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Laughing at Cripples: Ridicule, Deformity and the Argument from Design

Roger Lund

Readers of Sterne are familiar with Yorick's observations on "the unaccountable sport of nature in forming such numbers of dwarfs." While nature, no doubt "sports at certain times in almost every corner of the world," in Paris, "there is no end to her amusements—the goddess seems almost as merry as she is wise." Sterne laments that it is a "Melancholy application" to see

> so many miserables . . . every third man a pigmy!—some by ricketty heads and hump backs—others by bandy legs—a third set arrested by the hand of Nature in the sixth and seventh years of their growth—a fourth, in their perfect and natural state, like dwarf apple-trees; from the first rudiments and stamina of their existence, never meant to grow higher.

The passage ends as Yorick helps a small boy over a gutter only to discover, much to his surprise, that the boy "was about forty—Never mind, said I; some good body will do as much for me when I am ninety." Sterne insists that his response is born of principles "which incline me to be merciful towards this poor blighted part of my species, who have neither size or strength to get on in the world."[1] Both the analytical clarity with which Sterne anatomizes the "otherness" of the deformed, and the spontaneous sympathy which motivates him to ameliorate their distress are thoroughly modern responses: we applaud Sterne for sharing our own concerns for the disabled and the deformed.

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We are less certain how to respond to the remark with which Sterne introduces this passage, the suggestion that dwarfs are the "sports" of nature, quite literally God's little jokes. The notion that human deformity constitutes a legitimate object of ridicule strikes horror in the heart of the modern observer, but as Simon Dickie points out, English jestbooks of the mid-eighteenth century are filled with jokes about cripples, dwarfs, and hunchbacks, and one is stuck by "their sheer callousness, their frank delight in human suffering. They suggest an almost unquestioned pleasure at the sight of deformity or misery—an automatic and apparently unreflective urge to laugh at weakness simply because it is weak."[2] The English had a long tradition of laughing at physical deformities and handicaps. One thinks, for example, of the First Earl of Shaftesbury, nicknamed "Count Tapsky" because he was not only crippled with gout and ague but also outfitted with a silver tap (inserted in 1668) to drain a suppurating liver cyst. The combination of Shaftesbury's rabid Whig politics and his various disabilities inspired satirists to laugh at his escape from England on gouty old legs and to compare the drainage from Shaftesbury's tap with William's salvation of Holland by opening the sluices (1672).

> Nay, though no legs I had, my gait was fleet,
> Oblig'd to travel, though I had no feet. (58–9)
>
> My tap and spigot were dispos'd before,
> Or that had serv'd some Belgic common-shore;
> A sovereign cure for an hydroptic nation
> To stop, or else let out, the inundation;
> To drown the monsieur for his late abuses,
> And vent out all their venom through the sluices. (102–7)[3]

One might explain the cruelty of these images of Shaftesbury, leaking and limping his way into exile, with the cliché that the Restoration was a callous age.

The age was callous, to be sure, if we may judge from the *Miscellany Poems* of William Wycherley where one encounters the following lines inscribed "To a Little, Crooked Woman, with a Good Face and Eyes, tho' with a Bunch Before, and Behind." This verbal nosegay argues that God has given the woman a particularly beautiful face to compensate for her hunchback. According to Wycherley, such deformity is actually a blessing since it guarantees perpetual chastity.

> Because your Crooked Back does lie so high,
> That to your Belly there's no coming nigh,
> Which, as your Back's more low, more high does lie;
> You then all Breast, all Shoulders, and all Head,
> To be Love's Term or Limit may be said,
> By which our Love-Proceedings are forbidden;
> You, because Saddled, never will be Ridden.[4]

The bizarre cruelty of such images is compounded when one considers that these lines were actually edited, or at least reviewed, by Alexander Pope, the most notable hunchback of the eighteenth century, one who was deeply protective of his own deformity, and who, presumably, ought to have known better.

Clearly something odd is going on here. For as Dickie points out, the taste for such humor retains its hold on the imagination of both upper and lower

class readers despite the increasing "politeness" of the Augustans and the emergence of sentimentality at mid-century. "In mid-eighteenth-century England, it would seem, any deformity or incapacity was infallibly, almost instinctively, amusing" (16).

Dickie focuses on mid-eighteenth-century jokebooks, but epigrams, like the two which follow, were also a mainstay of poetical miscellanies throughout the eighteenth century:

Upon a Lame Man, Newly Married.
George Limpus is lame, yet has gotten a Bride;
He's lame, he can't walk; why then he may ride.
On a Deform'd Lady
When in the dark on thy soft hand I hung,
And heard the tempting syren in thy tongue,
What flames, what darts, what anguish I endur"d!—
But when the candle enter'd—I was cured.[5]

Given the popularity of such epigrams, one is compelled to ask why the Augustans were so eager to laugh at deformity? Was it possible, as Dickie suggests, that laughing at the deformities of others "may have been to discharge for a moment one's own fears of physical degeneration, one's own sense of the precariousness of the body, of the proximity and near inevitability of disease and disability"(16)? While this conclusion is tempting, such a response overestimates eighteenth-century "powers of foresight and identification, the ability to see oneself in the afflictions of another"(16). Of course, one can always fall back on the Hobbesian explanation that such laughter derives from a sense of superiority over the weaknesses of other people. Yet, as Dickie points out, even if we accept the hypothesis that eighteenth-century readers were simply experiencing that "sudden glory," which was produced by the "apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves," we are left to explain "certain deep-seated cultural assumptions that made the deformed and disabled almost automatic figures of fun—assumptions that go far beyond the mere acceptability of malicious laughter" (17).

The minute we attempt to articulate assumptions that legitimate the wholesale ridicule of deformity, however, we are forced to surface and then examine reasons why people we have chosen to read (and admire) nevertheless behave in ways which to modern sensibilities seem unaccountable, often brutal. The contradiction between Sterne's benevolent response to the dwarfs of Paris, and his suggestion that their deformity "naturally" inspires the laughter of those who see them, seemingly finds its origin in tacit assumptions which admit no interrogation and which are so deeply held as to constitute an ideology. As with other ideologies from racism to misogyny which have been anatomized by modern scholars, critical confrontation of eighteenth-century attitudes toward deformity creates an epistemic dislocation that tempts us to reject laughter at cripples as a form of cruelty without stopping to examine what other sorts of critical or moral expectations might have contributed to such peculiar and deeply-held prejudices against the physically deformed. One cannot simply disregard Hobbes's explanation for the origins of laughter. But, if we search for the cultural presuppositions that implicitly authorize laughing at cripples in the eighteenth century, we are far

more apt to encounter troubling questions regarding the relationship between physical deformity and the widespread faith in a harmonious order visible in nature.

THE DEFORMED AND THE BEAUTIFUL

Over the centuries monstrosity and human deformity had variously been interpreted as portentous, or preternatural, but by the time we reach the early-eighteenth century, deformity also posed an implicit challenge to traditional notions of what it meant to be human. In his discussion of the signification of the word "man," worked out in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke argues, in opposition to the traditional view of *homo sapiens* as a rational animal, that it was the human

> shape, as the leading Quality, that seems more to determine that Species, than a Faculty of Reasoning, which appears not at first, and in some never. And if this be not allow'd to be so, I do not know how they can be excused from Murther, who kill monstrous Births, (as we call them,) because of an unordinary Shape, without knowing whether they have a Rational Soul, or no; which can be no more discerned in a well-formed, than ill-shaped Infant, as soon as born.[6]

Locke's suggestion that the physical appearance of monstrous births defined them as inhuman helps to explain more widespread rejection of the crippled and deformed. Locke's emphasis on human "shape" leads naturally to questions of aesthetics. By the time we reach the early eighteenth-century, monstrosity had lost its power to shock or to amaze, and tended instead merely to annoy the observer because of its "unseemliness," inspiring mere repugnance at the violation of "conventions of beauty and decorum,"[7] violation sufficient to authorize laughter at the deformed, not simply because they were weak, although that is certainly one motive, but because they were ugly. As Martin Weinrich had written in his treatise on monsters (1596), "All that is imperfect is ugly, and monsters are full of imperfections."[8] For the English Augustans, most of whom accepted the notion that nature displayed a visible and unmistakable beauty and order, the equation of ugliness and imperfection made it easier to condemn the crippled or the physically deformed. In effect, the appearance, indeed the very existence of the physically deformed, marked them as violations of the argument from design. If, as Locke suggests, deformity could somehow authorize infanticide, would it not also justify less extreme kinds of exclusion, including the severest forms of ridicule?

For modern readers there are clear and significant distinctions between disability or crippling, which implies loss of ability, and deformity, which implies noticeable disfigurement. But for the eighteenth century all of these conditions tended to be conflated as occasions of ridicule. As Simon Dickie remarks, "The cripple's awkward shuffle; the hunchback's bent spine; the confusion of the blind; the comically inappropriate responses of the deaf; the stomp-stomp-stomp of a man with a wooden leg—to these and other afflictions laughter was an immediate and almost unquestioned reaction"(16). Eighteenth-century observers did make certain distinctions, however, and of all the senses, it was the sight that was most immediately and most grievously offended by visible deformity. Lennard Davis

observes that "rather than disability, what is called to readers' attention before the eighteenth century is *deformity*," which he defines as "a disruption in the sensory field of the observer."[9] This central fact is emphasized by William Hay, Member of Parliament and author of the first extended treatise on deformity written by one who was himself deformed. "Bodily Deformity is visible to every Eye,"[10] he argues, and indeed it is the visibility of deformity that in some sense defines it. There were some attempts to distinguish between the disfigurement caused by disease and other kinds of visible ugliness. Davis points out, for example, that in the *Life of Johnson* "while Boswell does note Johnson's scrofulous childhood," he takes great pains to point out that although Johnson was blind in one eye, "'its appearance was little different from that of the other'". What matters to the casual observer is not the question of Johnson's actual blindness, but rather the fact that he does not *look* blind. Hester Thrale echoes this point, saying of Johnson's blind eye that "'this defect however was never visible, both Eyes look exactly alike" (Davis, 61).

Attempting to account for public responses to his own hunchback, William Hay struggles to explain why "one Species of Deformity should be more ridiculous than another, or why the Mob should be more merry with a crooked Man, than one that is deaf, lame, squinting, or purblind." Hay wonders why no one laughs at his face which is "harrowed by the Small Pox," when instead "It is a Back in Alto Relievo that bears all the Ridicule; though one would think a prominent Belly a more reasonable Object of it; since the last is generally the Effect of Intemperance, and of a Man's own Creation"(35). Hay quotes Montaigne to the effect that "'Ill Features are but a superficial Ugliness, and of little Certainty in the Opinion of Men: but a Deformity of Limbs is more substantial, and strikes deeper in.' As it is more uncommon, it is more remarkable: and that perhaps is the true reason, why it is more ridiculed"(36).

In a just world where people were judged by the consequences of their actions, not by the arbitrary features of their appearance, the glutton, not the hunchback, would become the object of contempt. But Hay inhabits a world in which deformity is defined as a form of ugliness, quite literally a "disruption" in the observer's "sensory field," which inspires an immediate and unavoidable aesthetic response. Chamber's *Cyclopedia* (1728) defines deformity as "a displeasing or painful Idea excited in the Mind on Occasion of some Object, which wants of the Uniformity, that constitutes *Beauty*." Chambers argues that "Our Perception of the Ideas of *Beauty,* and Harmony is justly reckon'd a *Sense*; From its Affinity to the other Senses, in this, that the Pleasure does not arise from any Knowledge of Principles, Proportions, Causes, Uses &c. but strikes at first View. . . Ideas of Beauty, like other sensible Ideas, are necessarily pleasant to us, as well as immediately."[11] As a victim of such responses, Hay dreams of a world in which we think first about the implications of what we see, but as Chambers suggests here, our responses to beauty and deformity are immediate and "necessarily" pleasant or unpleasant. Our responses are controlled not by some form of ratiocination, but by the immediate qualities in objects themselves. As Francis Hutcheson remarks in *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), "some objects are *immediately* the occasions of this pleasure of beauty," and we "have sense fitted for perceiving it" that is "distinct from that *joy* which arises upon prospect of advantage."[12]

It is foolish to attempt any universal definition of what passes for beauty in eighteenth-century Britain. Each individual critic lays claim to some peculiar excellence, from the Palladian adaptation of the rational principles of geometry and harmony, to Hogarth's theory that the serpentine line is the key to our apprehension of visual beauty. Nevertheless, until Burkean sublimity, with its emphasis on the outsized, the powerful, and the asymmetrical, came to dominate the aesthetic landscape of the later eighteenth century, there was surprising agreement as to the rudiments of beauty, a continuing belief, in Martin Battestin's terms, that "beauty was objectively founded in a principle of Nature as firmly fixed as the law of gravity: namely, the principle of symmetry and proportion."[13] Although Hogarth certainly rejected the geometrical rigidity of earlier neoclassicist critics, even he conceded that certain properties are inherent in nature and universal in their claim on our aesthetic response. In *The Analysis of Beauty* Hogarth "endeavour(s) to shew what the principles are in nature, by which we are directed to call the forms of some bodies beautiful, others ugly." Among these principles are "FITNESS, VARIETY, UNIFORMITY, SIMPLICITY, and QUANTITY;—*all which co-operate in the production of beauty.*"[14] Although he is writing almost a century later than Henry More, Hogarth's analysis of the principles that create an immediate and involuntary apprehension of beauty bear a visible resemblance to More's description of those geometrical figures that

> gratifie our sight as having a neerer cognation with the Soul of man, that is rationall and intellectuall; and therefore is well pleased when it meets with any outward object that fits and agrees with those cogenit Ideas her own nature is furnished with. For *Symmetry, Equality,* and *Correspondency of parts,* is the discernment of *Reason*, not the Object of Sense.[15]

As a Platonist, More is determined to defend the agencies of reason: the apprehension of beauty or deformity involves the recognition of qualities in external objects which match the "cogenit ideas" inherent in our own natures.

Empiricists, like Francis Hutcheson, who reject any notion of "cogenit Ideas," nevertheless reach surprisingly similar conclusions: "Those figures which excite in us the ideas of beauty seem to be those in which there is *uniformity amidst variety*. . . . what we call beautiful in objects, to speak in the mathematical style, seems to be in a compound ratio of uniformity and variety" (357). As a student of Locke, Hutcheson argues that the mind is necessarily "passive" with regard to the sensations created by the "presence" and "action" of external objects on our bodies (349). One result of this process of cognition is that we are compelled to recognize the beauty which exists in objects themselves just as we are compelled by the deformity of objects to concede their inescapable ugliness: "The ideas of beauty and harmony, like other sensible ideas, are *necessarily* pleasant to us, as well as immediately so." While the hope of advantage might convince one to reject beauty and pursue the deformed, "our sentiments of the forms, and our perceptions, would continue invariably the same"(354).

Augustan critics may disagree as to the precise features of the beautiful or the deformed, but they nevertheless concur that the general principles of beauty and deformity are fixed and that we have no choice but to respond to them.

Joseph Addison, a relatively undogmatic Augustan, still insists that beauty makes its way "directly to the soul" where it "diffuses a secret Satisfaction and Complacency 'thro the Imagination." It is true that

> There is not perhaps any real Beauty or Deformity more in one piece of Matter than another, because we might have been so made, that whatsoever now appears loathsom to us, might have shewn it self agreeable; but we find by Experience, that there are several Modifications of Matter which the Mind, without any previous Consideration, pronounces at first sight Beautiful or Deformed.[16]

The implications of this argument for the deformed are immediately apparent. William Hay remarks that if physical beauty acts as a "Letter of Recommendation, Deformity must be an Obstruction in the Way to Favour. In this respect therefore deformed Persons set out in the World to a Disadvantage, and they must first surmount the Prejudices of Mankind before they can be upon a Par with others. And must obtain by a Course of Behaviour that Regard, which is paid to Beauty at first sight"(30–1). It is a short step from Addison's insistence that certain modifications of matter demand predictable aesthetic responses of pleasure or revulsion to the claim that Pope's deformity made him inherently despicable: "If Beauty be the Subject of our Praise, / A rude, misshapen Lump Contempt *must* raise"(emphasis mine).[17]

If as Hogarth, Addison and Hutcheson all suggest, we are hard-wired to embrace beauty and reject deformity, then the ridicule of Pope's disability, often regarded as a gratuitous violation of satiric and social decorum, may be seen instead as but a predictable outgrowth from this ideology of form. Paradoxically, it is not only the prevalence of symmetry and order in the art and architecture of the period which reinforces the Augustan argument from design, but also the rejection, indeed the punishment of human deformity, that suggests an unreflective adherence to principles of order so deep as to constitute ideology. So, for example, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury anchors his theory of beauty in the "decorum and grace of things," arguing that "if in the way of polite pleasure the study and love of beauty be essential, the study and love of symmetry and order, on which beauty depends, must also be essential in the same respect." Such sentiments reveal an ideology of form which assumes that symmetry and order are the "natural" and therefore normative condition of things. The logical corollary is inescapable. If beauty is born of symmetry and order, then all deviation from such symmetry is by definition "unnatural" and repulsive. Shaftesbury insists that it is "impossible we can advance the least in any relish or taste of outward symmetry and order, without acknowledging that the proportionate and regular state is the truly prosperous and natural in every subject. The same features which make deformity create incommodiousness and disease."

Shaftesbury moves easily from the laws of proportion as they bear on the visual and plastic arts, to notions of deformity as forms of transgression. As he says, it is "the same in the physician's way" as it is in the artist's. "Natural health is the just proportion, truth, and regular course of things in a constitution. It is the inward beauty of the body. And when the harmony and just measures of the rising pulses, the circulating humours, and the moving airs or spirits, are dis-

turbed or lost, deformity enters, and with it, calamity and ruin." The possibility that deformity might coexist with the health and "inward beauty" of the body is literally "unthinkable." Like Keats, Shaftesbury insists that beauty is truth and truth, beauty. "Will it not be found," he asks, "that what is beautiful is harmonious and proportionable, what is harmonious and proportionable is true, and what is at once both beautiful and true is, of consequence, agreeable and good"?[18] Although Shaftesbury does not complete the comparison, the implication is quite apparent: if beauty is truth and goodness, then deformity must imply wickedness and falsehood. This view of the natural harmony of the body marks the convergence of two familiar streams of intellectual influence: the notion of man as microcosm and the more modern assertion that the human body was itself proof of intelligent design. According to Castiglione, the human shape "may be called a little world, in whom every parcel of his body is seen to be necessarily framed by art and not by hap."[19] By the same token if man was "in little all the globe, he had every reason to expect to find in the globe and in the cosmos exact analogies for the structure, functions, and processes of the human body."[20] John Dennis makes explicit the connection between the view of nature as microcosm and the argument from design. "The Universe is regular in all its parts," he argues, "and it is to that exact Regularity that it owes its admirable beauty. The Microcosm owes the Beauty and Health both of its Body and Soul to Order, and the Deformity and Distempers of both, to nothing but the want of Order."[21]

The notion that each human being was a perfect abridgment of the universe was only strengthened by the new science, whose demonstration of physical law underscored the presence of an apparent predictability and form in nature. Richard Bentley's Boyle Lecture, *A Confutation of Atheism from the Structure and Origin of Human Bodies* (1692), asserts that the order of the universe itself is minutely recapitulated in human physiology:

> So uniform and orderly a system, with innumerable motions and functions, all so placed and constituted as never to interfere and clash one with another, and disturb the economy of the whole, must needs be ascribed to an intelligent artist.[22]

For the deformed, whose "motions and functions," quite frequently "interfere and clash" with one another, this argument from design is necessarily a doctrine of exclusion, suggesting that the deformed are incomplete or botched attempts of an "intelligent artist," and therefore fit only for rejection.

One might expect that the presence of monstrosity and physical deformity would pose a challenge to this celebration of perfection, that it would cause philosophers and aestheticians to question the adequacy of their definitions of beauty, virtue and form, but one would be mistaken. For the Physico-theologians and other promulgators of the argument from design, the apparent order in nature served as refutation of Epicurean accounts of creation that occurred by chance and hence involved the production of numerous false starts and monsters.[23] John Ray, whose *The Wisdom of God in Creation* (1691) presents the argument from design in its most titrated form, insists, like Bentley, that "We may fetch an Argument of the Wisdom and Providence of God from the convenient situation and disposition of the Parts and Members of our Bodies: They are Seated most conveniently for Use, for Ornament, and for mutual Assistance." For had we been born

> with a large Wen upon our Faces, or a *Bavarian* Poke under our Chins, or a great Bunch upon our Backs like *Camels*, or any the like superfluous excrescency, which should not be only useless but troublesome, not only stand us in no stead but also be ill favoured to behold, and burthensom to carry about, then we might have had some pretence to doubt whether an intelligent and bountiful Creator had been our Architect; for had the Body been made by chance it must in all likelyhood have had many of these superfluous and unnecessary Parts.[24]

Of course bodies regularly appear with wens and hunchbacks, with superfluous or ugly parts. And many so afflicted believe that they, too, were formed by God and not by chance. Ray is not a cruel man; but his complete acquiescence to an ideology of form leads to the denial of what his senses must have revealed to be true, and to a description of a perfect creation in which disability or deformity literally have no place.

For others who insisted on the perfection of creation, monstrosity, which had once been interpreted as a sign of God's anger, and hence of his continued involvement in the quotidian operations of the creation, was now reinterpreted as a simple glitch in the natural process.[25] Nicholas Malebranche, who was himself physically deformed, admits that monstrosity poses at least a hypothetical challenge to notions of perfect order.[26] "We know that God is wise, and that everything He does is good. We also see monsters or defective works. What is one to believe?" Malebranche reaches the same conclusion as Bentley and Ray, but by a different route. For Malebranche the idea of order demands that the "laws of nature by which God produces this infinite variety found in the world be very simple and small in number." When put in action these laws will occasionally produce "irregular kinds of motion, or rather, monstrous arrangements of them." Thus while God does not "will positively or directly that there should be monsters," he does will certain "laws of the communication of motion, of which monsters are necessary consequences" (588–9). In this view the monstrous and deformed are paradoxically regarded as "unnatural" phenomena produced by natural means. Indeed as Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park point out, for the seventeenth century, "as deformities or natural errors, monsters inspired repugnance." They were no longer ominous or wonderful, but merely "regrettable, the occasional price to be paid for the very simplicity and regularity in nature from which they so shockingly deviated" (209).

Enlarging on the view that only a perfect human body can provide a perfect microcosm, Castiglione admits "that it were a hard matter to judge whether the members (as the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the ears, the arms, the breast, and in like manner the other parts) give either more profit to the countenance and the rest of the body, or comeliness" (348). Perhaps the writer who most clearly understands the contradictions in this argument is Alexander Pope, who plays quite consciously with the categories by which he himself had been condemned. In the infamous "Double Mistress" episode of *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, Pope appears to make fun of such assumptions regarding the elements of perfect human form. Having fallen in love with one half of a pair of conjoined twins, Scriblerus provides his own analysis of their beauty. "Heavens!" he cries, "how I wonder at the Stupidity of mankind, who can affix the opprobrious Name of Monstrosity to what is only Variety of Beauty, and a Profusion of generous Na-

ture? If there are charms in one face, one mouth, one body; if there are charms in two eyes, two breasts, two arms; are they not all redoubled in the Object of my Passion?"[27] This Scriblerian rhapsody on the beauties of his charming monster, works a series of variations on the *topoi* of symmetry and form central to Castiglione's doctrine of ideal beauty, on more scientific defenses of design and on Pope's own ideas of form articulated in the *Essay on Man*. If nothing else, this hymn to monstrosity suggests that despite his own dedication to the argument from design, Pope recognized that the argument was easily parodied. Pope's elaborate joke also reveals the extent to which he himself was willing to exploit the whole topic of deformity as a subject for laughter.

HIEROGLYPHIC DEFORMITY

The metaphorical convergence of microcosm and design had curious consequences. For example, the notion that perfect beauty emerged from geometrical form led Thomas Burnet to argue that in its prelapsarian state the earth itself had been perfectly spherical and smooth, and that just as imposthumes and wens spoke of disorder in the body human, so the appearance of mountains could only be explained by some unnatural convulsion in nature herself. For Burnet, therefore, mountains on the horizon were like the hump on a human back, or the stature of a dwarf, "symbols of sin, monstrous excrescences on the original smooth face of Nature" (Nicolson, 83). Although the popularity of Burnet's theory gradually waned, it maintained sufficient staying power to inspire Ned Ward's account of Pope's deformity:

> A Chaos, few can show but thee,
> A frightful, indigested Lump,
> With here a Hollow, there a Hump;
> A true Epitome of *Wales*,
> Made up of ugly Hills and Dales.[28]

Given the insistence on the normative value of uniformity and design, on the "goodness" of the creation, one should not be surprised by the argument that deformity was itself transgressive. Castiglione remarks that while physical deformity is not necessarily a punishment, this conclusion is hard to resist:

> Thus everyone tries hard to conceal his natural defects of mind and body, as we see in the case of the blind, the lame, the crippled and all those who are maimed or ugly. For although these defects can be imputed to Nature, yet no one likes to think he has them, since then it seems that Nature herself has caused them deliberately as a seal and token of wickedness.[29]

John Dennis is far less equivocal. "Man was created, like the rest of the Creatures, regular, and as long as he remained so, he continued happy; but as soon as he fell from his Primitive State by transgressing Order, Weakness and Misery was the immediate Consequence of that universal Disorder that immediately followed in his Conceptions, in his Passions and Actions" (335–6).

Having endorsed the metaphor of man as microcosm, Augustan writers also accepted, in some inchoate form, the notion that there was a correlation between physical form and moral goodness. As Richard Steele remarks in *Specta-*

tor 86, "We are no sooner presented to any one we never saw before, but we are immediately struck with the Idea of a proud, a reserved, an affable, or a good-natured Man," and we respond in this fashion because the "Air of the whole Face" is "generally nothing else but the inward Disposition of the Mind made visible." This notion that the shape of the body reflects an equivalent beauty or ugliness of soul is given memorable formulation in Kaspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*: "in dwarfs we usually find extremely limited but lively faculties, confined but acute cunning, seldom true penetration and wisdom." In a word, "the morally worst, the most deformed."[30] There were more optimistic appraisals. Steele remarks that "nothing can be more glorious, than for a Man to give the Lie to his Face, and to be an honest, just, good-natured Man, in spite of all those Marks and Signatures which Nature seems to have set upon him for the Contrary." But this requires an almost unnatural effort. It is Lavater who claims the last word on this issue: "Extraordinary abilities are not expected in either giants, dwarfs, or deformed persons," he writes, and "this judgment appears to me to be deeply implanted in the bosoms of all men" (334–5).

The doctrine of moral signatures had a long pedigree, as did the notion that a beautiful form was a presage of a beautiful spirit within. We may turn once more to Castiglione for a bald assertion of the paradigm that "outward beauty" is a "true design of the inward goodness." In bodies

> this comeliness is imprinted more and less, as it were, for a mark of the soul, whereby she is outwardly known. . . . The foul, therefore, for the most part be also evil, and the beautiful good. Therefore it may be said that beauty is a face pleasant, merry, comely, and to be desired for goodness; and foulness a face dark, uglesome, unpleasant, and to be shunned for ill. (347–8)

Once again we find a warrant for the exclusion of the deformed. For if a beautiful countenance provides an exterior sign of interior perfection, the logical corollary must prescribe that a repellent appearance bespeaks an equally deformed soul. Indeed it is possible, as Castiglione concedes, that the body, where the soul "dwelleth," may be "so vile a matter that she cannot imprint in it her property" (349). For Castiglione the body is a signature of the soul. So, too, for Pope's enemies who view his deformity as "hieroglyphic." To quote Lord Hervey, Pope's body is "A Symbol and a Warning to Mankind: / As at some Door we find hung out a Sign, / Type of the Monster to be found within.[31]

This argument has a rich provenance. In his Essay XLIV. "Of Deformity," Francis Bacon argues that

> Deformed persons are commonly even with nature, for as nature hath done ill by them, so do they by nature, being for the most part (as the Scripture saith) void of natural affection; and so they have their revenge of nature. Certainly there is a consent between the body and the mind, and where nature erreth in the one, she ventureth in the other. [32]

Such assertions carried enormous force, and William Hay devotes several pages to the refutation of Bacon, arguing passionately that his twisted body does not bespeak a twisted soul, that his feelings and inclinations are as generous and noble as the presumptive generosity of the beautiful and the shapely. Hay is forced

to concede, nevertheless, that the belief that the deformed are also spiritually inferior is difficult to overcome. Even the highest post "cannot redeem a deformed one from Contempt; it attends him like his Shadow, and like that too is ever reminding him of his ill Figure; which is often objected for want of real Crimes"(33).

One should not be surprised, then, that Pope's critics repeated *ad nauseam* the argument that Pope's twisted body was inhabited by "a wretched narrow Soul," that "his *Form* is the best *Index* of his *Mind.*"[33] Jonathan Smedley complains that

> The *Frame and Make of P—'s Body* . . . inclines people to excuse and forgive him; for it is generally remark'd, that crooked, minute, and deform'd People, are peevish, quarrelsome, waspish, and ill-natur'd; and the Reason is, the *Soul* has not Room enough to pervade and expand itself thro' all their nibbed, tiney parts, and this makes it press sorely on the Brain, which is of a yielding Substance; and this *Pressure* again causes frequent Irritations and *Twinges on the Nerves*, which makes the crooked Person exert his Hands, his Feet, and his Tongue, in sudden *Starts* and *Fits,* which are very uneasy to himself, and which prove disagreeable and outragious often, to others.[34]

According to the author of *Durgen. A Satyr* (1729), it is not primarily the deformity of Pope's body which merits ridicule, but rather the strange conjunction of body and soul.

> Mistake me not to ridicule thy Frame,
> Which adds not to thy Glory, nor thy Shame,
> Only 'tis something wond'rous to behold,
> That Soul and Body both are of one Mould.[35]

As distasteful as such ridicule might seem, it merits scrutiny, for the attacks on Pope, the most notable and visible cripple of his age, reveal the ideological framework which provided justification for the ridicule of the deformed in general.

Francis Bacon provides useful perspective; for while he accepts the conclusion that exterior deformity suggests internal monstrosity, he concedes that natural deformity may actually serve as a spur to ambition: "Therefore it is good to consider of deformity, not as a sign, which is more deceivable, but as a cause, which seldom faileth of the effect. Whosoever hath anything fixed in his person that doth induce contempt hath also a perpetual spur in himself to rescue and deliver himself from scorn"(p. 158). This is William Hay's response, making of his own deformity an inspiration to greater personal kindness and public achievement. But as Bacon suggests, deformity may also inspire anger and revenge. "All deformed persons are extreme bold. First, as in their own defence, as being exposed to scorn, but in process of time by a general habit. Also it stirreth in them industry, and especially of this kind, to watch and observe the weakness of others, that they may have somewhat to repay"(158). Just as one is more apt to be bitten by a declawed cat, so one is more apt to be attacked by one who is vulnerable by virtue of his/her own disability or deformity. In effect, Bacon suggests, satire itself may be traced not merely to a "cankered muse," but to a cankered soul as well.

Not surprisingly we hear a similar argument from Pope's critics, who contend that it is precisely the ambition to do great harm, born of his own deformity, that inspires Pope's satire:

Malice with Envy in thy Breast combines,
And in thy Visage grav'd those ghastly Lines.
Like Plagues, like Death thy ranc'rous Arrows fly,
At Good and Bad, at Friend and Enemy.
To thy own Breast recoils the erring Dart,
Corrupts the Blood, and rankles in thy Heart.
There Swell the Poisons which thy Breast distend,
And with the Load thy mountain Shoulders bend. (*The Blatant Beast*, 5)

Pope's critics make no apologies for such ridicule, sneering that Pope's "Natural Deformity" is actually "the Curse of God upon him."[36] And so, like one in a long line of monsters beginning with Cain, Pope himself is rightly condemned to perpetual isolation:

Like the first bold Assassin's be thy Lot,
Ne'er be thy Guilt forgiven, or forgot;
But as thou hate'st, be hated by Mankind,
And with the Emblem of thy crooked Mind,
Mark'd on thy Back, like *Cain*, by God's own Hand,
Wander like him, accursed through the Land.[37]

Critics have often been nonplussed by the sheer nastiness of such exchanges; or they have fallen back on the conclusion that Pope, by virtue of his deformity, was the victim of a gratuitous mugging. It is important to remember, however, that there is a savage reciprocity in the whole exchange between Pope and the Dunces.[38] As John Dennis reminds us, "this little Monster" had also "upbraided People with their Calamities and Diseases" (II, 105). For example, Pope had frequently been compared to a venomous toad, a compliment he repaid in kind with his portrait of Lord Hervey, who "at the Ear of *Eve*, familiar Toad, / Half Froth, half Venom, spits himself abroad."(*Epistle to Arbuthnot*, 319–20). As Pope insists, Hervey is also short, his skin is unnaturally white, he requires treatments with asses' milk, he is sexually anomalous, an "Amphibious Thing" (l. 326); indeed Hervey is also a monster with a "A Cherub's face, a Reptile all the rest"(l. 331). Dennis Todd has argued that, "Even while he was writing the first *Dunciad*, Pope worried that he inadvertently had delivered himself over to his monster-breeding imagination and had exposed his monstrosity to the world."[39] It is not clear, however, that because Pope feared the ridicule of his own deformity he necessarily rejected the basic premises from which such ridicule arose. Pope certainly exploits the ridicule of physical weakness in the *Dunciad*, where, as Ambrose Philips points out, Dulness itself is defined as "want of *Capacity, Deformity,* a want of *Comliness,* and *Poverty.*"[40] The numerous variations on the "grotesque body" in the *Dunciad*[41] reveal Pope's comfort with the ridicule of deformity as an acceptable *topos* of satire, and it seems clear enough from the frequency with which Pope laughs at the deformity of others that his ridicule of the Dunces partook of the same theory of signification that seemingly authorized the attacks on Pope's own hunchback and withered limbs.

Indeed, Pope's satirical emphasis on the monstrosity of the Dunces, like their satirical return in kind, tells us something important about the peculiar relationship between ridicule and deformity in the eighteenth century. Robert C. Elliott has established that from ancient times the satirist had been viewed as a kind

of ritual magician who inflicted pain as part of "the expulsion of evil influences through the magical potency of abuse."[42] Among the classes of persons to be driven out by the magical potency of satire were the crippled and the deformed. From the time of the Old Testament, the prejudice against deformity had been justified by a concern for ritual purity.[43] As Mary Douglas points out, any cultural system of classification must give rise to anomalies and aberrant forms, and "it cannot ignore the anomalies which its scheme produces, except at risk of forfeiting confidence" in the system itself. This is why, she argues, "any culture worthy of the name" provides for "dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events." Within the context of an ideology of form outlined by such theorists as Ray, Bentley and Malebranche, there was nothing more anomalous than physical monstrosity, and no one more worthy of exclusion than the crippled and deformed. It seems only natural, then, that ridicule, which for centuries had been a primary instrument of cultural purification, should be directed toward the exclusion of the deformed as well. As Douglas observes, such verbal differentiation of the other serves to reinforce dominant ideologies because "A rule of avoiding anomalous things affirms and strengthens the definitions to which they do not conform."[44]

While ridicule thus becomes a primary rhetorical instrument for reinforcing cultural norms, from the standpoint of the satirist, such distinctions are never clear cut. The satirist's rhetorical stance aligns him with the dominant ideology, but the recognition of his own vulnerability, of his own uncertain relationship to the ideal of natural perfection, creates an ambiguous bond between satirist and victim, both of whom share a fear of anomaly. It therefore becomes one of the functions of ridicule to create or clarify difference in order that it can be excluded. As Fredric V. Bogel suggests, satire, and by extension ridicule, is best understood as a "literary mechanism for the production of differences in the face of anxiety about replication, identity, sameness, and undifferentiation."[45] It is something like this desire for differentiation in the cause of cultural solidarity that one detects in the preoccupation with physical deformity so central to the quarrel between Pope and the Dunces, each of whom seeks to stigmatize the victim as the "other" who must be expelled. In this regard, Pope's ridicule of Cibber's "monster-breeding breast," may be seen as the reciprocal of the charge that Pope's own "Deformity" was "Visible, Unalterable, and Peculiar to himself. 'Tis the mark of God and Nature upon him, to give us warning that we should hold no Society with him, as a Creature not of our Original, nor of our Species" (Dennis, II: 105).

DEFORMITY AND THE RIDICULOUS

Not everyone was comfortable with the implications of such conclusions, and amongst Augustan critics the whole issue of what might legitimately be ridiculed remained a matter of debate. Even the Dunces paid lip-service to satiric decorum, defending their reasons for ridiculing Pope's deformity.

> Let none his haggard Face, or Mountain Back,
> The Object of mistaken Satire make;
> Faults which the best of Men, by Nature curs'd,
> May chance to share in common with the worst.
> In Vengeance for his Insults on Mankind,

> Let those who blame, some truer Blemish find,
> And lash that worse Deformity, his Mind.[46]

Surprisingly, Richard Blackmore, a poet reviled by Pope, nevertheless makes the most humane case for the treatment of physical deformity. According to Blackmore wit is misapplied when

> exercis'd to ridicule any unavoidable Defects and Deformities of Body or Mind; for since nothing is a moral Blemish, but as it is the Effect of our own Choice, no thing can be disgraceful but what is voluntary, and brought freely upon our selves. . . . And therefore to make a Man contemptible, and the Jest of the Company, by deriding him for his misshapen Body, ill figur'd Face, stammering Speech, or low Degree of Understanding, is a great Abuse of ingenious Faculties.[47]

This is the argument that Hay had offered in his own defense, and it is an argument repeated in William Whitehead's *On Ridicule* (1743), which denounces the "standing jest" on the "mountain back, or head advanc'd too high,/A leg misshapen, or distorted eye." We are meant to "pity faults by Nature's hand imprest; / Thersites' mind, but not his form's the jest."

This sounds good in theory, but in practice Thersites' form had long served as a source of merriment, as had a whole cast of crippled characters from Aesop to Richard III. In imitation of the Kit-Kat Club, Steele's "Ugly Club" (*Spectator* 17) decorates its walls with portraits of the hideously ugly and deformed: Aesop, Thersites, Duns Scotus, and Scarron. Indeed the argument that the physically deformed ought to be spared the indignities of ridicule ran head-on into a powerful persuasion that deformity was implicitly ridiculous, that one could no more help laughing at cripples than one could help smiling at a beautiful face. "What shall we say of the contrary of beauty—deformity"? asks Lord Monboddo. "Is it not the object of ridicule?" Indeed, he argues, "upon inquiry, it will be found, that every thing ridiculous, I mean, what is the object of laughter or derision, is, in some way or other, *deformed*."[48] Even in Hay's defense of his own condition, one finds the recognition of the fact that he could expect ridicule to be the natural result of his deformity. His parents attempted to conceal his condition and taught him to be "ashamed of my Person, instead of arming me with true Fortitude to despise any Ridicule or Contempt of it. This has caused me much Uneasiness in my younger Days: and it required many Years to conquer this Weakness"(7).

I have spoken here of the ideology of form, an endorsement of visible symmetry, harmony and order held so deeply that it admits of no interrogation by those who hold it. As I have suggested, such assumptions tacitly authorize the ridicule of deformity, and naturalize the cruelty implicit in laughing at the disabled. One could ask for no better example of this process in action than is provided in George Frederick Meier's, *The Merry Philosopher; or Thoughts on Jesting*. Like Blackmore or Whitehead, Meier is concerned about the decorum of ridicule, and he argues that "Every reasonable person will admit, that it is unseemly to jest on religion, on the sciences, on virtue, on gross vices &c." According to Meier, it is also inappropriate to jest about one's own death.

> There was a law subsisting formerly in France, that a delinquent under certain circumstances should be pardoned, if he married a common prostitute. A native of Picardy who was to be executed for some capital crime, having ascended the ladder, a prostitute, who was lame, was presented to him; and it was in his option to marry her, or to be hanged. After surveying her for a moment, he called out to the Executioner, 'Tuck up, tuck up! she limps.' This jest, indeed, is uncommonly sprightly, as exhibiting a deformed creature to be a greater evil than hanging. But yet the last moments of our life are a period too important and solemn to admit of jesting and mirth.

This is an extraordinary passage, for while Meier clearly argues that one should never jest at death, he suggests that jesting at cripples is not merely allowable but recommended. This jest, he says is "uncommonly sprightly" because it exhibits a "deformed creature to be a greater evil than death."[49]

Meier is by no means alone in his insistence that the ridicule of deformity is somehow inherent in the very order of things. Such a conclusion is central to Shaftesbury's defense of ridicule as a test of truth. As he says, "There is a great difference between seeking how to raise a laugh from everything, and seeking in everything what justly may be laughed at. For nothing is ridiculous except what is deformed; nor is anything proof against raillery except what is handsome and just" (59). Shaftesbury's critic, John Brown, cautions that if Shaftesbury means that "'nothing is ridiculous, except what is *apparently* deformed,' the Proposition is true." But Brown questions whether we can ever know what is '*really* deformed' since in the real world "it is easiest of all Things to make that *appear* ridiculous, which is not *really* deformed."[50] What matters here is what is *not* debated: the question of whether deformity ought to be ridiculed at all. Rather, Shaftesbury and Brown implicitly agree that if one could detect what was "really" deformed it would be ridiculous.

In the Preface to *Joseph Andrews* Henry Fielding seeks to expand or at least clarify this linkage between deformity and ridicule. He argues that it is not simply deformity that is the source of the ridiculous, but rather the attempt to disguise deformity through some form of affectation.

> Now from Affectation only, the Misfortunes and Calamities of Life, or the Imperfections of Nature, may become the Objects of Ridicule. Surely he hath a very ill-framed Mind, who can look on Ugliness, Infirmity or Poverty, as ridiculous in themselves. . . . Much less are natural Imperfections the Objects of Derision: but when Ugliness aims at the Applause of Beauty, or Lameness endeavours to display Agility; it is then that these unfortunate Circumstances, which at first moved our Compassion, then only to raise our Mirth.[51]

In *Joseph Andrews*, "*Monstrous*," affectation is revealed through the art of "caricatura," a comically distorted portrait of the sort reserved for Mrs. Slipslop who was "very short, and rather too corpulent in Body, and somewhat red, with the Addition of Pimples in the Face. Her Nose was likewise rather too large, and her Eyes too little; nor did she resemble a Cow so much in her Breath, as in two brown Globes which she carried before her; one of her Legs was also a little shorter than the other, which occasioned her to limp as she walked" (32). Al-

though Fielding's version of ridicule meliorates the rigors of the abuse generally directed at the crippled or the deformed, his portrait of Slipslop still reveals the outlines of an ideology that finds ugliness or deformity fit objects of laughter.

Fielding's invocation of affectation as the focus or inspiration for ridicule is not original. Simon Dickie points out that jestbooks frequently claimed their jokes about the deformed and disabled "were corrective rather than malicious: it was not the person's physical misfortune that made people laugh, but the affectation that things were otherwise. 'Altho' the Infirmities of Nature are not proper Substance to be made a Jest of," declares the compiler of *Joe Miller's Jests*, "'yet when People take a great deal of Pains to conceal what every Body sees, there is nothing more ridiculous"(11). As Steele remarks, in *Spectator* 17, "When there happens to be any thing, ridiculous in a Visage, and the Owner of it thinks it an Aspect of Dignity, he must be of very great Quality to be exempt from Raillery." The author of *A Collection of Jests, Epigrams, Epitaphs &c.* (1753) insists that while one should not laugh at the normal infirmities of nature, "yet when People take great deal of pains to conceal what every Body sees, there is nothing more ridiculous." He cites the case of Old Cross the actor who wished to disguise his deafness.

> Honest *Joe Miller* going with a Friend one Day along *Fleetstreet,* and seeing old *Cross* on the other Side of the Way, told his Acquaintance, he should see some Sport; so beck'ning to *Cross*, with his Finger, and stretching open his Mouth as wide as ever he could, as if he halloo'd to him, tho' he said nothing, the old Fellow came puffing from the other Side of the Way, *What a Pox,* said he, *do you make such a Noise for? Do you think one can't hear.*[52]

There was general agreement that affectation was a legitimate target of ridicule. But where did this leave the physically deformed or the ugly who understandably wished to make the best of their appearance? Hay's response to this question is ambiguous. He appeals to the fraternity of the deformed "whether it is not sound Policy to use Strategem" to guard against ridicule and attacks, "to call in the Aid of the Taylor, to present them with better Shapes than nature has bestowed. Against so unfair an Adversary such Fraud is justifiable," he argues. And yet, he concedes "I do not approve of it in general"(36). Fine clothes "attract the Eyes of the Vulgar: and therefore a deformed Person should not assume those borrowed Feathers, which will render him doubly ridiculous. He could scarce expose himself more by dancing at Court; than by appearing the finest there on a Birth-day"(36). Hay's strategy to avoid attention is to deliberately outfit himself in "a plain Dress; which, for near thirty Years, has been of the same grave Colour; and which I find not the least Inclination to alter. It would be monstrous in me to bestow any Ornament on a Person, which is incapable of it: and should I appear in Lace or Embroidery, my Friends might assign it as no unreasonable Pretence for a Commission of Lunacy against me"(61). Hay's word choice is as instructive as it is perplexing. According to Hay, what is "monstrous" is not his twisted form itself, but the attempt to improve or disguise its deformity. But why should it be monstrous for Hay to "ornament" his person? Why should it be "lunacy" for him to add a touch of lace? Put simply, why shouldn't the deformed dress elegant-

ly; why shouldn't they strut what little stuff they have? As Hay suggests, however, these are improper questions, for where the disabled are concerned, the standards are fundamentally different. Withdrawal and deliberate understatement are the only reasonable and fitting defenses against the inevitable ridicule that physical deformity will inspire. Their very appearance renders cripples "other" than the norm, however it is defined, and any attempt to rejoin the mainstream or to disguise their otherness is itself an infraction worthy of ridicule.

By this standard, Pope himself was guilty of "affecting" normality. Dr. Johnson provides a poignant account of Pope's efforts to make himself presentable in company. "His stature was so low that, to bring him to a level with common tables, it was necessary to raise his seat." Because of his sensitivity to cold he wore a kind of fur doublet under a "shirt of very coarse warm linen." In order to hold himself erect he wore a "bodice made of stiff canvas." His legs were so thin that "he enlarged their bulk with three pair of stockings." His hair having fallen out, Pope often wore a velvet cap and his "dress of ceremony was black with a tye-wig, and a little sword."[53] This is all part of an effort to appear as normal as possible. But as Hay points out, the attempt to disguise such deformity could itself be interpreted as affectation, hence justification for ridicule. This is precisely what happens to Pope. Thomas Bentley sneers that " 'Tis very amazing, to see a little Creature, scarce four Foot high, whose very Sight makes one laugh, strutting and swelling like the Frog in Horace, and demanding the Adoration of all Mankind, because *it* can make fine Verses."[54] Pope may be the greatest poet of his age, but he is also a notable cripple, and that fact alone renders nugatory all other pretensions to respect or acceptance. His very notoriety and public visibility is itself a violation of the expectation that the deformed will make themselves as invisible as possible. As Ned Ward insists,

> No charming Mortal can desire,
> To raise our admiration higher,
> Than you can do, when you're inclin'd
> To stir up Wonder in Mankind
> Tis but appearing to Beholders,
> Without false Calfs and padded Shoulders (*Apollo's Maggot in his Cups. . .*)

One would expect Pope to reject the logic of such arguments. Yet, in *Guardian* 91 and 92, essays on "The Club of Little Men," Pope seems to rehearse the argument that we find both in Shaftesbury and in Fielding, that affectation is a legitimate source of ridicule. Pope remarks of short persons (at four foot six Pope qualified for this distinction), that "their Littleness would hardly be taken Notice of, if they did not manifest a Consciousness of it themselves in all their Behaviour. Indeed, the Observation that no Man is Ridiculous for being what he is, but only in the Affectation of being something more, is equally true in regard to the Mind and the Body." For the members of the "Club of Little Men," culpable affectation may consist of nothing more serious than wearing a hat with a tall plume, or adding high heels to one's shoes, both of which, one suspects, were strategies that Pope himself might have employed. The odds seem hopelessly stacked. If people are very short, they are inherently ridiculous. If they try to make themselves look taller, they are even more ridiculous.

Only one strategy will effectively improve this situation: by laughing at themselves, the deformed and disabled can defuse the ridicule of others. Although he was deeply wounded by the sneers at his deformity, "The libel'd Person and the pictur'd Shape" (*Epistle to Arbuthnot*, 353), Pope responds by making light of his condition:

> There are, who to my Person pay their court,
> I cough like *Horace*, and tho' lean, am short,
> *Ammon's* great Son one shoulder had too high,
> Such *Ovid's* nose, and 'Sir! you have an *Eye*—
> Go on, obliging Creatures, make me see
> All that disgrac'd my Betters, met in me. (*Ep. to Arbuthnot*, 115–19)

Here Pope shakes his head at awkward attempts to somehow praise him by endowing him with the deformities of his more glorious precursors. In effect he adopts a strategy of self-defense that involves laughing at his own disabilities before others can laugh for him. This is Hay's response as well. "Ridicule and Contempt are a certain Consequence of Deformity," he argues, and therefore,

> what a Person cannot avoid, he should learn not to regard. He should bear it like a Man; forgive it as a Christian; and consider it as a Philosopher. And his Triumph will be complete, if he can exceed others in Pleasantry on himself. Wit will give over, when it sees itself out-done: and so will Malice, when it finds it has no Effect (58–9).

This is wishful thinking, of course, for as Hay argues elsewhere in the *Essay on Deformity*, no matter how noble the behavior of the disabled, their deformity will inevitably inspire ridicule, effectively erasing all other claims to merit or admiration.

Both Hay and Pope exemplify the paradox that if you are crippled or deformed the best way to deflect the ridicule of others is to inflict that ridicule on yourself. Neither Hay nor Pope is comfortable with this position, but they find themselves enmeshed in a series of assumptions that leave them few other options. The inevitable consequences of this ideology of form emerge clearly from *Spectator* 17. Seeking to lessen the effects of ridicule on the ugly and the deformed, Steele suggests that "Since our Persons are not of our own Making, when they are such as appear Defective or Uncomely, it is, methinks, an honest and laudable Fortitude to dare to be Ugly; at least to keep our selves from being abashed with a Consciousness of Imperfections which we cannot help, and in which there is no Guilt." Even so, Steele resists, as a form of affectation, the efforts of the ugly or deformed to disguise their condition. Rather, he argues, with all the complacency of one who is himself well-favored, "that we ought to be contented with our Countenance and Shape, so far, as never to give our selves an uneasie Reflection on that Subject." One should simply accept the fact that ordinary people will take it as a "matter of great Jest, if a Man enters with a prominent Pair of Shoulders into an Assembly, or is distinguished by an Expansion of Mouth, or Obliquity of Aspect." And therefore, if one is afflicted with one of these "Oddnesses" the best he can do is to "be as merry upon himself, as others are apt to be upon that Occasion." The happy result will be that "Women and Children, who were at first frighted at him, will afterwards be as much pleased with him. As it is barba-

rous in others to railly him for natural Defects, it is extreamly agreeable when he can Jest upon himself for them." Steele argues, in effect, that given the choice, it is better to be laughed at as a jocular curiosity than to be shunned as a monster.

As is sometimes the case with Steele, there is a certain dim-wittedness here of which he was probably unaware. After all, "Dare to be Ugly" is not a slogan designed to fire the imaginations of the unattractive. Nor is the suggestion that the unattractive or deformed should band together in an "Ugly Club" whose members will agree to obey the bylaws set out in something described as *"The Act of Deformity."* Although Hay had recommended self-deprecation as an antidote to public ridicule, this suggestion is too much even for him. "I never was, nor ever will be, a Member of the Ugly Club," he insists, "and I would advise those Gentlemen to meet no more: For though they may be a very ingenious and facetious Society; yet it draws the Eyes of the World too much upon them, and theirs too much from the World." The contradictions are palpable. No matter how he tries, Hay cannot avoid the conclusion that deformity will inevitably inspire ridicule just as it will produce exclusion. Consequently the deformed should form no clubs whatsoever. "When deformed Persons appear together, it doubles the Ridicule, because of the Similitude; as it does, when they are seen with very large Persons, because of the Contrast"(14).

So powerful and inescapable is the ideology of form that those, like Hay, who are its most immediate victims almost come to believe that they somehow deserve the ridicule they inspire. One finds evidence of similar acquiescence in Pope's *Guardian* essays on the "Club of Little Men," where in the figure of Dick Distick, the president of the club, Pope limns his own self portrait:

> Not only as he is the shortest of us all, but because he has entertain'd so just a Sense of the Stature, as to go generally in Black that he may appear yet Less. Nay, to that Perfection is he arrived, that he *stoops* as he walks. The Figure of the Man is odd enough; he is a lively little Creature, with long Arms and Legs: A Spider is no ill Emblem of him. He has been taken at a Distance for a *small Windmill*.[55]

Even within the protections of the Club, there is apparently no escape from the standards of the outside world, including its prohibition against affectation. According to Pope, the club has assigned spies to report

> the Misbehaviour of such refractory Persons as refuse to be subject to our Statutes. Whatsoever aspiring Practices any of these our People shall be guilty of in their Amours, single Combats, or any indirect means to Manhood, we shall certainly be acquainted with, and publish to the World for their Punishment and Reformation. For the President has granted me the sole Propriety of exposing and showing to the Town all such intractable Dwarfs, whose Circumstances exempt them from being carried about in Boxes: Reserving only to himself, as the Right of a Poet, those *Smart Characters* that will shine in *Epigrams*.[56]

As a young man Pope had affected the habits of an aspiring rake, despite the effects of his "crazy carcass," even going so far as to undertake a flirtation with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Pope was suitably outraged when later in his career she laughed at his clumsy pretensions to gallantry. Yet here, in his role as

secretary of the "Club of Little Men," he offers to expose the amours of his fellows, at least those who do not have to be "carried about in boxes," and to immortalize in epigram whatever pretensions to normality they might otherwise affect.[57]

Maynard Mack suggests that in these *Guardian* papers, "Pope fantasizes wittily about an association" like this Club of Little Men, conceding nonetheless that for a "hunchback and dwarf, such comforting communities were realizable only in imagination."[58] One wonders just how comforting such fantasies could have been. For all the labored humor of these *Guardian* papers, one cannot ignore the element of self-loathing that emerges from Pope's description of the short, the deformed and the ugly, a motive that Pope would undoubtedly have denied, should anyone have accused him of such a response. Like Hay, Pope was also held captive by the very categories he endorsed. And like Shaftesbury, whose theodicean perfection finds echoes in the *Essay on Man*, Pope is an apostle of harmony, symmetry and order, which, if understood literally, would make his own existence a violation of the laws he had just proclaimed. One can only wonder what Pope was thinking when he penned the lines "Then say not Man's imperfect, Heav'n in fault;/Say rather, man's as perfect as he ought," (*EOM*, I: 69–70). In the context of Pope's personal situation does this mean that his deformities are somehow part of the natural plan, that it would be wrong for him to be taller, or to walk upright without the simian stoop? Were Pope to wish for health or beauty would such desire constitute not merely affectation, but that "reas'ning Pride" in which, he tells us, all "our error lies"? (*EOM*, I:123). When Pope argued that "All partial Evil" was "universal Good" (EOM, I:292) did he happen to be suffering from one of his head-splitting migraines, or lacing up his back brace or watching as his chambermaid helped him don his third pair of socks?[59] Pope doesn't answer such questions, of course, because they are literally unanswerable within the ideology of form to which he has ascribed. In a world as orderly, harmonious and symmetrical as the one Pope celebrates in the *Essay*, Pope's own deformity must either be interpreted as an unavoidable but accidental glitch in the mechanical processes of nature (of the sort Malebranche describes), or rejected as a visible transgression of the principles of order upon which such a world is based. Pope is mistaken: it is he, not Sporus, who is his own "antithesis." In a world where "Whatever is, is RIGHT" (*EOM*, I:294), Pope is a walking (or limping) contradiction to the very theory he espouses, a visible refutation of the argument from design and thus an invitation to ridicule.

I began this essay by pointing to the contradiction between Sterne's concern for the dwarfs of Paris and his apparent acceptance of the fact that, for most of his contemporaries, dwarfs served as figures of fun. As I have argued, this ridicule of deformity was not a random expression of human cruelty, but was authorized by an ideology of form which necessarily dismissed the deformed or the disabled as foreign, transgressive, ugly and inherently worthy of contempt. One result is that even those who were physically deformed in some way, and who tacitly endorsed this ideology, had no choice but to find themselves ridiculous. This is the situation that Pope dramatizes in his Club of Little Men: an imaginary world (not unlike the real one) where laughing at cripples is so widespread and so acceptable, that even dwarfs feel compelled to laugh at one another.

NOTES

1. Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, ed. Graham Petrie (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 82–3.

2. Simon Dickie, "Hilarity and Pitilessness in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: English Jestbook Humor," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37.1 (2003), 1–22. All quotations from this essay are cited by page number in the text.

3. See *A Supplement to the Last Will and Testament of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury* (1683), in *Poems on Affairs of State*, vol. 3, 1682–1685, ed. Howard H. Schless (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1968), 407.

4. William Wycherley, *Miscellany Poems* (London, 1706), 220.

5. *A Collection of Jests, Epigrams, Epitaphs &c.* (1753), 110. *The Merry Companion, or Humorous Miscellany.* (1752), 32. One might cite other representative titles: *On a Handsom Idiot.* By Mr. Congreve, *On a Young Gentleman and his Young Mother, who had Each Lost an Eye*, and *A Reverend D—r's Lamentation for the Loss of his Hearing.*

6. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 518–9.

7. Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 213.

8. Martin Weinrich, *De ortu monstrorum commentarius* (1596), qtd. in Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 203.

9. Lennard J. Davis, "Dr. Johnson, Amelia, and the Discourse of Disability in the Eighteenth Century, in *"Defects": Engendering the Modern Body*, ed. Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2000), 57, 56.

10. William Hay, *Deformity: An Essay* (London, 1754), 2.

11. Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia: Or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, 2 vols. (London: 1728), I: 178.

12. Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), in *Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays*, ed. Scott Elledge, 2 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1961), I: 354. All further quotations from Hutcheson will be taken from this edition and cited by page number in the text.

13. Martin C. Battestin, *The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 23.

14. William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. Ronald Paulson (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 17, 23.

15. Henry More, *Antidote Against Atheism* (1653), 62–3.

16. Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, 412, Monday June 23, 1712, in *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), III: 542. All other quotations from *The Spectator* refer to this edition and are cited by number in the text.

17. *The Blatant-Beast: A Poem* (1742; rpt. Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, 1965), 3. On the abuse of Pope's deformities, see also Helen Deutsch, *Resemblances and Disgrace: Alexander Pope and the Deformation of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996).

18. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), Miscellany III: 414–5.

19. Baldassare Castiglione, *The Courtier*, trans. Thomas Hoby (The National Alumni,n.p., 1907), Bk. IV: 349. I would like to thank my colleague Maura Brady for calling this passage to my attention.

20. Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* (New York: Norton, 1959), 161.

21. John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), in The Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), I: 335.

22. Richard Bentley, *The Works of Richard Bentley*, ed. Alexander Dyce, 3 vols. (London, 1838), III: 80–1.

23. The frontispiece to Thomas Creech's translation of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (1682) shows a memorable portrait of Epicurus surrounded by a series of monstrous and half-formed animals all arising from the ground. Scriblerian satire is filled with Lucretian images of "equivocal generation," monstrosity, and malformation.

24. John Ray, *The Wisdom of God in Creation* (London, 1691), 156–7.

25. On the appearance of monstrosity as proof of divine intervention in human affairs, see William Turner, *A Compleat History of the Most Remarkable Providences* (London, 1697).

26. Malebranche (1685–1715) was born with curvature of the spine and a sunken chest; he was so thin that his heartbeat was visible through the fabric of his shirt. See Introduction to Nicholas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth* (1674–75), trans. and ed. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), vii–ix.

27. *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus*, ed. Charles Kerby-Miller (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1950), 147.

28. Ned Ward, *Apollo's Maggot in his Cups* (1729), qtd. in J. V. Guerinot, *Pamphlet Attacks on Alexander Pope* (London: Methuen, 1969), 178.

29. Castiglione, qtd. in Davis, "Dr. Johnson, Amelia and the Discourse of Disability," 58.

30. Kaspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, trans. Thomas Holcroft, 4th ed. (London, 1844), 434–5.

31. John, Lord Hervey, and Colley Cibber, *The Difference Between Verbal and Practical Virtue* (1742), 5–7.

32. Francis Bacon, "Of Deformity," *Francis Bacon: A Selection of his Works*, ed. Sidney Warhaft (New York: Odyssey Press, 1965), 158. Subsequent quotations are cited by page number in the text.

33. John Dennis, *A True Character of Mr. Pope and His Writings* (1716), in *Critical Works of John Dennis,* II:9; *The Life of the Late Celebrated Mrs. Elizabeth Wisebourn, Vulgarly Call'd Mother Wybourn* (1721), 33.

34. Jonathan Smedley, *Gulliveriana: Or, A Fourth Volume Of Miscellanies.* (1728), xi–xii, qtd. in Guerinot, *Pamphlet Attacks*, 145.

35. *Durgen. A Satyr, to the Ceberbeted [sic] Mr. P-pe, On his Dunciad*, (1729), qtd. in Guerinot, *Pamphlet Attacks*, 184.

36. John Dennis, *A True Character Of Mr. Pope, And His Writings* (1716), *Critical Works of John Dennis*, II: 105.

37. [Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and John Lord Hervey], *Verses Address'd to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace* (1733), 8. In [John Roberts], *An Answer to Mr. Pope's Preface to Shakespear* (1729), Pope is portrayed as Cain to Theobald's Abel. Pope rises up and slays his brother and hence is driven out of town.

38. The satire directed at Pope by Addison's "Little Senate" at Button's Coffee House "had been infected by the tendency to sneer at Pope's hump," and Addison had intervened to prevent publication of Thomas Burnet's pamphlet *A Specimen of the Hump Conference* on the grounds that so low an attack on a cripple might actually arouse pity for the victim. See Daniel A. Fineman, *Leonard Welsted: Gentleman Poet of the Augustan Age* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1950), 83–4.

39. Dennis Todd, *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), 232.

40. Ambrose Philips, *Codrus: or, the Dunciad Dissected* (London, 1728), 7–8.

41. For a discussion of the "grotesque body," see "Introduction" to Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986).

42. Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1960), 5.

43. R. Sullivan, "Deformity—A Modern Western Prejudice with Ancient Origins," *Proceedings of the Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh*, 31: 265.

44. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 39.

45. Fredric V. Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), 25, 21.

46. John, Lord Hervey, and Colley Cibber, *The Difference Between Verbal and Practical Virtue* (London, 1742), 5–7.

47. Richard Blackmore, *An Essay Upon Wit* (London, 1716), 210–1.

48. James Burnet, Lord Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1786), III: 301–2.

49. George Frederick Meier, *The Merry Philosopher: or Thoughts on Jesting* (London, 1764), 85–6.

50. John Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics* (London, 1751), 55–6.

51. Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 9.

52. *A Collection of Jests, Epigrams, Epitaphs, &c.* (London, 1753), Joke 77, 21.

53. Samuel Johnson, "Pope" in *Lives of the English Poets*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), II: 293–4.

54. In his *A Letter to Mr. Pope, Occasioned by Sober Advice from Horace. . .* (1735), 17–18.

55. *Guardian* 91, June 25, 1713, in *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, Vol. 1. The Earlier Works, 1711–1720, ed. Norman Ault (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), 125.

56. *Guardian*, 92, Friday, June 26, 1713, 129.

57. In fact, Pope's laughter at the Club of Little Men only inspired more ridicule. In *Guardian* 108 Addison calls for the creation of a Tall Club. "When these pigmies pretend to draw themselves out from the rest of the world, and form themselves into a body, it is time for us, who are men of figure to look about us." Addison also laughs at "Little Dicky," hung up on a peg, a clear swipe at Pope's own self portrait, Dick Distick.

58. Maynard Mack, "The Least Thing Like a Man in England," in *Collected in Himself: Essays Critical, Biographical, and Bibliographical on Pope and Some of his Contemporaries* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1982), 374.

59. In *"This Long Disease, My Life": Alexander Pope and the Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), 37–44, Margorie Nicolson and G. S. Rousseau point out that Pope suffered most severely from his various ailments during the years when he was composing the first three books of the *Essay On Man*.