



The Siamese: A Historical Approach

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Editorial

The case of the Siamese Mary and Jodie, born in Manchester in 2000, generated a good number of articles in the press, and from almost every side, the general informative, that of the usual columnist, and even from criminal law, but perhaps a historical vision of a fact was missing, which has always attracted attention. People in general did not stop asking a series of questions, did the fact deserve so much printed ink? Can the informative fascination overflow the scientific field in which the subject should have been treated? It was another expression of the sensationalism that runs through publications of all type? To those who think so, I am sorry to say they are wrong. The theme of “*human monsters*” (name given to the Siamese in the ancient medical books) come from afar, has always worried men, generating at least two questions, the scientific one: why and how? And the theological one: do both have souls? Because that is what defines “*human life*”. The generation of human life has been for men a matter of interrogation throughout centuries, and the fascination that “*monsters*” have always accompanied western culture until nowadays. It is Aristotle who first began the study on the development on the embryo in his “*De generatione animalium*”, but we had to wait until the 16th century to have a publication that made reference to the “*monsters*”. Ambroise Paré (1509-1590), that from barber-surgeon in his own town became a royal surgeon at the service of Henry 2th, Francis 2th, Charles 9th and Henry 3th, and that for his hagiographs he is “*the father of modern surgery*”, and even Ronsard (1524-1585) collaborated with a sonnet in the edition of his complete works. Paré published a book “*Des Monstres et Prodiges*” [1] that reflects medical knowledge on the subject, and the spirit of his time, and that already in the 1575 edition, it provoked the ire of the Faculty of Medicine, and a complaint “*for an attempt against good customs*”.

In the preface to his book, Paré defines what a “*monster*” and a “*wonder*” is for him; “*Monsters are things that appear outside the curse of Nature (and that, in most cases, they are signs of some misfortune that has to occur), like a creature born with one arm, another that has two heads and another members outside the ordinary. The wonders are things that happen against Nature, like a woman who gives birth to a snake or a dog, or anything else totally opposed to Nature.....*”. What are the causes of monsters for Paré? “*The first is the glory of God. The second his anger. Third, the excessive amount of semen. Fourth, its insufficient quantity. Fifth, the imagination. Sixth, narrowness or reduced size of the womb. Seventh, the mother’s inadequate way of sitting, who, being pregnant, has been sitting too long with her thighs crossed or pressed against her belly. Eighth, due to fall or blows against the mother’s belly, finding a child is waiting. Ninth, due to hereditary or accident diseases. Tenth, by rot or semen corruption. Eleventh, due to confusion or semen mixture. Twelfth, due to deceit of the evil itinerant beggars. And thirteenth, by demons or devils*”. Within the examples of excessive semen, he shows in his book a drawing of a case similar to that of the Manchester Siamese, and describes it with the following words, “*on the last day of February 1572, in the parish of Viabon, on the road from Paris to Chartres, place of the small Bordas, a woman named Cypriane Girande, wife of Jacques Marchant, farmer, gave birth to his monster that lived until the following Sunday*”. Perhaps to the reader of today, the causes that Paré describes to explain the origin of the “*monsters*”, make him sketch a smile, but still floats in the collective unconscious, as causes of the malformations of the fetuses; divine punishment, blows or falls, “*imagination*” (cravings), etc. Little or almost nothing embryology had advanced until the 17th century, but from here, with the discoveries of the ovarian follicle (De Graaf), the sperm (Leuwenhoek), the initial embryo (Malpighi), is when the new ones begin Embryonic generation theories, with scientific battle included (as always), between epigenetics (Harvey) and preformationists (Von Haller). The former gave priority to shaping force; while the latter defended that the embryo was an adult being of microscopic size that “*unfolded*”. But even within the preformationists, there were two tendencies, the “*ovists*”, for whom the “*microscopic homunculus*” resided in the ovule, and the “*animaculists*” for whom this resided in the sperm. In the 18th century, while Encyclopedism and Enlightenment toured Europe, leaving the theme of

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"monsters" and their genesis limited to a small number of "specialists" (doctors, theologians, naturalists, legislators and scholars), more or less as it should of being now, including the controversies between "specialists". One of them had special relevance, which towards 1740, and with the name of "dispute of the monsters", maintained in the Academy of Sciences of Paris, Lemery and Winslow, shuffling theological arguments, such as "the impossibility of a doctrine that supposed a creator God of monsters". Spain was not unaware to the scientific knowledge of its time, hence characters such as the Benedictine Feijoo, the Cistercian Rodriguez (ovist) or the Jesuit Isla, were concerned with embryological issues, problems of the species, generation, inheritance, with special attention to the teratology. But it is necessary to mention the Jesuit and theologian Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro [2] (1735-1809), Director of the Imperial College of Madrid, expelled by the decree of Carlos 3th (1767) against the Jesus Company. After a stay in Cesena, Pius 7th appointed him Prefect of the Pontifical Library of the Quirinal. It was in Cesena (1778-1787) where he published his "Idea of the Universe, which contains the history of the life of man, elemental sphere images, travelostatics to the world plane, storia della terra", and later (1789) in Madrid, in which he dedicated an important part to the "human monsters", to eliminate prejudices and superstitions that made them be considered as "not human."

Hervás dealt with one of the teratology problems of his time: "the soul of the monsters." And it referred to cases of "two-headed monsters", defending one soul per head, thus describing different behaviors and feelings for each double headed head, which would not be possible if they shared a single soul, hence the heart would be dismissed as a seat of the soul, having observed two-headed monsters with only one heart, although in another of his works, "The Physical Man or Physical-Philosophical Human Anatomy" (Madrid, 1800), he did not propose a specific location for the soul, although "the soul does not leave the body missing any member, other than the head." Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro, an Enlightened, would always claim the essential perfection in his human nature, as a species and as being endowed with spirit, for "monsters" of any kind. And the controversy would continue throughout the centuries, because as Solomon said "nihil novum sub sole" (nothing new under the sun).

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