

UNNATURAL BODIES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATEGORIES OF SEXUAL DEVIANCY  
IN MEDICAL TREATISES AND POPULAR SEXOLOGIES ON GENERATION, 1675 – 1725

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By  
Terry J. Enns

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project report analyzes the emergence of categories of sexual deviancy as they appear in selected medical treatises from the eighteenth century. Terms such as homosexual or lesbian were not yet available in medical or public discourse but the early modern writers did use a variety of other references to establish the existence of such categories. For instance, one might label deviants as hermaphrodites, eunuchs, sodomites, or monsters to describe what were perceived as “unnatural” forms of sexual expression which ostensibly posed a threat to the social order largely because they were not procreative, but also because of the fear that they might produce children of the same ilk. Moreover, the sudden explosion in scientific and medical knowledge during the Enlightenment created a need for the organization and classification of such knowledge, as well as a fascination with anomalies and how they might be cured. My argument is that four of these deviant categories—the chronic masturbator, tribades or hermaphrodites, “mollies” (or effeminate male homosexuals), and eunuchs—were considered unnatural because they fell outside normative prescriptions of acceptable sexual conduct that was based primarily on pro-natal and pro-nuptial ideologies. I rely on experts in eighteenth-century scholarship, such as Rictor Norton, Randolph Trumbach, Thomas Laqueur, Robert Darby, Thomas A. King, and George Rousseau, to inform my discussion of writings from this period. Although contemporary scholars in this field have made significant contributions to our knowledge of early modern understandings of sexual deviancy, relatively few of them seem to have investigated how medical treatises on generation provided a scientific basis for the marginalization of specific types of people. By identifying these types under the larger category of generation, I argue that these medical texts and popular sexologies function as vehicles of social control by emphasizing that the only legitimate form of sexual expression was within the context of marriage and that its sole purpose was for reproduction.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my life-partner, Jim, who bore the sacrifice of my absence with patience and long-suffering during my extended affair with higher education.

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## Section I – Introduction: The State of the Field

Studies in eighteenth-century sexuality have proliferated in recent years showing it to be a field with rich deposits that have helped shape our understanding of the forces (whether social, cultural, political) that determined how sex and gender were constructed during the Enlightenment. Many of the experts in this field suggest that there was a radical shift in early modern perceptions of masculinity and femininity which led not only to the establishment of heteronormativity as the only legitimate form of sexual expression, but also to the stigmatization and marginalization of people and groups who were assigned positions within categories of deviance. As Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen state, “the categories available to men were being gradually reduced to either a macho heterosexuality or else an effeminate homosexuality, and these identities were being reified in relation to the body by new medical understandings of sexual difference” (3). To be sure, our modern concepts of heterosexuality and homosexuality were not yet available in the minds or discourses of the early moderns, but they did have their own idioms and classificatory language systems with which to categorize various types of people. Four of these deviant categories, as they appear in selected eighteenth-century medical treatises, will comprise the scope of investigation in this essay: the figure of the chronic masturbator, tribades or hermaphrodites, “mollies” (or effeminate male homosexuals), and eunuchs. I have chosen these particular categories because they are the ones that appear most prominently in the texts in question; there are no others. My argument is that these medical and paramedical texts are more than simply anatomical descriptions of the human body or commentary on reproductive biology—they constitute an important part of the social and cultural history of the Enlightenment and can be understood as vehicles for the transmission of pro-natal and pro-nuptial ideologies that regulate sex and gender norms. One of the ways my project differs from other scholars who have written about this period lies in its focus on the construction of sexual deviancy as it appears in literature on generation, rather than locating it, for example, in the infamous trials conducted against homosexual men by the Societies for the Reformation of Manners (Norton 44) during the mid 1720s.

Gender identities and sexual politics have been productive topics for scholars in this field to engage with, even if they have not made medical texts their primary focus. For instance,

Randolph Trumbach continues to have a major impact on social historians since writing his seminal article, “London's Sodomites: Homosexual Behavior and Western Culture in the Eighteenth Century” (1977). His work in *Sex and the Gender Revolution* (1998) is now a staple in eighteenth-century studies that tracks the history of sodomy in relation to masculine identities and convincingly argues that the emergence of heterosexuality is connected to prostitution and the disavowal of sodomy when he states, “Male reputation and identity grew out of a struggle to achieve an exclusive heterosexuality that avoided sodomy on the one hand and masturbation on the other, and that proved itself most easily by going to prostitutes” (14-15). Trumbach links this trend to the rise of individualism (9) and suggests that the existence of a “third gender,” embodied by the tropes of the sodomite and hermaphrodite, created a major anxiety for men which they usually resolved through romantic marriage (16), thus achieving their distinct gender identity *as men*.

Other studies in eighteenth-century sexuality concentrate on the sudden spike in masturbatory paranoia as part of the increasing emphasis on the proper uses of sex and the emergence of the modern nuclear family. For example, Roy Porter, in his collaboration with Leslie Hall in *The Facts of Life* (1995), offers one of the most comprehensive discussions on *Aristotle's Master-piece* (1733) (the first edition in 1684 had many subsequent editions throughout the eighteenth century). Their knowledge of the “print explosion” (Porter and Hall 35) and its relationship to popular sexual wisdom and advice literature is a good example of how to approach medical history from below. *The Facts of Life* (1995) also contains a fascinating chapter on masturbation which addresses one of the central tensions faced by anti-masturbation writers: their material, aimed towards prevention, might actually instruct people in a practice they might not have considered doing had they not read the tract at all (97). As a result of “informing readers precisely what it was too inflammatory for them to be told” (99), Porter and Hall reveal “the predicaments inherent in talking the taboo” (99), as they discuss the prominent role sex manuals played in forming sex and gender norms in popular consciousness. Porter appears in most books that house collections of scholarly essays, such as Robert Maccubbin's *'Tis Nature's Fault* (1987), and he also appeared as a co-editor with George Rousseau in their important work, *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (1987). These books offer a wide variety of essay topics that range from the cultural significance of hermaphroditism and the social construction of gender, to



the formation of homosexual subcultures and how they were perceived by eighteenth-century society. However, as important as these works are for scholars in this field, relatively little attention has been given to the role that medical texts played in the construction of sexual deviance.

Thomas Laqueur is another premier cultural theorist with whom one should be intimately familiar when pursuing academic investigations into sex and gender during the Enlightenment, though some of his ideas remain somewhat controversial and have faced substantial criticism by scholars such as Robert Darby. Nevertheless, Laqueur is an authority to be reckoned with and two of his works continue to impact thinkers' reconstructions of the period in question. *Making Sex* (1990) consolidated his reputation as a social historian by introducing his concept of the “one-sex/two-sex model” in order to account for the major shift in modern medical knowledge and discourse concerning the female body. Ancient physicians and natural philosophers such as Galen, Aristotle, and Hippocrates, Laqueur argues, regarded women as essentially incomplete or inverted males who lacked a “vital heat” (4) and that they were perceived as mutations of a single sex because “The language simply did not exist, or need to exist, for distinguishing male from female organs” (97). The two-sex model did not emerge all at once, but as early modern anatomists began to uncover fundamental differences in the reproductive biology of the sexes (especially William Harvey's monumental discovery of ovarian follicles), the categories of sex and gender conflated to produce new conceptions of women as distinct from men, rather than inferior versions of them.

Laqueur's most recent offering, *Solitary Sex* (2003), is an elaborate history of the medicalization of masturbation and tackles the central question of why it was perceived to be such a threat, both to individuals and to larger society. This work, in conjunction with Jean Stengers and Anne Van Neck's *Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror* (2001), provides a vivid composite of the masturbator as a particular type of person who was sure to suffer from a host of physical and mental ailments as a result of indulging in the lethal habit. Both works deal extensively with the most famous anti-masturbation tracts of the eighteenth century, the anonymously published *Onania* (1718) and Samuel August Tissot's *Onanism* (1766), and frame their discussions in light of the burgeoning quasi-medical profession known as quackery. Laqueur, in particular, devotes a significant chunk of his text to John Marten, author of

*Gonosologium Novum* (1709), which becomes an important focal point for my discussion of the chronic masturbator—an individual who could be either male or female.

Historians of lesbianism have made substantial contributions in the way of documenting same-sex relationships between women and exploring the intersect between hermaphroditism and female homosexuality. *Lewd and Notorious* (2003), edited by Katherine Kittredge, begins with an essay by Susan Lanser that contextualizes the materialization of the lesbian as a discursive product of hermaphroditism in the seventeenth century (23) which, as she suggests, is part of “the (re)construction of patriarchy on a foundation of heterosexual desire and identity” (22). While Lanser makes it apparent that the figure of the female homosexual does not come to fruition until the second half of the eighteenth century, that is not to say that it did not exist formerly in other idioms, such as the enlarged clitoris of the tribade or women who imitated men through cross-dressing in order to share the advantages of inherent in male privilege (Trumbach in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* 115). In fact, prosecutions for lesbian activities were often implemented on grounds of deception and fraud as Lynne Friedli observes: “Whereas men who were prosecuted in relation to homoerotic [or homosexual] practices were charged with sodomy, women who married [other women] were charged with fraud” (Friedli in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* 235). Sally O'Driscoll identifies another mode of expression that could be used to characterize lesbians when she discusses the image of the passionless woman in her important essay entitled, “The Lesbian and the Passionless Woman: Femininity and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century England” (2004). Emma Donaghue's *Passions Between Women* (1995) is one of the most comprehensive studies to address lesbian representations in early modern discourses and her work examines how those representations were being played out in poetic, religious, and medical works. She foregrounds lesbianism as a history that exists quite independently from gay history and that it can be traced through anatomical hermaphroditism, suggesting that “studies of sexuality have suffered from treating women as an afterthought to men” (9).

Just as scholars have traced the development of lesbianism through the figure of the tribade and hermaphrodite, much has also been written about molly culture by academic heavyweights such as Rictor Norton and Alan Bray. These authors represent the ongoing polarity between essentialism and social constructionism among queer theorists and social historians more

generally. Norton, famous for championing the idea that queer subcultures existed autonomous of the social forces that branded them as deviant, made a lasting contribution to the field upon publishing his book *Mother Clap's Molly House* (1992), to say nothing of the collection on his massive website *Gay History and Literature* located at [www.rictornorton.co.uk](http://www.rictornorton.co.uk). Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982) takes the constructionist approach by suggesting that the demonization of homosexuality during the Renaissance was the product of a mythological system that associated the sodomitical archetype with sorcery and witchcraft. By the 1700s, Bray argues, there was enough social upheaval to create a reorganization of ecclesiastical and governmental structures (110) so that “the generally accepted image of the sodomite was transformed [from an archetype] into one particular kind of individual” (112), which can be attributed to early modern obsessions with the peculiar. George Haggerty's *Men in Love* (1999) discusses male friendships in less frightening terms than those explored by Bray (such as the sodomite as werewolf and basilisk, for example) by framing his discussion of same-sex relationships “not in terms of sodomy...but in terms of love” (19). For Haggerty, love is an umbrella concept that represents part of a larger tradition of heroic and romantic friendship which needs to be recontextualized apart from its sexual connotations in order to account for the existence of homoerotic desire.

The writings of Thomas A. King and Raymond Stephanson are excellent examples of high theory in eighteenth-century studies, insofar as each of them develops complex ideas about the formation of masculine identities in homosocial communities. King's concept of “residual pederasty” (5), put forth in volume one of *The Gendering of Men* (2004), demonstrates the hierarchical organization and increasing privatization of modern male relationships which “were structured according to preexisting asymmetries of status and power—that is, differences of age and social position” (21), and connected to economic structures such as landownership. King argues that pederasty could be understood as a system of patronage which “entailed the materialization and embodiment of patterns of dominance and submission and—conversely—favor and superordination” (25), and that “subordination was pleasurable in the sense that having or achieving a place, or being granted a name, [which could] be pleasurable *and* oppressive” (emphasis mine, 25). He also traces the politics of effeminacy and suggests that, in a time where marriage was increasingly regarded as a form of social mobility (33), this form of invective

signified a separation of boys from men and could be used to validate one's citizenship (65). Raymond Stephanson's book, *The Yard of Wit* (2004), focuses on the cultural symbolism of the phallus as part of a new social milieu of male creativity and masculinity. Stephanson maintains that "Reproductive biology [in the eighteenth century] appeared more than ever one of the primary sites of an essentialized maleness" (9). Another central feature of his work is located in his detailed discussions on the significance of male potency (especially in relation to Alexander Pope) and he argues that there was a "gradual shift from masculinity as reputation to masculinity as sexualized interiority" (9). Both King and Stephanson occupy unique territory in the terrain of eighteenth-century scholarship and have made invaluable contributions to our understanding of the structure of masculinity during the Enlightenment.

Many of the works listed in this brief review of secondary materials focus either on court records of criminal prosecutions or on literary works (whether poetry or prose) to frame their discussions of transgressive sexuality and these approaches, far from being erroneous, offer salient insights into early modern perceptions of sex and gender and the norms that regulated them. These authors are also aware of the impact that print culture had on the medical profession and, as literacy increased among the lower and middle classes, so too did their appetite for the kind of knowledge (i.e. sex and reproduction) that was previously reserved for specialists of the educated elite. Consequently, this period of history is rife with medical and paramedical treatises that undertake to reveal the mysteries of generation and human anatomy to a broader reading audience that did not exist previously. Although most of the scholars I've mentioned discuss the works listed in my selection of primary materials in varying degrees, virtually everyone addresses these texts either in relation to generation itself, the rise of capitalism and individualism, or in light of the increasing awareness of the female body, as opposed to reading them for what the early moderns had to say about alternative or "unnatural" modes of sexual expression. These early modern texts on generation are vehicles for the dissemination of pro-natal and pro-nuptial ideologies which regulate sexual behaviour by categorizing particular types of people as deviants and reifying heterosexuality as normate. The title of this paper is also meant to suggest the kind of discourse that was most likely to characterize sexual deviance during the Enlightenment, namely, its so-called unnaturalness.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The word "unnatural" is a loaded term that is worth defining here in order to clarify what I want it to signify

I have chosen ten primary sources for this study which are meant to exemplify the range of medical knowledge that was available both to the wider public and those occupying higher social positions. Texts such as Thomas Gibson's *Anatomy of Humane Bodies Epitomized* (1703), François Mauriceau's *The Diseases of Women with Child* (1710), James Drake's *Anthropologia Nova* (1717), and Pierre Dionis's *General Treatise of Midwifery* (1719) are formal, sophisticated treatises geared towards professionally trained physicians and are most often concerned with objective descriptions of the body and its reproductive functions. The anonymous *Aristotle's Master-piece* (1684) contains more folklore than it does factual scientific knowledge but it was nevertheless one of the most popular sex manuals during the period. Jane Sharp's *The Compleat Midwife's Companion* (1671) was an affordable guide for midwives who might not have had access to higher education such as Gibson did, but who still played an important role in delivering children. John Marten's *Gonosologium Novum* (1709) is a good example of a paramedical text that is loaded with moral imperatives on the (im)proper uses of sex, whereas Nicolas Venette's *The Pleasures of Conjugal Love* (1740) emphasizes the idea that sexual moderation is crucial for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The anonymous *Onania* (1718) popularized the medicalization of masturbation and is most often regarded as the work responsible for spreading fear of the practice into public consciousness. Edward Ward's *The Secret History of London Clubs* (1709) reads more like a gossip column but it is a key text that identifies the figure of the molly and the homosexual subculture in London during the Enlightenment.

## Section II – The Figure of the Chronic Masturbator

Medical and paramedical treatises constitute an important source of cultural history that can be understood as vehicles for the distribution of pro-nuptial and pro-natal ideologies which govern sexual behaviour and act as agents of hegemony and social control. These texts point to

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throughout the rest of the paper. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as follows: a) contrary to the ordinary course of nature; abnormal; b) feelings or behaviours contrary to what is normal, conventional, or acceptable; or c) not existing in nature; artificial. The definition offered by the *OED* only partly captures my meaning, however. *Dictionary.com* comes closer to the way I want the word to register in the reader's mind: a) at variance with the character or nature of a person, animal, or plant; b) lacking human qualities or sympathies; monstrous or inhuman. Also, the term “deviant” presupposes the existence of an established norm and is used as a kind of subcategory of the unnatural which is discursively constructed in relation to abnormality.

the existence of underlying assumptions about sex and gender, which are often heterosexist in nature, and betray early modern anxieties about sexual difference. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen observe that there were growing concerns in the eighteenth century about how men were expected to conduct themselves: “What we see in the various literatures which describe the development of more sharply defined masculine behaviour is not the story of a unified male culture, but a growing variety of acceptable and unacceptable forms of male behaviour” (22). Masturbation was one of these unacceptable behaviours that was perceived as a threat to the social order precisely because it was not procreative. One of the central arguments posited by John Marten in *Gonosologium Novum* (1709) is that men have an obligation to produce children as part of their conjugal duties and that it is contrary to the laws of God and Nature not to do so: “Matrimony [is] instituted by Divine Authority, for the begetting of Children” (15). According to Marten, those who violate this statute, whether accidentally or intentionally, possess a particular constitution that is characterized by weakness and defect which renders them unfit for generation. Examples of an accidental violation might include a penis that is too large (16), a crooked yard (18), or a prepuce that cannot be retracted fully during copulation (20); his remedies include the use of a slotted cork to reduce the length of penile penetration (16), a lead mould with which to straighten the yard (18), and circumcision of the foreskin to free up the glans during ejaculation (20). Instances of intentional violations focus on the acquisition of venereal diseases (claps and gleans) through promiscuity (21) and most notably, our subject of interest, those who ostensibly contaminate and pollute themselves through masturbation.

Masturbation, contrary to being harmless self-pleasure, was seen by Marten as the primary cause of most sexual dysfunction—in males as well as females. For example, he claimed that it would almost certainly lead to impotence and irreparable damage to the testicles which, in turn, hindered the quality of semen which was supposed to be “thick and glewy” (23), and could inhibit reproduction if it was not. Furthermore, masturbation robbed a man of vital moisture and heat which invariably debilitated his physical strength and generative capacities: “Sometimes this deficiency [of moisture and heat] produces not only Effeminacy and Unmanliness, but also an universal Faintness and Consumption of the whole Body,...and that especially if the Person has us'd over much Masturbation or Friction in his Youth” (27). This particular excerpt is significant for several reasons: a) it reveals effeminacy as a kind of corruption that stands in direct

opposition to robust manliness; b) it establishes a clear link between genital activity and physical health; c) it locates masturbation in the province of adolescence. Laqueur also comments on the fear that loss of moisture and heat produced in the minds of the early moderns when he states, “In coition, people perspire[d] more than at any other time and thus might enfeeble themselves were it not for the fact that one person's loss is the other's gain, and vice versa: 'The one inhales what the other exhales.' The masturbator 'receives nothing'” (*Solitary Sex* 208). Laqueur's observation helps to contextualize Marten's comments in terms of reciprocity and thus explains “why it might be ten times more healthy to have intercourse with a prostitute than to masturbate once” (208). We can see how Marten constructs the deviant category of the masturbator not only as inefficient for reproduction, but also as a way of limiting sexual activity to heterosexual unions.

Marten also suggests that masturbation can lead to mental ailments and believes that the testes are connected directly to the brain through the nervous system; orgasm produces a kind of electric shock that can potentially damage the testes and, consequently, the brain. The following passage implies that there is an important connection between the sex organs and the higher functions of the brain:

[Those] that have us'd in their Youth too much or excess of Venery and manual Violence or Friction, which not only relaxes the Seminal Vessels, but destroys the Ferment in the Testicles or Stones, as plainly appears by their Seed's being of a thin, watry and inelaborate Consistency, which if not in time remedied, degenerates into Hecticks, Consumptions, &c. (34)

Here we can see a reiteration of the former excerpt with an added emphasis on the impaired mental capacities of the masturbator who “degenerates into Hecticks,” and lives in a feverish state of confusion. If we consider the prevalence of the homunculus at this time—the idea that each sperm was a kind of miniature version of the man himself—it is evident that Marten's focus is more on the preservation of the seed itself than it is about chastising the masturbator.

Nevertheless, the main idea of the passage suggests that masturbation is among the primary causes of this corrupt seed in the first place. Marten's use of “manual Violence” is a curious idiom that suggests people who masturbate can actually harm themselves physically by doing so and his writing is part of a larger shift in medical understandings of the form and function of “spermatozoa,” as was first observed under the microscopes of Antonie van Leeuwenhoek

(Stephanson 38). For Marten, the quality of sperm is vital for reproduction and is greatly reduced in men who masturbate.

The bulk of Marten's horror towards masturbation seems to be directed towards men but he has some interesting things to say about women who engage in the habit as well. For example, he claims that some people are more prone to be lascivious than others and that they are more likely to be at risk for disease because of it (54). Marten writes, “there are many, both Men and Women, of such unbridled Lusts and Passions, who frequently use Titillation to themselves without the help of one another, the Man by the Hand, and Women by the Fingers, or other more convenient Instruments” (54). Aside from his own disgust at such behaviour (he declines to say anything further on the subject), we can see that Marten thinks members of *both* sexes have difficulty controlling their sexual urges and that these people, far from exercising their reason and good judgement, have given themselves over to these apparently unnatural inclinations. On the whole, Marten believes men are more lustful than women are (he claims men are “the most lustful creatures in the universe” on page 5) because their bodies are naturally hotter. However, later in the treatise he suggests that some women violate the coolness of their natural constitutions by inflaming themselves with lust, especially women with “hot Wombs, of sanguine florrid Complexions, red Hair'd, [who have] merry dispositions” (86). Such women are incapable of sexual satisfaction and “procure to themselves with their Fingers or other more proper Instrument, a Pleasure that supplies the room of a Man's Embraces, for which reason the Clitoris in Women is call'd the Contempt of Men” (86-87), thus signifying the insatiable lust of women and the inability of men to ever satisfy them fully. Marten also identifies certain women who, he believes, are especially prone to “that practice” and suggests they can be found in particular places:

Widows, or such whose Husbands are absent, Maids, and even by Girls at Boarding Schools, to their irreparable Disgrace, that practice being almost as rife among them, as Friction among Schoolboys, and of which, as I am credibly inform'd, several young Girls were not long since detected, in at a certain Boarding School in this Town. (87)

Part of the “irreparable Disgrace” that Marten refers to has to do with his previous warning that women who pleasure themselves this way will lose their virginity by breaking their hymens (74). What made masturbation unnatural for women was not so much that it was an abnormal practice



—clearly there were a lot of them doing it. Rather, the answer to this question can be located in the pro-nuptial cultural ideology which regulated women's sexualities to the confines of marriage. The only socially acceptable way for a woman to lose her virginity or express herself sexually was with her husband on their wedding night; any sex outside the context of marriage was seen as a breach of sexual protocol.

We can also see that Marten locates the “problem,” especially among youths, in educational institutions where parents were not able to keep the same watchful eye on their children that they could at home and this surveillance became an important strategy of containment, to say nothing of how schoolmasters began to scrutinize their students. The paradox, of course, is that masturbation was usually constructed as a solitary vice but it could also be practised in social settings, such as Thomas King identifies when he discusses the model of pederasty in which the elder boy teaches the younger how to pleasure himself (107-108) or, as Robert Darby observes:

[P]rivate clubs centred around group wanking, a world of male libertines not unlike an American college fraternity, with lots of drinking, a bit of horseplay, and perhaps a female stripper. One of these, the Beggars Bension, held meetings twice a year at which the members dressed in monkish gowns, greeted each other by rubbing their penises together, and collectively masturbated into a ceremonial cup. (29)

The astute analyses of King and Darby verify the contradictory nature of early modern masturbatory paranoia; on the one hand, it was denounced because of its anti-social or isolationist implications. On the other hand, it could also be a relatively social practice and a kind of rite of passage with the potential to solidify human bonds and consolidate their sense of individual and collective identity.

The clitoris was probably the most unruly part of the of the female body for Marten (and others) and he had no qualms about connecting it to nationalist discourse or the fear of hermaphroditism and tribadism, which I discuss in greater detail in the next section. One of the most disturbing passages in *Gonosologium Novum* (1709) is when Marten discusses clitoridectomy, although he is careful to distance himself from its endorsement because such an operation would hinder generation. Nevertheless, he does prop up the superiority of England to other countries when he writes:

In some Eastern Countries the Clitoris in Women is so large, that for its deformity and filling up the passage, the better to facilitate, as they think, Copulation, they cut it quite out, or else hinder its growth by searing it, and is what they call Circumcising of Women: But of these things, and Hermaphrodites, as also of the odd and ridiculous Customs and Manners of many Countries, concerning the ordering, using, and abusing of the Genital Parts of both Sexes [he mentions elsewhere]. (87)

Interestingly, Marten uses clitoridectomy to distinguish between the practices of civilized nations (i.e. England) and barbaric ones. The quotation resonates with nationalist propaganda but it also exemplifies the growing anxiety about the clitoris as the site of uncontrollable lust which, if it remained unchecked, might even change women into men. This excerpt reveals both a fascination with and horror of the sensational, as well as the idea that the only proper use of the sex organs is for procreation and those who do otherwise violate the laws of Nature. Masturbation, in short, was seen as a deadly substitute for heterosexual intercourse.

Masturbation was also considered to be physically harmful and destructive to the reproductive system. Although Marten is usually credited with popularizing the word “masturbation” in the English language (*Solitary Sex* 29), other writers were aware of the practice even if it was not yet fully available as a concept in public consciousness. For example, Jane Sharp (one of the first English women to publish material on midwifery) describes it as a form of self-destruction and suggests that it is one of the causes of female infertility (*The Compleat Midwife's Companion*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition [1725] 104). She even suggests that priests and nuns are only able to maintain their celibacy and status as single people because they masturbate. Sharp writes:

Almost all Men and Women desire to be fruitful naturally, and it is a kind of self destroying not to be willing to leave some succession after us...But for Men or Women to Mutilate themselves on purpose, or use destructive means to cause Barrenness, besides the means prescribed of Prayer and fasting, I cannot think to be justifiable, though some Persons have presumptuously ventured upon it. Let the Votaries of the Roman Church look to it, when they make vows of Chastity, which the greatest part of them doubtless are never able to keep but by using unlawful means. (104)

The self-mutilation Sharp refers to is not the same genital mutilation we saw when Marten mentioned clitoridectomy; she is almost certainly alluding to masturbation. She also uses the

idiomatic expression of “unlawful means” to describe it as contrary to the laws of Nature and whereas Marten focuses on boarding schools as one of the primary locales of masturbatory practices, Sharp identifies both the convent and the priesthood as other ones. This might well be the result of anti-Catholic sentiments that were typical of the time but we can see the normalization of heterosexuality at work here, especially in the first sentence, as the dominant ideology of procreation is deployed through the rhetoric of fruitfulness as the product of “natural” (i.e. reproductive) sex practices. As Porter and Hall observe, “Heterosexual coitus was an act [which] it was assumed every adult would wish to perform, indeed, by Nature's promptings and civic responsibility, *ought* to perform” (96). Furthermore, the female equivalent to male impotence (which Marten claimed was the inevitable result of masturbation) can be established in Sharp's writing on barrenness. As a result, we begin to get a clearer image of how the early moderns were likely to conceptualize the figure of the masturbator—whether male or female—and this typology would become even more sharply defined later in the century in Samuel August Tissot's *Onanism* (1766).

Like Marten, Sharp also says that masturbation can lead to the loss of virginity and stain a woman's reputation when she discusses whether vaginal bleeding is a sure sign of virginity. Sharp questions the reliability of this proof, at least in older women, when she says, “the Sign of bleeding perhaps is not so generally sure; it is not so much in Maids that are elderly, as when they are young; bleeding is an undoubted Token of Virginity” (165). In the next sentence, however, she verifies that women *can* lose their virginity without any assistance from a man: “But young wenches (that are Lascivious) may lose this, by unchaste Actions, tho' they never knew Man; which is not much inferior, if not worse than the Act itself” (165). Sharp is saying that it is better for a woman to lose her maidenhood through intercourse in the context of marriage than it is to lose it by her own hand through “unchaste actions.” Given the fact that virginity was a guarantor of a woman's reputation and an important “selling point” for suitors, it becomes easier to understand why masturbation posed such a threat to women.

The unruly clitoris is a source of anxiety for Sharp as well and she suggests that masturbation can lead to an enlarged clitoris, a sign which we can begin to equate with female sexual deviancy. Sharp writes of the clitoris:

Some call this Disease Tentigro, when the Clitoris grows bigger by Odds than it should

be...it comes from a great Flux of Humours to the Part, being loose, and often handled: The Way to cure it is to purge the superfluous Humours forth, and to draw Blood, and use a spare Diet, and very cooling...You may take away the Excrescence by Sope... and, last of all, add a little Opium, make some Troches, and sprinkle the powder upon the superfluous part, and after that cut it off. (168)

Here we can see phlebotomy being recommended as a cure for the “great flux of humours” brought on by the “often handled” clitoris which exemplifies the early modern perception that sexual deviancy in women was the result of an imbalance of certain bodily fluids, as well as an improper or immoderate diet. For women, this meant that they should avoid hot foods because it might cause an excess of heat that would be contrary to the natural coolness of their bodies, whereas men should indulge in them because it contributed to their vital heat and sustained their virility. It also appears that Sharp is an advocate of clitoridectomy, at least in some cases, which seems odd given her assertion that the clitoris is necessary for generation because “it makes Women lustful and take delight in Copulation,” (36) and without it, “they would have no desire nor delight, nor would they ever conceive” (36). Again, the presumption here is that all women possess a natural inclination towards maternity, that sexual pleasure is necessary for conception, and that it is meant for the sole purpose of generation.

Sharp also suggests that “Rage of the Womb” can lead to insatiable lust, particularly in widows and maids (i.e. older women) for whom she recommends marriage if they cannot live chastely (198). “Modest women,” Sharp declares, “will die of Consumptions, when they have this Rage of the Womb, rather than declare their Desire: but some Women are shameless” (198). Here we can see the distinction between modesty and shamelessness being construed as codes for normality and deviance. She goes on to explain several causes of this womb-rage, which include masturbatory practices, when she states, “the Womb in the Nymph is most affected, which swells with heat, but the Clitoris, and not the Nymph is the Seat of Lust; hot Blood and Humours in the Womb breed this, and they are increased by hot spiced Meats and Drinks, Idleness and bawdy Acts and Objects” (198). Not only is the problem attributed to hot blood or foods, but she also implicates the clitoris as the culprit and, most importantly for my purposes here, “bawdy acts” can be interpreted as masturbation with a dildo or some similar object for sexual gratification. This passage indicates that masturbation was being perceived as more of a medical problem than

it had been previously and while it continued to be associated with immorality, it was increasingly explained in rational terms in order to demarcate its status as a problematic medical condition. In other words, masturbation was being discursively produced in relation to disease and infertility.

Studies on masturbation in the eighteenth century invariably devote some attention to the famous anti-masturbation tract *Onania; or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution* (1718). Although it was published anonymously, Laqueur argues that *Onania* (1718) was written by John Marten “in or around 1712,” (*Solitary Sex* 13) and sold above fifteen thousand copies before the arrival of its tenth edition in 1724, which was published by a “respectable” American publisher (34) in order to avoid the stigma of Grub Street publication. The implications of Laqueur's research suggest that the “invention” of masturbation was—first and foremost—intertwined with its commercialization and, like other maladies, could be combated with specially purchased remedies. The success of *Onania* (1718) was predicated on the representation of masturbation as both a sin *and* a disease, which effectively brought it into the forefront of public and medical discourse. Moreover, the weight of authority carried by the medical profession began to infuse this new discourse with authenticity and expertise, legitimating it as a real danger and a threat both to one's physical and mental health.

*Onania* (1718) usually characterizes masturbation as a spiritual problem that affects the body and the author often quotes Scripture out of context in order to validate his arguments. As Laqueur notes, “For almost all Roman Catholic commentators over the millennia 'the sin of Onan' had meant coitus interruptus” (48). Taken from the account in Genesis 38 when Onan refused to impregnate his brother's wife and incurred the wrath of God as a result, *Onania* (1718) interpolates the term as a neologism for masturbation. Another example that shows its decontextualization of Scripture is demonstrated when the author assumes that the apostle Paul used his metaphor of the body in 1 Corinthians 12 to describe the physical condition of the chronic masturbator, rather than the bickering that was going on in the Corinthian Church at the time. The author of *Onania* (1718) writes:

This reflection of St. Paul lets use see plainly, that whenever any give themselves over to Uncleanness [masturbation], they cease to be Temples of the Holy Spirit and Members of Jesus Christ, which shews this Sin to be the occasion that the Holy Spirit withdraws from

the Hearts of such as are guilty of it, because the Spirit can not dwell with Pollution. (9) Placed in its correct context, Paul's metaphor is meant to address members of the splintered Corinthian church in a call for unity but *Onania* (1718) uses it to scare people with the threat of excommunication from the body of believers if they masturbate. Furthermore, the masturbator could expect to be isolated from the presence of God who dwells in the believer through the Holy Spirit. In other words, a person's salvation was at stake should he or she fall into the heinous sin so people should “resist the devil and he will flee” (23).

It appears that women were in as much danger as men. Whereas men faced the impending doom of physical weakness, emasculation, or venereal diseases such as gonorrhea (18) (which Marten also established in *Gonosologium Novum* [1709]), women ran the risk of a host of symptoms if they indulged in the “filthy practice.” *Onania* (1718) states:

In Women, Self-Pollution, if frequently practis'd, relaxes and spoils the retentive Faculty, occasions the *Fluor albus*, an obnoxious as well as perplexing Illness attending that Sex, which upon account of the Womb, may draw on a whole Legion of Diseases; among other Disorders, it makes 'em look pale, and those who are not of a good Complexion, swarthy and haggd. It frequently is the cause of Hysterick Fits, and sometimes, by draining away all the radical Moisture, Consumptions. But what it more often produces than either, is Barrenness, a Misfortune very afflicting to them, because seldom to be redress'd. (21)

Masturbation appears not only to have caused impotence in men (19) but it also caused women to become barren, indicating that the author believed the practice would have a detrimental effect on the reproductive systems of both sexes. The primary purpose of sexual pleasure in women was to facilitate conception. As a result, orgasm apart from intercourse (as in the case of the female masturbator) was considered an illegitimate form of sexual expression because it was not procreative. This passage also shows the negative impact of masturbation on the mental health of women, who were liable to experience hysteria and madness if they indulged. Moreover, it appears that women who masturbate will not be able to retain the sperm they receive from men during coitus because of the increased relaxation and flaccidity of the vagina. With all its frightful consequences, it is little wonder that people were so quick to pounce on whatever cures might be offered by the author at whatever cost.

Masturbation was also seen as a highly addictive practice that women were especially

vulnerable to because they could not resist temptation as easily as men could, nor were they as rational. Pierre Dionis was a well established French physician who made reference to female masturbation in his *A General Treatise of Midwifery* (1719) as a form of “abuse,”<sup>2</sup> a term that seems to be one of the most standard rhetorical devices employed by those who describe masturbatory practices. Interestingly, Dionis's use of the word “abuse” seems to be more about misuse than it is about physical harm and his deployment of the term suggests the addictive nature of masturbation. He implies that there is a particular type of woman—a kind of proto-nymphomaniac—who is most likely to pleasure herself:

If it [the clitoris] is but slightly touch'd with one's Finger, it moves their Passion prodigiously: nay, some are so transported with Pleasure they have this way, that they abuse themselves...But what has been said must not be apply'd to all Women for there are some naturally very amorous, who controul their Passion, and give Instances of greatest Virtue. Others there are who are so indolent, that there's not the least Merit in their being virtuous. (105-106)

Dionis is saying that certain women are more likely to become chronic masturbators a) because it is part of their natural constitutions and b) because they will not be able to refrain from doing it once they start. We can see how the text attempts to regulate female pleasure by praising those who “control their passion” and denouncing those who are lax in managing their sexual desires. In this context, those who rigorously police themselves retain their virtuous status and we see self-control as one of the primary regulators of female sexual pleasure. The female masturbator apparently lacks the same restraint that sexually chaste women seem to possess which suggests that the practice was construed as addictive. The practice itself was most often heralded as unnatural, as we have seen in writers such as Marten and Sharp, because it represented a sexual activity that fell outside the normative prescriptions of marriage and reproduction and was regarded as a frustration of Nature's intentions. Dionis's main concern, however, is that the practice will become habit-forming but he also establishes a clear connection between a woman's

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2 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “abuse” as follows: a) use to bad effect or purpose, misuse; b) to make excessive or habitual use of, as in alcohol or drugs; c) to treat with cruelty or violence, especially regularly or repeatedly. Theresa Braunschneider also alerts our attention to the significance of this word: “In the late twentieth-century sense, *abuse* as 'to hurt' or 'to injure' does not signify in [medical excerpts about the clitoris]. Rather, women who abuse their bodies concern these writers because they are practising and possibly spreading unnatural behaviour: they are using their clitorises in a 'most unorderedly', 'improper' way.” (Braunschneider 517)

sexual behaviour and her character.

### **Section III – Mollies, Hermaphrodites, and Eunuchs in Early Modern England**

Much has been accomplished in the way of documenting the history of homosexuality during the eighteenth century and social historians who write about this period often rely on trial records or literary works to substantiate the existence of early modern homosexual subcultures. Rictor Norton tells us that the first anti-homosexual legislation was implemented in 1533, also known as “The Buggery Act” (15), and that it was a crime punishable by death. Buggery, virtually synonymous with sodomy, began to take on a particular significance during the Enlightenment through the emergence of a new category of sexual deviant: the effeminate homosexual, or “molly.” Randolph Trumbach observes that the word “molly” was slang for the more formal term “sodomite” and that it was first applied to female prostitutes before becoming a homosexual pejorative (*Sex and the Gender Revolution* 7). Alan Bray also suggests that the word came to have a specific association with male homosexuality and could be used as a marker of social identity similar to its lexical predecessors “sodomite” and “bugger” (103), although these latter terms could refer to a wider range of sexual practices than homosexuality alone. Bray writes, “What had once been thought of as a potential in all sinful human nature had become the particular vice of a certain kind of people, with their own distinctive way of life” (104). One of the ways my project differs from the scholars mentioned above lies in its focus on the construction of the figure of the homosexual as it appears in medical treatises on generation. The unnatural body of the molly was labelled as such precisely because it was not, in the most literal sense, procreative. However, the trope of the molly was also being constructed in a more figurative sense as well and some writers, such as Edward Ward, used reproduction (or lack of it) as a literary metaphor to consolidate English cultural identity and denounce national degeneracy. In other words, mollies became symbols of political invective in a culture war against libertines.

Edward Ward's *The Secret History of London Clubs* (1709) can be thought of as a guide to the sexual underground of London—the “English Sodom” (38)—and it contains an important chapter on Molly Clubs describing the kinds of activities that mollies were likely to engage in and how they might appear visually. For example, the author tells us that mollies imitated women



through affected mannerisms (such as talking in high pitched voices) and by wearing women's clothes (284), suggesting that they could be identified primarily by their effeminate exterior. He also reports that mollies held mock-births wherein someone would dress up as pregnant woman and the rest of the group would assume feminine roles such as a midwife, nurse, or gossip (i.e. a woman whose purpose it was to distract the birthing mother from her labour pains by talking) (285). Ward writes:

They [mollies] had cusheon'd up the Belly of one of their Sodomitical Brethren, or rather Sisters, as they commonly call'd themselves, disguising him in [woman's clothes], who was to mimick the wry faces of a groaning Woman, to be deliver'd of a joynted Babie they had provided for that Purpose, and to undergo all the Formalities of a Lying in. The Wooden Off-spring [was] to be afterwards Christen'd. (285)

This passage indicates the subversive nature of the molly subculture as members of the club perform their sexual identities through the rituals and practices that accompany birthing. Whereas the chronic masturbator was identified mostly in terms of his or her biological defects and lack of self-control, the molly is portrayed here as one whose deviance is based on a wilful transgression of gender expectations. The excerpt also shows how knowledge about reproduction, midwifery, and pregnancy was being widely disseminated as a major component of Enlightenment culture and suggests that pro-natal and pro-nuptial ideologies were normative structures that governed and regulated sexual behaviour—even among the mollies. Bray observes that mollies also deployed other euphemisms as signifiers of male homosexuality: “The room in a molly house where couples were able to have sexual relations was the 'chapel', and the act itself 'marrying' or a 'wedding night'; similarly a 'husband' was a sexual partner” (86). Clearly these heterosexual allusions carried substantial weight even in the communities of mollies, suggesting heterosexuality was not only entrenched in larger society, it was also being accessed by homosexual men to shape their identities.

Ward's disgust at such “preternatural Pollutions” (288) exemplifies the attitudes of English society towards homosexuality at this time as he titillates his readers with details meant to shock or offend the sensibilities of his polite readers:

[H]aving wash'd away, with Wine, all fear of Shame, as well as the Checks of Modesty, then they began to enter upon their Beastly Obscenities, and to take those infamous

Liberties with one another, that no Man, who is not sunk into a State of Devilism, can think on without Blushing, or mention without a Christian Abhorrence of all such Heathenish Brutalities. (288)

Here Ward sketches out a particular typology of the male homosexual that is characterized by ungodliness and depravity and he states that no reasonable or civilized person would ever engage in such “Beastly Obscenities,” reducing the molly to sub-human status as a result. Moreover, the author suggests that sex between men is part of an unscrupulous libertine agenda that threatens to undo the piety of conservative modesty which ostensibly knits the social, cultural, and moral fabric of England together.

The author finishes the chapter with a derogatory, homophobic poem that profiles the molly in terms of insanity, monstrosity, and unnaturalness:

Sure the curs'd Father of this Race [of mollies],  
 That does both Sexes thus disgrace,  
 Must be a monster, Mad, or Drunk,  
 Who [beds] some prepostrous Punk...  
 Men who chuse this backward Way,  
 Are fifty Times worse Swine than they:  
 For the less Savage four-leg'd Creature,  
 Lives but according to his Nature:  
 But the *Bug'ranto* two leg'd Brute,  
 Persues his Lust contrary to't. (299-300)

This poem echoes the concerns that medical writers had regarding the delicate, if not precarious, natural processes required for generation and Ward's depiction of the molly as unnatural is part of the dominant, hegemonic paradigm that the sole purpose of sex is for reproduction. Ward's implicit assumption here is that all men possess an innate desire towards heterosexuality; therefore, engaging in homosexual behaviour is a breach of a one's natural inclinations towards procreation and a perversion of one's role as a man—especially when he assumes the passive role. Furthermore, by labelling mollies as “monsters,” Ward melds masculine identity with reproduction and dehumanizes those who occupy peripheral or non-normative sexual spaces. Dennis Todd comments on the special social function of monsters:

Monsters make us experience a dispersion of identity. They are liminal creatures, straddling boundaries between categories we wish to keep distinct and separate, blurring distinctions, haunting us with the possibility that the categories themselves are ambiguous, permeable... Androgynous monsters such as hermaphrodites and bearded ladies perplex the normally distinct identity of the sexes...Monsters answer to suspicions we may have about our own identities. (156)

Todd's observation can be applied to Ward's writing insofar as Ward makes a clear distinction between the humanity of the heterosexual and the monstrous molly in order to valorize the one and vilify the other, thereby legitimating the primacy of masculinity that is founded on heterosexuality and setting up a homo/hetero binary with which to categorize the homosexual as deviant. Consequently, the molly is categorized as unnatural largely because his sexual behaviour falls outside the prescriptive social norms that buttress the idea that reproductive sex is the only legitimate form of sexual expression.

The only work from my selection of medical texts that deals with male homosexuality with any specificity is the anonymously authored *Aristotle's Master-piece* (1684). Its publication history has been amply covered by Porter and Hall and need not be reproduced here. However, the immense popularity of the text as a “how-to” manual for newly wedded couples warrants investigation into its representation of sexual deviancy. When compared to treatises such as Drake's or Gibson's (which I discuss later), *Aristotle's Master-piece* (1684) reads more like folklore than it does a high-end medical text containing specialized anatomical descriptions. Nevertheless, the text offers some interesting explanations on the origins of “monsters” (or children born with birth defects) and suggests that these children reflect the socio-political health of a given nation. For instance, the author makes reference to a French child born in 1597 that “was all over covered with Hair like a beast” whose “Navel was in the Place where his Nose should stand.” (98). Although the child died after only a few days, the author interprets its existence as a sign of societal degeneration which seems to be the result of male homosexuality:

It [the child] was looked upon as a forerunner of those Desolations which soon after happened in that kingdom, wherein men were turned towards each other, more like Beasts than Humane Creatures. Where Children thus are born with hairy Coats, Heaven's Wrath unto the kingdom it denotes. (98)

*Aristotle's Master-piece* (1684) is well known for its sensational descriptions of unnatural bodies and this passage, along with identifying homosexuality as a French practice, seems to imply that it is responsible for causing birth defects. Here we can see how the author explains such births as a kind of divine retribution on the nation that tolerates or practices homosexuality and that excessive body hair on infants is one of its consequential indicators. Moreover, it represents male homosexuals in bestial terms and configures them as scapegoats who are blamed for corrupting the natural order. As a result, the passage functions as a restrictive warning against homosexual practices for fear it might somehow deform the foetus while it is still in the mother's womb.

Although most of the medical materials that I've consulted for this study seldom mention male homosexuality or sodomy, when we substitute hermaphrodite in place of homosexual, the homosexual subject becomes easier to recognize. Trumbach argues that the category of the hermaphrodite was a seventeenth-century concept of a “third gender” that was gradually displaced by that of the sodomite after 1700 (*Sex and the Gender Revolution* 9). Androgyny does not necessarily translate into homosexuality but all of the early modern writings explored in this paper discuss hermaphroditism with some degree of anxiety. For example, Thomas Gibson, the English anatomist who published *The Anatomy of Human Bodies Epitomized* (1703), writes:

There are many stories of such as have had it [the clitoris] so long and big as to be able to accompany other Women like unto Men, and such as called Fricatrices or otherwise Hermaphrodites; who it's not probable are truly of both Sexes, but only the Testes fall down into the Labia, and this Clitoris is preternaturally extended. (198-199)

What is remarkable about this passage is that Gibson seems to elide the existence of hermaphrodites when he genders them as essentially female. He even tries to demystify the trope by reducing it to mere “stories” and in doing so, suggests that people have simply misinterpreted the true sex of the hermaphrodite. Valerie Traub gives a brief etymology of the word “Fricatrice” when she states, “*Tribade* is a French term derived from the Greek *tribas* and *tribein*, to rub—and hence the Latin *fricatix* and the English *rubster*” (Traub 253). Sally O'Driscoll argues that there was a growing apprehension about how to represent the female body and that the figure of the tribade was part of a “cultural rebirth of the clitoris and the re-emergence of her ghostly yet monstrous twin, the tribade, inaugurated a crisis in the representation of female bodies and bonds” (O'Driscoll 112). Whereas the molly was marked by cross-dressing or effeminate

mannerisms and characterized (at least by Ward) as psychologically or morally deviant, the tribade was being construed by medical writers as biologically deviant—an unnatural body. Moreover, we can see a larger cultural fear that women might run the risk of a sex change if they penetrated other women and that the tribade would necessarily *want* to do so, even though Gibson distances himself from endorsing such beliefs under the aegis of scientific objectivity. Consequently, his description lacks any condemnation of hermaphroditism but provides us with insight into how it was being perceived culturally nonetheless.

Although the category of the hermaphrodite was usually seen as ambiguous or anomalous, we should bear in mind that many of the writers of this period were simply trying to objectively describe what they saw. For example, James Drake was another prestigious English surgeon who included a brief discussion of hermaphrodites in his *Anthropologia Nova* (1717), although he seems less certain about their actual sex than Gibson was. Drake claims to have had first-hand experience in seeing a hermaphrodite and his description of the child's ambivalent genitalia indicates the difficulty he has in identifying the sex of the child with any certainty:

I had one brought to me, the Clitoris of which hung out of the Body so far, at about three Years old, that it resembled very much a Penis, but it wanted the Perforation...the Clitoris [filled] all the rest of the Orifice: So that the Parents mistook it for a Boy, and as such christned it, and as such esteem'd it when it was brought to me. But the Neighbours, who had notice of this Appearance, called it an Hermaphrodite. (148)

Whereas Gibson opined that hermaphrodites were women of some sort, Drake implies that they are more like men than women because their clitoris has the semblance of a penis. This passage also suggests that gender is socially constructed, insofar as the parents raise the child *as a boy*. What is less clear, however, is what the category of hermaphrodite actually signifies to the neighbours, since they seem to be in agreement that a hermaphrodite cannot be male. Emma Donoghue offers a compelling explanation of the paranoia surrounding hermaphrodites when she states, “What matters most about the concept of lesbians as hermaphrodites is not its accuracy, but its function: this theory served the interests of those who wanted to frighten women into heterosexual passivity” (28). Donoghue's observation helps square the cultural anxiety surrounding the enlarged clitoris, since women who had them were stereotyped as active, penetrative sex partners—a role that was, perhaps, the single greatest defining aspect of male

sexual identity. Furthermore, it becomes increasingly evident that the texts I've been discussing are more than merely descriptions of human anatomy and reproduction. As Harriette Andreadis notes, "Rather than reading [medical texts] as primarily providing information about what was known about female sexuality and about attitudes towards it, we can begin to understand them as instruments of social control" (Andreadis in *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe* 262). Like any other source of historical evidence, we can see how medical and paramedical texts can be interpreted as vehicles of socio-cultural value systems and ideologies that differentiate between the normal and the deviant or the natural from the unnatural.

*Aristotle's Master-piece* (1684) frequently uses body hair to categorize particular types of people and too much of it is just as bad as too little. For example, women who have facial hair are shown as "addicted to the Company of Men, and are of a strong and manly Constitution" (117) and men who have overly hairy arms (122), backs (126), or calves (127), are characterized as "luxurious and weak" (122) and "beastly" (126). However, a bushy beard and a lush head of hair "signifies a Man of good Nature, honest, loving, sociable, and full of Humanity" (118). Contrariwise, males with little facial hair are categorized as inferior and are suspected of being woman-like and the text even goes so far as to compare them with eunuchs:

He that hath but little Beard, is for the most part, naturally proud, pining, peevish, and unsociable. They who have no Beards, have always shrill and strange kind of squeaky Voices, and are of a weak Constitution; which is apparent in the case of Eunuchs, who, after they are deprived of their Virility, are transformed from the Nature of Men into the Constitution of Women. (118)

Once again, we can see the cultural fear of sexual metamorphosis being played out in a text on generation as the author expresses anxiety about the possibility of men becoming like women and vice versa. While eunuchery does not necessarily signal male homosexuality, it is evident that feminine characteristics cannot be mapped onto the male body without some kind of social transgression. The passage also assumes that external appearances are the best markers for gender and sexual identities which must be regulated in order to maintain the status quo of heteronormativity.

Eunuchs constitute an interesting subset of sexual deviant but I want to be careful not to conflate them with effeminate homosexuals because they are separate categories. However, we

might consider to what extent these two categories share similarities. Eunuchs were most often seen as possessing feminine attributes not unlike those of mollies, to say nothing of their inability to produce children. John Marten, for instance, offers the following description of eunuchs:

Man is very much injur'd [by the loss of his testicles], not only as to the Strength, Activity, and Vigour of his Body, Acuteness of his Reason and Judgement, &c. but is the sole hindrance as to Procreation, which perfectly un-Mans him; for we see those that are Born without Stones, or are Castrated, are much more effeminate and Womanish, with squeaking Voices, little or no Beards and thereby despis'd, especially by the Women. (4)

This passage reveals some of the gendered social expectations placed on men whose manhood depended on their embodiment of masculinity through various physical traits; *real* men have bushy beards and gruff voices. Furthermore, we can see how masculine status could be gauged in terms of one's ability or desire to reproduce, which effectively disqualified eunuchs (and, presumably, homosexual men) from ever fully possessing a male identity or accessing it in any meaningful way. As Raymond Stephanson notes, "the male reproductive system [became] one of the primary sites of an essentialized maleness, with the yard as the key symbol of that essence" (31). Similarly, any damage sustained by the male reproductive system that hindered procreation would have been regarded as a fundamental flaw of the essentialized maleness to which Stephanson draws our attention. In other words, the gender and social identities of males were inextricably linked to the genitals and one's worth or usefulness *as a man* was predicated on his generative capacities; the same could be said of women as well.

Marten was not the only one to express trepidation about eunuchs. Pierre Dionis published *A General Treatise of Midwifery* (1719) partly as a defence of man-midwifery and there is a tiny, though significant, section that addresses eunuchery. Interestingly enough, Dionis's discussion on eunuchs is situated right in the midst of an explanation of infertility and it evokes a strong response from an otherwise objective man of science:

Barrenness is esteem'd a very great Imperfection and Defect, not only in Women, but also in Men; for Eunuchs are shunn'd and despis'd by all Mankind, not only as good for nothing, but of a disagreeable Aspect that bodes no good where ever they come: and even in a Hen-house, Capons and Pullets are chas'd up and down, and peck'd by all other Fowls, that have an Aversion to them, tho they know not what moves them to it. Thus, by

the Appointment and Instinct of Nature, every Animal that cannot engender, or bring forth, is defective and contemptible. (62)

Here Dionis analogizes the eunuch in terms of a castrated cock in order to signal his uselessness to the human race and he even implies that there is something natural about social ostracism. None of the medical texts I've consulted ever mention the castrati (i.e. men who were castrated to acquire a high-pitched singing voice), although one could make the argument that they do constitute an important subset of eunuchs who occupied higher social positions in the culture because of their operatic abilities. Nevertheless, the eunuch is generally seen as an object of derision and scorn who occupies a social space that is characterized by mockery and contempt (and, later in the century, by parody and satire) because he cannot fulfil his procreative obligations to impregnate a female partner, nor does he contribute to the expansion of the nation. On the contrary, his reproductive system is considered defective (even if it is congenital) and he is intrinsically marginalized by those who require an anomalous “other” to justify their own positions of superiority in the social hierarchy. In addition to his pro-natal sentiments, Dionis also takes a strong pro-nuptial stance to solidify his argument: “I'm persuaded that Men and Women who do not use these [Powers of Generation], and do not marry, act contrary to the Intention and Will of their Creator, who instituted Marriage before the Sacraments” (63). We might consider to what extent single people were suspected of sexual deviancy by larger society. However, Dionis makes it clear that the socio-cultural value of sex is located primarily within the context of marriage and family.

Initially published in 1671 (Porter and Hall 71), Jane Sharp's *Compleat Midwife's Companion* (1725) also demonstrates the eunuch's ubiquity as an eighteenth-century trope of male sexual deviance. We can see the same kinds of effeminate attributes that were mentioned by Marten being moulded in Sharp's work as well, although she seems much less inclined to pronounce the same kinds of moral judgements:

Take away a Man's Stones, and he is no more the same Man, but grows cold of Constitution, though he were never so hot before, and is subject to Convulsive Fits, also their Voice grows shrill and Feminine, and their Manners and Dispositions are commonly nought. Eunuchs may live without them, and it hath been an approved Cure for Leprosy in former times. (61)



Whether or not leprosy could be cured by castration is largely irrelevant; what *is* important here, however, are the kinds of characteristics that are being associated with the eunuch—especially when we compare them with those of the molly, as were described by Ward. I want to be careful not to equate the two categories but even though mollies were not eunuchs in the most literal sense, it seems too coincidental that these groups of people would bear such striking similarities. At the very least, we can see how they occupy much of the same territory on the eighteenth-century cultural landscape, insofar as eunuchs and mollies were relegated to the periphery because their infractions were of a gendered nature. The eunuch is not only symbolic of a transgressive gender that is marked by effeminacy, but also marginalized because of he cannot reproduce; he reveals the normative ideology of procreation as a hegemonic sexual regulator. As a result, the eunuch is categorized as deviant because of his unnatural body.

Early modern medical and paramedical treatises on generation are important historical and literary artifacts which function as vehicles for the transmission of socio-cultural value systems that validate procreation within the context of marriage as the only legitimate form of sexual expression. Categories of sexual deviance are most often represented in these texts either as biologically defective, as in the case of tribades or hermaphrodites and eunuchs, or as morally and psychologically perverse, as in the case of masturbators and mollies. There is usually some degree of overlap between the biological and the moral but we can be sure that each of these groups is classified through a variety of idioms and euphemisms, depending on the category in question. The tropes of the chronic masturbator, the tribade or hermaphrodite, and the eunuch are much easier to identify in the medical texts than the figure of the molly, although we can see some interesting parallels between mollies and eunuchs. Sex and gender identities are intimately associated with one's generative capacities; therefore, any sexual behaviour or body type that does not meet pro-natal or pro-nuptial criteria is considered to be unnatural because of the hindrance and frustration of Nature's intentions. Furthermore, we can see how a person's worth is measured almost unilaterally in relation to reproduction, suggesting that these texts are heavily invested in the maintenance of heteronormativity and that they function as agents of social control which regulate sexual behaviour.

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