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“Such Monstrous Births”: A Neglected Aspect of the Antinomian Controversy

by ANNE JACOBSON SCHUTTE

The Antinomian controversy of 1636–1638, the earliest major theological conflict in colonial New England, has attracted much scholarly attention. For many, the central figure in the drama, Anne Hutchinson, is a heroine, a champion of religious freedom against the bigoted theocratic Puritan establishment of Massachusetts Bay captained by the elder John Winthrop, Governor of the colony. Others have interpreted the Puritan prosecution of the Antinomians as perhaps regrettable but absolutely necessary; theological splintering might well have led, as most contemporaries believed it would, to a fatal political weakening of the young colony at a critical moment.¹ One feature of the Antinomian episode, however, has not yet received the attention it deserves: the occurrence of two monstrous births, one in the midst of the controversy (although belatedly

¹Several popular biographies of Hutchinson portray her as a heroine: Helen Augur, *An American Jezebel: The Life of Anne Hutchinson* (New York, 1930); Edith Curtis, *Anne Hutchinson: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA, 1930); Winnifred King Rugg, *Unafraid: A Life of Anne Hutchinson* (Boston, 1930); Reginald Pelham Bolton, *A Woman Misunderstood: Anne, Wife of William Hutchinson* (New York, 1931); Deborah Crawford, *Four Women in a Violent Time* (New York, 1970). Emery Battis, in his scholarly but sympathetic treatment of Hutchinson, nevertheless argues against her being seen as a champion of religious freedom: *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill, 1962); and “Anne Hutchinson,” *Notable American Women* (3 vols.; Cambridge, MA, 1971), II, 245–247. Completely unsympathetic to Hutchinson is Winthrop’s biographer, Edmund S. Morgan: “The Case Against Anne Hutchinson,” *New England Quarterly*, 10 (1937), 635–649; *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston, 1958), pp. 134–54. For a persuasive interpretation of the controversy as a political conflict that served to delineate “the new boundaries of Puritanism in Massachusetts Bay,” see Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York, 1966), pp. 71–107. Two scholars explore Hutchinson’s activities from a feminist perspective: Ben Barker-Benfield, “Anne Hutchinson and the Puritan Attitude Toward Women,” *Feminist Studies*, 1 (1972), 65–96; Lyle Koehler, “The Case of the American Jezebels: Anne Hutchinson and Female Agitation during the Years of Antinomian Turmoil, 1636–1640,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 31 (1974), 55–78, and *A Search for Power: The “Weaker Sex” in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Urbana, 1980), *passim*. The major primary sources for the Antinomian controversy are presented in *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638: A Documentary History*, ed. David D. Hall (Middletown, CT, 1968), cited hereafter as Hall.

discovered) and the other at its denouement. The efforts of participants in the controversy to understand these monster births were fueled by the theological conflict and at the same time worked to raise its temperature.

A thorough exploration of these closely related cases will serve two purposes. First, it can enhance our understanding of mentalities in the late Renaissance by setting the experience of New Englanders in a European context. The intellectual universe of the five men who wrote about the monsters (John Winthrop, Thomas Weld, John Cotton, John Wheelwright, and Edward Johnson) was not bounded by the Atlantic and the wilderness. All of them were familiar at least with English popular accounts of monsters and prodigies. Like their erudite predecessors and contemporaries in the Old World (some of whose works they may have read), these convinced Puritans strove to push beyond superficial, sensation-mongering curiosity about strange occurrences. Their attempts to fit apparent anomalies such as monsters into a coherent picture of the universe governed by an omnipotent and beneficent Creator were conditioned, however, by the special circumstances in which they were operating. Delineating the distinctive dimensions of their reactions is the second aim of this investigation.

Let us begin with the people and events surrounding the births of the two monsters. The mother of the first was Mary Dyer, the future Quaker martyr. She first appears in historical records as Mary Barrett, the name she relinquished on October 27, 1633, when she was married in the church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London, to William Dyer.² The son of William Dyer of Kirkby Laythorpe, Lincolnshire, Mary's husband was a member of the Fishmongers' Company, in which he had served an apprenticeship, and was working as a milliner (haberdasher) at the New Exchange.³ Mary and William were already or soon became Puritans, for they immigrated to Massachusetts Bay late in 1634 or early in the following year. There they quickly established themselves as solid citizens. They joined the Reverend John Wilson's church in Boston on December 13, 1635; on the following day William was granted forty-two acres on the northeast

²G. Andrews Moriarty, "The True Story of Mary Dyer," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 104 (1950), 40-41.

³William Allen Dyer, "William Dyer, a Rhode Island Dissenter," *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections*, 30 (1937), 22-25.

side of Boston harbor; on January 23, 1636, he was named clerk of a special commission on fortifications; and on March 3 of that year he became a freeman of Boston.⁴ Their first child, a son named Samuel, was baptized on December 20, 1635, in Mr. Wilson’s church⁵—just one week after his parents had become members.

Soon thereafter, however, the Dyers were in serious trouble. Even before joining the church, Mary may have begun to attend the unsanctioned religious meetings held in Anne Hutchinson’s home.⁶ Her frequent presence there would have been noted by John Winthrop, who lived across the street.⁷ In any event, both Dyers clearly supported the Antinomians, advocates of a “covenant of grace.” This group included Hutchinson, her family, and many of those who attended her lectures. Two clergymen and an important political figure were also among the Antinomians: The Reverend John Cotton (Anne’s favorite minister in England, whom she had followed to Boston), now serving as teacher in the Boston church; the Reverend John Wheelwright, her husband’s brother-in-law, recently arrived in the colony (whose appointment as Cotton’s colleague in the position of teacher the Hutchinson faction was seeking); and Governor Henry Vane, who lodged in Cotton’s house. The Antinomians’ adversaries, whom they called “legalists” and accused of preaching a “covenant of works,” included John Wilson (minister of the Boston church), all the other ministers in the Bay colony, and their adherents, the most notable and active of whom was former and future Governor Winthrop. In March 1637 the General Court judged Wheelwright guilty of contempt and sedition for refusing to retract provocative statements made in his Fast-Day sermon of January 19. About this time Mary Dyer became pregnant. In October she

⁴James Truslow Adams, “Mary Dyer,” *Dictionary of American Biography* (20 vols.; New York, 1928–1936), V, 584; Dyer, “William Dyer,” pp. 10–11.

⁵Louis Dyer, “William Dyer, a Somerset Royalist in New England,” *Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset*, 6 (1899), 271.

⁶Battis, *Saints*, pp. 90–91. According to Winthrop, Hutchinson chaired twice-weekly “public lectures,” attended by sixty to eighty people, at which she “resolv[ed] questions and expound[ed] Scripture”; she continued to hold these meetings even after the synod had banned them. John Winthrop, *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649*, ed. James Savage (2 vols.; Boston, 1853), I, 286, 294.

⁷Hall, p. 199. Unless otherwise noted, what follows in this paragraph and the next is from Hall, pp. 4–10; and William K. B. Stoever, “*A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven*”: *Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, CT, 1978), pp. 23–31.

gave birth, two months prematurely, to a stillborn monster—a fact known at the time only to the Dyers, the two women who were present at the delivery (Hutchinson and the midwife, Jane Hawkins), and John Cotton.

William Dyer had been among the signers of a petition in support of Wheelwright. For this action the General Court disenfranchised him and others on November 15, 1637, and then proceeded to deal with the “heresiarch,” Hutchinson, who was sentenced to banishment but placed under house arrest over the winter. After another trial, this time by a clerical synod, she was excommunicated on March 22, 1638. It was during this second trial that Dyer’s monster birth came to light. A few days later Hutchinson and many of her followers, including the Dyers, left for Rhode Island. There, in the late spring of that year, Hutchinson herself gave birth to a monster.

For the following detailed descriptions of the monsters we are indebted to John Winthrop (returned to the governorship of the colony in May 1637), who recorded the events in his journal when they occurred. The accounts later appeared with his editorial comments in a collection of documents published anonymously in London in 1644. With a different title and a preface by Thomas Weld, they were reissued twice in the same year and again in 1692. From this published work—better known by its second title, *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines, that infected the Churches of New-England*⁸—Winthrop’s contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic learned about the two monsters.⁹

Here is Winthrop’s description of the first:

At Boston in New England, upon the 17. day of October 1637, the wife of one William Dyer, sometime a Citizen & Millener of London, a very proper and comely young woman, was delivered of a large woman childe, it was stilborn, about two moneths before her time, the childe having life a few houres before the delivery, but so monstrous and misshapen, as the like hath scarce been heard of: it had no head but a face, which stood so low upon the brest, as the eares (which were like an Apes) grew upon the shoulders.

⁸The first edition was entitled *Antinomians and Familists Condemned by the Synod of Elders in New-England: with the Proceedings of the Magistrates against them, And their Apology for the same* (London, 1644).

⁹The news was disseminated more promptly in private correspondence. See Edmund Browne’s letter to Sir Simonds D’Ewes (September 7, 1638), which contained a full description of Dyer’s monster and a preliminary report on Hutchinson’s, both obtained from Winthrop. *Letters from New England: The Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1629–1638*, ed. Everett Emerson (Amherst, 1976), p. 230.

The eyes stood farre out, so did the mouth, the nose was hooking upward, the brest and back was full of sharp prickles, like a Thornback, the navell and all the belly with the distinction of the sex, were, where the lower part of the back and hips should have been, and those back parts were on the side the face stood.

The arms and hands, with the thighs and legges, were as other childrens, but in stead of toes, it had upon each foot three claws, with talons like a young fowle.

Upon the back above the belly it had two great holes, like mouthes, and in each of them stuck out a piece of flesh.

It had no forehead, but in the place thereof, above the eyes, foure hornes, whereof two were above an inch long, hard, and sharpe, the other two were somewhat shorter.¹⁰

In addition, Winthrop related the circumstances of the discovery. In March 1638, as Hutchinson was leaving the Church trial on Mary Dyer’s arm, someone identified Dyer as “the woman who had the Monster.” When one of the elders asked Hutchinson about it, she told him what had happened and stated that on John Cotton’s advice the birth had not been entered in the public register. Winthrop, the elder, and another magistrate then interrogated Jane Hawkins, the midwife, who first admitted only that the baby’s head was badly deformed. But upon being told that Hutchinson had revealed everything and that they intended to disinter the monster, she described it in full, providing virtually all the details that later appeared in print. When Cotton was questioned, he justified his having advised the women to bury the corpse quickly and quietly on the ground that God intended such monstrous births only for the private instruction of the parents and witnesses. He added that if it had been his own child, he would have wished it to be concealed. Sometime thereafter, Winthrop had the monster disinterred. “For further assurance, the childe was taken up, and though it were then much corrupted, yet the horns, and claws, and holes in the back, and some scales, etc. were found and seen of above a hundred persons.”¹¹

A report that Winthrop obtained from Anne Hutchinson’s attend-

¹⁰[John Winthrop], *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines, that infected the Churches of New-England*, [ed. Thomas Weld] (London, 1644), p. 43; readily available in Hall, pp. 280–281 italics in the original). Subsequent references to *A Short Story* will be to Hall’s edition.

¹¹Hall, pp. 281–282; Winthrop, *History*, I, 313–317. The quotations are from *A Short Story*; Cotton’s role, however, is mentioned only in the journal. Cotton’s second reason for advising concealment—that he would not have wanted publicity if the mon-

ing physician, Dr. John Clarke, served as the basis for his description of the second monster:

Mistris *Hutchison* being big with child, and growing towards the time of her labour, as other women doe, she brought forth not one, (as mistris *Dier* did) but (what was more strange to amazement) 30. monstrous births or thereabouts, at once; some of them bigger, some lesser, some of one shape, some of another; few of any perfect shape, none at all of them (as farre as I could ever learne) of humane shape.¹²

The modern reader who encounters these descriptions may be tempted to find them fanciful. Given Winthrop's clear interest in destroying a dissident faction in his colony, one may well suspect fabrication, or at least exaggeration. Neither, however, was the product of an overheated Puritan imagination; in fact, Winthrop's thorough investigation and meticulous description make possible quite precise medical diagnoses. Hutchinson's misbirth has been identified as a hydatidiform mole,¹³ and Dyer's was almost certainly an anencephalic with spina bifida and other abnormalities.¹⁴ Making a medical diag-

ster had been his child—may well stem from the fact that in October 1637 his wife was pregnant for the third time. Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton: Puritanism and the American Experience* (Princeton, 1962), p. 168. The Massachusetts Bay authorities lacked one resource available to the magistrates of Nuremberg a few years earlier. When a monster (probably Siamese twins) was born in the outlying village of Liretzhofen in 1592, the city fathers dispatched an artist to sketch it, after which it was quietly buried. Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, Rep. 60b, vol. 50, fol. 379^v (January 4, 1592). I owe this information and the reference to Merry E. Wiesner.

¹²Hall, p. 214. Dr. Clarke's report is in Winthrop, *History*, I, 326–328; also in Battis, *Saints*, pp. 347–48.

¹³Margaret V. Richardson and Arthur T. Hertig, "New England's First Recorded Hydatidiform Mole," *New England Journal of Medicine*, 207 (1959), 544–45. See also Edith L. Potter, "Defective Babies Who Die at Birth," in *Birth Defects*, ed. Morris Fishbein (Philadelphia, 1963), pp. 52–53.

¹⁴Anencephalia is "a malformation characterized by complete or partial absence of the brain and overlying skull," in which "the absence of the cranial vault renders the face very prominent and somewhat extended; the eyes often protrude markedly from their sockets." About 70% of anencephalics are female. They are often carried to full term, or even beyond. If not stillborn, they die soon after birth. Since the head is abnormally small, breech presentations are common. *Williams Obstetrics*, 15th ed., ed. Jack A. Pritchard and Paul C. MacDonald (New York, 1976), pp. 829–31. Jane Hawkins told Winthrop and his colleagues that Dyer's baby "came hiplings till she turned it." Winthrop, *History*, I, 314. There is only a 4.5% chance of a woman's bearing more than one anencephalic; Dyer had one previous and six subsequent normal children. Gilbert W. Mellin, "The Frequency of Birth Defects," in *Birth Defects*, ed. Fishbein, pp. 12–15; Dyer, "William Dyer," pp. 40–41. The occurrence of anencephalia in the United States is .177% among whites and .024% among blacks, but it is more

nosis, however, was not Winthrop’s aim. What concerned him and his contemporaries was the meaning of such occurrences. Here they had abundant resources at their disposal. They were all at home in an intellectual terrain that was literally swarming with monsters, as well as with astute publicists eager to report on them and earnest investigators trying to determine their significance.

Since late antiquity Europeans had believed, on Pliny’s and Augustine’s slender authority, that monstrous races populated the little-known parts of the globe. India and Ethiopia in particular were thought to contain a menagerie of human–animal combinations, as well as people with a single giant foot, with two heads, or with none.¹⁵ Headless monsters appeared very frequently in medieval manuscript illustrations¹⁶ and early printed books.¹⁷ In the late fifteenth century, the reports of chroniclers like the Dominican St. Antoninus of Florence and the Augustinian Jacopo Filippo Foresti of Bergamo, who began to concern themselves not with monstrous races far afield but with individual monsters closer to home, fathered a rapidly evolving and very popular genre: narrative accounts of monsters and prodigies.¹⁸

common in certain parts of the British Isles, notably South Wales, where the incidence in the period 1958–1962 was .345%. Mellin, pp. 12–15; C. O. Carter, K. M. Lawrence, and P. A. David, “The Genetics of the Major Central Nervous System Malformations, Based on the South Wales Sociogenetic Investigation,” *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, Supplement 13 (1967), 30–34. The modern description of anencephalia accords perfectly with Winthrop’s account of the gross malformations of the head, bony protuberances from which could easily have been seen as horns. The details he provided about the back point to a severe form of spina bifida, which often occurs in conjunction with anencephalia. *Williams Obstetrics*, p. 831. The three-clawed feet suggest Type V syndactyly, in which two or more toes are fused. Samia A. Temtamy, “Syndactyly,” in *Birth Defects: Atlas and Compendium*, ed. Daniel Bergsma (Baltimore, 1973), p. 835 (#772). The only feature of Winthrop’s description that does not correspond to any abnormality known to modern medicine is the reversal of the torso. Here, perhaps, Winthrop was misled by Hawkins about a detail that would have been extremely difficult either to verify or to dismiss through examination of a partially decomposed corpse.

¹⁵Pliny, *Historia naturalis*, VII. 2; Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XVI. 8.

¹⁶For example, the thirteenth- or fourteenth-century *Livre de merveilles*, discussed by Eugen Höllander, *Wunder, Wundergeburt und Wundergestalt in Einblattgedrucken des fünfzehnten bis achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1921), p. 301.

¹⁷See, for example, the first German natural history, Conrad von Megenberg’s *Buch der Natur*, written around 1350 and issued several times by various Augsburg printers between 1475 and 1499. Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Réveils et prodiges: Le gothique fantastique* (Paris, 1960), p. 260.

¹⁸Jean Céard, *La nature et les prodiges: L’insolite au XVI^e siècle* (Geneva, 1977), pp. 71–

At first the authors of such books were much less interested in explaining how monsters were generated than in what their appearance signified. Earlier writers tended to speak in generalities: whereas nature in its ordinary forms manifested God's power and glory, monsters were "dated signs" of His direct intervention in the world He had created and continued to maintain.¹⁹ Before long, however—perplexed, like all their informed contemporaries, by the frightening disorders that seemed to be increasingly prevalent in the heavens and on earth—writers were making more precise attempts to read the signs of the times. A famous example will illustrate this new direction in interpretation.

The earliest reports of the probably apocryphal monster of Ravenna—a semi-human creature with a horn on its head, wings in place of arms, one leg with an eye on the knee and the other leg terminating in a claw, and two marks (an epsilon and a cross) on its breast—appeared in Germany during the first decade of the sixteenth century. Two woodcuts with explanatory captions placed its birth in a Florentine convent to a nun impregnated by the Pope. The conclusion to be drawn was obvious. In 1512 three Italian writers relocated the monster's appearance in Ravenna on the eve of Louis XII's victory over Julius II and his Spanish allies. Here again, the moral was anti-papal.²⁰

When Northern compilers of monster books, working in the latter half of the sixteenth century, dealt with the monster of Ravenna, they replaced the earlier topical interpretations with a complete set of moral significances. The horn, they maintained, represented pride and ambition; the wings, inconstancy; the eye on the knee, excessive worldliness; the claw foot, robbery, usury, and covetousness; and the bizarre ensemble, sodomy. The two marks on the breast, they asserted, pointed to a remedy more universally applicable than the French military humiliation of the Papacy in 1512. The epsilon stood for virtue, and the cross (as John Fenton, the English translator of Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires prodigieuses*, put it) meant

78; Katharine Park and Lorraine J. Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England and France," *Past and Present*, No. 92 (Aug. 1981), 30-34.

¹⁹Céard, pp. 60-71.

²⁰Rudolf Schenda, "Das Monstrum von Ravenna: Eine Studie zur Prodigienliteratur," *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, 66 (1960), 209-215.

that al those which wil returne to Jesus Christ, and take up his crosse, shal not only finde a true remedy against sinne, but a perfect way to helth and salvation, and a special meane to mitigate therby the ire of the Lorde, who is inflamed and redie to scourge and punish them for their wickednesse and abominable sinnes.²¹

English contributions to the monsters and prodigies genre carried on that tradition in an especially didactic and explicitly Protestant form. Fenton’s original, Boaistuau’s book, was not particularly serious in tone.²² Fenton strengthened its religious emphasis: his work, he claimed in the dedication, would be more useful to “the unlearned sorte” than tales of King Arthur and his Round Table, Gawain, and Gargantua.²³ Stephen Bateman, concluding his translation of Conrad Lycosthenes’ more religiously-focused tome and introducing his own additions to the collection, prayed,

Geve grace, most holy Father, to all that shall read the same, that they may perceive to what end thy gracious goodnesse hath pretended this work as a fragment among other most holy edictions, to warne this later age, by comming and dayly appearing of unaccustomed prodigies, to be the onely foretoken of mans destruction for sinnes²⁴

About the same time, however, some students of monsters were beginning to approach them in a different way. The Parisian barber-surgeon Ambroise Paré, in his *Des monstres et prodiges*, tried his best to attribute the generation of monsters solely to parents’ physiological defects or to specific errors committed during copulation.²⁵ Al-

²¹John Fenton, *Certaine Secrete wonders of Nature, containing a description of sundry strange things, seeming monstrous in our eyes and iudgement, because we are not privie to the reasons of them* (London, 1569), pp. 140–140^v. The original is in Boaistuau, *Histoires prodigieuses*, first issued in 1560 (Paris, 1564), pp. 180–182. On Fenton, a soldier of fortune, see *Dictionary of National Biography*, VI, 1184–86; on Boaistuau, see Céard, *Nature*, pp. 252–64. The monster of Ravenna also appears in the compilation by Conrad Lycosthenes, *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon* (Basel, 1557), p. 516; English translation of this work by Stephen Bateman, *The Doome warning all men to the Iudgement: Wherein are contayned for the most parte all the straunge Prodigies hapned in the Worlde, with divers secrete figures of Revelations tending to mannes stayed conversion towards God* (London, 1581), pp. 294–295.

²²Céard, *Nature*, pp. 242–253.

²³Fenton, *Certaine Secrete wonders*, sig. A3^v.

²⁴Bateman, *Doome*, p. 380. On Bateman, holder of a Cambridge divinity degree who served as domestic chaplain and librarian to Archbishop Matthew Parker, see *Dictionary of National Biography*, I, 1334; on Lycosthenes, see Céard, *Nature*, pp. 190–191.

²⁵Céard, *Nature*, pp. 293–305.

though he was unable to make such a connection in the case of the Ravenna monster, which he simply listed among examples of God's wrath,²⁶ he was more successful with monsters closer to home about which he had more reliable information. Here is how he dealt with an abnormal birth that looks and sounds very much like Mary Dyer's baby:

In the year 1562, on the first day of November, there was born at Villefranche-du-Queyran this present monster without a head, [information about] which was sent to me by monsieur Hautin, *docteur régent* in the Faculty of Medicine at Paris, the figure of which monster (anterior as well as posterior) you have here [in an illustration]; and he affirmed to me that he had seen it.

Paré argued that his headless female infant, like a male monster with truncated limbs also illustrated in his book, was the result of a deficiency in the quantity of the father's semen. He made no specific suggestions about misbehavior by the monster's parents or about possible connections between these deformities and religious or political developments in France.²⁷

During the sixty-four years between Paré's treatise and the Dyer and Hutchinson misbirths, writings about monsters took two increasingly distinct forms. A growing number of Continental physicians and natural philosophers—founders of the medical specialty known as teratology—sought natural explanations for monstrous births. The monsters and prodigies tradition, however, continued to flourish, both in compilations like Fenton's and Bateman's and in an increasingly popular form, the broadsheet dealing with a single prodigy (human, animal, climatic, or astronomical). Authors of broadsheets often pointed out the significance of a prodigy (usually a divine warning and call to repentance), but their main object seems to have been to astonish and entertain readers.²⁸

Closely associated with but more erudite than this second, popular genre was a growing tendency on the part of university-trained Protestant theologians, inaugurated by Martin Luther's and Philip Melancthon's polemical interpretations of the so-called Pope-Ass and

²⁶Ambroise Paré, *Des monstres et prodiges* (1573), ed. Jean Céard (Geneva, 1971), p. 7.

²⁷Paré, pp. 32–33. I have incorporated into the quotation Céard's modernization of the place name; the town is in the *département* of Lot-et-Garonne in southwestern France.

²⁸Céard, *Nature*, pp. 432–472; for a different approach, see Park and Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions," pp. 34–43.

Monk-Calf,²⁹ to pay careful attention to monsters. As Perry Miller and Keith Thomas have shown, English theologians of all shades of opinion, but Puritans in particular, were very much interested in God's role in creation.³⁰ Their emphasis was less on natural theology in the traditional sense (the design of the universe as a demonstration of divine power and glory) than on the relevance of events in the natural world to the moral world of man—that is, on God's providence. Following their Continental mentors (especially Girolamo Zanchi, Bartholomaeus Keckermann, and Johann Heinrich Alsted), the English Puritans argued that the ordinary operations of the world demonstrated God's "regular providence." Unusual occurrences, from the mundane (an axe-head flying off the handle) to the truly extraordinary (the birth of a monster), were instances of God's "special providence."³¹ Since the close of the New Testament era, most theologians agreed, miracles, in which God intervened directly in the natural order, had ceased. Special providences, in contrast, continued to be "wrought . . . through or with means, by natural instruments, by arranging the causes or influencing the agents."³²

The Puritan theologians' doctrine of providence, as Thomas has observed, presupposed an orderly, comprehensible universe, and it involved meticulous attempts to correlate the natural causes of events with their moral significance. Explanations in terms of providence, in fact, were often more "scientific" than the folkloric appeals to spirits or "fortune" with which they competed.³³ Divergent explanations were quite possible, however, when several Puritans, in general agreement about the workings of providence but in conflict on other theological and/or political issues, tried to deal with a particular event. Such was the case with the Dyer and Hutchinson monsters.

²⁹Konrad Lange, *Der Papstesel: Ein Beitrag zur Kultur- und Kunstgeschichte der Reformationszeitalters* (Göttingen, 1891); Baltrušaitis, pp. 312–313, 323.

³⁰Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (1939; rpt. Cambridge, MA, 1963), pp. 207–231; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York, 1971), pp. 79–112. On a seventeenth-century Anglican interpreter of special providences, see Anne Jacobson Schutte, "An Early Stuart Critique of Machiavelli as Historiographer: Thomas Jackson and the *Discorsi*," *Albion*, 15 (1983), 1–18.

³¹See especially William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, first issued in 1623 (London, [1638?]), pp. 39–45; and John Preston, *Life Eternall, or a Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes* (London, 1631), pp. 150–155.

³²Miller, *New England Mind*, pp. 227–228.

³³Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 91, 110–111.

We shall examine five reactions to them—as well as one significant failure to react—in approximately chronological order.

The first to address the problem was John Winthrop. Although he had some university and professional education, Winthrop was a layman, not a theologian.³⁴ His journal shows him to have been an assiduous but not uncritical recorder of unusual events—hardly the “avid cryptographer” that he has sometimes been called.³⁵ He did not interpret every event which was the least bit out of the ordinary or “lucky” as a special providence, nor did he claim to be certain about the significance of all the occurrences he mentioned.³⁶ In some respects his manner of dealing with the Dyer and Hutchinson misbirths would have gained the approval of erudite teratologists in his day, although it seems unlikely that he had read their works. When Dyer’s case came to light, he interrogated eyewitnesses to the birth and exhumed the corpse. After Hutchinson’s monster was delivered, he not only requested that Dr. Clarke make a written report but subsequently discussed the case with him. In neither instance did he assert that the monster birth constituted a special providence. In fact, his only reference to the occurrence of a special providence during the Antinomian controversy concerned a human utterance: Hutchinson’s statement during her examination by the General Court that she was operating on the basis of an immediate revelation from God. Winthrop explained to his readers that God had providentially led her openly but inadvertently to reveal her heresy.³⁷

Thomas Weld, who oversaw the second printed edition of Win-

³⁴Winthrop spent about two years (1602–1604) at Trinity College, Cambridge, and was at Gray’s Inn for an undetermined period. Morgan, *Winthrop*, pp. 5–6, 15.

³⁵Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, pp. 167–168; Miller, *New England Mind*, p. 229.

³⁶The special providences in Winthrop’s journal, which deserve a more extended treatment than is possible here, fall into several categories: instances of God’s special concern for the colony as a whole; escapes from environmentally perilous situations by individuals and small groups whose standing with God is not indicated; both avoidance of environmental peril as a reward for especially deserving individuals and destruction by such perils as condign punishment for wicked individuals; strange happenings which virtually demand interpretation (a mouse’s victory in combat with a snake [*History*, I, 97–98], Winthrop’s dream about his wife and children [I, 141], mice gnawing through the younger John Winthrop’s *Book of Common Prayer* but ignoring the Greek New Testament and Psalms bound together with it [II, 24], a snake’s appearance in a synod meeting [II, 403]); peculiar atmospheric phenomena; and monsters with prodigious significance (the deformed pig of New Haven, whose putative father was a “loose fellow” of the town [II, 73] and a monstrous calf at Ipswich [II, 311]).

³⁷Hall, p. 341.

throp’s account, took a very different approach to the monsters. He had first-hand knowledge of them, having served as minister in Roxbury during the Antinomian controversy; furthermore, Hutchinson had spent the winter of 1637–1638 (between her first and second trials) in the custody of his brother Joseph. Weld’s motives for editing and reissuing Winthrop’s account are not entirely clear. As the Bay colony’s representative in London, he probably felt it necessary to demonstrate that his employers had never been “soft on heresy” and that the Antinomian peril had been definitively surmounted.³⁸ Therefore he added to Winthrop’s account (which, as we have seen, was relatively restrained on the subject of the Dyer and Hutchinson misbirths) a preface in which he elucidated the meaning of the monsters in vivid republican language:

Then God himselfe was pleased to step in with his casting voice, and bring in his owne vote and suffrage from heaven, by testifying his displeasure against their opinions and practices, as clearly as if he had pointed with his finger, in causing the two fomenting women in the time of the height of the Opinions to produce out of their wombs, as before they had out of their braines, such monstrous births as no Chronicle (I thinke) hardly ever recorded the like

These things are so strange, that I am almost loath to be the reporter of them, lest I should seeme to feigne a new story, and not to relate an old one, but I have learned otherwise (blessed be his name) than to delude the world with untruths

And see how the wisdom of God fitted this judgment to her [Hutchinson’s] sinne every way, for looke as she had vented mishapen opinions, so she must bring forth deformed monsters; and as about 30. Opinions in number, so many monsters; and as those were publike, and not in a corner mentioned, so this is now come to be knowne and famous over all these Churches, and a great part of the world.³⁹

Thus—in contast to Winthrop, who confined himself to describ-

³⁸Weld took his B.A. at Trinity, College, Cambridge, in 1613/14 and his M.A. in 1618. Raymond P. Stearns, “Thomas Weld,” *Dictionary of American Biography*, XIX, 627. On his activities during and after the Antinomian controversy, see also Hall, pp. 200, 340. Stearns (p. 627) asserts that Weld, embroiled in English politics, “was induced by Presbyterian plotters” to issue *A Short Story*, which made the Massachusetts Bay authorities appear intolerant and thus embarrassed the English Independents and Weld himself. Ziff speculates, more plausibly, that Weld supervised the publication “perhaps under the mistaken belief that in publishing Winthrop’s highly partial account of the affair at the time he was offering proof of the ability of the Congregational system to check error.” *John Cotton on the Churches of New England*, ed. Larzer Ziff (Cambridge, MA, 1968), pp. 23–24. Stoeber (pp. 11–12) concurs with Ziff.

³⁹Hall, pp. 214–15.

ing the monster births virtually without comment—Weld took the position of an orthodox Puritan theologian preoccupied with the meaning of “unnatural” phenomena. For him the two monsters could not have been miracles, for the age of miracles was past. Neither were they prodigies or portents foreshadowing remarkable events to come. Instead, they were visible signs of the two women’s heresies. They were God’s confirmation of deviations already fully recognized by the “saints” in Massachusetts Bay but perhaps believed by English Puritans (quite wrongly) to be still attractive to some residents of the colony and therefore politically dangerous. Only secondarily and by implication did Weld suggest that the misbirths might be deserved punishment for sin. Never did he publicly state or even hint that adultery or witchcraft might be involved.⁴⁰

Weld’s task, that of a publicist demonstrating the orthodoxy of the Bay colony, was relatively simple. To other professional clergymen, however, the monsters’ appearance presented complicated problems. As William K. B. Stoever has shown, the Antinomian controversy was more than a power struggle between two political factions or an exercise in self-definition for a new community and church. It raised a fundamental issue, perennial in Christian theology: does knowledge that one is justified and elected to salvation come exclusively through the inner witness of the Spirit, or must this personal assurance be accompanied by outward evidence, namely sanctification?⁴¹ In this context Dyer’s and Hutchinson’s monsters raise another question, one that neither contemporaries nor modern scholars have made fully explicit—in part, perhaps, because the Puritans’ “scholastic” predilection for treating topics under separate subject headings or “common places” obscured the connection between providence and justification-sanctification. If, as the anti-Antinomians maintained, “graces of sanctification manifest them-

⁴⁰Augur (*American Jezebel*, pp. 245–246), Bolton (*Woman Misunderstood*, pp. 92–93), and Koehler (“Case,” p. 73) wrongly claim that accusations against Dyer and Hutchinson of witchcraft and/or adultery with Henry Vane, one-time governor and adherent of Hutchinson, were publicly raised in 1637–1638. As we shall see, the possibility of witchcraft in these cases was first suggested by Edward Johnson more than a decade later. The only allusion to Vane’s supposed liaisons with Hutchinson and Dyer comes from an English memorandum written about thirty years later by Sir Joseph Williamson, Secretary of State under Charles II; he claimed that his information came from a Major Scott. *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 1st ser., 13 (1873–1875), 132.

⁴¹Stoever, “*A Faire and Easie Way . . .*,” *passim*.

selves in the regenerate in empirically discernible ways,”⁴² must not God also reveal reprobates’ lack of grace in visible form? Could the two monsters, then, be not only warnings to the elect but also evidences of Dyer’s and Hutchinson’s damnation?

For several reasons almost all the Antinomians’ opponents eschewed interpreting the monsters in this way. Max Weber and his followers to the contrary, no responsible Puritan theologian went so far as to argue that individuals’ fortunes or misfortunes constituted unambiguous evidence, to themselves or to others, of their standing with God. To do so, as the divines were well aware, would have led to illegitimate prying into God’s inscrutable will, to the absurd claim that the just are always rewarded and the unjust always punished in this life, and to many additional illogical and impious conclusions. Perhaps the best example of their prudent reserve in this regard is furnished by Thomas Shepard, minister of Newtown (Cambridge), who along with his Concord colleague Peter Bulkeley led the anti-Antinomian clerical forces in Massachusetts Bay.⁴³ Between June 1636 and May 1640, Shepard delivered a series of weekly sermons on Matthew 25:1–13, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.⁴⁴ Although his aim was to awaken his listeners to the perils (theological, political, and Amerindian) of their current situation, so that they would be wise virgins prepared to meet their Bridegroom, he made almost no effort to identify concrete portents of danger.⁴⁵ He named no names. He confined himself to pre-nuptial imagery, never talking about the fruits of justification as progeny. And he never alluded, even in veiled terms, to specific outward manifestations of his opponents’ standing with God. Whatever he may have thought about the monstrous births, he did not reveal it to his congregation.⁴⁶

Two clergymen who initially supported Hutchinson and retained

⁴²Stoever, p. 46.

⁴³Stoever, p. 30 and *passim*.

⁴⁴Thomas Shepard, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins Opened and Applied* (originally issued in 1639), in *The Works of Thomas Shepard*, ed. John A. Albro (3 vols.; 1853; rpt. New York, 1967), II, 1–634.

⁴⁵One of the few exceptions was “the Pequot hornet.” Shepard, II, 378.

⁴⁶This sermon cycle was published by his son and namesake (minister in Charlestown) and Jonathan Mitchell (his successor in Cambridge), who obviously had an opportunity to edit out such pointed references. They claimed, however, not to have done so. Shepard, II, 9. Shepard’s autobiography and journal contain no reference to the monsters. *God’s Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety, Being the Autobiography & Journal of Thomas Shepard*, ed. Michael McGiffert (Amherst, 1972).

some vestiges of Antinomian views (or at least a lingering animus against the Antinomians' antagonists) reacted differently. Although John Cotton⁴⁷ deserted Hutchinson in the fall of 1637 when she claimed to be acting on the basis of immediate revelation, he never really abandoned his conviction that outward and visible circumstances provide no evidence whatsoever of inward and spiritual grace.⁴⁸ Furthermore, given his insistence on the radical separation between nature and grace, he was not inclined to deal with special providences, particularly when they were alleged against his theological bedfellows.⁴⁹ As we have seen, he participated in the concealment of Dyer's monster. At the time of its discovery he testified to his belief that through the misbirth God was speaking only to the Dyers and the witnesses of Mary's confinement, not to the community at large—a position that exasperated those among his colleagues who saw it as a special providence.⁵⁰ He did not subsequently discuss the Dyer monster, either in print or (as far as we know) orally.

But with the Hutchinson monster Cotton was forced to behave otherwise. Embarrassed by his initial support of her and anxious to confirm his reconciliation with his ministerial colleagues and their lay allies, he was the first to spread the news in Boston about the strange occurrence in Rhode Island. Apparently paraphrasing a report from Hutchinson's husband, he announced in public on lecture day (as Winthrop recorded in his journal) that she had passed "twenty-seven several lumps of man's seed, without any alteration or mixture of any thing from the woman." He proceeded to surmise "that it might signify her error in denying inherent righteousness, but that all was Christ in us, and nothing of ours in our faith, love, etc." This announcement led Winthrop to obtain the written and then oral evidence from Dr. Clarke that in some details contradicted Cotton's information and impelled Cotton to retract his statement.⁵¹ Chastened, perhaps, by the consequences of his uncharacteristic foray into the interpretation of monsters, Cotton never again re-

⁴⁷Cotton was educated at Trinity and Emmanuel Colleges, Cambridge; he proceeded B.A. in 1602/3 and M.A. in 1606. Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, pp. 6-15.

⁴⁸Stoever, "A Faire and Easie Way . . .," pp. 34-57.

⁴⁹Ziff (*Career*, pp. 166-67) shows that Cotton was "consistently reluctant" to engage in the interpretation of petty special providences in the natural world.

⁵⁰Ziff, p. 168.

⁵¹Winthrop, *History*, I, 326-28.

ferred to Hutchinson’s misbirth, though a decade later he wrote at some length about her errors.⁵²

John Wheelwright⁵³ also parted theological company with Hutchinson, but he never permanently made peace with the ruling establishment in Boston. When he was banished in November 1637, he departed for New Hampshire, where he found the settlement of Exeter. Shortly before that region came under Massachusetts Bay’s control, he retreated again, this time to Maine. After seven years had mitigated somewhat the bitterness between him and his antagonists, he negotiated for and received a cancellation of his sentence of banishment. About the time that it was lifted, however, he learned of the publication of *A Short Story*. Angered and afraid that his relatives and friends in England would think that he had turned heretical and rebellious, he wrote a rejoinder, *Mercurius Americanus*, published in London in 1645.⁵⁴ Two of his most vociferous counterattacks were on the way in which Dyer’s and Hutchinson’s monsters were presented.

Wheelwright began with the *Short Story* description of Hutchinson’s misbirth, which he believed had been written by Weld.⁵⁵ His first target was the unreliability of the author’s information:

I question not his learning, &c. but I admire his certainty, or rather impudence: did the man obstetricate? We know (as he saith of himself), *he sometimes hangs*

⁵²Cotton, *Way*, in *John Cotton on the Churches*, pp. 238–40; also in Hall, pp. 411–13.

⁵³Wheelwright studied at Sidney College, Cambridge, taking his B.A. in 1614/15 and his M.A. in 1618. James Truslow Adams, “John Wheelwright,” *Dictionary of American Biography*, XX, 62.

⁵⁴The full title is *Mercurius Americanus, Mr. Welds his Antitype, or Massachusetts great Apologie examined, Being Observations upon a Paper styled, A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Familists, Libertines &c. which infected the Churches of NEW-ENGLAND, &c. Wherein some parties therein concerned are vindicated, and the truth generally cleared* (London, 1645). Subsequent references to this work are in parentheses in the text (italics in the original). Background information is from *John Wheelwright: His Writings*, ed. Charles H. Bell, Publications of the Prince Society, No. 9 (1876; rpt. New York, n.d.), pp. 29–53. Wheelwright later stated (pp. 58–60) that he had also responded to the Scottish Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford’s assertion that the two misbirths helped to lead the misguided colonists “a little nearer to *Presbyterial Government*.” Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist* (London, 1648), pp. 177, 181–82 (italics in the original). Wheelwright’s rejoinder has not survived.

⁵⁵Naturally enough, since the title page of *A Short Story* did not bear Winthrop’s name, and Weld’s introduction did not make it clear that Winthrop was the author. Many writers on the Antinomian controversy have attributed the work to Weld, but as Hall (pp. 199–200) has conclusively shown, Winthrop was solely responsible for all but the preface.

up brats against the Sun, but surely he medled not with these, reserved I suppose, &c. unlesse he had it from him [Winthrop] who is so *eccentricke* in his motion (as one saith of him). But what if he had it from any then present? will that suffice to make him so confident, as thereupon to take occasion to ingage, and magnifie Divine direction, and derive this not known by him to be a truth, from the God of truth? (pp. 195–196)

The *Short Story's* interpretation of Hutchinson's monster annoyed Wheelwright even more than the description. He diagnosed it, only in part facetiously, as the result of a fevered brain that produced "phanatique meditations." The "thirty monsters" did not in fact correspond to the number of Hutchinson's errors. Worse, the author fell into logical and scientific inconsistencies both gross and impious:

. . . Yet [the author's] Notion is impertinent, for he brings in defects of Nature, amongst defects of Manners. All that he can say (if he were so acute) is, that those are these *reductive*, and as they are effects of sin. A poore plea, by the same reason he may under the same title discover all the weaknesses and naturall imperfections either of man or of woman, and fix a kind of morality upon them. But he will say perhaps, that this birth was an extraordinary defect: It avails nothing, unlesse he will either raise it to a miracle, or at the least prove a supernaturall remission of the *formative virtue* in her. That will require a most accurate physicall inspection which I think his learning will not reach, although (for ought I can see) his modesty might: for he tels us of women *purging and vomiting*, what if the distemper we usually call Cholera did for the present oppresse those women? must it needs be proclaimed? Must it needs be in print? (pp. 196–197)

Although Wheelwright dealt more briefly with Dyer's monster, he approached it in much the same way. Skeptical about the description, he was especially indignant about what he saw as a misdirected search for an explanation:

. . . Whether the conceptions of her brain had influence upon the conceptions of her wombe, or those of the wombe upon those of the brain, I will not discusse. This *discoverer* inclines to the former, I think he might by a deeper search have reached the naturall cause, whilst he in his *Method* telling us her penaltie, judges her for her errours immediately sentenced from heaven: in which passage, as in many others in his book, a spirit of censure and malice is pregnant. (p. 198)

As a theologian, Wheelwright in the long run was no more sympathetic to the Antinomians than Winthrop, Weld, Shepard, or Cotton. In metaphorically applied alchemical language consonant with his title, he referred to Hutchinson and her followers as

spiritual *Chymists*, extracting the sweetness of all into freedom of conscience, doubting not but that they might find all in that *Elixar*; but as no *Chymist* had yet got it, so they were many of them deceived; which when they surveyed, and see the result, it might trouble the weaker, and through melancholy fumes dispose them to strange fancies in Divinity. (p. 197)

Yet he totally rejected the theological interpretation of the two monsters as divinely caused manifestations of their mothers' doctrinal errors. In his view, they were neither special providences intended by God to warn His people nor signs of their bearers' reprobation, but rather events that called for a natural explanation.

The last American contemporary to comment on the Antinomian monsters was, like the first, a layman; but he abandoned the restraint exercised by Winthrop and the theologians. Edward Johnson, a joiner and substantial property-owner who had accompanied Winthrop to Massachusetts Bay in 1630, returned from a five-year sojourn in his native Kent just in time to experience the Antinomian controversy. His history of the colony, written in 1650–1651 and published anonymously in London late in 1653, is generally known as *The Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England*.⁵⁶ As his title indicates, Johnson—like Weld and certain English proponents of “orthodoxy”⁵⁷—was anxious to show that God had providentially delivered His people from the Antinomian peril. Writing at a considerable chronological distance from the drama, in which he had not played a central role, he felt free to introduce additional considerations that shed a lurid light on the events of 1637–1638. The Antinomian heresy, he claimed, was fomented by a conspiracy of women in league with the Devil:

. . . This Master-piece of Womens wit [Hutchinson] drew many Disciples after her, and to that end boldly insinuated her selfe into the favour of none of the meanest, being also backed with the Sorcery of a second [Jane Hawkins], who had much converse with the Devill by her own confession, and did, to the admiration of those that heard her, utter many speeches in the Latine Tongue, as it were in a trance. This Woman was wonted to give drinckes to other Women

⁵⁶J. Franklin Jameson, Introduction to Edward Johnson, *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, 1628–1651* (New York, 1910), pp. 3–10.

⁵⁷For example, Robert Baillie, *Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time* (London, 1645), p. 61; and Rutherford, pp. 181–82. Rutherford's treatise was directed primarily against English Familist preachers, some of whom may have influenced Hutchinson and Cotton. On this broader context of Antinomianism, see Stoever, “*A Faire and Easie Way . . .*” pp. 167–168, 234n.; and J. F. Maclear, “Anne Hutchinson and the Mortalist Heresy,” *New England Quarterly*, 54 (1981), 74–103.

to cause them to conceive, how they wrought I know not, but sure there were Monsters borne not long after, as you shall hear in the following History.⁵⁸

Fulfilling this promise later in his narrative, Johnson noted with punitive relish that Hutchinson's death at the hands of Indians in 1643 was not "the first loud speaking hand of God against them." It had been preceded by "a very fearfull Monster, that another of these women brought forth." The Machiavellian conspirators had sought to conceal it, "but the Lord brought it to light, setting forth the view of their monstrous Errors in this prodigious birth."⁵⁹

The reactions of Winthrop, Weld, Cotton, Wheelwright, and Johnson to the monstrous births cannot be arranged in simple categories. Discussing them in chronological order, we have certainly not encountered "progress" from "ignorance" to "truth": the last account, Johnson's, is by all odds the least "enlightened." Those sympathetic with Antinomianism do not emerge as a more "sensible" and "modern" group than their opponents: Cotton rashly, albeit temporarily, engaged in a form of interpretation much more "superstitious" and "unscientific" than Winthrop's. A distinction between university-trained theologians and laymen is not useful: Winthrop's position, ironically, has more in common with Wheelwright's than with Johnson's. Nor is it tenable to make Wheelwright the hero of this episode. To be sure, his combative confutation differs both in tone and in content from the others. At first sight his position appears consonant with the recent trend in medical teratology inaugurated by Paré. He called for verification of all the available evidence—but his opponent Winthrop had already tried his best to do so. He raised the possibility of alternative explanations and insisted that investigators must search for natural causes—but so, to a certain extent, had Win-

⁵⁸Johnson, *Providence*, pp. 132–133. He used witchcraft terminology elsewhere (p. 173) in describing the downfall of the Antinomians: "They [their errors] have never stood up in a living manner among us since, but sometimes like Wizards to peepe and mutter out of ground, fit for such people to resort unto, as will goe from the living to the dead." Johnson undoubtedly knew that Hawkins had been banished from the colony in 1641, at least in part on suspicion of witchcraft in connection with her practice of midwifery. Winthrop, *History*, I, 316n, 317; *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1628–1686*, ed. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff (5 vols. in 6; Boston, 1853–54), I, 224, 329. On the widespread belief that midwives had dangerous connections with the powers of evil, see Thomas Rogers Forbes, *The Midwife and the Witch* (New Haven, 1966); and Barker-Benfield, pp. 82–83.

⁵⁹Johnson, *Providence*, p. 187; on p. 153 he calls the Antinomians' activities "a Machiavilian Plot."

throp when he made further inquiries about the Hutchinson misbirth in order to counter Cotton's public statement. Wheelwright's distinctiveness, therefore, is only superficial. Although he utilized the Aristotelian categories of current scientific method and the more specific, recently coined vocabulary of iatrochemistry, his intention was not to enter the lists in support of a scientific paradigm of explanation. Rather, he was led by concrete personal and polemical motives to identify anomalies in the account of Winthrop as edited and interpreted by Weld.

Not only Wheelwright but all the other American interpreters of the Dyer and Hutchinson monsters were engaged in a complex battle conducted on several fronts. They had simultaneously to bear in mind the religious and political dynamics within their "city upon a hill," the reactions of allies in the mother country (itself rent by conflict) to events in Massachusetts Bay, and the bounds within which they believed God wished them to operate in relating occurrences in the natural world to the divine soteriological plan. Guidance provided by Europeans—erudite teratologists and theologians and recorders of monsters and prodigies writing for a popular market—was ultimately of limited use to them. Each had perforce to work out his own solution compatible with his own distinctively American circumstances.

The same would be the case in the next generation. In London in the late 1650's, the Reverend Matthew Poole, reviving a suggestion of Francis Bacon, proposed an international effort to collect fully documented "providences," which were to be sent to him at Syon College for processing—a clear parallel, as Thomas has noted, to the procedure soon to be adopted by the Royal Society and other scientific academies.⁶⁰ Although Poole's project was stillborn, it inspired a spate of writing on special providences in New England. But when Increase Mather and others took up the task of describing and determining the significance of monsters and prodigies, they did not merely follow the lead of English and Continental mentors in natural philosophy or theology. Of course, they wished to help confute Hobbesian mechanistic influences. They also, however, intended to address a specifically American problem: to revivify religious ardor

⁶⁰Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 94–95; Park and Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions," pp. 43–51.

by reminding their “sluggish generation” of God’s special concern for His chosen people in New England.⁶¹

Thus what may seem to be a peripheral aspect of the Antinomian controversy serves in fact as a small object lesson in intellectual history. Neither the scientific nor the theological dimensions of this episode can be fully understood if one adopts an exclusively “internalist” mode of explanation. Whether or not Winthrop had read Fenton or Wheelwright had read Paré, for example, is somewhat beside the point. Nor is an “externalist” causal approach wholly satisfactory. To argue that the opponents of the Antinomians were agents of a dominant class seeking to consolidate its hegemony over a subordinate group, women,⁶² would not help to clarify the differences in the anti-Antinomians’ positions on the Dyer and Hutchinson monsters. What is interesting and significant is the interplay between “erudite” and “popular” traditions and between personal inclinations and public exigencies in a particular time and place.

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⁶¹Miller, *New England Mind*, pp. 228–31. Increase Mather’s *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* (Boston, 1684) includes several examples from the early history of Massachusetts Bay, but not the Dyer and Hutchinson monsters.

⁶²Koehler (“Case,” *Search for Power*) comes close to making this assertion, but the deliberately exaggerated Gramscian vocabulary here is mine.