

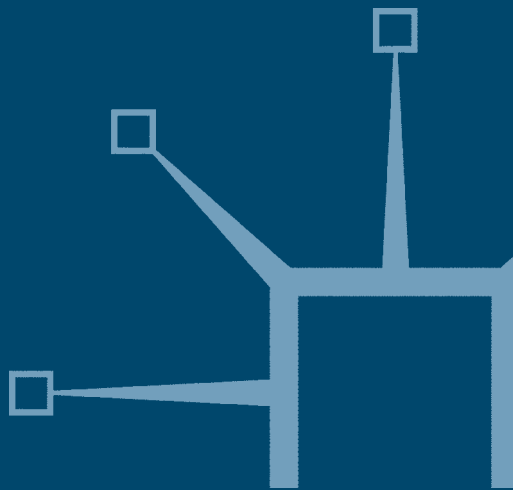
palgrave  
macmillan

# A Cultural History of Pregnancy

Pregnancy, Medicine and Culture,  
1750–2000

---

Clare Hanson



# A Cultural History of Pregnancy

*By the same author*

THE CRITICAL WRITINGS OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD (*editor*)

HYSTERICAL FICTIONS: The Woman's Novel in the Twentieth Century

KATHERINE MANSFIELD (*with Andrew Gurr*)

REREADING THE SHORT STORY (*editor*)

SHORT STORIES AND SHORT FICTIONS, 1880–1980

VIRGINIA WOOLF

# A Cultural History of Pregnancy

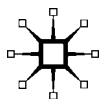
**Pregnancy, Medicine and Culture,  
1750–2000**

Clare Hanson

*Department of English*

*Loughborough University*

palgrave  
macmillan



© Clare Hanson 2004

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4LP.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted her right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2004 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN  
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10010  
Companies and representatives throughout the world

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN is the global academic imprint of the Palgrave Macmillan division of St. Martin's Press, LLC and of Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. Macmillan® is a registered trademark in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. Palgrave is a registered trademark in the European Union and other countries.

ISBN 0-333-98644-X

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Hanson, Clare.

Pregnancy, medicine, and culture, 1750-2000 / Clare Hanson.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-333-98644-X (cloth)

1. Pregnancy-Social aspects-Great Britain-History. 2. Pregnancy-Great Britain-Psychological aspects-History. 3. Obstetrics-Great Britain-History. I. Title.

RG556.H36 2004  
618.2-dc22

2003070739

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham and Eastbourne

# Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>A Note on Spelling</i>	viii
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>1 Advice to the Fair Sex</b>	16
Speaking of Pregnancy: Competing Truth-claims	16
Irritability/Sensibility and Maternal Impressions	23
Valuing Pregnancy	37
Preformationism, Epigenesis and <i>Frankenstein</i>	46
<b>2 Moral Physiology</b>	51
Woman's Nature	51
The Insanity of Pregnancy	60
'Take Your Son, Sir!'	71
<b>3 Mothering the Race</b>	83
Degeneration and Eugenic Feminism	83
Women's Rights and the Antenatal Environment	92
Analysing Pregnancy	105
<b>4 Mass Production</b>	114
Eugenics and Social Class	114
Ectogenesis	122
The National	128
The Natural	137
<b>5 Reproductive Futures</b>	146
Second-wave Feminism and Reproduction	146
Foetal Persons, Foetal Portraits	154
New Reproductive Technologies	161
Reproductive Choices	169
<i>Notes</i>	176
<i>Bibliography</i>	199
<i>Index</i>	209

# List of Illustrations

1. A male-midwife suggestively examines an attractive pregnant woman. Line engraving, 1773. Wellcome Library, London. 18
2. Joanna Southcott the prophetess exposing herself to three physicians in order to validate her pregnancy. Coloured etching by T. Rowlandson, 1814. Wellcome Library, London. 22
3. William Hunter, *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus*, 1774, Plate XX. Wellcome Library, London. 44
4. Ford Madox Brown 'Take Your Son, Sir!', c.1857 (detail). Courtesy of Tate London. 81
5. Lars Nilsson, 20-week foetus sucking thumb. Wellcome Photo Library. 155
6. Pregnancy artwork. Chris Nurse/Wellcome Photo Library. 157
7. Ultrasound scanning equipment. Wellcome Photo Library. 159

# Acknowledgements

Many colleagues have assisted me in the writing of this book. I am particularly grateful to Nicola Bradbury, Maroula Joannou and Imelda Whelehan, who generously read draft material and offered helpful criticism and advice. Mark Hanson read the complete typescript and provided much constructive criticism. Sarah Gamble gave early encouragement and put me on the track of the Haldanes. I am grateful to the staff of the Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Science for their friendly assistance, and in particular to Miriam Gutierrez-Perez for her help with visual material. The staff of the British Library have also been unfailingly courteous and helpful. My final thanks go to Antonia and Jack Hanson for their cheerful support.

A section of Chapter 4 first appeared in *Literature and History* 12, 2, Autumn 2003. I am grateful to the editors for permission to reproduce this material. I am also grateful to the Wellcome Medical Photographic Library for permission to reproduce the following images:

William Hunter, Plate XX, *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* (artist unknown), 'A male-midwife suggestively examines a pregnant woman'

Thomas Rowlandson, 'Joanna Southcott the prophetess'

Lars Nilsson, '20-week foetus sucking thumb'

'Ultrasound scanning equipment'

Chris Nurse, 'Pregnancy'



# A Note on Spelling

Throughout the text I have used the English spelling 'foetus', as this is the spelling used in the majority of the obstetric texts analysed here and it remains the preferred spelling in current British English. I have used the American spelling 'fetus', however, when quoting from modern scientific sources (for which it is the accepted spelling) or from American texts.

# Introduction

In October 1791, Judith Milbanke wrote to her aunt, Mary Noel, reporting her suspicion that she was pregnant, after fifteen childless years of marriage and two miscarriages. Her situation was unusual in many respects. She was married to Ralph Milbanke, a Whig MP with whom she lived happily and who apparently put no pressure on her to bear children in order to continue the family line. She was actively involved in his political career, led a busy social life and, above all, was wealthy.<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite her privileged position, her pregnancy plunged her into the doubts and uncertainties which were then the inevitable concomitants of the condition. Her aunt's letters to her offer a vivid glimpse of the anxiety and indeterminacy which characterised the experience at a time when it was impossible to have a certain diagnosis until a child could literally be seen in the course of labour. In response to Judith's first letter, her aunt writes of her own agitation, speculates as to symptoms and enjoins the strictest secrecy for fear of ridicule if Judith's hopes should prove false. Her next letter reports consultations with friends about 'breeding women' who, like Judith, have a 'hungry feel, & then they are not sick'. By 9 November she writes, 'I now begin to think you certainly must be breeding, for you have every Symptom except sickness, & that is no proof as it often is occasion'd by a Stoppage.'<sup>2</sup> In the same letter she suggests that Judith should contact the fashionable *accoucheur* Dr Denman, giving her symptoms and asking his opinion as to whether or not she is pregnant. Two weeks later the rumour about Judith's pregnancy was out, but its status still remained uncertain. Even though quickening (the mother's first experience of foetal movements) was generally considered the most reliable sign of pregnancy, it could offer no certainty. So, on 2 December, Mary Noel remained fearful, writing, 'I found your very agreeable Kick-Shaw