

THE LIMITS OF
THE HUMAN

*Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long
Eighteenth Century*

FELICITY A. NUSSBAUM



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Fictions of defect: Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood

I

Echoing Alexander Pope's sentiment in *Epistle to A Lady*, "Fine by defect, and delicately weak" (1735), an eighteenth-century misogynist tract defines woman as a defective man, less than a man and lacking his perfection, because she possesses less vigor and strength. *Female Rights Vindicated* (1753) continues by asserting that women have been regarded since Aristotle as deformed amphibious things, "neither more or less than *Monsters*."¹ Countering this assumption that sexual difference should be construed as defect, a feminist response to another vindication of women's rights claims, "Each [sex] was perfect in its Way; and it was necessary they should be disposed as we see them, and every Thing that depends upon their respective constitutions, is to be consider'd as Part of their Perfection. It is therefore without Foundation, that some imagine the Women are not so perfect as the Men, and represent that as a Defect, which is an essential Appendage to their Sex, without which they could not answer the Intent of their Creation."² The "Appendage to their sex" (called an "essential Portion of their Sex" in an earlier version) refers to women's reproductive organs, and in particular the womb, construed in the earlier Aristotelian and Galenic models to be an interior penis which constitutes the salient biological difference.³ Unlike a man's appendage, woman's is not palpable or easily visible. The essence of womanhood is her womb, hidden and interior, rather than the exterior organs of femininity. This mysterious female difference is misconstrued, the tract argues, as deformity since men habitually and misogynistically deem women's flaws to be intrinsic to their natural sexual difference. Their defect arises not only from the lack of a penis but from the presence of an alternative, inferior body part. Woman's appendage – the reproductive womb – embodies failed femininity within a striking dynamic of similarity and difference.

This chapter attempts to trace the ways that disability and gender inflect one another in the early eighteenth century, and to show a paradoxical valorization and rejection of anomalous beings. Here I examine the alignment between defect and gender in several early fictions written by women in the context of these vindications and other writings to assess the ways that aberrance and disfigurement helped both to articulate sexual difference and to obscure its binaries. Cultural anxieties about “natural” boundaries between the sexes help constitute the problem they describe and attack. In particular I am discussing fictions that complicate and realign expectations that femininity will prove defective. Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood, I suggest, celebrate, refine, and counter the prevailing constructions of femininity as deformity. These constructions also extend to the much desired but mutilated man, the eunuch, who veers so radically away from the conquering economic hero crucial to the formation of a British identity; and to a deaf, nonspeaking prophet whose compensatory gift as a soothsayer embodies the paradox of femininity. Thus disabling or disfiguring a woman sometimes corresponds to the equivocal marking of a man as a particularly anomalous being.

A defective man was often taken to be a mere imitation of femininity since defect bears a linguistic and cultural equivalency to womanhood. In this construction, substance signals masculinity while lack signifies femaleness. Another set of oppositions that help to shape the idea of a “normal” body arises between internal and external defect. A woman’s value within the sexual economy evolves from her external beauty which is both “*Merchantable*” and the object of contempt, both precious and demeaned, both visible and invisible, as her “defect” is valued as the object of envy, yet the site of monstrosity. *Beauty’s Triumph* (1751), a further defence of women, claims that even women’s elaborate artifice cannot adequately disguise blemishes. Here the cultural meaning of “blemishes” slips between the metaphorical and the material, between that of character and of a more literal physical disfigurement: “By shewing you to yourselves in a true light, it will, I hope, enable you to improve the real excellencies, and to remove out of sight all the blemishes you may discover in yourselves. And as patches and paint will be useless to hide the defects which this will point you out, it may possibly set you on finding out better expedients to prevent the ill effects of them, than the daubing disguise of affectation.”⁴ Anatomists of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries sometimes literally erased blemishes to mold representations of the body into more idealized versions.⁵ Depicting flaws obviously interfered with portraying womanhood as perfection, but cosmetics were only a temporary and unsatisfactory solution

to women's escaping their inherently inadequate state. In short, women's blemishes were often imagined to be the outward manifestation of an internal deficiency, and defects for both sexes could be deemed substantive as well as superficial.

The misogynist male narrator in *Beauty's Triumph* ironically links "blemish" both to women's beauty and to anatomical essentialism. Recalling the assignment of defect to the womb, he offers Salacia as an example of a mother whose interior blemishes result in deformed and monstrous children. For her, blemishes compose the perfection of womanhood, but the ability to give birth, the most potent marker of sexual difference, corresponds with monstrosity and moral perversion. Though women are responsible for reproducing the species, their principal deformity rests in their incapacity to bear healthy "normal" babies: "That WOMEN are no more to be trusted than their WOMBS: these being not more liable to miscarry of their fruits, than they of the trust we deposit in them" (124). A particularly defective nature (such as that of a prostitute) suffuses a mother's deformity into her progeny or, alternatively threatens to makes her barren, though even apparently "normal" mothers may give birth to defective children.⁶ The womb – in misogynist tracts, the sign of woman's ineradicable defect – either replicates its monstrosity in the children it spews forth or is condemned to forfeit its reproductive function. Woman's monstrous inadequacy, her freakishness, results from having a womb, whether she bears children or is unable to bear them.

Eighteenth-century controversies surrounding the question of the potency of the maternal imagination raised the spectre of extraordinary female power over producing "normal" offspring so that the entire category of the female embodies the difference that deforms.⁷ *Orthopaedia: or, the Art of Correcting and Preventing Deformities in Children* connected having intercourse during menstruation to bearing deformed children (illustration 3).⁸ Even Mary Wollstonecraft couples what she believes to be a cultural tendency toward effeminacy with a high incidence of mental retardation among the privileged classes, and she asserts that championing women's virtue produces healthy babies for the middling classes. While bearing well-formed children may excuse and justify woman's "defect," her intrinsic femaleness also aligns itself with disfigurement. The defect of womanhood that is concentrated within the womb may migrate to other parts of the body and even to other bodies. Beyond the inherent defect of the sex, *particular* women bear a double defect in also being blind, lame, deaf, ugly, or scarred. Women of both sorts – the general run of femininity and the particular case of anomalous beings – throughout the century focus cultural



Hulett Sculp

3 Frontispiece to Nicholas Andry, *Orthopaedia: Or, the Art of Correcting and Preventing Deformities in Children* (1743). The maternal figure provides the standard measure for the cherubic figures who nestle around her.

anxieties about links between normalcy and gender in fictions of defect as diverse as Henry Fielding's noseless *Amelia*, Sarah Scott's pock-marked ladies, and Frances Burney's lame, scarred, and humpbacked Eugenia.

Deformity, like defect, is a word with eighteenth-century currency. Though deformity was often linked to foreign locales, William Hay, a member of the House of Commons, provided a local instance. Articulating an identity as a disabled person in *Deformity: An Essay* (1754), he employs William Hogarth's admiration of the rounded line in *Analysis of Beauty* to define the curvature of his spine as aesthetically pleasing, and thus to suggest that judgments about attractiveness may be culturally determined. Yet "deformity" most frequently serves as the opposite of beauty in, for example, the treatise *Hebe; or, the Art of Preserving Beauty, and Correcting Deformity* (1786). There a missing eyebrow, large nose, wandering eye, hare lip, wide mouth, chin hair, freckles, and birthmarks signify deformities. Characterized by asymmetrical or misshapen bodies, deformity may be an unnatural and correctable condition, "not as a total privation of beauty, but as a want of congruity in the parts, or rather an inability in them to answer their natural design; as when one arm or leg is longer than the other; when the back is hunched, when the eyes squint, and such similar defects: which, however, are not to be opposed as a contrast to beauty; for the unfortunate object may, in every other part of his body, be exactly well-made, and perfectly agreeable."⁹ This problem of anatomical malformation, especially characteristic of women's bodies, may be deemed either accidental, man-made, or attributable to inadequate child care and poor health habits. Yet it may also be permanent and intractable, requiring cosmetic disguise and inspiring pity or derision: "Ugliness always excites our aversion to the object in which it resides; deformity as generally calls up our commiseration."¹⁰ In short, ugliness often reflects an inner evil while irremediable deformity, "an inability to answer nature's design," excites compassion.

Aphra Behn's two tales of defect, *The Dumb Virgin: or, The Force of Imagination* and *The Unfortunate Bride: Or, The Blind Lady a Beauty* (both published in 1700), suggest that all femininity is deformed or monstrous by definition, and that a particular subclass of defective women who populate these fictions is especially disquieting.¹¹ At one level these doubly defective women stand in for all femininity; at another level they represent women who defy femininity, women writers. In these novellas the unstable relationship of beauty to virtue, of defect to lust, displays the linkages between gender and defect. In *The Dumb Virgin*, a wealthy Venetian senator's wife expresses an unbridled passion to visit an idyllic seat of pleasure, an island in the Adriatic Sea. Renaldo's yielding to his wife's excessive desires rather

than taking command results in the birth of defective children. The eldest, Belvideera, a physically deformed daughter “addicted to study” (344) is described as a neutered child without an identifiable gender: “its limbs were distorted, its back bent, and tho the face was the freest from deformity, yet had it no beauty to recompence the dis-symetry of the other parts” (344). Belvideera’s femininity is lost because of the unmistakably obvious crippling of her body. The mother’s imagination, especially the erotic desire for something exotic and unfamiliar, and her unrealized fears of being taken captive and enslaved, produce defect; but defect also interrupts or complicates desire.

The tragedy resulting from the deformities is compounded when Belvideera’s mother dies in giving birth to a second daughter, Maria, who is beautiful but unable to speak, “which defect the learn’d attributed to the silence and melancholy of the Mother, as the deformity of the other was to the extravagance of her frights” (344). In both cases the mother’s reproductive power is compromised by immoderate desire, and her womb, the defective appendage, makes manifest her hidden faults to produce a more definitive secondary category of flawed femininity in the second generation. In Maria’s case the defect of speechlessness, as in the generality of womanhood, is made invisible through the natural disguise of female beauty; in the witty Belvideera’s case, her facility with words distracts auditors from the painfully obvious flaw, and she compensates for her natural impediments by becoming a linguistic prodigy. If Maria’s defect results from her mother’s timidity, Belvideera’s deformity arises from bold desire, thus setting forth a tentative distinction between the causes of defect and deformity.

The beautiful Maria, skilled at sign language but unable to speak, exhibits charm and grace, and her dazzling radiance is so extreme that it cannot be viewed directly. When a portrait painter finds himself incapacitated by her riveting beauty. Maria resorts to completing the picture herself. Silenced in traditional ways and thus excluded from a conventional loquacious femininity, Maria is a creative woman who finds a means to express herself through art. In contrast Belvideera’s tongue, in spite of her physical deformity, carries a force that is as compelling as Maria’s eyes. As such she typifies the learned, peculiar man-woman whose femininity throughout the eighteenth century is questioned, and she is placed outside the usual sexual traffic.

Both sisters, one beautiful but silent and the other ugly but brilliant, become competitors for Dangerfield, a suitor whose Turkish turban signals his exotic taste.¹² The uncomely Belvideera at first prevents Dangerfield

from learning about her sister's mute condition. Maria curses her speechlessness, a handicap explained as a penance for unnamed sins, that prevents her from voicing her passion. Though Maria pulses with sensual heat, "her breasts with an easy heaving show'd the smoothness of her Soul and of her Skin" (351); it is her searing beauty that inflicts metaphoric wounds on her lover. One sister's contorted limbs are weighed against the other sister's being "dumb" as the women debate whether disfigurement or muteness is the greater public shame; yet both seem united in their sexual desire for Dangerfield and in the fear that their aberrant femininity excludes them from successfully circulating within a marriage economy.

This romantic tragedy inspires women to believe that physical handicaps, handicaps that exceed the defect of being a woman, need not be an impediment to love but almost certainly preclude marriage. In choosing between the sisters Dangerfield prefers Maria's silent beauty to the deformed Belvideera's wit. Swooning into his arms, Maria scribbles a message that finally reveals her mute state, and he responds, "*Dumb, (he cryed out) naturally Dumb? O ye niggard powers, why was such a wondrous piece of Art left imperfect?*" (353-4). Maria figures the very state of being woman in her embodiment of the disturbing contrast between her remarkable external beauty and her interior flaw. The plot then takes a startling turn. In Dangerfield's dying moments, his dagger birthmark reveals that he is actually Maria's brother who had supposedly drowned in the Adriatic Sea. This bodily defect signifies the deeply tainted nature of the mother's legacy to her son, and Maria's figurative blindness leads to a greater monstrosity – incest. The recognition that Maria had slept with her brother dawns as "a violent impulse broke the ligament that doubled in her Tongue," and exclaiming "*Oh! Incest, Incest*" (359), she impales herself on her brother's sword. The narrator, herself a playwright, "struck dumb by the horror of such woful objects," is herself made speechless when the heroine's tongue is loosened.

To suggest that Behn constructs Maria without a subjectivity unwittingly replicates the idea of woman as a defect of nature. One critic has observed that "Maria's entry to subjectivity/speech is then coterminous with her death and with her recognition of her desire as incestuous,"¹³ but Maria's subjectivity is not confined to speech. In Behn's tale the disability that defines woman as woman does not completely disempower her, and though Maria struggles to make her wishes known, she is not without will. Maria successfully employs sign language ("her silent conversation," 345) and communicates intimately with her sister in an elegant and original way. The mute Maria conveys a fully developed subjectivity including desire,

envy, and surprise through painting, writing, body movements, clothing, and manner: “The language of her Eyes sufficiently paid the loss of her Tongue, and there was something so commanding in her look, that it struck every beholder as dumb as herself” (345). Both subject and object, she in fact turns the tables to disable onlookers with her stunning looks. Similarly, the leveling effect of a masquerade they attend allows Maria to compete for men without having to talk, and it becomes the turning point in creating jealous envy between the sisters: “Poor *Maria* never before envied her Sister the advantage of speech, or never deplor’d the loss of her own with more regret” (348). Though Maria flirtatiously affects an inability to communicate her passion, Dangerfield has no doubt about his conquest over her heart. Finally Maria’s recognition of her incestuous desire for her brother prevents the marriage; and Belvideera, assigning her fortune to an uncle, resigns herself to the reclusive virginity typical of a learned lady. Physical deformity, ugliness, and verbal impairment seem to forestall marriage, a marriage that could only reproduce monstrosity. In short, in the novella the more encompassing category of women in general reproduces defect through sexual desire, while the subclass of overreaching ladies defy their defect but die calling out the very name of monstrosity.

Women’s empowerment in this period, whether it derives from beauty’s empire, linguistic skill, or political and military victory, is deeply bonded to defect and deformity. Beyond the persistent strand of misogynist satire against learned ladies in the eighteenth century, the connection between deformity and female subjectivity easily extends to characterize eighteenth-century women and their literary productions as monstrous, mutilated, and compromised. The connection between women’s talent and their double defect is sometimes literal as in the example of the deformed poet Mary Chandler (1687–1745) who established a milliner’s shop to support herself; or the blind poet Priscilla Pointon Pickering (c. 1740–1801) who celebrated her marriage to a saddler in “Letter to Sister, Giving an Account of the Author’s Wedding Day.”¹⁴ But more often than not, able-bodied women acting on the Restoration stage or publishing in the literary marketplace are presumed to be defects of nature by definition. Mutilation and deformity are implicated in their perverse desires. We think, for example, of the grotesque image of Eliza Haywood “with cow-like udders, and with ox-like eyes,” her works compared to “two babes of love close clinging to her waste” in Pope’s *Dunciad* (2: 149–58).¹⁵ This enduring image of the woman writer as the monstrous and repulsive prize bestowed on the winner of a pissing contest should be given equal weight, I think, with the more familiar epithets applied to eighteenth-century women writers such as whore, heteroclit

and bluestocking. Perhaps women writers in articulating their deformity are released into an exposition of its history.

In a second tale of defect, *The Unfortunate Bride; or, the Blind Lady A Beauty*, again Behn pairs beauty with disability in the lovely blind Celesia. Again two women compete for the same man, Frankwit, who was “so amiable . . . that every Virgin that had Eyes, knew too she had a Heart, and knew as surely she should lose it. His *Cupid* could not be reputed blind” (325). Celesia, according to Frankwit, possesses a “*charming Blindness*” (328) and, like Maria in *The Dumb Virgin*, she is able to conquer lovers even with her significant handicap: “You, fair Maid, require no Eyes to conquer” (328). The story is rife with ironic visual metaphors: “her beauteous image danced before him,” “he saw his Deity in every Bush” (326), “there were pulses beating in their Eyes” (326), and “he only valued the smiling Babies in *Belvira’s Eyes*” (327). After these constant references to eyes, the female voice of the narrator only then coyly acknowledges that she had forgotten to mention that Celesia could not see: “*Celesia* was an heiress, the only Child of a rich *Turkey Merchant*, who when he dyed left her fifty thousand pound in Money, and some Estate in land; but, poor creature, she was blind to all these riches, having been born without the use of sight, though in all other respects charming to a wonder” (327). Being blind is not equated with sexual virtue, but it does happily make Celesia oblivious to the lustre of earthly wealth.

Celesia’s blindness, unlike ugliness or physical deformity, does not detract from her charms, and her powers of understanding, in the tradition of the blind prophet, are quite formidable: “Sight is Fancy,” according to Celesia. When childhood sweethearts Frankwit and Belvira seek Celesia’s advice as to whether they should marry, Celesia confesses her own attraction to Frankwit. Reminding us of the incestuous love in *The Dumb Virgin*, sexual expectation is likened to “A Monster which enjoyment could not satisfy” (329). Thwarted in love, Celesia “thought herself most unhappy that she had not eyes to weep with too; but if she had, such was the greatness of her grief, that sure she would have soon grown blind with weeping” (329). After Frankwit travels to Cambridge where he lodges with a wealthy Blackamoor, Moorea, Celesia miraculously recovers her sight in his absence through the ministrations of an aged matron.

Racialized as a shedevil, Moorea (whose name also implies she is a religious other) intercepts the letters from Belvira to her lover. “The Black *Moorea*, black in her mind, and dark, as well as in her body” (332) is complicit in the evil that befalls the other characters and sends false news of Frankwit’s death. When the bewitched Frankwit fails to return, a rival,

the rich and manly Wildvil, marries Belvira instead. Reminiscent of the staggering consequences of incest in *The Dumb Virgin*, the narrator reports that her writing powers begin to fail her. Frankwit too is struck speechless by the events that transpire. Killing Wildvil in a fit of jealousy, he accidentally inflicts a mortal wound on his beloved Belvira. The paralyzing effects extend to the narrator who professes to be stymied by the pathetic murder scene.

Regaining her sight allows Celesia to become a legitimate competitor for Frankwit, whom she marries after Belvira's death, exercising an option unavailable to a sightless woman. Yet Moorea's machinations in her behalf release the blind woman into the sexual economy, and when Celesia's blindness is restored, the narrator feels inspired to resume her writing. In each of these novellas, the release from the defect of nature (muteness or blindness) brings misery and chaos. Defects need not render desire untenable; in fact, they may fan women's passions. Desiring women, themselves figured as defective and monstrous, are instead punished by bearing deformed children, breeding incest, and losing their lovers. In these two tales, neither the category of able-bodied "women" or of more literally deformed women can be released from the defective essence of femininity.

II

When at midcentury Samuel Johnson ironically protests in *Idler* 87 that "There is, I think, no class of English women from whom we are in any danger of Amazonian usurpation," he protests too much:

I do not mean to censure the ladies of England as defective in knowledge or in spirit, when I suppose them unlikely to revive the military honours of their sex. The character of the ancient Amazons was rather terrible than lovely; the hand could not be very delicate that was only employed in drawing the bow and brandishing the battle-axe; their power was maintained by cruelty, their courage was deformed by ferocity, and their example only shews that men and women live best together.¹⁶

Amazons are, of course, widowed warrior women who colonized Asia and built the city of Ephesus. Temporarily defeated by Hercules and Theseus, these barbarous and nomadic natives of Scythia (ancient European and Asiatic Russia) escaped after murdering their guards. They are commanding women who amputate or cauterize their left breasts in order to become better marksmen. Actual ruling women in the contemporary moment of the eighteenth century were imagined to wage war in the Caucasus or to live primarily in Africa where they "kill all the Boys they bring forth, and

train up their Girls to military Exploits.”¹⁷ Amazons represent an entire “race” of exotic women who are deformed in several senses – physically mutilated, sexually perverse, and possessing a womb, but disinclined to marry and reproduce in the conventional manner. As we have seen, woman’s essentially defective nature arises by definition and also when she gives evidence of being insufficiently feminine, and the Amazon personifies this doubly impossible position.

The Amazon, a powerful yet mutilated warrior woman, is a specifically monstrous emblem of women’s entry into the public sphere. Her defective male counterpart, the eunuch, figures as man’s fear of what may result from exercising that power. Defective women are so closely aligned in the cultural imagination with eunuchs, those “ecchoes of virility,” according to the mythology, that it is they who allegedly introduce the practice of castration. In fact, the atrophy of male organs and the loss of masculine attributes characterized a “Scythian” disease named for the Amazon’s legendary home, and “Scythian insanity” showed itself in Apollo dressed as a woman among them. Linking Amazons to eunuchs as exotic and sometimes racialized deformed beings, *Eunuchism Display’d* (1718) recounts the commonplace legend that Semiramis, Queen of the Assyrians, having dressed as a man and having led her troops to victory, introduced the practice of castration in order to demonstrate her political power over her lovers, and other legendary manly queens mutilate and maim young boys: “Perhaps this Dress gave Birth to those Reports, that *Semiramis* had made imperfect Men, half-Men, and so on, till at last it was conjectured, that she effectually made People undergo the cruel Ceremony of Castration” (4).¹⁸ Semiramis brought up her son as a girl, took men to her bed, and then executed them.¹⁹ In this cultural parable, male deformity misogynistically results from female authority.

Merely being associated with powerful women may transform men into metaphoric eunuchs, weak and listless men, if not literally castrated beings. David Hume, for example, recounts the legend of Scythian Amazons who conspire against sleeping men to make them defective in another way, to blind them, and to free the women from pleasing men through fashion and display: “It was, therefore, agreed to put out the eyes of the whole male sex, and thereby resign in all future time the vanity which they could draw from their beauty, in order to secure their authority.”²⁰ Hume continues, “There are a few degenerate creatures . . . , they are such only as by conversing with *Womankind*, putting on their foibles, and affecting to be like them, degrade themselves of manhood, commence intellectual eunuchs, and deserve no more to be reputed of the same sex with us”.²¹ Definitions of defect rely heavily on connections to sexuality, including the question of whether

persons are able to become legitimate objects of desire or to reproduce. Women seem doomed to be defined as defective, irritating beings whether or not they possess this reproductive ability since giving birth may simply confirm their monstrosity, while men's ability to penetrate and spend their seed gives them some protection from charges of feminine defect. If they lack one of these, their defect effeminates them. Enfeebled masculinity – enervated, luxurious, and sodomite, and a particular threat to an English nation poised for military victory and continued imperial expansion – finds its most monstrous manifestation in the eunuch.

Women's sovereignty in both feminist and misogynist texts in the eighteenth century rests uneasily upon unmanning men, and yet in possessing a sexual defect they resemble the most reviled of men. The author of *Beauty's Triumph* likens women to impersonations of "that copy of themselves," Sporus, a neutered male wife who is famously "between *that* and *this*":²² "All the World knows the History of *Sporus*, whom *Nero* caused to be gelt, and whose Folly was so extravagant, that he endeavoured to change his Sex; he made him wear Woman's Cloaths, and afterward married him with the usual Formalities, settled a Dowry upon him, gave him the nuptial Veil, and kept him in his Palace in quality of a Woman, which gave birth to this pleasant Saying, *That the World would have been happy had his Father Domitian had such a Wife*. In short, he caused this *Sporus* to be drest like an Empress, had him carried in a Litter, and attended him to all the Assemblies and publick Fairs of *Greece*, and at *Rome* to the *Sigillaria*, and Squares of the City, where he kissed him every Moment."²³ Yet peculiarly in this account, even a manmade eunuch or a natural hermaphrodite is better than a woman: "How well the masterly limner knew them [women], who snatch'd from them the graces he so skilfully bestowed on *Sporus*, that copy of themselves, inspired too by them, as they by *Satan!*" (107):

*Whether in florid impotence they speak,
And, as the prompter breathes, the puppets squeak;
Or, Eve's true spawn, and tools of th' ancient toad,
In puns, or politics, or tales, or lyes,
Or spite, or smut, or rhymes, or blasphemies:
Their wit all see-saw, between that and this;
Now high, now low, now forward, now remiss;
And each herself one dull antithesis.
Amphibious things! That, acting either part,
The trifling head, or the corrupted heart,
Bullies at cards, and flirts when at the board,
Now jilt like dames, now swear like any lord.*

(107–08)

His gender status seriously at issue, Sporus is a profoundly inadequate copy of women but reminiscent of their intrinsic flaw. He is also a third sex, “neither Male nor Female, but a Prodigy in Nature” (7) whose wit like his sexuality is impossibly compromised. A eunuch could be categorized as a natural or man-made deformity, both a risible object and a prized rarity because of his *castrato* voice. Boys may be born eunuchs, their testicles “lank and flabby,” or they may become eunuchs by having their testicles removed, making them, like Sporus, into manmade or artificial monsters.²⁴ *Beauty’s Triumph* argues that whether a eunuch is involuntarily castrated determines the legitimacy and extent of our compassion:

These are imperfect Creatures, in a Word, Monsters, to whom Nature indeed has been sparing of nothing but the Avarice, Luxury, or Malice of Men, have disfigured and deformed. If they have sometimes been raised to the highest Pinnacles of human Glory, . . . the People look’d upon them as so many Erroneous Productions of the depraved and corrupted Minds of Princes, who elevated them to those High States of Honour, and when they appeared in Publick, they only increased and augmented the Hatred and Aversion the People had for them, who laughed at them amongst themselves, calling them old Women, &c. (95–96)

As we have seen, all women share an intrinsic defect, yet some carry the supplementary burden of ugliness, malformation, or disability. Because their defect is “natural,” it distinguishes them from the eunuchs whose bodies may be marked by a vicious act intentionally perpetrated upon them. Natural defect and manmade defect do not run strictly parallel. A man in woman’s clothing, Sporus dressed as Nero’s wife is a precious yet inferior object, a preferable substitute for a woman. In spite of his impotence, his inability to reproduce, the female imposter possesses a cultural value that exceeds that of a natural woman. The affectation of femininity perverts manliness, though the exchange value of both women and eunuchs is high. In an important way, in these texts “woman” is a eunuch.²⁵

The author of *Eunuchism Display’d* wonders about the paradox that would grant eunuchs political authority: “I cannot well comprehend how any one who is mutilated, and degraded (if I may so say) from the quality of a Man, should on that Account be *more precious than he was before*.”²⁶ This double attitude of adulation and contempt, of awe and disdain, toward the eunuch replicates the combination of idealization and misogyny for eighteenth-century women and brings to the foreground the artificially social nature of such a defect. These contradictions escape resolution, for to reconcile them would be to recognize the artificiality and contingent status of these categories. It is precisely that constructedness that Amazons, eunuchs, ugly women, or deformed persons of any sort make visible. Yet,

since femininity is also gaining its own substantial subjectivity in the eighteenth century through women writers, the pressure to define womanhood as *either* deformity or its absence increases while exposing such a resolution as inadequate, since defect signifies both the inexplicability of difference and its attraction.

Unlike Aphra Behn's narratives of female defect, Eliza Haywood's *Philidore and Placentia, or L'Amour trop Delicat* (1727) is an exotic romance that incorporates deformity through a Christian eunuch. A fantasy of female power, the first section of the novel set in England mirrors the second section placed in a seraglio. In the novella, personal merit rests on one's financial fortune, on moveable property rather than landed wealth. Though he does not mention the eunuch as an example, Michael McKeon aptly recognizes that economic exchange in the novel is an endless circuit in which the movement toward completion and consumption, a perpetual imagining of an end that must never come, becomes an end in itself.²⁷ The eunuch, I suggest, is both a conduit toward the completion of traditional male–female desire and an emblem of the impediment to achieving that resolution. The eunuch is *himself* a commodity as well as the nonreproductive circuit, the emissary through which the traffic in women takes place.

The first part of *Philidore and Placentia* focuses on an aggressively sensual Haywood heroine, Placentia, who is in love with the noble but impoverished Philidore. As in the Behn novellas, the defective is intertwined with Eastern exoticism from the beginning. Philidore darkens himself to an “Egyptian color” and transforms himself into a humble servant who silently worships his adored object of affection. But his “native whiteness” and nobility soon show through his disguise to charm Placentia,²⁸ and she rewards him for rescuing her from ravaging ruffians by making him groom of her chambers.

At first adopting a manly threat of force to seduce her reluctant slave, Placentia later shifts tactics to propose marriage to him in spite of the disparity in their fortunes. Steadfastly refusing because of his poverty, he flees to bury his broken heart. In the story that constitutes the second part of the novel, Philidore during his adventures in Turkey encounters the Christian eunuch, a beautiful mysterious man, disguised in blood and dust. The magnetic attraction between Philidore and the eunuch is palpable: “Philidore finds himself attached to him by an impulse which he could not at that time account for” (188). The homoerotic undertones remain subdued, but the affection Philidore expresses for the “lovely stranger” continues to resemble that of a lover. To clarify the eunuch's sexual orientation, and to erase these implications of desire between the two men, Philidore recovers a picture of a beautiful woman from the stranger's effects, and only then,

by witnessing a medical examination, discovers that “this beautiful person had been deprived of his manhood” (192), not in order to obtain a position in the seraglio, but as a punishment. The exotic stranger finally spills out the history of his emasculation which reminds us of a similar juxtaposition between beauty and defect in Behn’s lovely mute heroine Maria whose loosened tongue freed her to speak of monstrosity. The occasion of being made defective or recognizing monstrosity releases the narrative. As Haywood tells it, woman’s “deformed” subjectivity, like the subjectivity of the Christian eunuch, is resisted and redefined even as it is constituted by defect.

In Haywood’s *Philidore and Placentia* the Christian eunuch, like the female sex he is alleged to personify and parody, is “fine by defect.” Of ancient and honorable family, the eunuch, the last surviving male heir and himself an exotic, collects rarities and, as one would expect from an effeminate, attends to fashion. Shipwrecked and captured by Persian pirates, purchased as a favorite by the Bashaw of Lipera, the character soon recognized even before he became a eunuch that he was a feminized commodity at the Bashaw’s disposal who possessed use value. The eunuch resembles “a fine garden, a palace, a rich jewel, or any other thing which affords him delight. He [the Bashaw] thinks of those whom ill fortune has reduced to be his slaves but as part of the furniture of his house, something he has bought for his use (198).” To his peril he had fallen in love with the loose and sensual beauty of Arithea, one of the Bashaw’s wives, in the seraglio.²⁹ Disordered by infatuation he refuses to leave when granted his freedom. Both the seraglio and his enslavement are metaphors for the power that love wields in making him forget national loyalties. Entering the forbidden walls of the seraglio disguised as a mute, already taking on the mark of the defective, he risks slavery and exile at his peril. Unsatisfied, Arithea relentlessly upbraids him for his cold European nature and his failure to confront the Bashaw, just as Philidore had failed to be sufficiently aggressive with Placentia in Part I.

In the conclusion Philidore, still in Turkey, suddenly becomes heir to a great fortune, and the economic impediment to his marriage with Placentia is at last removed. At the very moment of potential climax between the illicit lovers, Turkish slaves capture the European and make him a eunuch, leaving him “nothing but the name of man (206).” Placentia, having followed Philidore to Turkey, resurfaces as the slave of a Persian merchant. Now dispossessed of *her* fortune, she turns tables on Philidore and refuses to marry *him*, but the Christian eunuch is revealed to be the barren Baron Bellamont, her brother who was returning home to claim his inheritance.

The Christian eunuch awards Placentia a third of his newly acquired estate. Firmly situated within the marriage economy, Placentia's capacity to bear heirs is reinstated through the eunuch's good graces. Men who are outside heterosexuality and aligned with women in their defective nature differ in that masculinity is deformed by an inability to reproduce, while woman's status is ambivalent and inclusive of both since her reproductive organ is the very site of her defect.

Ultimately, however, deformity or defect are firmly attached to a male body rather than a female one in Haywood's tale, and the eunuch's defect is the cruel consequence of desiring a woman of the seraglio, a religious and national other, for which the eunuch is condemned to a life outside the reproductive economy. Marriage between two passionate European lovers circulates through the eunuch, a defective imitation of a man, so that money and value are partially transferred to the woman instead. The Christian eunuch's misplaced desire for an Eastern woman, a woman of the seraglio, emasculates him, enriches the European woman, and enables her marriage. There is not a hint in Haywood's novella of a *woman's* being genuinely defective; rather the sexually charged heroines berate men for their cowardice, and are in fact rewarded with a fortune because a subclass of men is rendered impotent and relegated to a lesser status because of his castration. In Behn's tales, women, both intrinsically and externally defective, were depicted as being on the margins of such a circulation. Haywood's tale suggests that women's empowerment is entangled with their sexual, physical, and moral deformity but not integral to it, and though women's economic fortunes may depend on men's castration, femininity need not be tantamount to monstrosity.

During the eighteenth century, I am arguing, femininity as perfect difference, an inferior perfection, competes with femininity as defect. Amazonian women and eunuchs representing the perversion of desire are the flawed beings who become the collectibles and unnatural exotica of empire along with giants, pygmies, mermaids, hermaphrodites, and mutes. Yet they are also the troubling and fascinating emblems of gendered uncertainty reflecting England's anxieties about its national manliness and its capacity to muster the necessary rapacity for empire-building. Women's defect, their reproductive power, could be manipulated for the transfer of wealth, social status, and political power. In eighteenth-century England women like Behn and Haywood inscribe a subjectivity that queries the concept of a double defect and contests conventional forms of sexual difference which would portray the exceptional woman as defective, deformed, and monstrous, even among the earliest practitioners of women's writing.

III

Eliza Haywood was also fascinated with Duncan Campbell, a deaf-mute secular prophet who flourished from 1710 to 1730. A cluster of publications, some of which have been falsely attributed to Daniel Defoe, centered on Campbell who is the subject of *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell, A Gentleman, who, tho' Deaf and Dumb, writes down any Stranger's Name at first Sight* (1720); *Mr. Campbell's Packet, for the Entertainment of Gentlemen and Ladies* (1720), Eliza Haywood's *A Spy upon the Conjuror* (19 March 1724) and *The Dumb Projector* (1725); *The Friendly Daemon; or the Generous Apparition* (1726); and *Secret Memoirs of the Late Mr. Duncan Campbell* (1732).³⁰ Eliza Haywood's two contributions to the Duncan Campbell stories, *A Spy upon the Conjuror* (1724) and *The Dumb Projector* (1725), fit within the context of anomalous beings of both sexes and of women writers in particular. The Scotsman Campbell attracted a parade of the curious and the lovelorn to his door with claims of possessing second sight and foretelling the future (illustration 4). Eliza Haywood was among those who frequented his home as well as Susannah Centlivre, Martha Fowke, Aaron Hill, Richard Savage, and Richard Steele. His story became so popular "that even before the first edition was exhausted, the sanguine publisher Edmund Curll, ordered a second."³¹ According to the *Spectator* for 28 June 1714, "the blind *Tiresias* was not more famous in *Greece* than this dumb Artist has been for some Years last past in the cities of London and Westminster."³² Campbell himself boasts in his memoirs, "But I was once in such a Vogue, that not to have been with me, was to have been out of the Fashion; and it was then as strange a Thing not to have consulted the *Deaf and Dumb Conjuror*, as it is now not to have seen the *Beggars Opera* half a dozen Times, or to admire *Polly Peachum*" (*Secret Memoirs* 13–14). Realizing the benefits of being spectacularly à la mode, he enjoys performing as a man of the moment whose advice is advertised as more valuable than new fashion. For women, soliciting Campbell's advice apparently competed with expenditures on modish clothing for their pocket money. His fame was such that an advertisement in William Bond's *Weekly Medley*, 31 Jan. to 7 Feb. 1719, admonishes female masquerade-goers: "I would therefore advise most Ladies, who are at so much Cost for their Habits, to lay out as they may with much more Prudence and Benefit One Piece of Gold more to see him for so much previous wholesome Advice; or if they are so silly as not to follow my Counsel, they would be at least so wise to themselves" to impersonate Campbell as a mute, and to affect being dumb only when they are solicited by strange masked men.³³



4 Frontispiece, “The Effigies of Mr Duncan Campbell the Dumb Gentleman,” to *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell* (1720). Later versions attempt to remedy Campbell’s concern that he appears too corpulent. Campbell’s hands with which he communicated are not visible.

Taking advantage of the popular taste for the odd, Campbell commodifies his own person to become the equivalent of a London tourist site, thus avoiding the usual dislocation of the disabled to the marketplace’s margins as beggars or ballad-hawkers. Instead Campbell evolved into something of

a cultural icon, and he functioned, in the way that we have seen disabled figures so often do, as a corporeal node that tellingly reveals social and historical tensions. The deaf predictor blurs the limits of the human – since speech is so often indicated as a characteristic that distinguishes men from animals – and calls them into question. Articulating these differences also produces the “normal,” a word that first appears in 1759, even as the culture seeks to locate the abnormal in place and time, as elsewhere and other.³⁴

The Duncan Campbell myth is a kind of secular conversion story that inspires the irrational belief that there may be some connection between uncanny abilities and disability. Eliza Haywood makes use of this intertwining of imaginative power and physical anomaly to connect implicitly Campbell’s predicament to that of early eighteenth-century women writers. In spite of being perceived as monsters Campbell, along with able-bodied women who publish, support themselves through intellectual labor.

As Behn’s and Haywood’s other writings make clear, gender cannot be isolated from other regnant cultural and political values, and Campbell challenged other kinds of assumptions as well. Campbell violated expectations of the deaf as isolated, economically dependent, and lacking in sexual desire, and I am also arguing here that the fashionable Campbell has such peculiar cultural resonance because he represents both the past and the future. As a freak of nature, a human being who employs sign language, and a mute who writes, Campbell sits precariously on the cusp between prehistoric time and the unknown future as a modish rarity within whom past and present intersect. Figured as a remnant of the past, he is also nearly cotemporaneous with Linnaeus’ division of man into *homo sapiens* and *homo monstruosus* in *Systema Naturae* (1735; 10th edition 1758; translated into English in 1802), representing a being who evolved from ancient creatures *and* an analog to the noble savage, a marvelous brute.³⁵ The popular literature of the period including Addison and Steele’s *The Spectator* draws associations for example between Campbell as “A Dumb Oracle” and a chattering magpie who is taught to speak. In addition, the fortuneteller made his living as an emblem of the speculative and its promise for the future.

In the eighteenth century defective beings were often associated, not only with a location at the edge of European geographic knowledge but also with an earlier “less civilized” period of history. By defective beings, I mean those with exceptional morphologies such as giants, pygmies, and dwarfs, as well as those with physical and cognitive anomalies including the deaf, the blind, and the retarded. Campbell, then, is an example of monstrosity’s temporal location in the prehistoric. Mutant forms are, like race,

given geographic specificity; often indicative of a species apart, abnormality is relegated to intemperate climates. The defective, then, are easily intermingled and made synonymous with the racialized since dwarfs, giants, and blacks together compose “deformed races.” A “geography of monstrosity” places the freakish at the edges of what is known and beyond, just as the racialization of space took shape in climatic theories that ascribed low intelligence and lax morals to torrid zones populated largely by people of color. Ancient writers such as Pliny and Herodotus, notes V. Y. Mudimbe in *The Invention of Africa*, are among the first to locate a “geography of monstrosity” that distinguishes the savage, black, and strange (the headless, satyrs, cave-dwellers without language) as residing elsewhere than the “civilized.”³⁶ Pollution, deviation, and degeneration of the “race” created social disorder and contamination of the larger social body, and it was popularly accepted that an environmental cause, especially in faraway places could take root in physiology to become hereditary. That is, bodily conditions influenced by the environment may take sufficient somatic hold in the body to be transferred from generation to generation; similarly, skin afflictions may first appear as disease only to become hereditary in a second generation to allow race, like defect, to develop a history.

The concept of the monstrous when taken together with the geography of race complicates what Charles Mills believes to be inherent within the racial contract: that it “norms (and races) space, demarcating civil and wild spaces.”³⁷ In Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality*, as Mills points out, “the only natural savages cited are *nonwhite* savages, examples of European savages being restricted to reports of feral children raised by wolves and bears, child-rearing practices (we are told) comparable to those of Hottentots and Caribs”; and because the state of nature was deeply racialized, savages were universally defined as nonwhite.³⁸ This leap from monstrosity to racialization is also compatible with other conceptual frameworks in the Enlightenment. *Spectator* 17 contends that odd creatures are found in “the woody Parts of the *African* Continent, in your Voyage to or from *Grand Cairo*” (1.76). David Hume’s racist footnote singles out a Jamaican man of learning as a rare exceptional being who resembles a speaking parrot: the Negro who is aligned with a parrot can be trained to imitate language, and his hybridity is both bestial and incongruous. Similarly Robinson Crusoe taught his parrot to speak well enough to startle him awake by imitating human sentiments: “Poor *Robin Crusoe*, where are you *Robin Crusoe*?” just before locating the puzzling footprint.³⁹ The parrot is also a familiar means to mock women’s alleged talkativeness. Haywood herself adopts the persona of the glib gossiping talking tropical bird in a periodical *The Parrot*