Monstrosity, Bodies, and Knowledge in Early Modern England

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Monstrosity, Bodies, and Knowledge in Early Modern England

Curiosity to See and Behold

Whitney Dirks

Amsterdam University Press

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Table of Contents

List of Figures, Maps, and Tables

Figures

Maps

Tables

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Dedication

Mom and Dad, thanks for absolutely everything but particularly for sitting through the six-hour children's Shakespearean productions that eventually led to this project.

And to all the cats I've loved and lost, thanks for sleeping next to me while I worked.

Conventions and Abbreviations

Since the United Kingdom did not adopt the Gregorian Calendar until 1752, dates are provided according to the Julian Calendar unless otherwise noted; however, the calendar year has been standardized to begin on 1 January, rather than Lady Day (25 March). Spelling and punctuation have not been modernized, except that abbreviations have been expanded, superscripts eliminated, and confusing pronoun or title usage ('she', 'the Complainant') silently replaced with bracketed names ('[Mary Herring]'). Italics and full uppercase in primary sources have been omitted except where noted; text in foreign languages is italicized. Names have been standardized whenever possible. In the pre-decimal system of 12 pence (*d.*) to a shilling (*s.*) and 20 shillings to a pound (£), 4 farthings were worth a penny, 4*d.* were worth a groat, and 5*s.* were worth a crown; a half crown was thus 2*s.* 6*d.*

Preface

A Note about Form

In music, an *étude* (literally, a 'study') is a short piece intended to demonstrate a particular technique. In historical usage, the word *study* could refer to a state of amazement, astonishment, or wonder; in its modern sense, one *studies* in order to acquire knowledge. These various definitions – an exercise or technique, a sense of astonishment and wonder, the acquisition of knowledge – comprise both the approach and the subject matter of this book. I use the microhistorical approach within the Études to tell the story of the life, death, and cultural afterlife of the conjoined twins Aquila and Priscilla Herring, born in the year 1680. The Chapters, in turn, provide historical context for the Herring twins' story and address my broader subject matter: knowledge about and understandings of physical monstrosity in early modern England. Thus, this book is simultaneously narrow and broad, focusing down on a case study and then widening out into its historical context. Like the early modern audiences about whom I write, I hope that you will experience amazement and attain greater knowledge by reading this book.

Étude 1
An Anomalous Birth

Abstract
On 19 May 1680, Mary Herring, wife of the labourer Richard Herring from Isle Brewers, Somerset, gave birth to conjoined girls, whom they baptized 'Aquila' and 'Priscilla'. The Herrings were very poor, and Henry Walrond – Richard's landlord, occasional employer, and county Justice of the Peace – gave them a variety of goods to help support the infants.

Keywords: microhistory, conjoined twins, childbirth, baptism, poor relief, poverty

On 19 May 1680, Mary – wife of the agricultural labourer Richard Herring from the tiny village of Isle Brewers, Somerset, in southwestern England – went into labour.[1] The birth of her daughters, the conjoined twins Priscilla and Aquila Herring, would lead to a series of emotional events for the family: elation at the sudden (but fleeting) wealth that the twins engendered, dismay when the two-week-old infants were removed from their home, grief when they died at only a month old. These events were followed by a lawsuit that stretched over more than four frustrating years, eventually ending in a very unsatisfactory manner for Mary Herring (at least, so the evidence would suggest). These Études tell a story of conflict over ownership and income, of local celebrity and its pitfalls, of religio-political antipathy, and of the social consequences of a monstrous birth. The account is based upon a close reading of several contemporary printed sources and, most significantly, upon a lawsuit pursued in London's Court of Chancery. The legal case consists of more than 30 folio pages of conflicting testimonies that disagree about even the simplest facts, such as how many other children

1 TNA: C 6/6/94, Court of Chancery: Six Clerks Office: Pleadings before 1714, Collins. Herringe *v.* Walrond.

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were in the Herring household. The witness statements are often comprised of hearsay, occasionally contain blatantly partisan sentiments, and were recorded at a two-year remove from the events that the witnesses claim to remember so clearly. These Études comprise my attempt to winnow truth from fabrication – though as any historian can attest, 'truth' is a slippery concept at the best of times – and so I am ultimately telling the story of the Herring twins as I have come to understand it. And that story begins with a birth.

Mary Herring had apparently been 'so big and unwieldy' during her pregnancy 'that all concluded that she would have two Children or Twins at that Birth; which observations and asseverations did not altogether fail', as she gave birth to conjoined twins after 'an easie Travel [*travail*]', a distinctly unusual occurrence in cases of conjoinment.[2] The twins were connected at the torso, sporting two heads, four arms, and four legs, making them of the thoracopagus type (see Étude 4 for details of their anatomy). According to 'Mr. A.P.' – the Reverend Andrew Paschall,[3] vicar of Chedzoy, located about 15 miles (2.5 km) from Isle Brewers – who seems to have interviewed the midwife when he viewed the children on 29 May, 'the after-burthen though but one was triple in bigness to what is usual; [… and] the Navel string [*umbilical cord*] was very great'. Paschall appears to have been surprised that, 'though both females', their parents named them after the early Christian disciples Aquila and Priscilla, a husband and wife whom the Apostle Paul had converted on his travels.[4] What Paschall did not know was that Aquila was named after Richard Herring's sister, and so presumably naming her twin 'Priscilla' had seemed apt.[5]

The anonymous author of the pamphlet *The Strange and Dreadful Relation of a Horrible Tempest* (in which the twins were described as a

2 In this period, caesarean sections were only performed if the mother had already died in labour, and so Mary Herring would have given birth to the twins vaginally. *A True Relation of a Monstrous Female-Child, with Two Heads, Fower Eyes, Fower Ears, Two Noses, Two Mouthes, and Fower Arms, Fower Legs, and All Things Proportionably, Fixed to One Body* (London, 1680), 3; A[ndrew] P[aschall], 'A Letter from Mr. A.P. in Somersetshire, Giving an Account of a Strange Birth that in May Last Happened at Hilbrewers in that County', *Philosophical Collections*, 2 (1681), 21.

3 David Cressy identified 'A.P.' as Andrew Paschall. Private correspondence with David Cressy (Distinguished Professor Emeritus, The Ohio State University), 19 Aug. 2013.

4 'Aquila' was a masculine name (but a feminine word) in first-century Rome. P[aschall], 'Letter', 21.

5 It is impossible to determine whether Richard's sister Aquila Taylor was also named for the Christian convert, though it is tempting to speculate that she might once have had her own twin sister 'Priscilla'. TNA: C 22/89/11, Court of Chancery: Six Clerks Office: Country Depositions, Series II. Six Clerk Division: Collins. Herring *v.* Walrond.

secondary wonder) claimed that, '[a] Day, or Two after the Delivery, the Parents were advised by several, to have the Child (or Children so united) to be baptized;[6] the which, (according to the ceremony of the Church) was performed with Godfather and Godmothers'.[7] Baptism was generally held when infants were several weeks old, and so the suggestion that the twins be baptized so soon after birth suggests that they were not thriving; however, neither were they in imminent danger, as they had not been baptized by the midwife, a practice that was only allowed if an infant would not survive until the parish priest could be summoned. A particular problem for the baptism of conjoined twins was determining whether a given pair of infants had one or two souls, since most sects of Christianity dictated that it was essential to be baptized once *and only once* in order to allow entry into Heaven after death. The debate over whether the soul was located in the heart, the head, or distributed throughout the body stretches back to the ancient Greeks, and the determination of whether conjoined twins that shared a body and/or head constituted one or two individuals could be tricky. A clever medieval work-around to this problem suggested that, if there were room for doubt, 'the first one should be baptized and then [...] the other can be baptized conditionally by saying "if you are not baptized, I baptize you"'.[8] However, in the Herring twins' case, the pamphlet *A True Relation of a Monstrous Female-Child* asserted that 'all believe notwithstanding this wondrous Conjunction that it contains two [in]dividual souls'.[9] Therefore, Aquila and Priscilla likely received baptism twice: once for each soul.

Though the parish records for Isle Brewers do not survive for this period, Richard and Mary Herring must have been married for at least five years by 1680, as they already had four other living children.[10] We don't know

6 Contrary to Bondeson's claim that Paschall baptized the twins, Paschall himself never said so, nor are the twins listed in the records of his home parish of Chedzoy. Jan Bondeson, 'The Isle-Brewers Conjoined Twins of 1680', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 86 (Feb. 1993), 106; SALS: D/P/chedz/2/1/1, Chedzoy Parish Records, 1558–1694.

7 *The Strange and Dreadful Relation of a Horrible Tempest of Thunder, Lightning, and of Strange Apparitions in the Air* ([London, 1680]), 3. Their godfather was the husbandman George Stuckey of Isle Brewers. TNA: C 22/89/11.

8 See Resnick for an extensive discussion of the medieval head-versus-heart debate. Irven Resnick, 'Conjoined Twins, Medieval Biology, and Evolving Reflection on Individual Identity', *Viator* 44/2 (2013), 356–67. See also Jared Lucky, '"Strange and Deformed Births" in Hobbes's Civil Science', *History of Political Thought*, 37/4 (Winter 2016), 643–5.

9 *True Relation of a Monstrous Female-Child*, 3.

10 Various witnesses assert that the Herrings had between three and five other children; I privilege the account of Richard Herring's sister, Aquila Taylor. In addition to Aquila, who also

exactly what Mary looked like, but she probably resembled the 'country women' whom the traveller Celia Fiennes met in Somerset's capital Taunton late in the century:

> wrapp'd up in the manteles called West Country rockets [*rochets*], a large mantle doubled together of a sort of serge, some are linsywolsey, and a deep fringe or fag at the lower end; these hang down some to their feete some only just below the wa[i]st, in the summer they are all in white garments of this sort, in the winter they are in red ones; I call them garments because they never go out without them and this is the universal fashion in Sommerset.[11]

However, Mary's clothes were likely to have been old and worn, as the Herring family was desperately poor when the twins were born, having 'nothinge to Maintaine them withall but [Richard's] Labour'.[12] In late seventeenth-century Somerset, agricultural labourers – whose work would have included 'a scattering of casual tasks, such as harvesting, sowing, or harrowing' – earned perhaps 11*d*. per day or up to around £15 per year.[13] This income was low enough that the Herring family were recipients of parish poor relief, a system that converted local taxes into 'cash payments' to the penurious. In the seventeenth century, such relief was expanded from the traditional categories of worthy or 'impotent' poor (widows, orphans, the elderly, and the disabled) to include 'labouring poor' like Richard Herring: 'people characterized as "poor able labouring folk"[, …] "labouring persons not able to live off their labour"[, …] and "poor men overburdened with their children"'. By the second half of the seventeenth century, the going rate for

lived in Isle Brewers and was married to the husbandman George Taylor, the Herrings' extended family consisted of at least Mary's mother (the 'Widow Winsor') and Mary's brother (the tanner Thomas Winsor of Chard). Winsor (or Windsor) thus appears to have been Mary's maiden name. TNA: C 22/89/11.

11 Celia Fiennes, *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes: 1685–c.1712*, ed. Christopher Morris (MacDonald: London and Sydney, 1982), 196.

12 TNA: C 22/89/11.

13 Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550–1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 22. Wrightson and Levine suggest that, in the 1690s, a poor family of five likely expended around £13 14*s*. on a year's food, clothing, fuel, and rent, a total perilously close to Richard's projected annual income. Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700* (New York, San Francisco, and London: Academic Press, 1979), 40–1; Robin Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion: The Western Rising of 1685* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1984), 21; Gregory Clark, 'The Long March of History: Farm Wages, Population, and Economic Growth, England 1209–1869', *Economic History Review*, new ser., 60/1 (Feb. 2007), 100.

poor relief was on the order of a shilling per week for an adult and something like half that for a child. Though we do not know how much support Richard and Mary merited, the dole was likely to have been only 'supplementary [and] intended to make up for inadequate earnings'.[14]

As Robin Clifton points out, 'the work of wife and children would increase a family's income', but at the time of the twins' birth, the other Herring children were likely to have been young and therefore not yet productive members of the family. Moreover, Mary had been suffering from a 'greiveous sickness' for 'about two Yeares', further limiting her productive ability and throwing the family into debt. Since the twins' birth occurred at the end of May, it would have fallen before the June/July hay harvest, the period when agricultural labourers worked long hours 'to see them through the rest of the year', suggesting that the Herrings were perhaps going through an even leaner period than might have been the case in any other season.[15] Most labourers in Somerset during this period would have owned animals and/or small tracts of land, but neither are listed in the 1681 inventory of Richard's possessions.[16] Moreover, since Mary had been sick for two years and the family consequently far in debt, it stands to reason that they might have sold all their non-essential moveable property prior to the twins' birth.

'[W]ithin the space of Six howres or some such time next after' the Herring twins' birth, Henry Walrond – Richard's landlord, occasional employer, and county Justice of the Peace – sent a variety of goods to help the poor cottagers: 'severall cloathes for the cloathinge of the said Children', including 'a silke paine [*garment*] or Mantle for a Child' and 'severall yards of Scarlett robbon [*ribbon*]', presumably for dressing up the children for show; a canvas sheet and linen scraps for clothing or diapers; various foodstuffs; and the loan of a feather bed, pillow, and woollen blankets for the midwife who was temporarily living in the Herring home. Walrond also paid for the services of 'a woman reputed to bee very skillfull in chirurgery [*surgery; medicine*] to bee very often with the said Children to preserue theire liues';

14 TNA: C 22/89/11; TNA: C 22/88/17, Court of Chancery: Six Clerks Office: Country Depositions, Series II. Six Clerk Division: Collins. Herring *v.* Walrond; Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531–1782* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 4, 9, 19; Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, 40.

15 Clifton, *Last Popular Rebellion*, 21–2, 255; TNA: C 22/89/11; TNA: C 6/6/94.

16 At some point after Richard's death, 'A survey of the Mannor of Ilebrewers' stated that Mary Herring's cottage had no agricultural or garden acreage attached, and this had probably also been the case during Richard's life. TNA: PROB 4/10625, Prerogative Court of Canterbury and Other Probate Jurisdictions: Engrossed Inventories Exhibited from 1660. Inventory of Richard Herring of [?Illbrewers], Somerset, 13 April 1681; SALS: DD/BR/dt 14, Manors of Islebrewers and Islebrewers with Rectory with Capital Messuage, Demesnes, Parsonage and Advowson, etc., Belonging, *c.*1680–1734.

indeed, he claimed to have 'on all occasions dayly extend[ed] his charity and releife towards [Richard Herring,] his wife and Children'. The Herrings appear to have received monetary relief from Walrond in the past, as well, as Anne Brome asserted that Richard had told her 'that if it had not been for the Charity of him the said Mr. Walrond hee the said Richard Herring & his family as hee beleives had starved the winter before'. Brome added that Walrond 'did very frequently send them releife, oftentimes sending them victuals from his owne table some tymes Corne & did once procure an Doctor of Physicke to take care of & exercise his skill about them being then sick & paid the said Doctor for his paynes & care of them'.[17] With the help of Walrond's most recent charity, the twins were put on show in the Herrings' 'Little Cottage' (consisting of 'two vnder roomes only'),[18] which was located 'in or neare a Highway within the Mannor & parish' of Isle Brewers, 'builte vpp on the Lords Waste' (i.e. on uncultivated common lands associated with the manor).[19] Such a tiny building was ill-equipped to support the hundreds of curious gawkers who flooded Isle Brewers (see Étude 3) to view Priscilla and Aquila.

17 TNA: C 6/6/94; TNA: C 22/89/11. Walrond's charity toward the Herrings was part of the 'tradition of casual, albeit regular, almsgiving to neighbours' that was expected of the aristocracy and gentry. Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 104.

18 'The commonest type of cottage' in the earl of Pembroke's Wiltshire holdings, surveyed fifty years earlier, had featured 'a hall-living room, a chamber-bedroom alongside, and a storage loft over one of the ground-floor rooms'. M.W. Barley, 'Rural Housing in England', in Joan Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, iv: 1500–1640 (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), image 759, 762–3. See also John Broad, 'Housing the Rural Poor in Southern England, 1650–1850', *The Agricultural History Review*, 48/2 (2000), 154.

19 The cottage might have been erected by an earlier generation of the Herring family, as Richard was at least a second generation resident, having grown up in the house. TNA: C 22/89/11. Alternatively, the cottage could have been constructed by either the lord of the manor (Walrond) or the parish, as providing housing for the poor could constitute a form of poor relief. Broad, 'Housing the Rural Poor', 154–7, 160.

Chapter 1
Introduction: Monstrosity, Disability, and Knowledge

Abstract
This book examines how physically unusual humans and animals (referred to at the time as 'monsters' or 'monstrous births') were understood in early modern England. The author argues that England's populace was interested in physical deformity because such bodies provided news- and gossip-worthy information that could also reveal the will of God and the internal workings of Nature. The book's historiography addresses scholarship on disability, monstrosity, religion, politics, science, and print culture in early modern Europe.

Keywords: historiography, monster, monstrous birth, disability, Disability Studies, Monster Studies

On 19 May 1680, a pair of conjoined twins were born in a tiny, rural village in Somerset. A month later, they were dead. This book situates the story of Aquila and Priscilla Herring, their family, and their community within broader understandings of unusual bodies in early modern England: what were referred to as *monsters* or *monstrous births*. The English word 'monster' developed out of the twelfth-century French *mostre* or Latin *monstrum* (a portent, prodigy, or monstrous creature) and the Latin *monere* (to warn). According to the surgeon Ambroise Paré, whose *Oeuvres* first appeared in French in 1575 and were translated into English in 1634, monsters were 'what things soever are brought forth contrary to the common decree and order of nature. So wee terme that infant monstrous, which is borne with one arme alone, or with two heads'.[1] In *A Directory for Midwives*, first published in 1651,

1 Ambroise Paré, *The Workes of that Famous Chirurgion Ambrose Parey*, trans. Th[omas] Johnson (London, 1634), 961.

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the English physician Nicholas Culpeper simply defined a monster as 'that which is ill shaped extraordinary'.[2] The anonymous *Aristotle's Compleat Master Piece*, first published in 1702, asserted that monsters could be 'vicious in Figure, when a Man bears the Character of a Beast[, …] vicious in Magnitude, when the Parts are not equal, […] vicious in Situation many Ways; as if the Ears were on the Face[, …] And lastly, […] vicious in Number, when a Man hath two Heads, or four Hands'.[3] Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, first published in 1755, defined 'monster' as either '[s]omething out of the common order of nature' or '[s]omething horrible for deformity, wickedness, or mischief', compiling all of the earlier descriptions into a pair of concise definitions.[4] A monstrous birth was thus what modern medicine refers to as a congenital malformation or defect, a physical condition that has been present since birth.

In this book, I almost exclusively utilize early modern vocabulary to refer to such oddly shaped humans and animals, though these terms might sound problematic to modern ears. In part, this choice stems from the historical sources that I quote regularly, which (obviously) use pre-modern terminology. However, I have also been influenced by current best practices in historical Disability Studies, which advocates for 'the retention of historical terms and language', 'rather than attempting to retrospectively impose modern medical diagnoses onto conditions we can only guess at'.[5] By far, the most common nouns used to refer to such individuals in the early modern period were *monster* or *monstrous birth*, with occasional references to *wonders* or (even less commonly) to *rarities*, *marvels*, or *creatures*. If I refer to a *portent*, *prodigy*, or *miracle*, I am emphasizing that a given birth was attributed to the will of God, and these terms appear sparingly in this analysis, as my focus is not primarily religious. Common adjectives both directly reflect the above terms (*monstrous*, *wonderful* or *wondrous*, *rare*, *marvellous*, *portentous*, *prodigious*, *miraculous*) and also demonstrate a much wider variety of contemporary usages (*strange*, *terrible*, *misshapen* or *ill-shapen*, *unnatural*, *prophetic* or *prophetical*, *remarkable*, *horrible*, *deformed*, *unusual*, *extraordinary*, *surprising*, *uncommon*, *odd*). When referring to specific types

2 Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives, or, a Guide for Women, in Their Conception, Bearing and Suckling Their Children* (London, 1651; repr., London, 1700), 152.

3 *Aristotle's Compleat Master Piece. In Three Parts; Displaying the Secrets of Nature in the Generation of Man* (23rd edn, London, 1749), 88–9.

4 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1756), II, 16Sr.

5 Irina Metzler, 'Modern versus Historical Vocabulary?', in Cordula Nolte, et al., eds., *Dis/Ability History der Vormoderne: Ein Handbuch, Premodern Dis/Ability History: A Companion* (Affalterbach, Germany: Didymos, 2017), 59.

of deformity, I generally use the early modern terms: *giant*, *dwarf* (not little person), *hermaphrodite* (not intersex). Conjoined twins (relatively equally developed infants that are attached at birth) and parasitic twins (cases in which one twin is significantly smaller, not as well developed, and dependent upon the dominant twin) were sometimes referred to as *double monsters* or *double children* (with the occasional variant of *double births/foetuses/infants*) or, in reference to the parasite, as *imperfect* or a *semi-monster*. I have found a few manuscript sources that describe such people as *conjoined*,[6] though this usage was not yet common in the early modern period, and the compound noun 'conjoined twin' does not appear until the twentieth century. However, in the interest of linguistic variety and in an attempt to clearly differentiate between various categories of monstrous births, I do use the terms 'conjoined twins' and 'parasitic twins' throughout.

One term that I do not utilize beyond this introduction is *disability*, for all that Disability Studies influences my work. Twentieth-century scholarship on disability was dominated by what is called the 'medical model', wherein physical, mental, developmental, and other disabilities are seen as problems to be solved or illnesses to be cured. Such an approach explicitly or implicitly privileges health, ability, and normality,[7] thereby stigmatizing disability. From the mid-1980s, Disability Studies scholars began to counter the medical model by instead proffering a 'social model', which separates the concepts of 'impairment' and 'disability'.[8] According to this model, an

6 Henry Walrond characterized Aquila and Priscilla Herring as 'beinge conioyned'. James Paris du Plessis described several sets of both parasitic and conjoined twins as having been 'Born Conjoyned', with 'Bodyes Conjoyned', or 'conjoyned togather'. TNA: C 6/6/94, Court of Chancery: Six Clerks Office: Pleadings before 1714, Collins. Herringe *v.* Walrond; BL: Add. MS 5246, James Paris Du Plessis, Servant to Samuel Pepys: *A Short History of Human Prodigious & Monstrous Births of Dwarfs, Sleepers, Giants, Strong Men, Hermaphrodites, Numerous Births, and Extream Old Age &c.*, 21r–v, 24r-v, 36r, 49v; BL: Sloane MS 3253, James Paris Du Plessis, Servant to Samuel Pepys: *Collection of Wonderful Prodigies*: 1730–1733, 35v.

7 The *normal* or *average* human body was largely invented in the early nineteenth century by the statistician Adolphe Quetelet: 'If the average man were completely determined, we might [...] consider him as the type of perfection; and every thing [*sic*] differing from his proportions or condition, would constitute deformity and disease; every thing found dissimilar, not only as regarded proportion and form, but as exceeding the observed limits, would constitute a monstrosity'. M. A[dolphe] Quetelet, *Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés, ou essai de physique sociale* (Paris, Bachelier: 1835); trans. R. Knox and Thomas Smibert as *Treatise on Man and the Development of His Faculties* (Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers, 1842), 99. In Garland-Thomson's words, '[t]he description of average has led, largely under the pressure of medicalization, to a prescription for normality.' Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 30.

8 Catherine J. Kudlick, 'Disability History: Why We Need Another "Other"', *American Historical Review*, 108/3 (June 2003), 764.

impairment is 'a corporeal difference with which a person is born or that a person acquires during the course of his or her life', while an impairment only becomes disabling when societal systems prevent an impaired individual from participating 'fully, fairly, and completely' in life.[9] For example, a mobility impairment may only be disabling if buildings are not provided with elevators in addition to stairs, and a visual impairment may not be a disability when written materials are provided in multiple, accessible formats (such as large print, Braille, or audio). However, as Tom Shakespeare and others have pointed out, '[t]he social model, by seeking to fit the complex actuality of lived experience into narrow formal categories and reducing everything to oppression arising from material social barriers, has created a distance between theory and disabled people's own experiences' by implying that living with an impairment is not inherently difficult.[10]

In an attempt to bridge the social model's gap between impaired bodies and the social and built world through which they move, the 'cultural model' of disability 'does away with distinctions between impairment and disability, preferring instead to use the term "disability" to include both the reality of corporeal differences as well as the effects of social stigmatization'.[11] As the cultural model attempts to encompass all aspects of embodied experience, it works well as an approach to historical disability.[12] Indeed, Allison Hobgood and David Wood, following Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, argue that early modern disability studies provides 'a means for more *ethical* staring practices' that centre embodied difference within 'the radically different social, historical, and literary contexts in which those bodies and minds' existed.[13] By moving past staring at difference, the cultural model

9 Joshua R. Eyler, 'Introduction: Breaking Boundaries, Building Bridges', in Joshua R. Eyler, ed., *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations* (London: Routledge, 2010), 5.

10 Tom Shakespeare, 'The Social Model of Disability', in Lennard J. Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader* (3rd edn, New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 267–72; Tom Shakespeare and Nick Watson, 'Beyond Models: Understanding the Complexity of Disabled People's Lives', in Graham Scambler and Sasha Scambler, eds., *New Directions in the Sociology of Chronic and Disabling Conditions: Assaults on the Lifeworld* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 58–64.

11 Eyler, 'Introduction', 5–6; Bianca Frohne, 'The Cultural Model', in Cordula Nolte, et al., eds., *Dis/Ability History der Vormoderne: Ein Handbuch, Premodern Dis/Ability History: A Companion* (Affalterbach, Germany: Didymos, 2017), 61–3.

12 Eyler makes this assertion in relation to 'exploring medieval disability'. Eyler, 'Introduction', 6.

13 Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, 'Ethical Staring: Disabling the English Renaissance', in Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, eds., *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* (Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2013), 1: my italics. See also Garland-Thomson, *Staring*. This 'ethical' approach is similar to how Martin characterizes the contradictions inherent in studying unusual Black bodies in history: 'Leslie Fiedler has observed, "Nobody can write about freaks without somehow exploiting them for his own ends." […] In these chapters,

of disability allows for the historical exploration and explication of bodies within the concrete context of the societies that framed them.

Medieval scholars have explored disability from a variety of directions,[14] and nineteenth- and particularly twentieth-century disability scholarship is plentiful.[15] In between, in the early modern period, much British disability research has been conducted by literary and theatrical scholars.[16] For example, two collections edited by Allison Hobgood and David Wood have sought to 'rescue early modern disability narratives out of critical conversation that has often overlooked or misidentified non-standard bodies using the compelling but restrictive language of marvelousness,

I have become exhibitor'. Charles D. Martin, *The White African American Body: A Cultural and Literary Exploration* (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers UP, 2002), 1–2; Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 171.

14 See for example: Jenni Kuuliala, 'Miracle and the Monstrous: Disability and Deviant Bodies in the Late Middle Ages', in Rinaldo F. Canalis and Massimo Ciavolella, eds., *Disease and Disability in Medieval and Early Modern Art and Literature* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2021, 107-30); Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c.1100–1400* (London: Routledge, 2006); Irina Metzler, *Fools and Idiots? Intellectual Disability in the Middle Ages* (Manchester: MUP, 2016); Wendy J. Turner, *Care and Custody of the Mentally Ill, Incompetent, and Disabled in Medieval England* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013); and Wendy J. Turner and Tory Vandeventer Pearman, eds., *The Treatment of Disabled Persons in Medieval Europe: Examining Disability in the Historical, Legal, Literary, Medical, and Religious Discourses of the Middle Ages* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2010). A recent disability history collection ostensibly covers Europe between 500 and 1800 but is more heavily weighted toward the medieval than the early modern: Cordula Nolte, et al., eds., *Dis/Ability History der Vormoderne: Ein Handbuch, Premodern Dis/Ability History: A Companion* (Affalterbach, Germany: Didymos, 2017).

15 See for example: Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York: New York UP, 2001). The essays in David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg, eds., *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity* (London: Routledge, 2006) cover the historical arc from the early modern period to the twentieth century. For an excellent overview of disability history books published between 1999 and 2002, see Kudlick, 'Disability History'. Scholarship focusing on freak shows is plentiful but does not often interact with Disability Studies. For a few exceptions to this rule, see Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988); and Chapter 3 ('Cultural Work of American Freak Shows') in Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997).

16 Though this historiography focuses on the early modern English context, disability scholarship has obviously moved far beyond the British Isles. However, as Scalenghe points out, '[t]he need for histories of disability in non-Western contexts is particularly urgent if we aspire to avoid Euro-American centrism'. As one step toward moving disability history beyond its heretofore predominant geographical focus, Scalenghe's recent book explores 'deafness and muteness, blindness, impairments of the mind, and intersex and urogenital anomalies' in a wide range of sources, 'in the hope of recovering the widest possible range of information, narratives, and discourses about impairments' in Ottoman Syria and Egypt. Sara Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 8, 12–13, 15.

monstrosity, and deformity', instead 'encouraging scholars who have been pursuing a kind of disability analysis' to interact more concretely with disability theory.[17] Among early modern British historians, David Turner has examined disability through the widest lens. In *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment*, he focuses on a range of physical disabilities (congenital abnormalities, the 'lame' and 'cripples', the elderly, the blind, the deaf), as well as the relative experiences of disability between members of different classes and genders, to examine 'the cultural contexts of disability' in the long eighteenth century.[18] In more recent articles and chapters, Turner has also studied beliefs about 'impaired' children (including questions about the heritability of congenital or accidental disabilities, maternal impression, the eugenic right to procreate, and means of preventing and treating infirmity)[19] and adults (in relation to support of the worthy poor, the visual representation of disabled bodies, and ridicule of bodily difference),[20] predominantly in an eighteenth-century context.

Turner points out that the word 'disability' has been in use since the sixteenth century,[21] at which time it was conceived of in relation to 'the

17 Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, 'Introduction: "Disabled Shakespeares"', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 29/4 (2009), n.p.; this collection consists of six essays published in a special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*. Hobgood and Wood, 'Ethical Staring', 7. Mounsey has likewise edited a collection of early modern literary essays: Chris Mounsey, *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP and Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

18 David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 13.

19 David M. Turner, 'Birth Anomaly and Childhood Disability', in Raymond Stephanson and Darren N. Wagner, eds., *The Secrets of Generation: Reproduction in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2015), 217–37; David M. Turner, 'Impaired Children in Eighteenth-Century England', *Social History of Medicine*, 30/4 (Nov. 2017), 788–806.

20 David M. Turner, '"Not So Deformed in Body as Debauched in Behaviour": Disability and "Marginality" in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England', in Andrew Spicer and Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw, eds., *The Place of the Social Margins, 1350–1750* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 39–56; David M. Turner, 'Picturing Disability in Eighteenth-Century England', in Michael Rembis, Catherine Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 327–50; David M. Turner, 'Disability Humor and the Meanings of Impairment in Early Modern England', in Hobgood and Wood, *Recovering Disability*, 57–72. Other scholars have also examined the ridicule of deformity in early modern England, including Anu Korhonen, 'Disability Humour in English Jestbooks of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Cultural History*, 3/1 (2014), 27–53; and Roger Lund, 'Laughing at Cripples: Ridicule, Deformity and the Argument from Design', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39/1 (Fall 2005), 91–114.

21 Iyengar presents a case study of William Shakespeare's use of the words 'disability', 'disabled', and 'disabling' in several plays and Sonnet 66 in Sujata Iyengar, 'Introduction: Shakespeare's "Discourse of Disability"', in Sujata Iyengar, ed., *Disability, Health, and Happiness in the Shakespearean Body* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 9–13.

effects of wounding or debilitating chronic illnesses', 'the infirmities of old age', or deformities 'that might cause functional impairment such as "crooked legs, or stump feet"': all conditions that would have made one worthy of community support. Early modern 'disability' was therefore defined in opposition to 'able-bodied' individuals who could work for a living.[22] Thus, many early modern historians have approached disability at its intersection with poverty, poor relief, and questions of who was deemed deserving of such communal maintenance. For example, Margaret Pelling's examination of medical poor relief in Norwich from 1550 to 1640 is primarily concerned with medical treatment for the destitute, including poor rates, the demographics and training of practitioners, and lazarhouses and other institutional treatment centres.[23] Geoffrey Hudson has examined disabled veterans seeking pensions in England between 1590 and 1790, whose actions 'forced the governors to act and thereby enabled the governed to improve their lot: new laws were passed and practices were altered to the benefit of the disabled poor'.[24] Anne Borsay demonstrates how the philanthropic General Infirmary at Bath, founded in 1739, aimed to provide access to the city's famous spa waters to worthy patients from outside the geographic vicinity, in order to restore them both bodily and morally.[25]

Rather than focusing on disability, many early modern historians have studied particularly unusual bodies – dwarfs, giants, conjoined twins, hermaphrodites – in terms of monstrosity, with a broad range of foci: religion and wonder, reform and revolution, natural philosophy and science, and popular print and consumerism, with considerable overlap between these categories. The broadest overviews of early modern monstrosity are provided by Dudley Wilson in *Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* and Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park in *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750*. Wilson addresses 'the appearance and disappearance of four basic attitudes' in a chronological

22 It was not until the modern period that disability came to be viewed as a 'fundamental categor[y] of identity that divided everyone according to [...] the presence or absence of an impairment'. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 17, 20–1; David M. Turner, 'Introduction: Approaching Anomalous Bodies', in Turner and Stagg, *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity*, 4–5.

23 Margaret Pelling, 'Healing the Sick Poor: Social Policy and Disability in Norwich 1550–1640', *Medical History*, 29/2 (Apr. 1985), 115–37.

24 Geoffrey L. Hudson, 'Arguing Disability: Ex-Servicemen's Own Stories in Early Modern England, 1590–1790', in Roberta Bivins and John V. Pickstone, eds., *Medicine, Madness and Social History: Essays in Honour of Roy Porter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 117.

25 Anne Borsay, 'Returning Patients to the Community: Disability, Medicine and Economic Rationality before the Industrial Revolution', *Disability & Society*, 13/5 (Nov. 1998), 645–63.

format: the belief that God sent monsters as a warning against sin, the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century interest in monsters as strange knowledge to be collected, the detailed eighteenth-century observations and recordings of both normal and abnormal physiology, and the nineteenth-century medical and biological classificatory scientific attitude.[26] Daston and Park's approach is largely similar, though they problematize Wilson's straightforward, teleological narrative of scientific progress by pointing out that the emotional trio of horror (monsters as prodigies), pleasure (monsters as sport), and repugnance (monsters as errors) 'overlapped and coexisted during much of the early modern period', concluding that 'the march toward the naturalization of marvels was an illusion, created by a new unanimity among intellectuals in the late seventeenth century'.[27]

Religio-political examinations of monstrosity are almost exclusively concerned with Protestant narratives, with the exception of Jennifer Spinks, who traces how both Protestant print and Catholic anti-Lutheran propaganda utilized monsters during the Reformation and its aftermath in Germany, during which period she sees a 'growing, not decreasing, religious emphasis in understanding monstrous births'.[28] A.W. Bates places European monstrous births firmly in the emblem tradition, whereby monsters were read as 'symbols [...] of the invisible workings of the Creator' by being directly associated with 'events with which they coincided in time (a famine or battle, for example)'.[29] Julie Crawford focuses on how providential interpretations of monstrous births were utilized in 'the service of claims to [English] religious authority' from the Reformation through the Restoration, after which point she believes that a scientific explanation for monstrous births as natural

26 Dudley Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1. Asma also emphasizes the chronological development of beliefs about monsters. Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Oxford: OUP, 2009).

27 Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 176.

28 Jennifer Spinks, *Monstrous Births and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 4.

29 A.W. Bates, *Emblematic Monsters: Unnatural Conceptions and Deformed Births in Early Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 27–8. See also A.W. Bates, 'Birth Defects Described in Elizabethan Ballads', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 93 (Apr. 2000), 202–7. Bates has additionally published three articles focusing on retrospective diagnosis of early modern congenital defects: 'Conjoined Twins in the 16th Century', *Twin Research: The Official Journal of the International Society for Twin Studies*, 5/6 (2002), 521–8; 'Autopsy on a Case of Roberts Syndrome Reported in 1672: The Earliest Description?', *American Journal of Medical Genetics, Part A*, 117A/1 (Feb. 2003), 92–6; and 'Good, Common, Regular, and Orderly: Early Modern Classifications of Monstrous Births', *Social History of Medicine*, 18/2 (August 2005), 141–58.

rarities came to supplement these prodigious readings.[30] In a narrower timeframe, David Cressy examines how interpretations of monstrosity 'pointed to [...] a disturbance of the natural order' during the English Civil War and the Commonwealth, through an in-depth focus on two headless monsters whose deformity critiqued 'a commonwealth that had lost its way and lost its mind'.[31]

The most extensive discussion of monsters in a natural historical context appears in Palmira Fontes da Costa's *The Singular and the Making of Knowledge at the Royal Society of London in the Eighteenth Century*. Covering curiosities, extraordinary facts, and monstrous births, da Costa seeks to correct the 'misinterpretations of the place of extraordinary phenomena at the Royal Society' that she sees in modern scholarship, particularly in terms of an ahistorical definition of the term 'science' as referring preferentially to experimental and mathematical knowledge, while ignoring or deprecating the study of natural and artificial curiosities.[32] In studies of popular culture, scholars have generally examined either cheap print or exhibitions of unusual bodies. Aaron Kitch asserts that the authors and printers of the first English monstrous birth broadsides in the 1560s were important members of the Stationers' Company and that, therefore, 'their choice of subject matter [...] was dictated as often as possible by the tastes of their consumers, most of whom were probably in London'.[33] Malcolm Jones dedicates a chapter of his tome on early modern English prints to images of prodigies and monstrous births, arguing that 'the primary function of the majority of prints was decorative, that is, that interest in them was first and foremost *as pictures*'.[34] Stephen Pender and Paul Semonin have independently

30 This narrative largely mirrors Daston and Park's observations for Europe more broadly. Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 22.

31 David Cressy, 'Lamentable, Strange, and Wonderful: Headless Monsters in the English Revolution', in Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes, eds., *Monstrous Bodies/Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004), 47, 63. See also Chapter 2 ('Monstrous Births and Credible Reports') in David Cressy, *Agnes Bowker's Cat: Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

32 Palmira Fontes da Costa, *The Singular and the Making of Knowledge at the Royal Society of London in the Eighteenth Century* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 3. See also Palmira Fontes da Costa, 'The Understanding of Monsters at the Royal Society in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century', *Endeavour*, 24/1 (2000), 34–9.

33 Aaron W. Kitch, 'Printing Bastards: Monstrous Birth Broadsides in Early Modern England', in Douglas A. Brooks, ed., *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 221, 231.

34 See Chapter 11 ('"Lerning us to beware"') in Malcolm Jones, *The Print in Early Modern England: An Historical Oversight* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP: 2010), 6: original italics.

researched monsters on show in England. Whereas Pender claims that the fascination with exhibition is rooted in early modern ephemeral literature, Semonin, rather, points out that sixteenth- through eighteenth-century monstrous shows grew out of a long Western trajectory of fascination with the unusual, from Greco-Roman mythology to medieval English fairs.[35] Scholars have also examined specific cases of human display, including Nick Page's *Lord Minimus: The Extraordinary Life of Britain's Smallest Man* (on the life of Queen Henrietta Maria's court dwarf Jeffrey Hudson), Merry Wiesner-Hanks's *The Marvelous Hairy Girls: The Gonzales Sisters and Their Worlds* (on a hirsute family that was associated with various Continental courts), and Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz's *Gulliver in the Land of Giants: A Critical Biography and the Memoirs of the Celebrated Dwarf Joseph Boruwlaski* (on the life and travels of an eighteenth-century Polish dwarf).[36]

All of these works can be considered part of a rising interest in Monster Studies, an interdisciplinary field that seeks to interrogate questions of Self versus Other, of the culturally and historically constructed nature of normality, of embodied difference, and of alterity. Though Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* compendium cannot be said to have begun an academic interest in monstrosity, Cohen's articulation of a series of 'theses' for 'understanding cultures through the monsters they bear' may well have inaugurated Monster Studies as a field.[37] Indeed, as Asa Mittman points out in his introduction to *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, since about the year 2000, 'the study of monsters has moved from the absolute periphery – perhaps its

35 Stephen Pender, 'In the Bodyshop: Human Exhibition in Early Modern England', in Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., *"Defects": Engendering the Modern Body* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000), 95–126; Paul Semonin, 'Monsters in the Marketplace: The Exhibition of Human Oddities in Early Modern England', in Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York UP, 1996), 69–81.

36 Nick Page, *Lord Minimus: The Extraordinary Life of Britain's Smallest Man* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002); Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *The Marvelous Hairy Girls: The Gonzales Sisters and Their Worlds* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2009); Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Gulliver in the Land of Giants: A Critical Biography and the Memoirs of the Celebrated Dwarf Joseph Boruwlaski*, trans. Daniel Sax (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).

37 If essays that cite Cohen can be seen as evidence of his impact, he is mentioned in eight out of twenty of the chapters in Ashgate's *Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*; he additionally wrote the book's postscript. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996), 4; Asa Simon Mittman, with Peter J. Dendle, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

logical starting point – to a much more central position in academics'.[38] Even more recently, a very limited number of works have begun interrogating the connections between historical Disability Studies and Monster Studies, most notably the edited collection *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*. As the editors point out in their introduction, 'neither disability nor monstrosity has *any* ontological status; that is, they are not states of being, though cultures often treat both as such. Rather, they are both encounters in which beings – human or otherwise – have meanings imposed on them from without'.[39] Beliefs surrounding non-standard human bodies are culturally constructed, though perhaps, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues, the desire to *interact* with such individuals is biological: 'Staring is an ocular response to what we don't expect to see. Novelty arouses our eyes'.[40]

This curious impulse – to view, describe, and explain – underlies the vast majority of the sources for this book. Like every historical study, my corpus is constrained by what was recorded in the first place, by what has survived, and by what can be located. Taking the last consideration first, my bibliography lists around 350 separate sources – cheap print, advertisements for monster shows, painted portraits, woodcuts and etchings, legal cases, governmental records, letters, decorative ceramic plates, articles published in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society of London, diaries, and a manuscript monster compendium – that describe physically unusual humans and animals born in Europe (and a few from around the world) between 1450 and 1800. And yet, despite the size and variety of my corpus, I have not been able to locate every source that I have found reference to (see the case of Sir Thomas Grantham and Shackshoon in Chapter 6), some sources have not survived (see the discussion of pamphlets about a pig-faced lady in Chapter 5), and many strange births in this period were

38 Mittman is referring to the medieval and early modern monstrous peoples (groups of similarly bodied quasi-humans, such as the dog-headed cynocephali), who were believed to live beyond the 'periphery' of the civilized world. Asa Simon Mittman, 'Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies', in Mittman and Dendle, *Monsters and the Monstrous*, 1.

39 Individual essays within edited Disability Studies or Monster Studies collections have sought to make connections between the two fields (see for example Stagg) but Godden and Mittman's volume is the first to be explicitly dedicated to the topic. Richard H. Godden and Asa Simon Mittman, 'Embodied Difference: Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman', in *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 9, 11: original italics; Kevin Stagg, 'Representing Physical Difference: The Materiality of the Monstrous', in David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg, eds., *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity* (London: Routledge, 2006), 19–38.

40 Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 3.

never recorded outside of parish birth and death records (see the discussion of publications about conjoined twins in Chapter 2). While extensive, my source base is actually quite limited when compared to how often monstrous births must have been talked about in the early modern period.

This desire to discuss unusual bodies underlies the *knowledge* topic of my title. Knowledge spread is a multidirectional process wherein individuals exchange and act upon information that they deem significant.[41] The motives behind sharing knowledge and theories about monstrous births would have varied widely, with popular pamphleteers wishing to disseminate (and capitalize upon) the news of the day and correspondents of the Royal Society trying to ascertain the laws of Nature. Moreover, knowledge spread was a cumulative process, with later sources making liberal reference back to earlier ones and sometimes simultaneously reinterpreting them. In this book, I argue that balladeers, artists, natural philosophers, diarists, and other interested producers and consumers traded knowledge about physically unusual humans and animals throughout the early modern period because such bodies provided news- and gossip-worthy information that could also, at least occasionally, reveal the will of God and the internal workings of Nature. The interest in monstrous births could be prurient, frightened, fascinated, or all three at once, but it was rarely dispassionate. People talked about monstrosity in sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century England because they cared about the ramifications that such remarkable individuals might have had upon their own lives.

In order to clearly differentiate between the microhistory of the Études and the broader focus of the remainder of this book, the introduction has been labelled 'Chapter 1'. Thus, my analysis begins in earnest in Chapter 2, which examines the medium I have dubbed 'monstrous print': those cheaply printed English titles that described extraordinary individuals born around Europe during the early modern period. In particular, I focus on the printed medium itself (ballads, broadsides, pamphlets, and small-format books), the message spread by such works (where such creatures came from, what they meant, and how they were discussed over time), and their readership (literacy rates, cost, and evidence that such works were read). Chapter 3 examines monstrous shows, which became demonstrably popular in London from the late seventeenth century. I look at data for the exhibitions themselves (where,

41 Secord calls knowledge circulation 'the central question' for historians of science: 'How and why does knowledge circulate? How does it cease to be the exclusive property of a single individual or group and become part of the taken-for-granted understanding of much wider groups of people?' James A. Secord, 'Knowledge in Transit', *Isis*, 95/4 (Dec. 2004), 655.

when, and for how much you could view an unusual human) and their audiences, with a focus upon the experiences of three periodic attendees of such shows: two gentleman-diarists (John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys) and a domestic servant (James Paris du Plessis). In Chapter 4, I move on to the Royal Society (London's elite natural philosophical club), its journal, and other publications by the Society's members. This chapter traces how the Society collected both data about and the actual bodies of monstrous births, as well as how its members examined and conceived of such deformed humans and animals, in an attempt to understand the natural development of species. Though earlier chapters feature a variety of monstrous images, Chapter 5 explicitly examines three forms of visual media – woodcut prints, metal engravings, and courtly portraiture – in order to explore the various motives for creating representations of monstrous individuals. In Chapter 6, the conclusion, I address questions of agency and autonomy, exploring the extent to which deformed humans could exert control over their own bodies and lives, in relation to forms of unfree labour such as apprenticeship, patronage, and slavery. I conclude that, while a modern audience may object to the ethics of human ownership and exhibition, both were legally accepted (and common) practices in early modern England.

Unusual bodies pervaded almost every aspect of early modern English society, appearing in public, in the legal system, at the royal court, in print, and in manuscript. They were born on farms and in inns and were discussed as far afield as rural birthing rooms and London's Court of Chancery. They existed long before becoming a staple of London's cheap print trade and were born long after the Royal Society deemed them worthy of inclusion on the pages of the *Philosophical Transactions*. Physically remarkable bodies permeated both popular and elite culture, and it is this focus on the surprising, the prodigious, and the extraordinary that lies at the heart of this book.