

This chapter explores how human differences acquired racial meanings through physiological theories in medieval Arabic sources. It does so by looking beyond the well-known racial formulations, applied in myriad elite writings, grounded in the interactions of climate and humoral pathology or biblically inflected genealogical science. Instead, I consider moments of spontaneous re-racialization in popular works. The central case study is the birth story of the Arabic epic (*sīra sha‘biyya*) hero ‘Abd al-Wahhāb of *Sīrat al-Amīra Dhāt al-Himma*, who is born black “like a Nubian” due to being conceived during his mother’s menses. Through comparing several variant manuscripts as well as apposite instances of spontaneous racial change in *adab*, medical, and philosophical works, this chapter presents the speculative, biological discourse around race. I historicize the relationships—metaphorical and real—between race and various forms of bodily otherness in Arabic literary works, as well as the relationships between race constructed through lineage and through other kinship modes and interventions in the standard reproductive model. Ultimately, the variants of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s tale simultaneously exhibit a unity of concerns and a plurality of approaches: throughout storytelling traditions across the Arabic-speaking world, in a number of periods, race discourse was had in several distinct but mutually informing ways. Many of these centered on female biological susceptibility to internal and external forces. These susceptibilities changed the flow of race in patterns that emulated and were theorized against the etiologies of other congenital conditions in alterations to the blood, milk, semen, bile, and even mental stress.