

Abortion Distortion: Correcting Literary Criticism's Misreading of Early Twentieth-Century Abortion Fiction

Jeff Koloze

ABSTRACT: This article discusses literary works on abortion from the first half of the twentieth century, identified by Meg Gillette in recent (2012) research. Gillette's analysis considers the works (mostly novels) using standard feminist literary theory, which views abortion primarily from the mother's perspective, ignoring the father and the unborn child. This article, however, expands the feminist interpretation by including a life-affirming perspective. Thus, a more inclusive reading of the fictional works is obtained which necessarily considers the perspective of the mother, the role of the father, and the status of the unborn child. The article suggests areas for future research of the works for a further right-to-life literary appreciation.

RESearchers studying how right-to-life issues were presented in the early twentieth-century owe a debt of gratitude to Meg Gillette, whose 2012 analysis considers how abortion, the first life issue, was treated in numerous fictional works from the first half of that century. Many of her selections are categorized as feminist manifestations that affirm reproductive "choice," but from the perspective of a life-affirming literary criticism they are obviously myopic perceptions of feminist principles. Nevertheless, the fictional works that Gillette identifies are substantial, not only in their literary merit but also in quantity. The works total over 15,000 pages, and so the effort to use the New Critical method of close reading (the most challenging methodology in literary criticism) would consume a significant amount of time for any faculty member, for his or her

students, or for a critic presenting a paper within the standard half hour.¹

Although Gillette's analysis of these works may be restricted by a myopic application of the feminist label, the benefit of her research is significant, if only as an opportunity for pro-life enhancement of an already sound literary foundation. The concluding paragraph of Gillette's essay identifies the focus of her research:

Today abortion is not just a transitive act in a woman's life, but the political issue on which nearly everyone has an opinion. Modern abortion narratives helped pave the way for this politicization of abortion. While, no doubt, modern abortion plots aren't just about abortion – they deal with a host of other issues ranging from “spiritual sterility” to “modern individualism” to “female creative power” to the “failure of left-wing politics,” etc. – certainly, one of the things modern abortion narratives are about is abortion. Taking advantage of its generic possibilities – its creative license to draw connections and invest symbolic meaning, its cloak of authorial innocence (i.e., the writer isn't speaking publicly about abortion, the fictional characters are), its broad audience of diverse reading publics – modern literature created a significant abortion discourse during the early twentieth century, *one that moved abortion into the realm of social reality, shattered the medical community's hold on abortion, and created interested publics ready and authorized to judge abortion for themselves.*²

Of course, the italicized apposition at this essay's end leaves much to be desired and is a site where faculty using right-to-life literary theories can challenge the anti-life feminist stranglehold on academic discussion of the literature. For example, the claim that early twentieth-century literature “moved abortion into the realm of social reality” involves a redefinition on which both anti- and pro-lifers can agree. In order to solve the problem of mothers killing their unborn, one must face directly the issue that modern literature “shattered the medical community's

¹ The author wishes to thank David Mall, a rhetorician colleague, who took time from working on his sixth book to present this paper at the annual conference of University Faculty for Life in Minneapolis on 30 May 2015.

² Meg Gillette, “Modern American Abortion Narratives and the Century of Silence,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 58/4 (Winter 2012): 663-87 at p. 680 (citations omitted, italics added).

hold on abortion.” Now, this is obviously a negative consequence, for it was the medical profession that worked to save both the unborn child and his or her mother from a procedure fatal to one and harmful to the other. The jargon of contemporary feminist literary criticism dominant in academia would relegate pro-life physicians to the ranks of despised patriarchal forces, oppressing women so that they could not exercise their so-called “freedom of choice” to kill their unborn children.

Moreover, whether modern literature on abortion “created interested publics ready and authorized to judge abortion for themselves” can be considered a public good only if the public making such judgments does so after being educated. Recent social history demonstrates the power of an uneducated and of an educated citizenry. An uneducated electorate (categorized as “the low information voter” by political theorists) brought Obama and his disastrous policies twice to the U.S. presidency. In contrast, the power of an educated population is similarly easy to illustrate, especially vis-à-vis the life issues. As abortion activists in the U.S. can testify, the success of the anti-life philosophy in this country was predicated on there being an uninformed public. It was imperative to deny the humanity of the unborn child conceived by rape or incest so that abortion exceptions could be promoted on the emotional level, just as hiding the extent of the initial *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* decisions that legalized abortion throughout the nine months of pregnancy for any reason whatsoever was imperative to maintaining the extent of the killing. That the rapid erosion of the anti-life philosophy can be attributed to better education on the life issues, especially through web technologies, is a serious concern for the abortion activists who control anti-life groups and entities like the Democratic Party and the mass media.

More importantly, Gillette’s work can be improved by considering several significant pro-life themes in the literature of the early twentieth century that have been overlooked. Instead of demonstrating the liberation of women from oppressive patriarchal structures (the traditional, outdated, and tiresome claim of customary anti-life feminist analysis of literature), passages from the novels that Gillette identifies illustrate the collapse of interpersonal relationships (familial and societal) when abortion is contemplated, especially in the area of social

contracts such as that existing between a physician and his or her patient. This essential characteristic of the fiction has two effects. First, the literature portrays a dehumanization both of the conspirators in the abortion and of the aborted mothers. Second, there is an aspect that is disturbing to the contemporary anti-life narrative in academic circles, which claims that the literature promotes abortion: in many abortion works identified by Gillette from the first half of the twentieth century the joy attending the conception of a child often transcends the drastic socioeconomic circumstances into which he or she is born. That the joy surrounding the creation of human life occurs at all in novels whose plots often aim to end the child's life by abortion is rarely noted by literary critics, and the absence of a discussion of the literary merit of these events will be partially redressed here.

The rhetorical premise of Gillette's work is commendable. For instance, she incorporates Tasha Dubriwny's "work on the 1969 abortion speak-out" as an example of "new work on multi-authored collective rhetorics by communication theorists." But her summary claim needs to be challenged by a consideration of evidence from the literature itself:

Long overlooked by both scholars of modern literature and scholars of reproductive history, modern abortion narratives played an important part in American abortion politics, teaching readers about criminalized abortion and calling them to judge for themselves America's anti-abortion laws.³

This author believes that the abortion works that Gillette cites say much more about the sexual attitudes of characters involved, about the social conditions that underpin a mother's consideration of abortion as the only choice available to her, and about the disastrous consequences of an abortion contrasted against a life-affirming choice.

Works that Casually Mention or Briefly Concern Abortion

Some items from Gillette's list have already been considered from a right-to-life literary perspective elsewhere and need not be repeated

³ Gillette, p. 667.

here.⁴ Other works already have a substantial body of critical commentary, much of it waiting for right-to-life re-evaluation to be provided by specialists.⁵ Other items must be relegated to future research when they are published or become more readily available.⁶ A

⁴ See, for example, a discussion of Theodore Dreiser's two-volume novel *An American Tragedy* (New York NY: Boni and Liveright, 1925) and Ernest Hemingway's short story "Hills like White Elephants," found in *Men Without Women* (New York NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), pp. 69-77, in the author's *An Ethical Analysis of the Portrayal of Abortion in American Fiction: Dreiser, Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Brautigan, and Irving* (Studies in American Literature 78; Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005). Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "The Mother," found in *A Street in Bronzeville* (New York NY: Harper & Brothers, 1945), pp. 3-4, is considered briefly in "Abortion in the African-American Community: Sociological Data and Literary Examples," *Lifeissues.net*, 16 March 2005, at <http://lifeissues.net/writers/kol/kol_17abor africanamerican.html>, accessed 19 May 2015) and in "Poetry on the Right-to-Life Issues of Abortion, Infanticide, and Euthanasia: Commentary from Scansion of the Poems," *Lifeissues.net*, 15 August 2004, at <http://www.lifeissues.net/writers/kol/kol_14poetry commentary1.html>, accessed 19 May 2015. Arnold Zweig's 1914 novel *Junge Frau* (Berlin: Gustav Kiepehnheuer Verlag A.G., 1931), translated by Eric Sutton as *Young Woman* (New York: Viking, 1932) is considered in my "European Abortion Novels: Documenting a Fidelity to the Milieu," *Life and Learning XI: Proceedings of the University Faculty for Life*, ed. Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: University Faculty for Life, 2003), available at <<http://uffl.org/vol11/koloze11.pdf>>, accessed 19 May 2015..

⁵ Such is the case with the following works by canonical authors: John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (New York NY: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1930), Faulkner's "That Evening Sun" (1931) in *Selected Short Stories of William Faulkner* (New York NY: Modern Library, 1961), pp. 78-100, Sinclair Lewis's *Ann Vickers* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1932), Ernest Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* (New York NY: Scribner, 1962, originally 1937), Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, later published as *The Wild Palms* (New York: Random House, 1939), Robert Penn Warren's *At Heaven's Gate* (New York NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1943), Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* (New York NY: NAL, 1944), Sinclair Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal* (New York NY: Random House, 1947), and Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (New York NY: HarperPerennial, 2001; originally published, 1943).

⁶ Throughout the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015, the following three items listed in Gillette's catalog were either unpublished or unobtainable:

large number of works on Gillette's list (thirty-five items) can be immediately disposed of as inconsequential, and not only because Gillette herself either only casually mentions the works in her notes or briefly cites or quotes from them within her article. This is the case with seven poems, seven short stories, five dramas, and sixteen novels.⁷

The seven poems include Mina Loy's "Parturition,"⁸ which contains such lugubrious imagery that the reader might wonder how the poem concerns abortion unless the topic is extricated from its heavy

Josephine Herbst's *Following the Circle* (1922), which remains unpublished; Dorothy Day's *The Eleventh Virgin* (New York: A. & Co. Boni, 1924), and Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* (New York NY: Jonathan Cape, Harrison Smith, 1930), both held in a non-circulating collection at The Ohio State University).

⁷ Three items from Gillette's catalog are classified as autobiography and contain minor references to abortion. (1) Bernhard J. Stern, ed. *Young Ward's Diary: A Human and Eager Record of the Years between 1860 and 1870 as They Were Lived in the Vicinity of the Little Town of Towanda, Pennsylvania; in the Field as a Rank and File Soldier in the Union Army; and Later in the Nation's Capital*, by Lester Ward, who became the first Great Sociologist This Country Produced (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935). This diary documents that in 1864 his wife took an abortifacient, that the "pills" and "the instrument" (p. 150) she took were "ineffective" (p. 151), and that he saw a doctor "concerning secret affairs between me and my wife" (p. 152). (2) Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *Cross Creek* (New York NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942). Rawlings's *Cross Creek* contains ambiguous language where references to "a remedy" for a mother with many kids, a woman who "needed a minor operation" (p. 136), and a character needing an "operation" that is clearly not an abortion (pp. 203-04) are balanced by a reference to ergot as "killer of human unborn" (p. 360), a woman of the town getting a "remedy" [a tubal ligation?] (p. 361), and a summary assertion that life is better than death (pp. 364-65). (3) Betty MacDonald, *The Egg and I* (New York NY: Harper, 1945). Besides references to "contagious abortion" of Holstein cattle (pp. 43, 99), Betty MacDonald's *The Egg and I* mentions human abortion. A townsman offers to abort the narrator with "a plain old-fashioned buttonhook" (p. 99); the narrator thinks he should be arrested, but another person just laughs at his suggestion (p. 100). Asafetida bags are used either as a contraceptive or an abortifacient, and there is a final reference to "home-aborting" (p. 224).

⁸ Mina Loy, "Parturition" in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York NY: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1996, originally published 1913), pp. 4-8.

symbolism. Not even the hyperbatonic “Mother I am” (line 7) could suggest anything but a life-giving persona. Edgar Lee Masters’s “Editor Whedon”⁹ mentions abortion explicitly only in the last line: “here close by the river” is the place where “abortions are hidden” (line 132). The mention of abortion in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*¹⁰ is just as brief and seems only to give Gillette an opportunity to compare it with another abortion-related work:

Other abortion narratives use literary allusion to draw together a community of women having abortions. In Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, for example, Dewey Dell’s father uses her abortion money to buy his new teeth, recalling Lil in Eliot’s *The Waste Land* using the money to fix her teeth for an abortion instead.¹¹

E.E. Cummings’s “This Little”¹² casually recounts the abortion of a “pair [who] had a little scare [that] was aborted” (line 18). Ruth Lechlitner’s “Lines for an Abortionist’s Office” is an apostrophe to the “State.”¹³ The reason why a mother would choose abortion is purely economic, as the persona in this parenthesized couplet indicates: “(Better to let the unborn die / Than starve while others feast).” William Carlos Williams’s “A Cold Front” (1944) documents a mother’s efforts to obtain abortifacient pills.¹⁴ The physician persona’s response to her request (“In a case like this I know / quick action is the main thing,” line 131) is, as Gillette mentions, ambiguous: “will he perform an abortion quickly, or throw her out of the office quickly?”¹⁵ Lastly, Randall

⁹ Edgar Lee Masters. “Editor Whedon” (1914) in *Spoon River Anthology*, new edition (New York NY: Macmillan, 1944), pp. 131-32.

¹⁰ T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922) in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M.H. Abrams, 7th ed., vol. 2 (New York NY: W. W. Norton, 2000), pp. 2369-83.

¹¹ Gillette, p. 675.

¹² E.E. Cummings, *No Thanks* (New York NY: Golden Eagle Press, 1935).

¹³ Ruth Lechlitner, “Lines for an Abortionist’s Office,” available at <<http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/lechlitner.html>>, accessed 19 May 2015.

¹⁴ William Carlos Williams, “A Cold Front” (1944), *The Doctor Stories*, ed. Robert Coles (New York NY: New Directions, 1983), p. 131.

¹⁵ Gillette, p. 682.

Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner"¹⁶ only metaphorically concerns abortion in the place where the gunner is perhaps being compared to an unborn child. If these poems concern abortion, then their suggestion or explicit mention of the abortion is used more as a literary device than as a contentious social issue being explored at length in a larger literary form such as a short story, a drama, or a novel.

The seven short stories include Gertrude Stein's "The Good Anna."¹⁷ Although Gillette identifies it as a work involving lesbians concerned with abortion, certain details of the short story suggest that it is not a feminist tract on abortion as a liberating force in the life of an oppressed woman. Mrs. Lehntman suffers a psychological conflict between her career and her relationship with her husband. A midwife who "loved best to deliver young girls who were in trouble" (repeated twice, at pp. 31, 52), Mrs. Lehntman married a doctor who "got into trouble doing things that were not right to do" (p. 64). That she eventually left her husband indicates that she has resolved the psychological conflict by dropping her abortionist husband.

Six other short stories mention abortion as peripherally as Stein's does, but they do emphasize more the social effects of the abortion decisions. William Faulkner's "Hair"¹⁸ mentions a girl who is in "trouble" and who tried to self-abort (pp. 143-44).¹⁹ Claude McKay's "Truant"²⁰ briefly mentions a woman who is considering abortion but

¹⁶ Randall Jarrell, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" (1945) in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salzer, and Jon Stallworthy (New York NY: W. W. Norton, 1997), p. 889.

¹⁷ Gertrude Stein, "The Good Anna," (1909) in *Three Lives* (New York NY: Modern Library, 1933), pp. 9-82.

¹⁸ William Faulkner, "Hair" (1931) in *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York NY: Vintage International, 1976), pp. 131-48

¹⁹ Theresa M. Towner and James B. Carothers, *Reading Faulkner: Collected Stories; Glossary and Commentary* (Jackson MS: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2006). Towner and Carothers do not mention abortion at all in this work but instead focus on how "'Hair' has often attracted readers interested in identifying and tracing various patterns of character, technique, and theme in Faulkner's fiction" (p. 74); abortion, apparently, is not one of the themes.

²⁰ Claude McKay, "Truant" in *Black American Short Stories: One Hundred Years of the Best*, ed. John Henrik Clarke (New York NY: Hill and

(because a lover will support her having the child) gives birth. Langston Hughes's "Cora Unashamed"²¹ functions as an African-American rebuke to social values that would deem the child of a white Southern mother and a Greek father as unworthy to live. After the aborted mother euphemistically tells Cora that "the baby's gone" (p. 42) Jessie dies, and it is Cora who bravely speaks about the abortion at Jessie's funeral, chastising her family and the community.

Meridel LeSueur's "Annunciation"²² is a refreshing break from the standard narrative of mothers who seek abortion as a solution to dire economic circumstances or social disgrace. The narrator, four months pregnant, notes that many are unemployed. A further discouragement is that her husband often comes home drunk. Worst of all, he encourages her repeatedly to abort. In contrast, the narrator asserts that her writing is a "kind of conversation I carried on with myself and with the child" (p. 214). She does not tell anybody that she is pregnant because she "didn't want to be pitied" (p. 215). She further writes that "I've never heard anything about how a woman feels who is going to have a child" (p. 218). The story ends with a metaphoric birthing episode. The narrator writes that it was "as if it [the child] suddenly existed" (p. 219).

The final two short stories from the forties (both from Dorothy Parker), however, return to life-denying fiction. The eponymous main character in "Mr. Durant" impregnates his stenographer.²³ Unlike the mother in McKay's story, Rose aborts at the hands of "a woman" (p. 41). "Lady with a Lamp" features the appropriately named Mona, abandoned by the father of the child after her abortion.²⁴ Abortion is mentioned as "the only possible thing" that a mother in her situation

Wang, 1993), pp. 41-54.

²¹ Langston Hughes, "Cora Unashamed" (1934), ed. Akiba Sullivan Harper (New York NY: Hill and Wang, 1996), pp. 40-49.

²² Meridel LeSueur, "Annunciation" (1936) in *The Best Short Stories 1936 and the Yearbook of the American Short Story*, ed. Edward J. O'Brien (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1936), pp. 210-20.

²³ Dorothy Parker, "Mr. Durant" (1944) in *The Portable Dorothy Parker*, ed. Marion Meade (New York NY: Penguin, 2006), pp. 33-46.

²⁴ Dorothy Parker, "Lady with a Lamp" (1944) in *The Portable Dorothy Parker*, ed. Marion Meade (New York NY: Penguin, 2006), pp. 246-53.

could have done, or so the unnamed narrator asserts (p. 251). Even the word “abortion” is unmentionable. The narrator’s intention in saying “Even if you didn’t have an—” (p. 252) is obvious, given the form of the indefinite article used before words beginning with a vowel, and abortion is the only word that completes the thought.

The five dramas include Eugene O’Neill’s *Abortion*.²⁵ Jack, the main character, seems to be a successful young college man who has everything going for him. He is a “star player” at baseball, and Evelyn, his fiancée, is such a demure young woman that she blushes at the mention of her future marriage. This idyllic romance is shattered when Jack’s lust manifests itself. He asserts that he was not the same man who made Nellie, a young working girl, pregnant, for “it was the male beast who ran gibbering through the forest after its female thousands of years ago” (pp. 154-55). Jack argues that the culture’s ethics (especially the principle that he should save his sexual urges for marriage) are wrong, not his own moral behavior, which is based on simple animal instinct. After the killing of the unborn child, Nellie’s brother Murray indicates that Jack is also a victim insofar as he abandoned his fatherly responsibilities by encouraging Nellie to abort. “She might’a lived,” Murray asserts, “if she thought yuh cared, if she heard from yuh; but she knew yuh were trying to git rid of her” (p. 159). Even though Jack replies in a moment of redemption that Nellie’s death “was an accident; that I would gladly have given my own life rather than have it happen” (p. 163), the drama ends with his gunshot suicide. Given such sorrow, it would be difficult to conclude that O’Neill’s drama asserts that abortion is a liberating social force instead of a destructive one.

The four remaining dramas refer to abortion is much less detail. Theodore Dreiser’s *The Girl in The Coffin*²⁶ opens with the death of Mary, who died of complications from an “operation” (p. 20). The father of the child is unknown, and the plot concerns more the identification of the father instead of disclosing Mary’s motivations to

²⁵ Eugene O’Neill, *Abortion* (1914) in *Ten “Lost” Plays* (New York NY: Random House, 1964), pp. 139-65.

²⁶ Theodore Dreiser, *The Girl in The Coffin: Plays of the Natural and the Supernatural* (New York NY: Dodd, Mead, 1916), pp. 7-53.

abort. It is presumed that Ferguson, the strike leader whom Mary's father respects, is the father of the aborted child. In even sparser detail, Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*²⁷ contains a curiously feverish dialogue between a "Man" and a "Woman" who talk about and eventually decide on abortion. Sidney Kingsley's *Men in White*²⁸ relates the love affair of Barbara, a nurse who falls for Ferguson, an intern who is already engaged. After a brief love affair of three months, Barbara becomes pregnant and has an abortion. Although Ferguson presumed that Barbara "knew how to take care of herself" (105), the idea of abortion as a "help" occurs repetitively over several pages (pp. 106-08). Eventually, Barbara dies. The final drama, Irwin Shaw's *Sons and Soldiers*,²⁹ set in 1915, involves a situation where medical authority would consider killing the unborn child to save the life of the mother. When John tells his wife Rebecca that she should abort, the unborn child Andrew appears to her as an adult. Several scenes show how Andrew would grow up to be brokenhearted, and on this basis Rebecca wants Andrew aborted. Andrew appears again, asserting the value of his life, and Rebecca finally chooses life.

The sixteen novels include Edith Wharton's *Summer*,³⁰ which depicts a more impure side of New England life. Royall has had sex with Charity, a young woman under his guardianship, who has a "tainted origin" and who does not know who her mother was (p. 114). Although he confesses that he raped Charity, Royall wants to marry her. Charity finds more fulfilling sexual love with a younger man by whom she becomes pregnant. Given that the setting is at the turn of the twentieth century and that the environment is a backwards New England village, it is plausible that Charity "had come to this dreadful place [an abortionist's office] because she knew of no other way of making sure

²⁷ Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal* (London UK: Nick Hern Books, 1993; originally published 1928).

²⁸ Sidney Kingsley, *Men in White: A Play in Three Acts* (New York NY: Covici, Friede, 1933).

²⁹ Irwin Shaw, *Sons and Soldiers* (New York NY: Random House, 1944).

³⁰ Edith Wharton, *Summer* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2004; originally published 1917), pp. 89-210.

that she was not mistaken about her state” (p. 183). If there were any doubt about the outcome, it is resolved when she goes to the Mountain where she was born because “she only knew she must save her baby” (p. 188).³¹

Although the abortion dialogue between the main characters is also discussed elsewhere,³² this discussion will highlight Gloria in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Beautiful and Damned*³³ more than any other character since she represents the liberated woman of the flapper era whose pronouncements about quality of life correspond with most anti-life thinking of the early twentieth century. The claim that Beauty will come to America as a “society girl” (pp. 27-30) is a fitting introduction to Gloria, whose list of attributes fits well with the American version of the New Woman of the early twentieth century. At twenty-two, Gloria does not want to marry or have children. For Gloria, “motherhood was also the privilege of the female baboon” (p. 393). She refers to “one’s unwanted children” (p. 147), and her response to a suggestion that she and her husband have a child is “we can’t afford it” (p. 299). Gloria’s opinion of the elderly is just as negative. Her attitude toward the old (things and people) is expressed thus: “trying to preserve a century by keeping its relics up to date is like keeping a dying man alive by stimulants” (p. 167). Gloria says ordinary people are “*people [...] who haven’t any right to live*” (p. 360; italics in original). In a delirium induced by influenza, Gloria said that she would “sacrifice a hundred thousand of them, a million of them [people] for one palace full of pictures from the Old World and exquisite things” (p. 394).

Gloria marries Anthony Patch, primarily because of the expected

³¹ Carl Sprague reports that Yale Hill Pictures’ script “is very faithful to Wharton’s extraordinary book” and that “Current plans are to shoot in July 2015.” Interested persons may contact him at carlsprague.com. Carl Sprague, “Re: Progress of Wharton’s Summer,” message to the author (25 Sept. 2014).

³² See the author’s *An Ethical Analysis of the Portrayal of Abortion in American Fiction: Dreiser, Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Brautigan, and Irving* (Studies in American Literature 78; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen P, 2005).

³³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and Damned* (New York NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950, originally 1922).

fortune from his millionaire grandfather. Although Gloria, now twenty-three, wants to have a child three years forward, she is already pregnant, and the conversation about the baby is like that between the lovers in Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants":

"Do you want me to have it?" she asked listlessly.

"I'm indifferent. That is, I'm neutral. If you have it I'll probably be glad. If you don't – well, that's all right too."

"I wish you'd make up your mind one way or the other!"

"Suppose you make up your mind."

She looked at him contemptuously, scorning to answer.

"You'd think you'd been singled out of all the women in the world for this crowning indignity."

"What if I do!" she cried angrily. "It isn't an indignity for them. It's their one excuse for living. It's the one thing they're good for. It is an indignity for me."

"See here, Gloria, I'm with you whatever you do, but for God's sake be a sport about it."

"Oh, don't *fuss* at me!" she wailed. (p. 204, italics in original)

This interchange develops Gloria's character and philosophy more than the plot, for it is disclosed a few pages later that Gloria was never pregnant in the first place.

Arthur Stuart-Menteth Hutchinson's *This Freedom*³⁴ concerns childrearing practices more than abortion. Developing another aspect of the New Woman of the early twentieth century, Rosalie rejects the idea that a woman's career should end with marriage. She even abandons her distaste of men altogether when she marries and has children. Rosalie resents her third child, whom she originally did not want, and goes to work instead of staying home with her children. Abortion is only mentioned when her daughter is dying after aborting, and it is only at this point that Rosalie realizes the importance of sacrifice. At novel's end, renouncing their modern views, Rosalie and her husband raise a grandchild in the old-fashioned way.

³⁴ A.S.M. Hutchinson, *This Freedom* (London UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922).

Edith Summers's *Kelley's Weeds*³⁵ is replete with anti-life statements and actions. Coming from a family with no religion, Judy and her lover fornicate with impunity: "Accident was kind to them and did not thrust upon them with untimely speed the physical results of the sweet intimacy that they enjoyed" (p. 103). When Judy's eventual "sickness" is discovered as pregnancy, the negative images of the unborn and disastrous effects of too frequent maternity permeate the novel. "So many babies" contribute to aging a thirty-year-old man (p. 167); a child "eats up" another man's capital (p. 172). Judy reflects that a wandering horse trader's life "would be a jolly one, if one had no babies" (p. 179). She has "an unwelcome pregnancy" (p. 189). Judy "would slap him [Bill, her son] savagely" (p. 208). She views another of her unborn children as "a vampire" (p. 208). Care for her children is "bondage" (pp. 217, 219). When she is pregnant again, Judy concludes that she did not want to be pregnant with an "unwelcome baby" (p. 245). When she becomes pregnant by a visiting evangelist, Judy tries to self-abort by riding horseback and using a knitting needle and other abortifacients. While a reference to "blood-soaked clothes" probably indicates that she has miscarried (p. 288), Judy vows never to have more children (pp. 299-300). Judy reflects on her daughter's life and "the sordid burdens of too frequent maternity" (p. 321). At novel's end, Judy is resigned to her nature as a "child bearing" woman (p. 331). Even in an unpublished scene of her son's birth, which would have followed chapter eleven, the joy of childbirth is doubted.

The next two consecutive novels say more about the effects of sexual licentiousness than they do about how abortion affects a mother. Although Katharine Faraday, the main character in Frances Newman's *The Hard-Boiled Virgin*,³⁶ suspects she may be pregnant, her period would eventually come, and so the need to explore abortion as an option to resolve her crisis is eliminated. What is distressing at novel's end is that, even though Katharine asserts that "she was as glad to be rid of her

³⁵ Edith Summers, *Kelley's Weeds* (Old Westbury CT: Feminist Press, 1982, originally published 1923).

³⁶ Frances Newman, *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* (Athens GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1980, originally published 1926).

virginity as she was to be rid of her religion” (p. 284), the uncertainty of the victory is obvious: “she knew she would go on discovering that one illusion had been left to her a minute before and that she would discover it every time she heard another illusion shattering on the path behind her” (p. 285).

Similarly, Josephine Herbst’s *Money for Love*³⁷ depicts another woman’s sexual licentiousness, although abortion affects the main character’s sexual activity dramatically. Having wanted the baby whom she aborted, Harriet’s sexual license increases substantially afterwards. In fact, she becomes whorish after her abortion: “It got around in Indianapolis that she was easy and she became very popular” (p. 117). The denouement of marrying her lover and sailing for Europe seems like an escape rather than the attainment of a mutually-desired goal, especially when the decision to marry was based on mere proximity and not on deep love or intense philosophical principle: “He said that as long as they were in the building they might as well get a dog license and a hunting license and then they would be fixed” (p. 285).

Agnes Smedley’s *Daughter of Earth*³⁸ illustrates how deeply an anti-life philosophy can affect a character’s life. Apparently, the bias against life that Marie, the main character, exhibits throughout the novel is a family trait. Her sister Helen is sterile “because I’ve had two operations” (p. 97). Marie calls her unborn child “the enemy within me” (p. 205). For her first abortion, a doctor devises a spurious case of Marie’s having tuberculosis to justify aborting her; there is no such compunction for her second abortion. Her epideictic for freedom and especially, life (“life itself is the one glorious, eternal experience, and that there is no place here on this spinning ball of earth and stone for nothing but freedom”) becomes ironic and accusatory: “For we reach scarce a hundred before we take our place by the side of those whom we have directly or indirectly injured, enslaved, or killed” – her two unborn

³⁷ Josephine Herbst, *Money for Love*. Rediscovered Fiction by American Women: A Personal Selection (New York NY: Arno Press, 1977, originally published 1929).

³⁸ Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth* (New York NY: Feminist Press, 1987, originally published 1929).

children, of course, falling in the last category (p. 280). Ultimately, Marie affirms, “I hate life.... I hate love!” (p. 405, ellipsis in original) and, thus, at novel’s end, she wallows in being alone. In the Afterword Nancy Hoffman claims that Marie’s views are not merely fictional but biographical, for Smedley’s personal beliefs were that “childbearing [...] must not happen” (p. 410) and that “Love expressed in sex enslaves and humiliates married women”³⁹ (p. 412).

The next two novels provide an African-American perspective on the topic of abortion, both adding the possibility of infanticide to the plot. The only reference to abortion in Wallace Thurman’s *The Blacker the Berry*⁴⁰ occurs when Geraldine is pregnant and has “tried everything and now it’s too late” (p. 805). Since the child is born with abnormalities, the parents think of infanticide: “both wanted to kill it” (p. 812). The child’s condition, however, is curable. George S. Schuyler’s *Black No More*⁴¹ considers the success of a chemical product that changes African-American skin color to that of whites. Although the first inclination of the formerly black Matthew is to encourage Helen, his white wife, to abort so that they can enjoy the financial success created by the anti-black product, she gives birth to a black child. Matthew contemplates having the doctor kill his son, but it is Helen who manifests a liberal view of race, knowing she had “a beautiful, brown baby” (p. 154).

Tess Slesinger’s *The Unpossessed*⁴² illustrates the devaluation of individuality and human life in general. What she says to a lover – “You’re just a parenthesis, darling, in life’s long dreary sentence” (p.

³⁹ Nancy Hoffman, Nancy, Afterword (1929) to *Daughter of Earth* by Agnes Smedley (New York NY: Feminist Press, 1987), pp. 407-26.

⁴⁰ Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry* (1929) in *Harlem Renaissance: Five Novels of the 1920s: Cane, Jean Toomer; Home to Harlem, Claude McKay; Quicksand, Nella Larsen; Plum Bun, Jessie Redmon Fauset; The Blacker the Berry, Wallace Thurman*, ed. Rafia Zafar (New York NY: Library of America, 2011), pp. 687-831.

⁴¹ George S. Schuyler, *Black No More* (New York NY: Modern Library, 1999; originally published 1931).

⁴² Tess Slesinger, *The Unpossessed*, Novels of the Thirties Series (Old Westbury NY: Feminist Press, 1984, originally published 1931).

110) – is matched by her declaration that “life is the longest distance between two points” (p. 127). The final chapter, “Missis Flinders,” details Margaret’s self-abortion (pp. 339-57), wherein a unique perspective of the role of the father of the aborted child is offered, Margaret acknowledging that Miles, too, “had had an abortion” (p. 353).

Kay Boyle’s *My Next Bride*⁴³ presents a main character whose ambivalence about aborting or carrying a child to term runs throughout the novel. Victoria may be persuaded to abort because she thinks how her deceased mother would react to news of her being single and pregnant. She contemplates taking abortifacient pills: “Two of them six times a day until the murder is committed” (p. 280) and then “Four of them ten times in the day” (p. 285). “For two cents I’d have the baby” (p. 285) is countered ten pages later by “I’m taking some pills. [...] I’m trying not to have a baby” (p. 295). The abortifacient pill count increases: “Six of them twelve times a day and it doesn’t make any difference” (p. 296). Ultimately, she has “an operation” (p. 311).

Two novels by Josephine Herbst follow in the chronology. Herbst’s *The Executioner Waits*⁴⁴ repeats the archetype of a mother who wants to abort but who dies before the decision to abort can be made. Rosamond has “fears of pregnancy” (p. 190). When she becomes pregnant by her lover, she considers it an “awful thing” (p. 208). Jerry, the weak-willed father, says, “‘You have to decide, it seems to me,’ said Jerry, biting his fingers. ‘It’s your life. I haven’t the right’” (p. 209). Although Rosamond finds an abortionist, she dies in a truck accident, thus eliminating the need to decide the morality of her abortion choice. At novel’s end, Rosamond’s mother is deluded into thinking that her daughter wanted the baby. Herbst’s *Rope of Gold* concerns miscarriage more than voluntary abortion.⁴⁵ Victoria loses her baby early in the story and then continues to think of her miscarried child throughout the novel. Abortion may be considered when Steve regrets putting his girlfriend

⁴³ Kay Boyle, *My Next Bride* (New York NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1934).

⁴⁴ Josephine Herbst, *The Executioner Waits* (New York NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1934).

⁴⁵ Josephine Herbst, *Rope of Gold* (New York NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1939).

Lorraine “into so much trouble” (p. 280).

Meridel LeSueur’s *The Girl*⁴⁶ testifies to the enduring trauma of post-abortion syndrome. Belle is a secondary character who frequently discusses her thirteen abortions throughout the novel (pp. 10, 53-54, 75, 139). Despite urgings by other women and her lover, Girl affirms she will have the child and delivers her daughter. This life-affirming ending is consistent with LeSueur’s idea that “This should be the function of the so-called writer, to mirror back the beauty of the people, to urge and nourish their vital expression and their social vision” (p. 149).

Dawn Powell’s *A Time to Be Born*⁴⁷ documents the effects of Amanda’s view of sex as “currency” (p. 788) and the romantic exchange between characters becomes as complicated as the financial world. When she becomes pregnant by her lover Ken, her friend Vicky (Ken’s girlfriend) makes an appointment with an abortionist, and yet it is Vicky, not Amanda the mother, who reflects that “Under these dark imaginings ran the sickening knowledge that it was Ken’s child that was being denied birth” (p. 1005). Post-abortion syndrome manifests itself periodically when Vicky recalls her abortion as the “nightmare” (pp. 1006, 1007, 1008). Vicky and Ken marry at novel’s end, but they are both uncertain that he would never resume a relationship with his former lover Amanda.

Finally, Ruth McKenney’s *Jake Home*⁴⁸ illustrates conflicting views of marriage and childbearing. Jake thinks that “maybe just being afraid of a kid” is the reason why he and his wife Margaret are childless (p. 60); she uses Lysol as a birth control measure and calendars her periods. Jake’s lover Kate McDonough thinks that marriage is “a chain around my soul” (p. 238). Jake wants the child, but Kate does not, for she resents being “any man’s property” (p. 409). Although Jake insists that life should involve children, Kate affirms that she does not want a

⁴⁶ Meridel LeSueur, *The Girl* (Cambridge MA: West End Press, 1978, originally published 1939).

⁴⁷ Dawn Powell, *Novels 1930-1942; Dance Night; Come Back to Sorrento; Turn, Magic Wheel; Angels on Toast; A Time to Be Born* (New York NY: Library of America, 2001), pp. 767-1041.

⁴⁸ Ruth McKenney, *Jake Home* (New York NY: Harcourt Brace, 1943).

child. Kate aborts, even after an apparent reconciliation with Jake. Despite his pro-child philosophy, Jake tells her, “if you didn’t want it, you did the right thing” (p. 444), but there is remorse after the abortion (pp. 445-56).

Works that Significantly Concern Abortion

Although the remaining items in Gillette’s catalog significantly discuss abortion in their plot development, she only casually mentions the various works in her notes or briefly cites or quotes them. This last section, therefore, will not only examine how a right-to-life literary perspective applies to five novels that are significant markers of the topic of abortion but will also suggest pertinent questions for future research. Proceeding chronologically, they are as follows: Pearl Doles Bell’s *Gloria Gray, Love Pirate*,⁴⁹ which is representative of the second decade of the twentieth century; Floyd Dell’s *Janet March*⁵⁰ and Viña Delmar’s *Bad Girl*,⁵¹ which represent the twenties; Christopher Morley’s *Kitty Foyle*,⁵² which is representative of the thirties; and Nancy Hale’s *The Prodigal Women*,⁵³ which contains ideas emergent in the forties that had great impact on subsequent decades.

The intriguing title of Pearl Doles Bell’s *Gloria Gray, Love Pirate* may be attributable to a marketing strategy aimed at the young female reading audience who could identify with the eponymous heroine of the novel.⁵⁴ What is more surprising is that Gillette does not feature the novel at all in her review of abortion works. Certainly, a complete work

⁴⁹ Pearl Doles Bell, *Gloria Gray, Love Pirate* (Chicago IL: Roberts, 1914).

⁵⁰ Floyd Dell, *Janet March* (New York NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923).

⁵¹ Viña Delmar, *Bad Girl* (New York NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1928).

⁵² Christopher Morley, *Kitty Foyle* (Philadelphia PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1939).

⁵³ Nancy Hale, *The Prodigal Women* (New York NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1942).

⁵⁴ In this regard, the marketing approach has withstood the test of time, for popular paperback romance novels geared for the female reading public still feature glossy covers of buff young men grappling svelte young women in a variety of poses meant either to be sensuous or (in a more comical vein) laughable for their back-breaking possibilities.

of 333 pages written early in the century should have its abortion passages discussed in detail. Gloria is the prototype of the young woman who comes to the big city for employment and adventure and finds employment by a businessman who, unbeknown to her, is married. One passage depicting their sexual passion must have been outrageously bold for the 1914 audience:

“Stop,” I cried. “Stop!” You mustn’t talk so!”

But he didn’t hear me. He was taking the hair pins from my hair and when I tried to rise he held me back. He was still on his knees at my side and when finally my hair tumbled in shimmering waves over the side of the bed the man seemed to go utterly mad.

He was something primeval; a man of the stone age. This mad, wild thing seemed to fit in with the storm outside. He was a cave man of the time when brute strength was the only law. He was anything but Mr. Cunningham of Chicago.

I tried to scream but like one in a nightmare no sound seemed to come or if it did, no one heard it above the howl of the storm. Almost roughly he tore the lace from my neck and his lips were hot against my throat.

I cried and beat against his face, but he didn’t know it. I had kindled a fire that I could not extinguish and my frightened nerves cried out against my folly. Unwittingly I had put the cave man in power and brute strength was Law. (pp. 164-65)

The abortion chapter in the novel is as packed with emotion as the above passionate love scene.

I had been taking treatments from a downtown physician who was none too reputable, and the day I was taken to the hospital I had gone home at noon with a chill. Fifteen minutes after I had arrived at home one of the city’s prominent surgeons called, whispering to me at his first opportunity that Mr. Cunningham had sent him.

I do not know what he told mother was the cause of my illness, nor what sort of an operation would have to be performed, but I do know he did not tell her the truth and that the maid was told that I had appendicitis. (p. 234)

Casual readers may be more interested in the question of whether duplicity and secrecy should be features of a liberated woman like Gloria. From a right-to-life literary perspective, however, the reader needs to evaluate several other aspects.

A first question concerns whether Gloria's quest to abort the child is a valid means of securing her economic and social happiness. Second, while sexual ethics is not strictly a concern of right-to-life literary theory, considering this aspect is relevant when sexual activity results in a child. Why, therefore, must it be taken for granted that married businessmen must prey on unmarried young women for sexual satisfaction and not be able to control their lustful urges? Why do these men not understand their good fortune in being fathers? Third, unless active anti-Catholicism prevented such support, why was there no assistance suggested either for Gloria or for Verona, another young woman suffering and ultimately dying from aborting an unintended pregnancy, when by the time of the novel's composition, nascent pregnancy support services were available by Catholic orphanages such as that provided by Fr. Nelson Baker of the Our Lady of Victory complex of services in Lackawanna, New York?⁵⁵ Fourth, a right-to-life literary critique would ask why Gloria, the heroine, would value her sexual libertinism over the child created with her lover. Taking "treatments" at the hands of a "downtown physician" implicitly shows that Gloria has relegated the unborn child to the status of a disease. Perhaps the dehumanization of the unborn child is self-reflexive, the abortion episode showing the degree to which her own dehumanization occurs, for she herself has become, not a wife for a fellow human being, but just a sexual object for a male who is merely a "cave man" lover.

Floyd Dell's *Janet March* is a significant compilation of dating, sexual, and childbearing practices at the beginning of the flapper era. Dating practices are documented and form a basis for Penelope expressing her concern about "the relentless and endless process of childbearing" to which a friend "enlightened" her about ways "to keep from having them [children]" (p. 54). Janet, Penelope's daughter, is irreligious, writing in her diary that "I do not think I believe in God" (p. 99), and a secular view informs her friend's view on marriage; Janet's friend and her fiancé would not marry until they had money. Janet

⁵⁵ See the discussion of Fr. Baker's work to prevent abortion and infanticide in Richard Gribble, *Father of the Fatherless: The Authorized Biography of Father Nelson Baker* (New York NY: Paulist Press, 2011), pp. 112ff.

argues for pre-marital sex without having the “church and state interfere” (p. 142); birth control is addressed enigmatically as “there are ways—” (p. 152). The nineteenth-century belief in “law and order” (p. 198) continues in Janet’s view of sex as “‘Biology,’ thought Janet. / Not love” (p. 204). Suspecting she is pregnant, Janet approaches her cousin Harriet, who talks vaguely about abortion. Janet subsequently has an abortion, and the longest paragraph in the novel ensues, an elaboration of the opening sentence that her abortion “wasn’t sin” (pp. 212-16).

When she is pregnant again, Janet affirms that she will have the baby as emphatically as she claimed that her first abortion was not sinful: “And I’m going to *have* this one,’ she said defiantly, ‘whether you like it or not!’” (p. 455, italics in original). Speaking about the baby with Roger, the father, Janet proclaims, “at last you know what everything’s all about!” (p. 456).

A contemporary reader may find the denouement standard fare of a romance novel trying to end as happily as possible. From a right-to-life literary perspective, however, as with *Gloria Gray* above, even though religious ethics is not primarily a concern of right-to-life literary theory, once a child is conceived, acting on the thought to abort him or her should be considered sinful as a moral check against the commission of an inhuman act. Thus, while Gillette mentions that Janet March and Kitty Foyle explicitly refuse to consider their abortions sins, the denotation of sin as a violation of a religious principle that breaks the bond between the human being and the Creator is not eradicated simply by a character asserting that aborting a child is not sinful and then supplying a unique denotation of the term to justify the killing, followed by yet another negation, and followed by still another definition by synonym, as Janet March does when she asserts: “Sin? No, sin was something strange and terrible and mysterious. It wasn’t sin. What was it, then? It was—freedom” (p. 213). This maze of definitions may be an effective rhetorical ploy in literature to show the spiritual distress that an aborted mother feels when confronted by the cognitive dissonance of her act, but it should not be construed as an example supporting Gillette’s claim that “Unapologetic and committed to women’s reproductive autonomy, these narratives sound much like the arguments made by the 1960s women’s movement, which years later

would also hold controlling one's reproduction was a right, not a sin" (p. 672).

Secondly, why the narrator is unable to recognize that the pagan delight in the body that the March circle of friends espouses could be the Catholic joy of the body and not mere reduction to Janet's "Biology. [...] Not love" distinction is a formidable question for future research.

Third, while it is commendable that Janet's father discusses "the unmarried mother" and that the attendant shame that such a mother feels would not be removed by future social changes that the family discusses, why care for such mothers is not perceived as readily available from religious institutions of the day is a glaring gap in the narrative, a gap that may have been necessary to convey the dire circumstances of the unwed mother, thus confirming Janet's abortion (which had occurred two hundred pages earlier).

A final question for a future right-to-life researcher is the curious philosophical revelation that Janet, an atheist, reaches at novel's end. If having a child helps a woman to "know what everything's all about!" then does such an exclamation verify the existence of a natural law that pertains to men and women? If such a natural law exists, then voluntary abortion, which breaks the normal progression of that law, is an evil that must not be experienced, and this is for the benefit not only of the unborn child but also that of the mother and father of the child.

Viña Delmar's *Bad Girl* shows literary discussion of dating, sexual, and childbearing practices at the end of the flapper era. Dot Haley and Eddie Collins are irreligious, racist, and anti-Semitic. They fornicate and then quickly marry when Dot becomes pregnant. Dot seems to consider abortion as birth control. When abortifacients fail, Maude, Dot's friend who has a secular view of life, suggests "an operation" (p. 107) and even recommends an abortionist. Dot visits the abortionist for a check-up and finds a standard dirty office and slovenly abortionist. In contrast to Maude, Edna, another of Dot's friends, advocates a pro-life position, and Dot decides to have the baby and investigates a sanitarium where she would deliver. Afterwards Dot vows that she "would try not to have any more children" (p. 266).

A contemporary reader would find the experiences of a young couple in love and faced with an untimely pregnancy a simple narrative,

often repeated throughout the twentieth century in books and films. (*Bad Girl* was a commercially successful book and film.) From a right-to-life literary perspective, however, several elements of an otherwise life-affirming narrative are disturbing and indicate deeper problems about the value of human life that the apparently happy young couple manifests. Racist and possibly bigoted comments pepper the novel, with explicit references to “niggers” occurring twice (pp. 162, 241) and an episode of being “contaminated” by an African-American person shortly after the baby’s birth (p. 266).

African Americans are not the only individuals who suffer indignity in the novel. Although there is the customary comment about Al Smith not being electable “because he’s a Catholic” (p. 176), more negative attention is given to a Jewish aborted mother who, instead of being shown compassion, is viewed as an artifact for observation: “The Jewess had a sister-in-law who had had eleven abortions. Dot was promised a glimpse of her. [...] Dot would know her by the big diamond she wore” (p. 233). With such derogatory and stereotypical statements, can a life-affirming act such as the birth of a child be celebrated? Weighing this literary challenge needs to be evaluated at greater length by future researchers.

Christopher Morley’s *Kitty Foyle* continues the exploration of the diversity (if not racial, then ethnic) involved in abortion narratives. The narrative is obviously a retrospective of her abortion since it is mentioned early in the work: “that baby, if it had been born” (p. 27). Since she and her love Wyn had sex without “precautions” (p. 257), Kitty becomes pregnant. Before she is able to tell Wyn about the baby, Kitty reads in a paper that he is engaged. Her employer gives her the name of an abortionist, and she has an immediate post-abortion reaction. Fortunately, she rebounds from her first love affair when she meets her new beau, Dr. Mark (Marcus) Eisen, who is Jewish and, besides being “so hairy,” is identified as of a different “race” (p. 280).

Seven years later, Kitty has matured significantly. She sees Wyn’s son and remarks “that might have been *my* baby” (p. 288, italics in original). Even though Kitty has no religion of her own (her family heritage is Orange Irish), her maturity manifests itself in an ecumenical tone. Unlike other abortion novels mentioned above, Kitty expresses

admiration for Catholic support of a maternity hospital:

[Her friend Fedor] was telling me about the Cardinal in Chicago who instead of bawling in the pulpit about contraceptions and abortions went ahead and got an inexpensive maternity hospital started. Of course you've got to be legally wedlocked before you can use their delivery room, that's a disadvantage, but the point is they sell you the whole doings for \$50 and people that couldn't afford it otherwise can throw a baby there and like it.

That's what I call citizenship. (p. 311)

Despite, or perhaps because of, such maturity, Kitty reflects on the life of her aborted child often. She calculates that her aborted child would have been seventy in 2000.

Made into a successful film (as was Viña Delmar's *Bad Girl*), this novel might be thought by a contemporary reader or film aficionado to show the progression of a liberated woman into a wider social circle, overcoming obstacles such as post-abortion syndrome and social prejudices. From a right-to-life literary perspective, however, the reader would rejoice that post-abortion syndrome frames the entire work and makes it coherent. That Gillette focuses on Kitty Foyle's exclamation that her abortion was not sinful ("I couldn't feel any kind of wrongness. I did what I had to do," p. 672) is interestingly one-sided, but what is altogether neglected is Kitty's expressions of post-abortion syndrome and regret, which is carried to the end of the novel, for killing her unborn child. The entire work is a retrospective, the abortion being mentioned on unnumbered p. 27, and the post-abortion reflection on p. 272 is a literary pivot necessary to lead the protagonist to her future love. Moreover, unlike Delmar's *Bad Girl*, ethnic and racial prejudice are resolved in the narrative a few years before the United States tested its unity in fighting first a world war and then a cold one while rising to economic and military power. The resolution of such ethnic prejudice, which means that a crucial change occurred in the understanding of the value of human life, must be reserved for future pro-life research in race theory.

Finally, Nancy Hale's *The Prodigal Women* connects the experiences of several women whose sexual passions and life ambitions converge: Leda March, whose distinguishing characteristic is her love

of solitude and social success; Maizie Jekyll, who has a continuing and unhealthy relationship with Lambert Rudd; and Betsy, Maizie's sister.

While all three women have either promiscuous sexual or abortion experiences, it is Maizie's activity throughout the novel which is the most detailed regarding the effects of her abortion. When Maizie thinks she is pregnant, Lambert suggests "a man" who could "do something about it" (p. 57). Later, Lambert grudgingly marries her. Maizie seeks a doctor for abortion information and is given a prescription for quinine and castor oil; he also drops the name of an abortionist. Maizie eventually aborts and immediately experiences post-abortion syndrome; she also has a second operation post-abortion to control an infection. Lambert complicates the narrative with several contradictory statements: he says that the abortion was Maizie's idea and that Maizie tricked him into marriage. Maizie becomes pregnant again, but Lambert wants it "stopped" (p. 187). Leda's friend Nicola also thinks that Maizie should have the baby "stopped" (p. 191). Facing such pressure, Maizie tells her sister Betsy she had an "operation" (p. 256), and Maizie thinks of herself as "evil" (p. 337). Maizie relates a litany of grudges against Lambert, mostly dating from the time of her abortion. Even though she is able to express her grudges, when recalling her abortion, Maizie pleads, "*nobody must know*" (p. 531, italics in original).

A contemporary reader may find Hale's novel familiar; a trinity of women desiring either career success or sexual pleasure without resulting in pregnancy is a common scheme in contemporary literature and films. One thinks, for example, of both the book and film version of Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls*.⁵⁶ Leda and the other women in Hale's novel recapitulate major ideas of the four decades of the twentieth century and can suggest the negative social terrain into which women were headed in the second half of the century. They are physically abused by men. In a passage as revolting in 2015 as it was in 1942, Betsy lets Hector slap her twice, throw his drink in her face, and call her "bitch" (p. 378). Women harbor deep resentments, as Maizie demonstrates, when she utters her grudges against Lambert. Ultimately,

⁵⁶ Jacqueline Susann, *Valley of the Dolls* (New York NY: Bernard Geis Associates, 1966).

women are alone, an idea to which Leda testifies in an awkward syntax: “I only love alone” (p. 556).

A right-to-life literary perspective, however, would bring new questions for consideration. Leda’s love of nature and being alone punctuate the novel frequently. She enjoys the solitude of woods in snow (p. 49), her love of nature becomes rhapsodic at one point (p. 115), she delights in the snow at Christmas (pp. 394-95), and the novel ends with love for nature in October (p. 555) and a clear reiteration that Leda prefers being alone (pp. 555-56). Are such descriptive passages mere pauses in the narrative, breathing spaces in an often violent narrative, or do these depictions of natural beauty contrast the unnatural activity of the human characters?

Even more curious for a future researcher is the sudden desire of Hector (Betsy’s lover) to return to Catholicism. This, also, is unexpected (there is no indication that organized religion plays a significant role in any of the characters’ lives), so the shock value of such a plot development gains the reader’s attention. Perhaps Hector finds something in the religion that can make sense of the actions of the various disordered lives detailed over the course of five hundred pages. Perhaps there is a stability in the faith that Hector realizes and that Leda could yet realize since she prefers immersion in solitude, which Maizie might also experience if she overcame her sense of being evil, and a future pro-life researcher could develop as the connection between the value of unborn and born life.

It is no wonder, given the disheartening versions of abortion narratives of the early twentieth century, that Simone de Beauvoir and American abortion activists like Betty Friedan found such a fertile population in which to grow their life-denying version of feminism. Fortunately, both current research and the subsequent waves of pro-life researchers can develop the corpus of anti- and pro-life fiction to an even higher degree so that, besides enjoying the works as literature, society can learn from the mistakes of fictional characters in the past to protect and improve human life in the future.