"The Secrets of Generation Display'd": *Aristotle's Master-piece* in Eighteenth-Century England

The histories of sex and sexuality have been focused in recent years by the powerful reconceptualizations of scholars such as Michel Foucault, Edward Shorter, and Lawrence Stone.[1] Yet one enormous obstacle, which keeps this key dimension of life singularly opaque to understanding, remains: our almost total ignorance of the sexual beliefs and behavior of all but the tiniest minority of people in the "world we have lost." Certainly, as Peter Gay has recently reminded us,[2] more intimate secrets survive in the archives than we sometimes credit; yet it is safe to predict that we shall remain forever in the dark about the love lives of otherwise well-known public figures, about John Milton as well as the mute inglorious Miltons.[3] For this reason it is worth exploring the history of sexual advice literature, which promises to throw at least a few dim rays upon the broader contours of sexual values and practices of earlier times.

It goes without saying, of course, that extrapolating from the guidance of advice books to what people actually thought and did is immensely hazardous, for reasons that need little rehearsal here. We know next to nothing about who read such publications, for what reasons, and with what effects. In many cases we know little about the authors or their intentions. These uncertainties apply even to the best-sellers. It is not clear, for example, whether the many-editioned antimasturbation polemic *Onania* was written or read as either a puritanical morality tirade or a catchpenny emission of lewd softporn.[4]

What is clear, however, is that from the late seventeenth century in England, France, Holland, Germany, and, increasingly, North America, self-education sex literature started flooding off the presses. A few works aimed at "the common reader" became wildly successful, running into scores of editions and being energetically pirated, vulgarized, and recycled. In France the best-seller by far was Nicholas Venette's *Tableau de l'amour conjugal,* which first appeared in 1696, went through at least thirty-one editions in the eighteenth century for a chiefly bourgeois readership, and became in the nineteenth century the "Bible of the French peasantry."[5] Venette's work was translated into English, German, Dutch, and, eventually, Spanish. It enjoyed notable popularity in Enlightenment England, though perhaps the title page of a late eighteenth-

century edition should not be believed when it boasts of being the "twentieth edition."[6] The most successful primer in English, however, was *Aristotle's Master-piece*.[7] Surviving copies prove that this work, printed either separately or with other pseudo-Aristotelian writings, went through over twenty editions in the eighteenth century and far more in the nineteenth century in both Great Britain and America.[8]

The provenance of *Aristotle's Master-piece* presents problems barely yet tackled by scholars.[9] Fragments of the sexological doctrines of antiquity had begun to be codified in Latin in the late Middle Ages, and Renaissance humanism ushered in the publication of scholarly treatises on sexual topics, most notably Giovanni Sinibaldi's *Geanthropeia* (1642).[10] *Aristotle's Master-piece,* first appearing in English in 1684, drew heavily on these and other sources. It is, of course, not by Aristotle, and its compiler or compilers remain unknown, though the medical popularizer William Salmon may have had some hand in writing it.[11]

Considering its vast circulation and staying power from the end of the seventeenth to the present century, *Aristotle's Master-piece* has received oddly little scholarly attention. Of course, it is readily dismissed because it contains a "great deal of nonsense."[12] Condemning it as a "hoary old debauchee acknowledged by no-one," D'Arcy Power concluded: "The Master-piece at its best is a mere catchpenny production written for the prurient-minded and the less said about it the better."[13] Examining its fortunes in America, Otho Beall, Jr., labeled it a scrapbook of "pre-objective" and "occult" sexual "folklore," a "medical anachronism," which—like P.-G. Boucé's statement that it is a "rich lode of startling beliefs and myths"—pigeonholes it too neatly and disparagingly.[14] Similarly, in a study that focuses on nineteenth-century editions, Janet Blackman sees it as a "patchwork" or an "anachronism"—another label that prejudges too many issues: "It is almost too exact in the imprecision or ineffectiveness of much of its advice, and this stems from lack of thought and explanation rather than cogency or simplicity."[15]

The format, fame, and fortunes of *Aristotle's Master-piece* pose intriguing problems. Was the work primarily a compilation of vernacular sexual and gynecological know-how, or did it codify chiefly professional medical wisdom? What pressures were there on publishers, hack writers, and editors to modify successive editions to meet changing public expectations and medical teachings?[16] What did readers get out of it? Did it confirm their prejudices or open their eyes? Did it teach or titillate? Above all, who actually read it: the married or the unmarried, men or women?[17] Existing studies give us few leads on these questions, and this present article will illuminate them only indirectly.

My approach here will be primarily exegetical. I aim to anatomize *Aristotle's Master-piece* in order to bring out its main arguments and reveal its inner structure and assumptions. The book has been disparaged generally as a slipshod ragbag of myths and old wives' tales randomly sandwiched between two covers. My contention, by contrast, is that it possesses a logical, sequential plan and aim and operates within a consistent intellectual paradigm; I shall explore what these are.

I shall also place the teachings of *Aristotle's Master-piece* in the context of other sexual popularizations of the Enlightenment[18] by making glancing comparisons between its views and those of highly visible treatises, such as Nicholas Venette's *Tableau de l'amour conjugal,* James Graham's *Lecture on Generation* (1783),[19] and Ebenezer Sibly's *Medical Mirror* (1784).[20] I shall also hint more speculatively at what its contents might tell us about popular sexual outlooks in pre-Victorian England.

First is is necessary to clarify the nature of the text itself. Scholars have long recognized that there is no single text of *Aristotle's Master-piece* reprinted verbatim down the ages. Janet Blackman in particular has noted that the text was apparently transformed through time; and she has drawn on editions from the late seventeenth, late eighteenth, mid nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries to highlight shifts in tone and teaching. A lucky-dip sampling of this kind can be dangerous, however, since it fails to trace the true pedigree of the work. Blackman, in addition, seems to have fallen into the error of reading as long-term textual transformations what really were substantially distinct, simultaneously circulating versions of the opus. *Aristotle's Master-piece* should not be seen as a single text that evolved or was adapted over time but as several different books with a single title. By the early eighteenth century, three quite distinct versions had appeared, of which at least two remained in print sporadically through the eighteenth century and beyond; another utterly distinct version appeared in the Victorian period. This publishing story is most simply set out in the appendix.[21]

In outlook and content, what I shall for convenience call Versions 1, 2, and 3 are broadly commensurable; they cover much the same ground, though certain topics are treated only in some versions. For example, Versions 1 and 2 contain chapters that explain the endowment of fetuses with souls, whereas Version 3 has no such chapter. All three versions, however, contain comparable sexual and medical information that is explained in similar, often identical, terms. There is, however, one major and intriguing distinction between the first two versions and the third. The first two are essentially neutral in tone. They convey their information in direct, didactic prose. By contrast, Version 3 (which seems to have gone through the most editions) is altogether lighter and more jaunty, with an ear for innuendo and suggestion redolent of popular bawdy.[22] In this version, sexual arousal and male-female relations are subjects of wit, of raciness, and of sly irony. Thus Version 3 praises chastity: "Virginity untouch'd and taintless, is the boast and pride of the fair sex," while inserting a barb in the tail: "But they generally commend it to put if off, as good as it is care not how soon they are honestly rid of it."[23] Similarly, the newlywed husband, fired to feats of love by the beauty of his bride, is urged to embrace her; if, however, she is plain or ugly, the advice is to do it in the dark (3:47[40]). Moreover, in Version 3 alone, each chapter has a tailpiece of light, mildly suggestive doggerel. Thus, rounding off the chapter on marriage, the husband is advised to go to it:

> Now, my fair bride, new will I storm the mint
> Of love and joy, and rifle all that's in't;

> Now shall my infranchis'd hand, on ev'ry side,
> Shall o'er thy naked polish'd ivory slide.
> Freely shall now my longing eyes behold
> Thy bared snow, and thy undrained gold;
> No curtain now tho' of transparent lawn,
> Shall be before thy virgin treasure drawn,
> I will enjoy thee now, my fairest, come,
> And fly with me to love's elysium;
> My rudder with thy bold hand, like a try'd
> And skilful pilot, thou shalt steer and guide,
> My bark in love's dark channel, where it shall
> Dance, as the bounding waves to rise and fall.
> Whilst my tall pinnace in the Cyprian streight
> Rides safe at anchor and unlades the freight . . .
> Perform those rites nature and love requires
> 'Till you have quench'd each others amorous fires.
>
> (3:40–41[31–32])

It may be a sign of the greater sexual frankness of this version that it opens, as does Venette's *Tableau,* with a long, anatomically explicit exposition "of the parts of instruments of generation, both in men and women" (3:11[7]), whereas Versions 1 and 2 begin with an encomium on marriage.

At least, two of the three versions (2 and 3) were reprinted frequently during the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries. Once the separate versions had appeared, they underwent little change beyond trivial stylistic updating, some paraphrasing, and the inevitable descent to textual corruption (in an early nineteenth-century printing, Avicenna has become, rather symbolically, Advicene).[24] In other words, it would, pace Blackman, be a mistake to regard the texts as undergoing modification through time either to create or to reflect shifts in public or medical opinion. That did not happen (though it probably did with English translations of Venette's *Tableau de l'amour conjugal*).[25] Indeed, both the longevity and the stability of these texts are truly remarkable. In a commercializing culture dominated by fashion and speedy cultural turnover, why did the common reader desire the facts of life from so venerable, not to say out of date, a book?

The great exception to the general tone of successive editions of *Aristottle's Master-piece* is Version 4, first published at some point in the nineteenth century. Though retaining the original title and reproducing much of the advice about women's diseases contained in Version 2, it is a fundamentally different work. Above all, in this Victorian version the sex has disappeared. Here there is no anatomy of the genitals, no tips for creating the "soft lights and sweet music" atmosphere for lovemaking, no advice on conceiving a boy or a girl—none of the facets of making love and making babies that dominate all earlier versions. Rather, the burden of this version is captured by the chapter heading: "Words of Warning." Addressed primarily to young men, it has become a moral tract to open eyes to the perils of that "foolish infatuation" (4:18) youths may so readily contract for flighty belles or even for "unfortunates," women of the street (4:15). Men need to be on guard against their own weaknesses; they must

recognize that "eager pursuit of sensual gratification disqualifies for the exercise of the loftier powers" (4:43) and instead cultivate "self-command" and "abstinence" (4:18, 43). Young ladies, for their part, must learn the folly of flirtatiousness; "La Traviatas" will go down the roads to moral and physical ruin in the end. Marriage is the true goal for the virtuous, with emphasis on its "obligations" and "duties" (4:43) (though as a concession the text adds, "There is nothing debasing in connubial love" [4:43]). Marriage itself must be deferred until the husband has "adequate means of support" (4:36). Thus *prudentia carnis* has given way to prudence over pounds and pence, desire has been unveiled as danger, and sex has been replaced by the higher ideals of "family affection" and sentimental companionship (4:47). This is *Aristotle's Master-piece* for Charles Pooter. In the discussion that follows I shall ignore this degenerate edition and consider the earlier three versions collectively as a whole.

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One of the great debts we owe the late Michel Foucault is for his emphatic denial that sexuality is timeless. He contended that our notion of the sexual economy is distinctively modern; we should not foist it on the past.[27] This advice is well taken when approaching *Aristotle's Master-piece*, since one of the reasons it appears such a hodgepodge of obsolete fragments is precisely because few of the topics prominent in modern sexology receive even a mention. Little is said of sexual desire as a source of fear, guilt, or danger (medical, moral, or religious). There is no inkling of perversion or of *psychopathia sexualis*, nothing about homosexuality, masturbation, sadomasochism, prostitution, and nymphomania or about any intimate dialetic of sex with neurosis. Most fundamentally, *Aristotle's Master-piece* conveys no awareness of sexual problems inseparable from the psyche and the problems of the self: sex is not seen as a psychological category; it is not "in the mind" at all.

Neither does *Aristotle's Master-piece* anticipate the therapeutics of modern liberal sexology. There are no inducements to "the joy of sex" that show how to transcend shame, repression, and guilt, no advice on avoiding unwanted pregnancies, no drill of coital positions for maximizing erotic pleasure. Rather, *Aristotle's Master-piece* assumes that sex is nature's way of providing for "the business of generation." Far from being a potpourri of remnants of sexual lore, it is an integrated and coherent work whose unifying theme is the subject of reproduction. This organic scheme is apparent from even a casual glance at the chapter headings (most editions unfortunately lack a table of contents). For example, the 1690 edition (Version 1) opens with a discussion of the optimal age for marriage (i.e., the rite of passage that translates the biological potential for reproduction into social and moral actuality); by the second chapter it is already advising couples how to beget specifically male or female children. Successive chapters explain, among other things, why children resemble their parents. I shall analyze this structural plan in greater detail below, but here stress that the compiler did not see his main task as giving readers instructions in the art of lovemaking itself. That, it is assumed,

would be as redundant as teaching your grandmother how to suck eggs (was *anyone* before certain eminent Victorians and the likes of Marie Stopes ever ignorant of the mere mechanics of copulation?). Clearly the editor also did not anticipate James Graham's later anxiety that desire might dwindle unless one celebrated "the rites of Venus in a variety of ways."[28] Rather, instruction was not just in "the bare performing of that act . . . but the performing it so as to make conducive unto the work of generation. And since this act is the foundation of generation, and without which it cannot be, some care ought to be taken and consequently some advice given, how to perform it well" (3:39[31]).

Thus *Aristotle's Master-piece* takes it as axiomatic that sex forms part of the larger plan of the preservation and multiplication of the species.[29] This notion is expressed on a number of different levels. In part it is simply assumed that couples do indeed want children:

> Though there are some that desire not to have childbirth and yet are very fond of nocturnal embrace to whom these directions will be no way acceptable, . . . yet I doubt not but the generality of both sexes, wherein a married state, have such a desire to produce the fair image of themselves, that nothing can be more welcome to them than those directions, that they make their mutual embraces most effectual to that end. (3:39[30]).

Indeed, the compiler states that anticipation of motherhood is the chief pleasure certain women take in the marriage bed (3:45[35]). But procreation is also explained as both the telos of nature and the command of God ("go forth and multiply").[30] As Version 1 states, only the most hardened lechers could pretend to be ignorant "to what end they were created Male and Female, which was to beget children and propagate their kind" (1:51); and all versions set the reproductive history of mankind against a panorama of "the plastic power of Nature" (3:9[5]), viewed as *natura naturans*, a great creating Mother in the "dark recesses" of whose "womb" the labors of fresh creations are constantly coming to fruition (3:9[5]).[31] Furthermore, if nature is the eternal mother who instills mankind with the instinct of generation, God is the Father who commanded Adam and Eve (and through them, all successive generations) to people the Earth. God is also the Holy Ghost, the fecundating agent in the divine *fiat*. Thus, as both Father and Holy Spirit, God made the cosmos fruitful:

> It plainly appears in Holy Writ, that this glorious Universe . . . everywhere adorned with wonderful objects, proclaiming the Wisdom and Omnipotence of the Great Work-Master who in six Days Erected all Things for his pleasure, was at first drawn out of Nothing, or at most a Formless Chaos of Confusion; no Fruits nor Pleasure, no creature that hath breath, had being in the place this lower World possesses, till GOD out of the Abundance of his Goodness, sent forth his Holy Spirit, who Dove-like, with mighty out spread-Wings, sat brooding on the Vast Abyss, and made it pregnant . . . all Creatures soon had being, and every Plant, Tree, Herb, or Flower . . . sprung from the Verdant Earth . . .; every thing of life having Seed in it self, that no second Creation was needed. (1:[i]).

Since then every human coupling has been a sacramental love feast that reiterates the Creation: "The natural inclination and propensity of both sexes to each other, with the plastic power of Nature, is only the energy of the first blessing, which to this day upholds the species of mankind in the world." (3:9[5]).

Thus the subject of *Aristotle's Master-piece* is reproduction. That both men and women will desire to copulate, that copulation can be accomplished without biological and psychological impediments, that desire will not prove delusive or destructive, that there is a love above brute lust—these are taken for granted and require no rhetoric, special pleading, or elaboration. There seems nothing problematic about mutual sexual attraction. No chapter is felt necessary to deal with loss of libido; no mention has to be made of homosexual desires or practices, bestiality or buggery, erotic mania, or even that great bugbear of the age, masturbation.[32]

It is not assumed, of course, that sex is all plain sailing. It is noted that a woman becomes barren earlier in life than a man, but this is readily explained within the framework of humoural medicine: being cooler and moister in constitution, women are less vigorous than men. Instructions, indeed, are given to ensure that copulation be most enjoyable and certain. Relax, the reader is told, cast care aside, indulge in fine wines and delicacies:

> When a married couple, from a desire of having children, are about to make use of those means that nature ordained to that purpose, it would be very proper to cherish the body with generous restoratives, that so it may be brisk and vigorous; and if their imaginations were charmed with sweet and melodious airs, and care and thought of business drowned in a glass of racy wine, that their spirits may be raised to the highest pitch of ardour and joy, it would not be amiss; for any thing of sadness, trouble, and sorrow, are enemies to the delights of Venus. And if, at any such times of coition, there should be conception, it would not have a malevolent effect upon the child. (2:76–77[43])[33]

Nevertheless, the prime concern of *Aristotle's Master-piece*—more so than in the writings, for example, of Venette or Graham—lies not in overcoming anticipated snags in copulation but in tackling hindrances to conception and overcoming the spectre of sterility.

The best solution to this problem was marriage. Within marriage, sex was not merely moral and civilized, not merely "happy," "pleasant," and "delightful," but also more likely to prove fertile.[34] Promiscuity was attacked as brutish and barren. Marriage, however, was not viewed merely as a means of taming the flesh, as was depicted in Daniel Defoe's *Conjugal Lewdness*; nor was it seen as an instrument of proto-Malthusian "moral restraint" to control runaway population growth by deferred gratification.[36] Rather, marriage, it was emphasized, had been instituted in paradise as the divine instrument for peopling the world (1:1). The pronatalist *Aristotle's Master-piece* was unambiguously in favor of early marriage and against all obstacles to matrimony. In particular, it urged

that women marry while in their teens, as soon as their bodies had ripened. The ages of eighteen to twenty were recommended—markedly below the typical age of bonding in late Stuart and early Hanoverian England, when social retrenchment and economic anxieties induced late nuptuality as the norm.[36] Parents were urged under no circumstances to obstruct the marriage of their children, especially their daughters, for reasons of family policy, matchmaking, or the quest for "a large dowry" (1:62). For one thing, the work warned, characteristic diseases of pubescent girls such as the green sickness were caused by enforced sexual abstinence (1:3).[37] Even worse might follow: prevent young people from copulating lawfully within marriage, and they would merely do so promiscuously. The evils following that would be not merely sin, vice, disease, and social confusion but also frustration of what nature intended, because casual copulation or prostitution rarely resulted in pregnancy (1:58). Mirroring other pronatalist sex educators such as Venette and Graham, the message of *Aristotle's Master-piece* was that married unions would prove fertile, but irregular fornication would breed only sterility and disease. Pronuptualist as well as pronatalist, *Aristotle's Master-piece* thus contributed to the climate of opinion that repudiated "libertinism" and promoted marriage as more than a prudent economic contract. Marriage was companionable and sexually fulfilling, as well as healthy, both for the couple concerned and also (in a mercantilist way) for the body politic. Although "matrimony, in the present age, is looked upon as a most insupportable yoke—wives and husbands are accounted the greatest clogs and burdens to those who give up the reins to their unbridled appetites" (3:27[20]), in reality marriage was both blessed and enviable, "of all conditions the happiest" (1:55).

Within marriage, *Aristotle's Master-piece*'s advice was that regular, though not excessive, sex was most favorable to generation: "They that would be commended for their Wedlock Actions, and be happy in the fruit of their Labour, must observe to copulate at distance of time, not too often, nor yet too seldom, for both these hurt Fruitfulness alike" (1:10). The text clearly assumes no need to recommend a specific frequency or timetable of the right hours of the day or seasons of the year for sex, in the manner of Venette's *Tableau de l'amour conjugal*. It does, however, ban intercourse during menstruation (1:10), which (reflecting both medical and popular opinion) is seen as both filthy and liable to engender defective or monstrous children, such as infants with purple birthmarks.[38] Abstinence is also advised during most of pregnancy, lest miscarriage be induced, but in general, the work avoids "policing" sex with any rigid scheme of medical or moral rules.

Most of the advice on sexual intercourse follows a different tack, its chief concern being to aid conception. In particular, *Aristotle's Master-piece* stresses that the best chances of conception will follow when the wife as well as the husband is aroused:

> It is . . . necessary, that in their mutual embraces they meet each other with equal ardour; for if the spirit flag on either part, they will fall short of what

> nature requires, and the woman must either miss of conception or else the children prove weak in their bodies, or defective in their understanding and therefore I do advise them, before they begin their conjugal embraces, to invigorate their mutual desires, and make their flames burn with a fierce ardour. (2:47[43])

Arousing female desire is, however, no great problem, since the compiler views women as no less libidinous than men. In this context, the author debates at length the Hippocratic belief that the mingling of both male and female seeds, which requires mutual orgasm, is needed for conception, but rejects it as physiologically unsound; there being no evidence that women ejaculate seed (1:6).[39]

On top of this general advice for promoting conception, were offered further hints on producing a boy or a girl (assuming a preference for boys). Here *Aristotle's Master-piece* retails the popular belief (repudiated by Venette from his lofty vantage point as a learned physician battling superstition) that males can be produced if the woman lies on her right-hand side in intercourse (because boys are engendered in the right side of the womb). Copulating when the moon is on the wane will, symbolically, produce girls (1:8; 3:41[32]; 2:[8]).

The remainder of the book spells out the biological consequences of copulation. How is one to know if the woman has conceived (3:37–43[29–33])? A choice of pregnancy tests, mainly involving the inspection of urine (largely dismissed by Venette), is suggested:

> If urine be put in a glass three days, and the woman have conceived certain live things will appear to stir in it. If a bright Needle be put in a whole night and she have conceived, divers little red Specks will be thereon, but if not it will be blackish or rusty. Nor are these imaginations, but the proved assertions of the Learned in Physick and skilful in Midwifery, who have made it their study to search into the depth of Nature's Secrets. (1:114; 3:55[44])

Once pregnancy itself is established, how is one to determine the fetus' sex? Once again, a range of signs is listed. Boys give less painful pregnancies than girls; similarly, it is a sure sign of a boy if the right side of the womb is agitated (3:44[34]).[40]

Subsequent chapters advise for pregnancy management (3:37–50; 1:50). Tight lacing is to be avoided, and charms and medicaments are prescribed to prevent or ease the swelling of breasts caused by the plethora of blood that pregnancy produces (3:[50]). A rudimentary physiological sketch of the quickening and maturing of the fetus in the womb follows. Unlike the works of Venette or Sibly, which contain elaborate embryologies, *Aristotle's Master-piece* is little concerned with anatomical niceties; instead it addresses problems that would most worry pregnant women (1:16, 34; 3:48[38]).[41] One section answers whether the fetus derives all its nourishment through the umbilical cord or takes in some through the mouth (the latter view is, wrongly, accepted); another explains what stage of development the fetus has reached in each successive month of pregnancy (1:9).

The latter half of *Aristotle's Master-piece* looks forward to childbirth itself (a theme handled more copiously in the other pseudo-Aristotelian works, the *Compleat Midwife* and the *Last Legacy*, which were often printed with *Aristotle's Master-piece* (1:94ff.)[42] I shall not here analyze the account of midwifery techniques, though, in the light of recent scholarly controversy about the rise of male midwives, it is worth noting that from the earliest editions of *Aristotle's Master-piece* it is taken for granted that although normal births will be attended by women, men will deal with difficult confinements.[43] Nor shall I explore the group of chapters entitled, "A Private Looking Glass for the Female Sex," tagged onto later editions and announcing that it will treat "of several maladies incident to the womb, with proper remedies for the cure of each" (2:[12]). The presence of this section in most late Georgian editions probably reflects an increasing awareness of how extensively ill-health in women was caused by repeated or difficult lyings-in (in another perspective, its prominence could be said to mark a further stage in the medicalization of women).[44]

It is a measure of how far *Aristotle's Master-piece* is about "the business of generation" that almost all the problems confronted in the text relate not to sexual intercourse itself but to child-bearing. The problem treated in greatest depth is barrenness (indeed, it is so prominent that it actually heads the contents list on the title page of the 1690 edition).[45] The text assumes that failure to conceive will be experienced on all sides as calamitous. It lays responsibility on the woman (the idea is not even entertained that a potent man may nevertheless be sterile),[46] for women by their nature are less vigorous than men. Defects in the female constitution are examined—she may, in humoural terms, be too dry, too moist, too cold, or too hot—and these excesses or deficiencies, it is suggested, can be rectified by appropriate medicaments and restoratives, recipes for which are detailed (1:7). Changes in everyday living may also help, and above all luxurious habits are to be avoided: "City dames that live high and do nothing, seldom have children" (3:45[36]). Relaxation, contentment, and satisfaction are recommended as conducive to fertility (3:45[36]). The tone of this advice is not of the victim-blaming kind (it is not assumed that barrenness is a divine punishment for vice or sin). Rather, it appears a constructive attempt to provide a measure of reassurance capable of being translated into practical action, thus helping partners to restore some sense of control over their reproductive destiny.

Aristotle's Master-piece tackles head-on the most terrifying outcomes of reproduction. What if pregnancy did not result in a normal live baby but was either false or issued in an abortive, hideous lump of dead flesh (1:53, 118ff.)? The text offered a physiological rationalization of these "moles" by explaining that they were generally caused by weakness in either the male seed or a womb that lacked due heat or spirits to generate a normal child. Intercourse during menstruation was another cause of such "moles" (1:44–45). Restoratives and tonics were recommended to prevent recurrences.

This raised the problem of the status of such abortions in nature and under God. Were they truly human? If so, did they have souls? And, in