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Wendy Doniger and Gregory Spinner

Misconceptions: Female Imaginations and Male Fantasies in Parental Imprinting

INTRODUCTION: SEND IN THE CLONES

PEOPLE USED TO JOKE that if a child was born with certain characteristics, it was because the mother, when pregnant, had been frightened by someone or something that had those characteristics. Some still cosset pregnant women to inculcate happy thoughts in them and to protect them from shocking or unpleasant thoughts; our reference to "strawberry marks" is probably an atavism of the belief that such marks reflect the pregnant woman's frustrated desire for strawberries. The folk view that was the prevalent view of the premodern world is still a part of the unofficial postmodern worldview, submerged in our unexamined habits of speech and custom. The man's desire to control the woman's desire, as it might affect his offspring, strongly colors our emotional reactions to abortion, the extreme case of a woman's desire to assert her agency over not merely the form but indeed the very life of the embryo.

A surprisingly large number of people, in different cultures over many centuries, have believed that a woman who imagines or sees someone other than her sexual partner at the moment of conception may imprint that image upon her child—thus prede-

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termining its appearance, aspects of its character, or both. This essay will consider a number of stories about the workings of maternal imagination, impression, or imprinting, terms that are often conflated. We will argue for a clear distinction between impression (the mental reception, and transmission to the embryo, of a visual image that is physically present) and imagination (a fantasy about something or someone who may not be physically present); together, we will refer to them as imprinting. And, since we will also consider the far less common (but equally relevant) instances of paternal imprinting, and since maternal imprinting itself only became problematic as it threatened the assumed paternal imprinting, it might be better to address the problem as *parental* imprinting.

Variants on the stories of parental imprinting may assume more or less the same mechanism of human embryology yet draw very different conclusions in different cultural contexts. The problem of the resemblance of a child to its parent(s) evoked the aesthetic question of the relationship between the original and the replicating image, as well as the theological question of the relationship between the activity of the Creator and the act of human procreation. By tracking the different stories and taking note of their distinctive features, we may reconstruct the lines of transmission within the traditions, suggest borrowings between traditions, and interrogate the shared premise.

The unexpressed assumption underlying most of these stories, and still a part of our own expectations, is that a male child should resemble his father ("chip off the old block") and, to some extent, his mother. The emphasis upon the male child reflects the androcentric concerns that drive most of our texts; the fact that some children do not resemble their parents excites anxieties about paternity and inheritance. As Thomas Laqueur remarks, "It is empirically true, and known to be so by almost all cultures, that the male is necessary for conception. It does not of course follow that the male contribution is thereby the more powerful one, and an immense amount of effort and anxiety had to go into 'proving' that this was the case."[1] The theory of parental imprinting was one way of accounting for divergences from the expected norm without admitting the like-

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lihood of actual impregnation by an alienating male. This sort of mythological embryology involves a kind of pre-scientific cloning: it investigates ways of producing copies of desired stock. But, we must ask, desired by whom? One factor that seems to pervade all variants is the male desire to control female desire.

THE HEBREW BIBLE: JACOB'S PHALLIC RODS

Let us begin with a story from the Hebrew Scriptures. The patriarch Jacob promises to work for his father-in-law Laban, asking for his wages only the colored lambs and mottled kids from among the flock. This episode is recounted in Genesis, first in 30:25–43 and then in 31:1–12. In Genesis 31 the outcome of Jacob's wager with Laban is determined by God, as an angel reveals to Jacob in a dream; but the naturalistic explanation in Genesis 30 credits the clever use of ancient breeding techniques. Knowing that the specified mottling is unusual, Laban assumes that he will prosper from the deal, but this is not to be the case. Jacob takes fresh rods from almond, plane, and poplar trees and peels off strips and patches of their bark; he then places these variegated staves in front of the watering troughs. As the animals come to drink, they breed, and while they are breeding, the females stare at the rods. In this way, the patterns Jacob made by exposing the white of the wood are imprinted on the offspring; stripes, spots, and patches produce streaked, speckled, and brindled animals, respectively.[2]

The trick that Jacob played on Laban repaid Laban's trick on Jacob; as Laban had substituted Leah for Rachel (the object of desire) on the wedding night (Genesis 28:15–24), Jacob substituted variegated rods (phallic rods? ram-rods? the objects of desire) for the solid-colored rams within the field of vision of the ewes. The speckled ewes double for Rachel, whose name in Akkadian means "ewe"—a pun that plays a role in the scene in which Jacob meets, and desires, both Rachel and the sheep (Genesis 29:9–11; this is a conflation to which we will return in our consideration of later rabbinic texts). The biblical episode of the rods of Jacob became a paradigm often cited by later authors; by the process of prooftexting, and with the unsurpassed

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authority of Scripture, "the rods of Jacob" became a shorthand notation for the idea of maternal impression.

GREEK AND LATIN SOURCES: ARISTOTLE, EMPEDOCLES, SORAN, OPPIAN, HELIODORUS, AND JEROME

Aristotle remarked that the offspring of other animals resemble their parents more than human offspring do. He suggested that this might be because while animals are primarily concerned with the coupling, a human is not entirely filled with this desire but instead may be concerned with various things at the time of coupling, and the offspring become different from one another (*poikilletai*, "embroidered in different colors") in response to the concerns of the mother and the father.[3] A lost and probably apocryphal text attributed to Empedocles, a pre-Socratic poet (fl. fifth century B.C.E.) with whom Aristotle disagreed,[4] is quoted by Aetius: "How do offspring come to resemble others rather than their parents? [Empedocles says that] fetuses are shaped by the imagination of the woman around the time of conception. For often women have fallen in love with statues of men and with images and have produced offspring which resemble them."[5] The action begins with the mind, but the mental process quickly shifts to the eye, which passively receives the imprint of the artistic form (here, specifically an anthropomorphic form) and then, turning active, imprints that image upon the embryo. In keeping with the purely visual nature of the second stage of this replication, the child takes only external qualities from the mother's imagination. As with Jacob's ewes, the eye is the immediate organ of desire. But unlike Jacob, the husband in Empedocles's text plays no active role in supplying these artistic images; they may have been accidentally present or (dare one suggest?) actively procured by the wife. This is, as we shall see, a crucial difference.

The animal husbandry model in which the husband eugenically initiates the fantasy prevails in later Greek texts on this subject. In the *Gynecology* of Soran, an authority on obstetrics who lived at the turn of the second century C.E. in Rome and Alexandria, the husband plays the dual role of Jacob (master-

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minding the visual impressions) and the ram (impregnating the female):

> Some women, seeing monkeys during intercourse, have borne children resembling monkeys. The tyrant of the Cyprians, who was misshapen, compelled his wife to look at beautiful statues during intercourse and became the father of well-shaped children; and horse-breeders, during covering, place noble horses in front of the mares. Thus, in order that the offspring may not be rendered misshapen, women must be sober during coitus because in drunkenness the soul becomes the victim of strange fantasies; this furthermore, because the offspring bears some resemblance to the mother as well, not only in body but in soul. Therefore it is good that the offspring be made to resemble the soul when it is stable and not deranged by drunkenness.[6]

Soran assumes a correlation between human procreation and animal husbandry, comparing the tyrant who placed statues in front of his wife with horse-breeders who place handsome stallions (real ones, not images) in front of mares. He seems to have taken the folk wisdom recorded by Empedocles, that women *do* fall in love with statues, and connected it with the folk wisdom of animal husbandry recorded in Genesis (and elsewhere), that females can be *made* to desire obstetrically, as it were, the images that the husband desires eugenically; in the process, he has moved from the herd animals favored in the Bible (sheep and goats) to horses, the favorite animals of the Greeks. The result is an active attempt by the husband to treat his wife like a mare (or a ewe): he shows her images of what he wants her to give birth to. Soran pries into the psychology of a man who would do this: such a man might be ashamed of his own distorted form, and his fear that the child will not resemble the father (and will thus be illegitimate) is outweighed by his desire for a handsome heir.

The (human) males are in control in both halves of Soran's central episode, but it is framed by two others in which human men have no control at all. The stark, mindless physicality of the husbandry model has already been undercut by the first animals that Soran imagines the wife seeing—monkeys, far closer to the human than horses are and not so closely manipulated by humans in their breeding. This may account for the unusual

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(though still both limited and pejorative) agency granted to the woman's soul in the final episode, in which Soran considers distortions that arise not only in the mother's field of vision but in the inner vision of her imagination (though still excited by an external force, wine). He apparently assumes that both men and women have in their souls the spiritual quality that animates matter and makes parental imprinting possible. But even his acknowledgment that the offspring resemble the mother leads Soran quickly to emphasize the negative aspect of that maternal influence, the fear that the soul of a woman out of control—here not with lust, but with drunkenness—might, like the misshapen form of the father, make the child misshapen.

Where horse breeding serves Soran merely as an illustration of what he is really interested in, it is the central topic of the *Kynegetika*, attributed to Oppian, a Syrian of the late second or early third century C.E. Oppian veers from his line, horses and hounds, just long enough to apply the principles of their breeding to humans. First he describes subtle devices for "inscribing the foal while yet in his mother's womb": when "the mating impulse seizes the mare," the stallion is adorned with "spots of color" and brought to the mare like a bridegroom entering a bridal chamber; then, "the mare conceives and bears a many-patterned foal, having received in her womb the fertile seed of her spouse, but in her eye his many-colored form."[7] Then we come to the human species. The Laconians, we are told, place before their pregnant wives images of ancient demigods noted for their beauty (Narcissus and Hyacinthus, Castor and Polydeuces), as well as the gods Phoebus and Dionysus. The women look at these beautiful forms and, excited by their beauty, bear beautiful sons.

Again we have husbands—now normal men, not misshapen tyrants—actively encouraging their wives (treated like mares, an old Greek and Indian habit)[8] to give birth to children who do not resemble their fathers. But something theological has been added, which persists in later texts: the idea of the image of a celestial being imprinted on a human child. Here the divine is the model not of goodness or wisdom but simply of the external quality of beauty, as befits the simply visual mechanism of reproduction in this text.

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Oppian talks about changing the color of animals and the beauty of human children, and later texts combined these ideas to produce the agenda of changing the color of human children. Halfway through the *Ethiopica* of Heliodorus, who lived in Syria in the third or fourth century C.E., we learn that on the armband worn by the heroine Charikleia there is an inscription from her mother, Persinna, queen of the Ethiopians, explaining why she had abandoned her child. The part of the inscription that concerns us reads:

> Our line descends from the Sun and Dionysos among gods and from Perseus and Andromeda and from Memnon too among heroes. Those who in the course of time came to build the royal palace . . . made use of the romance of Perseus and Andromeda to adorn the bedchambers. It was there one day that your father and I happened to be taking a siesta in the drowsy heat of summer. . . . Your father made love to me, swearing that he was commanded to do so in a dream, and I knew instantly that the act of love had made me pregnant. . . . But you, the child I bore, had a skin of gleaming white, something quite foreign to Ethiopians. I knew the reason: during your father's intimacy with me the painting had presented me with the image of Andromeda, who was depicted stark naked, for Perseus was in the very act of releasing her from the rocks, and had unfortunately shaped the embryo to her exact likeness. I was convinced that your color would lead to my being accused of adultery, for what had happened was so fantastic that no one would believe my explanation. . . .[9]

Andromeda was the daughter of the king of Ethiopia, but Greek artistic convention generally represented her with white skin.[10] In the seventeenth century, Fortunio Liceti objected to this aspect of the story: "To a natural philosopher's eyes, since Andromeda was born to Cepheus and Cassiopeia, the king and queen of Ethiopia, she was black."[11] But this is precisely why Andromeda is invoked here: though she was regarded as racially black, she was conventionally represented as white. She is thus the ideal liminal creature to lure Persinna across the line. And so Charikleia, whose lack of resemblance to her own parents is problematic, resembles her ancestor Andromeda in three ways: she is the daughter of an Ethiopian king, she has a romance with the hero Theagenes (like Andromeda with Per-

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seus), and she has white skin. By emphasizing the color rather than the form or beauty of the child, Heliodorus is drawing upon the literature of animal husbandry, which emphasizes unusual color. But now this color is associated with a race of people, the Ethiopians; hence it is a racial, if not necessarily racist, story.[12] Certainly it provoked racist reactions in Europe; the editors of the French edition of Soran compared his Cyprian tyrant with Heliodorus's Ethiopian queen and blithely remarked, "One must not forget that, for a young black woman like the princess of the *Ethiopica*, the most beautiful baby in the world is a white baby."[13]

Heliodorus, like Soran, tells of a woman who sees an image that her husband has not actively intended her to see. As a result, the wife is afraid that she might be accused of adultery; but since she knows she is innocent, she deduces the cause of the lack of resemblance and preempts any accusation by abandoning the baby. In fact, her fears prove well justified; when Charikleia, years later, claims her heritage, her father, King Hydaspes, insists that she cannot be his child: "Your skin has a radiant whiteness quite foreign to Ethiopian women. . . . How could we, Ethiopians both, produce, contrary to all probability, a white daughter?"[14] For proof, the painting of Andromeda is brought out of the bedroom, and Charikleia stands beside it: "The exactitude of the likeness struck them with delighted astonishment." But the final proof of her identity, in addition to the cultural ring that her mother had left her (the ring that Hydaspes had given her at their wedding), is a natural ring, her birthmark, "like a ring of ebony staining the ivory of her arm!" Thus she is black after all, at least in that mark from her mother that answers to the ring of patriarchy.

Persinna calls this sort of maternal impression unbelievable, but many people were ready to believe it. Indeed, this very story of the black queen with the white daughter was retold on countless occasions. Jerome, one of the church fathers, writing between 386 and 390 C.E., regards it as "not astonishing" and uses it to gloss the story of Jacob and the rods. Then he remarks:

> Now it is not astonishing that this is the nature of female creatures in the act of conception: the offspring they produce are of

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> such a kind as the things they observe or perceive in their minds in the most intense heat of sexual pleasure. For this very thing is reported by the Spaniards to happen even among herds of horses; and Quintilian, in that lawsuit in which a married woman was accused of having given birth to an Ethiopian, brought as evidence in her defense that what we have been describing above is a natural process in the conception of offspring.[15]

Jerome, like the Greek writers, then moves from sheep to horses and goes on to cite a lost *controversia* (a legal fiction or hypothetical case) by Quintilian, from the first century C.E., involving Ethiopians. Though Jerome does not tell us the significance of the Ethiopian child of presumably non-Ethiopian parents, we might assume that, linked as it is with Jacob's rods, it has something to do with color.

Quintilian's colors—a white woman giving birth to a black child—represent a more logical choice of a meaningful problem for a white author, racist or not. However, it was Heliodorus's version (the black woman giving birth to a white child), not Quintilian's, that was more often cited in later Jewish and Greek literature.[16] No matter which way the colors flow, the underlying assumption remains the same: what a woman looks at when she is pregnant or at the moment of conception influences the physical nature, including the color, of the child.

The idea of maternal impression through artistic influence remained a part of the medical tradition in medieval Europe. Maimonides, the celebrated Jewish physician and philosopher, writing in Arabic at the end of the twelfth century C.E., took the theme of the imitation of a painting from the Greek medical tradition:

> I heard from the ancient physicians that he who wishes to give rise to a handsome son should request a very famous painter to prepare a portrait having the likeness of a beautiful child. He should then request of his wife that, during intercourse, she look at the portrait without winking and not move her eyes right or left. And so it happened that she gave birth to a beautiful child who resembled the portrait of the painter and did not resemble his father at all.[17]

Here, as in Soran and Oppian, the woman is given the image by her husband. Yet now it is an image of the desired child, not a

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handsome man who might perhaps incite the husband's jealousy; and the woman must stare without blinking or glancing aside, a daunting prospect in even the most abbreviated act of intercourse, but also an extreme form of the emphasis on the physical process of vision.

LATER JUDAISM: VARIOUS MIDRASHIM, THE HOLY EPISTLE, AND THE ZOHAR

The child of a different color than its parents is a leitmotif of later texts that continue to transfer the embryological principle from animal husbandry to human eugenics. One of the oldest compilations of Jewish commentaries, roughly contemporaneous with Heliodorus, presents several glosses on the verse, "And Jacob took the rods" (Genesis 30:37). The first two glosses, like Genesis 31, explain the episode of Jacob and Laban's flock by miracles; the water in the troughs miraculously turned to semen, says one, while the other suggests that angels came down to help Jacob. But the third gloss, like Jerome, connects this text with the Ethiopian tale—though it uses Heliodorus's version of the colors, not Quintilian's:

> It so happened that a Kushite [Ethiopian] man married a Kushite woman who bore him a white son. The king seized the son and went to Rabbi. He said to him, "Consider whether he is my son or not." The other responded, "Are there pictures in your house?" "Yes." "Black or white?" "White." "Because of this, you have a white son."[18]

This version reads like a Cliffs Notes version of the story of Persinna giving birth to Charikleia.[19] Unlike Persinna, however, the Kushite woman does not realize that she will be accused of adultery, nor does she understand why she has a white child; she is robbed of the agency that she had in the Greek text. This Hebrew text, like many others, shifts its perspective from the mother to the reaction of the father, who is alarmed to have a white son; the unexpected change in skin color raises the suspicion of adultery. It would be hard to hazard a guess as to who (Quintilian, Jerome, Heliodorus, or the rabbis) got the story from whom (one from another, or all from another source). But it is possible that the rabbis found Heliodorus's story so apt an

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illustration of the idea of maternal impression, already present in Genesis 30, that they appropriated the episode, reworking it to their own ends.

The tale of the Ethiopian queen who gave birth to a white baby reappears in the rabbinic discussions of the judicial ordeal of the suspected adulteress:[20]

> Our rabbis said: When a woman is with her husband and is engaged in intercourse with him, and at the same time her heart is with another man whom she has seen on the road, there is no greater adultery than this; for it is said, "The wife commits adultery, taking strangers while under her husband" (Ezekiel 16:32). Can there be a woman who commits adultery *while under her husband*? It is this one, who has met another man and set her eyes upon him, and while she carries on intercourse with her husband, her heart is with him. The king of the Arabs put this question to R. Akiba: "I am black and my wife is black, yet she gave birth to a white son. Shall I kill her for having played the harlot while lying with me?" Said the other, "Are the figures in your house painted black or white?" "White," he said. The other assured him, "When you had intercourse with her, she fixed her eyes upon the white figures and bore a child like them. If you are surprised at such a possibility, study the case of our father Jacob's flock, which were influenced in their conception by the rods, as it says, 'And the flocks conceived at the sight of the rods'" (Genesis 30:39). The king of the Arabs acknowledged the justice of R. Akiba's argument. In our case as well, Moses hinted in the Torah at a similar situation by saying, "[If you have gone astray, though you are] under your husband, and if you be defiled, and some man has lain with you besides your husband . . ." (Numbers 5:20).[21]

Now the parents are Arab, but the racial point is the same (the version in *Tanhuma* says that the king of the Arabs told R. Akiba that he and his wife were Kushite, i.e., Ethiopian, but had a white child).[22] As usual, the prooftext is from Genesis 30, "the rods of Jacob," but now one of the characters cites the rods of Jacob to explain the Ethiopian problem, whereas the previous midrash told that Ethiopian story to explain the Biblical story. In fact, this text adduces both stories to explain the relationship between maternal imprinting and adultery, the latter epitomized in a verse from Ezekiel that is not about a human woman at all:

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Jerusalem is personified as the unfaithful bride of the Lord. The biblical verse about adultery is directly linked with maternal imprinting by the midrashic process; Numbers 5:20 and Ezekiel 16:32 are intratextually correlated because the same phrase—"under her husband" (*tachath ishah*)—occurs in both verses. This phrase in Numbers is not read conventionally, meaning "under his control,"[23] but literally, meaning "under him physically," suggesting that the suspected adulteress is in fact embracing her husband while thinking of another man. The forceful pronouncement that "there is no greater adultery than this" indicates the high degree of anxiety aroused by the idea of female fantasizing, an anxiety that would be reinforced by an embryological principle empowering the maternal imagination to shape the child, distorting paternal resemblance. Thus questions are raised: Is the child still his child? Who is the true father?

Some fantastic considerations are taken up in the Babylonian Talmud in its discussion of the proper conditions and manner for conjugal intercourse, undertaken as a spiritual exercise. The Talmud cites a tale about Imma Shalom, wife of R. Eliezer, who was asked why her children were so beautiful; she credited her husband's pious conduct. More specifically, Imma Shalom had asked her husband why they engaged in conjugal relations only at midnight, and he had replied, "So that I do not set my eyes on another woman, begetting sons who are as bastards."[24] Such eugenic precaution assumes that in the middle of the night there would be no woman out and about upon whom Rabbi Eliezer might look and thus receive an image that he might then imprint upon his own progeny. This is a relatively rare example of paternal imprinting; Eliezer is concerned not that his wife will hear or see someone other than him, but that he will see or hear someone other than her. Moreover, it is a negative form of paternal imprinting: Eliezer makes sure that he does *not* make a false impression upon his unborn child.

Another story from the Babylonian Talmud, about Rabbi Yohanan, a sage renowned for his beauty, seems to contradict the story of Imma Shalom and Rabbi Eliezer:

> R. Yohanan used to go and sit at the gates of the *mikveh* [ritual bathhouse]. "When the daughters of Israel ascend from the bath,"

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> he said, "let them gaze upon me, so that they bear sons as beautiful and learned as I."[25]

The *mikveh* is where Jewish women go to prepare themselves for the sabbath, the last public place they would visit before returning home. As it is customary to engage in intercourse on the Sabbath eve, the beautiful image of R. Yohanan would still be freshly impressed on their minds' eyes when they made love with their husbands. R. Yohanan was trying to do precisely what R. Eliezer was trying to prevent: the women visually impregnated by R. Yohanan, through a (not so) chance encounter on the street, would give birth to near-bastards. Subsequent wordplay on "the gaze" in this text suggests that many listeners or readers would see it as a tongue-in-cheek parody of Greco-Roman eugenic techniques; but there may also be an underlying sense of anxiety over the reproduction not of male children but of male cultural values, notably Torah study.[26] The faithful reproduction of ideas, as well as children, requires a certain family resemblance; in recreating the sage's teaching, one replicates his image.

A condensed version of the Ethiopian story appears in *The Holy Epistle* (*Iggeret HaKodesh*), a thirteenth century Kabbalistic sex manual that elaborates upon motifs in the Babylonian Talmud. As usual, it cites the story of Jacob's rods as a prooftext, but it arranges the colors in the Quintilian fashion:

> [A queen] had a black baby though the king and she were white and extremely comely. The king wanted to kill her until a wise man came and said, "Perhaps you thought of a black man at the time of intercourse." They examined the matter and found black designs on the drapes in their conjugal room. She said that she had looked at these black figures during intercourse and thought of them. This is just like the sticks of Jacob.[27]

Of course, it isn't "just like" the sticks (the translator's terms for what we have been calling the rods) of Jacob: the imprinting is accidental, and problematic to the father, in part because the passive, accidental visual impression is here combined with an active, mental act on the part of the woman. But when the wife falls in love with art, she is innocent; loving the art is not adulterous.

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According to this text, the wife fantasizes about her husband, who contemplates the archetypal *sefirot* (divine emanations constituting the fullness and mystical shape of the Godhead) as a cognitive template to stamp the child with the *imago dei*. The mother's impression here is negative, like Eliezer's: her role is to prevent adultery of thought, while the husband's impression is positive. Thus the paternity is twofold: the wife focuses her mind on her husband, so that the child physically resembles his biological father, while her husband focuses his thoughts on the supernal form, so that the child metaphysically resembles his Father in heaven.[28]

Theological considerations are at the heart of the *Zohar*'s commentary on Jacob's first child, Reuben, begotten upon Leah apparently on the wedding night, when Leah was substituted for Rachel:

> On the night when he had intercourse with Leah he was thinking of Rachel. He lay with Leah but thought of Rachel, and his semen followed his thought, but it was not intentional, for he did not know. . . . And because the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that it was not intentional and that Jacob had truthful thoughts during his desire, [Reuben] was not disqualified from being counted among the holy tribes. Otherwise he would have been disqualified.[29]

This is an instance of paternal rather than maternal imprinting, and it is theologized by supplementing the power of the father's intentions with the power of the Father's intentions. The translator explains that since Jacob had intercourse with Leah under the genuine impression that she was Rachel, his sin of adultery was not intentional; and since Reuben's conception took place when Jacob was thinking of Rachel, she was finally the channel through which the birthright, bypassing Leah's son Reuben, was transmitted to her own later-born son, Joseph, and thence to Joseph's sons. The meditations on the true mother of Reuben, Rachel or Leah, depend upon the fantasizing of Jacob and God.

Jacob's imagination transformed not the form but the status of his son, indeed of both of his sons, Joseph and Reuben. The Babylonian Talmud enumerates ten kinds of children who are like bastards but who are not legally recognized as such, including the "children of substitution" (*b'nei temurah*), born when either one of the parents was thinking of someone else.[30] Simi-

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larly, in the *Zohar*, a man who makes love to his wife while he is thinking about another woman is said to "sow false seed," and the child is considered a kind of changeling, particularly susceptible to evil influences.[31] While adultery of thought is legally distinct from the corporeal act of adultery,[32] it nonetheless produces near-bastards and is considered morally reproachable:

> If a man defiles himself by evil thoughts when he comes to have intercourse with his wife, and sets his thoughts and desires upon another woman, and emits semen with these evil thoughts, then his thought effects changes in the world below [i.e., an exchange of women in one's thoughts]. . . . The body of the child that he begets is called "a changeling" [because the body was created while the father "changed" his thoughts during procreation].[33]

This idea underlies the *Zohar* text that insists that Reuben was *not* a "changeling," because Jacob was thinking about the woman he should have been in bed with, and thought he was in bed with; this is why he had "truthful thoughts." Had he known he was in bed with Leah and still thought of Rachel, the child would have been a changeling.

CHRISTIAN EUROPE: PARACELSUS, GOETHE, HOFFMANN, AND SCHNITZLER

Christians, too, tended to fantasize that their wives were fantasizing. That children usually resemble their parents remained the standard European folk opinion, despite dissenting voices of people such as Malebranche (and several authors before him), who "suggested that no two faces in all the world are absolutely identical, and that nature tolerates great diversity,"[34] and Jacques-André Millot, who argued (in Paris, in 1800), that "resemblance is uncanny. Contrary to the Aristotelian definition, he who does not resemble his parents is not a monster but a normal child; the monster is a rarity, the result of pure chance, he who *does* perfectly resemble his parents."[35]

But children who did not resemble their parents were, *pace* Malebranche and Millot, generally regarded as monstrosities that had to be explained by the theory of parental imprinting, which made an important distinction between external and internal objects of desire. Paracelsus, writing in Germany in the

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sixteenth century, argued that the man's fantasy was the source of his semen, and added, "Thus God has put semen into the imagination of man."[36] He granted that women's imaginations, too, could affect the embryo—yet in positive ways:

> Through the power of the imagination, women in such moments imagine a learned wise man, such as Plato or Aristotle, or a warrior, Julius or Barbarossa, or a great artist, like the painter Dürer . . . and so they will bear children like them. And there must be not just lust and desire, but also experience of these arts and wisdoms, in the same way as there is an experience when they see a fish. . . . Thus a woman hears an artist like a musician, or even a learned man, and has a desire for that, and gives the impression to the child: and even if she does not understand it, and cannot, nevertheless the child will show the effect.[37]

Paracelsus attributes to the woman's imagination the same positive effect that other texts assign to the woman's experience of looking at a painting (which, presumably, her husband has given her). What is unusual here is that mental qualities as well as physical are seen as transmitted in this way; stories about parental imprinting generally speak only of superficial resemblances. It is also unusual for the woman's accidental encounters with other men, artists and musicians, let alone her imagination of other men, like Plato or Aristotle, to produce benefits not planned but welcomed by her husband.

The positive eugenic benefits imagined by Paracelsus were, however, generally outweighed by the fear of the negative results of women's imaginations. Fortunio Liceti, in 1616, maintained that "though the father's imagination can affect him during the sexual act, the woman's is always at work, after copulation and during conception, when the fetus is formed."[38] Ah, but what were those women thinking about? Their husbands, Ambrose Paré had hopefully suggested in 1585: "One more commonly sees children who resemble their father than their mother because of the mother's great ardor and imagination during carnal copulation! So much so that the child takes on the form and the color of what she knows and imagines so strongly in her mind."[39] Now, the logic of this statement seems to imply that the woman normally imagines her husband and perhaps also looks at him, since the child normally resembles

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him. But two hundred years later, in 1788, Benjamin Bablot argued from the same premise (that women are more passionate and imaginative than men) to reach the opposite conclusion: "As a child presents sometimes more his mother's features than those of his father, those attributing the cause to imagination say that the mother's thoughts were completely absorbed by her loving passion during conception and were unable to focus on her husband's features."[40] And so, we may conclude, she focused on her own image, or even—heaven forbid!—her own pleasure. This line of reasoning had been made explicit in a medical case, cited by the Chevalier Sir Kenelm Digby in 1678, of a woman who kept gazing at her artificial beauty marks in a mirror and who gave birth to a child with such marks: "Instead of thinking about her husband, the mother has given in to . . . a narcissistic delight in her own image."[41] The possibility that she might have been thinking about another man, however, inspired still more devastating speculations.

Voltaire, writing in 1765, believed in the power of parental imprinting, despite himself: "This passive imagination of easily shaken brains often produces in children the visible marks of an impression that the mother has received; there are innumerable examples, and the present writer has seen such striking ones that he would accuse his eyes of lying if he doubted them, and although this influence of the imagination is inexplicable, no other influence explains the matter any better."[42] Montaigne did not doubt what he had heard: "There was presented to Charles, King of Bohemia and Emperor, a girl from near Pisa, all hairy and bristly, who her mother said had been thus conceived because of a picture of Saint John the Baptist hanging by her bed."[43] This could happen because the woman misinterprets what she sees, and her *mistaken* perception of what she has seen imprints the child: "Thus, the furs covering John the Baptist are 'translated' into a hair-covered body."[44] In the eighteenth century, the Siamese twins Judith and Helena were thought to be connected as they were "because early in her pregnancy their mother had been foolish enough to watch dogs mating."[45] We may also see in these texts atavisms of the ancient connection between maternal imprinting and animal husbandry. The theme remained popular in European fiction;[46] in James Joyce's *A*

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Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), Stephen Dedalus imagines "the sleek lives of the patricians of Ireland" and wonders, "How could he hit their conscience or how cast his shadow over the imagination of their daughters, before their squires begat upon them, that they might breed a race less ignoble than their own?"[47] Like R. Yohanan, Stephen longs to lend his superior qualities to other men's wives, using not his body but his shadow—that is to say, his image, like the image in a painting.

The theme was particularly influential in Germany. In Goethe's novella *Elective Affinities* (*Wahlverwandtschaften*, 1809), *both* parents fantasize, and the child resembles a combination of the two fantasized lovers. On what amounts to their wedding night, Charlotte and Edward make love, but Charlotte is aware of the ghostly presence in the bedroom of the Captain, whom she really loves, and Edward, similarly seduced by the darkness and his own imagination, feels that he holds Ottilie in his arms. As a result, the son of Charlotte and Edward is the striking image of their secret loves:

> People saw in it a wonderful, indeed a miraculous child. . . . What surprised them more . . . [was] the double resemblance, which became more and more conspicuous. In figure and in the features of the face, it was like the Captain; the eyes every day it was less easy to distinguish from the eyes of Ottilie.[48]

The child—who thus reveals the effects of his parents' imaginations and betrays their moral adultery—dies in early childhood.

In E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Doubles" ("*Die Doppelgänger*," 1821), two babies born to two different women look exactly alike; they completely resemble the man that only one of the women made love with, though the other loved him too: "Even if this could be chance or an illusion, the quite superior formation of the skull and a small moon-shaped mole on the left temple affirmed the complete similarity."[49] The father of the child that resembles the other man banishes mother and child. His jealousy is justified not physically but spiritually; the woman accuses herself of having committed adultery only in her mind but regards this as an inexpiable sin, a mental infidelity sufficient to cause the maternal imprinting. Her behavior outweighs mere visual considerations, but that behavior is a clue to her all-

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important mental state, which is ambivalent. People who were "closely acquainted" with her knew she could not have had an illicit affair, despite the visual evidence to the contrary, because she was so good; her husband, however, was swayed not by the visual evidence but by his wife's behavior—she hated her child.

The racial (or racist) aspects of maternal imprinting also continued to be expressed in European literature. Ambrose Paré, writing in the sixteenth century, retells the Heliodorus version of the Ethiopian queen and then tells the Quintilian version of the colors, for good measure:

> Hippocrates saved a princess accused of adultery, because she had given birth to a child as black as a Moor, her husband and she both having white skin; which woman was absolved upon Hippocrates' persuasion that it was [caused by] the portrait of a Moor, similar to the child, which was customarily attached to her bed.[50]

The story about Hippocrates was widely cited during the Renaissance.[51]

Arthur Schnitzler mocked the theory of maternal imprinting in his story, "Andreas Thameyer's Last Letter" (1918), about a suicide note written by a man unwilling to admit to himself that his wife had betrayed him with a black man:

> I've read the case described by Malebranche. And Martin Luther himself—as one can read in his after-dinner speeches—knew, in Wittenberg, a man who had a death-head because his mother had been frightened by the sight of a corpse while she was pregnant with him. [Here he cites Heliodorus's tale of the Ethiopian queen, and other cases noted by Hamberg, Weisenburg, Preuss, Limböck, and others.] In 1737 in France a woman gave birth to a son when her husband had been absent for four years, and she swore that she had, during that period, dreamt of the passionate embrace of her husband. The physicians and midwives of Montpellier declared that this was quite possible, and the court at Havre declared the child legitimate. . . .
>
> And it happened to me, and to my wife, who was true to me, as truly as I am living at this moment. Our child is now fourteen days old. . . . My wife has been true to me, and the child that she bore to me is my child. She had a shock in her pregnancy, in August, when she was at the zoo with her sister Fritzi, where these foreign people had camped, these uncanny black people

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> [*diese unheimlichen Schwarzen*]. . . . Wednesday she and her sister Fritzi went to the zoo, where Negroes had camped. I myself saw these people later, in September. . . . My wife was terrified, and alone, for Fritzi had suddenly left her to go off with a married man who has a rather bad reputation. . . . My wife waited for Fritzi for two hours, and then the gates were shut, and she had to go. She told me all this, with her arms around my neck as I sat on her bed, and she trembled in fear, and I was afraid, too, though I didn't know then that she was already carrying our child.[52]

The argument turns upon the layered meanings of the phrase, "*Sie hat sich versehen*," which means, literally, "She mis-saw" (on the analogy of *verhören*, "to mis-hear"), that is, "She made an oversight, a mistake," then, "She had a (visual) shock," and more particularly, said of pregnant women, "She had a (visual) shock in her pregnancy," that is, "She received a maternal impression." (Havelock Ellis refers to "the conception of a 'maternal impression' [the German *versehen*]."[53]) So a pregnant woman who sees something mistakenly has a shock which imprints a mistake upon the embryo. In Schnitzler's story, the husband's suspicions of his wife are projected onto the disreputable married man with whom the wife's *sister* has an affair and are further inflamed by his racist attitude to the black people who shocked his wife. These emotions keep breaking through his insistence that this sort of thing can be explained by men of science, and they finally drive him mad.

The Christian theories grow out of the father's fear that his child may not be his child, or, rather, that he can never be sure that his child is his child—unless, of course, he trusts his wife. Resemblance was the straw that men grasped in the storm of their sexual paranoia. Montaigne cites Aristotle as saying that "in a certain nation where the women were in common they assigned children to their fathers by resemblance."[54] The fear that women might be, indeed, "in common," is what underlies this entire corpus, and various ideas about resemblance are conjured up in the attempt to lay that fear to rest.

In premodern Europe, the mother's imagination and desire gave birth to a "false resemblance" and were defined as illegitimate when they were not directed toward her husband.[55] Thus, as Marie-Hélène Huet has pointed out, nonresembling children

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served as "a public reminder that, short of relying on visible resemblance, paternity could never be proven." The monster, the child that did not resemble the father, unmasked what the theory of resemblance concealed, the fear of adultery; it "erased paternity and proclaimed the dangerous power of the female imagination."[56]

As if this were not bad enough, the theory was turned on its head to show that resemblance, too, could dissemble. Thus Nicolas Venette, in 1687, agrees with the wise lawyers and doctors who "claim that a woman who thinks strongly about her husband in the midst of illicit pleasures can produce, through the force of her imagination, a child that *perfectly resembles him who is not the father. . . . Resemblance is not proof of filiation. . . .*"[57] Now, it is easy enough to imagine that a woman might dream of her lover while in the embrace of her husband, but why, one might ask, would she think of her husband while in the embrace of her lover? One answer is that if she, too, subscribes to the theory of maternal imprinting, she will think about her husband when she is with her lover on purpose, in order to conceal her adultery.[58] Thus, Huet argues, the mother is no longer regarded as a victim of her own passion or desire, but, rather, in control of her own imagination to such a degree that she can produce, through that imagination, "not a monster but its exact opposite: a child who actually resembles the legitimate spouse who did not father it."[59]

The backlash from this development was very serious. For where the theory of maternal imprinting doubtless saved the necks of a number of adulteresses whose children did not resemble their fathers, the corollary (that an adulteress could imprint her lover's child with her husband's features) cast suspicion upon *all* women, indeed particularly upon faithful women, whose children *did* resemble their legitimate fathers.[60] Women as a whole were portrayed as bodysnatchers, who could at will replace a seemingly normal child with a monster conceived in the pods of adulterous beds. This was truly a no-win situation; women were damned if they did, and damned if they didn't, produce children who resembled their husbands. The cognitive dissonance that resulted from this uncertainty drove men both to attempt to control women's sexuality and to project their images upon their sons. Thus M. Boursicot (the French diplomat

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in the real-life affair that inspired David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*) explained why he thought his (male) Chinese lover was a woman who had borne him a son by saying of the child, "He looked like me."[61]

There are also counterinstances in which the woman's revulsion from a man or his image, rather than her desire for him, produces another sort of negative effect upon the embryo. Thus Nicolas Andry de Vois-regard, dean of the faculty of medicine in Paris in 1700, wrote: "If the pregnant woman's passionate desire [*envie*] for certain things she cannot obtain right away is sometimes capable of producing deformities in the child she is carrying, the sight of an object that causes her revulsion and horror is even more capable of doing so."[62] This works simply enough in cases where a woman is frightened by the sight of a deformed man and brings forth a deformed child, or by the sight of a knife and brings forth a child with a birthmark in the shape of a knife. But what if that repulsive "object" is her husband? Jewish and Christian texts do not seem to have devoted much attention to this possibility, but it is much discussed topic in ancient Indian texts, to which we now turn.

ANCIENT INDIA: VYASA AND VARUTHINI

The idea of parental imprinting is expressed in several Hindu myths, the most famous of which is closely associated with the Levirate, or *niyoga*—the duty of a dead man's brother to beget a son upon his brother's widow. The child of such a Levirate is regarded as the son of the dead man, whose widow presumably imagines him when she is in the arms of his brother. In the great Sanskrit epic the *Mahabharata*, composed over a period of several centuries before and after the turn of the common era, the sage Vyasa—a dirty old man who appears in the epic as a kind of walking semen bank—is called in to beget sons upon Ambika and Ambalika, the widows of his half-brother:

> When queen Ambika looked at Vyasa she saw his tawny matted hair and his blazing eyes and his red beard. "How ugly!" she thought; she was so frightened that she could not look at him, and in her terror she shut her eyes as tight as buds. Indeed, the sage was ugly, a skinny man of a most peculiar color. [He said,]

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> "Because of his mother's deficiency in the quality of sight, [the child] will be blind." And after a while, Ambika gave birth to a son who was blind, Dhritarashtra.
>
> Ambalika sat on a splendid bed, deeply depressed, wondering, "Who is it who will come?" Then the great sage came to Ambalika in the same way. When she saw him, she too was so upset that she turned pale, and Vyasa said, "Since you with your lovely face turned pale when you saw how ugly I am, therefore this son of yours will be pale, and his name will be Pale (Pandu)."[63]

The text seems to take seriously—far more seriously than the texts that we have considered from other traditions—the woman's ability to imprint the child not with what she passively sees, or even actively fantasizes, but with what she *does* in reaction to what she sees; she closes her eyes (which we may see as simply another aspect of the emphasis on vision) or becomes pale. In fact, however, we may reformulate this as an instance of *paternal* impression: the child is born looking like *what the father saw* (and put into words in his curse)—a woman pale, or with her eyes closed.

The women reject Vyasa because he is old and ugly, but also because he is the wrong color (too dark? too light?), and this, plus Ambalika's temporary pallor, results in the birth of a child who is the wrong color, Pandu the Pale. Is this another echo of the racial aspect of color that haunts tales of maternal impression? Or is it an instance of the intersecting claims of maternal and paternal influence—the child who is pale both because his mother turned pale and because his father was the wrong color? Precisely such a conflation of influences is manifest in one of the few other ancient Indian stories of this genre, in a text composed several centuries after the *Mahabharata*. The woman in this story, like the mother of Dhritarashtra, closes her eyes. She does so not in conscious rejection of the man who forced himself upon her, but in imagination of the man she would have preferred—and thinks she is in bed with. This time, therefore, the child is born not blind but in the image of that other man:

> Varuthini, a courtesan of the gods, fell in love with a Brahmin named Pravara and begged him to stay with her, but he rejected her and returned to his wife. Now, a demigod [*gandharva*] named

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> Kali was in love with Varuthini and had been rejected by her. He observed Varuthini now and reasoned, "She is in love with a human. If I take on his form, she will suspect nothing and will make love with me." He approached her and said, "You must not look at me during the time of our shared sexual enjoyment, but close your eyes and unite with me." She agreed, and when they made love, and her eyes were tightly closed, she thought, because of his hot semen, it was the form of [the Brahmin] suffused with the sacrificial fire. Then, after a while, she conceived an embryo, who came from the demigod's semen and from (her) thinking about the Brahmin's form. The demigod went away, still in the form of the Brahmin.[64]

The implication is that the demigod asks her to close her eyes because he fears he will reveal his true form when he makes love. But the text also implies that the child had the *true* form of the man that Varuthini thought she was making love with, just as, in the Zoharic midrash, Jacob's heir is the son of the woman he thinks he is in bed with when he begets his first son. The Sanskrit phrase, "from his semen and from her thinking," closely parallels the Hebrew phrase, "his semen followed his thought"—though with the essential difference that, here, his semen follows *her* thought.

A Telugu version of the story explains how the child could be affected in this way:

> Through that experience of deep delight
> the flame that was burning
> in Pravara's body
> became magically kindled
> in the *gandharva*'s form
> now held fast in *her*
> unwavering mind.
> Thus the child, a glowing fire,
> was conceived and grew to ripeness
> during nine months in her womb.[65]

Presumably the child then had not only Pravara's form but Pravara's flame, his essence, indeed his soul.

One medical text, composed sometime after the ninth century C.E., conflates external and internal influences: the child is said to resemble not only whatever creature the mother might be

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thinking of at the time of conception, but whatever she might look at during her fertile period, right after menstruation ends.[66] Thus, a woman who wanted to bear a white child was encouraged to furnish her bedroom with white things and, morning and evening, to look constantly at a big, white bull or a white horse of noble breeding—a new twist on the combination of animal husbandry, color coding, and visual imprinting.[67]

But there is another party that outranks the father, let alone the mother, in shaping the embryo: the embryo itself. For, according to the karma theory, the nature of a child is determined primarily not through the imaginations of his [*sic*, as usual] mother or father, but through his own imaginations in previous lives. Far more relevant than what the parent fantasizes in the sexual act is what the embryo thought about (or, in some cases, saw or even heard)[68] when he was dying. In terms of the theory of parental imprinting, the unborn embryo is his own parent, and imprints what he imagines or sees upon his future self.

Hindu embryology also assumes that the male embryo (one is not concerned about any other kind) is sentient within the womb, which further limits the agency of the woman in whose womb he sojourns for nine months. Medieval Hindu medical texts imagine the musings of the child inside the womb,[69] and several Tibetan and Indian Buddhist texts maintain that the state of mind of the unborn embryo (the transmigrating soul of someone who has recently died), hovering voyeuristically over the bed of the copulating parents-to-be, determines the nature (and, more specifically, the gender) of the baby who is to be born: if the embryo desires the woman and therefore hates the man, it becomes a male child; if the opposite, a female.[70] This proto-Freudian plot leaves little room for the intervention of the mother's mind in forming the embryo. We might call it embryonic imprinting.

CONCLUSION

There are clear historical links between the Jewish, Greek, and Christian texts we have considered, which explains some of their overlapping ideas. Some of these influences may have operated in India as well, but by and large the Indian examples function

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in contrast, making us aware, on the one hand, of the arbitrariness of much of what is shared in the other traditions and, on the other hand, of possibilities that the other traditions never seem to have considered.

Let us attempt to sort out a number of rather different conclusions that have been derived from this shared assumption of parental imprinting. First of all, the gender of the imprinter varies: occasionally a man will exert a force of paternal impression on a child, but overwhelmingly it is women who participate in this process. Second, there are differing views as to the moment at which imprinting takes place: the moment of conception, or any moment during pregnancy (or, in Hinduism, the period after menstruation or the moment of death). Premodern traditions favor the moment of conception. Third, the nature of the resulting child is seen in varying ways: some traditions regard it as monstrous, others as illegitimate but still human, still others as preferable to children born without such influences. But this difference must be correlated with a fourth factor: the causes of this veering from what is normal, primarily visual imprinting and mental imagination.

Visual imprinting, which reacts to material objects physically present at or before the time of conception, may take place accidentally or it may be brought about by the father on purpose, through the active manipulation of external stimuli and to his liking. For the Greeks, at least, the intentional use of images in a kind of pre-scientific planned-parenthood program overrode many anxieties about the failure of a child to resemble his parents. Here we must distinguish between the images that the husband offers to his wife in the hopes that she will desire a *child* cast in that image (though only Maimonides, among the sources cited here, took the logic one step further and suggested that the image should be of a child, not of a man), and the images that the wife may accidentally see that make her desire a *man*, and produce a child cast in his image. It comes down to the matter of who initiates the fantasy. Her fantasy is only acceptable if it is, in fact, *his* fantasy, his idea of what she should be seeing while he makes love to her; and it is certainly easier to regulate external vision than internal vision.

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If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, different traditions disagreed as to who should be flattered. Early Greek sources (and Paracelsus) imagined fathers who wanted their sons to be better than them, or at least more beautiful, and so resorted to the techniques of animal husbandry and the manipulation of works of art to influence the mind of the mother, encouraging their wives to improve the stock by "flattering" other men—or, preferably, gods. But Jews were in general aniconic as well as anti-eugenic. What appears to have been a mostly satisfying fiction in Hellenistic lore reappears in rabbinic literature as a disturbing possibility, requiring censure; the midrashim reject eugenics as bastardy. Most Christian sources similarly imagined fathers who wanted their sons to be just like them, to resemble no one else (except, sometimes, God). And Hindus, too, believed in the negative effects of impressions from images not intentionally presented by the father. They also believed that the embryo himself might exert mental influence, for ill or good, upon the physical form of his future self.

But certain tropes transcend cultural barriers. Male authors within all of the traditions we have touched upon feared the woman who imagined a man of her own choice, instead of just looking at a picture supplied by her husband. They insisted that the woman's gaze is passive; by seeing, she herself is imprinted, and this visual passivity overrides the active role she takes in handing this imprint on to her child, whereas a man would take the initiative from the start in actively stamping him with the paternal mark. By contrast, the imprinting that takes place entirely within the mother's mind, through her active imagination, excites the father's jealousy. Thomas Laqueur states the case very well: "Since normal conception is, in a sense, the male having an idea in the woman's body, then abnormal conception, the mola, is a conceit for her having an ill-gotten and inadequate idea of her own."[71] The eye was therefore an instrument of eugenics, passively and externally receiving the images produced by the father, while the mind (hidden inside the woman) was an instrument of adultery.

The ancient tales of black women giving birth to white children through the implicitly positive influence of works of art (positive, in the view of these texts, both because art is superior

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to nature and because white is superior to black) yield, in later cultures, to racist fantasies about white women cuckolding their husbands with black lovers. These racist images are easily conflated with the ancient mechanisms of animal husbandry, in which color is an essential factor, through the implicit equation of animals with people of other races.[72] The emphasis on color is a part of the general emphasis on physical (visual) resemblance, which usually made other factors such as behavior seem irrelevant in establishing paternity. The best way, therefore, to answer the question, "Whose child is it?" was to ask another question: "Whose face does it have?"

What seems most astonishing in all of this is the extent to which the seemingly most plausible explanation for the birth of a child who does not resemble his father—namely, the fact that some other man fathered him—is rejected by most of our sources (with the notable exception of the Jewish sources) in favor of fantasies about fantasies of a most extravagant nature. If your wife gives a birth to a child who looks just like your best friend, it needs no ghost come from the grave to explain the cause. Our premodern sources knew this, too. Yet though Heliodorus ("What had happened was so fantastic that no one would believe my explanation") and Voltaire ("This influence of the imagination is inexplicable") believed that the theory of maternal imprinting was unbelievable, they believed it nonetheless.

Even the woman's active imagination, far more threatening than her response to an image prepared by her husband, was not as threatening to her husband as a real man glimpsed in the street or market, even if he subsequently made love to the woman only in her fantasy and never in the flesh. The simpler idea (adultery) does seem to have occurred to some. Thus in 1726 Dr. James Blondel remarked of one of Malabranche's cases that the mother had lied and Malebranche was too naive to recognize this—an argument that, as Marie-Hélène Huet remarks archly, "had never been made by those disagreeing with Malebranche."[73] And Jean-Baptiste Demangeon wrote in 1807, "As for dissemblances, it is not unreasonable to believe that, when they are not prompted by adultery, they result from some disorder in the functioning of the organs of nutrition."[74] Yet this, too, is puzzling. Since these men believed that women did in fact lie

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(dissemble) and commit adultery all the time, why did they not invoke that belief in the context of embryonic dissemblance? The answer must lie in two rather different factors: their desperate need for some sort of assurance of paternity, and their genuine curiosity about what we would now call genetics, particularly about the problem of nonresemblance—a curiosity that transcended even the highly charged agenda of paternal insecurity.

The theory of maternal imprinting mutes the power of the real other man, the obvious villain of the piece; the complex mechanical causations of imprinting obscure the affective dimension of wives falling in love with other men. There may have been a real man, but she merely imagined him, through the adultery of thought. This is then further distanced by the suggestion that she merely imagined a man who does not in fact exist (such as a character from fiction or mythology), then that she imagined an artistic representation of a real or unreal man, and then that the husband takes charge and deliberately places a picture of another man in the bedroom for his wife to gaze at—as a model for the desired *child*—while he makes love to her. But the repressed knowledge of adultery is always there and bursts out in various paranoid forms. To men who fantasized that mental acts influenced the quality of their offspring, the very survival of the species depended upon the sexual fantasies of their women.

ENDNOTES

[1]Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 58.

[2]The Babylonian Talmud, compiled after the fourth century C.E., briefly mentions the same eugenic mechanism in a discussion of breeding the "red heifer without defect" required by Numbers 19:2 for the cultic preparations of the water sprinkled for impurity. To ensure the birth of an unblemished red calf, according to Rav Kahana, "They place a red cup in front of her [the cow] at the time when the male mounts her." (*Avodah Zerah* 24a. All references to the Babylonian Talmud are to the standard Vilna edition, and all translations from the Hebrew are by Gregory Spinner, unless otherwise noted.)

[3]Aristotle, *Problemata* 10.10, trans. W. S. Hett, Loeb Classical Library (1936). Aristotle discusses at some length the resemblance of children to their parents, in *De Partibus Animalium* 1.1, 640, trans. A. L. Peck, Loeb Classical

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Library (1983), 63 and *De Generatione Animalium* 4.3, 767–769, trans. A. L. Peck, Loeb Classical Library (1983), 401–416.

[4]Aristotle, *De Partibus Animalium* 1.1, 640a:19–22 (p. 61) and *De Generatione Animalium* 4.3, 769a:15 (p. 415).

[5]Empedocles, cited by Aetius in *Doxographi Graeci* 5.12.2, ed. Herman Diels (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), 432. See also *The Poem of Empedocles*, trans. Brad Inwood (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 185.

[6]Soran, *Gynecology* 1, par. 39; in *Soranos d'Éphèse: Maladies des Femmes*, trans. Paul Burguière and Danielle Gouryevitch (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1988), 36; see also *Soranus' Gynecology*, trans. Oswei Temkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1956), 37–38.

[7]Oppian, *Kynegetica*, 1.327–328, in *Oppian Colluthus Tryphiodorus*, trans. A. W. Mair, Loeb Classical Library (1928), 34–35.

[8]See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 149–212.

[9]Heliodorus, *Ethiopica*, book 4, chapter 8; "An Ethiopian Story," in B. P. Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, trans. J. R. Morgan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 349–589, here 432–433.

[10]J. R. Morgan, in Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 433, citing Achilles Tatius 3.7 and Philostratos *Imagines* 1.29.

[11]Fortunio Liceti, cited by Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 23.

[12]Frank M. Snowden, Jr., in *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), argues that the Greeks were innocent of racism, though he is regarded by some reviewers as naive. Evidence in his favor might include the positive Greek attitude to the black Athena and black Demeter as well as Poseidon's friendship with the Ethiopians among whom he feasts, oblivious to the needs of his Greek friends (Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.22, 5.282–288).

[13]*Soranos d'Éphèse*, Burguière and Gouryevitch, 83.

[14]Heliodorus, *Ethiopica*, Book 10, chapter 14, 568–569.

[15]Jerome, *Hebrew Questions*, on Genesis 33; *Saint Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, trans. C. T. R. Hayward (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 67.

[16]This is puzzling unless we assume that the whole story, which is after all *about* a reactive back-formation ("What could have produced a child of the wrong color? Perhaps it was the sight of someone of the wrong color . . ."), is itself first expressed in a reactive back-formation ("Imagine if a black queen were as concerned about a white baby as we white people [like Quintilian] are concerned about a black baby . . .").

[17]Maimonides, *The Medical Aphorisms of Moses Maimonides*, trans. Fred Rosner (Haifa: The Maimonides Research Institute, 1989), 388, citing *De Theriaco ad Pisonem VI*.

[18]Bereshit Rabbah 73:10, ed. Theodor-Albeck, 854.

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[19]This connection was made by Julius Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medezin* (1911), trans. Fred Rosner (Brooklyn: Hebrew Publishing, 1978), 392.

[20]The ordeal, called Sota, is described in Numbers 5:12–31 and in the Mishnaic tractate of that name.

[21]*Bemidbar Rabba* 9:34, in M. A. Mirkin, ed., *Midrash Rabba* (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1977), 213 ff.

[22]*Tanhuma*, Naso, 7, ed. Hanokh Zundel, 141.

[23]As, for example, in Genesis 41:35; Isaiah 3:6; and Psalms 8:7, 106:42.

[24]*Nedarim* 20b; cf. *Kallah* 50b and *Kallah Rabbati* 52a.

[25]*Baba Metzia* 84a; cf. also *Berakhot* 20a. The version in *Berakhot* omits the phrase "and learned," thus emphasizing the external form of the beautiful R. Yohanan.

[26]Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), 216 ff.

[27]Seymour J. Cohen, *The Holy Letter: A Study in Jewish Sexual Morality* (Nashvale, N.J.: Aronson, 1993), 142–144.

[28]See Elliot Wolfson, "Woman—the Feminine as Other in Theosophic Kabbalah: Some Philosophical Observations on the Divine Androgyne," in Laurence Silberstein and Robert Cohn, eds., *The Other in Jewish Thought and History* New York: New York University Press, 1994), 201 n. 66.

[29]Isaiah Tishby, ed., *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, vol. 3, trans. David Goldstein, The Littman Library (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1402–1403.

[30]*Kallah* 50b, *Kallah Rabbati* 52a.

[31]Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 2, 646–649.

[32]At *Sota* 26b, the legal parameters of adultery are interpreted through the phrasing of Numbers 5:13.

[33]Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 3, 1401.

[34]Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 81.

[35]Ibid., 95.

[36]Paracelsus, *Liber de Generatione Hominis*, in Franz Hartmann, ed., *The Life of Paracelsus, with the Substance of his Teachings* (San Diego: Wizards, 1986), 215–216.

[37]Paracelsus, *De Morbis Invisibilis*, in Hans Ranser, ed., *Schriften, Theophrasts von Hohenheim gennant Paracelsus* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1921), 314–315. Translation by Wendy Doniger.

[38]Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 15.

[39]Ambrose Paré, *Toutes les oeuvres* (1585), book 24, 925–926, cited by Huet in *Monstrous Imagination*, 15.

[40]Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 71.

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[41]Ibid., 73.

[42]Voltaire, "Imagination," in Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopedie, ou Dictionnaire raisonne des art, sciences et metiers*, vol. 8 (Paris: Briasson, 1751–65), 560–563, here 561.

[43]Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 75. See also Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 13 and 19–20 and Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 129.

[44]Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 21.

[45]Midas Dekkers, *Dearest Pet: On Bestiality*, trans. Paul Vincent (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 83.

[46]See Joseph Garver, "Die Macht der Phantasie: Die 'heredity of influence' als literarische Thema," in *Saeculum* (1982) (3–4):287–311.

[47]James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), 259.

[48]Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, trans. James Anthony Froude and R. Dillon Boylan (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1962), 224.

[49]E. T. A. Hoffmann, "The Doubles," in *The Tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann*, ed. and trans. Leonard J. Kent and Elizabeth C. Knight (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 234–279, here 273.

[50]Ambrose Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*, trans. Janis L. Pallister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 38–39. Céard said the story came from Hippocrates's *Opera*, section III, "De natura pueri," perhaps through Sylvius.

[51]Ambrose Paré, *Monsters*, 190 n. 47.

[52]Arthur Schnitzler, "Andreas Thameyers Letzer Brief," in *Gesammelte Werke, Erste Abteilung, Erzählende Schriften* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1918), 220–228. Translation by Wendy Doniger.

[53]Havelock Ellis, "The Psychic State in Pregnancy," in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1906), 201–229, here 218.

[54]Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 578.

[55]Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 33.

[56]Ibid., 34 and 1.

[57]Ibid., 79–80.

[58]The same sort of triple-cross was at play in Jewish arguments that God could not only make the adulterer's child look like the adulterer (Vayikra Rabba 23:12) but could make him look like the husband, if the child was suspected of being fathered by someone else. Thus Rashi's midrash on Genesis 25:19 says that to counter rumors that Isaac had been fathered by Abhimelech, God intervened and miraculously changed Isaac's face into the image of Abraham's, so that the aged countenance of the father appeared on the face of the baby. (See also Baba Metzia 87a).

[59]Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 80.

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[60]Ibid., 81.

[61]Eric Gerber, "Not-so-hot a Lover," Houston *Post*, 21 May 1986.

[62]Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 18.

[63]*Mahabharata* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–69) 1.99-100; Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Textual Sources for the Study of Hinduism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 46–51.

[64]*Markandeya Purana*, with commentary (Bombay: Venkatesvara Steam Press, 1890), chapters 58–61, esp. 59.30–31, 60.1–5.

[65]David Shulman, "First Man, Forest Mother: Telugu Humanism in the Age of Krsnadevaraya," in *Syllables of Sky: Studies in South Indian Civilization* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 133–164, here 147, translating verse 4.3 and 5.20 of Allasani Peddana's *Manucaritramu*.

[66]Ram Karan Sharma and Vaidya Bhagwan Dash, eds., *Caraka Samhita*, text with commentary based on Cakrapani Datta's *Ayurveda Dipika*, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series 44, vol. 2 (Varanasi: 1977), *Sharira Sthana*, *sutra* 25: "garbhopapattau tu manah sriyaa yam jantum vrajet tat saddrsham prasuute."

[67]*Caraka Samhita*, *Sharira Sthana*, 8.9.

[68]There is a medieval Sanskrit story about a virtuous sage who died in a hermitage; as he died, demons overran the hermitage, and people shouted, "Demons!" He heard this and was reborn as a demon. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, ed., *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press; Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1980).

[69]*Markandeya Purana* 10.1–7, 11.1–21; O'Flaherty, *Textual Sources*, 97–98.

[70]J. P. McDermott, "Karma and Rebirth in Early Buddhism," in O'Flaherty, ed., *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, 165–192, here 171–172.

[71]Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 59.

[72]A case involving color was reported in the *Lancet* in 1890: A woman had been startled, when four months pregnant, by a black and white collie dog; she gave birth to a child whose "right thigh was encircled by a shining black mole, studded with white hairs." C. W. Chapman, *Lancet*, 18 October 1890; cited in Havelock Ellis, "The Psychic State in Pregnancy," 219. The mole is strongly reminiscent of the black birthmark in the form of a ring on Charikleia, in the tale told by Heliodorus.

[73]Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 66.

[74]Ibid., 78.

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