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F E T H I B E N S L A M A

Translated by Robert Bononno

THE GLOW

In many traditions, stories about origin contain a sequence involving the founder's birth.¹ It is a way of framing the question, Where does he come from, and how was he conceived? The answer often includes the representation of a moment of vacillation before destiny compels a refractory chance to do its bidding and completes its fulfillment. That the father is not present at the outset but must appear through the fiction of his genesis indicates the need to stage an unfolding through which the language of origin tames the possibility of the impossible.

In Islam, the staging of this question is positioned, through the biographical narrative of the Prophet, on a path between two women.² This choice, the specific scenario that it unfolds, contains information about the mechanism of the Islamic representation of origin, haunted by the attempt to control the other woman.

The Coming into Being of the Founder

The story of Muhammad's conception is told by several authors.³ The context is that Abdullah, the Prophet's father, has just escaped destruction through the help of his own father, who has exchanged his vow to sacrifice the child against a considerable fortune: the slaughter of a large number of camels offered up to the pre-Islamic divinities of Mecca. Consequently, it is a survivor who accompanies his father to the woman his father has chosen for him as his wife—Amina, who will become the mother of the Prophet. The genesis of the father takes as its point of departure the refusal to kill the son and the transcendence of the tyrannical and cruel figure of the primal Father.

In a chapter titled "Mention of the Woman Who Proposed Intercourse to Abdullah," the biographer Ibn Hicham writes,

¹ This is an extract from the forthcoming translation of Fethi Benslama, *La Psychanalyse à l'épreuve de l'Islam* (Aubier Montaigne, 2002), which will appear as *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). Our thanks to the University of Minnesota Press for permission to publish this chapter.

[Abdullah] walked past a woman known as Ruqayya, the sister of Waraqa, who happened to be in the sanctuary. When she saw his face, she asked him, "Where are you going, Abdullah?" He replied, "With my father." She said "If you lie with me now, I will give you as many camels as served to redeem you." He said, "I am with my father and cannot go against my father or separate from him." He then went to the home of Amina, whose rank and lineage were among the highest in Quraysh, whom he married. It is said that he joined with her sexually and that she thus conceived the Prophet. He then left to see the woman who had offered herself to him: "Why do you not offer me today what you offered yesterday?" he asked her. She replied, "You no longer have the light you had yesterday. I no longer have any desire for you today." Ruqayya knew from her brother Waraqa that there would be an Arab prophet.⁴

According to the same sources, there exists another, very similar, version:

Abdullah entered the home of a woman whom he had in addition to Amina. He went to work at the Clay Works and bore the traces. He made advances to the woman but she did not immediately respond because of the traces of clay. He left, rose, and went to Amina. He returned to the woman, who called him to her, but he refused. He returned to Amina and took her. She then conceived Muhammad. He then returned to that woman and said to her, "Do you want to?" She replied "No. When you passed by me, there was a white glow between your eyes; I called you then and you refused; you entered the home of Amina, she has stolen you."

According to Tabari, Ruqayya, who was a seer and knew from scripture the coming birth of the Prophet, proposed intercourse to Abdullah. He agreed and said to her, "Stay here. I'm going home to speak to my father." When he entered his home, Amina threw herself upon his neck. Yielding to his passion, he coupled with her, and the Prophet was conceived within Amina. The light that had surrounded Abdullah's forehead had disappeared when he returned to Ruqayya. She, no longer seeing the glow on his face, realized that the treasure he had borne within him had departed his body. Having learned from him that he had a wife and had just coupled with her, she said to him, "Go. My desire is gone." Abdullah then left.⁵

² I discuss this episode in *La nuit brisée: Muhammad et l'énonciation islamique* (Paris: Ramsay, 1988) 184. I have borrowed several ideas from it, which I have used to illustrate the hypothesis of the other woman.

³ These authors, considered to be the principal biographical sources for the Prophet, are Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Ibn Ishaq* (seventh century), based on several manuscripts (Maison d'édition et de diffusion de Konya, Turkey, 1981); Ibn Hicham, *Assayrat an-nabawyya* (Beirut: Dar al-ma'rifa, n.d.), vol. 2; and Tabari, *Tarikh ar-rusul wa al-muluk*, translated as *Muhammad sceau des prophètes* (Paris: Sindbad, 1980).

⁴ This story is told in nearly the same terms by Ibn Ishaq, in *Sirat Ibn Ishaq*, 23; and by Ibn Hicham, in *Assayrat an-nabawyya*, 1:164. According to tradition, Waraqa was a learned Christian who was the first to recognize in Muhammad the nomos revealed to Moses.

⁵Tabari, *Tarikh ar-rusul wa al-muluk*, 56.

Regardless of the variations among versions, what all the stories have in common is the space “between-two-women” as the site where the first acts of generation of the Prophet as a human being occur. It is in this space, through this back-and-forth from one woman to the other, that the Islamic narrative has chosen to set the stage for the most radical question of origin. Let’s examine the elements of this mechanism.

The point of departure is the question of destination proposed by Ruqayya, “Where are you going?” Isn’t this the enigma encountered on the road of existence for all of us, that of destination and knowledge? In a sense, the entire story is presented as a theatrical event—“Where are you going?” The protagonist is the son who becomes a father, and the “where” refers to the place of procreation of the child who establishes origin. The fiction that governs the organization of this narrative claims not only to answer this question but, especially, to answer for the truth and legality of the place.

The Dimensions of the Mechanism

The first dimension of this mechanism is found in Abdullah’s response to Ruqayya’s question. His answer does not directly address her question, however, because it refers not to a destination but to a companion; he confirms at once that he will not leave his father. The reference to the father as the one who prevents him from satisfying the woman’s request—and his own desire, if we are to judge by what follows—immediately establishes the question of the “between-two-women” as held in tension between the subject’s desire and his father’s choice. The narrative could have stopped there, ending with the man obeying his father’s order. But if it goes on, it is because the paternal prescript does not stop the son. For as soon as he is subjected to his father’s choice and deposits the “treasure” he carries with the approved woman, he turns around and returns to the first woman, to whom he is still attracted, the approved woman not having satisfied his desire. Nonetheless, there is no understanding possible between them: when she wants, he does not want, and when he wants, she does not want. Rather than an insurmountable obstacle, the father’s prescript creates a discordance in the time of desire. Apparently, the between-two-women establishes the stage space for this discordance, through which is revealed the distinction between the procreation of the Prophet and his father’s sexual desire, between this desire and the symbolic law represented by the father of this father.

The second dimension is related to the knowledge and desire of the woman with respect to the man. Ruqayya is referred to in several versions as the sister of Waraqa, a Christian monk who recognized the first prophetic signs of Muhammad’s arrival. She is, therefore, both a foreigner and a seer, two Hagarian characteristics of the “other woman,” to which is added the desire to “double” the legitimate woman and receive the father’s child. In the background is the approved woman, the noble woman (from the same tribe as Abdullah but of the highest birth, according to the story), that is, the woman of the Other, recipient of the holy child. Yet, although the foreign woman is presented by the story as possessing the gift of prophecy—and what prophecy! that of phallic illumination—the father of the Prophet is

characterized by ignorance and contempt. Contrary to what he believes, he is not the object of Ruqayya's desire, he is merely the *bearer* of the object of that desire. Abdullah does not know he carries the sign of fecundity that will produce the son, who will be the initiator of origin. There is a light or glow, which is perceived and deciphered by Ruqayya as "signifying" that the son is in the father. The other woman, because she is able to perceive "the son's glow," would like to take him into herself. But she is required to ask the father. She makes use of the fact that she knows what the other does not know, in order to capture his seed unawares. The other woman enjoys a knowledge about light and the body, about the body of light of infantile origin, that is invisible to the father who carries it. Abdullah, who does not know that he carries what Ruqayya wants, namely, the son, believes he is refusing something else. But, while he makes himself an object of desire only to reject the other, that other puts an Other in his place. Abdullah refuses something he is not asked for. The misunderstanding is complete. Through this misunderstanding, fiction stages the question of phallic appropriation. What does it say? That it is neither knowledge nor the possession of the phallus that determines destiny and destination, but the law of the father. No one is master of the light (semen) other than this law, which preexists the birth of the founder of the law.

The third dimension is related to the underlying rivalry between the two women. The narrative emphasizes that the glow Abdullah unknowingly carries refers to the "holy child," who will elevate its recipient to the rank of Mother of the Prophet, that is, woman of the Other. It tries to show that the rivalry between the two women revolves not so much around the man as sexual object as around access to the status of woman of the Other and to the phallic *jouissance* that access confers, that is, the supreme power of engendering the son who will become the founding father. Yet the scene seems to resolve the question: one woman has it and the other does not. One woman will become the Mother and the other will remain the foreigner—empty and "without desire," as she says in the story.

The interpretation of the episode is obvious: it is a fiction that reenacts the genesis of the father in Genesis, but with a "new deal," an ordinary deal that, while maintaining the separation between the two women, claims to better control the situation and succeeds in dismissing the other woman. The foreigner has not superseded the spouse, and the son has arrived at his legitimate destination; there is only one father and one son. The divine treasure is hidden in the body of the woman of the Other.

A Comparison

Given these elements, the Islamic staging of the scene of the between-two-women differs from the Mosaic one. Here, it is important to note that what is most central is not saving the child. The Islamic fiction emphasizes the question of desire and the law rather than survival. The element concerning the other woman's knowledge is not found in the Mosaic narrative, whereas it is central in the Muhammadan narrative. In the former, the foreign woman remains on the side of power in its most

destructive form, because Pharaoh wants to exterminate the male children of Israel. But it is the return of this woman to the service of the Mother that allows Moses to escape death. The woman of the Other and the other woman are unknowing accomplices in saving the child, who is the savior of his people.

Comparing the two scenes, we find that each tradition is haunted by the risk of its origin, or its originary fault. Ever since the origin of Judaism, the god of the Bible has held out the threat of withdrawing the gift, a threat of the absence of filiation and the destruction of the son. Yet, for Moses, the space between-two-women, that is, the originary Mosaic structural difference, is presented as the site of the fiction of rescue, so that the source of destruction (Pharaoh) becomes the source of salvation.

Islam, ever since the originary repudiation, has been haunted by the other woman, who has threatened to capture the son, making him an illegitimate bastard. Here, the space between-two-women carries with it a fiction that establishes the nobility of the mother's birth, control of the other woman, and preservation of the son's seed through the father. The son's obedience to the father to avoid capture by the other woman goes so far as to risk breaking his ties to his desire, which persists all the same, yet not without a certain ingenuousness. The price of submission to the symbolic law of the father is misunderstanding of the other woman's real desire. That is why the Islamic scene emphasizes the rivalry between the two women—one has the man and the other does not—whereas, in the Mosaic scene, the woman who has him (the mother) allows him to drift toward the woman who does not (the wife of Pharaoh), who returns him to the woman who agreed to give him up, his mother as his nurse. We could say that in this case the child is originally in exile, allowed to wander or subjected to fate, and in that way origin is saved and kept alive, as if the holy child, by becoming a stranger to his mother, enabled origin to split, to separate from itself, escaping the fate of self-identification and mortal self-foundation. In a sense, Freud repeats this gesture by making Moses a stranger to his people. For Islam, born to a foreigner, the opposite is true: the holy child must go toward the destination identified by the father, allowing for the appropriation of origin. In every case, the originary fault watches over and threatens origin at the same time—watches over it through the threat that exposed it to its becoming.

Between-Two-Women in Psychoanalysis

What does psychoanalysis have to say about this notion of “between-two-women”? You may recall that in the first part of his interpretation of the myth of Moses (*Moses and Monotheism*, SE, 23:1-137), Freud connects the two families—the family of high rank and the family of humble origins—to the family romance of the child who oscillates between over-estimation and disappointment concerning his real family, especially his father. He then applies this interpretation to the myth of the hero who rebels against the father who exposed him, while a child, to the risk of death, from

which the child escapes, later to return and kill the father.⁶ How does the Oedipal reading relate to the present case? Abdullah is in a situation of transition or genealogical articulation between father and son, son and father. The sequence of exposing the child is, indeed, present in this version, because, according to the story, Abdullah's father wanted to implement his vow to sacrifice his son, but buys back his life. And the son, now indebted to his father for his life, obeys him, accompanies him, and submits to his law. Thus, we are faced with an Abrahamic counter-Oedipal situation, where the son is connected to his father through sacrificial debt. (See the section titled "Sacrifice and Interpretation" in chapter 4.) And it is this connection that enables him to avoid giving the holy child to the other woman, the foreign woman who sees and knows far too much. The law of the father is an economic law of reciprocity, wherein the son's sacrificial debt entails a phallic debt in favor of the woman of the Other.

Note that there exists, in Freud's self-analysis, an important episode in which he meets the figure of a woman who holds a particular kind of knowledge. She is mentioned in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess; this is the elderly woman who was his nursemaid. Freud situates her in relation to his mother, attributing to her the role of instructor. He describes her as a witch and calls her his "professor of sexuality" (*Extracts from the Fliess Papers, SE, 1:173-280*). Does this mean that Freud received from this woman positive encouragement in the knowledge of sexuality? To judge from the episode, the figure of the "knowing witch," the other woman, would, in some sense, be at the infantile psychic root of the invention of psychoanalysis.

In Jacques Lacan's "The Signification of the Phallus" (1958), there appears a reference that evokes the between-two-women: "If, indeed, man is able to satisfy his demand for love in his relationship with a woman, inasmuch as the phallic signifier clearly constitutes her as giving in love what she does not have, conversely, his own desire for the phallus will make its signifier emerge in its residual divergence toward 'another woman' who may signify this phallus in various ways, either as virgin or as a prostitute."⁷ This statement could apply, in part, to the present case, for the narrative uses the "residual divergence toward 'another woman'" to illustrate that Abdullah bears on his face "the signifier" indicating that he possesses the holy child. The other woman reads "the signifier" and reveals it as such for Abdullah, who did not know what he had: "You no longer have the light you had yesterday," she says to him. In other words, it is only at the moment of loss that he knows what he had.

If the father, according to the story, is the one who gives what he did not realize he had, we can add some refinements to Lacan's statement: it is not only the gift of

⁶ Freud's approach incorporates the analysis found in "Family Romances," *SE, 9:235-41* (1908-1909), also published in Otto Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology*, trans. F. Robbins and Smith Ely Jelliffe (New York: Brunner, 1952), and originally published as "Der Familienroman der Neurotiker," in Rank's *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden: Versuch einer psychologischen Mythendeutung* (Leipzig: F. Deuticke, 1909) 64-68.

⁷ Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006) 583.

what one does not have that will define love, but the *unknown* gift.⁸ On the one hand, to give what one does not have anchors the problem in the domain of ownership, whether the gift is treated as a debt or as the concealment of stolen goods. This leads us to the economical logic of credit. On the other hand, “not knowing” that one gives falls to one side or the other of the question of ownership of the gift and its economic justification; to give without knowing is an un-thinkable transappropriation in terms of credit, value, and consideration. This transappropriation is part of the logic of the noneconomizable, where the gift is inestimable because it is imperceptible as a gift—unless there is someone (such as Ruqayya) who is supposed to know there is a gift. But the noneconomizable, the inestimable, the imperceptible . . . is the impossible.

The Father According to the Impossible

We have, therefore, two strata for the genesis of the father. The first is that of the economy of sacrifice, where the phallic gift is inscribed in the register of love as “giving what one doesn’t have.” This would refer to the life of the son who is the object of the concealment. We see it again in the gesture of Abdullah’s father, who is ready to proffer death and divert it at the same time. The son, now indebted, releases his semen where his father tells him to. The second stratum reveals the son-father as being unaware of what he has or what he gives, but he does indeed give it to the appropriate recipient, in keeping with the father’s preference. At this point, it is impossible to know that there was a gift before the gift took place, and before the other woman, supposed to know, tells him so. As long as there is no knowledge, the gift is confused with the impossible as elusive, inestimable, and noneconomizable. The formula I proposed in chapter 2 applies here as well: “There is there-is-not.” We could also add a variant form of the expression: “There is he-does-not-know.” But once Ruqayya knows of the gift, the law of the father goes into action. This law, as an economic law of debt, can legislate only ownership and destination, for the impossible escapes its jurisdiction—it predates the law of the *Pater economicus*, who needs to know that there is an *object* to manipulate somewhere.⁹ In short, the impossible is not subject to patriarchal law.

It appears that the god of Islam, as the Prophet understands him at the very beginning, is located on the side of this impossible. Subsequently, the religious institution of which he is the founder will co-opt him, placing him at the service of domestic paternity and phallic *jouissance*. But, as noted previously, the Qur’anic text retains the trace of the affirmation of this god who is not father through a fulguration that Jacques Berque has compared to the Unique God in the poem of

⁸ Jacques Derrida indicates that this expression is not Lacan’s. He apparently borrowed it from Heidegger, who took it from Plotinus, without either of them citing the source. “Fidélité à plus d’un,” *Cahiers Intersignes* 13 (1998): 237.

⁹ The word economy is a borrowing from the Greek *oikonomos*, which is derived from *oikos*, “house,” and *nomos*, “rule, custom, law.”

Parmenides: “unborn and indestructible . . . Whole, unique, and unmoving and complete.”¹⁰

In the fiction of the founder’s procreation, the inestimable impossible is manifested by “the glow.” It is not the light itself but the consequences it brings about in manifesting itself that reveal the mark of the impossible. Note how this glow provokes a split among the protagonists, which results in the fact that what is represented as an object of their desire is negated or concealed: “He has it, but doesn’t know it,” “He knows he had it when it he no longer has it” (Abdullah); “She knows but doesn’t have it” (Ruqayya); “She has what the other does not” (Amina). This last expression seems to indicate full possession; but this is only an illusion of belief in the phallic appropriation and interrogation of the impossible. In fact, even for Amina, there is a split: she has the son’s seed but does not have the desire Abdullah feels for the other woman. The woman of the Other does not have what the other woman has, namely, this supplemental *jouissance* that the man demands of her, in being neither son nor father but someone who is reaching for a supplement that overflows phallic *jouissance*. The inestimable impossible is the result of the glow that produces a universal split and dispossesses everyone of some amount of *jouissance*, which is lost forever. If we follow Lacan’s hypothesis, the glow would not be just any signifier but what he calls “the master signifier,” to the extent that it exposes all of us to this crisis of lack.

Between Emptiness and Fullness

Other psychoanalytic studies have examined the schema of the between-two-women from the point of view of the *jouissance* of the other woman, emphasizing the destructive hatred this figure may provoke whenever there is no working-off of the imaginary rivalry with this figure for a female subject. Michèle Montrelay’s research has helped clarify this issue.¹¹ In an interview on female jealousy, she says,

You lose all desire, you remain a body, a body that is only a body, and, at that moment, the body of the other woman—which is always seen as luminous, it is that body that bears the light of the mother’s desire, of the man’s desire—that body attracts you and you want to dissolve into it. . . . At that moment, you try to reconstruct yourself, and this reconstruction involves the gaze, from the point of view of a woman’s body. It is the body of a woman who is light—elsewhere, jealousy is said to be “blinding”—this brings us back to an altogether archaic period. What you need is the opportunity to give shape to this light, which is now on the other, to create the maternal body. You, you are nothing more than a body, you no longer have the words to express your jealousy, but there is the body of the other woman—it’s highly

¹⁰ Jacques Berque, trans., *Le Coran* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1990) 705. Youssef Seddik has examined this question in his doctoral thesis in anthropology, “L’enfance grecque du Coran” (École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1995).

¹¹ Michèle Montrelay, *L’ombre et le nom* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977).

enigmatic—which is like the first step you must take to reconstruct yourself. . . . This kind of blinding clarity that is nothing, which is the void of jealousy, you provide it with the contour of the body of that woman. But this implies that you have had constructive relations with your mother's body. That your experiences of jealousy with regard to your mother were fragmentary and not completely devastating.¹²

We should not be surprised that clinical research finds, through its own meanderings, the same issues expressed by the fiction of origin, sometimes even down to the details. I would like to focus for a moment on Montrelay's reference to light as a desire for the other, who is "void," "nothing," and at the same time something that needs to be given form by the body of the other woman. How does this light reveal voids and solids? By creating a feeling of destruction ("the void of jealousy") such that the only escape is through an appeal to the other woman, which establishes the structure of the between-two-women. The appearance of a binary modality—0/1 or 1/0—appeases the anxiety of destruction brought about by the light, providing the other woman is not destructive in turn.¹³ Jealousy conceals both this anxiety of nothingness and the intent to free oneself by creating the pole of the other woman. This is the function of the glow in the narrative, because through it the two terms of the fundamental structure—"There is a woman who has it" and "The other woman does not have it" (there is there-is-not)—are manifested; as if the glow is an epiphany through which antagonistic forces are revealed, opposite and yet complementary places, so that the founder of the symbolic institution can come into being. However, although there is a place (a womb) that remains empty and another that is full, according to the 0/1 binary schema, it is from this empty place that the glow is visible. The empty place does not receive the glow but creates the gaze that reads it. If the other woman sees, it is because she is not phallically fulfilled, because the lack or persistence of the desire of the other makes her prophetic and knowing. However, we must be careful here when using the concept of emptiness. The emptiness of the other woman (Ruqayya's womb) is a void of privation and not the void of interval that falls between two, the void that indicates the glow, or the vertical bar between 0 and 1. The void of interval is not a place, it is the place beyond (*hors-lieu*) of the impossible. It is not metaphor but nothingness and epiphanic interval, the in-between through which the existence of the structure we are studying is set in motion and becomes possible. Naturally, this is made manifest through the privation of the other woman, who reveals it through the gaze, through desire, through a metapsychological knowledge within the negating struggle with the woman of the Other.¹⁴ But the void of interval belongs to a different order of negativity, one beyond membership, identities, or essences; it is "neither one nor the other": neutral, therefore.

¹² Michèle Montrelay, "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal," in *La jalousie*, by Madeleine Chapsal (Paris: Gallimard, 1977) 142–73.

¹³ From the point of view of the genesis of the subject, 1 precedes 0. Pierre Legendre considers this binary function and the position of the void as the very foundation of reason. A binary relation is not the same as a "dual" one, and for good reason, given that the bar of the Third is present. See *La 901^e conclusion*, 209ff.

It should be clear that the Islamic fiction of the origin of the father differs from that in the Bible. By stressing the opposition between the two women, it allows the impossible, the void of interval, this withdrawal from which arises the very possibility of “fictionalizing” the father, to appear. This recalls what we found to occur at the beginning of Islam concerning a nonpaternal god: the original One is, in some sense, an infinite genealogical desert, out of which all origins and their imagination continually arrive. It is here that the ocean of illuminative philosophy and Muslim mysticism touch a (bottomless) bottom. But we also see how this idea is masked by the defensive stance against the other woman that arises from the originary disavowal and the phallogocentric patriarchal co-optation of her gaze. By presenting the man as the bearer of the “glow,” the father becomes “pregnant,” phallically certain, whereas the mother, to the extent she may have been displaced by the other woman, appears uncertain: if the father of the father (the patriarch) had not been there to direct the son’s seed toward her . . . Consequently, there is an inversion of the judgment of certainty that is customarily attributed to the mother. Here, paternity is attested by the evidence of the senses (sight) of the other woman.

The Mother as Fiction

In spite of this reversal, or possibly because of it, the narrative contains a problem of interest to the female subject. By making the man uncertain, even for a moment, about his desire for the mother, the narrative introduces a separation into the affirmation of generative certainty, and it is through this separation that the mother as fiction is produced. For such an operation to be possible, a sequence was needed in which the originary “deal” revealed that another distribution was possible, and how the law of the father abolished the accident of the ignorant desire of fate. Conception according to fiction rends the unambiguous space of maternal certainty.

For a period of time, the mother was almost not the mother; another woman could have taken her place. In this “almost” of eventuality, this “caesura of pure jealousy,” a story is produced, a narrative, a signifying construction. Because of the other woman, origin is not only a jet of sperm in the womb of the woman of the Other but also the emission of a fiction between two, that is, the story itself, or even the procreation of the fiction of the procreation of origin. Ruqayya had to delay Abdullah for a short while so there would be time for a story. This gift, through the attraction of the other woman, is necessary for instituting the origin of the founder. A kind of mediation takes place between Ruqayya and Amina, a *différance* (in Derrida’s orthography), that is, the gift of temporality as fiction, in which the procreation of the body of the founder takes place, which is merely the imaginary of the symbolic. For the subject, it is belief in this fiction that *makes* the founder, as body of sanctity or truth. This sanctity resides not in the flesh of the child but in the fiction that confers it upon him. In this sense, fiction is the mother of the sanctity of

¹⁴ Recall that with Hagar, there is a knowledge of alterity through sight and through naming. The other woman would, in a sense, be the starting point for the formation of a speculative theory, a metaphysics, our witch of metapsychology.

the holy child, which is what all fiction tries to achieve and re-create, including in the form we now call literature.

But when we speak of “the possibility that a woman can take the place of an other,” what is the status of this necessary eventuality that fiction is capable of introducing? As shown earlier, this necessary eventuality refers to a preexisting separation in which this permutation can occur, this alternative, a separation in which the possibility of the impossible arises. The “between-two” is a space that emerges not because there is one woman + one woman, an interval, a split created between them or by them; it is they who enter the separation that precedes all polarity, all alternatives, all paternal and maternal certainty. There is a separation that lies at the origin of all origin, an archistructural division around which originary meaning is constituted as jealousy of being. I have referred to this as the void of interval, and fiction is a garment for this void, from which arises the gift of time.¹⁵ The fiction of jealousy is jealousy of the void (in the initial sense of the Italian *gelosia*, a trellis that protects the woman from the gaze of others); it conceals real sovereignty. Fictions are presented as the mothers of an origin of which they are the daughters. Like the crocus in the poem by Apollinaire, they would be “mothers daughters of their daughters.”¹⁶ Would the imaginary be the mother of a real of which it is the child? But the real of origin withdraws from all paternity and maternity; it holds itself back from everything that might be said or imagined about it that is only jealousy.

¹⁵ This idea of interval as temporality is found in a text by Pierre Fédida, appropriately titled “Le vide de la métaphore et le temps de l’intervalle,” in *L’absence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 197–238.

¹⁶ Concerning these lines by Apollinaire, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Une petite énigme mythico-littéraire,” *Le Temps de la Réflexion* 1 (1980): 133–41.