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The Shadow of the Second Mother: Nurses and nannies in theories of infant development

Prophecy Coles

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The Shadow of the "Second Mother" explores why has there been such little interest, in psychology, social history and biography, in the important contribution that ‘second mothers’, such as wet nurses and nannies, have had upon the emotional life of the children they have nursed. For the last three thousand years and throughout most civilisations they have nurtured the children of the privileged, and kept alive the abandoned and unwanted child, and yet there has been a profound silence surrounding the influence they may have had.

The author explores the lives of several well-known people who have been wet nursed, such as Michelangelo, Rousseau, Jack London, Nabokov and Klein. She speculates that they all were affected emotionally by their ‘second mother’, and concludes that a universal feature of such delegated mothering seems to be that the bond between mother and child is broken, and the child may be left with a life-long distrust of close relationships. In *The Shadow of the "Second Mother"*, Coles combines an exploration of attachment theory with neurology, making it possible to give an explanation as to why these important figures have lain unnamed and ignored in our social and psychological consciousness.

This intriguing new approach to an ancient practice will be fascinating reading for psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, sociologist and students of social history.

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