4. "Conscious Makers of People:" Achieving a Free Motherhood

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"Conscious Makers of People"

Achieving a Free Motherhood

> The most important force in the remaking of the world is a free motherhood.
>
> —Sanger, *Woman and the New Race*, 1

THE BIRTH CONTROL movement built a conservative position throughout the 1920s by arguing that, just as birth control would strengthen marriage, contraception was beneficial and indeed necessary to motherhood. The movement extolled motherhood in articles, illustrations, and fiction, reinforcing the mother figure in U.S. popular culture.[1] The ideal of motherhood that became prominent at the end of the nineteenth century continued to influence social policy and artistic production. Dana Seitler argues, "The figure of the mother emerged with new meaning and significance at the *fin de siècle* as a fantasy of moral idealism, a symbol of quintessential American identity, and moreover, as a privileged site of material and biological value" (62). For instance, in the 1908 *Muller v. State of Oregon* case, the Supreme Court upheld a state law prohibiting women from working more than ten hours a day, basing its judgment on social conceptions of women's role as mothers. As Justice Louis D. Brandeis stated in his brief, women needed protection for the "[p]roper discharge of her maternal function." Other protective legislation followed, making reproduction a public social interest rather than an individual woman's decision to become a mother. How did the birth control movement co-opt the figure of the mother to advocate for its cause?

1. While popular culture praised motherhood, more women in the 1920s were "refusing" motherhood by remaining childless, according to Cott.

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Assessing whether birth controllers believed in motherhood as woman's natural role or if this approach was a conscious strategy to veil a more radical agenda is difficult. The growing notion that scientific control was a more ethical choice than "natural" motherhood influenced visions of motherhood. As demographers Paul David and Warren Sanderson have demonstrated, birth controllers adopted a two-child norm, revealing their own use of fertility control while maintaining the marriage/motherhood system. Just as birth control advocates did not suggest that contraceptives were for use by the unmarried, by the 1920s the mainstream movement would have denied that the purpose of marriage was anything other than to reproduce.[2]

As with the invocation of sexuality within marriage, the movement's supporters depicted contraception nostalgically, as a protector against the threats of modernity. If this seems counterintuitive, it was: birth controllers extolled traditional motherhood while arguing that contraceptive technology improved motherhood. In 1920 Margaret Sanger attacked modern motherhood, linking birth control to a nostalgic and utopian mother love: "How narrow, how pitifully puny has become motherhood in its chains! The modern motherhood enfolds one or two adoring children of its own blood, and cherishes, protects, and loves them. It does not reach out to all children. When motherhood is a high privilege, not a sordid, slavish requirement, it will encircle all" (*Woman and the New Race* 232). This appeal resonated with both women and men because it simultaneously revealed the practical dangers of maternity and upheld a sense of the mother as long-suffering and pure.

The ideological link between contraception and health led to a campaign among public health officials to include birth control in a comprehensive infant and maternal health program. Women's groups such as the Children's Bureau supported the passage of the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act in 1921 to provide maternal and well-baby care.[3] Much of the period's pro-contraceptive fiction corre-

2. Stories and articles about single pregnancy began to appear in mass-circulation confession magazines in the 1920s, according to Kunzel. While single pregnancy was socially taboo, these magazine stories "rendered unmarried motherhood at once more public and more private: by making information about maternity homes widely accessible for the first time, these stories could relieve women and girls of having to confide in parents or doctors" (Kunzel 1466). Kunzel focuses her argument on stories after World War II. See Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie,* for a discussion of race and single motherhood after World War II.

3. Many activists worked to improve conditions for women and children, but these groups, including birth controllers, did not agree on methods. Sanger's American Birth Control League argued that, without the ability to control family size, the Sheppard-Towner Act wasted resources. But the common belief that motherhood was an assumed

sponded with public opinion on the importance of mother/child health. Indeed, a wide range of fiction added to the discourse of motherhood and birth control, from simplistic poems reiterating the trope of mother-goddess, to experimental writers who assessed the reproduction of mothering and female control.

Fiction often includes a vision of the "natural" or ideal mother, and many critics have analyzed how depictions of the mother figure reflect social values.[4] When the trope of the mother is read in the context of birth control, however, these analyses place motherhood and birth control too easily in opposition.[5] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, an advocate of voluntary motherhood, or the right of a woman to deny intercourse to her husband unless she wanted a child, is one earlier writer whose views on motherhood appear in her fiction. Her 1915 utopian novel, *Herland,* reflects Gilman's belief that "the desire for motherhood, though not the ability to be a good mother, is inherent in the female condition" (Lane xiii). But while Gilman believed that all women desired motherhood, she created in her novel a form of female-centered telepathic birth control. The all-female society of *Herland* reproduces via parthenogenesis, and women control their fertility with a thought—the *desire* for children impregnates them.[6] One of the male interlopers in the novel remarks

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practice for all women and that the conditions surrounding it needed to be improved as official public health policy linked these groups. See Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work;* Meckel; and McCann on the Sheppard-Towner Act; see Schoen on the fight for birth control in the public health system of North Carolina; see Rosen for an examination of "the political circumstances that led to deep divisions among women activists who shared a commitment to improving the conditions under which women mothered" ("Federal" 53).

4. Many feminist literary scholars discuss fictional representations of motherhood and childbirth. Burstein examines motherhood in texts by Jewish women writers, Daly and Reddy examine the position of the maternal subject as narrator, and Kloepfer looks at the mother figure in selected works of H. D. and Jean Rhys. Homans examines nineteenth-century women writers, while Hirsch takes a psychoanalytic approach. Brown-Guillory examines motherhood in twentieth-century African American texts. Hansen, Adams, and Cosslett discuss contemporary fiction. Poston argues that childbirth is ignored in literature and, when written about, is characterized by a male point of view and male language even if the writer is female. See Berg, Doyle, and Irving on race and motherhood.

5. Hansen, whose work focuses on fictional nontraditional mothers separated from their children, links second-wave feminism and "stories about mothers who give up or lose their children. Most obviously, in its critique of motherhood as a site of female oppression, feminism, *like birth control,* seems to threaten to take women away from the children they bear, or ought to bear" (19; emphasis added). This comment implies that birth control acts as a force separating women from their duty ("children they bear") or fate ("or ought to bear"). This negative view of birth control characterizes much of the work that focuses on literary representations of motherhood and childbirth. These works focus on women's attempts to write about childbirth, or on the mother/child relationship, thus offering more scholarship on maternal subjectivity.

6. Originally serialized in 1915 in Gilman's monthly magazine, *The Forerunner, Her-*

on the difference between this method and his own society's: "You see, they were Mothers, not in our sense of helpless involuntary fecundity, forced to fill and overfill the land, every land, and then see their children suffer, sin, and die, fighting horribly with one another; but in the sense of Conscious Makers of People. Mother-love with them was not a brute passion, a mere 'instinct,' a wholly personal feeling; it was—a religion" (Gilman, *Herland* 68). Gilman creates a utopian vision of true voluntary motherhood in a society where childcare is communal and all children are precious, in the process critiquing the inability of American women to exercise reproductive control. This utopian vision reinforced the role of woman as mother while inserting an inherent argument for female fertility control into public discourse.

Other authors, like Gilman, recognized the central role of motherhood in women's lives and in the larger society. They envisioned what having control of this process, being "conscious makers of people" rather than victims of biology, could mean. The ideal of motherhood was important in the birth control movement's rhetoric, and fiction offered the grounds upon which to experiment. How did the fiction forward the argument that motherhood was more sacred if it was limited? How did the "feminine" value of selflessness become a major battle in this war of words, encoded in arguments over economics and female bodily control? Was it more selfish to limit births, or to overproduce? How was birth control differentiated from infanticide and abortion? These questions build in complexity, and this chapter will follow that progression to analyze how birth control propaganda reinforced images of motherhood as part of its campaign to gain mainstream acceptance, particularly during the 1920s. This fiction adds to our understanding of the social discourse of motherhood shaping the terms of the debate that mediated female experience.

"Do women want children?"

"Do women want children?" asked the title of a March 1929 *Birth Control Review* article. The answer: "The experience of the Clinical Research Bureau Proves that They Do" (80). This evidence, taken from former patients of birth control clinics and gathered by the Clinical Research Bureau (founded in 1923 as a research center in New York City), reaffirmed that women naturally desire children. The cases cited emphasize the "blessing of contraception" in enabling women to plan

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land was published as a novel in 1979.

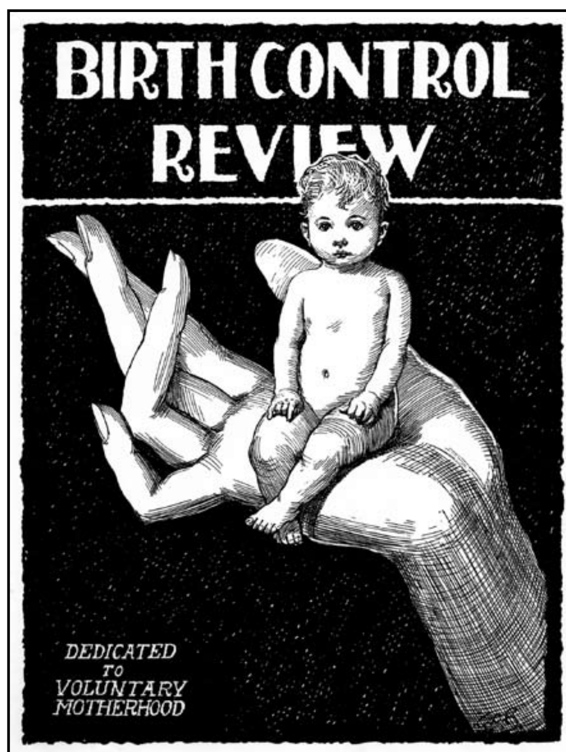

FIGURE 9. "Dedicated to Voluntary Motherhood," cover of *Birth Control Review,* February 1921.

their pregnancies. Thus, in answer to their critics, advocates responded that birth control is for women who want to create a better home for their families through scientific planning. This logic was consistent throughout the run of the *Birth Control Review,* and indeed is still a strong undercurrent in modern-day thought.[7]

Images of strong, healthy, loving mothers are central to birth control literature. Mother and child images commonly graced the cover of the *Review,* often in iconography invoking a biblical Madonna. Photographs reinforced this visual rhetoric, modernizing the mother and child trope by combining the idea of scientific birth control with the natural course

7. Signs abound that motherhood is still the assumed female destiny. One strand of current birth control advertising feeds this belief. An advertisement for Depo-Provera contraceptive injection reads, "Sure I'd like to have kids. Eventually. Until then it's Depo-Provera." In my own experience, gynecologists encourage women in their 20s and 30s to drink milk and take a multivitamin with folic acid to help future embryo development even if the purpose of the visit is a prescription for birth control. And many states give women applying for a marriage license a brochure with similar advice.

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of marriage and motherhood. This visual association of motherhood with contraception was reinforced by the subtitles, which changed regularly but often emphasized the well-being of children: among others, "Fewer Babies Better Born" (December 1927), "We Want Children of Choice Rather Than Children of Chance" (September 1927), "Dedicated to the Cause of Voluntary Motherhood" (October 1927), and "Fewer but Healthier Children" (February 1928) (fig. 9). Both the visual and written rhetoric reinforced the belief that women naturally want children. By repeatedly associating birth control with this image, the movement aligned itself with an ideology of sacred motherhood.

How, then, to reconcile birth control, which prevents pregnancy, and the constant romanticization of pregnancy and motherhood? Advocates argued that children must be wanted, that "the most important force in the remaking of the world is a free motherhood" (Sanger, *Woman and the New Race* 1). Thus, they criticized the conditions of motherhood, not the institution itself. In addition, while many of the stories and poems of the *Review* valorized the figure of woman as mother, other works complicated this simplistic association by distinguishing between glorious motherhood freely chosen and the bonds of unwanted pregnancy.[8] In Kate Mullen's short story "The Pregnant Woman" (1925), the protagonist enjoys a wanted pregnancy. The woman views her pregnant body as glorious and not "a dark thing to be hid" (170). Enraptured by her pregnancy, the title character feels that "[s]he was the great mother now, brooding, epic—god-like, as though from her warm breasts should soon flow milk to nourish man in the continuity of eternity" (190). Clifford Gessler's 1930 poem "Pregnancy" provides a brief example of a simplistic ode to motherhood. He extols the round, ripe body of a pregnant woman:

> You are the Race, you are the seeded Earth,
> you are the Torch that carries on the flame,
> and you are God made woman for a space.
> Now, as that inward glory lights your face,
> I, man, abase myself before your name
> and envy you the power of giving birth. (352)

The pregnant woman's creative powers should be worshipped by men. Healthy women experiencing voluntary motherhood are mythic mother-goddess figures, but uncontrolled fertility destroys women's health and

8. Other poetry and short fiction in the *Review* portrayed the mother ideal, including Katherine Mansfield's 1925 poem "The Mother," reprinted from the *New Republic*, which describes the feelings of a young mother holding her newborn son (317).

their ability to care for their excessively large broods; only birth control can restrain the excesses of nature and uphold the figure of the mother as goddess.

While many of the poems and stories in the *Review* valorizing motherhood were interchangeable with those found in popular women's magazines, others offer a more complex understanding of the pregnant body. Genevieve Taggard's 1925 poem "With Child" takes the perspective of the pregnant woman, awed and a little frightened by her condition.[9] Describing herself as "slow and placid. . . . Torpid, mellow, stupid as stone," the speaker enters a state of deep communion with her unborn child, an unthinking fecundity waiting for labor. This description is similar to Gessler's and Mullen's pregnant woman as ripe and natural. However, the poem, taken from Taggard's collection *For Eager Lovers,* reveals an ambivalence that was usually absent. Taggard's pregnant woman experiences the fetus as a stranger and an invader: "Defiant even now, it tugs and moans / To be untangled from these mother's bones" (344). The woman refers to the child as an "it" and herself as "big with loneliness." Engaged with the changes occurring in her body, the woman's experience is one not of unquestioned bliss but of fear and invasion. While the focus on the pregnant woman figure is consistent with other pieces in the *Review,* Taggard's poem does not participate in the simplistic idolization of motherhood but hints at the more complex analysis of the pregnant body made by modernist authors and published elsewhere.

Many of the propagandistic texts in the *Review* shifted the focus from mother to child while retaining strong sentimental appeals. These works adopt the consciousness of the unborn child, an effective trope often found in antiabortion works. In "Hymn of the Unborn Babe," the anonymous author writes:

> Out of the Land of Children's Souls,
> Comes forth this cry unceasingly:
> "Mother of mine, mother-to-be,
> Oh, bear me not unwillingly!" ("A Friend," 16)

Putting these words in the mouth of the unborn argues, in effect, that unwanted children would prefer never to be born. This powerful change in perspective shifts the ground of argument from the mother to the child.

9. Genevieve Taggard was also a contributor to *The Liberator*, the Socialist successor to *The Masses*.

This rhetoric established a discourse of rights—the child's rights, not the mother's. In the March 1929 *Birth Control Review* we find "Still Another Reason for Birth Control—The Right of the Child to Be Welcome" (67). Quoting from Sanger's "Woman, Morality, and Birth Control," the author argues that children are often harmed unintentionally when they are not planned for and wanted. Citing the "evil prenatal effect the emotional condition of the mother may have upon it," Sanger implies that unwanted children are often timid, fretful, feeble, and feebleminded.[10] She also critiques the unthinking "sentimentality about unfailing mother love," citing the strain and stress among poor women under which "the strongest mother love may turn bitter and cruel" (qtd. in "Still Another Reason for Birth Control"). The argument that bringing children into a world where they may suffer is wrong also circulated in poetry and fiction. This argument recalls the earlier socialist emphasis on economic injustice. George Lysander's 1918 poem, reprinted in the *Review* from the *New York Call*, addressed an unborn child. The poem transitions from a sense of wonder at the infinite variety and mystery of children, to a sad plea:

> O my beautiful babes! do not rush into this snare!
> You besiege the rotting doorways of infested tenements;
> You risk birth into dirt, disease, degradation;
> You must toil until you lose all sense of beauty;
> You will ache and agonize in body and spirit.
> You may be born on Fifth avenue and be unwelcome.
> Or on Canal street, where your brothers fight for food. (Lysander 4)

Entitled "Birth Control," the poem enacts many of the tactics used by the movement. The sentimental first half establishes a love for children, setting up the melodrama of the poem's later half, the direct appeal to the unborn not to seek entrance into the harsh world. The title clearly indicates that birth control is the solution. Advocates aligned themselves as sentimental lovers of mothers and children but insisted that it was their duty, for the sake of the children, to remind others that the world was not an ideal place.

The context of racial hatred in the 1920s and 1930s complicated images of mother love. The birth control relationship to better motherhood was reinforced by black leaders such as W. E. B. DuBois, who

10. The belief that a mother could "imprint" a physical or mental deformity on her unborn fetus was common in eighteenth-century medical debate. See Julia Epstein.

praised black female sacrifice and equated femininity with motherhood while arguing that a woman "must have the right of motherhood at her own discretion" (*Darkwater* 165). Motherhood is both the black woman's natural feminine and racial duty, yet, unlike during slavery, women should have discretion over their reproductive bodies.[11] Black clubwomen founded the "Little Mothers' League" for young girls, and *The Crisis*, much like the *Review,* featured pictures of mothers and children (Stavney 540). Anne Stavney notes "the defining characteristic of ideal womanhood became motherhood, and on this point many white and black men agreed" (538). Women as well saw motherhood as an ideology that could bridge racial divides. Writer Angelina Weld Grimke wrote, "If anything can make all women sisters underneath their skins, it is motherhood" ("*Rachel:* The Reason and Synopsis by the Author" 51). While black male political leadership and female activists praised motherhood, black women authors told a more complicated story. In a poem reprinted from DuBois's *The Crisis,* Georgia Douglas Johnson writes from the perspective of a mother who begs her spiritual children not to impregnate her body because the world is "cruel" and full of "monster men" ("Motherhood" 229). She writes in the poem "Motherhood,"

> Don't knock at my door, little child,
> I cannot let you in,
> You know not what a world this is
> Of cruelty and sin. (229)

The mother is protecting even her unborn children by ensuring that they are not born into a hostile society.

In their works of the 1920s, African American authors Angelina Grimke, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Mary Burrill, and Nella Larsen enter the debate over racism, motherhood, and fertility control. A loving mother would decide not to bear children, or would even kill her existing infants to protect them.[12] Stories and plays by Grimke, Burrill, and Johnson can be read as anti-lynching dramas, or "allegories of domestic and political

11. See D. Roberts 1997 on the relationship of race and reproduction; see Collins on how "issues of survival, power, and identity" are implicated in African American women's "motherwork" (61).

12. See Dawkins on the trope of infanticide during the Harlem Renaissance. Dorothy Roberts notes that slave women might have committed infanticide "in desperation to protect their children" (*Killing the Black Body* 49). The legacy of slavery and the role of infanticide in black reproductive control, explored more recently by Toni Morrison in her award-winning novel *Beloved*, reveal how the greatest sign of maternal love can be murder.

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protest" (English, *Unnatural Selections* 119). The stereotype that black men raped white women gained prevalence in the 1880s and continued to justify racial violence in the 1920s, when over 300 blacks were lynched (Bederman 47).[13] Daylanne English powerfully demonstrates how this violence inspired plays and stories that link lynching and infanticide. However, read more fully within the historical context of the birth control movement, we can further recognize the contraceptive argument in these fictions.

Two stories published in the *Birth Control Review* by Angelina Grimke sent the message that intelligent black people should reconsider having children when social racism is so strong. Published in 1919, "The Closing Door" is the tragedy of Agnes and Jim Milton, a happy young African American couple whose only sorrow is their childlessness. News that her brother has just been lynched in Mississippi mars the joyous occasion of Agnes's pregnancy. Stricken by the cruelty of the world, Agnes begins to see herself as "[a]n instrument of reproduction!—another of the many!—a colored woman—doomed!—cursed!—put here!—willing or unwilling! For what?—to bring children here—men children—for the sport—the lust—of possible orderly mobs" (October 1919, 10). She smothers the infant with a pillow shortly after its birth. By depicting the grim social reality of racism and brutality, Grimke's story argues for female control of the "instrument of reproduction" and leaves little doubt that birth control is preferable to insanity and murder. Birth control allows the woman to institute her own reproductive policy rather than following the dictates of racial betterment. Some critics, including Jennifer Fleissner and Gloria Hull, have been troubled by Grimke's choice to publish in the *Review.* Hull writes, "It seems somehow wrong that this tale of madness and infanticide would appear in such a journal and even more peculiar that the killing social reasons for Agnes's misfortune should be used as an argument for birth control among black people" (129). However, Grimke would have found a receptive audience in the *Review,* an audience familiar with many social ills. The birth control issue was complex, perhaps especially within the black community, where leaders like DuBois urged the survival of the race and black women's freedom to choose motherhood.

Impressed with "The Closing Door," the *Birth Control Review* solicited a story written specifically for its pages. In her 1920 "Goldie," Grimke returns to her earlier themes. Victor Forrest revisits the South to see his pregnant sister who had written that her husband had found out

13. See www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingyear.html.

about a white man "bothering" her. But Victor arrives too late and finds both his sister and her husband lynched: "Underneath those two terribly mutilated swinging bodies, lay a tiny unborn child, its head crushed in by a deliberate heel" (13). As Grimke makes clear, infants are no safer in this merciless society. The cycle of racial violence continues as Victor kills the man who had hurt his sister, only to then be lynched himself by the white townsfolk. These themes of racism and violence merge with an overall tone of futility, with the main characters isolated and withdrawn from the world. While Grimke presents motherhood as sacred, she also clearly implies that the world is too full of racial violence to bring black children into it. Although these stories do not explicitly mention birth control, they clearly do not advocate the birth of more black children and add fuel to the birth control movement. "All Art is propaganda and ever must be," DuBois wrote in his 1926 "Criteria of Negro Art," and he could have had Grimke's work in mind (*Writings* 1000).

The tension between the aesthetic and didactic functions of literature is evident in the critical response to another Grimke work dealing with lynching: *Rachel*.[14] According to Nellie McKay, some critics "objected to the propaganda aspects of the plot because they held firmly to the belief that black drama, as well as other forms of Afro-American creative writing, should focus strictly on artistic concerns and not become involved in political issues" (134). Grimke was accused of advocating genocide, her works interpreted as repeatedly arguing against black reproduction (Hull 121). But this criticism ignored Grimke's true audience: white women. Her play *Rachel*, staged in 1916 (but performed only three times) and published in 1920, used heavy-handed sympathy to convince a white, female audience of the tragedy of racism. An early title, *Blessed are the Barren*, reveals the play's message. Grimke characterized Rachel Loving as the perfect mother: set descriptions specify a prominent Madonna image, and the dialogue emphasizes Rachel's love of children and that she "is a graduate in Domestic science" (Grimke, *Rachel: A Play in Three Acts* 41). A close-knit, clean, and literally "loving" family, the Loving children are educated but cannot find professional work because of their race. Their father and half-brother had been lynched in the South when Rachel was very young, and even in the North they are snubbed and called "nigger." Confronted with racial hatred, Rachel decides that infanticide is preferable to raising children. She claims, "Why—it would be more merciful—to strangle the little things at birth" (28). Rachel struggles between her own love of children and the mounting evidence

14. *The Closing Door* was originally an early draft of *Rachel* (Hull 128).

that racism is cruelly destroying the children she encounters. She decides not to marry or to have children yet is haunted by dreams and visions of them. This is the tragedy: a woman so fit for motherhood will never have any and will indeed deny herself a loving marriage to ensure her barrenness. Indeed, the possibility of birth control within marriage is ignored, intensifying the tragedy.

According to Anne Balay, Grimke "rewrites birth control as the modern version of the protective infanticide whose appearance in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* registers the pervasiveness of the practice in American cultural lore" (491). Like Stowe, Grimke writes to a white audience to influence their thinking on racial issues. Georgia Douglas Johnson also used the trope of lynching to present melodrama in which infanticide protects children from a violent world. In the 1929 play "Safe," the mother, traumatized by a lynching in her southern town, kills her newborn son. The Doctor's words end the play, reporting the tragedy that has just occurred offstage: "When I looked around again she had her hands about the baby's throat choking it. I tried to stop her, but its little tongue was already hanging from its mouth. It was dead! Then she began, she kept muttering over and over again: "Now he's safe—safe from the lynchers! Safe!" (384) The contradictory duties of black motherhood in a racist world is a theme in much of Johnson's work. In "Maternity," from her 1922 collection *Bronze,* the speaker fears that her child is doomed by the "mezzotint" of his skin, and wonders if she dare "[r]ecall the pulsing life I gave, / And fold him in the kindly grave!" (42). Infanticide as an act of love supports the argument that birth control was necessary to African American women in the 1920s, at least while lynching and other racist acts threaten children with violence and oppression.

Competing Mothers in *Mother, Weeds, Quicksand,* and *Ryder*

As pro– and anti–birth control forces wrestled over the definition of good motherhood, one field upon which they struggled was the issue of selflessness. Earlier in the century Theodore Roosevelt encouraged women to have children and stop the decline in family size. In a speech to the National Council of Mothers in 1905, reprinted in the *Ladies' Home Journal* as "The American Woman as a Mother," Roosevelt blames women for many of the nation's problems, including the looming specter

of "race suicide":[15] "Unless the average woman is a good wife, a good mother, able and willing to perform the first and greatest duty of womanhood, able and willing to bear, and to bring up as they should be brought up, healthy children, sound in body, mind and character, and numerous enough so that the race shall increase and not decrease" (Roosevelt 3). The patriotic woman's duty was to marry and have a large family, and popular fiction reinforced this view, including Kathleen Norris's best-selling 1911 novel, *Mother.*[16] The text, praised by Roosevelt himself, reveals the romanticization of motherhood as a selfless act in the popular psyche. The novella, Norris's first (but not last) best seller, falls a few years before the focus of this study but provides insight into the context in which the birth control movement was operating, and the ideologies in which advocates were enmeshed.

Mother's title character is Mrs. Paget, a mother of seven who is romanticized as selfless and caring, serene and fulfilled. Her daughter, Margaret, is discontented with the genteel poverty and constant chaos of their household and dreams of a better life for herself than her mother's constant domesticity. Margaret states, "I've come to the conclusion that while there may have been a time when a woman could keep a house, tend a garden, sew and spin and raise twelve children, things are different now; life is more complicated" (12). Margaret's assertion that times have changed, that "you owe yourself something" other than domestic servitude, represents the modern ideas of the younger characters. But the novel presented these ideas as immature nonsense in the mouth of the selfish Margaret, and later replaced them with her womanly desire for home and family. After years of travel as the private secretary to a wealthy woman, Margaret falls in love with a man who idealizes Mrs. Paget, and succumbs to a romanticization of that role. The novel's title foregrounds its subject: Mother as role model and ideal of female fulfillment. As Anne Balay argues, this nostalgia creates an argument against birth control by enacting "a deliberate and effective intervention in the early twentieth-century debate about motherhood and reproduction" (472–73). That is,

15. Roosevelt is referring to the native, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant "race." Black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey made arguments similar to Roosevelt's, encouraging black women to reproduce in order to ensure that the race would survive.

16. Kathleen Norris published over 80 novels as well as "hundreds of short stories, articles, newspaper columns, radio scripts, film scripts, and reviews" (Davison, "Sinclair Lewis, Charles G. Norris, and Kathleen Norris" 504). She was married to Charles G. Norris, author of *Seed: A Novel of Birth Control*, which is discussed in the next chapter. They were part of a literary circle including Sinclair Lewis, Theodore Dreiser, and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

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Norris presents a simplistic view of motherhood as an alternative to birth control.

Kathleen Norris also plays upon class stereotypes in her argument for selfless maternity. The serene existence of Mother in her comfortable poverty contrasts against the wealth and beauty of Margaret's employer, Mrs. Carr-Boldt. Mrs. Carr-Boldt has only two daughters, indicating some knowledge of contraception. The size of Margaret's family is deemed "early Victorian" by Mrs. Carr-Boldt's wealthy friends, who discuss the benefits of a small family in this "complicated" world (111). Surrounded by luxury, Margaret at first adopts the wisdom of family limitation. But, as the "happy ending" demonstrates, this scene conveys an anti–birth control message. Norris depicts the indolent leisure of the wealthy gossips negatively, and Margaret realizes later that this life is selfish. Dr. Tennison, Margaret's love interest, waxes rhapsodically about Mrs. Paget, convincing Margaret that motherhood is woman's highest calling. "You know," Dr. Tennison muses, "in these days, when women just serenely ignore the question of children, or at most, as a special concession, bring up one or two—just the one or two whose expenses can be comfortably met!—there's something magnificent in a woman like your mother, who begins eight destinies instead of one!" (179–80). Only women who are frightened of responsibility would limit childbearing, he states. Deeply in love, Margaret sees marriage as her destiny and forgets traveling, a career, and "the idle ambitions of her girlhood," and dreams now only of the "miracle of a child" (185). The poverty of her childhood is forgotten in a wave of warmth toward her mother: "And suddenly theories and speculation ended, and she *knew*. She knew that faithful, self-forgetting service, and the love that spends itself over and over, only to be renewed again and again, are the secret of happiness" (189).

Mother reinforced Roosevelt's premise that "as for the mother, her very name stands for loving unselfishness and self-abnegation, and, in any society fit to exist, is fraught with associations which render it holy" (Roosevelt 3–4). Female happiness is found in selflessness, and through the daily drudgery of childbirth, childcare, and housekeeping she achieves sainthood. The female readers of *Mother* would have found its premise familiar, since this lauding of motherhood also was a common theme in magazine fiction. Ellen Hoekstra has shown that "[m]otherhood in the magazine fiction is considered a sacred office, for which a woman's superior intuitions particularly fit her. To a woman, motherhood is the ultimate fulfillment" (49). The extreme of this ideology led to the anti-contraceptive idea that any interference with fertility is murder. Margaret herself comes to this realization during her rapturous awakening to true

womanhood: "Good God! That was what women did, then, when they denied the right of life to the distant, unwanted, possible little person! Calmly, constantly, in all placid philosophy and self-justification, they kept from the world—not only the troublesome new baby, with his tears and his illnesses, his merciless exactions, his endless claim on mind and body and spirit—but perhaps the glowing beauty of a Rebecca, the buoyant indomitable spirit of a Ted, the sturdy charm of a small Robert" (K. Norris 194–95). This encapsulates Margaret's final stand on motherhood and birth control at the novella's end, and readers who sympathized with her youthful emotions throughout are brought to this conclusion with her. (Perhaps a few wiser readers realized that her mind may continue to change as she experiences the demands of childbirth and a large family.) It is easy to see why this novella "served as anti-birth-control propaganda, and was often given as a gift to engaged couples" (Balay 481). Following the classic romance plot that scripts women's lives from childhood to love, marriage to motherhood, *Mother* exemplifies fiction that perpetuated the ideology of natural and noble maternity.

While Kathleen Norris sent a message for all women to breed without efforts to control their fertility, her depiction of motherhood was surprisingly similar to that of the birth control movement's official propaganda in the 1920s. The movement aligned itself with idealized depictions of motherhood to attract supporters with conservative values. Thus, Norris's Mother is much like the serene mother figures in many pro-contraception texts. However, while grounded in the familiar mother-goddess, many pro-contraceptive texts complicated this message by focusing on conditions that improve motherhood. For instance, rather than the genteel, shabby poverty of Mrs. Paget, birth control fiction would depict the suffering of real poverty.

Mrs. Paget is selfless, and Margaret decides that it is selfish for a woman to "interfere" with nature. But advocates of contraception argued that the true selfishness was to bring children into the world who couldn't be properly cared for. Many American writers investigated the material conditions under which women mother, shifting the focus from the reproduction of a healthy state apparatus to the individual experience of women. These texts, by authors such as Edith Summers Kelley, Nella Larsen, and Djuna Barnes, present pro-contraceptive narratives of motherhood.[17] These authors reject the romantic vision of Kathleen

17. See chapter 5 for a discussion of the eugenic implications of Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground*, Edith Summers Kelley's *Weeds*, and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*. Allison Berg notes that Kelley may have taken the title of her novel from the 1922 short story "Weeds" by Richard Connell, published in the *Birth Control Review* (and discussed in the next chapter.)

Norris's self-sacrificing Mother, focusing instead on how class shapes the maternal experience.

Women did not experience marriage and motherhood in any universal way due to class, race, and other variables. Edith Summers Kelley's 1923 novel, *Weeds,* powerfully indicts popular conceptions of women's marital and maternal fulfillment.[18] Kelley focuses on the material conditions that affect female experiences of motherhood, depicting the toll this self-sacrifice takes on women's physical and mental health. Kelley narrates her protagonist Judith's journey from youthful hope to total exhaustion from her daily struggle as a tenant farmer and mother. Judith begins to view her children as parasites: "In such moments she hated them both, the born and the unborn, two little greedy vampires working on her incessantly, the one from without, the other from within . . . bent upon drinking her last drop of blood" (208). Motherhood is a competition for scarce resources and literal existence between woman and offspring. This physical struggle, with its life and death implications, is also present in childbirth. A chapter depicting Judith's first childbirth experience, cut from the original novel by an editor but included in the 1996 Feminist Press edition, graphically describes the violence of childbirth. Judith's body is out of her control, "driving, driving, driving, with the force and regularity of some great steel and iron monster" (345). She is dehumanized, an automaton, her body invaded and monstrous, and in other passages animalistic. Kelley wrote nearly seventeen pages depicting the graphic physical violence of childbirth in the original manuscript.

In *Why Women Are So* (1912), Mary Coolidge blamed women's fiction for perpetuating the silence surrounding sex and reproduction: In these romantic tales, she writes, "there were no puzzling and inevitable facts of nature—the lover was always pure and brave and considerate; the heroine beautiful and adored. There was no baby even, as in real life, to precipitate difficulties, except on the last page" (16). Kelley writes beyond the event of marriage, which ends the "roseate fiction" that Judith and her sisters read, romances that "allus ends when they git married. . . . They never tell what happened after. All they say is that they lived happy ever after" (120). This narrative trajectory allows *Weeds* to explore women's experiences within marriage and motherhood, including unwanted pregnancy. Judith's third child is unwanted, and she attempts to abort her fourth pregnancy, using the folk remedies of a wild horseback ride, a knitting needle, and "[p]ennyroyal and tansy and other

18. In *Mothering the Race,* Allison Berg presents a carefully developed reading of mothering in *Weeds* and *Quicksand*. See chapters 4 and 5.

noxious herbs" (285–86). This combination, and a failed suicide attempt, brings on the desired miscarriage, after which Judith sleeps apart from her husband. But when he begins sleeping with another woman to fulfill his "natural desires," Judith becomes resigned to her biological fate: "Henceforth she would accept what her life had to offer, carrying her burden with what patience and fortitude she could summon. She would go on for her allotted time bearing and nursing babies and rearing them as best she could" (331). The dehumanized language of the first childbirth scene is repeated, as Judith feels "like a dog tied by a strong chain" (330). Marriage may be the romantic goal of young girls who read romance novels, but once those vows are given motherhood seems inevitable. In the process, Judith becomes alienated from her previous identity as an artist and from her husband and children. Without birth control, Judith is doomed to reproduce the fate of her own mother, who died after three miscarriages and five live births.

Kelley supports an argument for birth control in her rejection of sentimental images of marriage and motherhood. A longhand revision of a draft of *Weeds* that was not included in the published version makes this point explicitly. Kelley writes, "Mrs. Sanger should send an apostle into these wilds," implying that birth control would ease Judith's hardships (qtd. in Berg 159). Although this reference was cut from the published text, *Weeds* contains many allusions to contraception, such as Judith's neighbor Hat's childlessness. Contemporary critics, such as Lawrence Stallings of the *New York World*, read the novel within the context of the birth control movement. Stallings wrote, "One may not accuse Miss Kelley of having written a pamphlet in a circuitous way to avoid those of the clergy who refuse the women of the poor the knowledge of birth control. She does not even suggest that a benign Government might issue pamphlets on the scientific breeding of the human race along with its gratuitous information as to the scientific breeding of hogs. She is too good a novelist for that, and she has a story to tell. The reader may draw his own conclusion as he witnesses the gradual disintegration of a woman's soul" (qtd. in Berg 185). Kelley's focus on the material conditions of motherhood challenge the predominant image of the selfless mother, inserting into popular discourse a more complicated exploration of female reproductive destiny.

Harlem Renaissance author Nella Larsen also offers a novel of the effects of motherhood on female identity that implicates selfishness and selflessness. To Helga Crane, the protagonist of Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928), physical reproduction leads to the loss of artistic and creative production. The novel does not focus on maternity but equates Helga's

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marriage and pregnancies with quicksand, sucking her inexorably toward death. "The children used her up," Larsen writes, leaving Helga "sinking into chairs" or "clinging desperately to some convenient fence or tree, waiting for the horrible nausea and hateful faintness to pass" (123). Larsen rejects marriage and motherhood as a happy ending, depicting instead the destructive impact of maternity on a woman who is not physically or mentally suited for it. Helga married to fulfill her sexual desires, a "selfish" motivation. Larsen glosses over Helga's early years as a mother, showing her later torn between wanting "to escape from the oppression, the degradation, that her life had become" and the knowledge that to leave her children "would be a tearing agony, a rending of deepest fibers" (135). Larsen ends the novel with Helga trapped in a cycle of endless childbearing that will surely end in death.

Nella Larsen's literary exploration of female sexuality is indicative of the growing willingness to explore sexuality in the 1920s. Other modernist writers, such as Djuna Barnes, experimented with fictional techniques, including shifting narrative perspective and altered chronology, to write about the taboo themes of abortion, unmarried sexuality, polygamy, homosexuality, and birth control. Published in 1928, *Ryder* was Barnes's first novel and was briefly a best seller. It provides a very untraditional portrayal of marriage and motherhood, as Wendell Ryder condemns monogamy and marries two wives. These female characters experience motherhood as "biological entrapment," to use the phrase of another modernist author, Ernest Hemingway, in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). In its depiction of multiple generations, *Ryder* demonstrates what Nancy Chodorow named the "reproduction of mothering," or the socialization of women into mothers. However, in *Ryder* this education emphasizes the suffering of repeated childbirth. In the novel's second chapter a woman in labor is described as "a terrible suffering centre without extremities" (8). She dies shortly after the birth of her fourteenth child, leaving the newborn in the arms of her oldest daughter. Thus, while pregnancy kills one woman, it reproduces the mother role in her daughter. Chapter 13, "Midwives' Lament," is a short poem about a woman who

> died as women die, unequally
> Impaled upon a death that crawls within;
> For men die otherwise, of man unsheathed
> But women on a sword they scabbard to. (93)

This brief but graphic poem shows women threatened by the life they contain while punning on the penis as sword. The greatest threat to the

woman warrior, then, is her own uncontrolled fecundity. Throughout *Ryder,* Barnes emphasizes the physical dangers of motherhood, undermining the image of motherhood as natural, uncomplicated, and fulfilling.[19]

In *Ryder,* mothers advise daughters not to marry or have children, a discursive attempt to end the reproduction of mothering. Ryder's wife Amelia tells her daughter, "don't let a man touch you, for their touching never ends, and screaming oneself into a mother is no pleasure at all" (117). Giving birth is a painful transformative process from "woman" to "wife" to "mother," with man's touch as catalyst. Kate, Ryder's other wife, feels trapped by motherhood and declares, "I'll kill it the minute it's born, but I'll bear it! . . . I'll stand over it like a distempered bitch before a wailing litter, and I'll stamp it into the ground, and be done with your filth! . . . I'll have my children, one, two, three, a dozen! until the mould breaks, and I'll stamp on them" (224). This passage disturbingly shows the psychological effects of uncontrolled fertility and depicts not the idyllic Madonna image but woman as violent animal, "a distempered bitch" dropping a litter, a body out of control.

Although Kate refers to a dozen children, family size declines through the generations of the Ryder family. As Sheryl Stevenson notes, this decline correlates with historical patterns, such that early generations have large numbers of children while later generations have only three or four. Although Barnes does not explicitly discuss birth control in *Ryder,* the text implies its presence through the decline in family size. As Stevenson notes, that Wendell's mother "probably benefited from some birth-control method (if only the currently most popular method, withdrawal) is suggested not only by the fact that she stopped having children so quickly, but also by hints that she continued to have many lovers" (100). Thus *Ryder* integrates historical trends in declining family size and infant mortality into its critique of motherhood.

Reading Djuna Barnes's experimental novel, *Ryder,* in the context of the birth control movement reveals how the cultural image of the selfless wife and mother became a contested issue within public discourse and served as one site for the acceptance of contraception. The novel contains many of the messages found within birth control arguments, such

19. According to Richard and Dorothy Wertz, maternal mortality peaked in 1920 at 90 deaths per 10,000 live births. It dropped steadily afterwards, due in part to increased use of hospitals for delivery, use of penicillin and antibiotics to fight puerperal fever, and advances in blood transfusion techniques (see especially 162). Maternal mortality rates for non-white women were up to three times higher than for white women. See also Hartmann 174–76.

as the evils of large families to women's health. Indeed, the stories of the female characters in *Ryder* correlate with the letters published in the *Birth Control Review* and collected in Sanger's *Motherhood in Bondage*. Many of these letters depict a state of "enslaved maternity," women trapped by their own bodies into repeated childbearing, broken health, and poverty. These voices merge with the voice of Barnes's characters, creating a space where women learn to articulate their ambivalence over morality and scientific control of the natural. Amelia Ryder tells her daughter, "Once I was safe enough and I could not let well enough alone, but must get myself in the way of doom and damnation by being natural" (95). Perhaps with birth control, the real letters to Sanger and the *Review* suggest, a woman could "be natural" without getting "in the way of doom and damnation" (95).

While Barnes employs arguments for birth control, she explicitly fought the same censorship law that so impeded the birth control movement. Even though she did not discuss contraceptive method, Barnes's descriptions of sexual intercourse caused her novel to be censored. Rather than rewrite her work, as Theodore Dreiser had earlier, Barnes published *Ryder* with stars to mark where text had been deleted by censors. In the preface she criticized the damage censors inflicted upon the "sense, continuity, and beauty" of her text (xi).

"Birth Control as a Prevention of Abortion"

The birth control movement established itself firmly against abortion as a way of aligning with traditional values such as motherhood. This section's heading is the title of an article by Benjamin T. Tilton, M.D., printed in the March 1925 *Birth Control Review*. Although illegal during the period of the American birth control movement, abortions could be procured from some sympathetic doctors, and "many women induced their own abortions at home. At drugstores, women could buy abortifacients and instruments, such as rubber catheters, to induce abortions" (Reagan 1245).[20] The public largely viewed both birth control and abortion as

20. According to Beisel, "Abortion, which during the first half of pregnancy had been legal in virtually all of the states until the 1850s, and which by 1870 was, according to physicians, moralists, and historians, still commonly practiced, if illegal, had become symbolic of the collapse of civilization" (25). Beisel notes, "During the early-nineteenth century abortion had been practiced primarily by desperate and unmarried women, but by midcentury married women increasingly used abortion to control the size of their families. Abortions were accomplished either through ingesting medicines that would end 'blocked menses,' poisoning the fetus without, hopefully, fatally poisoning the mother, or by resort

illicit practices, and the movement worked hard to remove the associative taint by consciously and vehemently arguing the difference between the two. Indeed, reason ten of the "Birth Control Primer," a regular feature of the *Review,* is "The Abolition of Abortion and Infanticide." "Year by year, in spite of prohibitory legislation, the murder of unborn children goes on, has gone on until it constitutes the scandal and tragedy of both Europe and America," continues the "Primer." The *Review* quotes from birth control advocates who abhorred "The Curse of Abortion" to overcome the common linkage in the minds of the general public. As Tilton argued, "Not only has Birth Control nothing in common with Abortion but it is a weapon of the greatest value in fighting this evil" (71).

By establishing abortion as an evil, the movement could set up contraception as a preventive of evil, and therefore as a good. Birth control would help to "eradicate this criminal practice" and save the "thousands of women who die annually from the effects of these illegal operations and other thousands become chronic invalids or permanently sterile" (Tilton 71). Tilton and other birth control advocates, such as Frederick Blossom, were careful not to blame the women who find themselves pregnant for the tragedy of abortion; rather, the blame rested "upon those forces of church and state which insist that these women be kept in ignorance of how to prevent pregnancy and thereby forestall any need of abortion" (Blossom 12).

Letters from readers of the *Review* supported the argument that contraception would eliminate abortion. Letters in the July 1923 issue, collectively entitled "Prevention or Abortion—Which?" set up a choice between two crimes: abortion or bringing an unwanted child into the world. One woman writes, "Since my last little girl was born, I can safely say I have been pregnant 15 times, most of the time doing things myself to get out of it and no one knows how I have suffered from the effect of it, but I would rather die than bring as many children into the world as my mother did and have nothing to offer them" (181–82). Other letters echo this woman's words and the painful choice they must make. These women have had abortions but found it "repugnant" and "sinful." They want reliable contraception to end the need for abortion and allow them to be better mothers to their existing children.

Although the fiction in the *Review* praised voluntary motherhood, it by no means advocated abortion for the woman who found herself pregnant when she didn't wish to be. Rather, writers made the argument for

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to mechanical means of abortion, such as injecting water into the uterus or rupturing the placental membranes with instruments" (26). For a discussion of how the state enforced criminal abortion laws, see Reagan.

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planned prevention. This allowed birth controllers to present their cause as a moral fight against the "great evil" of abortion. The *Review*'s fiction never depicts women having abortions or receiving information about them. Indeed, the stories reference abortion only occasionally as an unnamed but understood evil that kills the woman who was driven to it. The authors condemn abortion while demonstrating the lengths to which a woman faced with unwanted pregnancy will go. Thus birth control, the moral alternative, would save the life of the mother and lead to future wanted children.

While the prevention of abortion was often the subtext of the *Review*'s fiction, other writers made abortion an explicit topic in their works. While literary scholars have studied the role of abortion in fiction, especially women's fiction, they have not looked at the relationship between abortion and arguments for birth control.[21] These works implicitly assert the value of contraceptive knowledge by depicting the desperation of unwanted pregnancy. Authors provide insight into social perceptions of the "great evil" of abortion and the changing sexual reality. Not bound by an expressly political purpose of changing the laws regarding contraception and abortion, Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, and others could explore the issues through their writings of the 1920s.[22]

Most abortions were performed on married women who already had several children, demonstrating yet again how marriage could sanction some otherwise illicit practices if the woman's motherhood was already established. In T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), the section "A Game of Chess" is based on the link between marriage and motherhood. One middle-class woman recounts a conversation to another woman in a British pub. The question "What you get married for if you don't want children?" succinctly summarizes a common logic used by anti-contraceptive rhetoric: the purpose of marriage is to have children, so why get married if you don't want any? But the question is facetious, as the conversation in which it is asked clearly shows. The woman who is being asked is the mother of five already. It is not a question of not wanting any children, then, but of wanting to control how many and when. The conversation demonstrates the pressures on women within marriage, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the need for birth control to end

21. See Barbara Johnson and Judith Wilt on abortion in fiction. Many critics have examined the trope of abortion in works by specific authors of this period. For example, see Parry on Sinclair Lewis; Hollenberg on H. D. and Kay Boyle; Henninger, Urgo, and Eldred on Faulkner; Koloze on Lorraine Hansberry; and Renner on Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants."

22. Abortion became more accepted during the Depression, as will be discussed in chapter 6.

abortion. The woman feels she can't ask her husband for abstinence, as her friend warns, "he wants a good time, / And if you don't give it him, there's others will" (1416). She has already attempted to control her fertility with the last unwanted pregnancy, buying pills from a druggist in the hopes she'll miscarry: "It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said. / (She'd had five already, and nearly died of young George.) / The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same" (1417). Her health broken, and afraid to refuse her husband, the woman is caught in a conundrum that could be solved with reliable birth control. As Eliot realizes, even within marriage women need birth control or they will resort to abortion.

Other American authors of the 1920s depicted women seeking abortions to end an unwed pregnancy, including Theodore Dreiser in *An American Tragedy.*[23] The text supports the argument of Sanger and others that birth control would prevent abortion. When Roberta finds herself pregnant, and her lover, Clyde, unwilling to marry her, she feels trapped. At Clyde's suggestion she visits a doctor and, posing as a married woman who can't afford more children, asks for an abortion.[24] As the letters to the *Review* discussed above suggest, married women most often sought and could find abortions, even though most doctors were not sympathetic and were wary of legal repercussions. The doctor Roberta approaches replies, "There are those who feel it quite all right if they can shirk the normal responsibilities in such cases as to perform these operations, but it's very dangerous, Mrs. Howard, very dangerous legally and ethically as well as medically very wrong. Many women who seek to escape childbirth die in this way. Besides it is a prison offense for any doctor to assist them, whether there are bad consequences or not" (403). Roberta also tries "preventatives" that Clyde procures from a druggist to bring on a miscarriage. In the end she dies not from an illegal abortion but from her inability to get one: that is, Clyde murders her because he feels trapped by Roberta and her pregnancy. Dreiser's references to Clyde's ignorance of birth control and his conviction after Roberta's unwanted pregnancy

23. The rate of illegitimate births rose throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, according to sexual historians John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman (41, 42, 52). This trend generally continued during the first half of the twentieth century as strictures on premarital relationships relaxed somewhat. Hartmann notes that "during the Forties women demonstrated an increasing tendency to have children outside of marriage, as the rate of births to single women doubled during the decade. In 1940, single women bore children at the rate of 7.1 per 1,000 women aged fifteen to forty-four; by 1950 the rate had reached 14.1" (179).

24. According to Reagan, husbands involved in helping wives obtain an abortion were rarely arrested, but lovers were—revealing the importance of marriage in the eyes of the state (1260–61).

that "never again, without knowing a lot more than he did now, would he let himself drift into any such predicament as this" indicate that birth control could have prevented the tragedy of Roberta's death and Clyde's execution (376).

Authors treated abortion as an escape from enforced maternity (and paternity) in tones from tragedy to satire. Dorothy Parker's 1924 short story "Mr. Durant" takes on extramarital sex and illegal abortion as the topic of its satire. The blustery, self-satisfied businessman Mr. Durant has an affair with Rose, an office worker. When he finds out she is pregnant, Mr. Durant decides, "Cases like this could be what people of the world called 'fixed up'—New York society women, he understood, thought virtually nothing of it" (Parker, "Mr. Durant" 27). But he finds that he really knows nothing about how to get it done or whom to ask. While rumors float about the availability of abortion, especially among the wealthy, specific information was hard to find. Although respectable Mr. Durant is ignorant, one of Rose's friends knows of "a woman," and Mr. Durant provides the $25 fee. Parker sketches an emotionally distraught Rose and a callously shallow Mr. Durant, an exploitative sexual dynamic. Ignoring Rose's distress, Mr. Durant "chuckled" about his close call and immediately begins eyeing other young women. Parker satirizes Mr. Durant's middle-class values, his self-satisfied life, and his misogyny. While the story's overall message is neither pro- nor anti-abortion, its focus on sexual exploitation raises questions pertinent to the issue of contraception.

While the birth control movement positioned itself against the great evil of abortion, fiction demonstrates a more ambivalent exploration of the issue of reproductive control. Writers not associated with the political movement used their works to explore the complexity of the issue, including the relationships among economics, marriage, personal fulfillment, and creative expression with a woman's ability to be sexually active without pregnancy. Their texts joined a changing conversation that defined contraception within the parameters of social practice.

The birth control movement aligned itself with traditional values of motherhood and defined itself against abortion to persuade conservative politicians to change the law. There is an inherent contradiction here: the movement downplayed the radical possibilities to gain acceptance, so its rhetoric reinscribed motherhood even as the reality of access to birth control changed the paradigm of female reproductive destiny. While the mother figure was idealized, the movement distinguished between the conditions that allowed for ideal motherhood and sensationalized

the death, illness, and poverty that could result. Motherhood should be voluntary, a "conscious" decision to be an active "maker" of people. Some writers consciously saw their work as propaganda to advance the cause even as others engaged with the debate from a more artistic and exploratory stance. While the tension over the control of female bodies continued throughout the period, the terms of the debate shifted. The issue circulated through the fiction just as it did in political discourse. These genres engaged in conversation, providing a place for birth control and abortion in public discourse.