

Introduction

“New York is not renowned for its gallantry where pregnant women are concerned,” writes A. K. Summers in the graphic memoir *Pregnant Butch* (2014), “so imagine how often you’re offered a seat when most people take you for just another **fat guy** on the subway. It’s strange, but pregnancy increased my ability to pass” (bold original, 2). What would have happened if Teek, the author’s alter ego and titular pregnant butch, insisted on taking a seat because of her¹ pregnancy? I suspect at least some of the passengers would have accused Teek of lying, mocked her (the other “fat guys” showing off their stomachs and asking for seats, too), and possibly even demanded that Teek show proof that she is pregnant. Since her large belly would not suffice, I suspect that “proof” would mean biological evidence of female embodiment: show us your tits if you want a seat.² When confronted with the presence of a masculine pregnant person, many people resist giving up their more familiar narratives (“just another fat guy” as opposed to a masculine pregnant woman) and instead challenge the person’s legitimacy: are you really pregnant? Elsewhere in the memoir, Teek is forced to demonstrate her legitimacy as a pregnant person, as a parent, and as a person deserving common courtesy because her comportment is not feminine.

A character like Teek may seem to emblemize issues that arose in the twenty-first century. For many Americans, queer pregnancy ideologically began in 2008 with the appearance of Thomas Beatie, a man who was assigned female at birth, on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* to discuss his pregnancy.³ This perception of queer pregnancy as a recent or futuristic phenomenon has at least some grounding in fact since the biotechnology that would allow trans women, cisgender men, and others born without ovaries and uteruses to gestate human offspring is only now on the horizon. Yet these kinds of reproductive embodiment have always been possible in

fiction.⁴ Indeed, reimagining pregnancy is a hallmark of several genres, most obviously dystopias such as *Brave New World* (1932). Nevertheless, a recent spate of memoirs about nonbinary embodiment and reproduction are often discussed in the popular press as though queer pregnancy is a new literary subject without a history. Among other points, *Masculine Pregnancies: Modernist Conceptions of Creativity and Legitimacy, 1918–1939* demonstrates that the masculine pregnant woman is not a new character type but instead one with a literary history that stretches back more than a century. Queer people have always reproduced and had lives shaped by reproductive decisions; what is uncommon is the recognition of their presence in works of literature before the twenty-first century.

This book explores the relationship between masculinity and pregnancy in Anglophone literature published in the years between the First and Second World Wars. It focuses on depictions of what I call “masculine pregnancy”—mannish pregnant women and metaphorical male pregnancy—in the works of Djuna Barnes, Willa Cather, William Faulkner, and Ezra Pound, with comparative discussions of works by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Olive Moore, Jean Toomer, and Virginia Woolf. I argue that these modernist writers combined masculinity and pregnancy to give shape to their ideas about reproductive and creative legitimacy. The book considers one of many strands of transatlantic modernism. Barnes, Cather, Faulkner, and Pound were all born in the United States, but Barnes and Pound spent significant portions of their careers abroad, and Faulkner and Cather thought globally even if they wrote locally. These four authors incorporated transatlantic political, social, and scientific debates into their works, and these debates inform my readings of the selected texts. These readings highlight a fact that is still rarely acknowledged in literary criticism or elsewhere: not all pregnant people are feminine people.

The first half of this book considers texts in which most of the depictions of masculine pregnancy attempt to delegitimize the biological children and literary “offspring” of women and queer people; the second half of the book looks at texts that generally treat queer (pro)creation sympathetically. This two-part structure is motivated by principles Heather Love lays out in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007). Love delineates two of the important aspects of literary scholarship: the “critical function,” which reveals “the conditions of exclusion and inequality,” and the “imaginative function,” which illuminates “alternative trajectories for the future” (29). Love is careful to explain why literary scholars must

attend to these functions jointly rather than directing attention to one or the other:

Both aspects are important; however, to the extent that the imaginative function of criticism is severed from its critical function—to the extent that it becomes mere optimism—it loses its purchase on the past. . . . The politics of optimism diminishes the suffering of queer historical subjects; at the same time, it blinds us to the continuities between past and present. As long as homophobia continues to centrally structure queer life, we cannot afford to turn away from the past. (29)

Roughly speaking, my analysis of metaphorical male pregnancy attends to the first function by revealing that certain modernist authors attempted to use these metaphors to position women and queer people as illegitimate creators. My analysis of mannish women attends to the second function by offering alternatives to the usual ways of imagining queer pregnancy.

To be more specific, Pound and Faulkner used childbirth metaphors to position virile men as the only legitimate creators of literary and physical offspring alike, while effeminate men and masculine women appear in their works as unnatural usurpers. In these works, feminine people—be they women or men—produce bad and therefore illegitimate art; masculine women might be able to produce legitimate art, but only so long as they do not reproduce (and they always reproduce eventually, since the female body's drive to reproduce is supposedly unstoppable). The purpose of such depictions is to shore up the idea of the Author as a heterosexual, masculine man. Nevertheless, my analysis of Cather and Barnes demonstrates that these exclusionary efforts were published in the same time period as texts by women writers that radically reimagine reproductive embodiment. Barnes and Cather shift our attention away from the realm of metaphor by depicting the pregnant bodies of mannish women in *Nightwood* (1936) and *My Ántonia* (1918). (Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* [1939] is a special case because it includes both exclusionary depictions of masculine pregnancy and imaginative ones.) Toward the imaginative function, my reading of Cather and Barnes helps us see a different literary trajectory for queer pregnancy by showing that it has a trajectory at all. Like the broader public, literary scholarship tends to position queer pregnancy as a recent phenomenon coinciding with the rise of modern reproductive technologies.⁵

These two halves of *Masculine Pregnancies* give space to the critical and imaginative functions, thereby balancing the sobering reality of exclusionary politics with a politics of optimism.

Rethinking Masculinity, Pregnancy, and Modernism

I began writing this book with a working theory: experiences like Teek’s—pregnancy increasing her ability to pass as a man—are due in part to the unthinkability of masculine pregnant women. This unthinkability stems from a common worldview that links pregnancy with femininity; because femininity is defined and shaped by race, the version of this worldview that circulates in the United States is implicitly associated with whiteness, “born of the impulses to differentiation and hierarchization” (Schuller ch. 3).⁶ Despite the significant inroads made by LGBTQ+ activists, femininity is still often talked about as a by-product of or precursor to pregnancy, as though femininity “goes with” pregnancy. As a result, masculine women are outside the realm of what many people conceptualize when they think about pregnancy. Teek references the association between femininity and pregnancy when she expresses concern that her masculine embodiment will prevent conception: “I worried that **butchness itself** might preclude my chances of getting pregnant. The more **feminine** the woman, the more fertile, right?” (bold original, 11). Teek admits her logic is faulty—“warning! flat-earth-society-style reasoning” (ibid.)—but the historical association between femininity and pregnancy is hard to dislodge, even for a butch woman trying to conceive a child. The conceptual adjustment is harder still for the strangers who encounter Teek. The femininity-pregnancy linkage is so tight that Teek’s fellow passengers are *more* likely to perceive her as a man because that fits into their understanding of gender more easily than a pregnant butch. The pregnant man, a cousin to the pregnant mannish woman, is familiar as a comedic trope in the arts and pop culture, but his presence has historically been restricted to the realm of fiction, showing up in novels, stage productions, film, and TV. Most Americans do not expect to see a pregnant man or mannish woman in memoirs or the “real world”; much less are they willing to take masculine pregnant people seriously as legitimate claimants to reproductive rights, privileges, and justice.

The unimaginability of masculine pregnancy, especially pregnant mannish women, extends to academic communities. Indeed, when telling colleagues about my project I was often asked, “Is it about trans men?” The

question suggests the limits of imagination in Western scholarly communities surrounding queer pregnancy; within the academic spheres of literary criticism and gender studies, anecdotal evidence suggests that pregnant mannish women are even less imaginable than pregnant trans men.⁷ To be clear, trans male pregnancy is far from firmly ensconced within the realm of the imaginable. As N. Stritzke and E. Scaramuzza argue, “procreation remains a gendered binary” in medicine, law, and culture, since queer pregnancy is rarely discussed in these realms and, further, “MTF (male-to-female) and FTM (female-to-male) people were (and still are in many countries) denied the right of reproduction altogether if they choose to aim for a change in civil status. They were, or still are, lawfully forced to submit to sterilization” (149). Stritzke and Scaramuzza acknowledge that the situation is improving in many countries (142). Yet trans pregnancy is still regularly ignored, lampooned, disparaged, or worse. I surmise that the unimaginability of trans pregnancy has similar etiologies as that of mannish pregnancy: in addition to trans- and homophobia, it stems from lack of familiarity with the history of reproduction—especially as concerns queer people—among academics and the general public alike.⁸ Rather than pitting these varieties of reproductive embodiment against one another, or desiring finality in identity categorizations, *Masculine Pregnancies* recognizes the fluidity of identity and positions mannish pregnancy in a constellation of nonbinary, trans, and queer reproduction, historicizing its existence in interwar literature to contribute to a better understanding of the whole.

In the early years of the twentieth century, non-normative genders and sexualities were often combined under the umbrella of the same concept, inversion. Jana Funke explains that the term “‘sexual inversion’ conflates what we now describe as homosexual identity and trans or nonbinary identity” (Funke, “Radclyffe Hall,” 6:25). To put it another way, sexologists had not yet separated sexual “deviancy” (same-sex attraction) from gender “deviancy” or comportment associated with the “opposite” sex, which could range from women smoking cigarettes and being savvy in business, to dressing in masculine clothing and living as a man (Doan 519).

Although *Masculine Pregnancies* is mostly concerned with mannish women who have relationships with men, the possibility of same-sex attraction nevertheless informs depictions of these characters. As such, a point Laura Doan makes with regard to the term *lesbian* provides important context: “while we should regard with circumspection any secure link between the masculine woman and the ‘lesbian,’ we need also to acknowledge a degree of association between the two” (“Topsy-Turveydom” 522). Doan

argues that late 1920s England was a turning point after which *mannishness* was associated with sexuality; before then, however, “there was far more fluidity around notions of gender inversion, gender deviance, and sexuality” (522). Therefore, mannishness was not always perceived as an indicator of lesbianism, though it often lurks at the edges of depictions of mannish pregnancy, with characters hinting at, wondering about, or directly acknowledging the mannish woman in question having intimate relationships with women as well as men.

Lesbian, mannish, inverted: the variability among these terms begins to suggest just how fraught terminology is for scholars studying the history of queer identity. Among the challenges the scholar must navigate is presentism. As Doan contends, we should be cautious of applying modern terminology to interwar texts because they color our interpretive categories, “making it extremely difficult for us to differentiate between *what* was seen and read by *whom*; that is, how individuals were regarded by their own contemporaries and within their respective cultures, and how they regarded and presented themselves” (“Topsy-Turveydom” 526). In any case, it is impossible and unproductive for a scholar to attempt to say definitively that a character is *this* or *that* identity. They are, after all, fictional characters who do not have gender or sexual identities that exist off the page.

I have chosen to consider the masculine female characters in this book as mannish and inverted rather than trans (in the identitarian sense as opposed to trans as a theoretical framework or lens). First, the term transgender is anachronistic and, as Halberstam argues, applying current terminology to earlier iterations of queer lifestyles “denies them their historical specificity” when we should be “produc[ing] methodologies sensitive to historical change but influenced by current theoretical preoccupations” (*Female Masculinities* 46). Second, “inverted” is a much broader term than “transgender” in ways I explain in detail in chapter 3. The authors and audiences I study in this book understood non-normative genders and sexualities within the conceptual framework of inversion; as such, I find inversion to be an accurate framework from an identitarian perspective and a useful heuristic.

Although I do not read the characters in this book as trans in an identitarian sense, I readily acknowledge that it is possible to consider the forms of mannishness that I discuss here through a trans critical framework. Stryker and Currah describe this critical framework as “a conceptual space within which it becomes possible to (re)name, (dis)articulate, and (re)assemble the constituent elements of contemporary personhood in a manner that facilitates a deeply historical analysis of the utter contingency and

fraught conditions of intelligibility of all embodied subjectivity” (8). More specifically, “transmasculinity” has proven to be a rich theoretical apparatus in recent modernist scholarship. Chris Coffman defines “transmasculinity” as “a broad range of masculine traits in persons assigned female at birth [and] encompasses not only those who embody what Halberstam calls ‘female masculinity’ but also those who consider themselves transgender or transexual” (2). Understood this way, it is entirely possible to situate the forms of masculinity that I consider here through this lens. Indeed, I hope to see scholarship that does just that. If, as Ato Quayson says, one of the chief purposes of criticism is that it “illuminates new ways of experiencing existence” (*Calibrations* xvi), we should welcome alternate approaches and readings rather than attempting to narrow the field of vision to a single “right” reading.

With regard to categories of gender, sex, and sexuality, a guiding principle of this book comes from Gayle Rubin. In the essay “Of Catamites and Kings” (1992), Rubin states:

Our categories are important. We cannot organize a social life, a political movement, or our individual identities and desires without them. The fact that categories invariably leak and can never contain all the relevant “existing things” does not render them useless, only limited. Categories like “woman,” “butch,” “lesbian,” or “transsexual” are all imperfect, historical, temporary, and arbitrary. We use them, and they use us. We use them to construct meaningful lives, and they mold us into historically specific forms of personhood. Instead of fighting for immaculate classifications and impenetrable boundaries, let us strive to maintain a community that understands diversity as a gift, sees anomalies as precious, and treats all basic principles with a hefty dose of skepticism. (479)

Mindful of these many pitfalls and exigencies, I chose to rely on the texts themselves rather than my own, twenty-first century perceptions of masculinity exclusively. This book focuses on characters whose masculinity is a point of contention in the text itself. The pregnant characters I consider here are called “manly” by other characters, by a narrator, or in a self-description. For instance, the narrator of *Nightwood* tells us that parishioners in France perceive Robin Vote’s body as man-like, while in Faulkner’s *Jerusalem*, a man derisively notes that Charlotte Rittenmeyer wears “pants, man’s pants”

when pregnant (6). Some characters express the sentiment themselves, as when *Ántonia* Shimerda states, “I like to be like a man” while working on a farm in Nebraska (74).

I apply a similar logic with regard to the childbirth metaphor. In the examples considered throughout this book, the writers directly describe authorship in gendered terms and assert the legitimacy and superiority of what they call “manly” forms of creation. For instance, one of the characters in Faulkner’s *Mosquitoes* states, “Women can [create] without art—old biology takes care of that. But men, men. . . . in art, a man can create without any assistance at all” (320). The texts I study therefore register manliness and masculinity as they were perceived in the interwar years. I will have much more to say about inversion and masculinity in chapters 1 and 3. For now it suffices to say that the conceptual overlap between “mannishness” and “trans” means that the study of mannish pregnancy is a necessary complement to both modernist studies of transmasculinity as well as studies of queer pregnancy in contemporary works such as *Pregnant Butch* and Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* (2015).

Bringing the figure of the masculine pregnant woman into focus as this book does has the significant potential to redefine the way modernist studies theorizes reproduction. The figure of the mannish woman in interwar literature has been the subject of a small but growing number of scholarly studies, yet the pregnant mannish woman has never, to my knowledge, received sustained critical attention by modernist scholars.⁹ The unthinkable of masculine pregnant women is once again the culprit, preventing literary critics from recognizing the presence of these characters in interwar literature. This is, after all, an era in which the “mannish woman” was a figure of intense social, political, and medical debate since the suffrage movement and wartime labor demands increased her ranks to unprecedented numbers and salience. Reproduction, too, was at the forefront of American and European minds in the interwar years. Groups arguing for and against causes related to eugenics, access to birth control, and citizenship rights for immigrants fomented debate over reproduction. Was there literature, I wondered, that considered these two lightning rod subjects together? I quickly realized that depictions of masculine pregnant women in interwar literature are not uncommon, but criticism seldom recognizes them as such. Instead, the scholarly conversation tends to argue that pregnancy feminizes these characters despite textual evidence indicating that mannishness persists throughout gestation. Virtually all scholarship on reproduction in modernism centers on feminine women or assumes that femininity is a

by-product of pregnancy, as in the common claim that pregnancy is “the most feminine of acts.”¹⁰ The title of my book refers to *masculine* rather than *male* pregnancy to reflect the central place of the mannish woman in my analysis. The following chapters take the persistence of masculinity throughout pregnancy seriously and examine it against attempts by fellow characters—and sometimes by authors and readers, also—to delegitimize masculine women who (pro)create.

When scholarship does address the confluence of masculinity and pregnancy, it tends to center male characters and authors.¹¹ In modernism, important work has been done on male writers who represent authorship as a kind of reproduction via the childbirth metaphor, wherein the literary text is the author’s offspring. Yet most of this scholarship was written before the 1990s.¹² In the intervening years, queer and trans theorists have developed a multitude of conceptual frameworks for understanding the interlocking implications of gender, embodiment, and (pro)creation. In other words, scholarship on masculinity and pregnancy in modernism was largely written before such queer landmarks as Jack Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* (1998), which refuted the idea that masculinity is the property of men and demonstrated the diversity of forms that female masculinity has historically taken; and Lee Edelman’s *No Future* (2004), a polemic that ignited debates in queer theory over the relationship between queer identity, kinship, and reproduction.¹³ As a result, the intersection of masculinity and pregnancy in modernism is due for reconsideration.

Informed by queer theory, *Masculine Pregnancies* makes two major contributions to modernist scholarship. First, it draws critical attention to the figure of the mannish pregnant woman, as I have already discussed. These women exist outside modernism (and outside literature, of course), but depictions of her were newly salient in the interwar years because of the mannish woman’s prevalence in political and social discourse.

Second, this book contributes to modernist scholarship by demonstrating that literary concerns about legitimacy pervaded the works of major modernist writers to a greater degree than previously acknowledged. *Legitimate* stems from *lex* and *leg*, roots meaning *law*.¹⁴ To be illegitimate is to be outside the law and without state sanction. Reproductive illegitimacy, in the sense of bastardy, saturates Anglophone literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Tristram Shandy* (1759) and *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) are but two of the many familiar works treating the subject. By comparison, authors in the early years of the twentieth century seem to have turned their attention elsewhere because bastards appear less frequently, and plots

are less likely to revolve around attendant issues. As Allen Johnson argues, modernism is better known for its depictions of castration, infertility, and impotence: “Again and again in modernist literature, it is the temporal logic of biology—of reproduction, lineage, and offspring—that is forcibly disrupted” (6). The relative dearth of plotlines related to bastardy in twentieth-century literature prompted Isobel Armstrong to ask, “what happens to the issues of genealogy and illegitimacy that preoccupy earlier novelists?” (254) at the end of her study of these issues in nineteenth-century literature, *Novel Politics*.

Close examination reveals that writers in the years between the World Wars were not so much quiet on the issue of illegitimacy as they were reimagining the terms of the discussion. Whereas authors of earlier eras tended to direct their attention to the biolegal status of the offspring (i.e., whether a child was a legitimate heir or a bastard), the authors I study expanded the scope of their attention to include the legitimacy of the pregnant person’s gender. In sum, modernist engagement with legitimacy is marked by a thematic fascination with the gender of the (pro)creator.¹⁵ I see this interwar expansion of attention to the gestator as an attempt by modernist authors to work out anxieties surrounding watershed sociohistorical events in the United States and Europe. These events include WWI and its disruptions to gender norms (particularly the perception that men were less manly as a result of physical injury and shell shock, and women more manly because of greater involvement in the workplace); the unprecedented inroads women and people of color were making in the literary realm as writers, editors, and publishers, thereby threatening the dominance of white male authorship; and, finally, the panoply of interwar attempts to control reproduction that included but were not limited to eugenics, the medicalization of pregnancy, restrictive immigration policies, and contested definitions of whiteness that raised questions about whose offspring were legitimate citizens.

Authors frequently combine masculinity and pregnancy to repressive ends—Pound and Faulkner do just that—but the combination is not *necessarily* repressive. Indeed, I show that the discursive combination of masculinity and pregnancy can facilitate the agency of women and queer people too. Scholarship on masculinity and reproduction in modernism overwhelmingly addresses the oppressive ends to which this combination of discourses was put. Nina Auerbach states flatly that the “metaphorical equation between literary creativity and childbirth” is both “timeless” and “oppressive” (506). Auerbach’s assessment encapsulates how feminist critics have usually seen

the relationship between masculinity and pregnancy.¹⁶ There are plenty of examples of patriarchal oppression in the pages of this book; one of my goals is to follow a strand of discourse that uses depictions of pregnancy to disqualify women writers, and to unpack the effects of this disqualification on the development of literary modernism. But also, and crucially, this book contains examples of the opposite: female authors depicting female characters who embody masculinity for their own ends and desires. The texts studied here, especially *My Antonia*, provide us with examples of characters for whom the combination of reproduction and masculinity is salutary.

These characters are reminders of the lessons Halberstam taught in *Female Masculinity*, chief among them that masculinity is not always a foreign trait imposed on women. Kaja Silverman's explanation of why she chose to consider male rather than female subjectivity in her influential book *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992) is worth quoting here even though Silverman's book is not about reproduction. Her explanation sums up the imposition approach, which many feminist scholars still take toward masculinity studies: "It might seem surprising that I have chosen to pursue this project through male rather than female subjectivity, but I am motivated to do so in significant part because masculinity impinges with such force upon femininity. To effect a large-scale reconfiguration of male identification and desire would, at the very least, permit female subjectivity to be lived differently than it is at present" (2–3). I take no issue with Silverman's claim about reconfiguring male identification, and I agree that masculinity intersects with femininity with often violent results. Silverman nevertheless establishes a binary between masculinity and male subjectivity on one side, and femininity and female subjectivity on the other, making it difficult to see how masculine women fit into the analytical picture. For some women, masculinity is the authentic gender identity and femininity the impinging force. By reimagining the literary relationship between masculinity and pregnancy—and by imagining the figure of the masculine pregnant woman in modernism for the first time—this book maps out an alternative trajectory for both modernism and queer literature.

A reconsideration of masculinity and reproduction is underway in the critical conversations surrounding earlier literary periods. Scholars such as Alicia Andrzejewski and Melissa E. Sanchez have brought queer theory to bear on Early Modern British texts.¹⁷ Andrzejewski notes that queer theory typically "positions queerness as antithetical to reproduction and futurity and therefore in opposition to the pregnant body," and notes that Shakespearean scholarship typically follows suit (106). She states in clear terms

what is at stake when scholarship fails to consider the overlap between queerness and reproduction, a statement that applies equally well to modernist literature: “this [omission] contributes to the erasure of lesbian and bisexual women’s and trans and nonbinary people’s respective experiences as pregnant people. The assumptions that only women get pregnant; that every pregnancy ends in the birth of a child; and that pregnancy always reproduces the family in a recognizable form are inherent in definitions of heteronormativity, and these assumptions erase many people’s lived experiences of pregnancy” (106–7). The work of Andrzejewski and others is beginning to inscribe queer reproduction in its rightful place in scholarly understandings of Anglophone literature. *Masculine Pregnancies* is aligned with this body of scholarship; I take a similar starting point, the assumption that reproduction and queerness are compatible, and apply it to the twentieth century. The representations of masculine pregnancy that I consider are not always queer in the sense of challenging heteronormativity, but many of them are. These depictions are part of a literary lineage that stretches back at least to the Early Modern period and forward to the trans parenthood memoirs of the twenty-first century.

In the interwar years, the written record of Black American writers tells a different story than that of white Americans. Childbirth metaphors appear with some regularity in the works of Black interwar writers, but mannish pregnancy does not.¹⁸ Many interwar texts depict the vicissitudes of pregnancy for Black women, but these texts, such as Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928), tend to emphasize the femininity of their protagonists. The reasons for this difference are many, but among them is undoubtedly the imbrication of race and gender as it existed in interwar America. This is not to say that mannishness had no purchase in Black women’s lives or to suggest that Black authors had no interest in exploring such depictions in their writing. However, in the interwar era, “the grandchildren of the last generation of enslaved people were in the process of defining freedom in a society that held tightly to social and racial restrictions,” explains Tara T. Green (15). Green argues that this milieu resulted in stark differences between “public depictions and the private strivings of Black women” (15). Furthermore, culturally, politically, and legally, Black women have been seen in the United States as more capable of hard work, of bearing the lash, of enduring rough lives than white women because of a false belief that they have a higher threshold of pain and greater muscle mass (Christian 7). In short, Black women have historically been construed as more masculine than white women. In the same way that privileged, rich men have more

room to be feminine without risk—indeed, it asserts their power by showing how lightly they can throw some of it away (DuPlessis, “Virile” 20)—white women authors had relatively more room to be masculine themselves and to depict their white characters as mannish.

This dynamic was reflected in and exacerbated by issues connected to publication. Black writers were, from the very beginnings of the African American literary tradition, forced to contend with editors, publishers, and readers who questioned their very humanity. As Barbara Christian observes: “We must not forget that, by necessity, the first [Black] novelists were writing to white audiences. Few black people were literate at that time because of stringent laws against teaching slaves to read and write. The thrust of the black novel necessarily had to be a cry of protest directed at whites for their treatment of blacks. The problem was not whether black women were heroic, but whether they were women at all” (32). Black women had to write against the weight of centuries of history that characterized them and any Black female characters they might create as unwomanly or unhuman. In the words of Hazel Carby, they “had to confront the dominant domestic ideologies and literary conventions of womanhood which excluded them from the definition ‘woman’” (6). This history helps us understand the dearth of mannish pregnant women in the literary tradition of Black writers in the United States. If, in the works of white authors, mannish pregnancy reads as a daring rejection of the idea that pregnancy is the pinnacle of femininity, the effect is the opposite for Black women authors and their Black characters. The femininity of Black women was already in question; depicting them as masculine would only amplify an existing stereotype rather than read as avant-garde rebelliousness. Conversely, the act of depicting a Black pregnant character as feminine and womanly, particularly texts that *emphasize* femininity such as Larsen’s *Quicksand*, can be understood as attempts to inscribe the humanity of Black women.

Definitions: Male Pregnancy, Mannish Pregnancy, Masculine Pregnancy

The term “male pregnancy” and its synonyms “male maternity” and “male conception” have historically been used in literary criticism to refer to depictions of physical and metaphorical pregnancy in male *characters*, as well as the use of childbirth metaphors by male *authors*.¹⁹ In keeping with this tradition, *Masculine Pregnancies* considers depictions of male pregnancy and

childbirth metaphors in modernism. New to this tradition is my discussion of mannish women. By using the term “masculine pregnancy” instead of “male pregnancy,” I expand the usual frame of reference to include depictions of mannish female characters who gestate human offspring.

This expansion requires some adjustments to the usual terminology. In this book, I use terms in the following ways. *Mannish pregnancy* refers to masculine women who are literally and/or metaphorically pregnant, as well as depictions of them in literature. In chapter 1, I provide historical background on the term “mannish” and its salience in the interwar years. *Male pregnancy* refers to men who are literally and/or metaphorically pregnant, as well as depictions of them in literature. Depictions of pregnant trans men are rare in literary texts before the twenty-first century.²⁰ Therefore, most of my references to “male pregnancy” indicate fictional depictions of pregnancy in cisgender men as a kind of fantasy or wish-fulfillment. *Childbirth metaphor* refers to comparisons between literary production and physical reproduction. Writers of all genders use this kind of metaphor, but in the pages of this book it most frequently occurs in the context of male-identified authors asserting a contrast between the creative “offspring” that male artists produce and the physical offspring women produce.²¹ (The figure of the female artist who gestates is taken up most centrally in chapter 3.) *Masculine pregnancy* refers to the various ways that discourses of masculinity and pregnancy link up in literary imagination. As such, *masculine pregnancy* is an umbrella term covering all the above. The term furthermore conveys the fact that childbirth metaphors and depictions of pregnancy in men and mannish women occupied overlapping ideological territory for the authors I study. Barnes, Cather, Faulkner, and Pound almost always depict physical pregnancy in masculine women in texts that also thematically engage creative output. Therefore, when the discourses of masculinity and pregnancy intersect in the works of these authors, they do so in ways that invoke both metaphorical and physical pregnancies.

One of the most surprising revelations to emerge from my readings of mannish pregnancy is a concept I am calling “fictional kinship,” which refers to literary constructions of genealogy that rely on storytelling and the imagination to rewrite biological kinship. The texts I study implicitly debate the role of the body in determinations about legitimacy. These texts pose the question, to what extent is genealogical legitimacy determined by biology? This question might seem an obvious or rhetorical one, since the illegitimacy of offspring rests on biological origins: are they genetically related to the father and mother? Yet in my readings of *Nightwood* and *My Antonia*, a

picture emerges wherein the stories we tell about reproduction and kinship matter just as much, if not more, than biology. Chapters 4 and 5 develop the trope of fictional kinship—a phrasing I adapt from the anthropological term *fictive kinship*—with reference to eugenic theories of race and historical concepts such as parental impression theory. Pound’s and Faulkner’s works, discussed in chapters 2 and 3, take a more traditional line. These works imply that legitimacy derives from masculinity, which men have supposedly easier access to by virtue of their embodiment (biology). I demonstrate that Pound and Faulkner leveraged the rhetorical force of scientific discourse around masculinity to legitimize their own claims to authorial greatness. Taken together, the representations of masculine pregnancy considered in these four chapters position legitimacy as a far more important shaping force in interwar literature than previously acknowledged.

Before discussing the works of Barnes, Cather, Faulkner, and Pound, I offer historical and cultural context that is necessary to understand the ways these authors engaged with and revised discourse surrounding masculinity and reproduction. Chapter 1, “A Cultural History of Gender and Reproduction,” is a history of reproduction and gender in the years between the World Wars in the United States and England. This chapter considers threads of discourse not usually discussed together but that, when combined, demonstrate the multitude of ways that this book’s keywords—masculinity, pregnancy, legitimacy, creativity—were picked up and deployed by fields as varying as medicine, anthropology, politics, and literature. The chapter surveys debates around eugenics, the medicalization of pregnancy, bastardy, and immigration (especially as informed by changing definitions of race). Many of the concerns that animated these debates have roots in earlier disputes over bastardy and inheritance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and modernist writers were responding, in part, to their literary precursors’ depictions of bastardy. As such, this chapter also provides an overview of literary critical scholarship on bastardy in pre-twentieth-century Anglophone literature. Finally, this chapter takes up the figure of the “mannish woman” in the interwar years, enumerating the ways this newly salient figure exacerbated and complicated the period’s reproductive debates.

After this survey of historical and literary context, *Masculine Pregnancies* moves into the heart of the book: analyses of modernist texts that register concerns surrounding masculinity, pregnancy, legitimacy, and creativity. In chapter 2, “Literary Obstetrics: Ezra Pound and the Midwives Act of 1902,” I demonstrate that depictions of masculine pregnancy were an important part of the rhetoric Pound used to discredit female writers and editors, as

well as to position himself and T. S. Eliot as legitimate artists. Central to my analysis is Pound's doggerel poem "SAGE HOMME," which he wrote to commemorate his collaboration with Eliot on *The Waste Land* (1922). This chapter details the various ways that Pound's depictions of masculine pregnancy were influenced by a contemporaneous medical debate between midwives and surgeons. This influence—hitherto unrecognized—reveals a flaw in the critical consensus that regards Pound as the intellectual "midwife" of *The Waste Land*. Situating Pound's poem in context with this medical debate provides a fitting introduction to one of the book's central claims: interwar writers began combining masculinity and pregnancy to delegitimize female writers and editors and to shore up their own claims to literary legitimacy.

Pound's work is emblematic of anxieties surrounding legitimacy for some creative types in the interwar years, as it manifests the desire to exclude anyone who does not inhabit a white masculine body. William Faulkner, the subject of chapter 3, "Pregnancy in Faulkner's Artist Novels: Masculinity, Sexology, and Creativity in Interwar America," was less dogmatic than Pound but nevertheless struggled to incorporate newly powerful female artists into old-fashioned models of gender and generation. I consider *Mosquitoes* (1927) and *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (also known as *The Wild Palms*, 1939), arguing that Faulkner uses reproductive rhetoric to police the boundaries of "legitimate" art. I discuss these novels in context with the rise of sexology and the discourse of inversion, a concept thought to explain same-sex attraction. In doing so, I reveal surprising eruptions of sympathy for queer (pro)creation in the midst of the novels' more overt heteronormative plotlines. Faulkner's representations of masculine pregnancy sometimes function to assert the legitimacy of male authors only, as Pound's representations do. At other times, however, Faulkner's depictions of masculine pregnancy manifest identification with and admiration for masculine women who are both artists and pregnant people, and these depictions undermine the novels' otherwise misogynistic depictions of gender and creativity.

The queer interruptions in Faulkner's artist novels create a bridge with the final two chapters of this book, where I consider novels that grant cultural legitimacy to queer people and their offspring. While Pound and Faulkner combine discourses of masculinity and pregnancy to delegitimize queer bodies and their offspring, Cather and Barnes combine them to reject such exclusionary discourse. Chapter 4, "The Mannish Woman as Fertility Goddess: How Narrative Makes a Legitimate Mother Out of *Ántonia* Shimerda," focuses on *My Ántonia* (1918), the third novel in Willa Cather's

prairie trilogy. In it, I discuss the aforementioned “fictional kinship” trope. I begin by considering the racial dynamics of whiteness in the United States, highlighting the ways they inform Cather’s depiction of her protagonist as a mannish, Eastern European immigrant, as well as her depiction of *Ántonia*’s neighbors’ willingness to accept her as a legitimate American woman. I argue that Cather introduces a different version of creative legitimacy than the one espoused by Faulkner and Pound. Faulkner and Pound combine masculinity and pregnancy in attempts to argue for the legitimacy (and supposed superiority) of creations emanating from straight, white, masculine writers. *My Ántonia*, by contrast, implies that the biological offspring of queer individuals are not only legitimate but also inject much-needed variety into literature and genetics (this latter idea being distinctly and disturbingly eugenic). Ultimately, however, Cather undermines the centrality of biology to legitimacy. Whereas eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Anglo-American authors were preoccupied with heredity, inheritance, and other biology-based conceptions of legitimacy, Cather’s novel suggests that narrative is just as important, if not more so, than biology because it is capable of revising people’s ideas about who is and is not legitimate. Thereby, this chapter positions narrative as an alternative to biology-based notions of legitimacy.

As with chapter 4, the fifth chapter considers sympathetic representations of mannish pregnancy. In “‘Conceiving herself pregnant before she was’: Parental Impressions and the Limits of Reproductive Legitimacy in *Nightwood*,” I read Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* (1936) through the lens of parental impressions. This ancient theory of reproduction persists into the twentieth century and holds that the imagination has the power to shape a fetus’s physical form. I demonstrate that the Volkbein men in *Nightwood* attempt to erase their Jewish background by imaginatively shaping their offspring to be physically and emotionally suited for an aristocratic destiny in fascist countries. This chapter brings together strands of discourse from all previous chapters, including inversion, redefinitions of whiteness, the medicalization of pregnancy, and fictional kinship, weaving them together to reveal the limits of narrative to revise determinations of legitimacy. My reading of *Nightwood* demonstrates what narrative cannot do in the face of oppressive politics and furthermore questions the value of legitimacy in the first place.

Masculine Pregnancies concludes by suggesting avenues for further research. In the coda, I outline the ways mannish pregnancy complicates debates about queer kinship and what is commonly referred to as the antisocial thesis. Some of the energy animating these debates may have waned in

recent years, but the totalizing negativity of Edelman's *No Future*—with its provocative positioning of queers as non-reproductive—and the utopic models of kinship that motivate José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2009) are still epistemic poles between which much of the conversation occurs. The mannish pregnant woman is a figure who is both queer and reproductive, by turns enveloped in discourses of normativity and futurity and rejected by proponents of the same. The coda suggests ideas for further analysis based on the ways this positionality troubles foundational assumptions of queer kinship debates.

Together, the chapters of this book widen the aperture on masculinity and pregnancy in modern literature. Modernists combined these discourses in ways that attempt to silence, diminish, and delegitimize anyone who is not the picture of the traditional artist. But so, too, did writers attempt to change what legitimacy in literature looks like, bringing mannish women, queer immigrants, and their biological and creative offspring into the fold. *Masculine Pregnancies* illustrates how some modernist texts are far queerer than usually assumed, while others use depictions of masculine pregnancy to shore up traditional notions of authorial and procreative legitimacy.