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Twins in Early Modern English Drama and Shakespeare

Daisy Murray



Twins in Early Modern English Drama and Shakespeare

This volume investigates the early modern understanding of twinship through new readings of plays, informed by discussions of twins appearing in such literature as anatomy tracts, midwifery manuals, monstrous birth broadsides, and chapbooks. The book contextualizes such dramatic representations of twinship, investigating contemporary discussions about twins in medical and popular literature and how such dialogues resonate with the twin characters appearing on the early modern stage. Murray demonstrates that, in this period, twin births were viewed as biologically aberrant and, because of this classification, authors frequently attempted to explain the phenomenon in ways that call into question the moral and constitutional standing of both the parents and the twins themselves. In line with current critical studies on pregnancy and the female body, discussions of twin births reveal a distrust of the mother and the processes surrounding twin conception; however, a corresponding suspicion of twins also emerges, which monstrous birth pamphlets exemplify. This book analyzes the representation of twins in early modern drama in light of this information, moving from tragedies through to comedies. This progression demonstrates how the dramatic potential inherent in the early modern understanding of twinship is capitalized on by playwrights, as negative ideas about twins can be seen transitioning into tragic and tragicomic depictions of twinship. However, by building toward a positive, comic representation of twins, the work additionally suggests an alternate interpretation of twinship in this period, which appreciates and celebrates twins because of their difference. The volume will be of interest to those studying Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature in relation to the History of Emotions, the Body, and the Medical Humanities

Daisy Murray is Higher Education Programme Developer for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

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Introduction

The Cholmondeley Ladies is currently on display at the Tate Britain in London and is described by their curator, Karen Hearn, as “a great favorite with the public ... one of our iconic works.” In assessing this popularity, Hearn points toward the ‘linearity’ and ‘subject matter’ of the work for explanation.¹ Yet, neither of these features is what sets this painting apart from the norm—family portraits dealing with such topics as marriage and childbirth were relatively common in early modern England. Rather, I would posit that two other features of this work, which Hearn alludes to, make this painting a unique object of fascination. The questions surrounding the painting comprise the first feature. As Hearn describes, the work is “full of mysteries, full of puzzles.”² Not much is definitively known in relation to *The Cholmondeley Ladies*. Because of its style, it can be dated between 1600 and 1610. However, the artist and, moreover, the subjects, though presumably members of the Cholmondeley family, remain unknown. Such mystery adds to the appeal of the piece; although the most striking element of the painting and arguably the main reason it attracts so much interest is the extreme likeness of its subjects. The painting depicts two women sitting up in bed, each holding an infant. Sat side by side, they are almost mirror images of one another. Such a pose was common in tomb sculptures of the time, though it is not known to be used in any other British painting. The portrait’s inscription also emphasizes the parallel that is created between these women and their children. It reads, “Two Ladies of the Cholmondeley Family, Who were born the same day, Married the same day, And brought to Bed the same day.”³ Apart from this inscription, there is no surviving evidence to substantiate exactly how these women and their children were related; thus, it is impossible to know whether they are in fact twins or relations that are more distant. Close inspection of the painting reveals subtle differences between the sitters, such as eye color and jewelry. Despite this, at first glance, the subjects appear identical and, as Hearn describes, members of the public generally assume the women to be twins.⁴ I would argue that this feature of the portrait, the likeness between its sitters, emphasized through both their pose and the painting’s caption, defines this work and makes it a

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continued object of fascination; furthermore, this particular portrayal of likeness participates in a larger pattern of fascination with twin likeness that existed in the early modern period.

I begin with a brief discussion of *The Cholmondeley Ladies* because the painting encapsulates the early modern interest in twinship, as well as its continued appeal today. The likeness between its sitters reflects a larger fascination with twin likeness that abounded in the period, and the portrait's current popularity at the Tate demonstrates that such a fascination still exists. This project is largely interested in the cultural understanding of twins in the early modern period and, accordingly, turns to medical literature and cheap print about twins in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in order to conceptualize how these individuals were viewed and understood in early modern England.⁵ The majority of the introduction will be dedicated to the discussion of this cultural context, providing a basis for the literary analysis that comprises the following chapters; for, though concerned with recovering an understanding of twinship from the period, this project is specifically interested in the dramatic potential inherent in early modern twinship as well as how the ideas that emerge in medical literature and cheap print from this time are manifested on the early modern stage. To this end, the dramatic representation of twinship receives the greatest attention in this work, which attempts to demonstrate how a cultural understanding of twins can inform a reading of early modern drama.

The drama discussed endeavors to represent the range of plays featuring twins from the early modern period and specifically covers the dates between 1593 and 1638.⁶ However, the medical writing and cheap print that inform the readings of these plays extend from the mid-sixteenth



Figure 1.1 Unknown artist, *The Cholmondeley Ladies*, circa 1600–1610, oil on wood, 886 x 1723 mm, Tate Gallery, London, T00069.

century to the late seventeenth century, well after the dating of these plays. The justification for this choice is that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ideas about twinship remained fairly constant. The advent of print culture in England, marked by the introduction of the printing press in 1476, invariably means that there is much more identifiable material surviving from this point onwards.⁷ Tessa Watt traces the rise of cheap print between 1550 and 1640 in England, demonstrating both the rise in literacy rates over this period and an increase in appetite for printed material.⁸ Within the category of cheap print, broadsides, ballads, and chapbooks printed between the mid-1500s and the late seventeenth century reveal a consistent dialogue about twin births. Stories of twins commonly appear in the news genre of this literature, including “strange and wonderful news” broadsides and news pamphlets, which, amongst other topics, feature descriptions of marvelous creatures and deformed children. Accordingly, stories of twins in broadsides and news pamphlets are typically stories of conjoined twins, which proved the most popular topic within the monstrous birth genre.⁹ In the early sixteenth century, Watt identifies a religious affiliation in many of the circulating broadsides; however, from the mid-1500s onward, these “cease to be an acceptable vehicle for the Protestant message” and instead are bought mainly for entertainment purposes.¹⁰ Through the seventeenth century, the interest in monstrous births does not diminish, as tales of conjoined twins repeatedly appear in such literature, marking these children as prodigious figures and including descriptions of their birth and physical appearance alongside moralizing messages.

In terms of medical literature produced in this period, midwifery manuals and works on anatomy contain the most detailed discussions of twin conception and biology. The first such text to reach the English marketplace was *The Birth of Mankind*, which was initially published in 1540 and saw numerous reprints all the way through 1654.¹¹ This text was largely based on the German midwifery manual, *Der Rosegarten* by Eucharius Rösslin (1513); however, it moved away from its source text in that it addressed a general readership, as opposed to aspiring midwives. This shift was furthered in the text’s second edition, which, among other changes, included a “Prologue to the Women Readers.” The second edition of *The Birth of Mankind* was published in 1545 and attributed to “Thomas Raynalde, Physician.” The first English translator, Richard Jonas, had no discernible medical training and, because of this, his edition is marked by errors. Raynalde revised much of this work, correcting mistakes made by Jonas, as well as adding the anatomical Book One. Raynalde also added Vesalian anatomical drawings, along with his own description and analysis of these plates. In 1560, Raynalde’s anatomical table was replaced by a translation of Vesalius, attributed primarily to Nicholas Udall. Following this change, the text remains relatively stable until its final publication in 1654. As the first

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midwifery manual published in the English marketplace, *The Birth of Mankind* both initiated a popular interest in the topic and served as a basis for later work. As David Cressy highlights, plagiarism was rampant among the authors of these tracts, a practice that resulted in repetitiveness amongst such literature and helps to explain why discussions of twinship remain relatively unchanged over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹²

The medical texts produced during this period that discuss twinship in the most detail and, accordingly, receive the most attention in this work are Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man* (1615), Nicholas Culpeper's *A Directory for Midwives* (1651), and Jane Sharp's *The Midwives Book* (1671). Crooke's *Microcosmographia* was the first English anatomy written by a physician, rather than a surgeon, and, because of this, it received criticism from the College of Physicians. The president of the college and the bishop of London attempted to have the work suppressed but were unsuccessful in their suit.¹³ Despite this initial resistance, Crooke's text proved successful and popular in the marketplace. Though an expensive and extensive work, *Microcosmographia* was reissued in 1616 and 1618 and went through a second edition in 1631 and a third in 1651. Eve Keller's sustained analysis of *Microcosmographia* positions Crooke's work as the "apogee of Renaissance medicine—a text composed and compiled at the apex of Galenic revival."¹⁴ However, she additionally highlights that, while perpetuating the "fundamental components of Galenic anatomy and physiology," Crooke's text also "rewrites their workings to support a notion of subjectivity more nearly aligned with masculinist and humanist ideals."¹⁵ This reworking of classical ideas and specifically the practice of using discussions of childbirth and anatomy to privilege the male over the female becomes a larger issue in Culpeper's later midwifery manual. Mary E. Fissell positions Culpeper as "a radical London apothecary and medical writer" and marks his *A Directory for Midwives* as initiating a new trend in writing about pregnancy and childbirth:

First, he wrote without shame and without worrying about the potential for corrupting male readers. Instead, he wrote gleefully, joking with male and female readers. Second, he tried to ground social relations in the body itself. He was the first vernacular midwifery writer to talk about male bodies as well as female ones in print. Talking about men as well as women became a way of making female bodies inferior to male ones in Culpeper's account. He belittled women's own ideas about their bodies and instead urged his readers to place their faith in the male science of anatomy.¹⁶

Fissell argues that Culpeper's approach was moreover widely imitated and, following the publication of his midwifery manual, not only was

the female body something men could talk about unashamedly, but it became a site to discuss wider gender relations in the period.¹⁷ Interestingly, considering this aspect of Culpeper's work, Jane Sharp, a practicing midwife and, thus, potentially both a source of practical knowledge and an advocate for the female subjects of these texts, takes his midwifery manual as the main source for her work, *The Midwives Book*. Though Sharp borrows from a variety of sources, including Crooke's work, her midwifery manual clearly parallels Culpeper's, with many passages almost identical to those in *A Directory for Midwives*. However, while largely imitative, Sharp does interject her knowledge and experience as a midwife into her text and, moreover, alters language and meaning to produce a more sympathetic view of women. Elaine Hobby, in her edition of *The Midwives Book*, notes both these aspects of Sharp's work, tracing where and how she asserts a more equal depiction of the sexes, as well as positioning Sharp's text as the first of its kind to include practical knowledge and experience within a tradition dominated by translating continental knowledge into English.¹⁸

The gender issues that emerge in these early modern discussions of pregnancy and childbirth are largely linked with the revival of Galenic medicine, which Crooke's text signals, and particularly the growing acceptance of his theory of generation, as Galen augments the role of the female in the process of reproduction in a way that justifies the discussion of the female body and female sexuality in early modern medical literature.¹⁹ Classically, Aristotle proposed a one-seed theory of generation, which granted men a seminal role in procreation. Within Aristotle's model, matter, in the form of menstrual blood, was provided by the female; however, generative power was given to the male, who afforded human form to the matter through fertilization with the male seed. Galen challenged this model with his two-seed theory, which claimed that women likewise produced a generative seed that was necessary to achieve conception. As Crooke articulates, "to perfect generation there is required a concurrence and mixture of the seeds of both sexes."²⁰ In one sense, the two-seed theory elevates the position of women, granting them an active role in the process of conception. However, this model also introduces the ability to place blame upon women for issues related to reproduction and, moreover, brings female sexuality within the context of the dialogue, as Galen's two-seed theory additionally dictates that female orgasm is needed for the production of seed.

Such a depiction of the female body, which both positions it as inferior and opens it up to discussion within the medical field, is further supported by early modern humoral theory, which similarly gained prominence during this Galenic revival and largely shaped the early modern conception of health and approach to wellbeing.²¹ Humoral theory finds its earliest roots in the work of Hippocrates, who propounded that the body consisted of four humors that dictated overall bodily health. These

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he delineated as blood, phlegm, choler or yellow bile, and black bile. Within Hippocratic medicine, in order to achieve a healthy equilibrium, all the humors needed to be in balance; a deficit or excess of any would result in disease or disability. Galen introduced the first typology of temperament onto the Hippocratic model, classifying the humors as hot/cold and dry/wet. While an excess of any of these humors produced an imbalance, heat was understood to stimulate action, while cold depressed it. Men as a sex were believed to be hotter and drier than women, who were depicted as cold and wet in contrast—a system of differentiation that moreover invites comparison between the sexes. In discussing the process of conception, Crooke distinguishes between the male and female in these terms:

So then, in the first conception or soon after, whether it be in man or woman, the same Members are generated, but the fruite prooveth male or female, because of the temper of the seede and the parts of generation, either by heat thrust out, or for want or weaknes of the heate retained within: wherefore a woman is so much lesse perfect then a man by how much her heate is lesse and weaker then his.²²

In such an understanding of physiological constitution, women are thus seen as inherently ‘less perfect’ than their male counterparts and their cold/wet temperament viewed as detrimental to the reproductive process. In *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, Gail Kern Paster demonstrates how humoral differentiation functioned to construct a fear of the female body, tracing how female biological practices including menstruation, lactation, and reproduction participate in this dialogue.²³

As women possessed an almost exclusive authority in relation to pregnancy and childbirth practices in early modern England, the dynamics of the birth chamber are often represented as a rare instance of female empowerment in the period.²⁴ However, in discussing the humoral construction of generation, Paster argues for a more nuanced understanding in which pregnancy and childbirth offer a form of empowerment, albeit one “constrained by a whole host of stratagems, both real and symbolic, designed to counter an understanding of the maternal body as polluted and polluting.”²⁵ To support this claim, she turns to the “period’s materials on reproduction” in which she identifies “another narrative, founded upon sexual difference, giving institutional expression through humoral theory to a deep ambivalence toward the maternal body.”²⁶ This reading aligns with the earlier discussed conflation of medical ideas with masculinist ideals, which accompanies the translation and publication of childbirth manuals into English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As treatises on pregnancy and childbirth were most often authored by male medical practitioners, these texts

repeatedly privilege masculine knowledge, simultaneously discrediting the women traditionally involved in childbirth practices. In many instances, criticism is aimed directly at practicing female midwives, foreshadowing the rise of men-midwives and the modern preference for obstetrics.²⁷ Paster, Fissell, and Keller have effectively shown how the language of male-authored childbirth tracts and midwifery manuals endeavor to assert their own superiority over the women who traditionally occupied this field.²⁸ However, such degradation impacts on the female condition more widely, as these texts additionally promote a larger misogynistic understanding of women. Raynalde's discussion of male exclusion encapsulates this practice, as it argues for male involvement in childbirth practices, while simultaneously promoting a negative view of the female body:

Yet another sort is there, which would that neither honest ne dishonest men should see this book, for because (as they say), be a man never so honest, yet by reading here of things to them before unknown, they shall conceive a certain loathsomeness and abhorring toward a woman. To these I answer, that I know nothing of woman so privy ne so secret, that ye should need care who knew it: neither is there any part in woman more to be abhorred, than in man.²⁹

The statement specifically argues for an expansion of the field to encompass male involvement, as it insists on an open knowledge that would eliminate the need for female secrecy in relation to childbirth practices. However, as Paster notes, Raynalde additionally assumes a culturally misogynistic view of the female body in this passage and, moreover, propagates this idea through its repetition.³⁰

The inherent anatomical difference between men and women allows for this misogynistic dialogue, which constructs women as not only different from man, but less than her male counterpart. However, pregnancy offers a further opportunity for female degradation as "in reproduction, the female body was not only different as usual from the male body but different from itself in a way that, at its most dangerous, threatened contamination of self and baby."³¹ Such a view of reproduction is supported by the common description of pregnancy as a diseased state: "the greatest disease that women can have is that of the nine Moneths."³² Again, this understanding of the female body signals a specific male anxiety about the power afforded to women in the act of generation, as villainizing the pregnant state simultaneously strips women of their authority within this realm. However, this classification additionally highlights a parallel movement that separates the female from her generative function, further removing the power afforded to women through pregnancy. Positioning pregnancy as a disease marks the condition as an unnatural and alien condition impacting the female,

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as opposed to an event within her control, marking the woman as a passive force in the generative process. Within this construction of the pregnant state, particular attention is often focused on the womb as the site of generative activity, a tension that emerges in Chapter 1's discussion of *The Cruel Brother*, as well as Chapter 2's consideration of *The Lovesick Court*. In many cases, the womb and the female become expressly aligned, revealing the increasing definition of the female in terms of her generative function.³³ However, in other instances, the womb becomes a "quasi-independent force," a shift that both emphasizes the threat of the female body and removes power from the female herself.³⁴ In explaining the process of conception, Crooke refers to the actions of the female and her womb separately, anthropomorphizing the organ:

The man thereof and the woman joyned together in holy wedlocke, and desirous to raise a posterity for the honour of God and propagation of their family; in their mutual imbracements doe either of them yeeld seede the mans leaping with greater violence. The woman at the same instant doth not onely ejaculate seede into her selfe, but also her womb snatcheth as it were and catcheth the seede of the man, and hideth it in the bottom and the bosome thereof.³⁵

Crooke's description affords the womb its own independent agency, granting the organ the main role in achieving conception. However, the language through which this agency is given additionally marks the womb as a dangerous force, as its actions are expressly aggressive and animalistic, suggesting the womb's potential to cause harm in the generative process.

While such a depiction of female reproduction gestures toward male anxieties surrounding the power afforded to women through pregnancy, it also intersects with the earlier discussed depiction of the female body as culpable in the reproductive process, as problems with reproduction are increasingly blamed on female fault in this period. Monstrous and deformed births were commonly explained in ways that implicated the female and her bodily constitution. Coition during menstruation was a particularly popular explanation for monstrous births, as such a criticism is both supported by biblical writing and propagates the view of the female body as dangerous:

But the greatest cause of women's bringing forth children imperfect, or mutilated, or crook-backt, or with Issues or Leprosie I take to be, because the act of Copulation, was done at that time when the Woman had her Menstruas upon her. It was not for nothing that God Himself forbad a man from a man to touch a woman at such time; and from such corrupt beginnings usually little good proceeds.³⁶

As Cressy relates, “this was a gendered physiological explanation, linking menstuous and monstrous, which threw most of the responsibility for the misfortune onto the woman.”³⁷ Another favored interpretation of abnormal conception similarly marks female agency as unsafe and hazardous but extends this stigmatization beyond the womb. In addition to blaming the mother’s menstruation, writers frequently find fault in her imagination and the power of her mind, another organ men were unable to completely control and thus also a source of anxiety in this period: “again in time of Copulation, Imagination oftentimes also produceth Monstrous births, when women look too much on strange objects.”³⁸ Such explanations for deformed births place blame primarily upon the mother, crafting her monstrous production as a sign of her combined constitutional and behavioral flaws.

The most common explanation for twin births within this period also functions within this model that blames the mother for imperfections evident within her offspring. However, early modern ideas about twin conception additionally carry moral implications for the mother, as they call her sexual behavior into question. This alignment of maternal fault and twinship becomes a major concern in Chapter 2, in plays that stage both unnatural pregnancies and problematic females linked with twin conception. Twins function within this model because, though not always perceived as a monstrous birth, they were viewed as apart from the norm in early modern England. Culpeper highlights this overarching view of multiple births as abnormal, as well as the accompanying impulse to explain this phenomenon, as he states: “Authors make some flutter about the Conception of *Twins*, and what a Reason should be.”³⁹ Medical texts that feature discussions of twin conception typically structure their explanations as answers to common questions raised by twin births, gesturing toward a wider interest in twinship in this period. Among questions related to the sex of the twins and the location of conception in the womb, Crooke investigates, “why Twinnes are commonly so like one another.”⁴⁰ In answering this question, Crooke positions the place of gestation and the receipt of the same nutrients as reasons for their similarity; however, he additionally asserts that this likeness is “because they [the twins] are conceived together.”⁴¹ Such an understanding aligns with modern ideas of twin conception, in which the children are conceived during one sexual act, with either two eggs being fertilized or the egg splitting during the gestational period. However, while acknowledging the possibility for a single act of conception, early moderns typically believed twins to be conceived in separate instances, in an occurrence referred to as superfetation. Crooke goes on to provide a definition of this form of conception: “Now this *Superfetation* is nothing else but a second conception, when a woman already with child accompanying with a man conceiveth again, as if it were a new conception above another before conceived.”⁴² Moreover, he offers an explanation for why this takes

place amongst humans: “to the beasts the use of *Venus* is onely given for the preservation of their kinde; if therefore they conceive the finall cause being satisfied their desire of coition is also appeased; but man useth these pleasures not onely to propagate his kind, but also to sweeten and mitigate the tedious and irksome labors and cares of his life.”⁴³ Crooke thus positions sexual desire as the root cause of superfetation, separating man from beast because of this pursuit for sexual pleasure. Though Crooke refrains from moralizing beyond this point, the implication remains that twins are a result and sign of the sexual desire of the parents. The excess of their physical desire results demonstrably in an excessive birth, as two children are produced, instead of one.

Moreover, where Crooke emerges as restrained in his discussion of twin births, allowing for the possibility of twins conceived at once and avoiding overt moralization, Culpeper and Sharp both expand upon Crooke’s explanation of twin conception, emphasizing the damaging aspects latent within the early modern understanding of superfetation. In contrast to Crooke’s explanation, which recognizes single conception as an avenue for twin conception, both Culpeper and Sharp strongly argue for superfetation as the predominate method of conception:

Nor do all Authors agree that Twins are begotten at the same time, for all the *Stoick* Philosophers hold that they are begotten at several times, and if you read the Treatise of *Hermes*, he will tell you, that Twins are not conceived at the same minute of time; for if they were conceived at once, they must be born at once, which is impossible. Some may object, that the Treatise of *Hermes* speaks not to a minute, but if it be true to a Sign ascending, it must be true to a Degree, and to a minute, and Second.⁴⁴

While acknowledging the argument for single conception, both these authors also negate this option, arguing for such an occurrence to be effectively “impossible” and, instead, counter this explanation for twin conception with the assertion that “all Authors allow of a *Superfetation*, that is, the woman may conceive again when she hath conceiv’d of one Child before she be delivered of that.”⁴⁵ Culpeper additionally aims to “make the matter beyond all dispute,” with the biblical precedent set out in the story of Cain and Abel: “our Translation saith, Gen. 42. *And she conceived AGAIN, and have his brother* Abel: Those that have skill in the Original, know that it should be translated, *She CONCEIVED UPON CONCEPTION, and bare his brother* Abel. Let this put an end to the Dispute.”⁴⁶ This argument for superfetation as the most common cause behind twin conception moreover remains prevalent throughout the seventeenth century, with signs of it losing favor only beginning to emerge at the end of the century. Moving closer to a modern medical understanding of twinning, John Pechey, in *A General Treatise of the*

Diseases of Maids, Bigbellied Women, Child-bed Women, and Widows, published in 1696, argues against superfetation as the main cause of twin pregnancy:

This second Conception is very rare; for we must not imagine, that when a Woman brings forth two or more Children at once, there is Superfoetation; because they are almost always begot in the same act, by the reception of abundance of Seed into the Womb ... Of a hundred Women that have Twins, ninety of them have but one burthen common to them both, which is a certain sign they had no Superfoetation.⁴⁷

Revealing the development of medical understanding, Pechey cites the presence of one placenta, “one burthen,” to support his claim that twins are commonly conceived in one instance. However, his argument against a second conception also implicitly highlights the prevalence of this belief during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; superfetation was indeed how early moderns imagined twins to be conceived.

Moreover, both Culpeper and Sharp embellish Crooke’s explanation for why superfetation occurs, emphasizing the moral implications inherent within the occurrence of a second conception. Amongst the questions Culpeper and Sharp attempt to answer in relation to twin births is the specific question, “Why women desire the act of copulation after they have conceived, when Beasts do not,” which they explain:

Our own Writers give no wiser [answer], for they say, ’Tis a Prerogative and Vertue God hath given only to Women. Alas, poor Fools! that make a Vertue of a Vice. The very truth is, the Curse of God for *Adams* first sin lies more heavily upon Man, than it doth upon the Beasts, and Lust is a great part of this Curse, and the Propagation of many Children at once an effect of that intemperancy; and that I suppose to be *Hippocrates* his Reason of forbidding Copulation to women with child. For my own part, far be it for me to forbid it, for I know well enough the Nature of Man is so vicious, that he must have to do with his Wife, or some body else in that time, or do that which is worse than either: However, hereby you see the fruits of original sin, and what cause you have to be humbled in the presence of God for it, and require assistance against the wretched effects it produceth.⁴⁸

In this explanation, Culpeper and Sharp extend the message latent in Crooke’s earlier answer, heightening the negative associations linked with twin pregnancy and further indicting the parents in the process. Again, the reason behind a second conception is sexual desire; however, these later authors take pains to stigmatize such desire, specifically

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referring to this impulse as lust that they, moreover, classify as a vice, curse and sin. The male is implicated in Culpeper's condemnation of inordinate desire, as he references a specifically masculine need to continue sexual activity during pregnancy. However, as pregnancy only constitutionally changes the mother—the male experiences no physical change and, consequently, no change in desire for sexual activity—special criticism is reserved for the female in Culpeper's explanation. He specifies that this vice is one “God hath given only to Women” and, furthermore, emphasizes insatiate desire as “the fruits of original sin.” Early modern medical texts repeatedly align the pregnant or ailing woman with her religious mother and counterpart, Eve, and her role in original sin.⁴⁹ As Fissell explains, during this period, a transition occurs in which women are no longer encouraged to associate with the Virgin Mary during their pregnancies, instead being taught to connect with the role of Eve in causing all women to suffer in childbirth.⁵⁰ Culpeper employs this trope, painting excessive sexual desire as a female legacy resulting from Eve's original transgression.

These moral implications arise because superfetation entails continued sexual activity during pregnancy, behavior that marks the parents as inherently lustful and excessive in their desires. However, superfetation presents another possibility that additionally reflects a specific male anxiety related to pregnancy. Superfetation allows for the possibility that the twin children, conceived during separate sexual acts, might belong to different fathers. Thomas Browne, in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), an encyclopedia of seventeenth-century misconceptions and new knowledge that cemented his reputation as a scholar and naturalist, highlights this possibility in his discussion of superfetation.⁵¹ Following a brief consideration of how biologically a second conception can occur, Browne diverges from the medical scope of the topic to discuss the potential for infidelity implicit within the early modern understanding of superfetation:

Nor indeed any absolute securitie in the policy of adultery after conception; for the Matrix (which some have called another animall within us, and which is not subjected unto the law of our will) after reception of its proper Tenant, may yet receive a strange and spurious inmate, as is confirmable by many examples in Plinie, by Larissaea in Hippocrates, and that merry one in Plautus urged also by Aristotle, that is of Iphicles and Hercules, the one begat by Jupiter, the other by Amphitryon upon Alcmaena; as also in those superfecundations where one childe was like the father, the other like the adulterer, the one favour'd the servant, the other resembled the master.⁵²

Browne's explanation utilizes misogynistic stereotypes associated with women and pregnancy, referring to the womb as an uncontrollable