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**Reviewed:** Finucci, Valeria and Kevin Brownlee, eds

*Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity to Early Modern Europe*

Durham

Duke University Press

2001


Pp. iv, 327

21.95, ISBN: 0-822-32644-2

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TMR ID: 03.01.07

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This collection of ten essays is a vibrant and vital addition to the growing corpus of research focusing on bodily metaphors, pivotal to discussions of theology, medicine, literature and national myths. Alternating between the literal and creative sense of generation, all the contributors consider gender issues from a variety of perspectives including medical, historical, cultural and translatio traditions. As a whole, the essays are erudite, well-written and provide minute documentation for subsequent scholars to use as resources.

Part I, Theories of Reproduction opens with an essay by Elizabeth Clark, "Generation, Degeneration, Regeneration: Original Sin and the Conception of Jesus in the Polemic between Augustine and Julian of Eclanum." Clark traces the development of the bishop's theory of original sin as a way to reconcile inherent contradictions in christianity. For instance, how does one explain the fact that baptized Christians give birth to children who also require baptism? If baptism saves the parents, why is it not also capable of changing and transforming the eventual offspring? If original sin is transmitted from parent to child, why are not the effects of baptism transmitted likewise? Augustine's solution to this predicament is a biological metaphor: just as the cultivated olive tree produces fruit like that of its uncultivated ancestors, so baptized parents produced offspring similar to their unbaptized ancestors. His debates with Julian allow him to rehabilitate the sacrament of baptism, and to consider the larger questions of human nature and its transmission. Discussions of such a type inevitably lead to issues of creation and conception, giving Augustine the opportunity to consider the effects of the mother's physical environment on her unborn child, using an anecdote from Soranus: in an effort to protect his future offspring from suffering from his physically repulsive appearance, the husband in question made sure his wife looked upon the image of a handsome man during love-making. While this anecdote allows woman a certain amount of influence over the unborn child, current medical theory endowed man's seed with generative properties (and subsequently made him responsible for transmitting original sin), relegating woman to the position of supplier of mere nutritive matter. Augustine used this theory to bolster both his theory of original sin and to explain why Jesus was born without the taint of said sin: since Jesus is believed to have no human father, he is exempt from original sin.



The second essay of this collection is entitled "Maternal Imagination and Monstrous Birth: Tasso's Gerusalemme liberata," by Valeria Finucci, who presents Tasso's story about Clorinda as emblematic of the Renaissance concern and anxiety about the circumstances causing the birth of monsters. Clorinda was a white child born to black parents, and according to Tasso, was classified as a monster because she was so

completely unlike her parents. The cause of her whiteness was attributed to an image of St. George saving the white maiden Sabra from the dragon, an image upon which her mother focused during her pregnancy. Clorinda's monstrosity continues in later life when she becomes a knight, quite unlike her helpless feminine visual inspiration. Against this backdrop, Finucci then reviews contemporary beliefs about the supposed dominant role of the father in conception. The birth of monsters occurs when this biological domination is usurped by the mother during conception. While Finucci notes that monstrosity is less often perceived as a sign of divine displeasure, she does point out that in the Renaissance, deformed children were most often believed to be the result of women's bad behavior and even their thoughts. Thus, in order to restrain and control woman's imagination, there developed a trend for hanging images of beautiful people around the woman's bedchamber. A woman should think good and appropriate thoughts and gaze regularly upon images of perfection in order to have a well-formed child. As Finucci points out, however, the power accorded to the female imagination could be used against the patriarchy: white women who gave birth to black children could argue for the influence of visual images and passing glimpses of black men during pregnancy. Or a woman could attempt to cover her adulterous tracks should she conceive: she need only concentrate on her husband's physical features to stamp them upon the developing bastard fetus. Finucci provides a fascinating look at sixteenth-century medicine and cultural beliefs that she aptly connects to modern-day dilemmas regarding reproduction. Drawing parallels between early modern fears of woman's "abuse" of the fetus and modern anxiety over woman's power to terminate pregnancy, she concludes that woman's "womb is once more a feared tomb."

Dale B. Martin contributes the provocative third essay entitled "Contradictions of Masculinity: Ascetic Inseminators and Menstruating Men in Greco-Roman Culture" at the beginning of Part II, *Boundaries of Sex and Gender*. He begins by stating the basic contradiction in the early modern definition of maleness: while the ability to impregnate is a sign of virility, that same sexual activity is discouraged because of the belief that it saps men of their virility. Careful to point out that abstinence was not a concept or virtue invented by the Church, Martin reviews classical authors on the topic, summarizing recipes for aphrodisiacs and antaphrodisiacs, the latter reflecting "the ancient currency of self-control, the masculinization of sexual asceticism and the asceticizing of masculinity." This essay continues to explore the economics of sexuality, its savings and its expenses. Men who abstain build up a wealth of strength to be spent judiciously and in the realm of self-control, males were regarded as superior. Martin reminds us that the relegation of sexual urges to that domain of things to be controlled, participated in a corporeal hierarchy in which the head or intellect dominated the bodily processes, analogous to the social hierarchy. Women's bodily functions were likewise described in contradictory fashion. While woman with her monthly flow was a fearful monster with destructive powers, that same flow could have some beneficial effect: an antidote for garden pests or even epilepsy. With these and other advantages of menstruation, classical and medieval physicians came to develop a theory of beneficial male hemorrhaging, in the form of nosebleeds or even bleeding hemorrhoids. The latter condition was often considered to protect the patient from worse conditions, even madness. Since bloodletting, in general, was considered an effective remedy for many ills, male bodies could, and should, benefit from this palliative process just as much as women, yet another contradiction to the masculine experience that relied so heavily on the horror of anything remotely feminine. Martin then proceeds to the class issues cloaked by "medicalizing the assignation of masculinity," arguing persuasively that these conditions described by physicians were those of patients wealthy enough to engage the services of those professionals, concluding that "this particular class appropriation of the construction of masculinity, however, is the way the contradictions of masculinity rendered masculinity itself an even more precious commodity due precisely to its precarious nature."

Gianna Pomata continues the discussion of this fascinating contradiction in masculinity with her essay "Menstruating Men: Similarity and Difference of the Sexes in Early Modern Medicine." Using the writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century physicians, Pomata questions the modern belief that early science took as its ideal the male body and concludes that early modern physicians used female anatomy and function to inform their understanding of the male body as well. These sixteenth-century writers were continuing a tradition that dated back to Pliny and Galen who also believed that some men experienced cyclic, palliative bleeding, usually in the form of nosebleeds or bleeding hemorrhoids. Bloodletting is of course based on this



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