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Maternal Culpability in Fetal Defects

Aphra Behn's Satiric Interrogations of Medical Models

EMILY BOWLES

The abrupt and jarring proximity of desirability and so-called birth defects fascinated Aphra Behn and her circle. Dwarfs, giants, mute women, deaf women, disfigured women, and men and women with birthmarks, scars, and smallpox populate their writings and often take on central positions in the networks of sexuality and power circulating throughout the plays, poems, and prose narratives that were popular during the Restoration. Two prose narratives posthumously attributed to Behn foreground this crucial linkage of sexuality and disability. In "The Unfortunate Bride: Or, The Blind Lady a Beauty" and "The Dumb Virgin: Or, The Force of Imagination," Behn depicts women of extraordinary beauty that is contiguous to their disabilities.¹ Celesia in "The Unfortunate Bride" is "blind to all [her] riches, having been born without the use of sight, though in all other respects charming to a wonder," and Maria in "The Dumb Virgin" is "the most beautiful daughter" despite being "naturally and unfortunately dumb," the perfect counterpoint to her "distorted" and "bent" sister Belvideera.² The women's bodies engender desire despite and because of their failure to conform to standards of normalcy. Celesia falls in love with her cousin's lover Frankwit and marries him after Belvira dies in a freak accident; Maria and Belvideera compete with each other for a mysterious man who rapes Maria before it is revealed that he is their long-lost brother. Desire culminates in

and on the bodies of the visually and vocally impaired heroines, the blind and mute rather than the able-bodied Belvira or the disfigured Belvideera.

For Behn, desire circulates between able and disabled bodies in a way that draws attention to the seventeenth-century medical community's broader sense that women's bodies simply replicated male bodies in a defective, different form. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the continuum of what we now label gender, sex, and sexuality hinged on the notion that "sexual difference should be constructed as defect,"³ a point not too far removed from Judith Butler's critique of sex as a "regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled."⁴ Aristotelian and Galenic models of human sex organs layered gendered traits on women's bodies, thereby organizing, regulating, and forcibly constructing the genitals. In *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body*, Galen explains: "All the parts, then, that men have, women have too, the difference between them lying in only one thing . . . namely that in women the parts are within the body, whereas in men they are outside."⁵ The womb was concealed, dark, duplicitous, confusing, weak, and invisible—all words that became inscribed on the body in order to reify broader patterns or associations between women and dishonesty; "a woman's anatomy is physically the imperfect inversion of a man's."⁶ Felicity Nussbaum interprets medical depictions of women's sex organs as fitting neatly into misogynistic structures because they identify "women's flaws" as "natural and intrinsic to their sexual difference."⁷ Behn's literalization of the relationship between defect and femaleness in "The Unfortunate Bride" and "The Dumb Virgin" draws attention to several interconnected components of the disabled female body in Restoration culture. Central to these texts is the question of who creates defect or disability. Does medical discourse make women into defective creatures, interpellating them into and as the identities prescribed by its language, or do physicians simply describe actual bodies?

Judith Butler's concept of corporeal signification offers a model for understanding the shifting relation between cultural scripts and embodiment. For Butler, the body is always beyond the boundary that demarcates its material surface. She explains in *Bodies That Matter* that bodies are "a kind of materialization governed by regulatory norms," and she suggests that much effort has been put into the false naturalization of categories and qualities that "fix the site" of the body.⁸ The following analysis of "The Dumb Virgin" is based in part on Butler's ideas about the materiality of the body and its refusal to be disciplined, for the women in this novel (the mother and her two disabled daughters) are produced by the discourses assigned to both their exterior surfaces and interior organs. Behn selects heroines whose defects and disabilities

simultaneously reinforce and undermine codes of gendered, sexualized, and corporeal correctness; she uses her disability narrative to satirize the social and scientific discourses that make some women more available and more desirable than others. Behn begins her critique of the discursive constitution of the sex-gender system with a hyperbolic, satiric invocation of the double-braided myths of seventeenth-century motherhood. She showcases her awareness of the limitations that her contemporaries' understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality placed on women's bodies via representation of the slippages between desirability and disability, and she crafts Belvideera and Maria as self-abnegations of their own forms. They are archetypes and exemplars of female sexuality because of the non-normative bodies that destroy their semantic and corporeal stylizations. The body morphologies that Behn sets up in "The Dumb Virgin" disrupt the systems that value and devalue them, but ultimately the female characters cannot exist outside of the language, prejudices, and inscriptions that demarcate and define their bodies as other, as different.

THE TREMENDOUS POPULARITY of Dorothy Leigh's *The Mothers Blessing* (1616) and Elizabeth Jocelin's *The Mothers Legacie* (1624) underscore the cultural value placed on motherhood during the seventeenth century. They also show how precarious a state motherhood was. The best mothers were often dead ones, as these posthumously published texts demonstrate. In most of Behn's writings, mothers are dead (usually having died in childbirth), or they suffer abortive births. The mother in "The Dumb Virgin" died in childbirth after having given birth first to Belvideera and subsequently to Maria. Yet her failure to take on a socially and medically sanctioned role as wife and mother is the central component of "The Dumb Virgin."

Advice books for women centered on matrimonial and maternal obligations, and seventeenth-century women were encouraged to think of their identities as contingent to these social roles. The mother in "The Dumb Virgin" is defined solely by her failed adherence to these expectations. She was "a beautiful and virtuous Lady, who had rendered [her husband Rinaldo] the happy Father of a Son" (341), but her desire for something beyond the scope of her domestic framework produces a series of corporeal failures that are replicated on and written onto her daughters' bodies. In the second paragraph of the narrative, "*Rinaldo's Lady*" (the only name conferred on her in the text) "begg'd her Husbands [*sic*] permission to view" an "Island in the *Adriatick* Sea, about twenty leagues" from their home in Venice.⁹ The virtuous lady has transformed, in this interval, into a desiring creature; she

entreats her husband, “repeating her request” until he yields, “his love not permitting him the least shew of command” (341).

As is often the case in her writing, Behn shows a subtler inversion of gender binaries in relation to power. The male lover refuses to *command* his desiring beloved. Behn often draws on the tension between male political power and female sexual power. In *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684–87) and *Oroonoko* (1688), for instance, she shows women who transgress and attempt to acquire some degree of political agency only to take on singularly sexualized roles, and in her poem *The Disappointment* (1684), she develops a critique on the usual accordance of power and sexuality in pastoral and premature ejaculation poetry by spotlighting a woman whose sexual desires go unmet because of her male lover’s impotence. By doing so, she wryly demonstrates that feminine sexual submissiveness is a falsely naturalized category. With Rinaldo’s Lady, Behn constructs a satiric representation of the model by which female desire must remain controlled in order to reproduce normalcy.¹⁰

Behn alternates between aligning Rinaldo’s Lady with her male companion, “a faithful Servant call’d *Gasper*” (342), and setting her up as a foil to the male characters, different and defective in her feelings, her needs, and her mind. Behn implicates Gasper in upholding a private/public split that ultimately leads to the downfall of his private or domestic world.¹¹ Yet she repeatedly invokes the cultural prescriptions that make this Rinaldo’s Lady’s fault. Rinaldo’s Lady realizes she has lost everything:

the heaviest load of misfortunes lay on *Rinaldo’s* Lady, besides the loss of her liberty, the danger of her honour, the separation from her dear Husband, the care of her dear Infant wrought rueful distractions; she caught her Child in her arms, and with tears exorted thro fear and affection, she deplored the misfortune of her babe, the pretty Innocent smiling in the embraces of its Mother, shew’d that Innocence cou’d deride the persecution of fortune; at length she delivered the infant into the hands of *Gasper*, begging him to use all endeavours in its preservation, by owing it for his, when they fell into the hands of the enemy. (342)

Rinaldo’s Lady recognizes that her desire to transgress or exceed the boundaries prescribed to her of wife and mother—her desire to leave her domestic space—has broken down the fictions of conjugal and maternal identity; she delivers her child into Gasper’s hands (a word choice that suggests a rewriting of childbirth, redelivering her child so that he is reborn outside of her womb and her world).

Behn depicts Rinaldo's Lady as having a feminine, defective mind,¹² stating that "to a weak mind, that danger works still the strongest that's most in view; but when the Pyrate, who by this time had fetch'd them within shot, began to Fire; she seem'd pleas'd that her Infant was out of that hazard, tho exposed to a greater" (343). Rinaldo's Lady is impressionable, pliant, and (in Michel Foucault's sense of the term) docile.¹³ Her "weak mind" can only ascertain its material and corporeal surroundings; it cannot project or think beyond that circumference, yet it is Rinaldo's Lady's yearning for more than this that produces, first, her desire to leave Venice and then her powerful imagination, which engenders her daughters' disabled bodies.

After she gives up her son, the force of her imagination impinges on what would have been understood as her obligation to maintain what Laura Gowing describes as the "ecosystem which determined their future child's health."¹⁴ Her pregnancy is predicated on extreme emotion, for she learns that Gasper died and her son was lost: "her grief at the recital of this tragick story, had almost transported her to madness" (343–44). The *recital* of the *story* is what spirals Rinaldo's Lady toward madness, not an event, an action, or a body. In this way, Behn upholds the misogynistic system by which women are implicated in all fetal defects while critiquing the fact that this system contains and creates gender and power asymmetries. By repeating and reinscribing it, she also refuses and satirizes it. She shows that feminine defects of mind are written onto the bodies of children, a maneuver that replicates medical discourse while suggesting that women have a powerful ability to control what their bodies produce. The narratives that they believe are literally written onto the children contained in their womb (a metaphor that was popular with early modern booksellers and writers, many of whom compared publishing a book to giving birth). Belvideera and Maria embody Rinaldo's Lady's story—it is written on their bodies through their mother's form.

The storied nature of feminine defect is, in a sense, Rinaldo's Lady's failing but also her supposed natural state, which she imposes on her daughters by replicating, proliferating, and writing her defects onto their bodies. Belvideera's disfigurement is set up as the result of her imagination (so like a novel or a work of fiction and fancy): "upon its appearance their sorrows were redoubled, 'twas a Daughter, its limbs were distorted, its back bent, and tho the face was the freest from deformity, yet had it no beauty to recompense the dis-symmetry of the other parts" (344). Even though she is immediately called "a Daughter," this initial description of Belvideera insistently de-genders her, which is true later in the plot when Belvideera's distorted, bent, and deformed body confounds Dangerfield. He attempts to read her body

morphology at a masquerade but finds it does not correlate to any rules of embodiment that he has learned: “*Sir, (said he) if you are a man, know that I am one, and will not bear impertinence; but, if you are a Lady, Madam, as I hope in Heavens you are not, I must inform you, that I am under a vow, not to converse with any Female tonight*” (346).

Belvideera’s birth literally produces Maria’s disability. This is true in Behn’s satiric invocation of medical discourse, for she attributes Maria’s muteness to Rinaldo’s Lady’s sadness:

the Mother grew very melancholy, rarely speaking, and not to be comforted by any diversion. She conceiv’d again, but no hopes of better fortune could decrease her grief, which growing within her burden, eased her of both at once, for she died in Child-Birth, and left the most beautiful Daughter to the World that ever adorn’d *Venice*, but naturally and unfortunately dumb; 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)

The “learn’d,” Behn’s ironic tone here suggests, are not exactly subtle in their ways of thinking about the female mind or the female body. Here Behn clearly demarcates Rinaldo’s Lady’s mind, her pregnancies, and her daughters as the defamiliarized bodies of satire, and herself, a first-person but detached narrator, as a Menippean satirist bent on critiquing medical discourse in order to argue for the need for a new way of identifying difference.

THE DEFECTIVE WOMEN are the consequences of the mother’s failure to follow prescribed rules concerning the control of her imagination and her emotions or—again borrowing from Gowing—her resistance to the perceptions about maternal responsibility that were designed to “control women’s bodies and undermine women’s autonomy.”¹⁵ Rinaldo’s Lady felt too much for the loss of her son while pregnant with Belvideera, and she was too silent and melancholic during her third pregnancy. Along these lines, her identity as a mother functions as a part of a polymorphous body morphology. Her body is read by her husband/lover while simultaneously being read *onto* the body of her unborn child. The potential for women to engender disability begins with their sexuality and ends with maternity. As Gowing has suggested, “physical disabilities” could be read as having “sexual implications”;¹⁶ women’s bodies were thought capable of deforming or disabling men’s bodies through excessive, aggressive, or otherwise non-normative sexuality. At the

same time, their bodies were the cultural signs of biological difference. Behn's fictions repeatedly yield up a sense of disjuncture between the apotheosis of motherhood and the socially proliferating reality that the female body was always already marked as defective and monstrous, as a faulty male body. The Galenic and Aristotelian medical discourses created women as close to monsters, thereby designating them as abject and other—a necessary tactic for excluding women from equal treatment with men in nonbiological sectors, and one that was arbitrary, linguistic, and falsely naturalized.¹⁷

Terming disabled bodies monstrous was typical during the seventeenth century, as the following excerpt from Jane Sharp's *The Midwives Book* (1671) makes clear:

As for Monsters of all sorts to be formed in the womb all nations can bring some examples; Worms, Toades, Mice, Serpents, Gordonius saith, are common in Lumbardy, and so are those they call Soole kints in the Low Countries, which are certainly caused by the heat of their stones and menstrual blood to work upon in women that have had company with men; and these are sometimes alive with the infant, and when the Child is brought forth these stay behind, and the woman is sometimes thought to be with Child again; as I knew one there my self, which was after her childbirth delivered of two like Serpents, and both run away into the Burg wall as the women supposed, but it was at least three moneths after she was delivered of a Child, and they came forth without any loss of blood, for there was no after burden. Again in time of Copulation, Imagination oftentimes also produceth Monstrous births, when women look too much on strange objects.¹⁸

Sharp's emphasis here on *imagination* is specifically the site and subject of Behn's critique—she even gives “The Dumb Virgin” the subtitle “The Force of Imagination.” Imagination should produce fiction, not real bodies, Behn suggests. Yet midwives and physicians continue to set up female imagination as a crucial and detrimental component of sexual difference, as in this 1740 tract on female sexuality, in which an anonymous physician explains, “That Excess of Love cannot be particularly ascribed to the same Heat, but to the Inconstancy of their Imagination, or rather to the Providence of Nature, that has made them to serve us for Playtoys after our more serious Occupations.”¹⁹

Monstrosity was often literally assigned to sex organs. In *The Midwives Book*, monstrosity is aligned with a body's refusal to correspond to expectations:

Amongst false conceptions all monstrous births may be reckoned, for a monster saith Aristotle is an error of nature failing of the end she works for, by some corrupted principle; sometimes this happens when the sex is imperfect, that you cannot know a boy from a girl; they call these Hermaphrodites: there is but one kind of Women Hermaphrodites, when a thing like a Yard stands in the place of the Clitoris above the top of the genital, and bears out in the bottom of the share-bone; sometimes in boys there is seen a small privy part of the woman above the root of the Yard, and in girls a Yard is seen at the Lesk or in the Peritoneum. But three ways a boy may be of doubtful sex.²⁰

Sharp's construction of "monstrous births" as the result of female excesses (such as the imagination) or actions (looking at unpleasant objects) is not unique to her writing; she has consolidated much classical and current medical knowledge in *The Midwives Book* in order to make it accessible. As Caroline Bicks and Elaine Hobby have both argued, Sharp performs a unique and decidedly woman-oriented task when she publishes *The Midwives Book* by ensuring that knowledge of women's bodies is available to them and to the male and female midwives who were responsible for their reproductive health. But she reports on and even reinscribes many of the biases comprising the system of medical knowledge that was available to her, thereby inscribing bodies with the limitations placed on them by discourse and replicating the process of insisting on falsely naturalized binaries of monstrous and normal, of male and female.²¹

As mentioned above, Belvideera's deformity aligns her with monstrosity and, in Dangerfield's reading of her, with androgyny or mixed-sex identity. At the same time, Belvideera and Maria uphold a complex system of sexual exchange in the narrative. Both women's bodies fascinate Dangerfield, and his response to them becomes part of Behn's larger and more systematic critique of the ways these women have been situated as other or different. First they are women, essentially reducible to the construction of the female body as an inversion of or defective variation on the male body. Sexual difference is their most essential categorical inversion, and the one that corresponds to the largest organizing binary. Then they are inversions of each other. One is externally "distorted," the other "Beautiful"; one is witty, the other dumb. Their proximity to one another produces and exacerbates their sexual desirability, for just as sexual difference within a heterosexual matrix demands difference, so too does the privileging beauty over wit or vice versa, for Dangerfield vacillates between these women: "his love was divided between the beauty of one Lady, and wit of another, either of which he loved passionately,

yet nothing could satisfy him, but the possibility of enjoying both” (349). Crucially Behn does not “unwittingly replicate . . . the idea of woman as a defect of nature”;²² instead she satirizes it and sets up an economy in which women are in fact more highly valued for their defects, until these defects are pushed to their most intense and dramatic point. Their bodies underline how female desirability is always underscored by a “continuum of female disorder and ‘normal’ feminine practice” rather than a disruption or divergence between the disordered and normal body.²³

EXISTING OUTSIDE of the spectrum of bodies understood as normal, Belvideera and Maria develop beauties that expand their defects rather than correct them. After their mother’s death, Belvideera and Maria receive their father’s full support and attention: “their defects not lessening his inclination but stirring up his endeavours in supplying the defaults of Nature by the industry of Art” (344). This tension between nature and art, defaults and industry, function as the underlying pattern for the remainder of “The Dumb Virgin,” and Behn explores their relationship in order to heighten her readers’ awareness of how highly inscriptive “defaults of Nature” are, even when they are culturally set up as essential, unchangeable, and natural.

Belvideera’s desire for intellectual mastery suggests an attempt to balance her corporeal defects with mental perfections:

The eldest called *Belvideera*, was indefatigably addicted to study, which she had improv’d so far, that by the sixteenth year of her age, she understood all the *European* Languages, and could speak most of ’em, but was particularly pleas’d with the *English*, which gave me the happiness of many hours conversation with her; and I may ingenuously declare, ’twas the most pleasant I ever enjoy’d, for besides a piercing wit, and depth of understanding peculiar to herself, she delivered her sentiments with that easiness and grace of speech, that it charm’d all her hearers. (344)

Belvideera’s study results in a vast knowledge of languages and sociability, piercing wit, and charm. Her knowledge helps her enter into society rather than making her ostracized from it, in some ways making her character, like Angellica Bianca in *The Rover*, exhibit allegorical features of Behn’s ideas about female authorship.

Translation was one of Behn’s most marketable and sociable of skills; her deft turns of phrase, her confidence, her originality, and her knowledge helped her become as key a player in male intellectual culture as she was in

the commercial world of the stage. Her facility with French and her engaging Latin paraphrases earned her the praise and friendship of John Dryden and Nahum Tate.²⁴ In her translation of book 6 of Abraham Cowley's *Of Plants* (1689),²⁵ she sets out one of her most direct entreaties for fame and respect in a section set off with the phrase "The Translatress in her own Person speaks":

I by a double right thy Bounties claim,
Both from my Sex, and in *Apollo's* Name:
Let me with *Sappho* and *Orinda* be
Oh ever sacred Nymph, adorn'd by thee;
And give my Verses Immortality. (325)

Belvideera demonstrates a similarly acute power over language, but her unpublished, spoken discourse requires mediation in order to outlast her. Behn's narrator, like her narrator in *Oroonoko*, must confer immortality on her.

Maria's voicelessness directly opposes Belvideera's conversational skill and Behn's published writing. Mute, Maria seems most clearly to conform to the expectations seventeenth-century society placed on beautiful, marriageable women. She is docile and silent. However, her corporeally encoded and enforced silence leads her to learn or perhaps even create an alternate discourse:

she had improv'd her silent conversation with her Sister so far, that she was understood by her, as if she spoke, and I remember this Lady was the first I saw use the significative way of discourse by the Fingers; I dare not say 'twas she invented it (tho it probably might have been an invention of these ingenious Sisters) but I am positive none before her ever brought it to that perfection. ("Dumb Virgin" 345)

Because she is unwilling to allow her disability to remove her from discourse, she develops a system for "silent conversation with her sister" that becomes crucial to their bond and to Belvideera's ability to confer Maria's meaning to outsiders. Because she is thought to know Maria's otherwise unintelligible meanings, she has the power to represent her to others. She engineers Dangerfield's first interpretations of her, she applies meanings that she wants to the syntax of Maria's body, and she gives Maria reasons to envy "her Sister the advantage of Speech" (348).

The sisters complement each other on some very basic levels—they are the ugly and the beautiful, the witty conversationalist and the mute woman,

the mind and the body. Set in binaries, they prove inseparable. Dangerfield loves them both. Belvideera's "Tongue claim'd an equal share in his heart with *Maria's eyes*" (347). Their pathologies are subordinated to their perfections; their desirability comes from the traits that have been amplified because of their disabilities. The text reaches its climax when Maria's body becomes the focus of Dangerfield's gaze. He sees her in her nightgown and finds himself "like *Venus* caught in *Vulcan's* net, but 'twas the Spectator, not she was captivated" (351). Vision becomes a destabilizing power, like Rinaldo's Lady's imagination. Dangerfield sees what he desires, and he rapes Maria. Here all of the points of Behn's satire converge, for she brings together the traits most valued in women by patriarchal society (silence, beauty, passivity, and visual/corporeal availability) under the male gaze. After her rape, Maria learns that Dangerfield is her brother. He kills himself, and Maria speaks: "the working force of her anguish racking at once all the passages of her breast, by a violent impulse broke the ligament that doubled in her tongue, and she burst out with this exclamation; *Oh! Incest, Incest*" (359). The word "force" refers to the subtitle of the text, "The Force of Imagination," and Behn draws together the dead mother and her now-dead daughter with their shared balancing of this clause—Rinaldo's Lady is *Imagination*; Maria, *Force*.

HAVE FEMALE DEFECT and difference produced this tragic end, or does Behn accord blame to the systems that codify and produce female bodies as defective? The medical discourses that invented Rinaldo's Lady's "Monstrous births" (for Behn does see these as invented rather than described by medical discourse) and the sociosexual discourses that valorize the compensatory fictions produced on Belvideera's and Maria's bodies are part of the same set of practices, and the narrative offers a way of understanding how much of disability, female sexuality, and femininity is a product of the imagination.

Although Behn offers some real material details about the nature of disability, its causes, and its "correctability," "The Dumb Virgin" is most instructive in its modification of and response to the marginalization of disabled, defective bodies. Belvideera's physical deformity takes on some stereotypical features typical of Behn's antiheroines, for she is presented as duplicitous and bent internally in ways that match her exterior form. At the same time, she takes on the highest level of intellectual perfection in the text. Maria's beauty and her voicelessness, on the other hand, mark her as conforming to patterns of sexual value that she disrupts by learning sign language, engaging in conversation with her sister, and finally making herself unwittingly but corporeally available to Dangerfield.

With the attention that she pays to the construction of disability by seventeenth-century texts, Behn gives readers a clear sense of how disability was constructed by doctors, midwives, and even aesthetic theorists during the period while simultaneously highlighting the gendering of defects. The very literal and specific attention Behn plays to disability in this narrative has larger implications for the study of her writing, for she experiments with narrative tactics, allegories of authorship, theories of translation, and characterization that are contained in her more canonical works. Furthermore, her incorporation of medical discourse in these texts—especially Galenic theories and material about pregnancy and childbirth from books such as Sharp’s *The Midwives Book*—shows the dialogue that exists between her writing and documents about female biology and disability. Putting Behn’s writing into conversation with Sharp’s, as well as with other texts about the body and its reproduction, helps demonstrate the many sites of Behn’s satire and her attempt to reproduce through her fiction a space for the interrogation of discourses that rendered women as other, different, and defective.

Notes

1. I refer to these generically complex prose narratives as novels here because, first, they receive that label on their title page in the original sense of newness or novelty. Additionally, Behn employs literary and stylistic conventions of the novel, especially in her experimentation with narrative voice, intertextuality, and dialogue in these texts.

2. Aphra Behn, “The Dumb Virgin: Or, The Force of Imagination” and “The Unfortunate Bride: Or, The Blind Lady a Beauty,” in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 3, edited by Janet Todd (London: William Pickering, 1995), 327 and 344, respectively. Subsequent references to these works will be to this edition and will appear within the text.

3. Felicity Nussbaum, “Dumb Virgins, Blind Ladies, and Eunuchs: Fictions of Defect,” in *Defects: Engendering the Modern Body*, ed. Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 31. I follow Deutsch and Nussbaum in retaining the word “defect” as period-specific terminology “with eighteenth-century currency” (Nussbaum, “Dumb Virgins,” 35).

4. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

5. Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 628.

6. Martha A. Brożyna, *Gender and Sexuality in the Middle Ages: A Medieval Source Documents Reader* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 141.

7. Nussbaum, “Dumb Virgins,” 32.

8. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 16.

9. Although (and because) it is awkward to refer to her as “Rinaldo’s Lady,” I have

chosen to use this name throughout my paper to highlight the contingency of her identity, her namelessness, and her subordination.

10. Elizabeth V. Young provides a compelling overview of Behn's status as a satirist in "De-Gendering Genre: Aphra Behn and the Tradition of English Verse Satire," *Philological Quarterly* 81 (2002): 185–205. This study provides a much-needed corollary to broader, male-dominated trends in satire and helps showcase the ways in which seventeenth-century satire was constantly subverting the categories that were in the process of being codified by John Dryden and others in literary theory.

11. The narrative ends with incestuous sex between Rinaldo's son and Maria, followed by the death of Maria and her brother.

12. Although I refer to "Behn" as the author and ostensibly the narrator of this text, I want to emphasize that it is her fictional narrative persona rather than Behn's actual, historical self that enters into this text. As in *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister*, *Oroonoko*, *The Fair Jilt*, and other prose narratives, Behn's narrator enters into this story in passages like these: "this Lady was the first I saw"; "the two Sisters sent presently for me"; and "I was pleas'd to find so great an example of English bravery" (Nussbaum, "Dumb Virgin," 345). At the same time, the narrator is not an autobiographical self but instead a fictional character in the text who takes on the role of the Menippean satirist, not lampooning or using invective but offering modulated critiques of the system her heroines inhabit. When I use "Behn" rather than "Behn's narrator" throughout this study, it is for simplicity rather than to flatten or ignore this important point.

13. That is, her body is represented as a site of coercions that manipulate "its elements, its gestures, its behaviors"; see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 138.

14. Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 122.

15. *Ibid.*.

16. *Ibid.*, 115.

17. Rosi Braidotti has suggested that "woman as a sign of difference is monstrous," which is precisely how deformity and disability were set up in seventeenth-century discourse; see "Mothers, Monsters, and Machines," in *Writing on the Body*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 65. Felicity Nussbaum argues that Sarah Scott crafts an alignment of deformity with womanhood in *Millenium Hall* (1762) and that women's observations of harems, as in Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1762), inscribe the body of the Other woman with signs of alterity, difference, and even monstrosity; see *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Thus, according to Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, "the female body was one of the most significant sites where contemporary medical theorists wrote the text of women's otherness, weakness, inferiority, and passivity"; see *Women in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 18.

18. Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book* (London, 1671), 11–12. Available through the Brown Women Writers Project: <http://www.wwp.brown.edu>.

19. Quoted in Vivien Jones, ed., *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 82.

20. Sharp, *Midwives Book*, 115.

21. See Caroline Bicks, “Stones Like Women’s Paps: Revising Gender in Jane Sharp’s *Midwives Book*,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (2007): 1–27; Elaine Hobby, “‘To God Alone Be All Praise and Glory’ or ‘Serving Mine Own Sex First’?: Nicholas Culpepper, Jane Sharp, and the Restoration Midwifery Manual,” in *The Female Wits: Women and Gender in Restoration Literature and Culture* (Huelva, Spain: Universidad de Huelva, 2006), 249–63; and “‘The Head of This Countefeit Yard Is Called Tertigo’ or, ‘It Is Not Hard Words That Perform the Work’: Recovering Early-Modern Women’s Writing,” *Women’s Writing, 1550–1750* (Bundoora, Australia: Meridian, 2001), 13–23.

22. Nussbaum, “Dumb Virgins,” 38.

23. Susan Bordo, “The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity,” in Conboy et al., 93.

24. Dryden and Tate’s praise of Behn’s translations always inscribes them in her femaleness, her femininity, and her gendered education.

25. Abraham Cowley, *Of Plants*, translated by Aphra Behn, in *Works*, vol. 1, 311–53. The translation is part of a larger, multiauthor compilation of translations of Cowley’s works “by several hands.” In his preface to the text, Nahum Tate notes that Behn’s translation, with its personalized elements like the passage above, “o’er tops all the others” (quoted in editor’s notes to *Of Plants*, 343).