Appendix of the 1992 Dalkey Archive Press edition of her works, which includes an autobiographical sketch Moore wrote in 1933 for *Authors Today and Yesterday*, and a letter from Moore’s friend, Alec Bristow (421-425).
national responsibility” (68). Garrity argues the overarching message of Spleen is that if women eschew racial motherhood, the empire and race will disappear (69). Garrity offers a more extended reading of Spleen in her recent article, “Olive Moore’s Headless Woman” (2013), in which she claims that “Moore uses disability as a paradoxical figure for female artistic agency,” rooted in Moore’s reoccurring headless woman imagery that is “an important signifier of both female intellectual ambition and the historical impossibility of that aspiration” (290).48

A further critical source is Renée Dickinson’s 2009 work, Female Embodiment and Subjectivity in the Modernist Novel (the only extant text featuring Moore as a primary subject of analysis), in which Dickinson offers in-depth readings of both Spleen and Fugue. Dickinson claims that maternity is Moore’s way to draw “attention to the physical and ideological entrapments of female embodiment, specifically how the feminine is both lauded and imprisoned in its maternal state, unable to escape it and its association with both the sacred and the savage” (78). Dickinson concludes that Moore’s experimental texts look for a way out of the abject feminine state, and seek to find a “way to reshape the feminine” (134, 137).

In building on these excellent criticisms by Garrity and Dickinson, I am interested in focusing on how, as in Rhys, reproduction and social, racial and class-based otherness—even monstrosity—often dovetail in Moore. Not only does the individual marked as “other” experience extreme isolation as a wanderer in an unfamiliar landscape, but she also knows she is marked as an unacceptable reproducer, as she would inevitably reproduce children that exist outside of the established racial and cultural model of her adopted home. Put simply, the reproduction of the other is the one monstrosity that cannot be allowed to take place. And because the exiled character encodes this cultural message of the extreme need to be a genetic

dead-end, she often dreams of or actively fears the monstrosity of her real or imagined offspring.\footnote{Monstrosity in literature can also act as a reflection of the mother’s mental state as she fears her bodily changes and approaches the birth with apprehension. Fay Weldon’s *Puffball* is an apt example of this, as is *Still Life* by A.S. Byatt (1985), in which Stephanie, the main character, fears her unborn child may take on the monstrosity of a burned child, or, what’s worse, the monstrosity of her own self (51). Weldon, Fay. *Puffball*. New York: Summit Books, 1980; Byatt, A.S. *Still Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1985. Also see the 1983 British novel, *The Birth Machine*, in which the parturient main character, Zelda, transforms into “her very own monster, wolf-mouth howling, frog-legs flexing” (Baines, Elizabeth. *The Birth Machine*. London: Salt Publishing, 2010. Pg. 77.) Paul-Gabriel Boucé explains how monsters in literature traditionally appeared as markers of the woman’s sin (94), proof that God was punishing them according to his “divine wrath” (95). Monsters also functioned as concrete symbols of the birthing woman as a “frail and wayward instrument of procreation, the consenting victim of her wild fancy” (99).}

However, as Moore twists most aspects of her writing, she similarly twists this expected narrative arc of exile and negated reproduction. Ruth is wife to Stephen, a landed gentleman in England, living on his estate, “Sharvells,” which runs smoothly and efficiently. One would think Ruth is not an outsider at all but instead an insider, a white upper-class woman specially chosen to carry on the reproductive torch of the British empire. Yet, a closer look at the text reveals that Ruth has been an outsider all along. Indeed, the way the text is framed places the emphasis on exile and on the binary construction of us versus them from the beginning. The first few pages of the text revisit Ruth’s first hours in Italy, lingering on her upper-class clothes that are “heavy, solid, expensive; the hat a masterpiece of discretion” and her “small patent leather feet, so correct, so refinedly helpless” (Moore, *Spleen* 112). She appears reserved and “altogether too fragile, too docile, and entirely helpless” (115). In comparison to her self-portrait as the “civilized” white woman, Ruth describes the Italian native, the “garlic-thick melon merchant, shirt open to his waist and energetic hair bristling thickly down his chest” (112). Ruth’s body, contained and tamed, is drawn in sharp contrast to the “savage” Italians that appear as disembodied “rows of brown faces and foaming teeth” as the crowd hems her in upon her (113). Ruth, reflecting on this distant past, admits that “she had never belonged, although at first young,
eager, she had tried” (117). She is “unable to make [the Italians] hers” (117), she concludes, because “the only tie they understood, the blood tie, was not there” (120). She simply does not share their bodily lineage. Ruth’s body remains separate, distinct, othered; she importantly is able to keep her physical and intellectual distance from such “savages.”

Moore purposely begins with these first few pages of disorientation, isolation, and exile before she plunges back in time 22 years, back into Ruth’s pregnancy in the walled-in estate of Sharvells. This second narrative arc should be read in the same light as the previous narrative of exile, for Ruth consistently mentions how out of place she is. She is from a lower class—the upper-class voices of Stephen’s family whisper after her self-imposed exile that she “has gone back, back to where she belongs. For the best. […] And it is always a mistake to raise people from” (112). And further, Ruth does not meekly subscribe to the culturally-appointed rhetoric of woman as sacrificial mother and reproducer, woman who fully embraces her God-given role. Instead, she is dismayed when she discovers she is pregnant, and concludes that if she will have to “go through all this,” why not “have something else, something different, something new, something more worth having…?” (122; emphasis in original). She is chiefly offended by the lack of choice the pregnancy symbolizes:

How can one? Yet I am expected to. All women do. I am a woman. Therefore I do. And if I do not? (And at a movement real or imaginary within her). When I breathe, it breathes. When I feed, it feeds also. Against my will. Yet when it had finished using her for its own purpose, she must welcome it and say that it was hers and that therefore she loved it (all women do) at once and without question. When it had had nothing to do with her from start to finish. (125)

Her body, therefore, harbors the ultimate outsider: a fetus, suddenly and magically there “[a]gainst [her] will,” taking what it needs from her body in a monstrous state of vampirism. The cultural narrative of divine reproduction, of woman’s unquestioned role, would make Ruth into a zombie and her baby into a vampire. Moore illustrates that the monstrosity of reproduction lies in
the culturally-ordained control of women and children, an iron-clad control that the British empire wields with an exacting and unrelenting force.\textsuperscript{50}

Similar to the writers in chapter two, Ruth hopes her suffering and zombified female body, lacking a cogent will of its own, will be ameliorated with a healthy infusion of masculinity. If she must give birth, like so many hapless and unquestioning women before her, then she will do so like a man: “had [reproduction] been left to men centuries of creation would have produced some thing more vital, more exciting. But then men were the active and not the passive instruments of nature. Men questioned” (129). Raised without a mother (who died in childbirth after trying to abort Ruth), and excessively, even manically devoted to her deceased father, Ruth imagines that she will parturiate from her forehead, as her father must have done and as Zeus did to produce Athena: “I think I carry my womb in my forehead,” Ruth explains, “Whereas I do not feel it here at all (and her hand touched her body)” (128).\textsuperscript{51} But Ruth’s man-womanly attempt at reproduction does not produce the glorious sons and daughters of the empire as are found in \textit{The Squire}. Despite Ruth’s brave aspirations to step outside her “naturally” ordained role as a female reproducer and create “something beyond and above it all” (132), using both her mind and her body, she gives birth to a son whose feet hang “loose and shapeless from the ankle,” whose eyes are fixed in a “vacant […] stare,” and who lies in “utter soundlessness and immobility” (153). One of the puzzles of the text, then, and a question it steadfastly refuses

\textsuperscript{50}The brilliance of Olive Moore’s early critique of the cultural role of motherhood and her suspicion that mothers are culturally reproduced, not naturally born, anticipates Nancy Chodorow’s groundbreaking work in 1978, \textit{The Reproduction of Mothering}. Chodorow famously argues that mothering is not a natural instinct occurring in females but is instead a “fundamental organizational feature of the sex-gender system” (208) and is intimately linked to capitalism and male-dominant society (208-9). Similarly, Adrienne Rich claims that the institution of motherhood is incredibly harmful, as it “demands of women maternal ‘instinct’ rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self” (42).

\textsuperscript{51}For more on the significance of Ruth’s patrilineal heritage and on Moore’s rampant use of mythological figures in the text, see Garrity, “Olive Moore’s Headless Woman.”
to answer, is just why Ruth is “punished” with her mentally and physically deformed son, Richard. Or is this a punishment at all, or, instead, a gift—a way out of her entrapment in the stifling echelons of upper-class British existence and the culturally-contained role of wife and mother?⁵²

Ruth’s attempt to gestate and parturiate as a “man-womanly” creature thus fails miserably, marking *Spleen* as exceedingly different from the birth narratives of Woolf, Bagnold, and Richardson. Further, the birth of Richard plunges Ruth into a state of exile-within-exile, in the doubled exile of past Ruth at Sharvells and of present Ruth in Italy. Renée Dickinson labels this notion of double exile the “double alien status of women in maternity: first, the alien occupation of their physical bodies, and, second, the alien status in which they must continue to live if they refuse patriarchy’s constraints,” or the “trap of female embodiment in maternity” (82). While all parturient narratives may figure entrapment and estrangement to some extent, the otherness Ruth experiences is fundamentally different than what we have seen in Rhys.⁵³ Throughout the novel, Ruth *does* possess the time and economic means to think about her pregnancy, her birth, and what her deformed son might mean.⁵⁴ In fact, the majority of the action

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⁵² Renée Dickinson claims that Ruth’s attempt to create “something new” in Richard corresponds to the Modernist dictum to “Make it New” (22), and that Richard’s deformity means Moore is “insistently skeptical of modernism’s emphasis on the new, where the ‘it’ of ‘make it new’ is also vague and leaves open the option for monstrosity” (87). Garrity, in “Olive Moore’s Headless Woman,” argues that Richard is a “physical manifestation of the argument that maternity is incompatible with intellectual and artistic activity” (301).

⁵³ See Mary Ruth Marotte’s *Captive Bodies* for more information on narratives of gestation and parturition as narratives of entrapment. Marotte argues that such narratives work in terms of captivity, figuring reproduction as jointly a time of captivity (being trapped in the body) and a time of being “captivated,” or enraptured, by the process. To be captive, Marotte claims, is “to reach a kind of sublime, a rapturous experience that has both negative and positive effects on the experiencing subject” (1-2); “a sort of major revising of script and recovery of authorship” (110).

⁵⁴ See Titchkosky, Tanya. “Clenched Subjectivity: Disability, Women, and Medical Discourse.” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 25.3 (Summer 2005): n.p., for a discussion of the contemporary cultural narrative and its construction of the “deviant” meaning of the disabled body and of the unruly feminine body who produces such monstrosity. Titchkosky observes: “This way of constructing disability anticipates the knowledge that women who willingly give birth to disability are not only derelict in their duty but monstrously mistaken in their choices” (n.p.).
of the novel takes place within her own head, and the reader is subjected to a disorienting swirl of narrative fragments as Ruth’s thoughts jump from one subject to the next, rending temporalities and spaces along the way.

Moore’s narrative form in *Spleen*—so formless that its lack of cohesion itself becomes a form—is described by Dickinson as abject: bursting borders and boundaries, jumping from one consciousness to another (46). Dickinson claims as a central thesis in *Female Embodiment* that women writers like Moore sought to change the shape of the traditional narrative to reconceive women’s roles in society and to carve out new spaces for their thoughts, stories, and physical bodies. Yet I also find it significant that such a fragmented form mimics the ongoing state of the exile and the outsider: one who sees but cannot fully comprehend, one who tries to piece together a startlingly heterogeneous past, present, and future into some resemblance of a cohesive subjectivity. In Rhys, the narrator (and thus the narrative) simply cannot knit together due to the inherent fractures at the core of the splintered Creole subject, but in Moore, these splinters are deployed as weapons. Ruth takes on the mantle of the lower-class exile to protect herself and her son from censure. In much the same way, her narrative becomes a labyrinth full of false starts and turns that misdirect the reader, leading them in a wandering state of confusion and exile that mirrors Ruth’s projected state.  

For her state is nothing but projected: Ruth’s journey into exile and her interior condition are not nearly so fragmented as she would have the reader believe. Throughout, she projects an iron-clad control, quick wit, keen intelligence, and strong desire to do what she alone knows she

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55 With this idea that the experimental form of the novel is intimately tied up with race—and that race is intimately tied to mothers and reproduction—I am building on Laura Doyle, who explains how “mother-entangled complications of identity determine the unorthodox narrative practices of experimental novels” (4). Through interruptions, lack of chronology, and arabesque, Doyle claims, experimental texts try to “disengage the mother from her function as a sexual-racial matrix of group identity” in an attempt to reconfigure her body and her meaning (4). Similarly, Jane Garrity claims that when women writers experiment with form, it is directly linked to matters of empire or “national affiliation” (*Step-Daughters* 5).
must do. She repeatedly emphasizes that, upon her first arrival in Italy, she only appears to be “too fragile, too docile, and entirely helpless. But they were quite wrong. For all her endearing gentle appearance she was not a little mad, quite capable, and very determined” (Moore, Spleen 115). A product of the British class and educational system, Ruth possesses both the psychological and financial resources to chart her own controlled path through the exiled landscape she chooses. She gives away her rich wardrobe and chooses to adopt the clothes of the peasant-woman: “I shall wear what Donna Lisetta wears” (118); she cuts off her hair to appear “more fragile more docile than ever” (119). Yet, she dislikes the shoes of the peasant and instead wears “light low-heeled shoes sent especially from Naples” (119). The emphasis here is on choice: Ruth knows she could return to England at any time, whereas the heroines in Rhys fundamentally have no home to return to, and Ruth continues to draw on the resources of home. Ruth’s ability to choose and the power this choice grants her creates a fundamentally different exile experience for her.

Unlike the Rhys characters, Ruth is spared the torment of fearing money and social ostracization throughout Spleen. And perhaps what is the most crucial trajectory of the narrative, her arch of gestation and parturition, importantly occurs when she is seemingly not an “other” at all. As previously mentioned, Ruth has the luxury of time, space, and resources to fully devote to thinking about and experiencing her pregnancy at Sharvells. This brief space of racial belonging for Ruth is significant and may lead the unassuming reader to presume that Rhys and Moore are therefore deploying pregnancy very differently. However, I argue that both authors are extremely

56 With Ruth’s peasant costume, one is reminded of Marie-Antoinette pretending to be a farmer and villager in Hameau de la Reine, the farming village built especially for her on the grounds of Versailles. “Hameau de la Reine.” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 28 Jan. 2013. Web. 7 Jul. 2012. Web. 21 Jan. 2013. The Queen employed the idea of poverty and simplicity as an escape from the pressures of palace life, but it was of course a controlled experience. Her livestock were “carefully maintained and cleaned by her servants. Dressed as a peasant […] she used buckets of Serves porcelain specially decorated with her arms by the Manufacture Royale” (“Hameau de la Reine”).
interested in the same aspects of pregnant experience: that of the suffering female body, the alienating social and urban landscape, and the fractures of the British empire appearing at the seams of the immigrant experience. While Rhys situates her narratives on the outside, in the form of the racial other and the immigrant, Moore simply flips this model and situates her narrative on the inside, in the form of an upper-class British noblewoman who chooses the path of exile. But this essential choice belies the underlying message of *Spleen*, and it is the same message found in Rhys: the British are a faulty people, the British empire is a faulty system, it is beginning to break down upon specifically racial and economic axes, and this uncertain future is ultimately displayed in and represented by the pregnant experience of the outsider.

The predominance of the outsider brings us to another fault line encoded in *Spleen*, for not only is Ruth an outsider, but she is female. As woman, trapped in her womanly flesh, she can only reproduce as women reproduce: through her body, and not through her mind at all. As she contemplates her large pregnant form in the bath, she realizes “it was not happening in her forehead at all, but was happening very much where it was meant to happen” (131). Once she comes to accept her pregnancy, realizing “all her anger and despair had meant less than nothing to it,” that it “was becoming” and “happening” despite her attempted intervention, she throws herself into the contemplation of her act of creation (131). While strolling the grounds of Sharvells, importantly “separated […] from the house” by the “labyrinths of yew trees,” she proclaims, as if casting a spell, “You will not like it, and it will understand you as little as I do” (136). She is “drunk with the terrible knowledge of her terrible power” (133).

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57 Moore’s narratives sometimes approach another area of the gestational text—that of the “terrible power” of the witch-like pregnant woman (132)—but her texts always immediately sink back into the realm of the body and never fully realize this power. The pregnant woman as powerful witch-like agent begins to proliferate in later texts of the twentieth century, after the second wave of feminism expands women’s rights. For example, see Fay Weldon’s *Puffball* (1980) and Elizabeth Baines’s *The Birth Machine* (1983). For an early version of the non-pregnant woman as powerful witch, a move that allows her to escape the confines of the patriarchal familial unit, see Sylvia Townsend-Warner’s excellent *Lolly Willows, or The Loving Huntsman*. Chicago: Academy Chicago Limited,
And her power is indeed “terrible.” Her doctor proclaims that she has had “one of the most interesting manifestations of induced and sustained hysteria” that he has seen, a hysteria that is very close to “madness” (133). She smiles when she thinks of monsters, “half-woman half-bird, half-woman half-fish,” and at what others “would think of it” (144), and she continually ponders the horrific nature of the mother figure, oozing an “emotional maternal substance […] as a form of adhesive plaster by which mankind is held together, and is decaying” (146). If she must create, she will do so differently, and if she must give birth, she will do this, too, in a different way. Except, she doesn’t. She gives birth like countless other women before her: in a suffocated, closed-in room, surrounded by old faces, in a bed like a “tomb” (149). She characterizes the experience as “[w]orn out”:

Old. Stale with stale memories of repeated and familiar sights. How had it happened that everything vital had been reduced to the limits of four walls, bringing shame and fear with them? One should be born on hills, on clouds, near streams, in woods, on open and pleasant spaces. Civilisation. Fear of unsheltered spaces. Too many walls inside which things were performed in fear and shame. (150)

This is giving death, not birth. This is the final trajectory of the British patriarchal system and its birthing mothers, birthing countless years of tradition, expectations, and race- and class-consciousness. Birth here is “[o]ld” not new, “[s]tale” not fresh, grounded in repetition instead of innovation, and crammed into the stuffy, Victorian, heterosexual home where the very walls are saturated with “fear and shame.” Westernized, empire-centric civilization, Moore seems to be

1979 (originally published in 1925). Witches often haunt the periphery of pregnant texts throughout the twentieth century, appearing as figures that escape the control of society and manifest power specifically in “suffer[ing] no guilt. … They laughed, schizophrenic, caught between the truth and the pre-sealed images: mad, hysterical witch, apple sticking in the throat” (Baines 121). Witches therefore act as models of behavior for these pregnant women, offering an alternative (if not dangerous) space to the confines of cultural normativity. For a look at the origins of this literary representation of pregnant women, see Karpinska, Monika. “Early Modern Dramatizations of Virgins and Pregnant Women.” SEL 50.2 (Spring 2010): 427-444. Karpinska explains that representations of pregnancy in 1500-1700s drama cast pregnant women as outside strict patriarchal definitions, having a latent, threatening power that blended into witchcraft (427). The message of these texts is that women can be deceiving; they bear issues of property and legitimacy, the threat of cuckoldry, and, perhaps most damning of all, they are aligned with the tricky and mysterious body (439).
saying, turns a potentially liberating experience into just another way that woman is alienated, isolated, and othered, both from herself and from those around her.

Ruth’s experience of giving birth is so horrific that later she can only recall feeling as if she was “being burned alive,” and that she “laughed weakly” when she heard she had birthed “a beautiful boy” (152). Then, she sees her son, Richard’s, feet. They “hung loose and shapeless from the ankle, soft loose pads of waxen flesh,” and in a flash she comprehends “the vacant fixity of his infant stare” (153). Her body has produced the very definition of outsider. Mentally and physically incompetent, Richard is a living contradiction: he should be first in line to inherit Sharvells, but he certainly cannot manage an English estate. This birth for Ruth, like the heroines found in Rhys, is not an entry into the stable patriarchal reproductive system, for her or for her son. This birth only further entrenches her otherness and separation, a set of conditions that she continually reenacts as foreigner and exile in her later years in Italy.

These years in Italy are important, for the alternative setting allows Moore to further her critique of British racial patriarchy which is so intimately tied up with its machine-like production of mothers and mothering. Ruth’s critical engagement with her pregnancy is rooted in her conviction that “salvation” for the woman comes through the body, from “the neck downward: breasts and thighs and pelvic bone. And for head the ever-enlarging heart. The fatty ever-noble heart swollen with appropriate emotions” (163). Ruth refuses to place her heart where her head should be, to replace thinking for feeling, when it comes to her mothering; she refuses to be “the perfect, the headless woman” (207). As her friend Uller observes, Ruth “so evidently was not what is called a maternal woman” (169). Yet, in sharp contrast to Ruth’s deep-seated

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58 At the end of the novel, Ruth also ensures that Sharvells will pass to the public and not to Richard. Turning Sharvells into a “permanent all-the-year round home for poor children who were weak or had been ill, and especially for ill-treated children,” Ruth specifies that Sharvells would have “nothing to do with mentally defective children […] who were in no sense, she believed, worth saving” (220).
hesitation to mother Richard is the Italian mother who is repeatedly cast as easily inhabiting the space of the body, imbued “with the slow beautiful natural joy of the italian [sic] woman before the child” (168).59 Later, in London, Ruth muses that “a million mothers can found a nation. The italian woman […] is a born mother (though that is much a matter of olive oil and sunlight)” (227). The rural, pastoral setting of Italy seeps into its people and makes their bodies, movements, and mothering part of “nature,” versus the civilized, urbanized English, so artificially removed from the land. In this way, Moore’s inquiry into twentieth-century reproduction mirrors the arguments by men like Dr. Meyrick Booth: remove the woman from nature, and her mothering and capacity to reproduce will be adversely affected. The main characters in Moore’s texts are deemed “proper” racial reproducers, as they are white and from modernized European countries (England, France or Germany), and not of the lowest classes. They have access to sufficient resources, including education and medical care. And yet, these modernized bodies in Moore (bodies of civilized, educated, white Europeans) are continually portrayed as monstrous, experiencing disastrous results through the grotesque agency of the corporeal. For example, the narrative of Celestial Seraglio is littered with images of maimed bodies, including the nuns who kneel “legless, half-human” (77), and every birth in this text (metaphorical or not) is deformed: the girl who births a disfigured baby (5), and even the merry-go-round at the carnival, which “rocked and thundered past, emitting harsh tormented shrieks as though about to give birth to another painted monstrosity” (80). And in Spleen, Ruth continually avoids her adult son, feeling him “not merely a thing dumb, pitiful, deformed, but something evil, monstrous, and unreal into whose power she had delivered herself. He knows! he knows!” (172)

59 Garrity posits that Moore’s unusual habit of not capitalizing nation names is meant to “destabilize the reader’s complacency with supposedly natural hierarchies” (“Headless Woman” 292).
And so, while it is at first shrouded, the messages found in Moore are the same as that in Rhys, only spoken from the opposite side of the divide. The dominant and colonizing races (like the English) only presume to be better than those they dominate, but in reality, they are even more monstrous and depraved than the brown-skinned “others.” To be woman, especially to be birthing woman, is to take on the mantle of these “others,” for no matter the color of your skin, pregnancy only increases woman’s misery and reifies her position as outsider in the empire system. The status of the foreigner, the uprooted subject, the homeless wanderer, is fundamentally that of pregnancy: both contain fragmentation, extreme isolation, loss of self, and disbarment from the “man’s world” of commerce and empire.

Moore closes her foray into female reproduction with a reminder of reproduction’s true purpose: to birth bodies for empire, fodder for the guns of war. Importantly, at the end of the novel, Ruth abruptly returns to the heart of empire, London, and experiences the horrors of the British metropole, founded as it is on the hapless backs of its lower-class citizens birthed to serve the empire:

In Trafalgar Square a procession of unemployed was passing […] The men, it seemed, were from the distressed areas of the North. […] The men were soaked and shivering. Their faces were a uniform grey and haggard and emptied of all expression save hunger and weariness. Their heads dropped forward on their necks. They shuffled past, unsubstantial as ghosts […] so worn and spiritless they were. (230-1)

This scene emphasizes that every single birth contributes to the greater nation and to the greater state of humanity, and that race and class are just two of the many ways individuals are codified and demeaned in Britain. The problem of modern civilization for Ruth, and for Moore, a

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60 With this idea, I draw on Virginia Woolf’s “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” in which she links reproduction, maternity and war. The female narrator warns that all bodies yet to be born will be subjected to “the same death rattle overhead,” the droning planes of war,” if we cannot “think peace into existence” (1). She images a way to lure men from their love of war, likening the rooting out of this “fighting instinct” to women giving up birth for the sake of humanity. “[I]f it were necessary, for the sake of humanity, for the peace of the world, that childbearing should be restricted, the maternal instinct subdued, women would attempt it” (5).
civilization far removed from nature, vastly exceeds the binary of male versus female, or even of English versus Italian. *Spleen* illustrates that the problem of pregnancy and childbirth for a healthy feminine subjectivity, and the problem of a deformed birth, is nothing in the face of larger civilization, exemplified by the British empire system. This modern civilization is beginning to crumble at the foundational level, that of humanity, because humans deemed “unworthy” or “outside” of proper society are treated like the animals they are seen to be, and indeed, are becoming.

In light of the true horrors of the world, the horrors found in the gray London streets and in the “monstrous” modern women who eschew childbirth (230), Ruth finally “no longer reproached herself” (232) for her creative experiment and for her monstrous birth. She thinks of her son “lying in the shade of the rock on the hot yellow sand under a blue outstretched sky” (231), and realizes his physical and mental insentience is a gift both to him and to her. His ability to lie untroubled in the natural landscape is the way out of the “grotesque” reality of London, a reality founded on sorting people into restrictive binary positions. Richard’s existence is unquestioning, unscheming, and he is rooted to the earth which invests him with the only “dignity” that he needs (231). Ruth’s narrative, finally and startlingly, offers some glimmer of resolution: with the final line of the book, “[s]he no longer reproached herself” for Richard’s monstrosity (232). For even if masculine mental reproduction is the most formidable incarnation of all in Ruth’s approximation, she realizes that a fleshly female creation, bent and broken as it may be, can still lead to unexpected growth, and can in the end be life-giving.

Women in *Spleen* are too close to the animal, it is true; too trapped in their bodies and unable to fully access the space of the mind as man is purportedly able to do. Women, for Moore, remain all body, but this is not a death sentence as it is for Rhys. For with their bodies, as
with their pens, women will seek to create what is new and unexpected (as symbolized in Richard), to carve out Seshagiri’s “poetics of racial difference.” This difference may be misunderstood, deemed monstrous or obscene, but the importance is that the birth occurred and that there is space for new ways of non-normative embodiment and new ways of being in the world, space beyond the confines of the metropole and the rigid and unforgiving binaries of white/black, British/Other, man/woman, mind/body.
CHAPTER FOUR
FLESH AND STEEL: DYSTOPIC FEMALE REPRODUCTION
AND THE AMELIORATIVE SCIENTIFIC GAZE

“Woman [...]. Was there ever such a broad-backed and also such a dirty word?”
~ Salman Rushdie, Shame

“It MUST remain a place where highpower babies can be born.”
~ Susan Currell, “Breeding Better Babies in the Eugenic Garden City”

The final major area of British modernist novels that consider gestation, reproduction,
and the status of the troubling yet crucially important female body is that of the dystopian novel.
As Michael Davidson explains, modernism is a “moment when medical science is intervening in
reproduction by attempting to stabilize gender and racial differences and by monitoring
reproductive processes and potential sexual partners” (212). In tandem with this moment, the
eyears of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of dystopian texts and speculative fiction
that were rooted in questions surrounding proper and improper forms of reproduction, both as
projections of contemporary promising advances in science and technology and as warnings of
the potential of such advances to unravel the state of humanity as it was then known. The
collective trauma caused by the Great War additionally cast a troubling pall over the future of
humanity, for if humans were capable of such carnage and destruction, what might happen when
humanity had the full panoply of science at its disposal?

Early dystopian texts were also closely tied to science fiction, for each genre sought to
explore the fundamental limits (or lack thereof) of the human condition in the light of the


seemingly-limitless expanses of technology. The impact of technology on the human condition is clearly seen in the text that is widely considered to be the first-ever science fiction text, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (Donawerth xvii). And if Shelley was the mother of science fiction, a genre defined by Eric S. Rabkin as “the branch of fantastic literature that claims plausibility against a background of science” (459), then H.G. Wells was arguably the father. Writing prolifically from the late nineteenth century to well into the twentieth, his texts engage with a number of ground-breaking topics in science fiction, including time travel (first mentioned in *The Time Machine*, 1885), space alien invasion (first occurring in *The War of the Worlds*, 1898), and genetic engineering (*The Island of Doctor Moreau*, 1896). Like many other writers in the then-burgeoning science fiction genre, Wells’s texts work to remind their readers that “the outcome of history is not foreordained but is contingent upon human action, even if that action is limited by certain fundamental conditions of possibility” (Booker and Thomas 25).

Reproduction was also closely tied to the genre of science fiction and dystopia in several critical ways. First, through the advances of technology, men began to dismantle and appropriate critical glosses of the definitions and limits of both genres, see Claeys, Gregory. “The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell.” *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Ed. Gregory Claeys. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010; and Rabkin, Eric S. “Science Fiction and the Future of Criticism.” *PMLA* 119.3 (May 2004): 457-473. Notably, Claeys disagrees that the genres of dystopia and science fiction can overlap, explaining that science fiction texts portray different concerns and include any text in which “extraordinary or utterly unrealistic features dominate the narrative” (109).


Donawerth goes on to claim that science fiction itself is not limited to science fiction texts, for it is a “cultural system, and the future of criticism lies in exploring cultural systems” (461).
the various avenues of female biological reproduction, and many male scientists sought to gain control over this messy and uncontrollable process. Culturally, an interest in reproduction was exploding in England at the turn of the century, and this concern coupled with important new advances like endocrinology meant that many scientists became fascinated by the idea of streamlining the process of reproduction, modeling it after the factory model that was then so prevalent (for example, the “Fordism” of Huxley’s *Brave New World*) to produce biologically- and racially-superior infants that would best serve the state and especially the imperial effort. As Susan Squier explains, “Modern representations of scientific intervention into reproduction built on the romantic separation of developing fetus from machine-like mother to serve […] industrial [ends]” (*Babies* 15).

It is therefore the “fundamental conditions of possibility” (to employ Booker and Thomas once more) which the authors in this chapter struggled so hard to define and simultaneously overcome in their novels, novels which are in direct conversation with the joint fears and dreams that technology engendered surrounding female reproduction. Texts such as Charlotte Haldane’s *Man’s World* (1926), Susan Ertz’s *Woman Alive* (1936), Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1937), and Katharine Burdekin’s *Swastika Night* (1937) encapsulate the scientific and cultural aspirations of the early twentieth century extremely well, but they also carry with them warnings about the repercussions of unchecked scientific (and social) power through such advances. All four texts are dystopian, and portray a future society that is now struggling at the mercy of its own rapid developments and is beginning to crumble from the inside out. The culpability of the society’s inhabitants vary widely from one text to the next, but a central facet of all four texts is __________________________

6 Factories, of course, often malfunction, and the changeable female body crammed into the mechanistic and regular model of the factory means such “metaphors of production” figure the female body as constantly breaking down (Martin xxiv). Emily Martin asks what would happen if Western culture conceived of female body as operating under a “chaos model” like the heart, where sporadic activity is the norm, not a form of deviancy? (xi)
the issue of eugenic biology as rooted in technologized human reproduction. The texts vary in their portrayal of the effects of technology on reproduction, as we shall see, but all texts do portray, in some fashion, the direct effects a technologized world has on human reproduction. In *Man’s World*, inhabitants of a closely-monitored and stratified society are sorted into breeders or non-breeders—the latter are forcibly sterilized—and stepping out of this ordained societal structure carries with it severe repercussions. In *Woman Alive*, all the women in the world rapidly die after a chemical agent is released in warfare, except for one woman who is saved by science. In *Brave New World*, ex-utero reproduction is the normative model for “civilization,” leaving only “savages” to reproduce bodily; while finally, in *Swastika Night*, women have been “diminished,” or turned into pseudo-animals, and are no longer producing female offspring due to years of telling them that doing so is shameful. Put simply, the future of humanity itself is at stake in each one of these texts.

All four novels also enter into the conversation surrounding technology and eugenics: the idea that upgraded, advanced bodies could be created by a proper regime instigated by the joint attentions of science, technology and the state. In the area of techo-scientific improvements, all four novels are clearly critical of the human implications, arguing that too much scientific intervention reduces humanity. In the area of eugenics, however, the novels can be broken up into two groups: novels that portray the female body as a eugenically-groomed and upgraded entity, either specially marked for breeding or beyond breeding altogether (*Man’s World* and *Brave New World*), versus novels that portray the female body as relatively natural and untouched by science, yet experiencing the repercussions of science in the larger society and even world (*Woman Alive* and *Swastika Night*). The early twentieth-century notion of eugenically improving the stock of humanity in part stemmed from the many idealistic and
radical movements in the first half of the twentieth century, including socialism, communism, the Russian revolution, and even fascism, all movements which imagined a more egalitarian society in which members were divided according to predetermined socially-stratified roles. The idea was that humans would be happier and less destructive—therefore, more stable—if they were less free. In these models, birth-giving was often either highly restricted to a special class of people (positive eugenics), or discouraged from occurring in the lower ranks (negative eugenics). In a way, the “science” of eugenics only illustrated that no matter the technological advances surrounding the human form, the human form itself, and the reproduction of this form, remained the one aspect of civilization that was most in need of an upgrade, and the one aspect most difficult to subject to rigorous, sustained, and organized scientific scrutiny and intervention.

At the heart of these four texts, and at the heart of this chapter, then, is not only the question of the power of the individual in the face of such regimes and global problems, but also the question of woman, especially that of the New Woman. With the scientific revolutions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the globe-shaking two world wars, the rapid change in sexual relations and gender roles, the rise of birth control, and the rise of the working woman, the cultural and literary spheres did not know what to do with this new woman. Projections proliferated: would she be the key to a better world, or would she and her unruly body prove disastrous to all the hard work men had poured into the world for centuries? What effect would her desire to cease birthing multiple babies have on reproduction? What about her embrace of new forms of birth control—where would humanity be if women simply stopped reproducing? And what exactly was the status of the female body under the new and sophisticated medical gaze? According to Jane Donawerth, women writers in particular “point to the dangers of bodily
manipulation and scientific management” in their texts, highlighting the main question: “who will be in charge of this management of bodies?” (480)\(^7\)

I argue that the third main way that reproduction was figured in the British novel in the modernist era was in light of these troubling cultural questions that arose from the rapid advances of science. The four novels in this chapter engage with reproduction—not necessarily pregnancy and childbirth, as I shall explain—in order to question the fundamental category of “woman” itself. In these texts, woman is a troubling thing, often a stumbling block for the “disembodied” masculine, scientific mind, bringing with her baggage of love, romance, and the bodily truth of the intimacy of traditional forms of human reproduction that only her flesh and her experience can attest to (Cote n.p.; emphasis in original).\(^8\) This same female flesh is troubling, cannot be fixed or named or defined, or—most scandalous of all—controlled. It is the scandal of the uncontrollable and breeding female body, out of step with the rest of the controllable and controlled masculine world, that is the biggest problem here. Woman. Whatever would be done with her?

I also argue that these texts engage with the idea of fixing the broken and/or suffering female flesh. Not only is the woman figure often uncontrollable in these works, she is additionally dysfunctional in several crucial ways and needs to be amended to become more masculine (read: normative, operating on a masculine body model). As Iris Marion Young explains, the medical field is founded on the norm of the unchanging male body, rather than the

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\(^8\) Cote, Mark. “Technics and the Human Sensorium: Rethinking Media Theory Through the Body.” *Theory & Event* 13.4 (2010): n.p. As Cote explains, technology itself is figured as jointly masculine and therefore disembodied, which means that only men can have “definitive agency” over it, leaving no space for “feminine attributes—sensuality, care, or affect” (n.p.). In Cote’s view, technology therefore poses a “violent assault […] on such suspect attributes of femininity” (n.p.).
constantly changing female, young, old, or pregnant body (57). Female flesh is changeable and therefore faulty, and can breed new bodies improperly, as we have seen in Olive Moore’s *Spleen*. For example, in Burdekin’s *Swastika Night*, the women are animalistic partially due to their extreme bodily status as reproducers, a status that must be improved for the good of future generations. Female flesh is also suffering due to being at the mercy of such physical changes as the menstrual and reproductive processes, as we have seen in Rhys and in Woolf. Two of these novels (*Man’s World* and *Brave New World*) importantly imagine a world in which the female problem has been largely solved by scientific and cultural advances, while the other two novels (*Woman Alive* and *Swastika Night*) explore the continuing problems posed by the “unfixed” female body. The final moral pronouncements on such advances vary—for example, humanity is all but erased in *Brave New World* and *Swastika Night*, while science saves the day in *Woman Alive* and *Man’s World*—but at their root, all four texts tackle the troubling problem of the reproducing body.

As I mentioned before, not all of these texts figure explicit pregnancy and childbirth, but I include them nevertheless because they either feature reproduction (whether from proper human bellies, as in *Man’s World*, or from bottles, as in *Brave New World*), or reproduction is fixed at the center of the crisis in the novel (as in *Woman Alive* and *Swastika Night*, novels that both pivot on humanity’s imminent demise because women are either not able to reproduce or are not reproducing the right offspring). While these texts may not include actual birth scenes, they are extremely concerned with these birth scenes all the same: with the births that are not happening, will happen, or should happen. Put simply, human reproduction, and the problem of women, are at the center of these novels, whether they are the ones birthing or not.
The final notable aspect of these novels relates to the first epigraph of this chapter:

“Woman […]. Was there ever such a broad-backed and also such a dirty word?” (Rushdie 58) At the fundamental level of the scientific exploration and amelioration of the female body and the female-centric human reproductive process is a cultural conception of woman as lack, as reproducer of disability and not-good-enough, as mere flesh crying out to be improved with a healthy injection of the enlightened and disembodied masculine scientific presence. This problem of the category of (reproducing) woman is highlighted in all four novels in this chapter to various degrees, and exists most prominently in *Swastika Night*, where women have participated in their own process of debasement, and at the time of the novel, 700 years after the establishment of a Hitler-centric society, they are little more than beasts. Caged like animals and treated like imbeciles, taunted and beaten for bearing girls, women have finally begun to cease to have girl babies, and the reproductive crisis of too many boys and not enough girls poses the looming catastrophe of the novel. But in all four texts, the female reproductive body continues to misbehave despite the mandates and advances of science. Dying when it shouldn’t, reproducing when it shouldn’t, bearing improper offspring, these somatic instances of misbehavior only emphasize the importance of gaining control through scientific technology, and the impossibility of ever doing so.

1. *Brave New World: Conquering Female Flesh Through Science*

The reproductive female body (or, the potentially reproductive female body) signifies lack and the possibility to veer wildly out of control in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. In this futuristic society, fertilization, pregnancy and childbirth have become fully removed from the flesh and instead, in a testament to the streamlined factory culture of “Fordism,” occur within
a factory entitled the “Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Center” (Huxley, *Brave New World*). The famous opening chapter of the book explores this factory almost completely, beginning with the Fertilization Room in which the “Bokanovsky’s Process” is explained. In this Process, an egg can be divided into a maximum of 96 different embryos, turning the tedious and quite costly process of manufacturing bodies for the state into a streamlined and efficient method: “The principle of mass production at last applied to biology” (19). The Director of the Center calls the Bokanovsky Process “a prodigious improvement […] on nature,” and “one of the major instruments of social stability” (18). In this single image—one egg and one sperm yielding almost 100 identical individuals—the anxieties of the 1930s are perfectly encapsulated. For example, the rise of eugenics and birth control, the pressure of a catastrophic world war on the birth rates and the supply of young men, the new possibilities introduced by the “modern mechanized world,” and specific advancements in the realm of the body like endocrinology and artificial insemination all meant that, for many modernists, “the boundaries between natural and artificial in reproduction were collapsing—that ecological and scientific advances were bringing about a crisis in the relationship of humans, machines, and the environment” (McLaren 2, 82).

As Angus McLaren recounts in his extraordinary foray into reproductive science in the early twentieth century, “interwar discussions of sexuality, reproduction, endocrinology, eugenics, and environmentalism were hopelessly entangled,” meaning that everyone from novelists to doctors to city planners were discussing reproduction and its possible futures, effectively “producing ‘science fictions’” (2). One example of an extreme form of social planning coupled with reproduction is “Municipal Darwinism,” which “aimed to set the course

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of human evolution back on track toward a collective ideal” (Currell 269). Municipal Darwinism was a direct response to the fear that “low quality” citizens would breed without impediment, overrunning other citizens and ruining society; therefore, “utopian socialists” sought to create the perfect “socialist welfare-society to correct the problems of unfettered capitalism” (268-9). Susan Currell also links Municipal Darwinism to the rising tide of cosmopolitanism, explaining that many early twentieth-century authors expressed overt “fears over the consequences of gene-pool mixing in a borderless world” (270). The second epigraph to this chapter—“It MUST remain a place where highpower babies can be born”—refers to an actual “eugenic garden city” of Les Jardins Ungemach, in a suburb of Strasbourg, begun in 1921 by French industrialist Alfred Dachert (273). Potential residents of Ungemach, couples all, were selected to live in the city “based on their completion of certain eugenic selection texts and by agreeing to have large families” and based on a barrage of other tests by scientists, including several home visits by Dachert (276, 278). Mostly white-collar residents were chosen; residents that were not promising enough (did not reproduce quickly or enough) were replaced (278). Ungemach is the actual flesh-and-blood precursor to the controlled society at the heart of Huxley’s joint utopian/dystopian vision, as Ungemach was founded to illustrate “the splendid possibilities of a new civilization based on service to the community and not self-interest” (272; qting Ebenezer Howard). And this service to the community was, first and foremost, the breeding of better citizens to slowly and methodically build a better society from the womb up.

Huxley brilliantly reproduces such a society founded on Municipal Darwinism and on community, locating readers within a terrifying system in which the individual no longer matters, especially the procreative individual. Factories can produce all the bodies needed for society—and indeed, that’s just what these babies are, mere bodies predestined for a specific social status
and a specific career trajectory, mere fodder for the canon of the social state. All individuality is systematically bred out of these bodies, and the society hammers in the notion of the collective existence through its motto, “Community, Identity, Stability” (Huxley, *Brave 15*), and through conditioning phrases (whispered repeatedly in the sleeping citizens’ heads), like “I’m really awfully glad I’m a Beta, because I don’t work so hard” (35). To be an individual in this society, especially an individual reproducing individual traits, quirks, and deficiencies, is tantamount to disaster.

Critical reception of the novel often centers around gender roles, the incorporation of technology, and the widespread cultural agency it has achieved over the years. But what I find important, in light of the reproductive elements of the novel, is the emphasis on docile versus unruly bodies in the Foucauldian sense, and the manner in which the unruly bodies are portrayed as potentially—or actually—reproductive. As with so many other texts explored in this dissertation, and similarly to the texts by Burdekin, Haldane and Ertz, the female reproductive body lies both in the form and in the heart of the modernist narrative, representing the capacity for mania, hysteria, excessive and unruly breeding, monstrosity, and unauthorized flows.

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12 As Michel Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*, “discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” where once were unruly bodies, and such “docile” bodies “may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (138, 147, 136). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1995. For more on the reproductive mother as particularly unruly, see Rebecca Kukla’s *Mass Hysteria*. 
Brave New World, like many dystopian texts of the modernist era, jointly celebrates the advances of reproductive science and of applied eugenics while warning humanity against their excesses. Huxley was “clearly motivated by both a faith in science and a fear of the masses” (McLaren 30). As Allen Thiher explains, “modernist writers knew that a critical encounter with science was central to their creative projects. Science is thus inscribed in the novels themselves as part of their representation of a world” (xi). Further, Huxley’s text duplicates the extreme interest in “bodily reform” that was so popular during the early years of the twentieth century. As Tim Armstrong explains:

In the first decades of this century, the British or American enthusiast for bodily reform could choose among a vast array of methods, ranging from mind-cure techniques to mechanical manipulation: Christian Science, New Thought, Alexander Technique, Fletcherism, the Culture of the Abdomen, colonic irrigation, electric therapies, among numerous eating and exercising regimes, gland treatments, and mechanical devices. The body became the site of techniques which operated externally and internally to regulate and reorganize. (106)

The dystopic vision of Brave New World exhibits nothing if not the capacity for “bodily reform,” and the human and social consequences of doing so.

One of the most important innovations concerning bodily reform and the female reproductive body that occurred in the early twentieth century was sex endocrinology, or the study of sex hormones in the 1920s and 1930s. As Nelly Oudshoorn explains, once scientists could medically intervene at the hormonal level, they could change menstrual cycles and

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13 Thiher, Allen. Fiction Refracts Science: Modernist Writers from Proust to Borges. Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 2005. Thiher’s book is an excellent source on the epistemological sciences in the modernist era. He claims that the critical scientific advancements between the two world wars were “the development of quantum mechanics in the 1920s, Hubble’s discovery of the red-shift effect in 1929 suggesting cosmic expansion, Godel’s theorem in 1931, Dobzhansky’s major synthesis in 1937 linking evolution and genetics, and the recognition that atomic physics had the power to develop weapons never dreamed of before” (40).
menopause, bringing reproduction solidly “into the domain of medical intervention” (156).\textsuperscript{14} The discovery of sex endocrinology also figured the female body as a natural supplier of laboratory materials, “a convenient guinea pig for tests and an organized audience,” and fixed the “woman as the other” in the scientific mind (156-7). Celia Roberts explains that the twentieth century hormonal body is a critical example of the “informational body,” where “the body increasingly became systematized and understood as a network of communication” (49).\textsuperscript{15} In many ways, the modernized body under the disciplinary gaze of science is the modernist body, subjected to forces outside its control and adrift in an unfamiliar landscape. The uncertainties of the period were etched into the flesh; the need and desire to transcend the status of the mere mortal became embodied.

Modernist writers like Huxley were therefore particularly poised for an exploration of flesh and steel—for considering the human body meshing with the mechanical, scientific, and technological advances surrounding it. As Tim Armstrong explains, the modernist period held “primitive” bodies as “out of step with the modern, technologically advanced, world: diagnoses like hysteria, neurasthenia, even constipation and eye-strain, registered the stress placed on the body by civilization, and suggested that compensatory action was necessary” (3). The modernist period specifically highlights the very new tension between old (body) and new (science), and “brings both a fragmentation and augmentation of the body in relation to technology; it offers the body as lack, at the same time as it offers technological compensation” (3). The “technological


compensation” one finds in Huxley’s novel is tricky to pin down, for the people and society he creates do have their positive aspects. The world in *Brave New World* is stable, with little to no violence (this characteristic, in an age of repeat world wars, is a crucial one), and most citizens are happy simply because they are both blissed out on soma, a drug rationed out to citizens to keep the peace, and constantly conditioned not to question their place in the world or their status in society. Yet John, “The Savage” once placed into “civilization,” offers the reader a glimpse of a heightened modality of living: he questions, understands much more due to being raised away from the brainwashing of modern society, and he views dominant culture through the analytical lens of Shakespeare (the only author he has read). Most importantly, his origins are different, as he was birthed the old-fashioned way, directly from his mother’s life-giving body. This embodied beginning disgusts the citizens of the World State when they find out—they view physical birth as an “obscenity” and a “pornographical impropriety” (Huxley, *Brave* 140). Acting as a technology-free and science-free modality of existence, then, John is a crucial foil to the “advancements” of a completely scientific and rational society.

However, John also represents something else: the danger of breeding apart from the watchful eye of societal forms of birth control, and the excesses of the unruly reproductive female body. Despite the novel’s repression of birthgiving, there is one instance of birth in the novel, albeit a birth that has taken place in the distant past. As Linda, John’s mother, recounts her non-voluntary birthgiving: “What I had to suffer—and not a gramme of *soma* to be had. […] And I was so ashamed. Just think of it: me, a Beta—having a baby: put yourself in my place”

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16 Diane Wiener, in “Mentalism, Disability Rights and Modern Eugenics in a *Brave New World*,” argues that mainstream medicine is beginning to veer dangerously close to the novel by phasing out unacceptable people with unacceptable disorders like mental “illnesses,” and by employing soma-like “psychiatric medications in an effort to control differences perceived as threats to the dominant (idealized) social and cultural order” (601). She concludes that “there is little doubt” modern-day citizens like Americans “have bought into the idea that taking mind-altering drugs is desirable” (601). *Disability & Society* 24.5 (Aug. 2009): 599-610.
Linda refers only to the pain of giving birth and the shame of such a gross physical act coupled with the knowledge that she is too high on the social ladder to stoop to such behavior. She laments that in the Reservation she did not have access to the World State’s abortion center with its “lovely pink glass tower” (113), a shining beacon of cold, hard phallic strength promising to clean and contain the transgressive flows of the female form.

Once the female body is removed from the umbrella of care offered to it by science, therefore, this body quickly becomes dirty, transgressive, burdensome, and uncontrollable. Disgusting, corpulent Linda is too much body; her maternal relationship with her son is not idealized or romanticized, but instead she is figured as a predominately selfish and unloving mother. In one memory recounted by John, when he tries to comfort Linda she bangs his head against the wall, calls him a “Little idiot,” and begins slapping him, insisting, “I’m not your mother. I won’t be your mother” (119). Her overtly-bodily state only serves to harm her son and to harm those around her. She is a negative example of Bakhtin’s grotesque body, a body not “closed” or “completed,” but instead “ever unfinished,” a body that “outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits” and always gestures towards its capacity as an “ever creating body” (26).

It is to avoid such situations (that of the body run amok) that the World State so rigorously polices its fertile members, for the danger of unmanaged breeding lies at the heart of

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17 “Soma” is a hallucinogenic drug that the society rations out to all its members to keep them content and drugged enough not to think about their station or plan and execute any sort of revolt. It is interesting that the drug is named “soma,” for aside from the word being linked to an “intoxicating drink” found in “Verdic ritual and religion,” the word also refers to the physical cells of the body aside from the reproductive cells, or “germ-cells.” “soma, n.” OED Online. September 2013. Oxford UP. 14 September 2013. The drug that in many ways secures the future of the civilization, that removes the citizens from bodily action by locking them in the fantastical dreamscapes of the mind, is named after the non-reproducing body. In this way, bodily form, that of the non-reproductive body, is front and center in the novel. On a related note, Bryan S. Turner explains that a “somatic society is one in which critical social and political concerns are transferred onto the human body such that bodily disruptions are ways of thinking about political disruptions” (5). In this capacity, the society of Brave New World is “somatic,” as the physical body is mapped onto the body politic in crucial ways.

this society and at the heart of the novel itself. The government has phased out dirty words like “mother,” “family,” and “birth,” while even “father” prompts embarrassed laughing and blushing: “My father—and it was the Director! My father! Oh Ford, oh Ford! That was really too good” (Huxley, *Brave 140*). The few fertile members of society, like the main female character Lenina, are given fashionable Malthusian belts which they wear constantly, and children are subjected to unexplained “Malthusian drills” throughout their childhood. Linda describes these drills as “you know, by numbers, One, two, three, four, always, I swear it” (113). The majority of women in this society are simply sterilized while still embryos, “destined to become freemartins” by receiving “a dose of male sex-hormone every twenty-four metres” on the production line, which renders them “structurally quite normal […] but sterile. Guaranteed sterile” (23).

This automatic sterilization aside from a few elite “Alpha” members of society allows the citizens to engage in near-constant and consequence-free “rudimentary sexual games” from the age of seven, termed “ordinary erotic play” (38). In the extremely rare case of an accidental pregnancy, “Abortion Centres” quickly handle the problem—Linda recalls the center in Chelsea being routinely “floodlighted on Tuesdays and Fridays,” with a “lovely pink glass tower” (113). Why Linda would have such familiar knowledge of this abortion center is up for the reader to decide, but throughout the novel, the repeated emphasis on the problem of policing the female reproductive capacity reflects the joint scientific and eugenic concerns of Huxley’s historical moment, a time when many intellectuals (writers and scientists alike) agreed that science, despite all its troubling advances, would sooner or later be used to improve humanity itself. But behind this “growing fixation on the possibility of the biological penetration and transformation of minds and bodies” lay a fearful premonition that “nature itself” would in the end become completely controlled by scientific and technological advances (McLaren 10).
Scientists also sought to ameliorate the fundamental weakness of the human condition: illness (including maternity, categorized as a disease), old age, death. If, through the biological or cyborg sciences, bodies could be made more durable and resilient to disease and decay, reproduction as it was then known would not be needed on such a massive scale as bodies would simply not need to be replaced. The payoff for increased longevity of its citizens for the state would be significant, as would the payoff for the Foucauldian docility of such bodies to the larger projects of the state. The medicalized body, as Elizabeth Grosz points out, contains parts that can be sewn, amended, and upgraded, forming a pliable body that responds to power, “a machinic structure in which ‘components’ can be altered, adjusted, removed, or replaced” (Space 35, emphasis in orig). These upgraded and upgradable bodies, participating in the larger eugenic project of forming better stock for the British empire, would be docile and beholden to the system that had formed them, subject to intense monitoring from within and therefore “no longer [bodies] docile with respect to power, but more [bodies] docile to will, desire, and mind” (2).

Huxley himself was a member of the Eugenics Society, founded in 1907 under the original moniker “Eugenics Education Society,” which sought to educate and improve humanity through the application of both positive and negative eugenics (Squier, Babies 16).

19 Michel Foucault explains the process by which sex and its discourses became continuously more policed in *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I*. He claims that all attention paid to sex was motivated by one thing: “to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative” (36-7). In this way a country began to be tied to its population, or “to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex” (26). We will see how the four novels in this chapter consistently illustrate this Foucauldian linking of a country and its population, thereby illustrating the proper manifestation of sexual relations therein.


21 The Society was renamed the Galton Institute in 1989 after the founder of the eugenics movement, Francis Galton. The current aims of the Institute, according to its website, include supporting “the scientific study of human heredity and of its social implication,” promoting “understanding of the ethical and moral implications of
controversial, the Society embodied the then-popular interest in forming a “Darwinian utopia” that had been increasing since the late nineteenth century with the rise of “Darwinism and Malthusianism” (Claeys 110-111). As David King Dunaway describes it, *Brave New World* was formed through a combination of influences from “the intellectual aristocracy of the Bloomsbury Group, the writings of H.L. Mencken, the extension of the Darwinian-Galtonian movement” and “developments within the eugenics movement itself toward the selective breeding of human beings” (168). What’s more, Angus McLaren describes the discovery of hormone therapy and the study of endocrinology as a monumental shift within eugenics, because “healthiness” quickly came to be defined as a “manifestation of good biochemistry” while non-normative individuals were assumed to be suffering “from a hormonal problem” (106).

Huxley famously writes about eugenics in his 1927 essay, “A Note on Eugenics,” warning, “When the microcosm is sick, the macrocosm is liable to be infected with its diseases” (272). Huxley goes on to claim: “In societies like our own, the inferior are in a very strong position, because they are technically trained. If he has a gun and can shoot straight, a chimpanzee is a match for Napoleon” (277). The barely-concealed fear of the lowly masses rising up and toppling the strength of an empire, held by a few superior minds, is a stringent theme in Huxley’s brief article. It is well known that Huxley, like many scientific intellectuals in the early twentieth century, harbored unease when it came to the proliferation of the masses (something we have already seen in T.S. Eliot). Huxley encoded his simultaneous dream and nightmare of a society that would rein in free and unfettered reproduction, channeling it into human genetics,” and promoting “the public understanding of human heredity and of its relevance to human well-being in the broadest sense” (“About” n.p.). “About.” *Galton Institute*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.

sanctioned avenues that resulted in “models” of humans, models that, like Ford’s automobiles, had already been tested.\(^\text{23}\) One knew what one was going to get with a Alpha, Beta, or Epsilon. One didn’t need to rely on the tremulous and uncertain workings of the human flesh, not where machinery and the factory floor rein supreme.

*Brave New World*, at its core, depicts a society that is disgusted by the physical mechanisms of the body, especially the female body. While the word “father” elicits uncontrollable laughter, it is the appearance of the mother, wallowing in her corpulence and significantly defined by her physical existence, a “strange and terrifying monster of middle-agedness” that is the true cause for alarm (*Brave* 139). When Linda is first introduced to the reader, and to Lenina,

Lenina noticed with disgust that two of the front teeth were missing. And the colour of the ones that remained … She shuddered. It was worse than the old man. So fat. And all the lines in her face, the flabbiness, the wrinkles. And the sagging cheeks, with those purplish blotches. And the red veins on her nose, the bloodshot eyes. And that neck – that neck; and the blanket she wore over her head – ragged and filthy. And under the brown sack-shaped tunic those enormous breasts, the bulge of the stomach, the hips. Oh, much worse than the old man, much worse! […] it was too revolting, in another moment she’d be sick […] (112; first set of ellipses in original)

In this passage, the breakdown of the human body that is unaided by scientific advances is at the fore. Linda, suffering in the wilderness without the help of civilization, has lost her teeth, the remaining teeth have turned brown, her skin has become discolored and has lost its elasticity, her eyes are “bloodshot,” her body is misshapen, overweight and lumpy. But it is Linda’s breasts, twin symbols of her late status as a child-bearing woman, and Linda’s bulging stomach and

\(^\text{23}\) For more on automobiles and modernism, see Angus McLaren’s chapter two, “What is better, a car or a wife?: Automobiles and Modern Bodies” in *Reproduction by Design*. McLaren explains, “No other machine was credited with having such an impact on sexual relations” or is “more representative of twentieth-century modernity” (6, 38). Automobiles were also directly linked to power, for the car “reinforced the power of its owner—usually a male” (39).
wide, child-bearing hips that cause Lenina to become nauseous. Lenina, it must be remembered, has arguably never seen anyone old or pregnant, or any bodies that have born children and are not quite as lithe and nubile as before. The monstrosity of uncontrollable female flesh here is “worse” than that of male flesh simply due to of the female capacity to reproduce, to expand the problem and thereby to undermine the control of society and of science.

Throughout *Brave New World*, women continue to be defined by their corporeality much more than men. While women may be officially “equal” in the eyes of this society, they are nevertheless treated as different citizens simply due to their ability to bear children, an capacity that, because it exists in a society where birth-giving is disgusting and shameful, marks their bodies as deviant, as gross, as disgusting, as excessive. It is this repugnance of the reproducing female form that is critical to any reading of reproduction in the novel.²⁴

When Linda is returned to the Society in England and confronts the man who impregnated her and left her for dead (albeit accidentally), she returns to the primary manifestation of her shameful exile—that of giving birth:

> “You made me have a baby,” she screamed above the uproar. There was a sudden and appalling hush; eyes floating uncomfortably, not knowing where to look. The Director went suddenly pale, stopped struggling and stood, his hands on her wrists, staring down at her, horrified. “Yes, a baby—and I was its mother.” She flung the obscenity like a challenge into the outraged silence, then, suddenly breaking away from him, ashamed, ashamed, covered her face with her hands, sobbing. “It wasn’t my fault, Tomakin. Because I always did my drill, didn’t I? Didn’t I? Always . . . I don’t know how . . . If you knew how awful, Tomakin . . . But he was a comfort to me all the same.” (140; ellipses in original)

Here, both the physical act of mothering and the social status of acting as a “mother” is shown to be the ultimate “obscenity” in this streamlined, mechanized society. While Linda admits that

²⁴ Cristie March claims that it is not only Linda that the reader is disgusted by, but the “vacuous” Lenina, “whose sexual promiscuity and social freedom horrifies John (the Savage) and frustrates Bernard, the novel’s ‘enlightened’ characters” (53).
there was some good in her reproducing—her son was a “comfort”—the mother-son relationship is consistently overshadowed by the physical horror of giving birth, which Linda deems “awful.” Science and technology promise to rid the world from the mess of childbirth and from such disgusting specters as women like Linda, ruled by their physical existence and existing too much under the sign of the flesh.

A useful critical paradigm to apply when analyzing the horrific nature of the birthgiving woman in *Brave New World* comes from Barbara Katz Rothman, who, in *Recreating Motherhood* (1989) explores the impact on mothering that science and technology is having and will continue to have. She explains that three ideologies shape motherhood: patriarchy, capitalism, and technology, and that the last of the three, technology, shapes humans who eventually “see everything as a potential resource,” including humans themselves (14, 29).25 “In technological society we apply ideas about machines to people, asking them, too, to be more efficient, productive, rational, and controlled,” Rothman argues, a methodology of rationalization and compartmentalization that “does harm to the human spirit” (30-31). Yet what is the single bodily status that refutes the human-as-machine and the division of such a human into clear roles of work and rest, commerce and family? That of pregnancy. Pregnancy, according to Rothman, offers an “embodied challenge” to technological society because it is “the physical embodiment of connectedness,” a “walking contradiction to the segmentation of our lives: pregnancy does not permit it. In pregnancy the private self, the sexual, familial self, announces itself wherever we go” (35).

Linda embodies such a “walking contradiction” to the ideals of the society in *Brave New World*, a society founded on cleanliness, bodily control, rationality, and most of all, the

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simulacrum, or the appearance of the real over that of reality. As Jean Baudrillard explains, the process of simulacra is the process of “substituting signs of the real for the real itself,” a process which eventually “threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false,’ between ‘real and ‘imaginary’” (4-5). References to simulated reality pepper the pages of _Brave New World_: citizens go to the “feelies,” movies that incorporate all the senses and that John thinks are “far more real than reality” (Huxley, _Brave_ 154); and citizens routinely submit their bodies to simulated physiological journeys such as rage—called “Violent Passion Surrogate treatment”—and even pregnancy (159, 170). But Linda has transgressed the clean lines of the simulacrum and has fleshed out into the realm of the real, existing under the sign of the body rather than under the sign of the mind. Her body, once a “potential resource” (in the words of Katzman) to the controlled society, has metamorphosed due to the freedoms found in nature versus human society. The giant canvas of her flesh is a walking billboard displaying all the things the society most wants to forget (and indeed, has forgotten): the workings of the body unassisted by technology; the ravages of time; the process of physical human reproduction; the mother, the ultimate “obscenity” (142). To have sprung from the loins of a woman such as Linda is beyond distasteful; it is obscene. The misogynistic message of the novel is quite clear whether it is a message Huxley intended to encode or not: feminine birth unaided by masculine intervention in the form of science and technology only leads to the unstable, grotesque and emotional mother figure, whose “madness is infectious” (46). Far better, for the good of society and the individuals

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27 As Henry advises depressed Lenina, “Anyhow, you ought to go and see the doctor [. . .] Perhaps you need a Pregnancy Substitute [. . .] [o]r else an extra-strong V.P.S. treatment. Sometimes, you know, the standard passion surrogate isn’t quite . . .” (170; last set of ellipses in original).
therein, to be cleanly “decanted” amidst smooth bottles and shining lights, in a factory birthed from the masculine mind.

2. **Swastika Night: The Unruly Woman-Animal**

   A second early twentieth century text intimately concerned with the horrific female birthing body, proper versus improper reproduction, and sex and gender relations in light of eugenics is Katharine Burdekin’s *Swastika Night* (1937)—a “pioneering feminist critique” (Claeys 126). But like Huxley, Burdekin makes the mistake of encoding so much misogyny in her novel that she, and the novel, begin to become complicit in the misogyny, not only duplicating hateful and hurtful messages about the female body but furthering them as well. Similar to my interest in *Brave New World*, my interest in *Swastika Night* once again lies in the manner in which the novel positions the reproducing female body as the problem at the heart of the text, a problem that must be solved by the ameliorating presence of the masculine mind and its twin tools of science and technology.

   Although *Swastika Night* still appears quite infrequently in published criticism, extant analyses focus on the complicity of women to conform to their disempowerment in a world ruled by men and the portrayal of fascism in the novel. For example, Elizabeth Russell claims that women in both *Swastika Night* and Haldane’s *Man’s World* “comply with the dominant ideology” and “are depicted by silence rather than sound and only exist in so far as they internalise male desire and imagine themselves as men imagine them to be” (15). Kate Holden, on the other hand, analyzes texts such as *Swastika Night*, Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, and Rhys’s

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*Good Morning, Midnight*, exploring their responses to 1930s political fascist culture and “the fear and hatred of women” therein that ensured women’s “exclusion and degradation” (149).  

*Swastika Night* is set seven centuries after Hitler and his Nazi troops have conquered the globe and follows Hermann, a young Nazi living in Germany, and his friend Alfred who is visiting from England (the English are a race that are barely tolerated by the Germans and therefore allowed to live). Alfred is disgusted by the loss of history and individuality created by generations of subjection to the systematic violence of Nazi ideology, beginning to question a cultural climate that venerates masculinity, hardness, violence, and rape, and that seeks to destroy everything feminine, kind, and “soft.” Alfred asks Hermann, “[W]hat is a man? A being of pride, courage, violence, brutality, ruthlessness, *you* say. But all those are characteristics of a male animal in heat. A man must be something more, surely?” (28). Throughout, the novel is extremely invested in the project of teasing out the normative behavior of the separate sexes after centuries of ruthless abuse and brainwashing at the hands of the Nazi regime.

Such pervasive ideology of the extreme difference between the sexes and the need to keep them separate has trained almost all members of Burdekin’s futuristic Nazi society into becoming docile bodies, blindly following society’s prescribed roles for them. In this way, Burdekin mocks the contemporary ideology of the early twentieth century that, as a response to the greater freedoms of women, would have women become more womanly and men more manly to protect traditional reproductive practices. This extreme characterization of the sexes

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was also a response to new reproductive technologies and dovetails with a cultural interest in “sexual rejuvenation” that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s (McLaren 95). As Angus McLaren explains, the falling birth rate, the ravages of war, the new access to contraceptives and the reported “sexual excesses” that such contraceptives created, and even “civilization itself” were all believed to undermine “male potency” (95). While it was feared that women would lose interest in their bodily status and traditional role as bearers of the race, scientists were much more interested in bolstering the virility of the man, not the woman.\(^{31}\) The male had the active role of conquering the flesh of the female; the female just had to sit still long enough for him to do it. Thus, science and technology was shown to be a double-edged sword: while it reportedly could increase the virility of men and strengthen and improve bodies, it also paved the way for relations between these same bodies to be much more complex and difficult, especially where reproduction was concerned. In other words, the improvement of (male) bodies and the freedom of (female) bodies necessarily brought on by an increasingly technologized world could only spell disaster for traditional, fleshly forms of heterosexual reproduction.

Alfred soon meets von Hess, the Knight (a local ruler and landowner), who instantly decides to confide in Alfred due to Alfred’s obvious intelligence. As von Hess observes Alfred’s “fiery and most resolute spirit,” he realizes, “Here […] in the face of all probability, is a man” (Burdekin 43). Alfred and Hermann are soon listening to von Hess’s accounts of their joint history under the Nazi state, and they become living receptacles of the true heritage of their

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\(^{31}\) McLaren explains the brief craze in the early twentieth century around specifically masculine sexual rejuvenation, most clearly seen in the “Steinach operation” (merely vascectomies), named after the Vienesse scientist who “discovered that by transplanting gonads the sexual characteristics […] of the guinea pig could be changed, though not its sex” (85). Such an operation, Steinach claimed, increased libido, strength, and virility (85). In the 1920s, he was highly regarded by the scientific community and nominated “several times for the Nobel Prize” (87), and famous figures like W.B. Yeats signed up for the Steinach operation, reporting miraculous results (Armstrong 149). Women’s virility was not an issue; rather, they were quickly subjected to hormonal treatments to bolster their inherent femininity: female hormones “would make women better wives and mothers” in an age where the independence of women purportedly created “more cases of vaginismus and lesbianism” (99).
society (they are also given a book, the only book left in existence, that chronicles this history). They learn, much to their horrified shock, that women were not always borderline animals, but used to stand up straight, possess intelligence, and were objects worthy of love and adoration.

For only the men rule this society, a fact which they do not question because women, filthy objects of disgust and scorn, have degraded into beast-like animals. Further, this “Reduction of Women” occurred partially due to women’s “blind submission” to men and to masculine desires (70). Von Hess, in a thinly-veiled critique clearly aimed at the feminists of Burdekin’s day and their rapidly-changing banner issues, explains that women have “no will, no character, and no souls; they are only a reflection of men. [...] If men want them to have an appearance of perfect freedom [...] they will develop a simulacrum of those things” (70).

Lacking their own individuality and the power and will to choose their own destiny, the very things that make men natural rulers in the novel, women readily agreed with men when the men insisted women must be “degraded.” As von Hess recalls, women

> threw themselves into the new pattern with a conscious enthusiasm that knew no bounds. [...] They thought, those poor little typically feminine idiots, that if they did all that men told them to do cheerfully and willingly, that men would somehow, in the face of all logic, love them still *more*. They could not see that they were helping to kill love. [...] Women *are* nothing except an incarnate desire to please men. (82)

Like we have seen in Huxley, the problem of the horrific nature of the female and of her grotesque corporeal is once again pinned on the woman: Burdekin clearly explains it is woman’s fault that she has agreed to the “new pattern” set out for her. While Burdekin obviously wants to critique the treatment of women in the early twentieth century, especially the treatment of women under such totalitarian regimes as Nazi Germany, Burdekin also becomes complicit in such poor treatment of women by the continual abuse of them in her text. Woman, she explains in her novel, continues to defy “logic,” asserting a bodily reality of love and affection against the
overwhelming counter-evidence mounted by the masculine intellect. Yet women are not the only transgressors here. Men, it seems, will continue to delineate, confine, and control femininity. As Ann Oakley claims, “the historical evidence unmistakably points to a societal need to define the place of women and then keep them in it” (“Walking Wombs” 55). Yet the most important aspect of this masculine need for clear definition and control for Burdekin is that women will continue to acquiesce. Women, wanting only the love of men, will bend themselves into whatever “pattern” is required of them, and will do so with a smile.

The women in Swastika Night are background players, tantalizingly flashed onto the canvas of the novel and then shuffled away so the male characters can once again resume center stage. Moving in “herds” and only allowed out of their enclosed pens once every three months for a special “Women’s Worship” of Hitler at the Nazi church and for other special occasions, Hermann views the women around him with disgust, “with their small shaven ugly heads and ugly soft bulgy bodies dressed in feminine tight trousers and jackets—and oh, the pregnant women and the hideousness of them, and the skinny old crones with necks like moulting hens” (Burdekin 8, 9). Burdekin critiques what she sees as the flaw in women, their incessant desire to be agreeable to men, by warning them of the possible consequences of their behavior: their eventual transformation into the passive animals that men would have them be. The inherent inhumanity of the women in Swastika Night, with their insubstantial and “soft” bodies, is consistently figured through comparisons to animals: here they are “hens,” stupid communal animals who are small, virtually worthless, and insignificant, when elsewhere they are “cows,” “too stupid to be really conscious of anything distressing except physical pain, loss of children,

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shame of bearing girls, and the queer mass grief which always overtook them in church” (158).

The pregnant woman also gets special mention for her “hideousness,” as the Nazi men are so disgusted by the fleshly condition of women that many have eschewed women altogether and homosexuality is accepted as an adequate recourse (166). The myth repeated about Hitler to the point that it has become gospel is that Hitler was, importantly, “exploded” rather than created from a woman’s body, and he therefore has no link to the perversions of the female flesh (5-6). Once again, as we have seen in Huxley, Burdekin’s text is jointly critical of such misogyny yet begins to be complicit, replicating it to such extremes that it is impossible for the reader to separate what is sarcastic critique and what is collusion.

It is Burdekin’s inherent complicity with misogynistic narratives that makes a reading of Swastika Night in light of F.T. Marinetti’s 1910 novel Marfarka the Futurist so productive. Part of the Futurist movement, Marfarka bombastically celebrates the worth of the mechanized male body and lauds the reproductive capacity of the masculine body and mind. Marinetti offers a vision in the novel of a world laced with steel, a world that embraces the forces of modernization rather than eschewing them (Levenson 46). In the novel, the mechanized Gazourmah, much like Athena, is birthed by his father, the African king Marfarka, “without the help of the vulva” and

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33 The motif of reproducing women being compared to cows is actually quite prevalent throughout the twentieth century. Patricia Spallone explains that, as far as reproductive technologies are concerned, humans are akin to animals, especially the reproducing female human who is quite similar biologically to “sheep and cows” (86). The “reproductive engineer” therefore enjoys his “status as THE human subject” (86). Spallone, Patricia. Beyond Conception: The New Politics of Reproduction. Granby, MA.: Bergin & Garvey Pub., Inc., 1989. It is in response to such animalistic themes in the reproductive process that in the early nineteenth century, words like “breeding” gave way to fashionable new French terms like “enciente,” “fausse couche or accouchement” (Jane Lewis, In the Family Way 72). Angus McLaren explains how scientists like the Russian Serge Voronoff placed “a human uterus into a monkey, fertilized it,” and was reportedly awaiting the birth of a human child in 1927 (87). The British were simultaneously “fascinated and appalled by such accounts of the erosion of the human/animal boundary” (87-88). Works like Huxley’s Brave New World and Olive Moore’s Fugue pick up on the double meaning of animalistic human reproduction (as a way to degrade the female and to elevate the scientist, and as a response to very real scientific pursuits): Huxley’s novel features babies bred in bottles and nourished with “massive doses of hog’s stomach extract and foetal foal’s liver” (23), while in Fugue, women see maternity as a “cow-like vocation” (283).
“without the support and stinking collusion of the woman’s womb” (Marinetti 145).  

Throughout *Marfarka*, as in many futurist texts, the female body is simply elided, and reproduction becomes not disembodied or intellectual, but a matter of a masculine body joined with will, force, and technology to physically and mentally birth the offspring of a new world. As Benedikt Hjartarson argues, futurist discourse posits that only through purging all problematic traces of female corporeality can there be a “total spiritual renewal” (186). Christina Poggi similarly explains that the female body, predicated on nature, is “displaced by both the machine, and its symbolic ally, matter (sheer dynamic physicality),” and that Marinetti’s conception of the speed and force of the machine is “inextricably linked […] to cycles of gestation, birth, maturation, and death” (24). Importantly, then, this machine not only displaces the faulty and problematic maternal model of reproduction, but it replaces it.

Strangely enough, however, and in direct opposition to both *Marfarka the Futurist* and *Brave New World*, Burdekin’s *Swastika Night* contains little to no mechanization, science, or technology, even surrounding reproduction. The society Burdekin describes is predominately agrarian, and aside from planes and cars, there are no technological advancements. There are not even any books. The previous world, enmeshed in a global struggle for domination that was intimately aided and abetted by technology, has been swept away, and all that is left is the brutal violence of Nazi rule, stripped down to its most basic form: the animalistic ruling of women and

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“lesser” races by men. Von Hess explains that any research into “sex biology” has been outlawed by the Nazi regime, in case it is discovered that men, not women, determine the sex of the fetus or that “the female, being the more complicated and developed physical machine, takes more vitality in her conception and gestation” (104). Burdekin’s novel is thus a portrait of the aftermath of the heights of technology illustrated in Huxley and in Marinetti—in this respect, similar to Ertz’s *Woman Alive*, as we shall see. Technologized existence may not be flourishing in Burdekin’s vision, but the same preoccupation existing in Huxley and in Marinetti exists here: how to best police and amend the disruptive and deviant reproducing female body.

For this is the crux of the novel: in a world dominated by man and successfully ruled by his strength and his intellect, the disgusting female body is still necessary to reproduce bodies for the race. As the Knight muses, “their physique and their mental make-up prevent them doing anything worth while, doing it *well*, that is, except just their animal job of bearing children” (111). And because these women have been abused and taunted for bearing girls and praised for bearing boys, they have slowly begun to birth many more boys than girls. It is feared, in fact, that soon girls will cease to be birthed at all, and the Nazi race will invariably fall, a victim of its own successes. It turns out men *can’t* do everything and *can’t* create a society of men that completely blocks out the physical and emotional needs of women. Burdekin’s message here is that women, discarded in every other way, partially due to their own compliance in the “Reduction of Women,” will always be a necessary element of patriarchy, if only for their ability to reproduce. And if modern society is quite literally founded upon the backs of women, far better to practice a

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37 Later in the novel, Alfred converses with his Christian friend, Joseph Black, who explains, “The whole child, whether male or female, is complete in the seed of man. The woman merely nurtures it in her body until it is large enough to be born” (183). Alfred insists, “*We* don’t believe that. […] The mother contributes part of the child” (183). This discussion is of course based on the medieval theory of the homunculus: the idea that the complete infant, including its soul, was deposited in the body of the mother by the man, with the female only acting as an incubator (Rich 120).
form of situational eugenics and improve their environment and the resulting environment of their children to better the human race.

It is notable that *Swastika Night* is so highly invested in reproduction—especially eugenic reproduction to improve the race—and yet no actual birthing scene takes place in the novel. The one birth that occurs, that of Alfred’s claimed woman, Ethel, marked by a band around her wrist to keep her from being freely raped by other men (only the “disgusting” Christian races still practice marriage), occurs behind the main action of the narrative, and Alfred, in a shocking move, visits her soon after the birth of their little girl. Such a visit is unheard of in this society, as female births are culturally constructed as an extremely shameful event, but Alfred begins to understand that unless women begin to take pride in bearing girls, and pride in being women, the race will continue to crumble. As he holds his baby girl, still unformed by cultural and societal dictates, he realizes further he “could turn her into a real woman. Something utterly strange. […] I could make a new kind of human being, one there’s never been before. She might love me. I might love her” (160-1). It is of course problematic that in Alfred’s construction, the man is still God, the ultimate scientist, controlling the essence of human life and forming or not forming malleable female bodies and minds according to his will. Yet Alfred’s accompanying realization that “[i]t’s not in the womb the damage is done” (161) importantly goes against Burdekin’s contemporary cultural narrative and obliquely blames men for the damage done to women, to their birthing bodies, and to the babies issuing forth from their wombs. It is not that women are disobeying their directive in birthing adequate bodies for the state, Burdekin is saying, but that

38 The Christian practice of marriage is explained by Alfred’s Christian friend, Joseph Black, as akin to keeping “dogs. We are fond of them, they play with us and are happy with us. If we have food they never go short while we are filled, they obey us and they love us. […] [L]ike all decent and trustworthy dogs they are free to come and go where they will when they are not working” (184).
men with their violence and perversions are diluting the pure stream of babies being birthed. It is men who must change their ways to affect the quality of births.

Despite the comparative honor Burdekin gives to women by blaming men, not women, for the inadequacy of the children birthed, men in her novel still remain in control, and they wield that control firmly. Their rule is twofold, based on the inadequacy of women, who “are neither men nor women, but a sort of mess” (107), and the inherent superiority of masculine flesh. For no matter how much Alfred believes that women must be treated better, he still retains his extreme prejudice against them. Soon after he holds his baby girl, Edith, he hands her to Ethel for nursing, a “natural process” which disgusts him and makes him “furious with Ethel for being able to do something for the baby he could not do himself” (163). Men will continue to be “furious” with women for evading their ultimate control, for only women in this society can give birth. Men must come to terms with the fact that they issue forth from such disgusting flesh, that their beginnings are so base and defiled.

The perceived extreme grossness of the female bodily condition by the Nazis in Burdekin is an excellent illustration of Klaus Theweleit’s 1987 critical text, *Male Fantasies*. Theweleit explores the Friekorps, a Nazi volunteer army working after WWI, who hated and dreaded women based on a reversal of desire and the defense of the male ego. Drawing on Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow, Theweleit explains that the male ego is formed by the fear of dissolution, knowing that it has sprung forth from the female body which it now necessarily dreads and suppresses (xvi). Theweleit queries, “[C]ould it be that the fear of dissolution through union with a woman actually causes desire to flee from its object, then transform itself into a representation of violence?” (44-5) In other words, in order to properly form as a separate and
self-contained individual, the male ego (and the female ego, to a certain extent) must abject itself from that which it first loved: the mother’s body (Kristeva 226).39

_Swastika Night_ explores then-contemporary theories of Freudian development and theories of unconscious drives—what Ann Kaplan claims was the “most central” discovery of the modernist era (10). Yet it also engages with the hopes and fears of a quickly changing society as it plunged into technologization and machination coupled with the rising wave of fascist rhetoric and the rise of Hiterlism. At the center of these debates and rapid changes stands the female body—specifically, the body of the mother. What would happen to her as the world shifted around her? Who would this budding new woman become in a few hundred years? What would technology and fascism do to the traditional family unit? Because birthgiving (literally the production of human beings) forms the foundation of any society, Burdekin knew that women would be a critical aspect of any future society, technologized or no, fascist or no. The world would always require new male and female bodies for the state. The women of _Swastika Night_ are so hated and feared because they are crucial for the survival of the Nazi system, yet they remain unruly in not birthing the right bodies and in birthing crudely and messily. They are “depicted as victims of their own undisciplined desires and in the wake of this excessiveness, women become the producers of many more victims” (Titchkosky n.p.). These women are tagged and caged like animals, all rights and freedoms removed from them, and yet they still do not behave. The unruly female corporeal, the sacred, messy, and unknown process of giving birth, eludes the full control of these men, and that is the ultimate crime—a crime for which the women pay with their lives.

39 In “Approaching Abjection,” Julia Kristeva explains that to wean, the infant must “abject” the mother – find her fascinating and horrifying, and separate from her. Kristeva claims this abjection process is only specific to the male infant, who is repulsed and also erotically attracted to the mother. Daughters don’t split the mother but instead unsuccessfully try to rid themselves of her (226).
3. *Man’s World: “All you little mother-pots need is babies”*

Gestation and parturition take a futuristic and scientific turn in Charlotte Haldane’s first novel, *Man’s World* (1926). A vision of the future that is partially utopian and partially dystopian much like *Brave New World*, the inhabitants of Haldane’s civilization are strictly divided by sex and occupation.⁴⁰ The men truly rule this world—they are the scientists who control the bodily fate and therefore the biological reality of the citizens, and one of Haldane’s overarching messages in the novel is that humans are their bodies. Biology is reality in the book—as Susan Squier puts it, the society in the novel is “biologically deterministic” (*Babies* 124). There is no overcoming what is seared into flesh and bone and blood.

I argue that, similar to the novels we have seen so far in this chapter, the reproductive narrative in *Man’s World* is especially compelling in light of the way Haldane figures human reproduction as a struggle between the male scientists who would streamline and control the process and the unruly female subjects who would choose to retain the freedom to decide when and with whom they will reproduce. As in *Brave New World* and *Swastika Night*, the female flesh in *Man’s World* is something to be curtailed, monitored, and controlled, and reproduction is one of the primary problems that this futuristic society has therefore wrestled into manageable form. While it is a shame in this society that human reproduction still has to take place in the female, whose “thoughts are as podgy as [her] body” (C. Haldane, *Man’s World* 76), this little biological oversight will soon be amended by ex-utero reproduction.⁴¹ Haldane rightly shows that to control a society, you only need to control its mothers. Yet, no matter how much the

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⁴⁰ As Susan Squier explains, “Poised between celebration and critique of the scientific control project,” *Man’s World* is a “profoundly troubling dys/utopia that vividly exemplifies the double bind of female modernism” (*Babies* 127).

society attempts to keep its female citizens under (reproductive) control, the waywardness of the female body will always find a way to disrupt.

While the need to amend or at least monitor the unruly female body and control her process of reproduction is very much the same in *Man’s World* as it is in *Brave New World* and *Swastika Night*, *Man’s World* has the added distinction of being the most positively eugenic novel. Haldane’s vision is an uneasy hybrid of the utopian and dystopian, for her women quietly breed while the men cruelly exterminate other non-white races, but the babies such “vocational motherhood” produces are extraordinarily advanced. Haldane seems genuinely excited about the advances of science and technology as applied to society and to human bodies, and while she encodes both veiled and overt warnings about what these eugenic advancements might mean to races and peoples deemed “lesser than,” in the end, the message of her book is clear. A properly-formed eugenic society, one founded on the tenets of science and technology, is just the thing to nurture and support the vast majority of healthy, functioning citizens. As with any system, however, the success rate will not be one hundred percent. There will always be one or two people that inevitably fall through the cracks.

Charlotte Haldane was extremely invested in the topic of motherhood and physical reproduction, and it appears repeatedly throughout her oeuvre. For example, in her most well-known work, *Motherhood and Its Enemies* (1927), she famously argues that “normal” women aspire to be mothers (Johnson 143) and that childbearing is “the basis of family life” (McLaren 20).[^42] Her interest in the application of science and technology to the mother and to the family

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unit, which we see operating in *Man’s World*, was assisted by her marriage to J.B.S. Haldane, a leading scientist and genetic researcher of Charlotte’s day and the author of the influential *Daedalus; or, Science and the Future* (1924). An important precursor to many science-fiction and speculative texts in the early twentieth century, including *Man’s World*, *Daedalus* argues that the progress of science would rival the effects of industrial revolution, and that this progress was inevitable, therefore society must devise a way to apply “biology to human life” (J.B.S. Haldane n.p.). The biological reorganization and management of humanity coupled with reproduction via ectogenesis was also crucially necessary, J.B.S. claimed, for improper breeding would soon transform the entire population into unfit men and women (n.p.). J.B.S. concludes, “If reproduction is once completely separated from sexual love mankind will be free in an altogether new sense” (n.p.).

Haldane’s *Man’s World* takes up the notion of the separation of reproduction and “sexual love” found in *Daedelus*, and the possible freedoms such separation might engender. Out of all her novels, *Man’s World* is perhaps the most well known, although it languishes out of print. Critical reception of the novel is sparse, but includes Susan Squier, a foundational source for my

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43 Interestingly enough, Charlotte Haldane’s marriage to J.B.S. Haldane caused her to become the sister-in-law of Naomi Mitchison for a time, a radical and fearless proponent of birth control. For more on the two women, including a comparison of their differing feminist and scientific agendas, see Squier, Susan. “Conflicting Scientific Feminisms: Charlotte Haldane and Naomi Mitchison.” *Natural Eloquence: Women Reinscribe Science*. Eds. Barbara T. Gates and Ann B. Schtier. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1997. 179-194. Squier argues that Haldane valorized the “maternal role,” while Mitchison pushed for biological “multiplicity” achieved through science (180-1). Haldane was a “pronatalist, essentialist” feminist leading to “scientific meliorism” (181); Mitchison was a “proto-postmodern feminist” challenging “scientific practice” (182).


45 *Daedalus* inspired several published responses, including one by Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, which attacks Haldane for megalomania and posits a more reciprocal, flowing relationship between bodies and machines (Armstrong 86). Another response came from Bertrand Russell, whose *Icarus; or, The Future of Science* (1924) “questioned Haldane’s optimism” by wondering if science would not be used “by the elite to control the masses” (McLaren 32). Russell worried that too many boy babies might be born, a superior race bred, or only a small percentage of people might be needed for reproduction (32).
argument, who explores Haldane’s deployment of science and its ties to the historical moment in which Haldane lived. Similar to my argument, Squier argues that Man’s World illustrates “how reproductive technology can produce power/knowledge for a patriarchal state through control of the (female) body” (Babies 121). Also, Angus McLaren briefly mentions the importance of Haldane’s exploration of the contemporary fascination with hormones and endocrinology – “mysterious, recently discovered, and apparently powerful substances” (81), while Elizabeth Russell, comparing Man’s World to Swastika Night, concludes: “Whether mothers are in gilded cages or behind iron bars, the result is the same: their loss of freedom is absolute when their sole reason for existence is reduced to breeding” (22). Finally, the most recent and most comprehensive published explication of Man’s World comes from Sarah Gamble, who employs Foucault’s panopticon and Haraway’s cyborg theories to interrogate “the uneasy vacillation between resistance and compliance” in the novel (3).

Using these critics as a foundation for my argument, I claim that the text is notable in light of the way it illustrates the uneasy relationship between science and the female body and the instability of the uncontrollable female reproductive flesh. Indeed, most, if not all, critics agree that Haldane’s project in the novel is ultimately unstable and unsatisfying, because the novel is unable to make up its mind about the implications of a completely scientific and eugenic society. There is a reason why the novel is titled Man’s World, after all. The society in the novel is a haven for women: they are able to choose, to a certain extent, whether to be mothers or artists, and if they do become “vocational mothers,” a role respected by society, they will do so communally and with the support of the entire society behind them. They will not have to balance work and home life in the midst of their giving birth, either. Women are either

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completely mothers or completely artists—and therein lies the major problem in the text. Mothers may be revered here, but their agency is extremely limited. They are almost too controlled, too sheltered, leading to the unruliness of Nicolette in attempting to birth on her own terms (as we shall see).

The novel follows Nicolette and her brother, Christopher, two young adults living in a “new world” facilitated by the biological advances of a man named Perrier, a geneticist who devised a way to reproduce only boy babies, and therefore a way to produce one whenever one was wanted. This control of reproduction, in turn, has created a new social order without government, traditional careers, superstition, or God. The scientist is the new god of this society, and instead of false religion, he preaches the truth of facts. He is not “the perverter nor the destroyer of mankind, but [...] the new director, the inevitable successor to the priest and the politician” who delivers true liberation through the “two great principles of experiment and observation” (C. Haldane, *Man’s World* 4, 16). Like the all-powerful scientist figure in J.B.S. Haldane’s *Daedalus*, the society in *Man’s World* is transformed by this morally-responsible scientist who will “reshape society” (Joannou 208). The novel is indeed a “man’s world,” as only men are the scientists, and the scientists rule this world by biological and reproductive control.

Further, the society takes as its “religion” the absolute scientific fact: the observation and the

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47 Susan Squier argues that the Perrier method of choosing sons does not empower the woman but instead traps “her in a masculinist culture and ideology; directing her gestational empowerment toward the production of sons” and transforming “female choice into female necessity” (*Babies* 121).

48 In “Invisible Assistants or Lab Partners? Female Modernism and the Culture(s) of Modern Science,” Susan Squier explains how women like Haldane were traditionally viewed as laboratory assistants to the male scientists, and not as scientists in their own right. During the modernist era, however, Squier uncovers a profound “shift in women’s position that might be described as the move from being invisible assistants to lab partners” (299). Haldane’s own experience dictating J.B.S.’s scientific discoveries may have contributed to this theme of women as passive assistants and not active participants in the scientific process.
experiment, eschewing emotion, intuition, and interiority, all traditional aspects of the female and of the gestational process.

The communities of Haldane’s nameless society are separated according to categories of profession—sexless “Neuters,” or entertainers; Mothers; “Brains,” or the male thinkers—and citizens live in communes and are housed in bunkers. Just like *Brave New World* and *Swastika Night*, there is no family and no home. The society in *Man’s World* is supposedly predicated on freedom (no religion, no fear, no job or family to tie one down), but it is very strict in deciding roles. Nicolette, for example, always knows she is destined to be “mated” and become a mother, therefore she doesn’t consider doing anything else with her life. Women, after all, are “the epitome of the most desirable qualities of her sex” and belong “chiefly to the order of vocational motherhood” (C. Haldane, *Man’s World* 9). Vocational motherhood in this society means that the women who are destined to be mothers and comply with this choice are paired off with approved males for fertilization and are given a mother mentor from whom they will learn the art of mothering. Nicolette’s mentor, Leila, explains that Nicolette is “instinctively a little mother,” and that the feelings of love she experiences for children who are not her own are “quite natural” (49). Upon becoming pregnant, these vocational mothers devote their life to the art of mothering, even though the babies are housed in a separate nursery and the women have much more freedom than before. Vocational motherhood is practiced chiefly to produce the best mothers, therefore the best babies, because the founder of the society, the Jewish Mensch, was disgusted by the “promiscuous breeding” and “unintelligent motherhood” of the old world order (18).49

49 The topic of race, especially Jewishness, in *Man’s World* is one that awaits further exploration. Much is made of Mench’s Jewishness: repeated references to his “great Jew nose” (11), for example. In chapter four, the council of Brains who guard the society’s safety admit unease at giving away their secrets to the visiting Japanese, and boundaries between races are alluded to (64). There is also mention of “chemical warfare” in the novel, of a kind that only latches onto the pigment in “dusky skin,” killing black people and sparing whites (64), and of the “great purge” that formed this society, a purge that obliterated “the native Celtic slothfulness” (180).
But the society cannot control every aspect of reproduction after all—once again, the wayward female body escapes the complete control of the male scientist. Nicolette revolts by putting off vocational motherhood in a last-minute fit of indecision, becoming an apprentice to an artist and taking a risky and secretive new medicine to safeguard her fertility even though the society injects her with infertility treatments. As one of the wise mothers on the Motherhood Council explains to Nicolette:

Either you become a mother or you must be immunized. It is the only safeguard that must be taken for the future of the race. As soon as you abandoned it, children would be born haphazard everywhere, would be bred by the pure and the impure; it would be impossible to exercise the necessary hygienic control, and those who had no vocation for motherhood would cheat and lie, would refuse or neglect the years of preparation [...] it would simply lead to the dirty, bestial breeding of the past again. The race would be doomed. (127-8)

It is easy to see the scientific and eugenic concerns of Haldane’s contemporary moment in this passage. With biological processes being discovered daily by scientists and with the joint production of advanced machines being churned out on factory assembly lines, it is no wonder that scientists like Haldane expected such advancements coupled with quality control to eventually be applied to the physical human body. As Angus McLaren explains, the consensus among writers in the early twentieth century was that future societies would be focused on productivity, the elimination of the “unfit,” and the use of science to “solve society’s social ills” (27, 29). It seemed like an inevitable development that science would soon turn its attentions to the improvement of the human body.

The above passage also highlights the primary concern of Haldane’s novel and of the many science fiction novels in the early twentieth century: the control of human reproduction, the wresting of gestation from the clumsy hands of women and the relocation of this essential human process in the laboratory where, under the close supervision of the male scientist, the process would for the first time be perfected. Such “necessary eugenic control” takes the form
not only of state monitoring of potential mothers and state training of these mothers in *Man’s World*, but the application of the “Perrier solution,” a vague series of exercises that pregnant women perform to ensure the birth of a boy and therefore combat the extreme problem of “Surplus Women” (C. Haldane, *Man’s World* 44). As we have seen in *Swastika Night*, this futuristic society values the birth of boys over the birth of girls, even as these girls grow up into women and continue to do the important work of birthing new bodies for the state. Such breeding work, the backbone of this society, is still undervalued: the panel of mothers in Nucleus is nowhere near as powerful as the panel of “Brains,” male leaders who control the desert boundaries that separate the races and who seem to be in charge of the chemical warfare that exterminates less-desirable peoples and populations (64). Haldane rightfully suspects that once birth is controlled, the eugenic thinking that produces “pure” or “impure” offspring will turn its attention to regulating other kinds of “pure” versus “impure” people, and whites will inevitably be valued over other races.50

Unlike *Brave New World*, the society in Haldane’s vision has not yet perfected the production of human bodies outside of the womb (ectogenesis or ex-utero reproduction), and Peter, a leading scientist who speaks to a panel of mothers in the novel, admits that such an achievement remains in the distant future (57). When the process of ectogenesis is finally realized, however, Peter suspects that it will be based on an ancient model, reestablishing a central “goddess World Mother” as the “supreme reality again” (61). Leila, a mother on the panel of mothers, is alarmed: “A sort of human termite queen? From whom the entire race shall

50 *Man’s World* also alludes to a “Great War” from which the scientists chose not to rescue humanity, which was rotting away “by the slow disintegration of disease and death. The swifter process was the cleaner. Let the flames leap and lick, and the gases stifle and strangle” (22). Only the few desirable humans were saved, “the raw human material from which might begin to be fashioned the ultimately desired human being,” while “the tainted, the intelligent savages whose instincts had been trained and sharpened towards this end, whose competitive rabies had reached its climax, must go. They went” (22-3).
be bred? Luckily that will not be for a few thousand years yet!” (60) Peter reassures her that eventually “those who supply the race” will be “the supreme female types humanity can produce. Pyramidal” (61-62). Once again, as we have seen throughout this chapter, the literature of the modernist era mirrors the conversations swirling around the myriad breakthroughs in the scientific community, breakthroughs that made it seem as if a little tinkering would eventually produce an upgraded model of humanity. The eugenic implications of this upgrading process are clearly mapped out in *Man’s World*: an upgraded birthing body would inevitably produce upgraded offspring, creating an entire race and country of “super” people. Yet the notion of a biologically-perfect reproducing female also highlights the fundamental uneasiness with eugenics that many feminists, including Charlotte Haldane, had: “the passive role that it ascribed to them. Women were either genetically good, fit stock or they were not” (Joannou, “Chloe” 199). Therefore, while most of Haldane’s book is “docile” and dutifully spells out her rapturous enthusiasms about the exciting implications of a eugenic and scientific society (a society that grants adequate time and space for women to properly birth, for example, with no other family obligations getting in the way), the novel itself, much like Nicolette’s body, escapes and becomes “unruly” at times, betraying a deep-seated and uncontrollable fear that such a society might end up being too good to be true. The control inherent in a eugenic reproductive system might, in the end, control women just a little too much.

Haldane’s ambivalence about science and technology, including eugenics, is mirrored in her ambivalence about the sex and gender system itself. As a woman trying to make her way in the “man’s world” of science occupied by men like her husband, it is understandable that Haldane would eventually, on some level, begin to question the inherent worth and capability of the female body and mind. Her doubt about the position and value of femininity is illustrated by
Nicolette, who eventually falls in love with the hulking male, Bruce Wayland. Wayland’s “influence on [Nicolette’s] virginal mind was akin to that of dry, full sunshine on her growing body” (C. Haldane, *Man’s World* 108), and Wayland is a man so intelligent and who moves through ideas so quickly that Nicolette feels like “a small child of old legend trotting breathlessly along by the side of a giant in seven-leagued boots” (109). For Bruce’s part, he is also taken with Nicolette: “The eager plasticity of her mind aroused in him the wonder and joy of a sculptor who feels beneath his fingers the perfect clay from which to fashion his masterpiece” (111). It is curious that a woman as smart and accomplished as Haldane would paint her heroine in such infantilizing tones. Sarah Gamble argues, “One of the most disconcerting aspects of the novel […] is the extent to which Charlotte Haldane herself appears to actively admire the masculine, ruthlessly rationalist figure of the scientist” (5). Haldane was one of the first women on Fleet Street (Johnson 142) and certainly fought to hold her own with male scientists such as J.B.S. Haldane.\(^{51}\) Her brand of feminism is not like that of Naomi Mitchison or Virginia Woolf. It seems as if Haldane simply could not imagine a world that was not run by men, or women that were not controlled by men. As Bruce explains, “women, broadly speaking, are always a century behind men in mental development” (C. Haldane, *Man’s World* 200). Any critique Haldane offers against such a belief is ambivalent at best. While she includes a female character that strongly resents being “divided off into breeders and non-breeders to serve the race,” Haldane

\(^{51}\) Beyond holding her own with J.B.S., Charlotte Haldane interestingly figured their working relationship as one in which she was in control. J.B.S. was a “docile machine, a profitable cyborg,” and Charlotte would feed in an interesting question, then out would pop the answer, which she would then transcribe and give to the world, thereby securing both her fame and his (Squier, “Conflicting” 185). In Charlotte’s words, “I created a legend” (185, Qting C. Haldane). However, Charlotte mentions in her autobiography, *Truth Will Out*, that she was “completely over-awed by the largeness of [J.B.S.] and, nearly scorched by the blaze of his intellect, I felt my inconsiderable culture shrink to Lilliputian insignificance” (18). Haldane, Charlotte. *Truth Will Out*. New York: Vanguard P, 1950.
also cannot imagine any future for womankind that does not pivot on human reproduction (188).

To illustrate Haldane’s dependence upon the female-as-reproducer narrative, Nicolette is soon pregnant, thrust into a new bodily reality that underscores for her the significance of vocational motherhood and leaves no doubt that becoming a mother is what she has been waiting for, “entranced, like a sleeping beauty,” until Bruce with his fertile presence awakened her (258). Nicolette is absorbed with “the purely sensual delight” of being pregnant, and is captivated by the “Someone” in her womb, “her son, and the sun that caressed her eyes […] the food she ate […] were His; passing to Him by the marvellous [sic] processes of which she knew a little and of which more could be learnt” (250). The capitalization of “Someone” and the construction of “son” and “sun” makes it clear that Nicolette, a product of a godless society, has found the only source of religion and spirituality that she needs, and it has been inside her all along. A woman is not a woman until what is sleeping inside her is “awoken” by a man and she is transformed into what she has meant to be: a mother.

And indeed, Nicolette has been dutifully training for the honor of motherhood since girlhood. Science and technology take the form of “childhood lessons” in which Nicolette, like the other girls marked for motherhood, learned how to produce a healthy male child. Once pregnant, she is thankful for these lessons, “anxious” to know what is happening inside her, and

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52 Critics frequently cite this “double bind” of the novel (borrowing a term from Susan Squier’s *Babies in Bottles*). For example, Sarah Gamble claims that the “most challenging” aspect of *Man’s World* is its “double-voiced discourse, which presents the scientist simultaneously as hero and villain” (12); this, she asserts, is the novel’s “greatest weakness and its greatest strength” (13). Maroula Joannou explains how the novel is torn between “a woman’s right to follow her instincts and choose the father of her child, or indeed choose not to be a mother at all” and “her social and ethical responsibility” to “embrace eugenic motherhood” (“Chloe” 210). Clare Hanson explores the novel’s tension between “scientific rationalism and romantic individualism” (*Cultural History* 125), while Susan Squier sums it all up with: “Charlotte Haldane was a woman of deep contradictions” (138). Squier, Susan. “Sexual Biopolitics in *Man’s World: The Writings of Charlotte Haldane.*” *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers, 1889-1939*. Eds. Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai. Chapel Hill and London: U of North Carolina P, 1993. 137-155.
is eager to return to her hometown of Nucleus so she can “devote herself entirely to His comfort” (250). While Haldane does not elaborate on these lessons, the “Perrier solution,” she does allude to the fact that the process takes continued mental discipline on the part of the mother to be successful. As we have seen in so many other narratives of the early twentieth century, the mother’s mind and body is a danger to the growing fetus, and if the mother is not careful to guard her influence, she may produce a disastrous human product that will cause problems for the society around her for years to come—Nicolette’s brother, Christopher, is just such a faulty human product. But Nicolette, as we have seen before, is merely putty in the hands of strong men like Bruce who run this society. After she gets her brief spat of rebellion out of her system, she meekly does what she is told, and sinks wholeheartedly into the self-effacing demands of motherhood. She finds “joy of these hours of complete abandonment to the dictates of His needs,” and realizes the “genius” of vocational motherhood, by which she can give her unborn child “health, strength, and a suitable environment from the beginning” (250-251).

In the end, *Man’s World* is a story of the production of “well-trained little mother-pot[s]” like Nicolette, a woman who cannot even focus on her own brother’s untimely death in the face of her pregnancy (295). Nicolette’s brief and half-hearted revolt against her society, much like her brother’s similar revolt, only leads her to do the very thing society was asking of her in the first place: to unquestioningly breed, and to happily take her place in the hallowed halls of

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53 Christopher suffers from a “streak of femininity perversely bequeathed to him by his mother” (85), who became lax in the preparations necessary to have a masculine child after five sons and was not “disobedient but rather unobedient” (86). What she produced, then, was effeminate Christopher, whose “submasculinity” leads to a “slight mental perverseness” that in turn causes “sterile mysticism, which led to his self-ending” (297). Because Christopher is unable to assimilate into such a society as Nucleus and is unable to breed according to the dictates of such society, his “slight sexual perversity” (297) results in his committing suicide by flying his plane so high it crashes. In *Man’s World*, an individual is intimately linked to sexuality, and if sexuality is deviant, then the individual cannot be a productive member of society. As Elizabeth Russell puts it, “A ‘feminine’ mind within a masculine body has no possibility of survival in a society which insists on polarising gender differences” (20). For more on Haldane’s view of what she categorized as the “intersex,” see her 1927 book *Motherhood and Its Enemies* (currently out of print), in which she criticizes the “intersex” for not having children (Squier, *Babies* 108).
motherhood, to retire in a “mother settlement” and “submit[] willingly to the stringent discipline of hygiene, striving to attain physical and mental perfection, poise, and balance, and to transmit it to those born to the high wonder of scientifically directed living” (54).

4. Woman Alive: “the new-made Eve”

The final noteworthy modernist British novel that has reproduction at its core is Woman Alive (1936) by the little known author Susan Ertz. Ertz, like Mitchison and Haldane, was a prolific writer who produced texts over the span of fifty years and is now “unjustly neglected” (Berg 5).54 While there are no pregnant women in Woman Alive and no scenes of childbirth, I include the book because it dovetails nicely with the other three texts of this chapter, as the novel is similarly and intimately concerned with fixing the broken female body through the application of masculine science, a repair that is crucially linked to the human need to reproduce. Once again, the female body in Ertz’ s novel is a barely-concealed cipher for reproduction. A woman is her capacity to reproduce, and no women equals no babies being born and thus the imminent destruction of mankind (emphasis on “man”). Much like Swastika Night, the futuristic society in Woman Alive faces an escalating crisis due to women once again not cooperating by quietly churning out healthy babies for the good of the state. As we have seen in the previous three texts, the unruly female body in Woman Alive is the single greatest problem in the novel, a problem that the men are devoted to solving while the one living woman petulantly makes their lives difficult by not cooperating.

Ertz’s novels cover “the emancipation of women, nonconformity, freedom of thought, intellectual honesty, and the dignity of the individual,” and perhaps her most critical concern is

with “the problems of moral responsibility in human relationships” (Berg 6). Woman Alive, Ertz’s tenth novel, has barely made a ripple in critical conversation, but the only extant notable analysis focuses on Ertz’s portrayal of “a way out of despair through a feminist revolution” and her mockery of “the inevitable failures of social planning that do not consider models for human relationships other than patriarchal” (Lassner 264-265). 55 I find it notable that in Woman Alive, the unruly body and its inability to reproduce is not exactly the woman’s fault. Unlike in Swastika Night, in which the women complied on some unconscious or conscious level with their “Reduction” and eventually embrace their animalistic status enough that it affects their biological ability to birth girls, the women in Ertz’s futuristic vision are all dead. The novel takes place in a dream of the narrator, Dr. Selwyn, who is mysteriously projected to the future through a vision cast by the odd and dying man Ugolino Spero. Selwyn is projected to London in April 15, 1985, a new world in which all the women are rapidly dying from a fatal disease and a world in which all the elderly, Selwyn included, take a drug called “Evitalin,” to live longer and better lives. The United States of Europe (“USE”) has split into two warring factions, one of which released a gas on the other to kill thousands of hapless people. Greenish-gray, this celadon gas burned and poisoned (Ertz 24). 56 Women immediately started dying all around the globe, for the bodies of those killed by celadon gave off a disease fatal only to women (25).

Selwyn’s son-in-law, Alan Holderness, stays with him after Alan’s fiancée, Helen, dies. Alan’s father in 1958 had published theories of sex-control in a book titled Sex At Choice, and afterwards, most couples around the world birthed boys (47). Selwyn admits to his readers that


he can’t remember just what they did to produce these males, but, similar to the plot points in *Swastika Night* and *Man’s World*, this futuristic society has figured out how to birth the preferable sex (male), and the citizens pursue male-centric births eventually to their own detriment. The only futuristic society among the four novels in this chapter who seems to birth the sexes equally is *Brave New World*, whose factories churn out babies who are classified by ability, intellect and class rather than sex (although, women pointedly do not hold positions of higher power).

Why does Ertz, along with Haldane and Burdekin, include sex selection in her novel? Indeed, many writers of modernist science fiction in the 1920s and 1930s channeled this cultural narrative that pushed for the birth of boys over girls. For example, in response to articles such as J.B.S. Haldane’s *Daedalus*, writers like Ertz worried that such optimistic dreams of controlling reproduction would eventually lead to too many male births (McLaren 32). This cultural fear also responded not just to texts projecting the future of reproduction but to very real scientific pursuits. For example, in the 1930s, German doctors struggled, and failed, to master sex determination by using alkaline douches after discovering that male births issued from wombs with higher alkaline secretions (Corea 325). While sex determination remained out of reach for scientists, other forays into the malleability of sex and gender succeeded, including the first sex-change operation which was announced in 1930, when the Danish painter Einar Wegener “emerged as Lili Elbe” (McLaren 103).

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It is clear that early twentieth-century science fiction texts like *Woman Alive* respond to very real events in the scientific world, but they also pick up on the hidden cultural subtext that it is the female body that is most ailing and therefore most in need of recuperation. Like the previous novels by Huxley, Haldane, and Burdekin, the masculine scientific figure once again comes to the rescue. In Ertz’s particular dystopian vision, the broken female body is soon mended by an eccentric yet ultimately brilliant male scientist—proving science has the will and the capacity to amend what is lacking not just in nature but in woman who is the epitome of nature. Selwyn (still in the future), while walking in the street one day, is led by a young boy to the boy’s sleeping aunt, Stella Morrow, the only woman still left alive in the world. Upon waking, Stella explains how a “quack” doctor, Dr. Gordon Hummel, saved her by subjecting her to a full-body dip, believing he could immunize bodies through “chromosomes” (Ertz 74). As Stella reports, Hummel “specialized in experimental cytology, and for twenty-five years had been working on a prophylactic dye or stain, which, made to permeate the body by means of a ray, caused every cell and segment of it to resist the invasion of dangerous germs and poisons” (74). While Stella does not know what the stain was, the most important aspect of the stain and its process of administration is that, somehow, and to everyone’s surprise, the process has worked. Stella, the last woman alive, is quite literally baptized by Hummel, born again as a new creature of science. Her embodiment is a “medical problem, and, therefore, […] a problem best managed by technology and science regulated through a medical regime” (Titchkosky n.p.). Emerging blood-red from the stain, the color fading over time, Stella is a hybrid organism, a woman fundamentally altered by science at the chromosomal (therefore genetic) level. As Selwyn sees it, “nothing short of violence or an accident would be likely to kill her. She was
born to be the mother of many children; her broad hips, full bosom, and calm looks suggested great fertility” (Ertz 77).

Much like Haldane’s *Man’s World*, Ertz’s novel is a strange and ambivalent mix when it comes to women and reproduction. Women are figured as good for nothing but reproduction, as we clearly see in the passage above: Stella’s mind is not important but what is important is her “broad hips” and other bodily attributes that speak to her ability to birth future generations. Yet even while women are shown to be inherently limited to their role in reproduction and unable or unwilling to rule as the men do, men are often criticized for their complacency. All four novels in this chapter are constructed with men, and only men, clearly in charge, yet all four blatantly critique this leadership. In *Woman Alive*, Stella writes in a letter, “Men! Without them, how happy we could have been! We ought to have destroyed the majority of them years ago, only keeping enough to increase the population, or perhaps keep it from declining” (62). And Selwyn muses,

> Why, oh, why, did women not make use of their collective good sense to prevent wars? Why did they never organise? Women are the world’s true internationals. Their lack of natural prejudice, their adaptability, their mental fluidity, all fit them for this role. Why did they never play it? Why did they never assert themselves in any ways that mattered? Why did they never find, never even seek, solidarity? The power they might have had! (70)

In this passage, Ertz echoes Woolf’s call in *Three Guineas* for the daughters of educated men to resist the narratives and mindsets that lead to war. Ertz criticizes women for not even trying to establish “solidarity,” a clear reference to women’s groups splintering off in myriad directions in the early years of the twentieth century. Yet Ertz also belittles women by categorizing certain aspects of their character as “natural,” effectively repeating the same patriarchal arguments that damned women to social and cultural inferiority in the first place. We have already seen how Stella’s hips and bosom transmit “great fertility” in an essentializing manner (77). And in the
passage quoted above, women are credited with “natural” characteristics like a lack of “prejudice,” a “mental fluidity,” and an inherent “adaptability.” While none of these characteristics is damaging in its own right, it is troubling that Ertz would seek to categorize woman in any way that was fundamentally linked to her reproductive capacity. And in Woman Alive, woman is just that: the opportunity for men once again to sew their seeds and to breed. Woman is the fertile ground that men will employ to once again build the great countries and empires of the world.

In fact, in all novels except one in this chapter (Brave New World), woman is used predominately for only one thing: reproduction. And the only reason why woman is no longer needed for reproduction in Brave New World is because science has completed the ultimate upgrade from bodily (utero) to laboratory (ex-utero) reproduction. But until disembodied, masculine science has delivered this dream and promise of severing manhood from embodied woman once and for all, the female body (if not the mind) retains its importance, even centrality to a certain extent, for one cannot have a society or a state without new bodies to reproduce and replicate its borders. As Bryan S. Turner explains, “Our sense of social order is spoken in terms of the balance or imbalance of the body” (4), and I would claim that it is specifically the imbalance of the female reproducing body that is the crucial marker of unstable social order in these texts.

While pregnancy and childbirth does not occur between the covers of Ertz’s novel, as previously mentioned, the novel is noteworthy for the argument it makes about the centrality of both women and of reproduction to the health of the British state and, by extension, the world. And it is very much presumed that Stella will want to, and will be able to, reproduce. When she finally marries Selwyn’s son-in-law, Alan, Selwyn notices that when the newly-married couple
exchanges a meaningful glance, “their children might have been born in that look” (204). Marriage is solely for reproduction here, and everyone assumes that Stella will be able to reproduce without any problems—she is a woman, after all, and that is what women do. “She was the universal Woman, and her voice was the voice of Womankind. She was hope; she was future; she was life” (198). Because this is a vision of the future, Selwyn is sucked back into the present soon after the wedding, and the reader never discovers if Stella was able to bear the only children of the future. But because the book centers around her and is titled *Woman Alive*, one assumes that the marriage was successful in producing the future heirs of the entire world.

Stella’s marriage to Alan is a personal triumph for the men surrounding Stella, including Selwyn, for all along Ertz has given her criticisms of the patriarchal society to Stella, the sole mouthpiece of feminist critique. She criticizes the indoctrination of the young by the old—“You kept alive in the young all your own hatreds, all your own prejudices” (95)—and mocks the impossible situation that man, with his guns and fighting, has created for the entire world: “Dig a vast grave for all the men there are left in the world, and erect a towering monument over it, and carve on the monument, ‘Man was a fighting animal.’ It will look splendid, splendid, when there is no longer a human voice to be heard or a human eye to see!” (101) Early in the novel, when Selwyn takes Stella to the palace for safekeeping, such criticisms by Stella prompts Selwyn to comment that even the prime minister “began to perceive the truth of what I had told him—that we had to deal with a very strong-willed young woman” (89).

In the end, Ertz’s novel is a story of “deal”ing with, of indoctrinating, a “very strong-willed woman,” making her fit into masculine life (the only life that is now left on the earth) and making her accept the task set before her: to plan, execute, and reproduce an entirely new world in “her rightful place in the Palace as Queen of Great Britain, Queen of the League of English-
Speaking Nations, Queen, indeed, if she wills it, of all nations…” (124). Stella’s assumed future motherhood is automatically recast in racial-mother terms, and Stella becomes the guardian of the proper race, the English race, a race that will supercede all other races not only due to its eugenic fitness but due to the happy accident of the one woman alive, Stella, belonging to the English race. Ertz’s narrative therefore seems to be, on some level, pushing for a return to the British empire system, for in her novel it is English and their offspring that will, quite literally, rule the world.

Throughout the process of upgrading Stella into a racial mother figure and guardian of the race, Stella, who is at first categorized in animalistic terms by Selwyn—her teeth are “as white as a young dog’s,” for example (64)—continues to increase “her power of understanding,” adding “a cubit to her [mental] stature every day” (188). These men, the illustrious men of the English race, have successfully transmuted Stella from an inhabitant of nature to one of culture; they have sealed her body off against infection, and they are the only things standing between her and absolute destruction and death. A male scientist once again fixes and upgrades the unruly female body, ensuring that it will continue to seamlessly reside in a world which these male minds imagine and execute.

In all four novels, as we have seen, the Foucauldian unruly bodies of women have been radically amended by radical masculine science, with varied results. But despite the bio-scientific breakthroughs portrayed in these novels and in their futuristic societies, the ancient puzzle of reproduction is still at the fore. As Susan Squier explains, “both modernism and

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59 Throughout this chapter, with my use of the concept of “science,” I gesture towards the foundational and monolithic presence that science exerts in these science fiction novels, novels that manifest a “distrust,” but also a “faith” in that science (Rabkin 472). Susan Squier points out that scholars suggest that “we should speak not of monolithic science, but of sciences: a collection of dynamic ‘forms, practices and representations’ that change in response to different local sites as well as over time” (“Invisible Assistants” 302; qting Christie and Shuttleworth 5).
modern science have been defined in and through the repression of the birthing woman’s body—its powers and pleasures” (“Invisible Assistants” 314). Pregnancy and childbirth, the one physical activity that the male cannot perform, constantly escapes the grasp of the male characters who would control every aspect of biological reality. While world-wide war is alluded to in *Swastika Night*, *Man’s World* and *Woman Alive*, all four texts figure birth as a war between the feminine body and the masculine scientific mind. And rather than with weapons, this war is fought with ideology, with cultural hegemony, and with scientific advancements forged in the space of the laboratory. These novels by Haldane, Huxley, Ertz, and Burdekin question “the taken-for-granted sense that technology alone can provide the meaning and movement of life” (Titchkosky n.p.). They make it clear that, at least in the early twentieth century, the war over reproduction was waged, and largely won, by men.
CODA

BEYOND MODERNIST BIRTH

“I know of no woman [...] for whom her body is not a fundamental problem: its clouded meaning, its fertility, its desire, its so-called frigidity, its bloody speech, its silences, its changes and mutilations, its rapes and ripenings.”

~ Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born (284)

On October 4, 2010, *Time* magazine chose a provocative cover for an article on fetal origins entitled “How the First Nine Months Shape the Rest of Your Life”: a pregnant woman, naked and sprawling, her legs akimbo, her belly unfurled, her gaze turned away, fixed as a still life for the viewer to inspect and decode (“How the First Nine Months”).¹ This arresting image is important for three main reasons: first, as an apt illustration of the multitude of narratives placed on and around the reproducing female form; second, as a marker of how much Western cultural conditions surrounding birth have changed since the early twentieth century; and, third, as an example of how much more the image of the pregnant and birthing woman still needs to develop to achieve full subjectivity in the glaring camera lens of the media-saturated twenty-first century. For, while the pregnant form here is on full display, its curves and recesses celebrated, it is also subjected to extreme normative conditioning: the woman here is thin, white, young, and sexually attractive. Further, her averted gaze brings to mind Iris Marion Young’s argument about growing up as a female: “one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject’s intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living

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manifestation of action and intention” (44). Indeed, the woman here is exhibited as a female work of art, a startling embodiment of shape and form, a testimony to physical beauty even as the body undergoes a shocking metamorphosis many people would concede borders on the grotesque. This picture celebrates this border, and gleefully toes the line between a culturally-acceptable image and an offensive one.

Another set of narratives surrounding this image of reproduction can be read as quite positive, however. Many critics argue that after the 1980s, a new emphasis was placed on the fetus due to technological developments enabling one to see what was previously unseen.\(^2\) The pregnant woman was consequently displaced as merely a “fetal container” (Bordo 77); she was “simply not a part of anything,” while pictures showing the fetus blown up to larger-than-life size, floating in a cosmos seemingly of its own making, captured the public imagination (Kaplan 203-4).\(^3\) Leaving the story of the pregnant woman behind, the story of the fetus seemed to be the only narrative the public wanted to read. This cover of *Time*, therefore, is very unlike the fetus-only photos which work to “write the mother out of the story […] or to marginalize and negate her subjectivity” (Kaplan 209). No, this photo places the woman squarely in the birthing story as the key and central figure, emphasizing her body, subjectivity, needs, desires, and decisions. In this regard, the cover can be read as a positive advancement for women’s studies, reproductive studies, and women’s rights. While this picture symbolizes the myriad ways Western media has

\(^2\) For example, see Susan Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight*; Rebecca Kukla’s *Mass Hysteria* (2005); Emily Clark’s “(Un)Mothering the Nation: Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake.*” *M*othering the *N*ation. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008. 201-210; Annie Murphy Paul’s *Origins*; and Iris Marion Young’s *On Female Body Experience*.

progressed when it considers the pregnant woman and the female form (it’s okay to celebrate her! Uncover her! Show her for what she is: a mere human being, not a goddess!), it also conversely emphasizes that women are very much in the same position they were in 100 years ago: fixed, silent, awaiting decoding by the patriarchal gaze. This woman, this body, is not figured as a powerful form with control of its situation and surroundings. Who, then, has the power and control?

British novelists after 1950 continue to grapple with the inherent power of the gestating body, and they speak to the desire, even the fundamental need, to harness this power. While the novelists we have seen so far in this dissertation—Woolf, Bagnold, and Mitchison; Rhys and Moore; Huxley, Haldane, Ertz, and Burdekin—struggle to ascertain if birth-giving holds any power at all, their conclusions markedly mixed, later novelists are absolutely sure of the power in female reproduction. The only problem is accessing it in a world which, at every turn, seeks to undercut and dismantle such a threat. One example of mass culture curtailing the dangerous power of birth appears in the 1960s and 1970s, when the public en masse began to understand that the scientists and authors of the self-help books discussed in chapter one were not actually scientists at all, but merely self-made and self-described “experts” (Ehrenreich and English, Good 26). The public therefore became deeply skeptical of the trend to encode cultural knowledge into self-help books, widely agreeing that such texts aim “not to seek out what is true, but to pronounce on what is appropriate” (26). One of the primary ways that the threatening

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4 For a refresher on how I am employing power in this dissertation, see footnote five in the Introduction in which I explain that my use of “power” is linked to the ability of the birthing woman to affect the future generations simply by choosing to birth or not. This power is also linked to her implicit totemic role as a “kin group mother,” and the culturally-powerful, Foucauldian process of marking and sorting bodies as either deviant or docile, “normal” or “abnormal.”
power of birthgiving was curtailed and controlled for so many years, then, was through such self-help texts and their definition of proper versus improper births and mothers.

The controlling, clearly-defined binary categories of docile or deviant birth-givers given such prominence in this dissertation begin to break down towards the latter part of the twentieth century as fictionalized texts begin to reflect a world in which women embrace almost all forms of reproduction. Later female protagonists often choose which predominate narratives they will subscribe to and boldly eschew the rest, and, most importantly, they often choose an embodied existence that is jointly of a feminine mind and a feminine body. Therefore, both the mind and the body are empowered in these texts, and it is due to, not in spite of, femininity. As I previously mentioned, however, just because the female body in these texts is moving closer to proper alignment with itself does not mean that the female parturient character is always a perfect conduit of bodily power. As the pregnant protagonist Liffey explains in Fay Weldon’s 1980 novel *Puffball*, “It is hard to believe that the cool, smooth, finished perfection of young skin covers up such a bloody, pulpy, incoherent, surging mass of pulsing organs within; hard to link up spirit to body, mind to matter, ourselves to others, others to everything” (158). The Conradian darkness that I mentioned in the Introduction, the dark and solitary journey that a woman must take into the core of chaos as she gestates and gives birth, has not been erased by the empowerment of these later heroines. In many ways, parturition remains as mysterious and as uncontrollable as it has always been. As we have seen in chapter four, woman remains a unknowable factor: what she, and her body, will do is always unknown, therefore always dangerous and disruptive.

Later texts also highlight the problematic nature of postcolonialism so aptly prefigured in Jean Rhys’s texts. The postcolonial heroine, as we will see, is often empowered by the breaking
down of strict rules of empire that police the limiting categories of “other” even while she continues to be hampered by a world system that feels the aftershocks of the breakdown of this power most clearly manifested in the existence of old prejudices. Such texts highlight the necessarily multitudinous narratives of power (forces that seek to contain and conscribe lives), and its subversive and slippery definitions, creating protagonists that are divided at best, and absolutely fragmented at worst. As the British empire becomes increasingly splintered as the twentieth century ticks on and the boundaries between countries continue to shift, the birthing mother figure simultaneously becomes aware of not only racial boundaries, but of policing or transforming such boundaries, and of different models of birthing.

The four texts I highlight in this chapter specifically engage with not only the old boundaries of birth-giving guarded by hegemonic power systems, but also with breaking these same boundaries and moving towards increased empowerment of the parturient female. And yet, as we shall see, even these empowered latter-day women continue to be hampered by the dominant cultural narratives of race, class, and a woman’s proper place therein. These texts are therefore divided: hesitantly seeking new forms of empowerment while remaining constrained by worn-out power systems.

For example, in Margaret Drabble’s The Millstone (1965), the heroine, a Ph.D. student named Rosamund, becomes pregnant outside of wedlock, therefore stepping out of her proper role as a racial mother and pushing the boundaries of acceptable female procreative behavior. She brags that having an illegitimate child is “just about the last word” in being posh, but she is also imminently relieved that, as an unwed mother calling for an ambulance to take her to the hospital, she is at least calling from a good address (84).5 She becomes quite insistent about

defining herself as upper-class, therefore illustrating that it is acceptable that she is having an illegitimate child—she is not one of those women after all (124). While the text explores the new avenues of “socially-acceptable” freedom available to white, upper-class, second-wave feminists, it also remains skeptical that these “freedoms” will ever truly be open to women without the exacting judgment of society. The text seeks to highlight one illegitimate mother’s journey to racial motherhood (tied up as it is in the proper reproducing and policing of racial boundaries), and to illustrate the ultimate acceptability of her role as single, white, upper-class, educated mother. For example, Rosamund notices that her bed in the maternity ward is marked “U” for “unmarried” (116), and later she admits that earning her doctorate would “go a long way towards obviating the anomaly of [her baby’s] existence” (173). However, in its utter blindness toward lower-class and non-white mothers, single or wed, The Millstone implies that these borderline births have been, and will remain, a problem for upper-class society to police and control. As the solidity of the British empire dissolves and becomes heterogeneous, so too does the totemic racial mother figure splinter, creating new forms of empowerment but also creating more questions.

An alternate birthing model is found in Buchi Emecheta’s 1979 novel, The Joys of Motherhood, which offers a portrait of mid-twentieth century mothering in a Nigerian colonial city where “[t]he British own us, just like God does” (165). Here, as in Woolf, scenes of childbirth are either truncated or excised altogether, and there is no growth of subjectivity through physical birth for the heroine, Nnu Ego, who is described as merely “[a] full woman, full of children” (170). While the novel directly refutes the notion of the black mother as existing only in the body, only engaged with models of birth from below, it also acknowledges the

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perniciousness and agency of such models, as they eventually lead to Nnu Ego’s demise. Clear boundaries between the white colonial others and the black natives are erected in the text, but in choosing the hybrid life of the city dweller and eschewing the traditional Nigerian life of her family, Nnu Ego becomes another casualty of empire. If Nnu Ego serves as a racial mother for her Nigerian tribe, she is also outdated. She is simply not equipped to handle both her children and a life of capitalist demands, and the text illustrates this “double burden of womanhood and her colonized position” (iii). The new hybridity of white city and black city dweller, the erection of racial boundaries that are sharply policed yet closely aligned (running parallel in such cramped city spaces), negate any agency as mother Nnu Ego may have. The traditional black mother is in decline due to the onslaught of transnationalism, yet the mixing and shifting of borders here is not the fruitful space that we will see in the novels of Zadie Smith. It is instead the extinction of a people, a way of life, and of a clearly-defined racial mother figure.

Even as traditional boundaries between race and class continue to dissolve and transform, the heroines in these later novels are painfully aware of the racial boundaries their births either solidify or disturb. What’s more, their conception of themselves as borderline individuals is mirrored in their birthing models, which blur the lines between birth from above and birth from below. For example, in the 2004 novel *Small Island* by Andrea Levy, women are highly subjugated by racist patriarchal constructs, as the novel (set in 1955) is a portrait of the colony quite literally returning “home” to the empire. While the gestation and parturition of the main character, Queenie, is firmly rooted in her body, the process also carries with it immense social and racial implications: inhabiting a white nation that is being “overrun” by black immigrants, in a white neighborhood infused by blacks, in a white house with black renters, she gives birth to a half-white and half-black child in a cultural space that the English citizens complain is “[h]ardly
like our own country any more” (360). Yet for the “black” couple who adopt the child, Hortense and Gilbert, this new and hybrid child of a new and hybrid race ushers in a chapter of prosperity and growth in their lives, and signals the advent of their gaining more acceptance (or at least more economic power) in their adopted country of England. The text’s portrayal of transnationalism leading to mixed races and a better atmosphere for people of color is therefore quite similar to Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000), in which Irie, the mixed-race daughter of a white Englishman and a black Jamaican immigrant, has sex with two Bangledeshi twins in one night, Millat and Magid. Because she quite literally cannot know who the father is, Irie’s daughter is raised fatherless, and the text paints an idyllic picture of a mixed-race, mother-daughter pair in London, blissfully cut free of patriarchal ties. The text seems to celebrate the fact that there is simply no “home country” anymore, no racial mother figure, and while the whites continue to harbor overt anxiety over race which manifests itself in the mania over the eugenic, genetically-perfect “Future Mouse,” the text eschews these whites in favor of jointly celebrating and lamenting the loss of clear boundaries inherent in the “feeling of belonging nowhere that comes to people who belong everywhere” (225), people like Irie and her daughter.

Projected the inquiry of the function of “gestational modernisms” out past the modernist era and into post-modernism and the early twenty-first century, one finds that while literary women are beginning to awaken to their inherent power in birth-giving, the roads and channels to access this power remain fraught with tangled racial and class relations (still very much

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8 I place “black” in scarequotes in this sentence to emphasize that there are several reminders in the text that both Hortense and Gilbert are themselves hybrid and come from both black and white parents. Part of the Saidian project of the novel is to argue that one’s racial heritage and identity can by no means be classified as wholly “black” or “white.”

policed by hegemonic society). It seems that if a woman is to give birth powerfully, if she is to fully access the powerful space of joint bodily and linguistic agency so perfectly captured in Sharon Olds’s poem “The Language of the Brag,” she will have to do so outside of the confines of the patriarchal order, a sort of feminine paradise that is forever promised and never obtained. Therefore, while perfectly powerful birth-giving may remain out of reach for these latter-day textual birthers, at least they can still retain a modicum of power in the fleeting moments of pregnancy and childbirth when they are briefly aligned body and mind with the pulses and signals of their transformative condition.


“Genesis, or the first book in the Bible (‘Subject to Authority’).” The Little Review 5.7 (10-1914): 56.


Rosenman, Ellen. “A Fish on the Line: Desire, Repression, and the Law of the Father in *A Room of One’s Own*.” *Virginia Woolf: Emerging Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Third*


APPENDIX B: “MAURICE” MATERNITY CLOTHES AD, JUNE 7, 1916

If you are a busy woman
and wish costumes grew on trees, so you could just pick one off whenever you needed it; if shopping means wasting valuable time, and being fitted (or disappointed) spoils a whole afternoon, why “ECIRUAM” GOWNS were just made for you.

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and love to rest without your corsets—and yet don’t want to be seen around in negligés—an “ECIRUAM” dress will solve your difficulty. You can pour tea or entertain your friends in it, and they will probably ask you who made your pretty frock.

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we can help you to appear smartly and becomingly clothed during the entire period, and to be, at the same time, ideally comfortable.

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