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# Spectacular Pregnancies / Monstrous Pregnancies As Represented In Three *Pliegos Sultos Poéticos*

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“For as St Paul says, every sin that is committed is outside  
the body except this one alone.

All the other sins are only sins; but this is a sin, and also  
disfigures you and dishonours your body,  
... [you] do harm to yourself, mistreating yourself quite voluntarily  
in such a shameful way.” (31)

—“Hali Meiðhad / A Letter on Virginity for the Encouragement  
of Virgins” (1190-1230?)

“The grotesque body, ... is a body in the act of becoming.  
It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created,  
and builds and creates another body.” (317)

—Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1965)

In this age of advancements in procreative technologies that have increased the incidence of multiple births, we are at times fascinated and at others repulsed by these reproductive results. Our fascination with multiple births is evident, on the one hand, from the exploitation of the Dionne Quintuplets during the Depression to the popularity of reality-based television programs in which the principal characters are families with what might be perceived by

many viewers to be an overabundance of children.<sup>1</sup> Our repulsion is evident, on the other hand, by our tabloid obsession with the gestational exploits and excesses of women like the Octomom Nadya Suleman—mother first to sextuplets and later to octuplets, all produced via fertility treatments. According to Mary Russo in her study of fat (although not necessarily pregnant), female bodies,

The grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process and change. The grotesque body is opposed to the classical body, which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individuals; the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the world. (Russo 219 / 325)

In a compelling discussion of female bodies and a gendered model of disability, Tory Vandeventer Pearman cites Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque and its intersection with gender and the grotesque: "... Everything about the grotesque body centers on excess; as such, images of the grotesque body focus on eating, drinking, defecating, *giving birth*, and dying. *As a result, the fecundity and excess of the grotesque body links the grotesque [sic] with the female body*" (my emphasis, 29).

In a similar manner to that in which a grotesque female body can provoke disgust, Rosi Braidotti acknowledges this same emotional reaction to the sight of a pregnant female body in her study "Mothers, Monsters and Machines" (1997).

The woman's body can change shape in pregnancy and childbearing; it is therefore capable of defeating the notion of fixed *bodily form*, of visible, recognizable, clear, and distinct shapes as that which marks the contour of the body. She is morphologically dubious. The fact that the female can change shape so drastically is troublesome in the eyes of the logocentric economy within which to see is the primary act of knowledge and *the gaze* the basis of all epistemic awareness. (64)

Pregnancy itself, as represented in the *pliegos sueltos poéticos* (or *las relaciones de sucesos*), is subject to the gaze and can function as a form of public spectacle and also even punishment or moral exempla to those who both experience it as well as to those who witness it. Tracing the historical development and conventions of the *pliegos sueltos poéticos* in his study “The Illustrated Spanish News” (1993), Henry Ettinghausen commends them because

... they were truly news stories, which, besides providing information, helped structure reality into meaningful fables, performing such other important social functions long associated with literature as entertainment, *ideological promotion and moralising*. (my emphasis, 118)

Cristina Castillo Martínez similarly describes themes contained within the *pliegos sueltos poéticos* as functioning as a corrective (632) “... de aviso moral y de enseñanza a partir del ejemplo descrito” (630). In *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Michel Foucault details the development of the modern prison and documents the importance of the spectacle of punishment: public torture and execution as spectacle for public consumption, and the relationship of the body to production and subjection. According to Foucault,

Historians long ago began to write the history of the body. ... But the body is also directly involved in a political field; ... it is largely as a force of *production* that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of *subjection* (...); *the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body*. (my emphases, 25-26)

These pregnant women’s bodies are indeed productive, that is to say, reproductive. As early modern women are limited by their reproductive function, the women represented in the *pliegos sueltos poéticos* are also delimited as their extreme and monstrously spectacular / spectacularly monstrous pregnancies

strain the limits and boundaries of the female bodies. They are also similarly subjected as they suffer through the monstrous<sup>2</sup> pregnancies they are obligated to bear as a type of public punishment or public spectacle for the sin of avarice or pride.

The term *monster* derives from the Latin *monstrare* (Williams 10) or *monstrum* (*Diccionario de autoridades* 598), which means “to show.” In *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611), Sebastián de Covarrubias defines the term as “Monstro: latine monstrum, a monstrando, quod aliquid significando demonstret” (812). Similarly, he defines the term *espectáculo* as a public space designed for viewing (833), a meaning shared by the *Diccionario de autoridades* (1732) shares this meaning but also refers to “... el objeto de algún caso grave, digno de admiración, y por lo regular lastimoso, ...” (597). In Isidore of Seville’s taxonomy of the human body, one of the twelve categories he lists in his consideration of monsters is the “superfluity of bodily parts” (Williams 107; Isidore 52). Covarrubias also initially characterizes a monster as a malformed infant, or one whose body parts appear in an excessive number: “Es cualquier parto contra la regla y orden natural, como nacer el hombre con dos cabezas, cuatro brazos, y cuarto piernas” (1294). The *Diccionario de autoridades* defines a related word, *monstruosidad*, as “Desorden grave en la proporción que deben tener las cosas, según lo natural, o regular” (599). Rogelio Miñana, who provides a detailed etymological consideration of the term *monster* (388-389), highlights the idea of multiplication in his reference to Covarrubias, noting that “Así, la multiplicación se convierte para Covarrubias en una de las características distintivas del monstruo en el origen de su excepcionalidad” (391). These conjoined ideas of superfluity and multiplication are particularly apt for a consideration of the literary representation of pregnancies resulting in multiple births, and the public space through which to view these pregnancies at times with pity is the literary form of the *pliegos sueltos poéticos*.

In addition, the women’s spectacular pregnancies are markers of spatial identity. Doreen Massey has investigated the relationship between women and the physical spaces they are socially obligated to occupy in her study *Space, Place and Gender* (1994). Historically, women have occupied private spaces, and, therefore, private spaces have been gendered traditionally as female or feminine. Moralist Fray Luis de León reminds female readers in *La perfecta casada* (1583) that spaces are gendered and movement in and out of these spaces is determined by one’s identification as male or female: “Como son los hombres para lo público, así las mujeres para el encerramiento; y como es de los hombres el hablar y el salir a luz, así de ellas el encerrarse y encubrirse” (67). Massey

echoes this gendering of public and private spaces:

... space and place are important in the construction of gender relations and in struggles to change them. From the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages which they transmit, to straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood. The limitation of women's mobility, in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination. ... One of the most evident aspects of this joint control of spatiality and identity has been in the West related to the culturally specific distinction between public and private. The attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity. (179)

Pregnancies resulting in multiple births have been recognized and recorded for centuries. While examples abound of deformed, monstrous children,<sup>3</sup> multiple births themselves are not necessarily represented as monstrous or produce monstrous progeny. Yet, they are represented as if the sheer number were monstrous and spectacular enough. According to Cristina Castillo Martínez, who has analyzed the phenomena of pregnancy in several early modern *pliegos sueltos poéticos* from the city of Jaén, the origin of this popular literary form and the tales it tells are not certain: “No sabemos si partían de episodios reales, contados de forma hiperbólica para causar la sorpresa, o eran directamente fruto de la imaginación de sus autores” (627). In addition to anecdotal information about multiple births, Ambroise Paré's *On Monsters and Marvels (Des monstres et prodiges)* (1573) offers expert explanations to account for this phenomenon.

Empedocles says that when there is a great quantity of seed, a plurality of children is produced. Others, such as the Stoics, say

that they are conceived because in the womb there are several cells, separations, and cavities, and when the seed is spread into them several children are created. However, that is false, for in the womb of women only one cavity alone is to be found, but in animals, such as bitches, swine, and others, there are several cells, which is the cause of their carrying several babies. ... Aristotle has written that women could not deliver more than five children at one pregnancy; yet it happened ... (23) ... Aristotle, book four, chapter four, *De generatione animal*, thinks that twins or multiple births in one litter are formed in the same way as a sixth finger on the hand, namely, through the superfluity of matter, which, being in great abundance, if it reaches the point of dividing in two, twins are formed. (26)

Pliny the Elder (23-79 A.D.) also described cases of multiple births:

The birth of triplets is attested by the case of the Horatii and Curiatti; above that number is considered portentous, except in Egypt, where drinking the water of the Nile causes fecundity. Recently on the day of the obsequies of his late Majesty Augustus a certain woman of the lower orders named Fausta at Ostia was delivered of two male and two female infants, which unquestionably portended the food shortage that followed. We also find the case of a woman in the Peloponnese who four times produced quintuplets, the greater number of each birth surviving. In Egypt also Trogius alleges cases of seven infants born at a single birth. (Book VII: I, 527-529)

Despite Aristotle's contention that women could not give birth to more than five children at a time and Pliny's that women could not give birth to more than seven children at a time, others have purported to verify multiple births in excess of these numbers. In

Pierre de Boaistuau's collection of tales titled *Histoires prodigieuses et mémorables extraites de plusieurs fameux auteurs, grecs et latins, sacrez et profanes* (1560), Boaistuau dedicates two entire chapters to multiple births: "Primera parte: De algunas mugeres q̃ de vn vientre hã parido muchas criaturas, y de otras que mucho tiẽpo las hã tenido muertas en el cuerpo. Cap. XXXI" (128-129) and "Segunda parte: De algunas mugeres, que de vn parto han parido muchos hijos. Cap. VII" (179-83). In these chapters readers learn about women who purportedly gave birth to increasingly more spectacular numbers of children: seven children in one pregnancy (128, 182); twenty by way of a pregnancy that produced first eleven and then nine children (128, 183); twenty children, resulting from four pregnancies producing five children each (182); and thirty-six children resulting from one pregnancy (183).

I will examine three ballads<sup>4</sup> found in seventeenth-century *pliegos sueltos poéticos* in which the primary characters—spectacularly and monstrously pregnant women—are subjected to the public gaze. They are pregnant women whose stories are not relegated to the private, female sphere but instead are public, purported to be factual, as supported by dates, locations and eyewitness accounts. In two of the ballads women give birth to seemingly implausible numbers of children, and the women's fecundity is represented as monstrous in its magnitude, their gestational exploits straining credibility. In another ballad a woman's pregnancy is represented as a form of divine punishment for her and her husband's not having accepted their lot in life to remain childless. The pregnancy is fraught with difficulty, and the resulting birth produces a monstrous son who commits a series of horrific crimes.

In the first ballad, titled "*Relacion muy verdadera, en que se da cuẽta de vna muger natural de Seuilla, que en tiempo de doze años que ha que es casada ha parido cincuenta y dos hijos, y oy en da esta viua. Cuentase de vna señora muy principal de Irlanda, que pario trezientos y setenta hijos en vna fuente de plata, y los bautizaron: y esta fuente se la enseñaron al Emperador Carlos Quinto, por caso prodigioso...*," a woman gives birth to fifty-two children in twelve years. The poetic voice itself admits repeatedly the incredulity of the very events it narrates.

Bien sé que algunos avrã  
 que en aqueste caso incredulos  
 ni acrediten mis razones,  
 ni crean lo que refiero. (1)



... caso raro,  
que aun yo mismo no lo creo, (2)

Y porque a alguien se le hará  
difícil el entenderlo, ..." (2)

caso estupendo (2)

milagroso suceso (2)

deste milagro y portento (2)

The woman's identity is purportedly verified by the poetic voice, who claims that she is married—" ... a la muger conozco, / a su marido, y sus deudos, / Y a todos los he tratado, / y supe este caso dellos, / y por ser tan conocidos / en Seuilla, ..." However, he maintains her anonymity—"viue vna muger casada, / cuyo nombre va en silencio" (1)—and makes no specific identifying mention of her husband. The poetic voice tries to explain for the reading public the bewildering calculations by which he can verify the human possibility of a woman's giving birth twice a year to a grand total of fifty-two full-term children during the twelve years of her marriage.

Ha parido, ...  
cincuenta y dos hijos, todos  
de nueue meses enteros. [...]  
Cada año pare dos vezes,  
y de cada parto nuevo  
dos y tres criaturas juntas,  
todas de cumplido tiempo:  
Porque quedando preñada  
de tres meses, buelue luego  
despues de los seis passados  
a parir, caso estupendo.  
Y assi vienen a cumplir  
los nueue meses enteros,  
y le sucedio tal vez,  
despues de partos inmensos,  
Parir vna criatura,  
y saliendo a Missa al Templo  
mayor de aquesta ciudad,  
a la Capilla y entierro  
De los Reyes, parir otra ... (2)

The second ballad takes place in Italy and recounts the story of a woman who gave birth to three hundred seventy children, all on one day as a form of divine punishment.<sup>5</sup> What is particularly interesting about this second ballad is that the socio-economic tension is placed in the forefront. The poetic voice reminds the reader three times that one woman is poor and that her children accompany her to beg for alms.

... fue vna muger pobre  
 su limosna a demandar,  
 Y lleuando muchos hijos  
 hermosos para alabar,  
 allegò a pedir limosna,  
 por poderse alimentar, ... (2)

A wealthy woman from Ireland—Madame or Princess Margarita—stops to interrogate her, refusing to believe the poor woman's insistence that her children were all fathered by one man ("... es imposible, ... Que ellos sò de muchos padres / y esto no puedes negar.") and questioning the poor woman's ability to provide for them. The poor woman prays to God to punish the princess with a monstrous pregnancy by making her give birth to as many children as there are days in the year. As a result of divine intercession, the princess gives birth to three hundred seventy children on the same day.<sup>6</sup> These children are attractive but are likened to rats in their proliferation. The phenomenon is so astonishing that the poetic voice does not even endeavor to explain it or to calculate its feasibility.

... esta dama vino a enge`drar  
 trezientos y setenta hijos, ...  
 Todos los pario en vn dia,  
 sin peligros, y con pesar,  
 chicos como ratonzillos,  
 viuos, sin vno faltar. (3)

In these ballads, the fecundity of the women is spectacular and exceptional, monstrous in its magnitude. The first ballad is narrated as an interesting fact, the second as a moral exemplum. The mother of three hundred, seventy children is punished because she criticized a poor mother who did not possess the economic wherewithal to care for her children. Although the poor woman claims that only one man fathered her children,

he is suspiciously absent from the poetic narrative, provoking the princess to insinuate the poor woman's promiscuity, as if a multiple pregnancy could result from impregnation by multiple fathers in a manner similar to that of cats. The princess is punished for her insinuations and her cruelty and finds herself excessively burdened by her three hundred, seventy progeny.

The episode upon which this ballad is based is also found in prose form in Boaistuau's *Histoires prodigieuses* (1560?) except that the wealthy woman is from Holland and her only slightly less monstrous pregnancy—producing only three hundred, sixty-five children in one pregnancy instead of three hundred, seventy—causes her death.

...vna muger mendiga con quatro hijos en los braços llegò a pedir limosna a la Cõdessa de Holanda que entonces era, que se llamaua Margarita: la qual deuiendo cõsolarla y socorrer de su necesidad y pobreza, con palabras asperas le dixo, que si tenia por bueno darse al vicio de la luxuria, para venir a parir tantos hijos, que no los pudiesse criar. Y ella le respondio, que era casada, y que eran de su marido. A lo qual la Condessa respondio, que era imposible ser aquello verdad, porque vn hombre solo no engendraua tantos hijos, y la echò de si con afrenta, y sin darle limosna. La muger pobre suplicò a Dios que dello mostrasse milagro, y fue oyda, porque la Cõdessa se hizo preñada, y de aquel parto pario trezientas y sesenta y cinco criaturas, varones y hembras, y todos ellos fueron bautizados en unas grandes vacias: Y acabados de bautizar, ellos y la madre murieron, y de aquesto se vee vna pintura en vna yglesia de vna Abadia de Holanda, que se llama Lostuna, y alli se dize que fueron enterrados. (183)

This tale, recounted in Spain and in France by Boaistuau, suggests the “permeability of generic borders” (Gernert 208) and mirrors the tale of the birth of the famous Monster of Ravenna, whose tale appears in Italy, France, Spain and Germany (198).

A moralizing tone continues in the third ballad titled

*“Curioso romance del caso mas estupendo que se ha visto en sstos tiempo[s]. Dase cuenta como marido, y muger, que avia algunos años que estaban casados, no tenian sucession, y, muy deseosos de tenerla, hizieron muchos extremos, y casi desesperados, con peticiones injustas, irritaron a su Divina Magestad, dandoles vn hijo, el qual en el vientre de su madre rabiaba, y la mordía como perro; y despues de nacido matò a su padre, y otras muchas muertes que hizo, y grandes estragos, como verà el Curioso, sucediò en el Reyno de Aragon. Año de 1697.”* Its message is intended for “... todos los padres, / que altivos, locos, y ciegos / piden, sin saber pedir, / sucession injusta al Cielo” (1). Not content to accept their lot in life, an infertile couple, [Francisco Fortun] Francisco Fortùn and [Ysabel Perez] Isabel Pérez, prayed to God to give them a son to inherit their wealth and property.

... con loco extremo  
 estaban siempre en su casa  
 comunicando, y diciendo:  
 què querrà Dios de nosottos.  
 Què agradecerle podemos,  
 si vna cosa que pedimos  
 tan justa, no quiere hazerlo?  
 Para què dà las haziendas  
 sin hijos? Para tormento;  
 por què se està trabajando?  
 Para què herede el infierno.  
 Finalmente en estas cosas,  
 loco, pertinaz, y ciego,  
 el desventurado hombre  
 gastaba lo mas del tiempo;  
 hasta que Dios que nos oye,  
 yà piadoso, ò justiciero,  
 se valiò de su justicia,  
 y dentro de breve tiempo  
 se sintiò en cinta Ysabel; ... (my emphasis, 1-2)

People often use various methods to increase the odds of fertility, and religiously devout people commonly pray for divine intercession in the case of pregnancy, whether to ensure fertility, to guarantee a successful outcome, or for marriage or miscarriage in the event of an unplanned pregnancy.<sup>7</sup> In Gonzalo de Berceo’s thirteenth-century work, *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* (1255), for example, the narrator recounts the story of a nun who prays to the Virgin Mary for divine

intervention to resolve an unexpected and unwanted pregnancy. Facilitating a type of divine adoption, angels miraculously spirit the baby away to be raised by a hermit, and the nun, no longer encumbered, finds herself restored to her virginal state.<sup>8</sup>

Isabel's problematic pregnancy in the *pliego suelto poético* foretold the trouble that was to come.<sup>9</sup> The unborn child bit his mother *in utero* "como que vn perro rabioso / la mordía" (2), and she perished in childbirth, a common cause of female mortality. Although four wet nurses also died as a result of breastfeeding the child, and he had to be nourished by the milk of goats, a symbol for the devil, his father did not admit that the child was to blame: "el padre nunca creyendo / que su hijo era la causa / de tan horroroso efecto" (2). When the son was fifteen years old, he disrespectfully called his father "vn hombre necio," threatened him—"... llegarà el tiempo / en que pueda con mis iras / verter sangre de tu pecho" (2)—and demanded that he give him his inheritance. When his father refused, he murdered him. He then embarked upon a crime spree—robbing, raping and killing men, women and children—that occupies more than an entire page in the manuscript and becomes more brutal with each criminal act described. After stabbing his father to death, he shot and killed a monk while trying to rob him. He tried to rape a woman with a small child, and then smashed the child against the floor and beat the woman and cut (or possibly cut off) her breasts. He kidnapped and raped a young girl and then hanged her in a tree by her hair and stabbed her to death. He slit the throats of some shepherds and of their entire flock. He broke into the house of a wealthy man, murdered a sleeping servant boy, slit the throats of four female servants, killed the lord of the house, tried to rape his wife and then killed her when she cried out. Finally, when he encountered a priest who was giving communion to an ailing man, he killed them both out of fear of discovery. He was eventually apprehended and executed on May 14, 1697, as documented in the *pliego suelto poético*.

The poetic voice reiterates the proverbial moral of the story, casting aspersions on the parents who were not content to remain childless, even though that was the will of God. The pregnancy and subsequent birth of their son is represented as divine punishment for their reproductive avarice.

... es justo que siempre estemos  
vnanimos, y conformes  
con la voluntad del Cielo.  
Y aunque es bueno que pidamos

como dize el Evangelio,  
 es menester que sepamos  
 conformarnos con el Cielo,  
 rogandonos que nos dè  
 luz, quietud, paz, y consuelo,  
 y que vamos à gozar  
 tanto bien despues de muertos. (2)

The moralist Juan Luis Vives, author of *Formación de la mujer cristiana [De institutione feminae christianae]* (1524), disparages pregnancy and motherhood. He shares the opinion of the poetic voice that those who are sterile should accept their fate and be happy about it, despite societal pressures to the contrary, particularly for women. Vives writes, “Si no parieres ... gózate de [tu esterilidad], porque quedas inmune de increíble molestia y pesadumbre ... ¿Quieres ser madre? ¿Para qué?” (II, xi: 1136).<sup>10</sup>

Birth defects were believed to be the result of sin and could reflect divine punishment. Therefore, it was readily believed that “The bodily disorder of the monstrous child thus became in a certain way the visible expression of the disorder of the senses of those who had generated it” (Niccoli 20) and that “Any malformation of a child at birth was normally seen as an accusation of sin in its parents, and more in particular, of a sin against chastity, since the child is the physical fruit of its parents’ sexual commerce” (Flandrin 154; Gélis 263). Vives goes on to remind mothers that they are largely responsible, not only for the physical or gestational development or deformation of their children, but for their moral development as well, specifically of their sons, and mothers are held responsible for their sons’ immorality. Vives tells mothers, “Yo no quiero, ¡oh madres!, que ignoréis que la responsabilidad de que haya malos hombres recae en su mayor parte sobre vosotras” (II, xi: 1143).<sup>11</sup>

In a surprisingly egalitarian perspective, Fray Luis de León in *La Perfecta Casada* (1583) blames both parents when children behave badly: “... ¿qué pueden decir sino confesar que los vicios de ellos [los hijos] y los desastres en que caen por sus vicios, por la mayor parte son culpas de sus padres?” (69). However, he, too, places more blame on mothers, in this particular case, for their failure to breastfeed their own children and their reliance on wet nurses to do so.

... entiendan las mujeres que, si no tienen  
 buenos hijos, gran parte de ello es porque  
 no les son ellas enteramente sus madres.

Porque no ha de pensar la casada que el ser madre es engendrar y parir un hijo; ... esta perfecta casada que no lo será si no cría a sus hijos; y que la obligación que tiene por su oficio a hacerlos buenos, esa misma le pone necesidad a que los críe a sus pechos.  
(69)

Interestingly, in the *pliegos sueltos poéticos* analyzed in this study, the husbands are represented as either absent (in the first ballad), anonymous (in the second ballad), and ineffectual or dead (in the third ballad). In the first ballad, the poetic voice acknowledges the woman's married status ("... a la muger conozco, / a su marido, ...") and "viue vna mujer casada, ...") but does not identify her husband. In the second ballad, the woman insists that one man fathered all of her children. Having no concrete poetic identity, both of these husbands escape responsibility. In the third ballad, however, both husband and wife, who are identified by name, share equal blame for wanting that which they were not destined to have—a child—and are held equally liable for the monstrous and diabolical son born to them. After the mother's death, the father is ineffective in his role as single parent and then he dies at the hands of his son.

By way of the new technology represented by the *pliegos sueltos poéticos*, fashionable after the development of the printing press, those citizens without prior access to libraries now had access to literature (Rodríguez-Moñino 12) and fantastic stories. Why were these sensationalistic and spectacular pregnancies the subjects of these *pliegos sueltos poéticos*? Undoubtedly, they served the more pedestrian purpose of titillating the audience and provoking the sale of more *pliegos sueltos poéticos*. In addition, the women's status as exceptionally fecund mothers could reflect a desire to re-inscribe women in traditional roles, procreation being their supreme womanly duty and goal. Pregnancy functions to contain and limit women and their experiences as women are circumscribed within the traditional role of mother. And yet, these women are described in such a way as to suggest that they were not intended to be emulated because of the monstrosity of the pregnancies: in the first two, the pregnancies are monstrous; and in the third ballad, a monstrous pregnancy results in a monstrous child who grows up to be a monstrous adult.

These pregnancies delimit women as their bodies necessarily expand to supernatural dimensions and cause them to function as monstrous spectacles. In two of the ballads, the women are punished

for their pride, and the pregnancies themselves are punitive and function as public punishments and spectacles. Women, who might have been subjected to a type of confinement during the final period of their pregnancies, are subjected to public scrutiny and spectacle by way of their spectacular monstrous pregnancies, which cannot be obfuscated, due to the sheer quantity of the children, and by the public nature of the *pliegos sueltos poéticos* themselves. Foucault reminds readers, "... the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (26). The bodies of these spectacularly pregnant women are both productive and subjected. They are productive, that is to say, reproductive, given that procreation was a highly valued capability in early modern Spanish women. They are also subjected, subjected to compulsory reproduction, as measured by their spectacular pregnancies and as measured by their appearance in the *pliegos sueltos poéticos*. The bodies of these pregnant women—as visually pregnant spectacles and as evidence of spectacular pregnancies—are subjected to the public gaze, particularly that of the readers of the *pliegos sueltos poéticos* who yearn for the extraordinary worlds now open to them through their access to this new print technology.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Such programs are prolifically broadcast on *The Learning Channel* (A Discovery Company).
- <sup>2</sup> For a study of the relationship between the literary representation of monsters and the Protestant Reformation, see Park and Daston's "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in France and England."
- <sup>3</sup> For studies about monsters and monstrous children, see works by Boaiustauu, Castillo Martínez, Daston and Park, Genert, Kappler, Lunger Knoppers & Landes, and Platt, among many others too numerous to mention.
- <sup>4</sup> The reference to these ballads can be found in the *Catálogo de pliegos sueltos poéticos de la Biblioteca Nacional. Siglo XVII*, edited by María Cruz García de Enterría, María and Julián Martín Abad.
- <sup>5</sup> This ballad is also cited in González Alcantud (1-2).
- <sup>6</sup> This ballad, composed or attributed to Timoneda, is also cited in Durán (393).
- <sup>7</sup> For social customs designed to promote female fertility, see Gélis (15-18 and 26-33) and Haas (90-91). For the benefits of sulfur baths and sea bathing to promote female fertility as practiced in Spain, see Limón Delgado (21-24). For information about Saint Anne, the patron saint of infertile women, see Tilmans (347-48).
- <sup>8</sup> "Recudió la parida, fizose sanctiguada, / dizié: '¡Valme, Gloriosa, reina coronada! / ¿es esto verdad o si só engannada? / Sennora beneita ¡val a esta errada!'" / Palpóse con sus manos quando fo recordada, / por ventre, por costados e por cada ijada, / trobó so vientre llacio, la cinta muy delgada, / como muger que es de tal cosa librada" (161-62).
- <sup>9</sup> For other examples of agony-inducing pregnancies and childbirths, see Soranus' *Gynecology* (175-207), Castillo Martínez (628) and Boaiustauu (129), in which a woman is purported to have agonized for five years before submitting to a



caesarian section. Also see the medieval text “Hali Meiðhad / A Letter on Virginité for the Encouragement of Virgins”: “... that cruel distressing anguish, that fierce and stabbing pain, that incessant misery, that torment upon torment, that wailing outcry; while you are suffering from this, and from your fear of death, shame added to that suffering with the shameful craft of the old wives who know about that painful ordeal, whose help is necessary to you, however indecent it may be; ...” (Millet 33).

<sup>10</sup> For a description of the physical maladies and discomforts of pregnancy as an admonition against it, see the “Hali Meiðhad” / “A Letter on Virginité for the Encouragement of Virgins” (Millet 31, 33).

<sup>11</sup> John of Jandun (c. 1285-1328) notes that “it is dangerous that the female moves during sexual intercourse in the way prostitutes are reputed to do, because if at such a moment they would conceive, they could generate an awful two-headed monster” (Bates 116; Thijssen 237-46). Also see Niccoli for the correlation between sex during a woman’s menstrual period and the birth of monsters.

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