Puer barbatus: Precocious Puberty in Early Modern Medicine

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ABSTRACT

During early modernity, medico-legal concerns with timing puberty gave way to physiological and medical-hygienic concerns with pubertal timing. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical-jurisprudential tracts isolated rare cases of conception before the legal marriage age. Scattered reports of “monstrously” early menarche and “prodigious” male puberty were offered from the latter half of the seventeenth century. Tied to excess heat, moisture, plethora and climate since antiquity, in the second half of the eighteenth century pubertal timing attracted sustained commentary regarding the purported role of social stressors, from novel-reading to diet and trousers. Both the known variability and strikingly outlying instances of pubertal timing thus provided an inroad to unravelling such perennial explanatory devices as temperament, constitution, and lifestyle. Despite and in part because of its explanatory significance in early modern physiology, leading eighteenth-century nosologists did not yet itemize precocious puberty. One precocious boy described in the 1740s, the Willingham Prodigy, provided the best documented early medical and public response. Formal nosological interest followed by the 1760s, initially under Haller’s heading of excessive growth (incrementum nimium, tied to enhanced circulation) and only much later under Meckel the Younger’s heading of premature development (vorschnelle Entwicklung).

KEYWORDS: precocious puberty, pubertas praecox, early modern science, premature development

Among seventeenth-century medical curiosities one finds, next to bearded ladies, bearded boys (pusiones barbati, puelli barbati, pueri barbati). How to classify these seeming cases of early pubescence proved challenging. Pierre Borel mentioned one “boy giant” (puer gigas) growing to adult size in eighteen months, with no mention of pubescence, and another, “born pubescent” — ostensibly different phenomena.¹

¹ Pierre Borel, Historiarum, & observationum medicophysicarum, centurie 4 (Paris: Joannes Billaine [etc.], 1656), 45-46, 59.
While only some data are available on medieval menarche age, tales of children born with secondary sexual hair (*infantes barbati*) were widely recited by the sixteenth century, at times associated with bearded women (*mulieres barbata*), in discussions of medically exceptional beards. Cited by Abraham Zacuto in 1637 is one *puella barbata*, a “girl aged three years old, handsome and beautiful, with a large beard, whose whole body was very hairy” and made a public spectacle. But hypertrichotic, giant, hermaphroditic and morbibly obese children (such as *niña giganta* or *la Monstrua Eugenia Martínez Vallejo*, immortalized by painter Juan Carreño de Miranda), all known to have been publicly displayed, did not clearly speak to sexual precocity. Pertinent cases were being filed under the heading of hair marvels (*mirabilia capillorum*), and it is only by the early 1700s that bearded babies can be found grouped, rather, with more recent examples of overall protracted manhood and womanhood in early childhood. These nosological shifts animated a reframing of pubertal timing as a physiological explanans, and of unseasonable puberty as a category of medical attention.

Fleshing out the pertinence of Foucault’s famed take on early modern monstrosity to premature puberty in early nineteenth-century (and later) Anglophone medical discourse, Pinto and Macleod have recently proposed that precocious children here presented ambiguously as “benign monsters [...] neither unlawful nor biologically

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2 "Medieval records are remarkably quiet about biological puberty." Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 111; but see Darrel W. Amundsen and Carol Jean Diers, “The Age of Menarche in Medieval Europe,” *Human Biology* 45 (1973): 363-369. Definitions varied; medieval male *pubertas* was not ritualized but legally defined (as the pubescence age of 14) though Byzantine male puberty’s “defining characteristic” was rather the passage from beardlessness to initial, or full, beard growth. Herbert Moller, “The Accelerated Development of Youth: Beard Growth as a Biological Marker,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987): 748-762; and, for general reference, *Coming of Age in Byzantium: Adolescence and Society*, ed. Despoina Ariantzi (Boston: De Gruyter, 2018). More generally on human growth in the ancient through Renaissance appraisal, see James Mourilyan Tanner, *A History of the Study of Human Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), ch. 1 and 2.

3 Johann Schenck von Grafenberg, *Observationum medicarum, rararum, novarum, admirabilium, et monstrarum*. Lib. VII (Frankfurt: Hoffmann, 1609), 6, referring to Egyptian physician Haly Eben Rodan (Rodohan Aegyptius, 998–1061 AD), a Latin translation of his work entitled *Commentarius in artem parvam Galeni* (Venice, 1486). Available to me was a reprint: *Antiqua Thegni Galeni translatio cu[m] co[m]m[en]. Haly Rodoan* ([Pavia: Jacob de Burgo Franco, 1510]), here 60v.

4 Zacatus Lusitanus, *Praxis medica admiranda* (Lyon: Johannes Antonius Huguetan, 1637), 504. A virilized, bearded girl nine years of age is shown in Magnus Hirschfeld, *Sexualpathologie. Teil I: Geschlechtliche Entwicklungsstorungen mit besonderer Beruecksichtigung der Onanie* (Bonn: Marcus & Weber, 1917), 74-75.

5 M. A. Katritzky, “‘A Wonderfull Monster Borne in Germany’: Hairy Girls in Medieval and Early Modern German Book, Court and Performance Culture,” *German Life and Letters* 67 (2014): 467-480. An artistic impression of a hair-covered boy (*puer villosus*), with bear’s claws, reported in 1282, is found in Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Monstrorum historia* (Bologna: [Giovanni Battista Ferroni], 1642), 581.

6 Caspar Schott, *Physica curiosa, sive mirabilia naturae et artis*. Lib. XII (Würzburg: Johann Andreas Endter, 1662), 573, cf. 559-560. The medieval term *citiberbes* (which with precocious beards) is not used in these denotations.

7 Franz Christian Paullini, *Observationes medico-physicae, rare, selectae & curiosae* (Leipzig: Widow of J. Heinich, 1706), 355; Christian Friedrich Garmann, *De miraculis mortuorum, libri tres* (Dresden/Leipzig: Johann Christoph Zimmermann, 1709), 38-39; Martin Schurig, *Spermatoeologia historico-medica* (Frankfurt: Beck, 1720), 9.
dysfunctional subjects.” As they show for the Anglophone record, various early nineteenth-century physicians were able to claim clinical familiarity with pediatric patients, as they followed up, in cases autopsied, demographed, and attempted to supervise sexual unseasonableness. These activities illustrate the progressive grip initially especially on the female pubescent body, at multiple disciplinary and biopolitical levels. The pioneering work into menarcheal timing by its first Scottish medical demographer John Roberton historically converged with Quetelet’s early child growth studies applying statistics to anthropometry, for instance, but betrayed Roberton’s reformist interventions in what had hitherto been accounts of racial and climatological determination of pubertal timing. Roberton traded these for a pre-Darwinian speculative suggestion of social selection (in India, at least, where unmarried postpubescent girls would remain unmarried), fueling his prospect of a worldwide Christianization of female reproductive lives. A soon international scene of statistical probing of menarche ensued, as a result of which, from the late 1840s onward, menarcheal timing became a prominent medical inroad to various politicizations of child labor and factory work conditions. Although this did not immediately present anchors for intervention, it laid the groundwork for various problematizations of pubertal timing as health concern seen in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Pinto and Macleod’s qualified Foucauldian reading explicitly invites both qualification and refined periodicization. Reports of egregiously precocious puberty remained occasional until the late nineteenth century, but quite a few antedate 1800. Much of nineteenth-century framing of sexual temporality reiterated Enlightenment re-framing of premodern conceptions of the *cursus aetatis* (stages of life). Medieval concepts of precocity were mostly moral and negative, cued by the obscure but seemingly exemplary *tempestivitas* (seasonableness) of Christ’s life. An emergent prism not properly historicized by Pinto and Macleod, however, “development” became a critical

8 Pedro Pinto and Catriona Ida Macleod, *A Genealogy of Puberty Science: Monsters, Abnormals, and Everyone Else* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 40.
9 Tanner, *A History*, chap. 6.
10 It may be noted in passing that on a number of points, Roberton’s epochal etiological and social welfare concerns had earlier been addressed by orientalist Christian Friedrich von Schnurrer and Prussian explorer Alexander von Humboldt, among others. Liberal physician Peter Gaskell also raised concerns about sexual precocity in factory life of the early 1830s.
11 Early cases, mostly nineteenth-century, were mined by, among others, Dietrich Wilhelm Heinrich Busch, *Das Geschlechtsleben des Weibes*, vol. 4 (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1843), 457-465; C. F. Reuter, “Ueber Praecocitat der Menstruation in psychologischer und kranioskopischer Hinsicht,” *Medizinische Jahrbücher für das Herzogthum Nassau* [Wiesbaden] 5 (1846): 1-47; A[olph] Kussmaul, “Ueber geschlechtliche Frühreife,” *Würzburger medicinische Zeitschrift* 3 (1862): 321-360; Pierre Carrière, *De la précocité physique et intellectuelle chez l’homme* (Paris: Imprimerie de la Faculté de médecine L. Boyer, 1901); W[illiam] Roger Williams, “Precocious Sexual Development: With Abstracts of Over One Hundred Authentic Cases,” *British Gynaecological Journal* 18 (1902): 85-114, and R[udolf] Neurath, “Die vorzeitige Geschlechtsentwicklung,” *Ergebnisse der inneren Medizin*, 4 (1909): 46-81 (esp. 46-49). More popular early listings are found in such works as A[uguste] Debay, *Histoire des métamorphoses et des monstruosités de l’espèce humaine* (Paris: Garnier frères, 1845), 289-294; H. [Hermann Heinrich] Ploss, *Das Weib in der Natur- und Völkerkunde: anthropologische Studien*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Th. Grieben, 1885), 154-159.
12 J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 139, 144-150.
Enlightenment concept, informing but also troubling the progressively formulaic reifications of the “sex instinct” (“venereal appetite”) with its purported innate directions and goals, the “reproductive faculty” alongside many others, the sympathies and antipathies, and sex/gender differentiation. This sponsored prominent nosological attention to what were called “developmental disorders” (Entwickelungskrankheiten) by century’s end. Already circa 1750, precocity was a problem not of kinds (child-adult, say) but of degree and various (physical, moral, mental) entangled, and at times divergent, lines of development. Abnormal puberty was thus set to highlight various emergent questions of developmental normativity and componentiality, coming out of an era preoccupied with legal definitions of maturity but with growing medical and pedagogical interests in adjudicating in maturational nuances. Richard Sha has ventured that, during Romanticism, increasingly, questions of “the descent of the testicle and premature puberty begin to complicate the ontological solidity of sex, suggesting that the work of differentiation was an ongoing biological process, sometimes uncompleted until thirteen years of age or not at all [. . .] a lengthy process that could go dreadfully wrong.” More specifically, early puberty and premature pregnancy became explicit concerns already in mid-eighteenth-century works on child health and hygiene such as by French physicians Pierre Brouzet (1722–1773) and Joseph Raulin (1708–1784). Puberty here figured as a matter of medico-hygienic scrutiny and parental surveillance, well in advance of systematic scientific approaches to pubertal timing (in Britain, circa 1830). “Fathers and mothers must be very careful to divert all that could accelerate the puberty of their children,” wrote Geneva physician Jacques Ballexserd (1726–1774) already in 1762. In his epochal Émile, published that same year, Rousseau agreed that environmental factors in physiological timing had been underestimated, stressing a role for surveillance and supervision. Thus cued, the co-emergent notion of sex-instinctual development (Entwicklung der Geschlechtstriebe), specifically its presumed ubiquitous prematurity, went on to become a major German Enlightenment fixture.

Was early modern precocity indeed dreaded, as Sha suggests? How monstrous was it, as Pinto and Macleod have asked, before becoming abnormal circa 1830? An early

13 “Thus, the development of the parts intended for generation is announced by several signs & mainly by the first impressions of the venereal appetite; whence follows the sense [sentiment] which makes known, in each individual, the difference of the two sexes, in a more characterized manner than it has been seen until then.” [Jean Ferapie Dufieu], “Générations,” in Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, vol. 7 (Paris: Briasson, 1757), 558-574, here 560-561.
14 Richard C. Sha, Perverse Romanticism: Aesthetics and Sexuality in Britain, 1750–1832 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 109, 107.
15 [Pierre] Brouzet, Essai sur l’éducation médicinale des enfants et sur leurs maladies, vol. 1 (Paris: Cavelier & fils, 1754), 342-371, esp. 370-371; Joseph Raulin, De la conservation des enfants: ou les moyens de les fortifier, de les préserver & guérir des maladies, depuis l’instant de leurs existence jusqu’à l’âge de puberté, vol. 1 (Paris: Merlin, 1768), 210-216; also 2nd ed. (Paris: Fr. Didot jr., 1779).
16 Jacques Ballexserd, Dissertation sur l’éducation physique des enfants, depuis leur naissance jusqu’à l’âge de puberty: ouvrage qui a remporté le prix le 21 mai 1762, à la Société Hollandoise des Sciences (Paris: Vallat-la-Chapelle, libraire, 1762), 236-237.
17 J. J. [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau, Émile, ou De l’éducation, vol. 2 (The Hague: Jean Néaulme, 1762), 186-191.
18 Johann Gottfried Herder, Aelteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts, vol. 2 (Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1776), 102.
modern figure constituting the domain of the abnormal, Foucault’s monster embodied breaching of nature’s laws while invoking the wrath of a legal interdiction of civil or religious proportions. But unlike hermaphrodites, precocious children are absent from Pierre Boaistuau’s *Histoires prodigieuses* (1560), Ambroise Paré’s *Monstres et Prodiges* (1573), and comparable tracts. In line, they are essentially absent from the voluminous literature on medieval and early modern monsters. Problematizing a periodization of monstrous unseasonableness in the Foucauldian sense of undercutting legal and natural law, Pinto and Macleod observe that legal problems presented by sexual maturity preceding the legal marriage age remained either implicit or theoretical in the earliest of nineteenth-century reports. Numerous such problems did transpire, to be sure, apropos some of the hundreds of cases described internationally over the next century, but they were rarely central, and they often pertained, for instance, to the criminality of adult partners in cases of premature pregnancies. Precocity, by now, was hardly the nature-defying and law-defying hybridity of species, genders, or sexes marking classical monsters such as hermaphrodites. It rather posed comparable physiological questions as suggested by the eunuch. Speaking to “pubertal development,” there had been ubiquitous early modern acknowledgments, and some tentative explanations, of variation in pubertal timing within the realms of the natural and the emergent ethnographic records. Deliberating whether children should be received into religion, Thomas Aquinas already maintained that “what is called the age of puberty” (*qui dicuntur anni pubertatis*) varied “according to the varied disposition[s] of nature” (*secundum diversam dispositionem naturae*). 19 It thus varied, specified a mid-sixteenth-century physician, “according to that the nature and complexion of the bodie [Naturen unnd Complex der Körper] is full of bloud, strong, suffereth much labour, is quiet, and [i.e., or] fœble.” 20 Menarche (*Anfang der Blumen*) varied as did women’s nature, or as trees, variably nourished by sunlight and moist soil. 21 Yet menstruation occurring before age twelve was “virtually unprecedented, & monstri loco,” one author opined. 22 Gross bodily precocity spoke variably to the ancient, generic categories of Prodigia & Miracula and of *lusus naturae* (freak of nature), indeed well into the nineteenth century. The absence of a common medical formulation of premature puberty as late as circa 1800 rendered it enduringly vulnerable to public demonology in Central Europe, most strikingly in female cases. An 1802 report from Poland relates that parents of a precocious 3½-year-old twin girl, “a monstrous child exceeding all expectation,” delayed medical care as the common man would rather seek counsel from exorcists, “of whom there is one in every convent,” than resort to physicians—until the girl’s facial hirsutism started to “pique the curiosity of all

19 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (1265–1274), 2-2, q. 189, a.5, responddeo.
20 Christoph Wirsung, *Arzney Buch* (1568), 417; tr.: *Praxis medicinae universalis* (London: Edmund Bollifant, 1598), here 476.
21 Hippolytus Guarinonius, *Die Grewel der Verwüstung menschlichen Geschlechts* (Ingolstadt: Andreas Angermayr, 1610), 893.
22 Levinus Lemnius; trans. Jacobus Horst, *Occulta naturae miracula* […] (Leipzig: Steinman, 1588), 818. This was seemingly added by Horst.
inhabitants.”23 An 1821 report from Hungary substantiated this: a menstruating two-year-old with breast formation (“Catharina Simon,” followed up till age six) was held by a mob for “a monster that produced evil spirits.” When first seen, her grandmother had been “determined to bring the child on the following day to an old woman, who is in the call to be a sorceress (saga), so that the same, through her magic, might swap the changeling by means of spell (incantatione), and to reclaim the really born child from the evil spirits.”24

One encounters precocious children, typically pubescent three-year-olds, marketed as “freaks” as late as the late nineteenth century—though not many. One boy not yet four years old was exhibited for money in hospitals around 1828.25 For a same-aged boy born in 1836, Hyman Barber, plans were made in 1840 to exhibit him to the public and men of science.26 Another boy, three-year-old Anderson, was exhibited in Mobile (Alabama) in 1843.27 A four-year-old precocious girl was exhibited in Madrid in 1846.28 Arnold “the Bearded Boy, or, the Man in Miniature” Mockeritz, another “singular freak of nature” born 24 September 1853, in Culm, Prussia, was brought to America to be exhibited, at age three, in various parts of the East Coast in early 1857.29 He died on 7 July before age four, on returning from a New York theatre. He weighed 130 pounds; autopsy revealed “a large cancerous mass growing from the right kidney, weighing about two pounds.”30 Three-year-old “Baby Woman” Sophia Gantz was exhibited in theatres in Chicago and New York in 1868-1869, entertaining “hundreds of people daily.”31 Lastly, a Texan gentleman is mentioned in 1891 newspapers stating “he has a boy monstrosity whom he wants to exhibit”—a pubescent three-year-old—and inquiring whether a state license was necessary for that purpose.32

These rare, sensationalized cases poorly reflect contemporaneous medical appraisal, and, moreover, pose the broader question of representations of sexual precocity before 1800. Below I aim to extend Pinto and Macleod’s genealogical focus on the nineteenth century, to a factual discussion of the international early modern medical literature.

Unseasonable puberty was of occasional public and medical note around Cambridge

23 [Joseph] Bevern and [Gottlieb Erdmann] Römhild, “Beschreibung eines zweijährigen durch eine zu frühzeitige Entwicklung monstroßen Kindes nebst Sectionsbericht,” *Journal der practischen Arzneykunde und Wundarzneykunde* 14 (1802): 141-149, here 142.
24 Von Lenhossek, “Geschichte,” 69.
25 “Precocious Puberty,” *London Medical Gazette* 2, 29 (1828): 96n.
26 “Lusus Naturae!” *Burlington Free Press* 13, 667, 3 April 1840, 2.
27 A. Lopez, “Case of Remarkable Precocity in a Male,” *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 5 (April 1843): 500-501; idem, *The Medical Times* [London] 8, 193 (3 June 1843): 152.
28 Pedro Mata, *Tratado de medicina y cirugia legal*. 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Madrid: Imprenta de Suarez, 1846), 31-32.
29 “Arnold the Bearded Boy,” *The National Magazine* 11 (July 1857): 20, including a picture, ostensibly after a daguerreotype. A twelve-year-old bearded boy, the purported son of a Swiss bearded lady, is reported as being exhibited in the *Notes and Queries* (3rd Ser.) of 11 May 1867, 392.
30 “Sudden Death of the Bearded Boy,” *New York Herald*, 9 July 1857, 2.
31 *Chicago Tribune* (25 June 1868): 4; *Watertown Republican*, 7 July 1869, 1; W.M. Weber, “The Baby-Woman,” *California Medical Journal* 4 (1883): 14-15.
32 “A Monstrosity,” *Fort Worth Gazette*, 17 September 1891, 6; “Singular Freak of Nature,” *Fort Worth Gazette*, 6 October 1891, 4.
already in the mid-1740s, for instance. One of the first cases of precocious puberty to be discussed in the modern English natural science annals is that of Thomas Hall (31 October 1741–3 September 1747), the “Willingham Prodigy” who had developed pubertal signs at age nine months. The boy was first seen in August 1744 and described in a 3 October letter from the village’s Rev. Edmund Almond to Fellow of the Royal Society of London Philip Miller (1691–1771), read at the Society’s 8 November meeting. An extract of it was published in the Society’s *Philosophical Transactions*, together with a letter concerning the case by Thomas Dawkes, a surgeon at St. Ives near Huntingdon, to Fellow of the Royal Society Richard Mead (1673–1754), read 10 January 1745. 33 An extract reappeared in 1746, in a section discussing a miscellaneous number of “monsters” including “dwarfs,” conjoined twins and congenital deformities. 34 Brief references are found in *The London Magazine*, 35 as well as in German and French translated accounts. 36 Dawkes, a minor author on midwifery, went on to draft a 66-page memoir on the case in late 1747 after the boy’s death (from what seemed unrelated causes) at the age of five, addressed to the Fellows of the Royal Society. 37 Extracts of it appeared in various magazines, demonstrating the case’s sustained public interest. 38

Dawkes only cited two ancient anecdotes as presenting comparable—and seemingly earliest—cases: by Pliny, and by Craterus as cited by Phlegon of Tralles. 39 These references, often recited, established a link with ancient monstrosity, but at the same

33 “Some Account of the Gigantic Boy at Willingham near Cambridge”; “Letter from Mr. Tho[mas] Dawkes, Surgeon at Huntington [rectius: Huntingdon], to Dr. Mead, F. R. S. & Med. Reg. concerning the same Child,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 43, 475 (January-March 1745): 249-254.
34 “Monsters,” *The Philosophical Transactions* [London] 10, Pt. 3 (1756): 1205-1207.
35 *The London Magazine*, and *Monthly Chronologer* 15 (March 1746): 140.
36 “Einige Nachrichten von einem riesenmaßigen Knaben zu Willingham bey Cambridge,” *Hamburgisches Magazine* 1 (1747): 223-228; “Vollständige Einleitung in die Monatschriften der Deutschen” 1 (1747): 405-406; Transactions philosophiques de la Société Royale de Londres 8 (1761): 12-16.
37 T[omas] Dawkes, *Prodigium Willinghamense: Or, Authentic Memoirs of the More Remarkable Passages in the Life of a Boy, Born at Willingham, Near Cambridge, October 31, 1741; Who, Before he was Three Years old, was Three Feet, Eight Inches high, And had the Marks of Puberty* (London: C. Davis, 1747).
38 “Farther Account of the Willingham Boy,” *London Magazine*, February 1748, 84-86; “Old Age in Infancy,” *The Scots Magazine* 10 (February 1748): 74-75; *The Polite Politician* (London) 1 (1751): 58-62; *A Choice Collection of Original Essays on Various and Entertaining Subjects* (London: T. Thompson, 1748), 58-62; Edmund Carter, *The History of the Country of Cambridge, &c.* (Cambridge: Author, 1753), 298-302.
39 Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 7.7; 77–79 AD): “We find it stated by the historians, that the son of Euthymenes of Salamis had grown to be three cubits [four feet] in height, at the age of three years; that he was slow of gait and dull of comprehension; that at that age he had attained puberty even, and his voice had become strong, like that of a man. […] I myself, not very long ago, was witness to exactly similar appearances, with the exception of the state of puberty, in a son of Cornelius Tacitus, a member of the equestrian order, and procurator of Belgic Gaul. The Greeks call such children as these, ἐκτραπελοὶ [ektrapeloi or ektrapeloi, monsters, freaks]; we have no name for them in Latin.” “Craterus [321–c263 BC], brother of king Antigonius [II Gonatas], writes that he knew a certain man, who within the space of seven years had been a child, a young man, a husband, and an old man, and had married a wife, died, and left offspring.” Phlegon Trallianus, *Quae exstant, opuscula: De rebus mirabilibus* (Lugdunum Batavorum [Leiden]: Isaac Elzevir, 1620), 96 (c. xxxii).
time, the case presented a novel medical frame of inquiry, measurement, and follow-up echoed in early nineteenth-century cases. Throughout the eighteenth century, moreover, there was already less a concept of monstrous precocity, than an array of physiological, ethnographic, and medical-hygienic allusions to acute variability in pubertal timing.

**EARLY MODERN TALES OF SEXUAL PREOCITY**

Early pubertal timing long mattered legally. Early modern interest in pubertal timing was largely confined to medico-legal commentaries on distinctions of legal maturity in ancient Roman, canon and civil law. Marriages contracted before Ætas pubertatis were, technically, void. The most extensive disputation and difference of opinion pertained to whether boys nearing this age (Ætas pubertati proxima) were doli capaces, that is, deemed capable of forming the intent to commit a crime. The curiosa of precocious—by legal definition out-of-wedlock—conception, young rapists, and sexually active girls who were not viripotentes (i.e., before age twelve) thus rendered untimely puberty of theoretical juridical note, all the more because in ancient law, pubertas, and especially Ætas pubertati proxima, had remained widely disputed entities.

Unseasonable puberty could assume a sense of monstrosity in the “juridico-biological domain,” in Foucault’s terms, when arguably driving a wedge between man’s and nature’s laws, or rather, stipulations of pubertas ex annorum numero or ex annis (i.e., as fixed age, such as per civil law) and pubertas ex potentia generandi or ex habitu corporis (i.e., as reflecting the “Habitude of the Body, and the Faculty of Generation”—as per canon law). Sensibility to pubertal timing variability divided two traditions in defining legal socio-sexual majority.

Thus sensitized, a speciation of precocious conception as medical curiosum dates back to at least the mid-sixteenth century, where it can be found in consilia, discussions of matrimonial law and rape law, and subsequently in tracts of medical curiosities.

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40 E.g., Paul Zacchias, _Quæstiones medico-legales_ (Rome: Andrea Brugiotti, 1621), 1:27-39; Johann Peter von Ludewig, _De Aetate legitima puberum et maiorum_ (Amsterdam: Grunert, 1725); Matthew Hale, _Historia Placitorum Corona: The History of the Pleas of the Crown_. 2 Vols. (In the Savoy: E. and R. Nutt, and R. Gosling for F. Gyles, 1736), 1:17-20.

41 Lauren Caldwell, _Roman Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 113.

42 Michel Foucault, _Les Anormaux. Cours au Collège de France, 1974–1975_, ed. François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1999), 51.

43 E.g., André Tiraqueau, _De legibus connubialibus et iure maritali_ (Paris: Jacques Kerver, 1546), 51; Pedro de Plaza y Moraza, _Epitome delictorum, causarumque, criminalium, ex iure Pontificio Regio et Caesareo: Lib. I_ (Venice: Hieronymus Scotus, 1573), 563; Tomás Sánchez de Córdoba, _Disputationes de sancto matrimonii sacramento_, vol. 2 (Antwerp: Martin Nutius, 1607), 410-411; and much later in, e.g., Johann Wilhelm Kleinau, _Disputatio politica de societate conjugalii […]_ (Leipzig: Christian Fick, 1672), §13 (note m); Henry Swinburne, _A Treatise of Spousals, Or Matrimonial Contracts: Wherein All the Questions Relating to that Subject are Ingeniously Debated and Resolved_ (London: Robert Clavell, 1686), 52-54.

44 E.g., Heinrich Kornmann, _Enucleate questiones, de virginitum statu ac iure_ (Jena: Philip Wagner, 1612), 146-147.

45 E.g., a section entitled “Sera, & cita Generatio admiranda,” in Marcello Donati, _De medica historia mirabili libri sex_ (Mantua: Franciscus Osana, 1586), 221-223; Johannes Schenck von Grafenberg, _Observationum
Several tracts offered early deliberations on the legally salient possibility of prepubertal conception; Joubert mentions from personal acquaintance one famed case (Jeanne de Peiré) of an abortion before age ten. According to one endlessly reprinted anecdote, “In the Annals of Swabia [Annales aevi Suevici], a girl, who was only eight years old, gave birth to a boy in 1278.” Another invariably cited account of a boy who at age ten got his nurse with child goes back to one of Jerome’s epistles, dated 398 AD, responding to a question posed by Vitalis: “Is Scripture credible when it tells us that Solomon and Ahaz became fathers at the age of eleven?” In an identical scenario, widely though wrongly attributed to Pope Gregory I, the boy was nine. A contextual note here, always omitted in medical references, is that Jerome referred to divine intervention: the woman’s pregnancy occurred “by the permission of the Lord, in order to publicize her shame, she who, in defiance of God and against the ordinary laws of nature, had abused the simplicity of this child.” The case, then, did not document aberrant pubescence; to the contrary, it held up for public denunciation the “unnatural” situation of child abuse. The monstrousness of the boy’s precocity here de-monstrated the woman’s moral mon-strosity and lack of discretion, if one is to honor Canguilhem’s nuance.

Seventeenth-century accounts of male precocity made for equally short but rarely clearly moralistic stories, such as the chronicled tale of a bearded infant reported in 1251: “Monstrous. In the village of Badon, located in between Lyon and Vienne, Gaul, a bearded baby was born, and his beard hair, head, chest and genitals were as sizeable as had he been born thirty years earlier; he lived almost two years.” A “monstrous” Dwarf briefly described in The Spanish Mandeuile of Miracles had “brought from his mothers wombe, the haire of his secretes, as if he had beene 20. yeres old. At 7. yeres of age, his chin was couered with a beard, at 10. yeres he begat a child, and was in the chiefest strength of his age as other men at 30. and which is more, is not at this present aboue
Although the author alluded generally to the maternal “force of imagination” as capable of engendering monsters, cited observation was not granted such an interpretation, and precocity here remained an anecdotal back-story to the monstrosity of dwarfism. Later descriptive reports discussed a bearded seven-month-old boy born in 1667 who in 1672 had the body and “natural parts” of a man of thirty, and often displayed “movements in the natural parts not made by ordinary children.” One other bearded three-year-old boy, born 1673, was reported in 1686 by Prague professor of physics Dobrzensky von Schwarzbuck (1623–1697), a credible source. In another well-cited report dated 1695, a magistrate of Besançon (a French diocese) communicated to the Académie royale des sciences that there was near Mont Saint Claude a child, then ten years old, “who at the age of six months began to walk; at four he seemed capable of generation; at seven he had a beard, and the size of a man." This matches a 1688 report of a 3 1/2–year-old boy named Henri Joseph Martelet who then was “like a man of 40 years old,” embarrassing his mother so much as not even wanting him to be seen in the village, “let alone going to exhibit him in Paris.” In Villavelha, in the Kingdom of Galicia, yet another two-year-old boy was sighted with a moustache and secondary sexual hair in the expected places, though not a real beard; his mother, however, said he had been born bearded. Aetiology was of little concern: in none of these short descriptions (maternal) moral transgression was insinuated.

Precocious menstruation made for a much less conspicuous, separate category of miscellaneous curiosity, in any case before the mid-eighteenth century. Neonatal precocity cases on record. It is much more suggestive, for instance, than Louis II of Hungary, said to have been born prematurely “without epidermis” but who reportedly “grew quickly” (citō adoleverit) and had “a Beard too soon” (Præter ætatem barbam adeptus) (Johannes Dubravius, Historia Boemica [...], lib. XXXII [Basel: Petrus Perna, 1575], 312).

"Extrait d'une Lettre écrite par Monsieur Gerberon Medecin de S. Calais, & communiquée à l'Auteur de ces Memoires: Sur un Enfant prodigieux qui avoit de la barbe, & d'autres parties comme un dreyzyjahriger Mensch gehabt," Hamburgisches Magazin 22, pt. 2 (1759): 115-118.

"De puer tertio ætatis suæ anno barbato," Miscellanea curiosa sive Ephemeridum medico-physicarum Germanicum Academiae naturæ curiosorum, 4 (Neuremberg: V. J. Trescheri, 1686), 318; cf. bibliographic rejoinders on pp. 348 and 203 (appendix). Johann Zahn, Speculae physico-mathematico-historica. Tomus III (Nuremberg: Johann Christoph Lochner, 1696), 73.

"Lettre de Monsieur Boisot, Abbé de Saint Vincent, à Monsieur l'Abbé Nicaise Chanoine de la sainte Chapelle de Dijon. De Besançon, le 6. Août 1688," Journal des sc¸avans, 6 September 1688, 232-234, here 233.

Francisco da Fonseca Henriques, Apiarium medico-chymicum, chyrurgicum & pharmaceuticum [...]

E.g., Thomas Bartholin, Historiarum anatomicarum rariorum centuria 3. & 4. (Copenhagen, 1657), 184-185; Johann Doläus, "Præcci mensium fluxu," Miscellanea curiosa medico-physica Academiae naturæ curiosorum 6/7 (1677): 91; Théophile Bonet, Medicina septentrionalis collatitia, vol. 2 (Geneva: Leonard

Antonio de Torquemada, Jardin de flores curiosas [...] (Antwerp: Juan Corderio, 1575), 34, quoting from the 1600 translation by Lewis Lewkenor and Ferdinand Walker. This may be one of the first bona fide male precocity cases on record. It is much more suggestive, for instance, than Louis II of Hungary, said to have been born prematurely “without epidermis” but who reportedly "grew quickly" (citō adoleverit) and had "a Beard too soon" (Præter ætatem barbam adeptus) (Johannes Dubravius, Historia Boemica [...], lib. XXXII [Basel: Petrus Perna, 1575], 312).
vaginal bleeding was commonly seen, and cases of precocious menarche or pubarche in girls must have been easily hidden from the unwelcome gaze. Commenting on a 1683 account of a menstruating seven-year-old girl of a sanguineous temperament, the editor writes that multiple such cases had been reported in German medical outlets, “rendering it less remarkable.” More remarkable were travellers’ reports of such ages being the norm, which had indeed rendered early menarche an ancient through early modern ethnographic curiosum. As Phlegon drawing from Megasthenes’ (c. 350–c. 290 BC) *Indica* (which is lost), Arrian’s *Indica* (2nd c. CE) on ancient India held that, with purported nubility at age seven, “the fruits ripen earlier in this country than elsewhere,” and it was widely echoed in sixteenth-century Europe that an Indian girl “submits to men [patiuntur viros]” as young as age nine. A century onward, travellers including Jean de Thévenot (1633–1667) confirmed that in parts of India, girls “can enjoy Man, at the age of eight or nine years, and have Children at ten.” There evidently were curiosities within curiosities as well. German traveling nobleman Mandelslo briefly discussed a case of a Mogol girl near Agra, India, who “at two years of age had Breasts as big as those of any Nurse,” menstruated by age three and conceived a son at age six. The outlandish case was still being debated over two centuries later. Indian female precocity, perennially conflated with child betrothal and marriage, animated anthropological and gynaecological fascinations to the end of the nineteenth century, as it had in classical antiquity. Mandelslo cited Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) observing that “Mandi [ . . . ] women are capable of bearing children in the seventh year of their age, and become old at forty [while] Among the Calingæ, a nation also of India, the women conceive at five years of age, and do not live beyond their eighth year”—a
feat of orientalist hyperbole doubted by others, reported Martin Schurig by the early 1700s, in any case still helping little in explaining European, or oriental, outliers. A contemporaneous author just briefly mentioned apropos a case of neonatal genital bleeding and adult feminine physique by age four that made her seem “perfectly nubile”: “The girls of the East Indies who the Travelers assure beget children at 9 years of age, do not create wonder anymore.” Wonder had become commonplace.

The fragile crux in these accounts—the date of birth of putative mothers—explains the invariably ostentatious efforts of eighteenth-century authors on precocity to authenticate children’s date of birth. Authenticated reports before the eighteenth century are very few, however, and understandably often involve pregnancy. Physician Savonarola (1385–1468) only briefly mentioned the miraculum, seen by Marsilius of Padua (c.1275–c.1342), of an impregnated nine-year-old, which Savonarola rated rare and, echoing ancient through medieval consensus, as foreshadowing a short life. The 1684 volume of the Journal des sc¸avans reports a precocious delivery, in 1681, by an eight-year-old girl, submitted apropos an earlier, equally “extraordinary” report of a prodigious nonuplets (nine births) case. In the most well-known case study, a Swiss girl called Anne Mummathaler or Mummenthaler (1751–1816) reported in December 1759 and later by Von Haller, had menstruated by age two and given stillbirth at age eight (reportedly from an uncle, who fled to escape execution).

**TWO PUBERTIES**

Haller still offered little aetiological reflection for the occasion. During the eighteenth century one finds little connection between what was supposed to be extreme precocity

65 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 7.2. For classical sources on menarche age in India, compare B. Datta and D. Gupta, “The Age at Menarche in Classical India,” *Annals of Human Biology* 8 (1981): 351-359.
66 *Histoire de l’Académie royale des sciences, Année MDCVIII* (1709): 52. The same is maintained by A.J.S.D. [Joseph-Aignan Sigaud de Lafond], *Dictionnaire des merveilles de la nature*, vol. 1 (Paris: Rue et hôtel Serpente, 1781), 250. In translation: Wunder der Natur: eine Sammlung außerordentlicher und merkwürdiger Erscheinungen und Begebenheiten in der ganzen Körperwelt, zum Unterricht und Vergnügen nach alphabetischer Ordnung (Leipzig: Johann Samuel Heins, 1782). The 1709 report is of a French girl born 8 February 1704, said to have menstruated from eight hours after delivery (“or three months, according to other reports”) and who near age four, had “breasts and the generative parts like a girl of 18 years, so that she appeared perfectly nubile.”
67 Giovanni Michele Savonarola, *Practica medicinae: sive de egritudinibus* (Venice: Bonetus Locatellus, 1497), tr. 6, chap. 21, rub. 6.
68 “Extrait d’une lettre contenant un fait fort particulier, écrite de Bologne par . . . & communiquée à l’Auteur du Journal,” *Journal des sc¸avans*, 15 May 1684, 186.
69 Schmidt, “Lettre écrite à M. J. d’Annoni,” *Acta Helvetica* 4 (1760): 167-168. Repr. in *Collection de différentes pieces concernant la chirurgie, l’anatomie et la médecine pratique, extraites principalement des ouvrages étrangers*, vol. 2 (Paris: Didot jr., 1761), 3-5; Gottlieb Emanuel von Haller, “Nachricht von einem in ihrem neunten Jahre geschwängerten Mädgen,” [Blumenbach’s] *Medizinische Bibliothek*, vol. 1, pt. 3 (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1784), 558-560. The girl’s “parts, proportional to her size, are like those of a girl of seventeen to eighteen. Her mother assures that her daughter has had her monthlies constantly from the age of two, until the time of her pregnancy. If I have called this fact unique, I say it only in relation to our country [Switzerland], where so far we have not had such examples” (Schmidt, 168). Further reference in *Journal encyclopédique* 5, pt. 2 (July 1760): 127; *Bibliothe`que des sciences, et des beaux arts* 13 (1760): 487; *The London Chronicle* 8, 608 (5-8 November 1760): 483.
of the Orient (India, especially) and occasional remarkable reports in the medical annals. Environmental and constitutional factors could hardly explain egregious instances of disease (maladie), and few etiological invocations of temperament are seen in medical discussions of precocity cases. In 1773 surgeon-obstetrician Louis François Luc de Lignac (1740–1809) distinguished factitious (factice) and natural types of puberty and of its untimeliness (puberté accélérée/puberté précoce). The former type of precocity "owes its birth to dangerous company, to obscene books, to succulent aliments, and all that is calculated to inflame the imagination." This suggestive notion of deux pubértes one sees plagiarized in subsequent work by physician Pierre Boyveau-Laffecteur (1743–1812) and echoed by German evangelical theologian Karl Gottfried Bauer (1765–1842) in distinguishing natural from unnatural pubertal and "sex-instinctive" timing. One indeed sees this widely echoed in German Enlightenment medicine. By now, then, puberty was neither a straightforwardly natural nor a mono-causal phenomenon, and called for a discriminating approach of its plural components and triggers. As earlier de Buffon, de Lignac stressed latitudinal, inter-sexual, and individual variation in timing, but also reminded that the beard (prima lanugo) was neither ethnically universal nor contemporaneous with pubescence, and that menstruation alone, too, did not make puberty. Among some “savages,” menses did not occur at all, he observed.

What allowed late eighteenth-century authors to dichotomize pubertal timing factors in cited proto- or quasi-nosological fashion, between natural and morally deviant, unnatural determination? In line with ancient authorities on pubertal timing, including Oribasius, seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century texts linked both the initial menstrum profluvium (menstruation) and profusio seminis variably to plethora, heat and moisture. In the Galenic reading, the mechanics of menarche were considered consequential to general (systematic) plethora, which, in the Boerhaavian account, entailed “Juices being no longer employed towards the Growth or Increase of the Body,” and

70 As admits Daignan: Tableau, 101n1.
71 These quasi-technical terms—forward puberty/precocious puberty, in translation—are unique to this work. [Louis François Luc] de Lignac, De l’homme et de la femme, considérés physiquement dans l’état du mariage, vol. 2 (Lille: J. B. Henry, 1772), 227-253; idem, new ed., vol. 2 (Lille, 1773), 103-120; tr.: A Physical View of Man and Woman in a State of Marriage: With Anatomical Engravings, vol. 2 (London: Vernor & Hood, 1798), 117-141, here 117-118.
72 [Pierre] Boyveau Laffecteur, Essai sur les maladies physiques et morales des femmes (Paris: Author, n.d. [1798?]), 149 et seq.; Laffecteur, Traité des maladies physiques et morales des femmes, 2nd ed. (Paris: Author, n.d. [1802?]), 128 et seq. The latter was republished as late as 1819.
73 Bauer, Über die Mittel, 30-43.
74 E.g., [Johann Heinrich Jung], “Beweis des Herrn Prof Jung zu Lautern für den Bürger und Landmann der Kaffe für die Gesundheit für die Haushaltung und für das ganze Land ein höchst schädliches Getränke sey,” Archiv für den Menschen und Bürger in allen Verhältinßen […] [Leipzig] 5 (1782): 347-404, esp. 362-363; I. H. G. Schlegel, "Fragment Ueber die physische Erziehung des Menschen," Neues Archiv für die Geburtshilfe, Frauenzimmer- und Kinderkrankheiten mit Hinsicht auf die Physiologie, Diätetik und Chirurgie 1 (1798): 516-532, esp. 527.
75 E.g., Nicholas Robinson, A New Theory of Physick and Diseases, Founded on the Principles of the Newtonian Philosophy (London: C. Rivington [etc.], 1725), 74; Nicolas Venette, De la generation de l’homme ou tableau de l’amour conjugal: Divisé en 4 parties (Cologne: Claude Joly, 1716), 107. On antiquity see Emiel Eyben, “Antiquity’s View of Puberty,” Latomus 31, Fasc. 3 (1972): 677-697, esp. 696; Tanner, A History, 11.
thus accumulating in the relatively uncompressed and accommodating uterus and breasts. Thomas Simson (1696–1764) tentatively explained three menstrual episodes in a seven-year-old girl as an effect of partial plethora, rather: temporary compression of neighbouring vessels causing the uterus to receive a larger share of blood. Thomas Simson, *The System of the Womb, with a Particular Account of the Menses, Independent of a Plethora: to which are Subjoin’d, a Few Observations Relating to Cold, and Its Effects Upon the Body* (Edinburgh: Robert Fleming, 1729), 38.

Heat would explain why in India girls menstruated at age seven, opined German physician Theodorus Craanen. Craanen, *Tractatus physico-medicus*, 707.

“Bearded infants” and children “born” pubescent were explained in terms of excess heat in utero. Neonatal and infant menstruation were alternatively explained by “sudden passion” in a pregnant woman. According to Henry Cufé, in young children, “the abundance of their natural moisture hindreth the too speedy prevailing of the heat, by resisting its action.” Of children who are “too ripe witted,” then, it would have to be presumed “that from the beginning they had but little moisture, over which their heat soone prevailed.” Therapeutic options were cooling. In an 1683 etiological comment on a five-year-old menstruating girl, Scottish physician in Montpellier Daniel Duncan (1649–1735) attributed the symptom to plethora due to a combination of temperament and abuse of salt and alkaline spices. “The refreshing remedies she used not only tempered her bowels/womb [entailles], but they also moderated the impetuousity of the blood which was going to bump up, so to speak, at the door of the womb [matrice].” Duncan later elaborated his case, in what may be the most extensive deliberation on menarcheal timing and precocity in the seventeenth century.

Francis Bacon, similarly, tied pubertal physiology to innate heat (thought responsive to exercise) and moisture (avoidance of dry food), while Gottfried Voigt considered female pubescence to outpace the male equivalent for reasons of surplus moisture. John Marten, too, considered pubescence to proceed from “the encrease of heat in the girls.”
the Natural heat of the Thorax,” rendering reports of prematurity implausible: “We have read indeed of Boys that have got Children at eight or nine Years of Age, and of Girls of ten or twelve, that have conceive’d and born them, from their Robust and Vigorous Natures; which I cannot tell how to believe; for the weakness as well as coldness of the Parts, at that time, besides other Occurrences relating to them, cannot possibly, if I know anything, afford Matter sufficient for Generation.”87

If this seemed to qualify the emergent moral hygienics of pubescence, pertinence of the foregoing to male cases seemed overall slim. Known for his critical reflections on mechanistic models of plethora, Théophile de Bordeu discussed “three young Satyrs,” “children already more than pubescent” and apparently preoccupied masturbators at the young ages ten or eleven, to point out the “imperious and tyrannical effect” of the “seminal organism” on the entire nervous and psychic being.88 Though not explaining precocity, this engaged a proto-endocrinological theory of male pubertal growth: a surplus of *semen masculinum*, as an in principle “salutary balm” (*baume salutaire*), worked its way to the blood and the humours, “nobilitating” them and “augmenting their movements and fluidity.”89

The humoral and caloric determination of pubertal, especially menarcheal, timing was thus ubiquitously considered to render it responsive to diet, climate, venery, and customs (*les mœurs, genre de vie; hygiene; Sitten*), temperament, constitution (inborn disposition), and race—as one English clergyman summed up in 1627: “several constitutions, educations, diet, situation of Clymates and countryes, and the like.”90 Timing

87 John Marten, *Gonosologium Novum or a New System of all the Secret Infirmities and Diseases, Natural, Accidental, and Venereal in Men and Women* (London, 1709), 91.
88 Théophile de Bordeu, *Recherches sur les maladies chroniques […]* (Paris: Ruault, 1775), 416-417.
89 Thomas Wharton, *Adenographia, sive glandularum totius corporis descripto* (Amsterdam: Johannes Ravenstein, 1659), 187; Richard Russell, *The Oconomy of Nature in Acute and Chronical Diseases of the Glands* (London: J. & J. Rivington, 1755), 94-95; [anon.], “Sur la voix des Eunuques,” *Journal économique* (August 1755), 154-157.
90 G.H. [George Hakewill], *An Apologie of the Power and Providence of God in the Government of the World* (Oxford: John Lichfield & William Turner, 1627), 162. See further [David Dickson], *An Essay on the Possibility and Probability of a Child’s being born Alive, and live, in the latter end of the fifth Solar, or in the beginning of the sixth lunar month* (Edinburgh: David Scot, 1712), 69-71; John Friend, *Emmenologia […]* (Guillelmum Cavelier filium, 1727), 55-56, 75-85; Charles de Secondat baron de Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, vol. 1 (Geneva: Barrillot & fils, 1748), 411-412; Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon (comte de), *Histoire naturelle, génerale et particulièr, avec la description du Cabinet du Roy* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1750), 2:489-490, and Appendix, Vol. 4 (1777), 381-383; pertinent passage repr.: “Pubert,” in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. [Denis Diderot] (Neufchastel: Samuel Faulche & Co., 1751), 13:549-550; Rousseau, *Émile*; Jean-Ferapie Dufieu, *Dictionnaire raisonné d’anatomie et de physiologie*, vol. 2 (Paris: Vincent, 1766), 335 (entry on “regles”); de Lignac, *De l’homme et de la femme considérés physiquement dans l’état du mariage*, New ed., vol. 3 (Lille, 1773), 98ff.; Johann Christian Gottlieb Ackermann, *Ueber die Krankheiten der Gelehrten und die leichteste und sicherste Art sie abzuhalten und zu heilen* (Nuremberg: Martin Jacob Bauer, 1777), 267; Friedrich August Weber, *Onomatologia medico-practica: Encyklopädisches Handbuch für ausübende Aerzte in alphabetischer Ordnung*, vol. 3 (Nuremburg: Rasp, 1785), 1600-1608 (entry on ”Pubertas. Mannbarkeit”); Benjamin Moseley, *A Treatise on Tropical Diseases, and on the Climate of the West Indies* (London: T. Cadell, 1787), 59-61; Gerhard Wilhelm von Eicken, *Dissertatio medica de noxis ex prematura pubertate oriundis in physica educatione maximopare attendendis* (Jena, 1789); Karl Gottfried Bauer, *Über die Mittel dem Geschlechtstriebe eine unschädliche Richtung zu geben* (Leipzig: Crustius, 1791), 19-46, 92-99, 250-272; Thomas Denman, *An Introduction to the Practice of Midwifery*, vol. 1 (London: pr. for J. Johnson, 1794), 160-162; Johann...
difference between female and male pubescence was increasingly related to sex differences in physical build rather than in strict terms of temperature or moisture; still, mentioned factors were thought to be acutely interrelated: “the confluence of a thousand unfathomable causes.”

This left a wide open terrain for the disputation of the relative import of any specific factor, including moral and behavioural factors and interventions thought to influence temperament. Pubescence thus became the site at which the distinctness of customs, sexes, races, and temperaments was on display and revealed itself to the informed eye. At the same time it was a site where these forms of distinction would reveal their vulnerability to corruption both incidental and endemic.

Progressively in late eighteenth-century French exercises in natural history, the notions of puberté and tempérament experienced, in the pedagogical belabouring of their respective développement, a near synonymy. According to an entire book devoted to the problem, “Puberty is the epoch, where the temperament takes on the character it must have later on, as this is the time of growth; the one accompanies the other as one influences the other, for temperament hastens or delays puberty, and puberty strengthens temperament, alters or destroys it, according to whether it is well or badly directed.”

The premature body here became the facies of the adolescent’s unchecked sexual mobility or agency. According to one representative mid-eighteenth-century gynaecology tract: “It may happen that some Maids may have their Ordinaries in our Climate at the Age of ten or eleven Years; but this anticipated or premature flux is owing to the reading of obscene Books, unchast Touching, &c. for hereby the Subject becomes as it were a Woman before her due Time.”

Female pubertal timing was responsive to socializing with men, kissing and sexual encounters, physician Georg Friedrich Rall (1632–1670) already asserted. Clearly an etiological nuance between constitution and moral transgression already presented itself in this timeframe, as midwives Culpeper and Sharp agreed: “A child of eleven daies old had a bloody humor flowing from the Privities. Another of five years old had every month a moderate flux. Fernel reports that a Girl of eight years old had the Terms: but these are rare, and for the most part very lecherous, and short lived.”

Lechery was to be inferred, and which could only lead to speedy downfall.

Friedrich Blumenbach, De generis humani varietate native. 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1795), 239, 264-265; Friedrich Schnurrer, Geographische Nosologie; oder Die Lehre von den Veränderungen der Krankheiten in den verschiedenen Gegenden der Erde: in Verbindung mit physischer Geographie und Naturgeschichte des Menschen (Stuttgart: Johann Friedrich Steinkopf, 1813), 87-90.

91 Der Beischlaf: Eine phisiologische, historische und philosophische Darstellung, vol. 4 (Berlin: Ohmigke Jr., 1798), 16.

92 E.g., G[julioame] Daignan, Tableau des variétés de la vie humaine, vol. 1 (Paris: Author, 1786), 97-98, see also 65-70. The book saw a 1789 German translation entitled Schilderung der Veränderungen des menschlichen Lebens, oder von den Krankheiten des mannharten Alters.

93 Jean Astruc, A treatise on all the Diseases incident to women (London: M. Cooper, 1743), 52. Various alternative factors are mentioned in Astruc’s Traité des maladies des femmes, vol. 1 (Paris: P. Guillaume Cavelier, 1761), 72.

94 Georg Friedrich Rall, De generatione animalium disquisitio medico-physica in qua celeberrimorum virorum (Frankfurt: Melchior Klosemann, 1669), 164-165.

95 (Nicholas) Culpeper’s Directory for Midwives: Or, A Guide for Women, Pt. 2 (London: Peter Cole, 1662), 69 (paragraph “Of the Terms flowing too soon”); echoed in Jane Sharp, The Midwives Book; or, The
In many tracts the relationship between menstruation and “the venereal emotion” was figured as bidirectional. At pubescence, wrote Scottish physician John Brown (1735–1788),

the desire for coition, a stimulus, never experienced before, produces a com-
motion over the whole body; and, in preference to other parts, in the genitals of both sexes, in the female, over the whole region of the ovaria, womb, and va-
gina: By this stimulus, the uterus, its seat, being nearly incessantly solicited, is the more powerfully affected, the more there is of excitability, hitherto acted upon by no such stimulus, existing in the system.96

Brown’s “Brunonian” system of medicine sought to simplify aetiology to either over- or under-stimulation, including desire. As pertinent evidence he adduced the ob-
servation that “before puberty, and after the time of life when menstruation ceases (which are the two periods, at which the fitness for effective love has not yet commencing, or is now passed,) the menstrual discharge is constantly wanting.” Equally, however, “girls, who are of a forward growth, of great strength, and large limbs, and consequently sooner ripe for love, are also more early in menstruation.” 97 Direction of causality thus remained suspended between constitution, libido, an overarching eti-
ological role attributed to developmental excitability, and a teleology of “effective love.”

In response to French authors, late eighteenth-century German educational reform-
ers widely discussed the problem of premature sexual interest, a concept often poorly differentiated from that of premature puberty. The specter of “child-age mothers” (kindische Mütter) and “beardless fathers” (unbärtige Vater) was highlighted in all major works on social hygiene, often invoking the authority of Aristotle and Hippocrates to suggest that offspring from too young parents, as in animals, remain small, and that un-
ripe seeds were unfit for reproduction.98 To a myriad of nineteenth-century authorities, early puberty remained related to “too early excitement of the sex drive on account of corrupted phantasy, early dealings with the other sex” and in turn thought, as any develop-
mental disharmony, to endanger “the health of the whole future life.”99 A prize essay call was put out in 1787, asking explicitly for the causes and corollaries of what was al-
leged to be an unnaturally precocious and overactive sexual drive: “What are the causes in our legislation, state constitution, way of life, reading and education, for the procre-
ative urge to awake earlier, and to be stronger, than it should be according to the forces

96 Joannis Brunonis [John Brown], Elementa medicæ (Edinburgh: C. Elliot, 1780), 299-304; Brown, The Elements of Medicine [...], vol. 2 (London: J. Johnson, 1788), 185-190.
97 Brown, Elements, 2:189.
98 Johann Peter Frank, System einer vollständigen medicinischen Polizey, vol. 1 (Mannheim: C. F. Schwan, 1779), 242-246.
99 [Adolph Christian Heinrich] Henke, Ueber die Entwicklungen und Entwicklungs-Krankheiten des menschli-
chen Organismus: in sechs Vorlesungen (Nuremberg: Johann Leonard Schrag, 1814), 266.
of nature?”

Author of one of the price-winning responses, obstetrician Bernhard Christoph Faust (1755–1842) centralized the impact of ejaculation on the nervous system, with a specific role for premature spermarche: the timing of semen or the aura seminalis, associated with moral decay (Sittenverderbnis). To Faust, the body’s semen was a clockwork’s spring, its true drive: the boy ceases to be a child with its appearance. He fully acknowledged the protraction of male puberty insinuated by the essay call: the age of spermarche used to be 15 to 16 (or even 18), however it would have dropped to 10-12 in a generation’s time. This purported premature puberty would lead to seminal loss and overall bodily unbalance, stunting growth. The main culprits were boys’ trousers: his time’s new fashion. Faust’s thesis was thus a fanciful pivot around the eighteenth-century moral physiology of puberty, which had mostly focused on menarche. His proposal to ban trousers before age fourteen was widely discussed and translated though ultimately little successful: several authors elaborately disputed his etiological claims for a lack of evidence.

Grounding the German Enlightenment promotion of sexual precocity to a national emergency was ancient ethnology—illustrating how unpacked the notion of “sexual development” still was. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century physiology texts subscribed to a general connection of premature venery (Venus præmatura) to rapid aging and physical debilitation. The concept aspired to a medical and typological significance, dividing sexual indulgence into seasonal and premature modes of emergence. It goes back to an Aristotelian dictum specified to the male case and to reproductive costs, reminders of which can readily be found as of the early sixteenth century. In late eighteenth-century translation: “In males, premature venery seems to stunt the growth: the animal ought to be itself perfect before it is duly qualified to propagate its kind.”

Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) earlier wrote of the Germans: “Those who remain longest

100 The call appeared in Journal von und für Deutschland 4, pt. 1 (1787): 425-426; Journal für Prediger [Halle] 20, pt. 2 (1788): 185-186; Intelligenzblatt der Allgemeinen Literatur-Zeitung vom Jahre 1788, no. 6, 47-48; and Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek 78, pt. 2 (1788): 615.

101 Bernhard Christoph Faust, Wie der Geschlechtstrieb der Menschen in Ordnung zu bringen und wie die Menschen besser und glücklicher zu machen (Braunschweig: In der Schul-Buchhandlung, 1791), 15-16, 19-21; similar claim in Faust, Die Perioden des menschlichen Lebens (Berlin: Johann Friedrich Unger, 1794), 43-45, 65n35.

102 Faust, Wie der Geschlechtstrieb, 5, 15, 19.

103 Beyond various monographic rebuttals, see returns to a 23 July 1791, call for responses by German educator Rudolph Zacharias Becker (1752–1822) to Faust’s two key conjectures. R. Z. Becker, “Aufforderung an das deutsche Publikum zur Beherzigung und thätigen Beförderung einer das Wohl der Menschheit betreffenden Sache,” Der Anzeiger, no. 18, 23 July 1791, 121-126, here 123. The call co–appeared in Deutsche Zeitung oder Moralische Schilderungen der Menschen, Sitten und Staaten unserer Zeit (Gotha) 8, no. 32, 12 August 1791, 541-47, here 544. All discussion takes place in the former journal.

104 Josse Clicthove (1472?–1543), De vera Nobilitate, opusculum [etc.] (Paris: Henricus Stepansus, 1512), 43.

105 Aristotle, Politics. Here quoted from Aristotle’s Ethics and Politics, trans. John Gillies (London: A. Strahan, T. Cadell, W. Davis, 1797), Vol. 2, 245-246. Compare: “The physique of men is also supposed to be stunted in its growth, when intercourse is begun before the seed has finished its growth. (The seed, too, has its own period of growth—a period which it observes exactly, or with only a slight variation, in the course of its development.)” (Aristotle, Politics, trans. Ernest Barker [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], 291-292).
in chastity [“prepubertal”] win greatest praise among their kindred; some think that stature, some that strength and sinew are fortified thereby. Further, they deem it a most disgraceful thing to have had knowledge of a woman before the twentieth year [...] Among the ancient Germans, echoed Tacitus (c56–c120 AD) some 150 years onward (and possibly on the basis of no other sources) early marriage was unusual; hence “the youths partake late of the pleasures of love, and hence pass the age of puberty unexhausted.” Nineteenth-century translation of this passage was notably understood to be problematic, meriting pages of commentary. In any case, Tacitus was here understood to suggest that “Lust and premature venery deform body and mind” (Luxuria et praematura Venus corpus et animum debilitant), an opinion widely echoed and variably medically elaborated in early modern science. A similar opinion was attributed to Galen. Athenaeus of Naucratis (d. early third century AD), too, agreed that “nothing hinders the development of the mind and the body as much as premature and excessive sexual activity.” There was, in short, a pervasive ancient connection between venereal indulgence and pubertal growth, with precocity understood to forestall natural growth toward strength (and hence, cultural hegemony).

Part of a broader Enlightenment frowning on precocity, “two puberties” articulated an associated and equally culturally pervasive intuition of hurried development as both due to corruption and corrupting. Systematic research on menarcheal, let alone spermarchial, timing was not available until the end of the eighteenth century, however; moreover, it did not moderate these durable intuitions. The one study that qualifies here is that by Göttingen obstetrician Osiander (1759–1822) published in 1795, based on questions posed to 137 respondents. The study was poorly described but allowed the author to confirm roles for climate, a sanguineous temperament (based on one anecdotal case of menses at age eleven), a congenital “disposition to plethora” (based on purported sibling and mother-daughter correlations), and an extensive list of putative

106 "Qui diutissime impuberes permanserunt, maximam inter suos ferunt laudem: hoc ali staturam, ali vires nervosque confirmari putant. Intra annum vero viscemia feminae notitiam habuisse in turpissimis habent rebus; [...]" Julius Caesar, De Bello Gallico. Lib. VI, chap. XXI (C. Luli Caesaris Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum VII, ed. T. Rice Holmes. Oxon: Clarendon, 1914, 250).
107 Tanner, A History, 469n. Tanner points out that the idea originates from Aristotle’s Politics (ibid., 8).
108 "Sera juvenum venus, eoque inexhausta pubertas. Nec virgines festinantur. Eadem juventa, similis proceritas, pares valdaeqque miscentur; ac robora parentum liberi referunt." Tacitus, De Germania. Quoted from Alexander Adam, Roman Antiquities, Or, An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Romans (New York: Collins, Keese & Co., 1837), 184.
109 E.g., Edmund Henry Barker, Classical Recreation; Interprested with Much Biblical Criticism, vol. 1 (London: H.W. Lunn [etc.], 1812), 46-54; Edmund Henry Barker, The Germany of C. Cornelius Tacitus, from Passow’s Text; and the Agricola, from Brotier’s Text [...], 5th rev. ed. (Longman; Whittaker; Simpkin, 1836), 53-54n3-4; Tanner, A History, 467-69n.
110 Cornelius Tacitus, De Germania, ed. Matthias Weishaupt (Solothurn: Jent & Gassmann, 1844), 318.
111 "Veneris usus à prima aetate immodicus, libidinem auget, quod uata genitalia amplius patentia, maiorem ad se sanguinis copiam alliciant, ut inde coeundi cupiditas magis increscat." François Valleriola, Loci medicinae communes, tribus libris digesti [etc.] (Venice: Vincentium Valgrism, 1563), 455-456.
112 Aline Rousselle, Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity, trans. Felicia Pheasant (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), here 60. On Galen on sexual development, see 58-61.
113 Friedrich Benjamin Osiander, Denkwürdigkeiten für die Heilkunde und Geburtshülfe [...], vol. 2, pt. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoek-Ruprechtischen Verlag, 1795), 380-388.
mediating factors including “weak and voluptuous education; a sedentary, not very active way of life; love examples; early novel-reading; early caresses; any voluptuous and often repeated action.” Osiander also insinuated that some parents “knowingly accelerate the occurrence of the menses when they believe, apropos every morbidity of a girl nearing puberty [thought to suggest chlorosis, or greensickness], that they should do the utmost to bring about the menses, and to this end use all the driving means recommended to them by quacks [Ärztet] and midwives.” But morbid precocity was not encountered: “The three persons, with whom the monthly cleaning had already appeared in the twelfth year, looked well, and had grown well; two of them were especially tall and blond.”

THE WILLINGHAM PRODIGY AND CONTEMPORANEOUS CASES

Being the most extensively documented case study before 1800, and one of the few prospectively followed, the Willingham Prodigy case became and remained fairly well-known throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Late Victorian travel guides still highlighted the village’s fame. Anticipating a definitive nosological framing of precocious puberty, the Willingham prodigy provided an unusually rich account of a mid-century precocity case illustrative of only few coeval ones. Dawkes acknowledged the problem of credibility inhering in ancient texts about monsters, but offered his own laboriously documented case as a scientific rejoinder: “But this modern Instance, so fresh in Mine, and the Memory of the Thousands who have seen this wonderful Boy, should teach us, not to be too rash in censuring an Author, who entertains us with the Relation of Matters of the marvellous kind.”

Comparable cases in the Anglophone and continental literature had, indeed, not been many. Moreover, they did not serve to test or even to illustrate received humoral theories on pubertal timing variations. At least one precociously pubescent boy, reported in 1730, was characterized as a case of “monstrous” obesity. By the 1740s, one English case description of (virilising) precocity in a six-year-old girl named Hannah Taylor, published in 1695, had already drifted from medical memory. (It

114 Ibid., 383.
115 Ibid., 384.
116 Ibid., 381.
117 John Doran, Memories of Our Great Towns: With Anecdotic Gleanings Concerning Their Worthies and Their Oddities, 1860–1877 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1878), 50-52. Pertinent section appeared first in The Athenæum (London) 1822, 27 September 1862, 391-394.
118 Arthur George Hill, Tourist’s Guide to the County of Cambridge (London: Edward Stanford, 1882), 109.
119 Dawkes, Prodigium, preface.
120 Wolfgang Heinrich Schrey, “Pueri insolita magnitudo,” Acta physico-medica academiae Caesareae Leopoldinae-Carolinæ naturae curiosorum 2 (1730): 90-91.
121 Hen[ry] Sampson, “A Relation of one Hannah Taylor, a very Extraordinary Child of about six Years of Age, who in Face, etc. was as large as a full grown Woman; and of what appeared on the Dissection of her Body,” Philosophical Transactions [of the Royal Society of London] 19, no. 217 (October 1695): 80-82. James Paris du Plessis (1666–c1735), author of the 1730 manuscript A Short History of Human Prodigious and Monstrous Births of Dwarfs, Sleepers, Giants, Strong men, Hermaphrodites, Numerous Births, and extreme Old Age, &c. (BL MS Sloane 5246), claimed to have been “very intimately acquainted with her [Hannah] and her mother, who lived in St. Martin’s-lane, and sold chocolate when the girl dyed.”
notably reported of a dissection identifying an exceedingly large left kidney but normal “Testicles,” that is, ovaries.) The few recent French cases of precocity—such as that of a menstruating four-year-old with the body parts “of a twenty-year-old girl,” and another of “extraordinary growth”—made few waves in the English literature. 122 Of one precocious five-year-old boy (Charles Charlesworth) only very briefly reported in 1734, it was said that he had “Hair on his Body like a Man.”123 Another “Prodigy of Virility, of Three Years and Two Months of Age, perhaps One Month older” had been equally briefly reported to the Royal Society (on 22 December 1743) as seen in the Hospital at Rouen. 124 Of him the reader learns not much more than that “He has Hair only about the Privy Parts; the Penis is Three Inches long when there is no Erection, but of Six when there is any. They have found him to have Emissions.”125

Little interest was seen as yet in psychological development; in the last-mentioned case, the boy was apparently mentally challenged, “practicing just about the exercises that may be demanded of a poorly trained dog.” A contemporaneous case is that of Noël Fichet (born 19 March 1729, near Falaise, Normandy) who showed pubescence at age two. His growth measurements were reported as normalized when briefly followed up in 1741.126 Commenting on his decursus, member of the Académie Royale Claude Joseph Geoffroy (1685–1752) opined that “the young farmer may well have abused his premature temperament [abusé de son tempérament prématuré]” (or, in an English translation, “had made too free an [sic] use of his early manhood”). 127 Here, bodily and psychic sexuality had been notably out of step, leading one unnamed author to briefly speculate:

“A Prodigy Hunter,” All the Year Round: A Weekly Journal 6, no. 140 (28 December 1861): 331-334, at 333.

122 Mercure de France (October 1728): 2268; “Extrait d’une Lettre écrite de Gand par Madame la Baronne de P... le 27. Octobre 1735 au sujet de la croissance extraordinaire d’un Enfant,” Mercure de France (November 1735): 2462-2463.

123 The Gentleman’s Magazine, Or, Monthly Intelligencer 4, December 1734, 636.

124 “Part of a Letter from M. Geoffroy, F.R.S. and Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Paris, to Sir Hans Sloane, Bart., late President of the Royal Society, concerning a Child of a monstrous Size,” Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London 42 (1742-1743): 627; Histoire de l’Académie royale des sciences (1744): 13; brief reference on this “very big child” in Nathanael Gottfried Leske, Auserlesene Abhandlungen, praktischen und chirurgischen Inhaltus, aus den philosophischen Transaktionen und Sammlungen der Jahre 1719 bis 1744, Pt. 2 (Lübeck/Leipzig: Johann Gottfried Donatus, 1775), 354. Compare Johannes Baar and Malte H. Stoffregen, “Ein vergessenes Zeugnis des adrenogenitalen Syndroms. Luigi De Crecchios Beschreibung eines weiblichen Pseudohermaphroditen (1865),” Sudhoff’s Archiv 90 (2006): 29-74, esp. 29n5.

125 “Monsters,” The Philosophical Transactions 9 (1747): 304-318, here 317.

126 Histoire de l’Académie Royale des Sciences: année 1736 (1739): 55-56; année 1739 (1741): 3; année 1741 (1744): 21-22; The London Magazine 34 (March 1765): 120. Likely the same boy (accompanied by an inhabitant from Séés, also in Normandy; said to be age 6 years 3 months in April 1736) was reported in Die Neue Europäische Fama 13 (1736): 1-60 (see 59-60) to have a beard and the semblance of “a person of 30 years.” The father had his age authenticated; “The King and Queen have greatly admired this birth [in Versailles], and the [Royal] Academy of Sciences, too, is breaking its head over seeking out the causes of this rapid growth.” His parents could look forward to “immortal fame, but also gain great reward” if they put him on display, the author suggests. If this was the Fichet boy, this was not to be.

127 Southwell, Medical Essays, 3:82.
This Child, already a Man by his bodily strength, is only a Child by his spirit. He has no more advanced than his peers of his age, and their childish little games give him as much pleasure as them. We shall not be much surprised on reflection that the growth of the mind consists in a number of ideas acquired through use and experience, which necessitates a long time spent, instead of that the increase of the body and the increase of its forces is by a continual addition of matter, which some singular chances may render more prompt and abundant. A little peasant must come out of the infancy of the mind later than does another child, to whom at the same time a good education furnishes without comparison more ideas, and yet how many of these well-educated children perpetually remain children!  

Dawkes’s attempt to frame his own case in the familiar categories of giants and dwarfs (the public called the boy “young Giant,” or “Willingham Wonder”) was similarly frustrated, noting that given an apparent “Discrimen in his Growth” during his later sickness, “instead of being a Giant, he [Thomas] might have turn’d out a kind of Dwarf” had he lived on. But it had been mention of the “Lanugo on the Pubes” that proved most incredible to a number of notables Dawkes tried to impress, and to whom he eventually showed the boy. Almond wrote of the Willingham boy that “The Report of him has brought People far and near to see him,” though by the age of two, according to Dawkes, as yet “He is not made a public Shew of, but walks about, and plays in common with other Children.” He had shown “the marks of puberty” since about nine months old, causing “the utmost uneasiness” in his parents, who kept it secret until age two “when it could no longer remain in Privacy.” He eventually developed “long and strong Whiskers, of a dark-brown Colour.” Dawkes later reported that the boy was definitely made “a publick Spectacle […] carried from Place to Place, and exposed to publick View,” so much so that he was unavailable for medical follow-up, ostensibly for at least a year. “Before he came to Huntingdon, he had been made a public Shew of at Cambridge, St. Edmundsbury, &c. and afterwards [sic] continued to be shewn about in the same Manner […]” Moreover, he was “frequently debauched with Wine, and

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128 Histoire de l’Academie, 55; [Francois] Planque, Bibliothèque choisie de Médecine, tirée des ouvrages périodiques, tant Francois qu’Etrangers, vol. 1 (Paris: D’Houry, 1748), 459-460, here 460.  
129 Dawkes, Prodigium, 15, 25, 41.  
130 Ibid., 15-16.  
131 “Some Account,” 253.  
132 Dawkes, Prodigium, 51, 24.  
133 Ibid., 23; The Polite Politician [London] 1 (1751): 60. A later case (“young Everitt”) of “an extraordinary large child […] excites a greater degree of curiosity [than had a large sibling], of which a father intends to avail himself, by carrying the child up to London, and making a public shew of him” (The Gentleman’s Magazine, and Historical Chronicle [London] 50 [1780]: 126-127; co-appearing in The Scots Magazine 42 [March 1780]: 118-119; reprinted in A Selection of Curious Articles from the Gentleman’s Magazine, ed. John Walker. 3rd ed., vol. 2 [London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814], 519-21). Eventually, his mother “made a considerable sum of money by admitting the public to see him at one shilling each person. She continued to exhibit him at various public houses and private lodgings in different parts of the metropolis for about six months, but finding at length, the child in itself was not sufficiently attractive, she joined forces with a dwarf […]” (George Smeeton, Biographia Curiosa [London:
other inebriating Liquors, which the Unthinking among the Croud of Wonderers, would be apt to entertain him with.”

Dawkes occasionally followed up on the boy, tabularized various biometrics taken at August 1744 and November 1746 visits, including penile length and circumference, testicular size, and (on the second occasion) “Length of a Lock of the Lanugo, clipp’d off, and extended on a Rule.” Essential growth measurements were also made in June 1747, informing a prototypical growth chart. The author innovatively included a to-
ken psychological and sexological assessment in 1746, visiting the boy for physical measure-
ment updates (to which the latter was bribed by money and, at this occasion, the promise of a new outfit) and to inform himself of “the Passions of his Mind, his Genius, and Improvement, in Knowledge.” He specifically commented on the faculties of mind: understanding, memory, genius, temper and disposition, and improvement of knowledge. This early exercise in biometry and developmental psychology led the surgeon to a very early, if largely inferential, appraisal of psychosexual development, which merits quoting at length.

If the Girls provoked him [Thomas], (as they often would) his Way of avenging himself of them was, to run after them, with his Penis in his Hand; and if he overtook them, to piss on them. This a Person of the Town, who said he had been often an Eye-witness of the Fact, assured me was his Custom. How far his Inclination might lead him to Venery, and the Pursuit of the Pleasures, arising from Copulation, I cannot assure the Reader, from any Observation I could make: But, I think, that as the Organs of Generation, were so remarkably large in him, as the Marks of Puberty, appeared so very soon, and as he was endowed with so large a Share of Strength; we may venture, physically, to con-
clude; that an Increase in Understanding, barely equal to common Discretion, added to that of his Stature, would naturally have led him to Pursuits of that kind; for his Disposition was amorous, and he had a lascivious Eye, and both his Father and Aunt assured me, that he took great Notice of the Features of fe-
male Objects, and would single out of a Number, the most agreeable of them. Nor is there, I think, any Room to doubt, whether he could perform the Act of Generation; for an Officer in the [Royal] Welsh Fusileers, assured me, that he was present, when another Gentleman, while he was at Huntingdon, did, by a

J. Robbins & Co., 1822], 86). Nothing is mentioned about pubertal status for the latter case; his portrait (ibid.) does not suggest precocity.

134 Dawkes, Prodigium, 26, ital. in orig. No wonder that his surgeon “used to affright him, by brandishing a dissecting Knife, when he was unruly, or petulant, to his Father or Aunt” (Preface, n.p.). According to an 1807 newspaper account, one precocious three-year-old boy, in a similar show of prowess, “without intoxication, swallows two pints of wine” (Royal Cornwall Gazette, 10 October 1807, 3).

135 Ibid., 39-40. This well predates the earliest normal growth chart on record comunicated by de Buffon in 1777. Inviting anthropometry, precocious boys’ strength was measured by means of Régnier’s dyna-
mometer (invented in Paris in 1798), in early attempts to objectify physical prowess (e.g., Moreau, “Fragment”).

136 Ibid., 29.

137 Ibid., 49-64.
certain Artifice, procure so strong an Erection, as threw the Boy into such an
Ecstasy, that had not the Father intervened, they all believed he would have
emitted. The same Account I also had, from three more Officers of Wade’s
Regiment, who made Use of the same Artifice, at the same Place. 138

“A certain Artifice” may have been genital, verbal or graphic stimulation.
Masturbation (onanism, onany) was not medically reified in the century’s Philosophical
Transactions although various English translations of anti-masturbation tracts had been
extant at least as far back as the 1710s. 139 The boy, in any case, was made a mockery of
both by peers and multiple adults, with the ambivalent complicity of the father, who pa-
raded him around local towns.

An ancient proverb said: soone ripe, soone rotten (festinata maturitas occidit celerius,
or: quod cito fit, cito perit; or after Antiochus on Hermogenes, In pueritia senex, in senec-
tute puerr). 140 True to this ubiquitous dictum and his status as sexual prodigy, the
Willingham boy died “a decrepit old man” before age six—from what may have been
pulmonary tuberculosis. In an allusion to Craterus and with reference to Seneca,
Dawkes observed the boy “pass’d through each of the Stages of Life, called Childhood,
Youth, Manhood, and old Age; in seventy Months, which Men generally do in so many
Years.” 141 No autopsy was conducted and no formal diagnosis offered. The latter’s
newspaper obituary (roughly the same appeared in an epitaph drafted by Dawkes)
read: “Last Week died at Cambridge, after a lingering Illness, aged five Years and ten
Months, Thomas Hall, the extraordinary Boy, who was born at Willingham near that
Town, October 31, 1741 At the Age of two Years and a half he was four Feet and one
Inch, well proportioned, strong and lusty, and had the Marks of Virility.” 142

Subsequent case descriptions remained few and brief until the 1800s, though with
increasing interest shown in psychological development. They merit brief mention. A
comparable case communicated in 1759 of a boy aged five who had had the genital
parts of a thirty-year-old man since age three and showed more alignment of preco-
cious body and interests than had others. His parents were of average build and poor,
rendering the boy’s growth mysterious.

Since a year, he has had a decided inclination for sex [le sexe]. He likes to be
with girls, especially when they are nubile; and when he is near them, he gives
all the external signs of a very serious passion. His childish physiognomy, and
his reason, which is not more formed than is common at his age, make for a
singular & entertaining contrast with his passionate posture and his amorous
desires. All this detail seems to prove that nature has not contented itself with

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138 Ibid., 62-63, ital. in orig.
139 Onanism Display’d (London: E. Curll, 1719); Onania or the heinous Sin of Self-Pollution […] (London:
Thomas Crouch, 1723).
140 M. Whitals, A Dictionarie in English and Latine […] (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1616), 123.
141 “Farther Account,” 75.
142 Derby Mercury, 18 September 1747, 2.
giving him all the external characteristics of virility; it appears that he also has the attributes; however, he has not yet given full proof.143

Another well-publicized case was Jacques (James) Viala, from the former French Catholic diocese of Alais, a case also picked up in the British literature.

At the age of five years his voice changed, his beard began to appear, and at six he had as much as a man of thirty; in short, all the unquestionable marks of puberty were visible in him. It was not doubted in the country but that this child was, at five years old, or five and a half, in a condition of begetting other children which induced the Rector of the parish to recommend to his mother that she would keep him from too familiar a conversation with children of the other sex.144

Yet, though advanced in terms of wit, “His air and manner still retained something childish.”145 Much comparably, a two-year-old boy (Jean-Gilles Loustain, born 15 November 1754) was described in 1757 as being afflicted by “a species of early virility.” “The rod this child had acquired an unusual length and size, the two testicles were as big as those of a man of thirty years,” he developed pubic hair and obesity; yet his intellectual development was normal (“not very advanced”).146 A last, brief note from 1786 may be quoted in full: “There is now living at Burton in Lonsdale, in the County of Westmoreland, a boy whose name is John Pooley; his age is eight years and six months, and his weight nine stone four pounds; his height five feet nine inches, and he is bulky in proportion. At six years of age he had all the marks of puberty, and he has been obliged to shave for these two years past. The boy continues to increase in size, and is in good health and spirits.”147

143 Fages de Cazelles, “Sur un enfant de cinq ans, prodigieux,” Journal de médecine, chirurgie, pharmacie, &c. 10 (January 1759): 37-40, here 39. Case translated in Neue Sammlung auserlesener Wahrnehmungen aus allen Theilern der Arzneywissenschaft: aus d. Französischen übersetzt, vol. 1 (Strasbourgh: Johann Gottfried Bauer, 1766), 21-25.
144 Histoire de l’Académie royale des sciences, Année 1758 (1763): 43-46, here 44; “An Account of the extraordinary and sudden Growth of a Child,” The Universal Magazine 34 (March 1764): 120-121, co-appearing in Annual Register for the Year 1764 7 (1765): 107-109; brief mention also in The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal [London] 30, app., 1764, 560; Collection de pieces académiques, concernant la médecine, l’anatomie & la chirurgie, la chymie, la physique expérimentale, la botanique & l’histoire naturelles, tirées des meilleures sources, vol. 12 (Paris: G. J. Cuchet, 1786), 370-371.
145 “An Account,” 120.
146 de Nicolais de Saulsay, “Description d’un enfant de près de trois an, d’une force extraordinaire, & qui a les marques extérieures de la virilité,” Recueil périodique d’observations de médecine, chirurgie, pharmacie, &c. 7 (1757): 221-224; translated as “Beschreibung eines Kindes, das nicht völlig drey Jahr alt ist, an welchem man aber eine außerordentliche Stärke, und die äußerlichen Kennzeichen der Mannheit wahrnehmen kann,” Sammlung auserlesener Wahrnehmungen aus der Arzney-Wissenschaft, der Wund-Arzney- und der Apotheker-Kunst 7 (1763): 239-242. The case reappears in Essai sur les phénomènes de la nature, pris dans les éclumes & les trois regnes des animaux, végétaux & minéraux, en forme de dictionnaire (Bouillon: Société Typographique, 1773), 78-79.
147 The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal 10 (1786): 479; The New Lady’s Magazine, Or, Polite and Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex 1 (1786): 277.
As suggested supra, beyond the Willingham boy, few were said to have been put on display until the nineteenth century. With growth abnormalities, this practice was common enough: a number of contemporaneous cases of teenage “giants” were advertised and exhibited in the mid-1740s, including one 15-year-old “young colossus” of seven feet. The idea, then, was not unthinkable. Concerning the Viala boy, “a mountebank [charlatan] was already soliciting his parents for him, and flattering them with hopes of putting him in a way of making a great fortune.” One morbidly obese three-year-old (Eva Christina Fischer) made her parents a lot of money at fairs in Frankfurt and Leipzig.

TOWARD NOSOLOGY
Leading eighteenth-century nosologists did not itemize unseasonable puberty, or unseasonableness in general, confirming that they understood it in symptomatic, mechanistic terms. The arguable pendant cases of delayed puberty (tied to ovarian deficiency) and sexual infantilism (called ateleiosis in 1902) may not have been described until 1805 and 1868, respectively. The more ubiquitous early modern spectre of greensickness presented an occasion to spell out a distinction between physical prematurity and “premature psychic sexual development” (frühzeitigere psychische Geschlechtsentwicklung), but this explicit analytic gesture is hardly seen before the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, chlorosis was tied to suppressed menstruation (de Sauvages: ménostase) circa pubescence, but rarely explicitly to pubertal or menarcheal timing. Moreover, case descriptions of precocious menstruation had been so short and endlessly recited, some, by the early nineteenth century, doubted their veracity.

148 Edward J. Wood, Giants and Dwarfs (London: R. Bentley, 1868), 147-149.
149 The Universal Magazine, 121, citing Histoire de l’Académie.
150 Christoph Frider Kühn, "Puella mirandae corpulentiae," Nova acta physico-medica Academiae Caesarae Leopoldino-Carolinae naturae curiosorum ephemerides 1 (1757): 225-226. See also Waldemar Schweisheimer, Dickwerden und Schlankbleiben. Verhütung und Behandlung von Fettleibigkeit und Fettsucht (Berlin: Springer, 1926), 77.
151 Notably François Boissier de Sauvages’s Pathologia methodica (1752) and Nosologica methodica (1768), William Cullen’s Synopsis nosologiae methodicae (1769), Wilhelm Gottfried Ploucquet’s Delineatio systematis nosologicorum naturae accomodatae (1791–1793), even Franz Xaver Schedaar’s Novum nosologiae methodicae systema (1812).
152 Charles Pears, “The case of a full grown Woman in whom the Ovaria were deficient,” Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London 95 (1805): 225-227; Schaaffhausen, in Verhandlungen des Naturhistorischen Vereines der preussischen Rheinlande und Westphalen 25 (1868): 26-27; Hastings Gilford, “Ateleiosis, A Disease Characterised by Conspicuous Delay of Growth and Development,” Medico-Chirurgical Transactions 85 (1902): 305-359.
153 Such as by an unnamed Southern-German physician and statistician: [Anon.], “Die Bleichsucht in volks-wirtschaftlicher Beziehung,” Austria: Wochenschrift für Volkswirtschaft und Statistik 9, no. 48 (28 November 1857): 393-395, here 394.
154 For representations of delayed menarche in early modern England, see Sara Read, Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), chap. 3.
155 Reflecting a massive increase of empirical attention in menarcheal timing in the nineteenth century, Lenz amassed 130 cases of premature menarche in 1913, eleven (mostly seventeenth-century) reports of premature menarche before 1750. J. Lenz, “Vorzeitige Menstruation, Geschlechtsreife und Entwicklung. (Menstruatio, Pubertas et Evolutio praecox.) Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der
In 1812 German obstetrician Franz Naegele (1778–1851) lamented what he considered had been an uncritical rehashing of wondrous tales (Wundergeschichte) filed under the header of menstrua infantum, s. praecocia. He proceeded to qualify many—all of those signalled out—as hearsay, non-menstrual, or inconclusive.

After 1700, as cited, rare elaborate descriptions especially of gross male sexual precocity of the “infant Hercules” type did occasion proto-scientific, pre-endocrinological speculations about the intricate developmental relations between sexual body, sexual appetite, and sexual psyche. Prodigies of various kinds (ingenia praecocia) were reported during the eighteenth century, raising more general questions concerning normal development. Familiar to mid-century audiences, for instance, were the continental cases of “Learned Child of Lübeck” Christian Heinrich Heineken or Heinecken (1721–1725) and “prodigy of learning” Jean-Philippe (Johann Philipp) Baratier (1721–1740). In published accounts of lectures from 1801, Franz Joseph Gall’s (1758–1828) organology would provide a single interpretative framework for explaining such specific talents and precocities, including that of the supposedly cerebellar “organ of reproductive instinct.” Gall, as well as Spurzheim, saw cases of precocious pubescence and childhood nymphomania, but used them mainly to problematize the governing theory of the sexual instinct as deriving from testicular function. Few earlier attempts had gestured toward a more general conception of forwardness. An article on enfants précoces in a Dictionary of the Wonders of Nature, issued in 1781 and 1806 by French obstetrician and experimental physicist Joseph-Aignan Sigaud de Lafond (1730–1810), included both somatic and mental examples, but little effort to sub-classify. In 1759 one case reporter offhandedly spoke of “prodigies of matter or of the mind” (prodiges pour la matière ou pour l’esprit) but did not elaborate the distinction.

Mid-eighteenth-century works subsumed celebrity cases of premature puberty under the heading of “child of monstrous size,” “very extraordinary ripeness,” or “excessive growth.” Even by the 1800s, cases can be found catalogued as giants (gigantes), though the most telling cases showed rapid growth only to decelerate into slow development.

Skelettentwicklung. Aus dem St. Elisabeth-Krankenhaus in Prag,” Archiv für Gynaekologie 98 (1913): 67-144, see 100. A 1922 article claims 398 pertinent cases, including 188 female and 57 male cases of “precocious puberty,” and another 83 of “precocious pregnancy.” Mark S. Reuben and Randolph Manning, “Precocious Puberty,” Archives of Pediatrics 39 (1922): 769-785 and 40 (1923): 27-44.

Franz Carl Nägele, Erfahrungen und Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der Krankheiten des weiblichen Geschlechts (Mannheim: Tobias Loeffler, 1812), 312-328. The former term occurs only once, however, in Plougquet’s Bibliothecae medico-practicae (Vol. 4, 1803).

At least one case, examined by Spurzheim, the author (anatomist at the Faculté de Médecine de Paris) shyed away from a cerebellar theory: G[ilbert] Breschet, “Description d’un enfant de trois ans offrant tous les signes de La puberté,” Bulletins de la Faculté de médecine de Paris, et de la société établie dans son sein 7 (1820): 302-315.

156 Lafond, Dictionnaire, 1:439-464, and new ed. (Paris: Delaplace, 1806), 1:439-464.
157 Fages de Cazelles, “Sur un enfant,” 37.
158 Mihles, Medical Essays and Observations Relating to the Practice of Physic and Surgery, vol. 1 (London: S. Birt & J. Newbery, 1745), 468-469; Thomas Southwell, Medical Essays and Observations. Being an Abridgment of the Useful Medical Papers, Contained in the History and Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris [etc.], vol. 3 (London: J. Knox, 1764), 80, 81-83.
an eventual low-stature outcome (due to premature epiphyseal closure). A speculative, general concept of endocrinology was offered only in the course of the mid-eighteenth century, and little attempt at formal diagnosis beyond prodigious growth was offered until well after this date. This was still true for cases of male puberty presented during the 1800s and 1810s. Autopsies of two “monstrous children,” ostensibly cases of adrenogenital syndrome, were communicated in the German literature, in 1802 and 1803. Authors of the 1802 article credited the symptoms to uterine pathology, that of the 1803 article (in a separate 1803 post mortem report) to adrenal neoplasm. These instances may be the earliest associations of precocious puberty with internal organic pathology but neither article as yet specified sexual precocity as a sui generis class of prodigious development. Author of the second report Tiselius spoke of “premature pubescence” (frühzeitige Pubescenz) but qualifies the expression in an endnote, restricting it to the sensus strictus of sexual hair appearing (or pubarche, a term not coined until 1950). This literal use was innovative enough, though; the post-classical term pubescentia (pubescence, the sprouting of hair) has sporadic English medical uses from 1646 (with reference to Solon) but well into the nineteenth century remained unused except by botanologists (Charles de l’Ecluse, and later Carl Linnaeus) and medical lexicographers. By contrast, the reifying nosological terms præotia and pubertas praecox/praematura (precocious puberty) were suggested mostly after the

161 “Gigantic Children,” The Monthly Mirror (London) 2 (December 1807): 393; Jeremias David Reuss (ed.), Repertorium commentationum a societatibus litteraruis editarum [vol. 1] (Göttingen: Henricus Dieterich, 1801), 101-103.

162 Victor Cornelius Medvei, A History of Endocrinology (Lancaster: MTP Press, 1982), 149ff.

163 J. L. [Jacques-Louis] Moreau, "Fragment d’une notice sur un jeune homme de onze ans, chez lequel on observe tous les signes extérieurs de la virilité, accompagnées de l’accroissement extraordinaire d’un état pathologique du testicule," Journal de médecine, chirurgie, pharmacie, etc. 12 (1806): 274-278 (a case with testicular tumor, which was removed, and put in a museum: Journal de médecine, chirurgie, pharmacie 25 [1812]: 207; Guerbois, translator’s note to Matthew Baillie, Anatomie pathologique des organes les plus importants du corps humain. Paris: Auteur, 1815, 292-294n); Anthony White, “Historical Account Philip Howarth, A Boy, in Whom Signs of Puberty Commenced at an Early Age,” Medico-Chirurgical Transactions 1 (1809): 276-285. Notes on decursus in Royston, “Historical Sketch of the Progress of Medicine in the Year 1809. No. 4,” The Medical and Physical Journal [London] 24, no. 137 (1810): 1-39, see 7-8; and in translation: Annales de littérature médicale étrangère [Ghent] 11 (1810): 393 et seq., see 405. Similar cases were evidently rare; one precocious four-year-old boy was exhibited on 21 September 1830, at the Versammlung deutscher Naturforscher und Ärzte.

164 Malte H. Stoffregen, “Zwei frühe Fallbeschreibungen des adrenogenitalen Syndroms (Bevern und Römhold [1802]-Tilesius [1803]),” Sudholfs Archiv 85 (2001): 138-168.

165 [Wilhelm Gottlieb] Tilesius, “Vorläufige Nachricht von einem außerordentlichen dicken Kinde,” Magazin für den neuesten Zustand der Naturkunde mit Rucksicht auf die dazu gehörigen Hilfswissenschaften 5 (1803): 289-300. An illustrative contemporaneous case description read 21 November 1809, deals with four-year-old Louisa Flux presenting with obesity and “premature development of the external pudenda” since age four including clitoris hypertrophy and pubic hair growth, such that “her whole contour was that of puberty, with the general stature. [..] Her cheeks were downy, and her upper lip was covered with so much hair, that it might be said she had a beard. Her voice, which had formerly been shrill, was now more strong.” She died at age six from hydrocephaly, and was found to have a large glandular tumor occupying nearly the whole of the hypochondriac region protruding from the liver and communicating with the pelvis of the left kidney. Abdominal lymphadenopathy would explain the hydrocephaly. William Cooke, “A Case of Hydrocephalus Internus,” Medico-Chirurgical Transactions 2 (1811): 17-23.
mid-1790s, as do the terms *catamenia/menstruatio praematura, menstruatio praecox* (premature menstruation), and *hyperepidosis* (an essentially never used term denoting abnormal growth, but specifically recommended for application to primary or secondary sexual characteristics).166

Suggestive of a definite speciation of medical curiosity, collections of sexual precocity cases are found throughout the eighteenth century, notably in work by Dickson, Von Franckenaau, Schurig, Kundmann, Storch, and Von Haller. Except for Haller, mentioned authors were little interested in aetiology and catalogued cases of boys siring (*pueri generantes*, juxtaposed to *senes generantes*) and girls menstruating (*menses praecoces*) and becoming pregnant early (for Schurig, early meant menarche before age fourteen).167 Cases of precocious male puberty are also listed in a section of Schurig’s work on macrogenitalism.168 Kundmann, in contrast, presented much more miscellaneous cases of sexual and procreative untimeliness violating the pseudo-Hippocratic seven divisions of man (Solon’s hebdomads).169 Similar enumerations of pertinent *idi-osyncrasia* are encountered in contemporaneous medico-legal tracts.170

Definitive medical reification occurred in the 1760s. Writing in 1764, Friedrich Casimir Medicus (1738–1808) believed that “Premature monthly cleansing definitely

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166 Pubertas praecox appears as a bibliographic heading in Wilhelm Gottfried Ploucquet, *Initia bibliothecae medico-practicae et chirurgiae sive repertori medićinae practicae et chirurgiae*, vol. 6 (Tübingen: Joannes Georg Cotta, 1796), 601. *Catamenia praematura* and *menses praematuri* appear in Carl Joseph Meyer, *Systematisches Handbuch zur Erkennung und Heilung der Blutfluss für Äerzte und Wundärzte*, vol. 2 (Vienna: Carl Schaumburg & co., 1805), 418, cf. 381-383. *Menstruatio praematura* (and *serotina*) appear in Joseph Jakob Plenck, *Doctrina de morbis sexus feminei* (Vienna: Binz, 1808), 7-9. *Fluxus catamenialis praecox* appears in Georg Philipp Friedrich Stracke, *De metrorrhagia abortive. Diss. Inaug. [etc.]* (Marburg, 1824), 14; *menstruatio praecox* in C.W. Hufeland’s *Bibliothek der practischen Heilkunde*, 77 (1814): 74; *hyperepidosis* (— *mammarum, scroti, preputii, clitoridis, nympharum*) in F. [Franz Xavier] Schwedauer, *Novum nosologiae methodicæ systema*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gabon, 1812), 732-733; and *hyperepidosis membræ virilis* in Steven Blankarta, *Lexicon medicum*, new ed. by C. G. Kuhn (Leipzig: Schwickert, 1832), 759. The essentially never used term *pubertas serotina* (belated puberty; compare a section in Schurig’s *Parthenologia*: “de mensibus serotinis”) is found in Friedrich August Benjamin Puchelt, *Das System der Medicin*, pt. 2, vol. 3 (Heidelberg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1831), 608, and possibly independently in Ernest von Grossi, *Opera medica posthuma*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart [etc.]: J. G. Cotta, 1832), 333. Rudolph Neurath speaks of *Graviditas praecox* and *Fruhgravidität* (*Die Pubertät; Physiologie* [Vienna: Julius Springer, 1932], 92, 93).

167 Dickson, *An Essay*, 60-69; Georg Franck von Franckenau, *Satyræ medicae XX. Quibus accedunt Dissertationes VI variis simulque rarioris argumenti, una cum Oratiane de studiorum noxa* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1722), 73-76; Schurig, *Spermatologia historico-medica*, 185-188; Schurig, *Parthenologia historico-medica*, 129-38; Schurig, *Syphilologia historico-medica* (Dresden/Leipzig: Hekel, 1731), 115-116; Schurig, *Embryologia historico-medica* (Dresden/Leipzig: Hekel, 1732), 590-596. Storch largely relies on Schurig for *menses praecoces* and is one of the first and few to use the term in gynecology and pediatrics. Johann Storch, *Von Krankheiten der Weiber*, vol. 2 (Gotha: Christian Mevius, 1748), 545-553; Storch, *Theoretische und practische Abhandlung von Kinder Krankheiten*, vol. 3 (Eisenach: Michael Gottlieb Grießbach, 1751), 490-493.

168 Schurig, *Spermatologia*, 109.

169 Johann Christian Kundmann, *Rariora naturæ et artis item in re medica* (Breslau/Leipzig: Michael Hubert, 1737), 823-832.

170 Johann Christoph Fritsche, *Seltsame jedoch wahrhaftige theologische, juristische, medicinische un physicalische Geschichte*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Johann Friedrich Braun, 1730), 66, 68.
is a disease which weakens nature, hinders growth, and generally promotes death.”¹⁷¹ Physician and medical historian Johann Christian Gottlieb Ackermann (1756–1801), too, counted untimely nubility “in our climate” (i.e., as opposed to India) among “deviations of nature” (Abartungen der Natur).¹⁷² But neither elaborated the nosological gesture. By 1814 Henke wrote more confidently: “Unusually early sexual development may generally be considered as a morbid phenomenon,” and classified it under “puberty-related developmental diseases” (der Pubertät angehörige Entwicklungskrankheiten).¹⁷³

In 1766 Haller had listed cases variably associated with somatosexual precocity under the heading of excessive growth (incrementum nimium).¹⁷⁴ Haller admitted his puzzlement and speculatively linked sexual precocity to heat, judging from the seeming hypertrophic effects of climate and fever: a larger or more irritable heart, servicing a more robust or expanded circulation, would force blood out of the arteries, explaining female but also male early puberty. Comorbid obesity, however, would rather suggest a subdued temperament and gentler circulation; perhaps there was a role here, next to diet, for laxity in the growing organ. Problematically extending a plethora theory of menarche, Haller’s tentative account remained the most ambitious eighteenth-century pathophysiological approach to precocious puberty. One illustrative minor etiological framework following Haller’s is an 1804 schematic nosology of menstrual disorders by Vlotho physician Heinrich Osthoff (1777–1850), which listed the item of “too early [monthly] cleansing in relation to the individual’s age” (Zu frühe Reinigung in Verhältniß zum Alter des Subjektes).¹⁷⁵ Osthoff’s appraisal of menstrual precocity is intricate, connecting it with what he called a girl’s overall habitus (Totalhabitus) and to a heritable “asthenic opportunism” leading to “abnormal direction of life activity,” rather than to any mechanism particular to the symptom.¹⁷⁶ The intervention into gynaecological nosology, recalling Brown’s etiological monism, remained fully theoretical, and enjoyed little following.

Meckel’s 1816 teratological discussion of postnatal growth acceleration (vorschnelle Entwicklung) is one of the earliest semi-systematic reviews of what in the British case literature was now called premature puberty, solidifying the category as a sui generis

¹⁷¹ Friedrich Casimir Medicus, Geschichte periodischer Krankheiten, vol. 1 (Karlsruhe: Michael Macklot, 1764), 172-173. This was widely cited verbatim, for instance by Carl Bernhard Fleisch and Joseph Schneider, Handbuch über die Krankheiten des mannbaren Alters enthaltend, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Friedrich Gotthold Jacobiär, 1808), 76.

¹⁷² Ackermann, Ueber die Krankheiten, 267.

¹⁷³ Adolph Henke, Ueber die Entwicklungen und Entwicklungskrankheiten des menschlichen Organismus: in sechs Vorlesungen (Nuremberg: Johann Leonhard Schrag, 1814), 142, 149-150.

¹⁷⁴ Albrecht von Haller, Elementa physiologiae corporis humani, 8 vols. (Bern: Societas Typographica, 1766), 7, pt. 2:139-140, and 8, pt. 2:37-39. In translation: Anfangsgründe der Phisiologie des menschlichen Körpers, trans. Johann Samuel Halle (Berlin/Leipzig: Christian Friedrich Voß, 1759-1776), 7:1070-1072; 8:836-841. Compare Haller’s footnote to Boerhaave, Praelectiones academicae 5.2, 84n.

¹⁷⁵ Heinrich Christian August Osthoff, Untersuchungen über die Anomalien monatlicher Reinigung, besonders über ihr Verhalten bey allgemeinern krankhaften Zuständen des Körpers (Lemgo: Meyer, 1804), 3-4.

¹⁷⁶ Osthoff, Untersuchungen, 155-161.
medical conundrum. Meckel’s review emphasized the heterogeneity of the category, for instance with regard to variation in the timing and rate of acceleration of pubescent symptoms. Sexual growth, overall growth, and psychological development, wrote Meckel, were not necessarily connected, and there was a distinction to be made between generalized hirsutism and pubes development. This invited a teasing apart of cultural-climatological variation and types of developmental abnormality, which is evidenced, for instance, in subsequent extended case studies by Von Lenhossek (1773–1840) and Gedike (1797–1867). Following Meckel, Carus, in 1820, also dealt specifically with “morbidly precocious pubertal development” (krankhaft zu zeitig entwickelte Pubertät). In subsequent work, Saint-Hilaire distinguished explicitly between growth and development, and thus between precocious growth (accroissement précoce) and precocious puberty (puberté prématurée). Normal physiology remained largely unexplained, however.

Among early nineteenth-century formal nosological gestures, lastly, the unsuccessful term prœotia (or proeotia, proiotia, proiotes) was used in 1817 by English nosologist John Mason Good (1764–1827), after Theophrastus’s botanological uses, to designate “premature development of sexual organization, or power” or “premature semination.” In Good’s system, the entity fell under genetica (“diseases of the sexual function”) and more specifically under orgastica (diseases “affecting the orgasm,” with the term “Orgasmus [..] used for salacity in general,” or rather, “the desire of procreating”). Prominently citing the Hall and Howorth cases, Good seemingly equated prœotia with the largely anatomico-physiological sense of præcox maturitas, and concomitantly rendered it a different genus as lagnesis salacitas (i.e., salacity, including

177 Johann F. Meckel, Handbuch der pathologischen Anatomie, vol. 2, pt. 1 (Leipzig: Carl Heinrich Reclam, 1816), 2-11. Meckel nominated 21 male and only 12 female cases. Compare the very brief discussion by Henke, Ueber die Entwicklungen, 265-267. Compare the symptomological status of pubertal signs in cases of unusual growth collected in Georg Friedrich von Jäger’s booklet Vergleichung einiger durch Fettigkeit oder colossale Bildung ausgezeichneter Kinder und einiger Zwerge (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1821), 27-28.

178 [Michael] von Lenhossek, “Geschichte einer ungewöhnlich schnellen Entwicklung bey einem Mädchent. Nach einem amtlichen Berichte mitgetheilt und durch physiologisch-pathologische Bemerkungen erläutert,” Medicinische Jahrbücher des österreichischen Staates 6, pt. 3 (1821): 68-125; [Carl Emil] Gedike, “Ein Fall von zu frühem Eintritt der Pubertät bei einem siebenjährigen Mädchen,” Archiv für medizinische Erfahrung im Gebiete der praktischen Medizin, Chirurgie, Geburtshülfe und Staatsarzneikunde 48 (1825): 189-201 (abstracted in Kritisches Repertorium für die gesammte Heilkunde 14 [1826]: 284-286).

179 Carl Gustav Carus, Lehrbuch der Gynäkologie, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Gerhard Fletscher, 1820), 106-113.

180 Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Histoire générale et particulière des anomalies de l’organisation chez l’homme et les animaux [...], vol. 1 (Paris: J-B. Bailliére, 1832), 188-203.

181 præcox maturitas “attested in Theophrastus, De causis plantarum (III.24.3) discussing seed crops (per, e.g., Henri Estienne’s Thesaurus linguae Graece, ab Henricico Stephanico constructus, vol. 3 [Geneva, 1572], 578), i.e., precocious sprouting, and hence, more generally, “earliness; forwardness of time, early maturity; precocity” (James Donnegan, A New Greek and English Lexicon [London: Cowie, 1826], 829). The ancients were specifically concerned with the aging of wine. In sixteenth-century dictionaries one finds the term præcox maturitas mostly associated with Roman agriculture authority Columella (4–c.70 AD) making pertinent vinological observations in his De Re Rustica.

182 John Mason Good, A Physiological System of Nosology (London: Bensley & Son, 1817), 391-392; Good, The Study of Medicine, 5 vols. (London: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1822), 1:xliv, and esp. 4:113-117.

183 Good, A Physiological System, 388n.
William Cullen’s satyriasis juvenilis or by Good’s own synonym, salacitas pubertatis).\(^\text{184}\) Treatment according to Good, interestingly, was restricted to dampening of the sex drive, in order to prevent it from, in turn, “debasing the mind”—a suggestion reiterated by several nineteenth-century authors and homeopaths.\(^\text{185}\)

**CONCLUSION**

Pubertal timing variations and disorders presented an atypical form, or gradient, of early modern monstrosity. Puberty witnessed an early modern transition from a much embattled legal bracketing of age, stipulated in ancient Roman law and belabored in early modern matrimonial and rape law review, to a delicate transitional period subject both to endogenous and environmental factors, piquing the interest of the eighteenth-century physiologist, philanthropist, gynecologist, and social hygienist. Early modern concepts of sexual precocity drew from a heterogeneous set of anecdotes animating the ethnographic, legal and teratological imagination, and invoked humeral theory to account for egregious and relative precocity, bringing the uncanny admixture of childlike and mature features into the known physio-moral realms of temperamental and dietary intemperance. The Willingham case was still in explicit dialogue with ancient and seventeenth-century reports of monstrous bearded and giant boys, though male cases were already largely described in terms of extraordinary “talents,” “wondrous” “strength” and prodigious capacity. On the whole, male cases made for prodigies and female ones for a more ambiguous variety, though early menarche and “nubility” were long observed, already in seventeenth-century medicine and travelogues, to allow much responsiveness to life style. Whereas cases caused some parental distress and some mothers suspected “morbidity” (such as in Loustain’s case), male cases were generally considered to bring fame and fortune to their caretakers, at least the most well-published was paraded before crowds and royalty. Dawkes’s 1748 report addressed the medical establishment but was clearly drafted for public consumption and rendered available for the price of one shilling. The case was developed, after favourable reception in the Royal Society and interest by other notables, into a quasi-systematic, prospective, biometric study of overall as well as sexual development, with brief but differentiated attention given to cognitive development and, more inferentially and well *avant la lettre*, psychosexual development. The Fichet boy’s physical development (not cited by Dawkes) had been prospectively followed before, but Dawkes’s analytic scope was unprecedented, and the case received due citation in all of the earliest tentative nosological circumscriptions of premature puberty (Haller, Meckel, Good) and early nineteenth-century case studies. Multiple boys’ destinies seemed that of giants but no such wondrous outcome ensued, leaving doctors to wonder why. And answers were definitely not new: where in multiple reported cases children’s unusual growth rate rapidly stagnated, this was considered a “sad alteration” blamed on “the imprudent trials [the boy] was let to make of his strength” (Viala),\(^\text{186}\) or a more endogenous

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\(^\text{184}\) Ibid., 394.

\(^\text{185}\) E.g., Puchelt, *Das System der Medicin*, 607.

\(^\text{186}\) “An Account,” 120.
principle of premature exhaustion (Hall). This economic model of growth and exhaustion was ancient but also mirrored a broader multifactorial ("two puberties") concept of sexual differentiation with definite seventeenth-century roots and fleshed out particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century.

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