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Literature and Medicine, Volume 21, Number 1, Spring 2002, pp. 1-25 (Article)


Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2002.0014>



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Eighteenth-Century “Monsters” and Nineteenth-Century “Freaks”: Reading the Maternally Marked Child

Philip K. Wilson

The human genome, the body, and disability have attracted unprecedented levels of interdisciplinary academic interest in recent years. Literature abounds describing myriad concerns over human genetic research, its regulation, and subsequent implications for what is, at least figuratively, often referred to as the “Brave New World” in which we live.¹ Somewhat paradoxically, as technological advances steer many to gaze deeper into the hitherto invisible, twisted ladder of our genetic code, others have diverted their gaze toward the skin, the most outwardly visible layer of the physical body. It is often through markings on the skin that expressions of both individual and cultural identities are read.²

Considerable attention has also been focused upon ways in which “the body” can be seen to express deviance through some physical, readable marking. In essence, those deemed to be socially or morally deviant are believed to carry upon them, or within their genes, some recognizable marking peculiar to their deviancy. Similar arguments regarding the “disabled” body regularly appear in the burgeoning literature of disability studies.³

This essay interconnects current interest in heredity, the body, and embodied deviance by reviewing representations of children reputedly “marked” by their mother’s imagination in English and American medical and popular literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. An age-old belief, which persists in many cultures, alleges that a

pregnant woman's imagination, frights, or longings can be transferred to her unborn child, thereby imprinting the child with characteristic marks or deformities. In Henry Fielding's satirical novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742), the protagonist's strawberry-shaped birthmark is claimed to be the result of his mother's longing for strawberries while pregnant. Frights, too, have reputedly contributed to such markings. One nineteenth-century medical case history describes a pregnant woman, while being bled with leeches, becoming frightened by an unusually large leech. The incident forges such an impression upon her mind when awake and in her dreams that she ultimately delivers a child marked with the likeness of a leech.⁴ In medical literature, a child's resemblance to either parent—what many now consider to be the result of a random reallocation of hereditary traits—was once commonly attributed to maternal impressions.

My intention in this essay is to selectively examine medical and popular discussion of the "maternal imagination" in Britain and the United States from the early eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries.⁵ Rather than a complete historical overview, this work represents, at best, a respectable fragment of how discussion about the origin of "marked children" in medical and popular literature changed over time. Differences in the textual representation of marked children between these two kinds of literature and between the two centuries will be highlighted. Additionally, attention will be focused on the skin as the corporeal text upon which monstrosity or freakishness was inscribed.⁶ Ways that professional and popular audiences "read" markings upon the skin are also discussed. Here, "reading" is taken to imply the ways in which the bodies themselves were made objects of study, scrutiny, investigation, and interpretation. Such endeavors not only help us better understand what marked children meant in earlier times but also, as my concluding remarks will suggest, provide useful historical insight into the discussion and representation of the "disabled" in current scholarship.

Eighteenth-Century Monstrous Children

Discourse on the belief in maternal impressions has been a staple of both popular and medical literature for millennia. The following poem by Abbot Claude Quillet, *Callipaediae: or, An Art How to Have Handsome Children*, vividly contextualizes the popular imagery of this peculiar maternal-fetal phenomenon during the early Enlightenment.

Ye Pregnant Wives, whose Wish it is, and Care,
 To bring your Issue, and to breed it Fair,
 On what you look, on what you think, beware.
 When in the Womb the Forming Infant Grows,
 And Swelling Beauties shew a Teeming Spouse;
 All Melancholy, Spleen, and anxious Care,
 All Sights Obscene, that shock the Eyes, forbare.
 But a fair Picture, and a beauteous Face,
 By Fancy's mighty Pow'r, refine the Race,
 The Spirits to the Brain the Form convey,
 Which thence the Seed receives, while Nature works her way.
 On ev'ry Part th' Imprinted Image stays,
 And with the *Foetus* grows the borrow'd Grace.
 Strong are the Characters which Fancy Makes,
 And good, and bad, the ripe Conception takes.
 As when the Wheaten Mass is work'd to Dough,
 Or swells with Leaven in the Kneading-Trough.
 It takes whatever Marks the Maker gives,
 And from the Baker's hand its Form receives.
 So works the Fancy on the Female Mold,
 And Women shou'd beware what they behold.⁷

Dramatist Aphra Behn's novel, *The Dumb Virgin; or, The Force of Imagination*, published posthumously in 1700, represents the earliest use of the maternal imagination in English literature of the eighteenth century. In this novel, we learn early on that the beautiful young wife of Ronaldo, a Venetian Senator, gives birth to not one but two children prenatally marked by the force of their mother's imagination. The first child, a daughter named Belvideera, is found upon delivery with distorted limbs and an arched back. Although her face is remarkably "the freest from Deformity," it has "no Beauty to Recompence the Dissymetry of the other Parts; Physicians being consulted in this Affair, derived the Cause from the Frights and dismal Apprehensions of the Mother, at her being taken by the Pyrates; about which time they found by Computation, the Conception of the Child to be." Sulking over the "Defaults of Nature," the mother "grew very Melancholy, rarely speaking, and not to be comforted by any Diversion." Soon, however, she "conceiv'd again, but no hopes of better Fortune cou'd decrease her Grief, which growing with her Burden, eased her of both at once, for she died in Child-birth." This child, Maria, survives, and is hailed to be "the most beautiful Daughter to the World that ever adorn'd Venice."

She is, however, "naturally and unfortunately Dumb," a "defect the learn'd attributed to the Silence and Melancholy of the Mother, [just] as the Deformity of the other [daughter] was [attributed] to the Extravagance of her Frights."⁸

Nowhere in this popular representation of maternal impressions does Behn resort to the word "monster" to describe any of the marked children. This is unusual, as both the lay public and the medical community of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries routinely deemed children whose form was somehow marked, disfigured, or deformed as "monsters."⁹ Monstrous children were regularly exhibited with other irregularities of nature in the "Raree shows" held at annual fairs throughout capital cities like London.¹⁰ Many of these children gained notice due to their extra bodily parts. One such "*Child born with a Bear growing on his back*" could be seen "Near Hide-Park [*sic*] Corner during the time of May Fair, near the sheep-pens against Mr. Penkethman's booth."¹¹ After the fairs closed, the same monstrosities were frequently displayed "from morn till night" in the "upstairs rooms of taverns and coffee houses, from Charing Cross to the City."¹² In another exhibit, "A Boy and Girl, with two distinct heads and necks and one body, three arms and three legs and feet and one foot with six toes," could be seen at The Rummer, in Three Kings Court, Fleet Street.¹³ People also commonly encountered "monstrous human children" on city streets. The parents of one "Child with a double head," born in May 1783, displayed it on the streets "as a curiosity to be seen for money."¹⁴

Monstrous children were also paraded before London's natural philosophers. The Reverend William Derham's letter to the Royal Society of London recounts a "Monstrous Humane [*sic*] Birth" in which a "Child, or Children" was born alive with "two Heads, four Arms, and but one Body at the Navel."¹⁵ A picturesque account of another "Monstrous Child" is given by Timothy Sheldrake in a similar letter to the Royal Society of London: "The Head had a Rising on the Top of it, and the Nose was as if one Nose was on the Top of another. . . . The Arms were without the Elbow-Joint; . . . Just under the Ribs, and above the Hips, was a deep Place, as if a Cord had been tied very streight [*sic*]. . . . By this girding-in of the Body, the lower Part of it was almost round, it being without either Legs or Thighs; but had two Feet joined unto the lower Part of the Body, the Heels inward, the Toes (of which it had not the full Number) pointing towards the Sides." This child's mother, who gave birth while being held for the crime of shoplifting and awaiting transportation to Australia, claimed the monstrous form

owed its origin to the criminal sentence she had received. She argued that the sentence put her under “strange Apprehensions” of the “uncommon [animal] Creatures” she feared that she would soon encounter in the country to which she was banished. This fear of hers, Sheldrake notes, was “the only thing that had occasioned so great a Change from the natural Form the Child might otherwise have had.”¹⁶

Unlike Behn’s dramatic narrative, medical cases at this time are typically quite short, often containing only a few paragraphs that anatomically describe the monstrous deformity. Authors guide the reader’s gaze toward the monstrous aspects, consequently magnifying the peculiarity and prohibiting readers from gaining any insight into the whole child’s character, care provisions, or comforts. As such, these medical case histories served more as primers for diagnostics than as guides for care.

In both popular and medical writings, the putative causes underlying such monstrous formations were openly debated. The public dispute in the late 1720s between two London physicians, Daniel Turner and James Blondel, drew unprecedented attention to this phenomenon. Turner and Blondel staged their dispute in a public pamphlet war, acknowledging that the phenomenon of the maternally marked child was a matter of popular as well as professional interest.¹⁷ Turner accepted the long-standing belief in the power of the maternal imagination, whereas Blondel refuted his view, drawing upon logical (*post hoc ergo propter hoc*) argument and anatomical evidence. One perennial problem, well articulated by Blondel, was that physicians, midwives, and mothers typically resorted to an explanation of the power of the maternal imagination *after* noticing some irregularity on a child’s body. Blondel also noted that women frequently experienced longings and frights during their pregnancies without producing marked children.

Blondel initiated his attack upon the belief in maternal impressions in response to the delusion created by Mary Toft. In November 1726, Toft, a village woman from Godalming, Surrey, gained notoriety after it was rumored she had been delivered of sixteen rabbits over a course of months. Toft claimed that her mental longings while pregnant resulted in the monstrous formation of rabbits in her womb. The possibility of transformation from human to animal was common in contemporary discourse about monstrosity. And, as Dennis Todd argues in *Imagining Monsters*, Toft’s claims provoked anxiety over the fragility of human identity. The threat that “many people intuited in [the story of] Mary Toft and her offspring was the possibility that mind, spirit, and consciousness, the very grounds of our sense of identity,” could, in

a mere moment of fancy, be reduced to the "level of the body . . . and turn us out as shapeless monsters."¹⁸ Once the self was "corporealized by the imagination" into "the lineaments of a monster," personal identity "began to collapse," for a "self delivered over to its body," Todd concludes, "is incapable of identity."¹⁹ Thus, the markings upon monstrous children were often read as a sign of dehumanization or, according to Todd, as a "miscreation" of self.

Monstrous children fulfilled a variety of functions throughout eighteenth-century England. Exhibiting such creations as *lusus naturae* ("sports" or "jokes" of nature) could be profitable for the parents and/or "showmen" involved. Such children, especially those from indigent families, were often forced into exhibitionist careers for mere sustenance, as Nature had prohibited them from working in a "normal" capacity.

Heaven in our first formation did provide,
Two arms, two legs: but what we have beside
Renders us monstrous and misshapen too,
Nor have we any work for them to do,
Two arms, two legs, are all that we can use,
And to have more there's no wise man will choose.²⁰

Although many "Raree shows" exhibited living children, some also displayed the bodily remains of children who had died or were stillborn. "Pickled" or partially dissected specimens were, in fact, considerably cheaper to maintain and easier to transport. These accounts demonstrate that death itself did not terminate the lucrative value of monstrous children.

For the anatomically inclined, the death of monstrous children represented an opportunity to explore previously hidden mysteries of nature. English statesman and philosopher Francis Bacon urged natural philosophers to examine monsters closely, noting that "he who has learnt . . . [nature's] deviations, will be able more accurately to describe her [normal] paths."²¹ Anatomical appreciation of monstrous deviation was typically gained through dissection. Physiological irregularities were also elucidated by learning to read anatomical peculiarities in the nervous system. For example, upon finding two brains encased in the double skull of a child at autopsy, the dissector was left pondering what might have been learned if only "the child [had] lived to a more advanced age." Although not explicitly thinking of the benefit (or detriment) of prolonging this child's existence, the dissector focused on

how it could have provided “men of observation opportunities of attending to the effects of this double brain.” Its “influence upon the intellectual principle,” it was argued, would have “afforded a curious and useful source of inquiry.”²² By comparing the anatomies from a number of such dissections, physicians secured their authority as arbiters of the normal and the anomalous in regard to human form. Skills perfected by reading one monstrous child could be translated to decipher encoded meanings in other children. Thus monsters became valued, to borrow Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s phrase, as “the Rosetta Stone that reveals the mechanics of life.”²³

Monstrous children, in their deceased form, also served as symbols of status for gentlemen collectors of curiosities. The more lurid the specimen, the greater the funds expended to secure it. The value of rare specimens became enhanced in the eighteenth century, when city or national museums sought the finest treasures from private curiosity cabinets to add to their own grandiose exhibitions. These collected *curiosa* attracted academic attention as well. Questions were raised as to how these children might be classified. Common parlance had adopted *lusus naturae*, according to historian of science Paula Findlen, to explain “something that would otherwise have been without explanation.”²⁴ To explain the inexplicable was, by definition, an academic matter, but in this case it also presented a considerable classificatory conundrum. Monsters, argues Todd, were “liminal creatures, straddling boundaries between categories,” that completely “threw all conventional definitions into chaos.”²⁵

To overcome this chaos, Carl Linnaeus, the noted Swedish Enlightenment nosologist, classified *Homo monstrous* as a species separate from *Homo sapiens*.²⁶ He argued that members of these two species, though vaguely similar, differed markedly from each other by their physical appearance. His *Homo monstrous* was purposefully an inclusive category of various aberrations of “the other” within the natural order of things. Gathered into one hodgepodge grouping were all humanlike beings—camel girl, elephant boy, bear girl, and fish boy—whose physical structures excluded them from being recognized scientifically as fully human. Linnaeus demonstrated the flexibility of his working nomenclature, in essence his precise way of reading nature, according to three forms of monstrosity that had vividly caught contemporary popular attention: the albino-negro, the “tailed-man,” and the mermaid. He assigned them to three different, humanlike monstrous species: *Homo troglodytes*, *Homo caudatus*, and *Homo marinus*, respectively.²⁷

In *Homo monstrous*, Linnaeus provided a collective name by which all natural, humanlike anomalies would become known. Descriptions of

"the other" that had been previously identified according to labels in private collections became publicly known through a standard nomenclature. Metaphorically speaking, Linnaeus provided a universal language by which all monstrous children could be read. His language stigmatized deviance because it distinctly distanced monsters from humans, treating them as separate species. Paradoxically, it also emphasized the interrelatedness of these different species by focusing upon particular blendings or hybridizations of characteristics. What Linnaeus deemed a logical and coherent interpretation was not, however, shared by all "readers" of nature. His classificatory subdivision of *Homo monstrous* remained a nosological nuisance for decades to follow. As Paul-Gabriele Bouc  argues, the semiology of monster types "does not vary much" from Ambroise Par 's descriptions and illustrations in *Des Monstres et Prodiges* (1573) through the end of the eighteenth century.²⁸

Evidence for monstrous children can also be drawn from childbirth literature. Medical writings typically included brief case histories of difficult deliveries in sections labeled "Diseases Peculiar to Women." Domestic manuals of the period, such as the *Accomplish'd Female Instructor* (1704), the *Young Lady's Companion* (1734), the *Ladies Dispensatory; or, Every Woman Her Own Physician* (1739), and the *Accomplish'd Housewife: or the Gentlewoman's Companion* (1745), provided midwives—whether male or female—readily accessible information for assisting women through labor and delivery. Still, these works provided scant if any coverage about the formation of monstrous children. Such information was, however, available in many of the popular midwifery handbooks and "sex manuals."²⁹

Published in more than sixty printings between the 1680s and the 1930s, the pseudonymous *Aristotle's Master-piece* prevailed as the domestic medical authority on reproduction in vernacular English. *Aristotle's Master-piece* reputedly includes centuries of collected wisdom about reproduction. Loosely described by Roy Porter as a "sex manual," this work addresses myriad concerns about copulation, conception, and childbirth.³⁰ *Aristotle's Master-piece*, he observes, "sets sex in a context that is fundamentally natural and functional." This "generally relaxed" approach was unusual in discourse on a subject that Christianity had rendered "inflammatory."³¹ As an influential and commonly reprinted work about all reproductive matters, *Aristotle's Master-piece* deserves recognition for sustaining popular belief in the power of the maternal imagination. The text claims that children marked by a maternal impression are prodigies of nature. If the skin markings are properly read, they foretell significant future events in the lives of the marked

individuals. In this way, the maternally marked child served much like the zodiac bodies popular in previous centuries. Some have argued that the habit of reading maternal markings as portents, omens, or prophetic signs had widely diminished by the eighteenth century.³² However, the heavy reliance upon *Aristotle's Master-piece* throughout the century strongly suggests that the concept prevailed in the minds of many during this period.³³

Just how maternally marked children were to be read was difficult to know, as their markings frequently represented ambivalent warning signs. Some authors (typically midwives) used maternally marked children as a rhetorical device to warn pregnant women of the need to avoid placing themselves in harm's way during pregnancy. "Raree shows" that displayed children reputedly marked by their mothers' imagination were said to have frightened pregnant women who, in turn, sometimes delivered marked children. In this way, the public display of monstrous children was believed to perpetuate its products. Cautionary messages warning women of their ever-present need to remain alert to all potential harms during pregnancy appeared throughout Europe.

Precise meanings underlying the cultural function of belief in maternal impressions remain open to debate. Some scholars have argued that these warnings reinforced stereotypic gender roles, particularly that of men exerting their authority over women. Rosi Braidotti characterizes this use as part of the controlling and disciplining actions men took in their "pathologization of the woman's body" in the late eighteenth century.³⁴ Such arguments are strengthened when viewed within the context of the eighteenth-century British medicalization of childbirth by male midwives.³⁵ Conversely, Roy Porter insightfully notes that this purported power of women actually endows them with a hold not only over men but over all humanity. The "future of the race," he argues, "seemed to depend on what chanced to be racing through the mind of the weaker vessel, whose rationality was doubted at the best of times."³⁶ Others argue that warnings surrounding maternal impressions were precursors of prenatal care initiatives that physicians, nurses, and midwives professionalized decades later.

The popular belief in the power of the maternal imagination was stirred through the writings of Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, and Tobias Smollett. As in Aphra Behn's tale of the deformed child and the child who could not speak, the maternally derived birthmark in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* ultimately reveals the true identity of a main character. Jonathan Wild, Fielding's protagonist in his 1745 novel of the same

name, has his whole criminal future impressed upon him by his mother's "violent desires to acquire all sorts of property" during her pregnancy.³⁷ Sterne's novel, *Tristram Shandy*, also concerns an individual whose life is marked via *in utero* influence, a point that readers learn from the opening pages of the work.

Tobias Smollett, a trained surgeon and physician, presents a more elaborate account of the actions of maternal impression upon the character development of his protagonist, Peregrine Pickle. Smollett's attention to maternal matters in this work is understandable given that, while composing *Peregrine Pickle*, he was concurrently editing and annotating a *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* for the Edinburgh physician and male midwife, William Smellie, to whom he had served as an apprentice. In one choice passage from *Peregrine Pickle*, Smollett satirically represents the maternal power through Mrs. Grizzle's attending her sister-in-law, Sally Pickle, during the latter's pregnancy.³⁸

She restricted her [Mrs. Pickle] from eating roots, pot-herbs, fruit, and all sorts of vegetables; and one day, when Mrs. Pickle had plucked a peach . . . and was in the very act of putting it between her teeth, Mrs. Grizzle . . . entreat[ed] her . . . to resist such a pernicious appetite. Her request was no sooner complied with, . . . [then] recollecting that, if her sister's longing was baulked, the child might be affected with some disagreeable mark.³⁹

By the end of the eighteenth century, British medical authorities were still to be found on either side of the maternal imagination argument.⁴⁰ Unlike in previous centuries, this division was not primarily a split between advocates of supernatural and natural causes. Rather, most Enlightenment authorities argued from anatomical grounds in representing the possible range of actions of the maternal imagination. Differences stemmed from varied interpretations of the "invisible" workings of nervous sensation and reproductive generation, two of the most popular yet least understood areas of physiological investigation at the time. These themes were incorporated into contemporary literary plots as well.

In both medical and popular writings of Enlightenment Britain, visible skin markings on children were rarely perceived as more than superficial blemishes often caused, during fetal development, by maternal imagination. True, they were read as signs of stigmatizing and ostracizing deformities, leading children to be classified among the *Homo monstrosus*. Yet, however indelible, the markings adhered to the

body's surface layer. In the following century, the markings began figuratively to metastasize inwardly, where they became interpreted as markings of an inborn immorality.

Nineteenth-Century Child Freaks

Ascertaining the precise type of monstrosity became a focal point of the burgeoning nineteenth-century science of teratology. Initiated by the 1820s writings of Etienne and Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, natural philosophers in Britain and the United States reclassified children as *Homo monstrosus* according to various states of arrested embryonic development.⁴¹ By doing so, teratologists forged a new professional understanding of monstrous children. Still, they failed to dissuade many in the medical community from their belief in the power of the maternal imagination. Nineteenth-century "imaginationists," including United States Surgeon General William Hammond as well as Benjamin Fordyce Barker, a founder of the American Gynecological Society, remained outspoken supporters of this belief.⁴² Glasgow physician John Brown argued in 1888 that hundreds of cases routinely appeared as "evidence" of this belief in "various Medical Journals," thereby suggesting that any "unbelief in the influence of the Maternal Impressions . . . was dying out."⁴³

Support of maternal impressions was also sustained on the popular front throughout the nineteenth century. One key difference distinguishing this discourse on monstrosities from that of the previous century was the way in which maternal marks came to be read as indelible marks of moral character. This claim was consistent with the growing interest in the apparent nervous connections between mind and body discussed in both contemporary medical investigations and popular literature. The inheritance of physical markers denoting moral character became particularly apparent in the raging fads of physiognomy and phrenology.

Physiognomy, or the "science" of reading people's character by studying their facial features, became common as a form of physical diagnosis and as parlor entertainment. At the end of the eighteenth century, Swiss physician Johann Caspar Lavater popularized this practice through the analysis of thousands of facial nuances, published in his four-volume *Essays on Physiognomy* (1798, English translation).⁴⁴ In the United States, Nathaniel Hawthorne featured the art of physiognomy in a number of his popular short stories, including "The Pro-

phetic Pictures" (1837) and "Edward Randolph's Portrait" (1838).⁴⁵ The public's acceptance of the related art of phrenology (i.e., reading the contour of "bumps" on the head) was due, in part, to the potential this "science" held for controlling or reforming personality and character. Traveling "professors of phrenology" or "bump doctors"—like the Combes, Fowler, and Wells families in the United States—offered lectures and analyzed heads across the country.⁴⁶

Two individuals greatly interested in the phrenological movement also wrote popular accounts of maternal marking. Like other mid-century writings, their accounts incorporate an interpretation of the imprint of the maternal imagination as a character defect.⁴⁷ In Hawthorne's short story, "The Birthmark" (1843),⁴⁸ a scientist becomes increasingly preoccupied with the miniature, hand-shaped birthmark on his wife Georgiana's left cheek.⁴⁹ The mark, which symbolizes a wide range of meanings, including human imperfection, original sin, and human mortality, has also served as Georgiana's "emotional barometer" since childhood.⁵⁰ For instance, her changing state of mind is decipherable from reading fluctuations in the intensity of color and the size of her birthmark. Looked at in this way, the maternally derived marking was considerably more than "skin deep."

Harvard professor of anatomy Oliver Wendell Holmes, well known among both medical and popular audiences, interweaves a complex tale of maternal markings in his "medicated novel," *Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny* (1861).⁵¹ In this work, Holmes created a serpentine child/woman protagonist whose mother, Catalina, had been bitten by a rattlesnake while pregnant with Elsie. According to Holmes, "an antenatal impression . . . had mingled an alien element in her nature."⁵² The venom poisons Elsie from her childhood, both morally and physically. Literary critic Charles Boewe summarized Elsie's snakelike characteristics as follows:

She has a sinuous neck and diamond-shaped eyes; her clothing suggests snakelike qualities; she has compulsions to writhe in orgiastic dances, even her ordinary walk is slithering; she experiences torpor in the winter; her unblinking eyes have a hypnotic ability; and she is literally cold-blooded. She does not suffer from the delusion that she is part snake; she actually *is* part snake.⁵³

In addition to emphasizing Elsie Venner's inheritance of outward physical characteristics, Holmes admittedly used this novel to raise public consciousness over the possibility of inheriting "moral responsi-

bility for other people's misbehavior" as well.⁵⁴ Such concerns were also strongly debated among physicians at that time, particularly regarding the creation of a medical specialty devoted to the study of morality. Like these physicians, Holmes promoted the reading of maternal markings as predestined or prognosticating signs of character. As such, children could no more overcome their marked destinies than they could outgrow their skin.

While some nineteenth-century authors focused their attention on maternal markings as signs of morality, others attempted to explain the maternal origin of conjoined twins. Teratologists described these twins as the result of an improper splitting of the "embryonic mass." The public, however, more readily turned to explanations that advocated maternally impressed origins of such children. The cultural mythology that developed around Chang and Eng Bunker—the "original Siamese Twins"—was perpetuated by the popularity of the twins Giacomo and Giovanni Tocci later in the century.⁵⁵ No less celebrated an author than Mark Twain spun a tale around the Italian hereditary hybrids.⁵⁶ Twain featured the twins in his 1894 "Those Extraordinary Twins, A Comedy," a work he abandoned and then revised as *The Tragedy of Pudd'n Head Wilson*, published in the same year. Like his contemporaries, Twain focused upon reading, prognosticating, and satirizing the personalities inside peculiarly "deformed" bodies.

Popular literature provided models from which to read maternal markings in terms of the personhood of deformed children. One notable nineteenth-century medical case that offers personal reflections upon deformity can be found in the brief pathography by Joseph Carey Merrick—better known as "The Elephant Man."⁵⁷ Merrick, who maintained that his condition was due to a powerful maternal imprint, was displayed, when a teenager, in Tom Norman's museum in London's East End. There, barkers claimed that his deformity had resulted from his mother's fright during pregnancy.

Joseph Merrick was born in Leister, England on August 5, 1862. He initially appeared by all accounts to be "a perfect baby." During his second year, however, significant abnormal growth patterns were noticed. Among the most prominent of the "bizarre distortions" upon his body was an "extraordinary mass of flesh" that "continued to force its way from beneath the upper lip," eventually protruding "several inches" from Joseph's mouth in the form of a "grotesque snout" that weighed several ounces. To "even the most unimaginative eye," the resemblance of this protruding growth to an elephant's trunk "must have been obvious."⁵⁸

As Joseph's mother, Mary Jane Merrick, née Potterson, "cast around helplessly to explain the inexplicable, to herself as much as to her relations and gossiping neighbours," she recalled a mishap she had encountered with an elephant at the May fair in nearby Humberstonegate.⁵⁹ Reputedly, the rush of the crowd caused her to stumble directly into the path of a parading elephant. She scrambled to get out of the way, thereby saving her life. However, she remained "distressed and badly shaken" by this event.⁶⁰ At the time of the incident, she was well into her second trimester with Joseph. Merrick himself later claimed that it was this maternal imprinting rather than his physical appearance that prompted his use of the show name, the Elephant Man.⁶¹

As a child, Merrick gained renown as a popular spectacle—a "professional freak"—on exhibition in Whitechappel Road.⁶² His popularity crossed class barriers in London's society, and he gained the admiration of Alexandra, Princess of Wales. Merrick's story remained popular well after his death in 1890, due primarily to the widely read work *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences*, published in 1923 by his medical caretaker, benefactor, and liberator, Sir Frederick Treves.⁶³

In many ways, Merrick represented what had previously been characterized as a *lusus naturae*. Although he evoked feelings of horror and fear in many who gazed upon him, his own narrative and that of Treves remind readers of how truly human he was. Anthropologist Ashley Montagu argues that Merrick "unaccountably . . . escaped the blight that usually so seriously befalls the deprived and disadvantaged child."⁶⁴ According to Treves, "As a specimen of humanity, Merrick was ignoble and repulsive; but the spirit of Merrick, if it could be seen in the form of the living, would assume the figure of an upstanding and heroic man, smooth browed and clean of limb, and with eyes that flashed undaunted courage."⁶⁵ In this sense, Merrick was an exception to the general nineteenth-century view that monstrosity was written both upon the physical body and within the moral fabric.

Merrick was but one of a number of "professional freaks" whose actions began to close the man-made gap between what teratologists continued to envision as *Homo monstrous* and *Homo sapiens*. This assimilation of the monstrous into the human also became a paradoxical offshoot of the noted freak exhibitions of America's greatest showman, Phineas Taylor Barnum. In contrast to Linnaeus's attempt to distance monsters from humans, Barnum emphasized the humans underlying the aberrant and varied bodily forms. And unlike Hawthorne and Holmes, Barnum stressed the normal character development of people

labeled “freaks.”⁶⁶ However, as pecuniary reward was never far from Barnum’s interest, care must be taken here not to overrepresent his actions along humanitarian lines. Indeed, it is more likely the consequences of his actions rather than his underlying motives that helped reform the American view of the misshapen. Still, Barnum’s globally distributed advertisements effectively popularized a paradigm shift in the cultural perception of child freaks.⁶⁷

Many of the rarities of nature that Barnum exhibited in his American Museum in New York City from 1841 to 1868, and later in his traveling circus, were claimed to owe their peculiarity to maternal imprinting. Attributing freaks to episodes in a mother’s pregnancy was “the customary speech of the dime-museum lecturer.”⁶⁸ This attribution became most widely circulated in Barnum’s advertisements of the most famous “child” exhibit of all time—General Tom Thumb (the stage name of Charles Sherwood Stratton). Stratton was a “dwarf” born in 1838, whom Barnum literally purchased for exhibition in 1842.⁶⁹ According to Barnum’s story, Stratton’s mother became distraught during her pregnancy over the drowning of a puppy and the tears of her anguish, gushing forth in uncontrollable crying fits, reputedly shrank the size of the fetus she was carrying.⁷⁰

Although Stratton was literally an adult throughout much of his forty-one-year career, Barnum continued to capitalize on Stratton’s size, emphasizing the amazing capabilities of this childlike body. In essence, Stratton never outgrew the overtones of Barnum’s portrayal of his “diminutive prodigy” as a precocious child.⁷¹

Barnum’s career peaked during the decades of Reconstruction. At that time, deformity—thousands of maimed Civil War veterans—suddenly appeared in the United States. Unlike children marked from birth with maternally impressed deformities, most of the highly respected yet deformed American Civil War veterans had once been known by their family and society to have been completely whole and were never viewed as other than completely human. Although noticeably disfigured, the war wounded were never labeled “freaks” but, rather, as “damaged” or “disabled” people.⁷²

Part of the ethos underlying Reconstruction involved assimilating those with acquired disability back into society. Since the disabled veterans were often unable to perform tasks they had once accomplished with ease, many acquired training in particular tasks that were suited to their respective disability. Parallel to this vocational specialization, Barnumesque sideshow operators increasingly displayed child freaks who had become exceptionally skilled in one ability such as

singing or memorization. Although these children continued to be exhibited at sideshows in circuses and carnivals, they came to be viewed more as humans with special abilities than as *Homo monstrous*. Like aerialists, strong men, contortionists, mentalists, and sword swallowers, child freaks became celebrated for exhibiting some amazing ability as well as for their physical anomalies. This emphasis on special ability rather than deformity challenged antebellum assumptions that depicted child freaks as morally and physically defective.

Reading Deviance

The central focus of this essay is on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but this survey of the past also offers an intriguing glance toward the present. How have the earlier beliefs and attitudes described above developed and changed in our own time? Certainly concern with maternally marked children continued into the early twentieth century, but instead of concentrating on the physical and psychological makeup of freaks, medical and popular attention at that time shifted toward new explanations of their origin.

The rediscovery of Mendelian genetics around 1900 prompted scientists to apply methods designed to improve livestock and agricultural production to human subjects in order to breed better babies. In their quest to populate the world with "well born" children only, eugenicists distinguished between adults they perceived to be fit or unfit to reproduce. The unfit became categorized, both scientifically and popularly, as the "socially deviant," the "socially degenerate," and the "socially inadequate"—all labels that replaced the earlier categorization of freaks.⁷³

Many such individuals were marked by feeble-mindedness, tuberculosis, syphilis, blindness, deafness, and deformity—markings often first noted in childhood. Instead of resorting to the mother's wayward imaginings, eugenicists sought hereditary explanations for these disorders. Thus the diseased were thought to have inherited either the infectious agent or a heightened susceptibility to it. Alcoholism, drug abuse, and prostitution—all disorders tending to produce feeble-minded children—were attributed to a hereditary predisposition toward addictive behaviors.

Environment as well as heredity contributed to this newer understanding of maternal influences. By mid-century, certain prenatal injuries to the fetus were explained by direct environmental exposure to

blood poisoning, disease, or toxic substances such as lead, mercury, or phosphorus. As potential causes for the “socially degenerate” multiplied, advocates of both nature and nurture began to argue for better protection of motherhood as a professional and civic duty.

Summarizing half a century of nature/nurture research in *Prenatal Influences* (1962), anthropologist Ashley Montagu traces increased scientific insight into the stages of fetal development and the way these are affected by the mother’s nutrition, emotions, and *impressions* as well as her illnesses, medications, activities, and “bad habits” like smoking and drinking. Arguing that neglect of the prenatal period has “cost humanity dearly,” Montagu insists that an infant’s prenatal period requires “at least as much attention as does its postnatal development.”⁷⁴

Changed explanations of maternal markings did not necessarily diminish the resulting shame and guilt for mothers. Many mothers of children with physical or mental disabilities continue to suffer life-long guilt and blame.⁷⁵ “As long as we cannot explain to a mother why *her* child is deformed,” observes pediatrician and teratologist Josef Warkany, “she will retain her own explanation,” unconvinced by generalizations of the medical profession.⁷⁶ And lingering in these private explanations are thoughts consistent with the age-old belief in maternal impressions.

This concern over maternal imprinting is reflected in some late twentieth-century writing by authors as diverse as Sylvia Plath, Toni Morrison, and Luce Irigaray.⁷⁷ The interest of contemporary fiction in themes of cloning or developing the “perfect human” shows the other extreme, for clones are the antithesis of marked children, products of human reproduction without any undesirable markings of bodily difference.⁷⁸ Popular advertising feeds belief in the power of maternal imprinting by promoting various products for prenatal care. A pregnant mother can stimulate the intelligence of her developing fetus by listening regularly to Mozart or other select classical music. By inference, women who fail to do so are providing their children with less than optimal care. So too the proliferation of advice manuals in shopping malls and online remind mothers-to-be of their responsibility for optimizing the unborn infant’s preconceptual as well as prenatal development. Clearly anxiety and hope for the effects of maternal imprinting survive in our culture, albeit under the guise of prenatal care.

Meanwhile, the lot of children themselves, all these marked by physical or mental difference, has undergone a radical change, as evidenced by the growing body of disability studies and social programs in our time. In both literature and culture, “monster,” “freak,” or “degenerate” is now subsumed under the category of “disabled.” To

extend the phrase used by Rosemarie Garland Thomson to categorize collectively the freaks of earlier centuries, the disabled have become an "icon of generalized embodied deviance" in our era.⁷⁹ Until very recently, people with disabilities were sequestered in homes, segregating them from the "normal" members of society. Today, however, the disabled have begun to escape their isolation and their inferior status. This cultural and social shift is reflected in our very language, in the way the derogatory terminology of earlier periods is being replaced by neutral or euphemistic terms: the "monster," the "freak," the "degenerate" has now become the "partially disabled," the "physically or mentally challenged," or even the "alternatively abled." Such cultural transformations result, at least in part, from the way people with disabilities—so long marginalized and mute—have found and raised their own collective voice. The legislation prompted by their political and social efforts has resulted in a growing integration into the larger society: people with disability now have access not only to public buildings but also to the many vocational and education opportunities so long denied them. We are at last learning to stress personhood and not anomaly. If the resulting assimilation of the disabled into discourse and culture succeeds, children in the future born with disabilities will be "read" very differently from the maternally marked children of the past three centuries.

NOTES

The author is grateful for the scholarly assistance offered by Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, June Watson, Esther Dell, Janice Wilson, and Rebecca Garden.

1. Key works that focus on popular representations and meanings of genetics are Dorothy Nelkin and M. Susan Lindee's *The DNA Mystique: The Gene as a Cultural Icon* (New York: Freeman, 1995), Jose Van Dijck's *Imagination: Popular Images of Genetics* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), and Celeste Michelle Condit's *The Meanings of the Gene: Public Debates About Human Heredity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

2. Jane Caplan's recent edited volume, *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) focuses on the epidermal level, as does Margo DeMello's *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). The skin is also featured prominently in Elizabeth Haiken's *Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), Sander L. Gilman's *Creating Beauty to Cure the Soul: Race and Psychology in the Shaping of Aesthetic Surgery* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), and Allen M. Hornblum's *Acres of Skin: Human Experiments at Holmesburg Prison* (New York: Routledge, 1998). Philip K. Wilson describes the skin's historical significance in dividing the practices of surgery and medicine in two recent works, "Surgical Perspectives of the Body with a Special Focus on Skin," Chapter 4 of his *Surgery, Skin and Syphilis: Daniel Turner's London*

(1667–1741) (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 59–84, and “Imaging the Human Body: A Surgical Perspective of Skin in Enlightenment London,” in *Medicine and the History of the Body*, ed. Yasuo Otsuka, Shizu Sakai, and Shigehisa Kuriyama (Tokyo: Ishiyaku EuroAmerica, Inc., 1999), 339–55.

3. These Foucauldian themes draw attention to the cultural construction of bodies through which medical and scientific knowledge as well as particular power structures are gained. See Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, eds., *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) reconceives disability as a narrative of cultural liberation rather than a narrative of medical oppression. For a broader representation of disability, see *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, ed. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

4. John Brown, *Notes and Observations on Maternal Impressions*. M.D. thesis, University of Glasgow, 1888, 58.

5. Marie-Hélène Huet attempts a much more comprehensive discussion of the maternal imagination, drawing especially upon literature, in her *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). To supplement Huet’s work bibliographically, see J. W. Ballantine’s exhaustive reference for this maternal power in medical and philosophical literature from antiquity through the early twentieth century in his *Manual of Antenatal Pathology and Hygiene: The Embryo* (Edinburgh: William Green & Sons, 1904), 105–28. Pathologist F. González-Crussi provides a cursory popular overview of changing thoughts about prenatal influences in “From Mother to Fetus, from Superstition to Science,” *Britannica Medical and Health Annual* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998), 42–59. For a discussion of the maternal imagination within cultural meanings of fear, see Herman W. Roodenburg, “The Maternal Imagination: The Fears of Pregnant Women in Seventeenth-Century Holland,” *Journal of Social History* 21 (1988): 701–16. Jan Bondeson reviews this wide-ranging belief in “Maternal Impressions,” a chapter in his *A Cabinet of Medical Curiosities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 144–69. On a completely different tack, Ian Stevenson argues that maternal markings are evidence of reincarnation. For an overview, see Stevenson’s *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997).

6. I intend no disrespect in my references to “monster” and “freak” throughout this article; my reliance upon these terms is simply consistent with their once common use in medical and popular literature.

7. Abbot Claude Quillet, *Callipaediae; or, An Art How to Have Handsome Children* (London: John Morphew, 1710), 53–54.

8. Aphra Behn, *The Dumb Virgin; or, The Force of Imagination*, in *Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Phaeton Press, 1967), 5:417–44. My citations are taken from p. 424. Following the birth of these maternally marked children, an Oedipal tragedy ensues. It is noteworthy that the true identity of the “English” nobleman, Dangerfield, becomes known when his father, Rinaldo, discovers the dagger-shaped birthmark—an omen symbolic of the action at the close of the novel—on Dangerfield’s neck.

9. As Huet shows in *Monstrous Imagination*, 6, several philological traditions exist regarding the term *monster*, including the Latin *monstrare*, to show, as well as Augustine’s use of *monstrum* to signify the prodigious demonstration of God’s will. Other traditions associate *monster* with the Latin *monere*, to warn, to emphasize the prophetic nature of monsters. Later in the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson defined *monster* as both something out of the common order of nature and something horrible because of deformity, wickedness, or mischief (*A Dictionary of the English Language*, 9th ed., vol. III [London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1805, n.p.]). The Scottish natural philosopher William Smellie, the first editor of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,

provides the following definition of *monster* in his monumental work of 1768–71: "any production that deviates from the species to which it belongs, whether with respect to the number or disposition of its parts; in which sense, a man with six fingers on each hand, or six toes on each foot, is a monster." Smellie carefully adds, "But the term monster seems to be chiefly applied to such productions as deviate very much from the ordinary course of nature." *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh, 1771), III:269.

10. Richard D. Altick provides many well-documented accounts in his *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), esp. 36, 42, and 49. Paul Semonin argues that the cross-class appeal of monsters originated from a general sense of them as comic grotesques. See his "Monsters in the Marketplace: The Exhibition of Human Oddities in Early Modern England," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 69–81. Using Bakhtinian ideas of high and low culture, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White address the display of the human body at carnivals in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

11. C. J. S. Thompson, *The Mystery and Lore of Monsters* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1930), 67.

12. Colin Clair, *Human Curiosities* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1968), 2.

13. C. J. S. Thompson, 67.

14. *Ibid.* Although this "Two-Headed Boy of Bengal" was not shown live in the streets of London, he was exhibited live in British India and, after his death, was displayed (and remains on display) at the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons (London). For a complete medical description of this case, see Jan Bondeson and Elizabeth Allen, "Craniopagus Parasiticus: Everard Home's Two-Headed Boy of Bengal and Some Other Cases," *Surgical Neurology* 31 (1989): 426–34. Bondeson presents similar cases in his *The Two-Headed Boy, and Other Medical Marvels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

15. "A Letter from the Reverend Mr. W. Derham, F.R.S. to Dr. Hans Sloane, R.S. Secr. giving an Account of some . . . Monstrous Births . . .," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 26 (1709): 310.

16. "A Letter from Mr. Timothy Sheldrake to Sir Hans Sloane, . . . concerning a Monstrous Child born of a Woman under Sentence of Transportation," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 41 (1739–40): 341–43.

17. Philip K. Wilson, "'Out of Sight, Out of Mind?': The Daniel Turner–James Blondel Dispute Over the Power of the Maternal Imagination," *Annals of Science* 49 (1992): 63–85.

18. Dennis Todd, *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 104.

19. *Ibid.*, 136.

20. *Aristotle's Master-piece*, in *The Works of Aristotle: In Four Parts*, 4th ed. (London, 1822). Often printed together, there were four separate works that comprised the many editions of this pseudo-Aristotelian creation: *Aristotle's Complete Master-piece*, *Aristotle's Experienced Midwife*, *Aristotle's Book of Problems*, and *Aristotle's Last Legacy*. *Aristotle's Master-piece*—the whole work—has received surprisingly minimal historical consideration, given its enduring influence on roughly three centuries of readers.

21. *Novum Organum*, in Sir Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning, Novum Organum, New Atlantis*, vol. 30 in *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 159.

22. C. J. S. Thompson, 78. For an assessment of how Enlightenment natural philosophers used "abnormal" bodies, see Javier Moscoso, "Monsters as Evidence: The Uses of the Abnormal Body During the Early Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Biology* 31 (1998): 355–82.

23. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity," in R. G. Thomson, *Freakery*, 3.

24. Paula Findlen, "Jokes of Nature and Jokes of Knowledge: The Playfulness of Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990): 293. Harriet Ritvo similarly describes monsters as being "united not so much by physical deformity or eccentricity as by their common inability to fit or be fitted into the category of the ordinary," in *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 133. For reassessments of monsters in the Early Modern period, see Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 173–214; *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan Wiseman (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); and Zakiya Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine: Magic, Medicine, and the Marvelous in the Time of the Scientific Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). On the morality underlying early modern monstrosity, see Kathryn M. Brammall, "Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (1996): 3–21.

25. Todd, 156.

26. Linnaeus's distinction appears in the 10th edition of his *Systema Naturae per Regna Tria Naturae* (Holmiae: L. Salvii, 1758). For a brief contextualization of this work, see Annemarie de Waal Malefijt, "Homo Monstrosus," *Scientific American* 219 (1968): 113–18.

27. Gunnar Broberg discusses these three species in "Homo sapiens, Linnaeus's Classification of Man," in *Linnaeus: The Man and His Work*, ed. Tore Frängsmyr, rev. ed. (Canton, Mass.: Science History Publications, 1994), 156–94.

28. Paul-Gabriel Boucé, "Imagination, Pregnant Women, and Monsters in Enlightenment England and France," in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 94.

29. For an introduction to writings for midwives about reproductive generation, see Robert A. Erickson's "'The Books of Generation': Some Observations on the Style of the English Midwife Books, 1671–1764," in *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 74–94.

30. As in so many areas of Enlightenment medical historiography, Roy Porter led the way toward better contextualizing the usefulness of *Aristotle's Master-piece* to its numerous readers: see "'The Secrets of Generation Display'd': *Aristotle's Master-piece* in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Eighteenth-Century Life* 9 (1985): 1–21. See also Chapter 2, "Medical Folklore in High and Low Culture: *Aristotle's Master-piece*," in Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

31. Porter, "The Secrets of Generation," 12, 16.

32. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Peregrine, 1978), 104, 125. See also Katharine Park and Lorraine J. Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England," *Past and Present* 92 (1981): 20–54; and Dudley Wilson, *Signs & Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1993).

33. Although the readership of this pseudo-Aristotelian text is difficult to ascertain, Porter points out that references to *Aristotle's Master-piece* in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) support the idea that it was very much "in the air" at the time. Roy Porter, "Spreading Carnal Knowledge or Selling Dirt Cheap? Nicholas Venette's *Tableau de l'Amour Conjugal* in Eighteenth Century England," *Journal of European Studies* 14 (1984): 235. Janet Blackman discusses the popularity of *Aristotle's Master-piece* in "Popular Theories of Generation: The Evolution of Aristotle's Works, The Study of an Anachronism," in *Health Care and Popular Medicine in Nineteenth Century England*, ed. John Woodward and David Richards (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1977), 56–88. For an account of this work's popularity in America,

see Otho T. Beall, Jr., "Aristotle's Master Piece in America: A Landmark in the Folklore of Medicine," *William and Mary Quarterly* 20 (1963): 207–22.

34. Rosi Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: On Teratology and Embodied Differences," in *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine, and Cyberspace*, ed. Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti (London: Zed Books, 1996), 149.

35. For various perspectives on the development of male midwifery in eighteenth-century England and nineteenth-century America, see the articles gathered in *The Medicalization of Obstetrics*, ed. Philip K. Wilson, vol. 2 in *Childbirth: Changing Ideas and Practices in Britain and America, 1600 to the Present*, ed. Philip K. Wilson (New York: Garland, 1996).

36. Porter, "The Secrets of Generation," 11.

37. Bondeson, *Medical Curiosities*, 164.

38. For a discussion of the maternal imagination in Enlightenment literature, see G. S. Rousseau, "Pineapples, Pregnancy, Pica, and *Peregrine Pickle*," in *Tobias Smollett: Bicentennial Essays Presented to Lewis M. Knapp*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and P.-G. Boucé (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 79–109.

39. Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, in *The Miscellaneous Works of Tobias Smollett, M.D.* (London: for J. Mundell, Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1796), Book I, Chapter V, 25.

40. Andrew Curran and Patrick Graille reach a similar conclusion concerning the explanations of monsters in late Enlightenment France in "The Faces of Eighteenth-Century Monstrosity," a special issue on "Faces of Monstrosity in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21 (1997): 8–10. For additional discussion of eighteenth-century monstrosity as difference, see "*Defects*": *Engineering the Modern Body*, ed. Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000).

41. For the development of modern teratology, see Alice Domurat Dreger, "Nature Is One Whole: Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's *Traité de Tératologie*." Master's thesis, Indiana University, 1993.

42. G. J. Fisher, physician at Sing Sing, New York, discusses Hammond's beliefs in "Does Maternal Mental Influence Have Any Constructive or Destructive Power in the Production of Malformations or Monstrosities at Any Stage of Embryonic Development?" *American Journal of Insanity* 26 (1870): 250–53, 56, 80, 84. Barker discusses cases he views as supportive of the maternal imagination argument in "The Influence of Maternal Impressions on the Fetus," *Transactions of the American Gynecological Society* 11 (1887): 152–96; reprinted in *Methods and Folklore*, ed. Philip K. Wilson, vol. 3 in *Childbirth: Changing Ideas and Practices in Britain and America, 1600 to the Present*, ed. Philip K. Wilson (New York: Garland, 1996), 384–428.

43. Brown, 35. G. J. Fisher charges physicians with being "in no inconsiderable degree responsible for the existence and continuance" of this popular belief (p. 293). I have yet to find substantial evidence of Ballantyne's claim that the recrudescence of belief in the maternal imagination was greater in the United States than in Britain. See his *Antenatal Pathology and Hygiene*, 123, as well as T. E. Glenister in "Fantasies, Facts and Foetuses: The Interplay of Fancy and Reason in Teratology," *Medical History* 8 (1964): 24.

44. Many nineteenth-century authors introduced physiognomy into their works, as discussed in Graeme Tytler's *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) and in Christopher Rivers's *Face Value: Physiognomical Thought and the Legible Body in Marivaux, Lavater, Balzac, Gautier, and Zola* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994). Lavater's influence on medical thinking pervades Barbara Maria Stafford's extraordinary vision of the Enlightenment in *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

45. Taylor Stoehr discusses Hawthorne's reliance upon physiognomy and phrenology for the framework of many of his tales in *Hawthorne's Mad Scientists: Pseudoscience and Social Science in Nineteenth-Century Life and Letters* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1978), esp. 64–102.

46. Roger Cooter deciphers the cultural meaning of British phrenology in his *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). See also antiquarian book dealer Madeleine B. Stern's history of nineteenth-century American phrenology, *Heads and Headlines: The Phrenological Fowlers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).

47. Nineteenth-century literary authors frequently incorporated characters marked by the prenatal influence of the maternal imagination in their writings. A sampling of novels using this theme includes George Monk's *Bravo of Venice* (1805), Sir Walter Scott's *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822) and *Redgauntlet* (1824), James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), William Harrison Ainsworth's *Rookwood* (1834), Frederick Marryat's *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1836), Charles Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* (1840–1841), Richard Doddridge Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* (1869), Charles Reade's *Griffith Gaunt; or, Jealousy* (1869), George Eliot's *Felix Holt the Radical* (1878), H. Seaton Merriman's *From One Generation to Another* (1892), J. MacLaren Cobban's *The Red Sultan* (1893), George Egerton's *Keynotes* (1893), and G. A. Henty's *Rujub, the Juggler* (1893). Hereditary influence is also commonly featured in Thomas Hardy's writings.

48. Hawthorne's "Birthmark" first appeared in *Pioneer* 1 (1843): 113–19. Hawthorne was also likely to have been influenced by chirapsy, a contemporary "scientific" movement that supported the belief that a pregnant woman's hand placed upon her own body could, via "sympathy," produce a likeness of her hand at the corresponding spot on her fetus. Brown, 102.

49. Aylmer, in his attempt to erase the birthmark—symbolic of science's quest for perfection—pays dearly as he destroys his wife together with her "imperfection."

50. According to Judith Fetterley's feminist reading of this story, the hand "which shaped Georgiana's birth" also "left its mark on her in blood." *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 25. For other interpretations, see Robert B. Heilman's "Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark': Science and Religion," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 48 (1949): 575–83; Alfred S. Reid's "Hawthorne's Humanism: 'The Birthmark' and Sir Kenelm Digby," *American Literature* 38 (1966): 337–51; and Lewis B. Thorne's "The Heart, The Hand, and 'Birthmark,'" *American Transcendental Quarterly* 1 (1969): 38–41.

51. *Elsie Venner* initially appeared as serialized segments in the *Atlantic Monthly* under the title "The Professor's Story," beginning in December 1859.

52. Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Elsie Venner*, vol. 5 in *The Writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes*, Riverside Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1891), 434.

53. Charles Boewe, "Reflex Action in the Novels of Oliver Wendell Holmes," *American Literature* 26 (1954): 303–19. Margaret Hallissy discusses Elsie's sexual monstrosity, focusing upon the serpent woman myth (or lamia) in "Poisonous Creature: Holmes's *Elsie Venner*," *Studies in the Novel* 17 (1985): 406–19.

54. Holmes, xii.

55. Susan Gillman, *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 55. "Siamese twins" became common parlance for all physically conjoined twins.

56. Twain had previously written "The Personal Habits of the Siamese Twins" for *Packard's Monthly* in 1869. For further discussion on Twain and twins, see Nancy Fredrick's "Twain's Indelible Twins," *Nineteenth Century Literature* 43 (1989): 484–99.

57. For an discussion of pathography as a genre, see Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, *Reconstructing Illness: Studies in Pathography*, 2nd ed. (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue

University Press, 1999). Merrick's brief pathography, originally distributed where he was exhibited, is reprinted in Michael Howell and Peter Ford, *The True History of the Elephant Man* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1980), 182–84.

58. *Ibid.*, 57–58.

59. *Ibid.*, 58.

60. *Ibid.*, 55.

61. Philosopher Arnold I. Davidson correctly notes this in "The Horror of Monsters," in *The Boundaries of Humanity: Humans, Animals, Machines*, ed. James J. Sheehan and Morton Sosna (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 53.

62. *Ibid.*, 11.

63. Merrick gained recent celebrity through Bernard Pomerance's Tony Award-winning stage play, *The Elephant Man* (New York: Grove Press, 1979). People have also come to know of Merrick's plight through David Lynch's 1979 movie, *The Elephant Man* (Paramount Pictures). For an analysis of the true and fictitious tales surrounding Joseph Merrick, see Peter W. Graham and Fritz H. Oehlschlaeger, *Articulating the Elephant Man: Joseph Merrick and His Interpreters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

64. [M. F.] Ashley Montagu, *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity* (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1971), 3.

65. Sir Frederick Treves, *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* (London: Cassell & Co., 1923), as reprinted in Howell and Ford, 210.

66. Interestingly, as George M. Gould and Walter L. Pyle note in *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1900), 81, pregnant women were often warned not to visit Barnumesque freaks for fear that what they saw might precipitate the birth of similarly formed freaks.

67. In essence, Barnum helped establish a paradigmatic cultural view of the limits of normality by displaying the range of freakery. This distinction is consistent with Thomas S. Kuhn's argument that "anomaly appears only against the background provided by the paradigm," *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 65.

68. Gould and Pyle, 81.

69. A. H. Saxon, *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 125. For a discussion of medical and social distinctions between the labels of "dwarf" and "midget," see Joan Ablon, *Little People of America: The Social Dimension of Dwarfism* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

70. Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 151.

71. For insight into the commodity of cuteness, see Lori Merish, "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics: Tom Thumb and Shirley Temple," in R. G. Thomson, *Freakery*, 185–203.

72. David D. Yuan discusses the cultural impact of these war wounded in "Disfigurement and Reconstruction in Oliver Wendell Holmes's 'The Human Wheel, Its Spoke and Felloes,'" in *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, ed. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 71–88.

73. See, for example, eugenicist Harry H. Laughlin's "The Socially Inadequate: How Shall We Designate and Sort Them?" *American Journal of Sociology* 27 (1921): 54–70. Philip K. Wilson elaborates upon this labeling in "Eugenicist Harry Laughlin's Crusade to Classify and Control the 'Socially Inadequate' in Progressive Era America," in a special thematic issue, "The New Genetics and the Old Eugenics," of *Patterns of Prejudice* 36 (2002): 49–67.

74. [M. F.] Ashley Montagu, *Prenatal Influences* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1962), 5.

75. Such pangs are still described by many mothers of infants with maternally derived Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, crack addiction, and HIV. Janet Golden discusses changes in the maternal view of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in "'An Argument That Goes Back to the Womb': The Demedicalization of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, 1973–1992," *Journal of Social History* 33 (1999): 269–98.

76. Josef Warkany, "Congenital Malformations in the Past," *Journal of Chronic Disease* 10 (1959): 95.

77. The dichotomy between a creative and a destructive maternal power recurs throughout Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (London: Heinemann, 1963). Luce Irigaray develops the metaphorical representation of the womb as a screen upon which the mother's fantasies are projected in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). The psychosocial anxieties surrounding the maternally impressed birthmark as a disablement are central to Toni Morrison's *Sula* (New York: Knopf, 1973), Jill McCorkle's *Ferris Beach* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin, 1990), and Michael Golding's *Benjamin's Gift* (New York: Warner, 1999). The maternally marked "monster" becomes integral to the plot development of Tom Gilling's *The Sooterkin* (New York: Viking, 2000). In a current best-seller, one finds that Harry Potter's lightning bolt scar on his forehead was also maternally impressed. However, this mark, signifying his mother's powerful and enduring love, serves a protective function. The only ones to fear this scar are Harry's enemies, who know that "it was agony to touch a person marked by something so good" (J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* [New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, Scholastic, 1998], 299). I am grateful to James and Douglas Wilson for introducing me to this last cited source.

78. See Fay Weldon, *The Cloning of Joanna May* (London: Collins, 1989); Nancy Kress, *Beggars in Spain* (Eugene, Ore.: Axolotl Press/Pulphouse, 1991); Jack Dann and Gardner R. Dozois, eds. *Clones* (New York: Ace, 1998); and Nancy A. Parker, *Double Helix, A Novel* (Ashland, Ore.: Ashland Hills Press, 2000).

79. R. G. Thomson, *Freakery*, 10.