

What Women Want - The Penis Market in Renaissance Italy

MA in Art History, Curatorship and Renaissance Culture

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Contents

Introduction	3
Sources and Historiography	4
Chapter 1: Penis - The Measure of a Man	8
A Cautionary Tale	8
The Cuckold and the Lascivious Woman	10
Chapter 2: 'Come women to the good fruits'	166
The Little Animal	19
The Enormous Fruit	222
The Welcome Wares	233
Chapter 3: The Female Consumer	266
The Loquacious Woman	266
The Erotic Dream	28
The Glorification of the Penis	311
The Cold Consuming Body	322
Feared, Ridiculed and Shamed	35
Conclusion.....	39
Appendix	54
Image List.....	536
Bibliography.....	58

Introduction

The large erect penis has enjoyed a multitude of connotations: fertility, male dominance and sexual desire to name a few. What then is the significance of the large erect penis, separated from the male body, placed in the hands of a woman? Scenes of women watering and cultivating penises (Figure 1), with vessels filled to the brim with penises (Figure 2 and 3), or with phallic shaped vegetables and animals (Figure 4 and 5), can be found in Ancient Greece and continue their presence to the modern day (Figure 7).

In *The Reign of the Phallus*, Eva Keuls accounts for the penis in Classical Athens.¹ She defines her 'reign of the phallus' as men's assertion of general dominance, established through the myths of rape, the subjugation of women and the reduction of sex to a game of power and submission. This dissertation will extend her discussion within the context of Renaissance Italy, a period that has seen relatively little scholarship on the large erect penis, and nuance our understanding of the dynamics of gender representation and power. Art of the time generally depicts penises as small, soft and childlike. Yet some rare examples echo the priapic, comic and erotic exaggeration of earlier times (Figure 8 and 9), and deserve serious attention.² This dissertation will tackle the erect penis within the realm of Renaissance humour, drawing theoretical perspectives from recent feminist and gender analysis of Old French *fabliaux*.³

A letter dated 14 January 1496 from Floriano Dolfo, a Bolognese priest and university lecturer in canon law, to Francesco II Gonzaga, the Marquis of Mantua and the husband of the famous art collector and patron Isabella d'Este, contains 'a beautiful large one, big, long and white, gleaming so much that it seemed like the one depicted in the bathroom commissioned by our Monsignor Bentivoglio' (41-44).⁴ Dolfo, who was 'a sort of erudite epistolary entertainer', tells the story of the fantasy of a *bona donna* [a 'good'

¹ Keuls 1993.

² For a discussion of the 'funny phallus' in Ancient Greece see (Simons 2011) 60ff.

³ Works by E. Jane Burns, John Baldwin and Sarah White on the French *fabliaux* will be greatly influential for this dissertation (Burns 1993; Baldwin 1996; White 1982).

⁴ The translation of this letter is my own and can be found in the appendix accompanied by the transcription from (Minutelli and Dolfo 2002, 72-78, 372-84). The line numbers referred to within the essay refer to the Italian rather than the English. The epistolary exchange between Dolfo and Francesco is discussed by Molly Bourne in 'Mail humour and male sociability: sexual innuendo in the epistolary domain of Francesco II Gonzaga' in Matthews-Grieco 2010, 199-222.

woman] who, dissatisfied with her sex life, dreams of attending a penis market.⁵ Amongst the stalls, the *bona donna* spies the penis of her dreams. There was a comparable penis on the bathroom wall of Monsignor Bentivoglio, identified as Antongaleazzo Bentivoglio, the protonotary, elected in 1483 at age eleven.⁶ The mention of visual erotica in a cleric's bathroom is not necessarily surprising for the time, considering the existence of the famous *stufetta* of Cardinal Bernado Bibbiena in his papal palace apartments, frescoed by Raphael in 1516 with erotic Ovidian scenes.⁷

This dissertation will explore the literary and visual construction of these phallic goods and the penis market, drawing on feminist and gender approaches to art history. Many of my observations could apply to cultural contexts from ancient East Asia to modern North America. But given the inevitable limitations of this study, I will confine myself to a critical analysis of what the disembodied penis can tell us about female agency: this will involve analysing the place of the penis market within Renaissance humour and the sexual roles of the penis and female consumer.⁸

Sources and Historiography

Within the conceptual framing of the 'penis market', I will discuss depictions of women cultivating, hunting, selling and using penises separated from the male body. Dolfo's letter is the fullest account of the penis market: it provides a context for the writer and audience and therefore will be central to this discussion.

The penis market appears in both public and private domains. Marta Ajmar-Wollheim noted that 'at various levels of Renaissance society, playful and explicit references to sexuality and genitalia were considered entirely appropriate within the domestic context.'⁹ Some more public depictions such as the Massa Marittima mural (Figure 6), where twenty-five large phalli hanging from branches are being plucked by women below, pose questions about our understanding of medieval and early modern attitudes towards erotica.

⁵ Matthews-Grieco 2010, 207; in my translation of *bona donna*, I have included the quotation marks around good to imply a sense of irony. It is unclear whether Dolfo intends *bona donna* to be taken literally or ironically, since in Italian *bona donna* can imply a prostitute or a lascivious woman.

⁶ Minutelli and Dolfo 2002, 74.

⁷ Matthews-Grieco 2010, 219, no. 38.

⁸ Lo and Re'em forthcoming.

⁹ Marta Ajmar-Wollheim, "'The spirit is ready, but the flesh is tired'": erotic objects and marriage in early modern Italy' in Matthews-Grieco 2010, 150.

Previous analyses of these Renaissance markets argue for the importance of antique influences. Within the phallocentrism of Graeco-Roman societies, depictions of the phallus abound, possessing talismanic and apotropaic properties as well as connoting eroticism and fertility.¹⁰ A perplexing mid fifth-century red-figure vase by the Hasselmann painter depicts a woman watering her phalluses (Figure 1). John Boardman also provides twenty-five different examples of phallus birds from the ancient world (Figure 4).¹¹ The *Carmina Priapea*, a Latin anthology of 80 poems dedicated to Priapus the god of fertility - attributed to various classical authors including Virgil and Ovid - was greatly influential in the Renaissance tradition of representing genitalia as fruit.¹² Catherine Hess uses the apotropaic function of genitalia in the ancient world to assist her interpretation of a woman flashing her genitalia to a winged phallus on a Renaissance maiolica drug jar (Figure 10).¹³

Classical scholars such as Eva Keuls and importantly Amy Richlin in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* engage with feminist theories of pornography to explain power relations within erotic depictions. Within Richlin's volume, Holt Parker argues that Greek and Roman sexualities were essentially pornographic.¹⁴ She employs feminist theorists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon who define pornography as the graphic, sexually explicit, subordination of women through pictures and/or words. This includes women being presented dehumanised as the sex objects, things or commodities and women's bodies being reduced to vaginas, breasts and buttocks through exclusive focus on these parts.¹⁵ Martha Nussbaum and Rae Langton identified ten features that intensify the objectification of a person: instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, denial of subjectivity, reduction to body, reduction to appearance, silencing.¹⁶ Alison Assiter uses Hegel's analysis of the political dynamic between a master and slave to critique pornography:

¹⁰ Matthews-Grieco 2010, 149.

¹¹ Boardman 1992, 227-243.

¹² The sixteenth-century saw a renewed popularity of the *Carmina Priapea* thanks to Alus Manutius' edition in 1517. A poem describes Priapus' garden: suggestive luxuriance with 'figs better than the neighbour's' [*ficus praeferenda vicinae*]; 'splendid almonds' [*amygdalum fulgens*]; 'leeks with an ever-growing head' [*semper crescens in suum caput porrum*] and 'courgettes filled with seed' [*cucurbitas seminosas*]. *The Carmina Priapea* ed. Sella and Fedeli 1992 tr. Ajmar-Wollheim in Matthews-Grieco 2010, 150.

¹³ Catherine Hess, 'Pleasure, shame and healing: erotic imagery on maiolica drug jars' in Levy 2010, 21.

¹⁴ Holt Parker, *Loves body anatomised* in Richlin 1992, 100.

¹⁵ Richlin 1992, 99; MacKinnon 1987, 176.

¹⁶ Langton 2009, 228-9; Nussbaum 1995, 257.

'the Master-Slave dialectic seems to capture the relation between people in pornographic eroticism. In much pornography, people, usually women, become objects for another. In the case of pornography, what happens is that the one person becomes a body desired by the other, but this is not reciprocated'.¹⁷ To treat a person as a tool or a body for another's use, not recognizing that they have autonomy and desires, is the equivalent as treating someone as a slave, as subhuman or an object (or prostitute).

These theories of pornography particularly manifest in the influential Ovidian poetic model that dismembers women. The end of Book 3 of the *Ars Amatoria*, includes explicit advice for sexual positions for women which instruct her to make a display of her 'best' parts during sex i.e. to anatomise and, therefore, objectify herself. The male body, in contrast, is kept out of sight.¹⁸ These theories of pornography, objectification and representation will be essential to this discussion, since the penis market appears to turn the table on traditional pornographic discourse, a startling possibility that this study will put to the test.

Scholars have already identified the pornographic associations of the penis market: Ajmar-Wollheim connected a maiolica dish (Figure 3) - made near Deruta in 1530 - to both classical and Renaissance pornographic sources. The dish has an enticing inscription 'Come women to the good fruits' [Ai BONI FRUTTI DONNE]: a woman sits in contemporary dress on the ground handling a phallus surrounded by leaves from a basket full of similar fruits. She connects the dish to an attic red-figure vase: a naked *hetaera* steps into a basket full of penises (Figure 2). The eyes on these penises indicate these are living, sentient objects: a living dildo.¹⁹ The Renaissance parallel drawn is Pietro Aretino's pornographic literature, in particular the *Ragionamenti* (1534): Innocent Nanna, having virtuously joined a nunnery, is introduced to the erotic activities of nuns and monks.²⁰ Nanna describes in detail 'the fruits of earthly paradise... glass fruits made in Murano in Venice in imitation of the prick'. Nanna describes the moment during a banquet when a youth walks in with a basket full of these fruits,

¹⁷ Alison Assiter, 'Autonomy and Pornography' in Whitford 1988, 65.

¹⁸ For the influence of Ovidian dismemberment in the ancient world see Richlin 1992, 95 and see Baldwin 1996, 108ff for Medieval France.

¹⁹ Matthews-Grieco 2010, 149-150.

²⁰ Ibid.

covered in a white napkin. Once the contents are revealed, the nuns and monks help themselves to the dildos.²¹

Other more sinister but arguably comic connections are drawn to these images, as in the case of the penis tree of Massa Marittima (Figure 5). George Ferzoco connects the mural to the *Malleus Malificarum*: the famous witch-hunting manual, authored by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, of the late fifteenth-century.²² Kramer recounts tales of witches stealing penises, keeping them in nests and feeding them oats.²³ Others connect the mural to the medieval tradition of the phallus tree, which appears on a German trinket box (Figure 11) and in medieval French illuminations: in the first of the illuminations (Figure 12), two nuns gather phalluses from a tree, tucking them away in the folds of their robes, while on the right a monk hands over a phallus to a nun; in the second (Figure 13), a young nun harvests phalluses from the tree with the text - 'It's pointless to resist the call of nature. Even living like a saint won't save you. So you'd better enjoy life to the full'.²⁴

The tradition of depicting women with disembodied penises, or what stands for them, continues throughout the Renaissance with the famous courgette penetrating a fig which borders Raphael's fresco at the Villa Farnesina (Figure 14) and a drawing attributed to Francesco Paciotti *Leda and the Swan* (1571) (Figure 15). Notably, this tradition of depicting disembodied phalluses does not feature the whole man: we seem to be dealing with a broad category of artwork that explores the relationship between a woman and a man's sexual organ.

²¹ 'Frutti del paradiso terrestre' and fruttu de vetro che si fanno a Murano di Vinegia alla similitudine del K[azzo]' Aretino and Marrone 1993, 24 tr. Ajmar-Wollheim in Matthews-Grieco 2010, 148.

²² Ferzoco 2005, 81ff.

²³ Kramer discusses magical penis-snatching in three places: in Part 1, Chapter 9 he discusses whether penis snatching is just an illusion. He concludes that only the devil can make it disappear in actuality and witches only create an illusion. In Part 2, Chapter 4, he offers advice on how to remedy the affliction. In Part 2, Question 1, Chapter 7, he gives three accounts of men who suffered penis-snatching (Broedel 2003 19ff). For a translation see Summers 2012.

²⁴ The illuminations are from the *bas-de-page* of a fourteenth-century manuscript of the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, illustrated by Jeanne de Monstbaston. Equally subversive scenes, such as a team of nuns gathering phalluses, sex among monks and nuns, and a nun leading a monk by a chain attached to his penis appear on other folios (Camille 2003, 147-149; McDonald 2006). The translation of the text accompanying Figure 13 is 'Inutile de résister au désir de nature! Même l'habit monastique ne vous sera d'aucun secours! Cueillez donc les plaisirs de la vie!' and is translated in Mattelaer 2010, 847.

Penis - The Measure of a Man

The husband, listening and agitated by the story, asked her:

'Tell me, in good faith, my wife, how much were the pricks sold for, which were the same type and size as mine?'

And, placing his prick in the hand of his wife, so that she might well certify it (which, Sir Marquis, was to my judgement as big as yours or perhaps bigger), the woman responded with a lovely grin:

'The pricks of this sort were not on sale. Instead, they were on the ground beside the vessels, and were trampled beneath feet. For the others were all so big, long, beautiful, hard and vigorous, that these little pricks among those others had no value.' (63-73)

The husband is weighed, measured and is found wanting. This humorous episode is one of a many jovial and often sexually explicit letters that Dolfo wrote to Francesco between 1493 and 1506. The Mantuan State archive holds many of the Marquis letters recording his public administrative duties and his personal life. He did not shy from crude and 'low brow' attitudes: his letters include a description of a secretary's adventures with a group of local prostitutes and a suggestive letter from his four-year-old cousin, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga.²⁵ These illicit exchanges occur between the Marquis, members of the chancery and an elite group of professional men at court. Molly Bourne argues that the erotic letter provided a space for these men to fashion an elite masculine identity for themselves and was a form of cross-class male sociability.²⁶ This chapter will discuss the purpose of the dream within Dolfo's letter and then the context of Italian sexual humour.

A Cautionary Tale

Fundamentally, Dolfo's letter merely informs the Marquis that, unfortunately, he is unable to accept his invitation to a party. Why, then, does Dolfo tell this story? The indication is in the introductory remarks:

As I am not accustomed to lying, and I employ the same criterion to condemn and to criticise the intolerable life and morals of princes and masters of every kind, I do not censor myself nor touch Your Grace in secret or in public. But, I make an exception on your account, avoiding slanderous practices. For, to be honest, others' defects are so numerous and so abominable that your matters seem a trifle in comparison (1-10)

²⁵ Given the age of his nephew, Molly Bourne argues that it is unlikely that the nephew wrote the letters himself and were written by a tutor or a secretary to amuse the Marquis (Matthews-Grieco 2010, 203).

²⁶ Matthews-Grieco 2010, 199-202.

The dream is introduced as an example of ‘the defects of others’. Therefore, the story is to be understood as a sort of cautionary tale: a genre of tale which warns against the dangers of certain behaviours delivered through the generations.

The source of this story is, however, unclear. Is this a story of a contemporary, a product of word of mouth, or oral tradition? Minutelli suggests that the source is not a real dream but a *fabliaux* by the Old French poet Jean Bodel (1165-1210) titled *Les Sohaiz des Vez* [The Dream of Pricks].²⁷ Bodel claimed that he heard the tale from the husband, a merchant, who reported his wife’s dream throughout Douai in Northern France. Catherine Hess connected the same tale to the aforementioned plate from Deruta (Figure 3), suggesting the separate instances of the penis market motif are connected by a popular folk tradition rather than by any identifiable lineal transmission.²⁸ Bodel wrote a number of *fabliaux*, which are comic, often anonymous, tales written by minstrels from northeast France c.1150-1400. These tales are generally characterised by sexual and scatological obscenity.

Bodel’s tale introduces unnamed protagonists - *fabliaux* types are seldom named. The designations *prode fame* [good woman] and *prodon* [good man] suffice.²⁹ The scenario that Bodel creates is of a merchant husband, who has been absent for three months. The husband, on return to his wife, drinks too much and falls asleep. The wife is disappointed: ‘The lady was anxious to give him her very best, because she was expecting to have his in return and to receive her own welcome gift.’ The wife having cursed her husband, falls asleep and dreams of the penis market.³⁰ The story continues in a similar fashion to Dolfo’s version, except that Bodel’s ending is different: Dolfo’s *bona donna* never receives satisfaction and Bodel’s *prode fame* does and ‘the night together is a good one.’³¹ In summary, there is little value in trying to trace the sources and transmission of these images and stories. Since the characters are anonymous and

²⁷ Minutelli and Dolfo 2002, 373 no.21–67; the tale is sometimes titled *Li Sohais Desvez* [The Crazy Wish].

²⁸ Levy 2010, 16.

²⁹ White 1982, 196.

³⁰ ‘Mout ot la dame bon talent/ de lui faire auques de ses buens,/ car ele i ratandoit les suens/ et sa bienvue a avoir’. tr. White 1982, 197.

³¹ ‘La nuit furent mout bien ensamble’ tr. White 1982, 198.

repeated types, related to real-life figures. Perhaps the cuckold and the lascivious woman can be thought of as Jungian 'archetypes'.³²

The Cuckold and the Lascivious Woman

The recurrent motifs of the penis market dream, the dissatisfied and insubordinate wife and the incompetent husband, are common in Renaissance humour. Italian academies flourished as centres of both learning and exchanging jokes. The *Facetiae* of Giorgio Francesco Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), who became papal secretary and a respected humanist, was one of the first books of jokes.³³ They were a product of a club in Rome that Poggio himself describes as the *Bugiale* – 'the place for telling tall tales'. The *Facetiae* were written in Latin, indicative of their educated, elite audience. These *Facetiae* remind us of a long medieval tradition of bawdy tales, deriving from the *novelle* and ultimately the *fabliaux*.³⁴ Both the popular and learned traditions of Renaissance humour did not exclude the vulgar and obscene.

These jokes were written by men for men, very often to ridicule men. Baldassare Castiglione in his *Book of the Courtier* (1528), catalogued the many forms of wit with which a gentleman should be accustomed.³⁵ It was part of male sociability. Frantz uses the studies of Gershon Legman and Keith Thomas to interpret the forces behind dirty jokes. In *The Rationale of the Dirty Joke*, Legman writes: 'under the mask of humour, our society allows infinite aggressions, by everyone against everyone. In the culmination of the laugh by the listener or observer – whose position is often really that of the victim or butt of the joke – the teller of the joke betrays his hidden hostility and singles his victory by being, theoretically at least, the only person present who does not laugh'.³⁶ In Legman's *The Horn Book* in 1964, he wrote that sexual folklore while being humorous also addressed some of the most pressing fears and issues. In particular, he references

³² 'Archetypes' as described by Carl Jung are universal, archaic patterns and images that derive from the collective unconscious. They are realised when they enter the consciousness through images or behaviour, differing depending on the individuals and their cultures. These archetypes refer to motifs such as the mother, the child, the trickster, and the flood (Jung 1991).

³³ Frantz 1989, 10; For a translation of the *Facetiae* see Bracciolini and Hurwood 1968.

³⁴ Frantz 1989, 13–14.

³⁵ Singleton, Mayhew, and Castiglione 1959, 177.

³⁶ Legman 1968, 9.

certain standard comedy figures and situations: cuckoldry, seduction, impotence, homosexuality, castration and disease.³⁷

Keith Thomas in 'The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England' gives a social explanation for dirty jokes:

...laughter did not only reflect contemporary anxieties. It also played a more powerful role as a crucial part of the social process - very often that role was a conservative one for its affirmation of shared values - laughter could be a powerful source of social cohesions. [...] mockery and derision were indispensable means of preserving established values and condemning unorthodox behaviour [...] This was a harshly intolerant popular culture, hostile to privacy and eccentricity, and relying on the sanction not of reason but of ridicule. Laughter was a crude form of moral censorship.³⁸

What then are the anxieties and concerns that Dolfo is addressing with this tale and what values is the joke trying to reinforce? Dolfo's narrative takes place in the domestic context, with a husband and wife sleeping side by side. In the wife's dream, 'many women crowded competing to buy the desired merchandise, they boldly shoved each other, fearing that they would lack that enormous fruit, never more to be seen or touched by them, although there was an abundance of that thing which could fully supply not only the whole village but many more' (15-21). Dolfo represents the problems caused by the inattentive husband: unruly female lust and violent behaviour.

Dolfo's themes are not singular. In Giovan Battista della Porta's comedy *La Furiosa* (1609), a feminine perspective of a life as a young wife is given. She is married to an old doctor and desperate for a cure for her husband's impotence. She laments to a servant that even though her husband can revive dead bodies, this was no use to her as he could not revive his 'own member' - which was 'more than death itself' - neither with ointments nor with caresses.³⁹ Aphrodisiacs were a hot topic in Renaissance comedy, expressing the concern over the libidinal problems of old men, sexual desires, performance anxiety and the search for the right erotic aid.⁴⁰

³⁷ Legman 1964, 245-46.

³⁸ Thomas 1977, 77.

³⁹ 'Che giovano a me le sue medecine e che resusciti i morti, se non fa risuscitar le sue membra che son più morte della morte stessa? Che né per losinghe, onzioni e carezze che gli si faccino, ponno resuscitare' Giovan Battista della Porta, 'La Furiosa' in *Teatro Quarto tomo-Commedie*, ed. Battista della Porta and Sirri 2003 I, iii, 115 [101-70].

⁴⁰ Laura Giannetti, 'The Satyr in the Kitchen Pantry' in Matthews-Grieco 2014, 104.

While Dolfo's *bona donna* battled in her sleep to acquire the desired fruit, she accidentally hit her husband who was sleeping beside her. Angry, he woke her up, inquired after the content of her dream and enquired after the value of his own penis. She responds:

The pricks of this sort were not on sale. Instead, they were on the ground beside the vessels, and were trampled beneath feet. For the others were all so big, long, beautiful, hard and vigorous, that these little pricks among those others had no value. (73-78)

The good woman, at the end of the story, admits that her husband's penis is inadequate. Dolfo jokes that even the Marquis, known for his sexual prowess and loose sexual behaviour could not satisfy this woman.⁴¹ Women's sexual desire transcends anything that the husband or the Marquis could ever provide.

The *bona donna*'s dissatisfaction has led her to look elsewhere: the husband, in a sense, is cuckolded by an imaginary dildo. Dildos were not unproblematic in the Renaissance. Just as the US state of Alabama illegalised sex toys, the church tried to police the use of dildos.⁴² The devices are even given a confessional presence.⁴³ In the *Decretum* of Burchard of Worms (c.1012), questions asked of a woman included:

Have you done what certain women are accustomed to do, that is, to make some sort of device or implement in the shape of the male member, of a size to match your desire, and you have fastened it to the arena of your genitals or those of another with some form of fastening and you have fornicated with other women or others have done with a similar instrument or another sort with you?

The penalty for this act was penance for three to five years. Masturbation without a dildo resulted in a one year fine.⁴⁴ To confess the use of dildos could be, on the very rare occasion, life threatening: two Spanish nuns were burnt to death for employing the instrument.

Dildo's and the self-penetrative woman clearly posed some threat to expectations of female behaviour: they were 'unnatural' and sexually transgressive.⁴⁵ Crucially, they were symbols demonstrating that women could be agents of penetration – both of

⁴¹ Paolo Giovio in his *Elogi degli uomini illustri*, a popular compendium of portraits of famous literary figures described Francesco as a man who 'amused himself by changing women frequently.' Giovio 2006, 763–764 tr. Bourne in Matthews-Grieco 2010, 201.

⁴² *The Guardian* 1999.

⁴³ Patricia Simmon, "The cultural history of 'Seigneur Dildoe'" in Levy 2010, 77–91 provides an account of the dildo in Renaissance Italy; for a discussion of sex and the penitential see Payer 1984.

⁴⁴ *Patrologia Latina*, 140.971D-927A. For a brief discussion of the significance of this text see Levy 2010, 80.

⁴⁵ Crompton 1981, 11-25.

others and themselves - and consequently did not need men for sexual satisfaction. Political polemics used the penetrative woman and the penetrated man as a figure of fear and ridicule. Henry III of France, in some examples named a hermaphrodite, and his mother Catherine de' Medici, queen regent to ten-year old to ten-year old Charles IX, were branded as the figures of unnatural sodomy (organs penetrating unnatural places): 'Happy the Romans, who had for tyrants the Caesars, lovers of arms and art, but unhappy he who lives as an infamous slave under a manlike woman and a female man.' (2.53-54)⁴⁶ The French, in particular the author Paré, used the phallic *tribade* as a chief symbol of the inversion of the state by female political authority, which led contemporary debates on the female authority and the Salic Law.⁴⁷

A recent compilation of essays 'Cuckoldry, Impotence and Adultery in the Renaissance' by Sara Matthews-Grieco addresses male sexual anxieties. It claims to be an antidote to previous scholarship that gives more prominence to female adultery than male cuckoldry. 'The seriousness with which female adultery was viewed in Renaissance and early modern Europe was but the more visible face of a coin on which male honour and the social stigma of cuckoldry (including a presumed lack of virility) constituted the dark and complex reverse.' Renaissance society depended on female fidelity and chastity. But conversely male impotence caused scandalous divorce trials.⁴⁸

Cathy McClive argued that male corporeality has been ignored in gender and medical history for the late medieval and early modern periods in favour of exploring 'Women's Secrets'. The female body held the secrets of the uterus, the locus of contestation of female interiority, the mysteries and powers of childrearing, and issues of paternity. McClive claims that existing historiography on the male body is largely Anglocentric and - due to the emphasis on woman's secrets - 'is skewed towards a fixed, generic, stable but 'little-defined norm' of masculine corporeality against which the leaky, grotesque, mysterious and deceptive female body was mapped'. However, the male body was no less problematic than the woman's in patriarchal terms. It was a 'contested site' and the locus of social and cultural expectations.⁴⁹ Impotence was a patriarchal issue. It was a

⁴⁶ Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Les tragiques*, 2.53-54 ed. d'Aubigne et al. 1932 tr. Parks in Hillman and Mazzio 1997, 185

⁴⁷ Hillman and Mazzio 1997, 185.

⁴⁸ Matthews-Grieco 2014, 1.

⁴⁹ McClive 2009, 45.

justifiable reason for female divorce and, as the *bona donna's* dream demonstrates, sexual transgression. The definition of impotence is twofold in the Renaissance: *Impotentia coeundi* implied an inability to perform the sexual act; *Impotentia generandi* the inability to generate offspring. *Impotentia coeundi* was a viable reason for a woman to file for divorce but *impotentia generandi* was not.⁵⁰

Male impotence and a wife's infidelity affected more than just male personal and sexual honour. An unfaithful wife not only implied that the husband could not satisfy his wife but further that he could not keep order within his household. The sexually incompetent husband is ridiculed in Poggio's tale 'Of the fool who thought his wife had two vaginas'. The wife convinces her husband to donate her superfluous vagina (her anus) to the clergy, so that she could continue her affair with the local priest.⁵¹ The husband's lack of virility labels him a 'fool' in the public eye. Such a reputation affects a man's business networks and his public reception: he is seen to threaten – by setting a poor example – community stability.⁵²

The virility test, which became standard at the end of the sixteenth-century, was a trial that was endured by Vincenzo Gonzaga (1562 –1612), Francesco II Gonzaga's great grandson. It demonstrates how the sexual prowess of an individual was of public concern. Vincenzo divorced his 15 year old bride, Margherita Farnese, for her impotence. He wanted to remarry with a new bride, his first cousin Eleonora de' Medici, the daughter of Francesco I de' Medici and Joanna of Austria. The Farnese were offended by the accusation of Margherita's impotence and stirred rumours of Vincenzo's impotence. Such rumours and accusations threatened Vincenzo's new match: the Medici's demanded proof of his virility as a pre-condition for Eleonora's hand in marriage. Vincenzo had to deflower an orphan girl before eye witnesses from both the Medici and Gonzaga courts in Venice.⁵³ Concern over the sexual competence of rulers could also be traced in France: repeated female regencies, exacerbated by the inability of successive male monarchs to impregnate their queens caused great anxiety about

⁵⁰ Many reasons were supplied for male impotence: magic, disease or wounding. For women natural impotence could be the condition of a narrow or closed vaginal passage (Matthews-Grieco 2014, 37).

⁵¹ Bracciolini and Hurwood 1968, 120 no. CXXXXVI.

⁵² Matthews-Grieco 2014, 1–2.

⁵³ Molly Bourne, 'Vincenzo Gonzaga and the Body Politic: Impotence and Virility at Court' in Matthews-Grieco 2014, 35–58, especially 39–41.

political succession and the continuation of the monarchy. Political pamphleteers interpreted it as the 'castration' and 'emasculatation' of the country.⁵⁴ Molly Bourne argues that the virility test demonstrates how 'the body was implicated in the construction of masculine identity'. It was not his reproductive powers that were tested but his sexual performance: 'a man's sexual identity was based primarily on his capacity to penetrate and ejaculate within a woman's body'.⁵⁵

Rumours and reputation were of the utmost importance for the construction of identity. The tales told about Vincenzo, true or false, were crucial to his ability to rule and the future of his leadership. Dolfo's tale is part of a world where the relationship between fact, rumour, hearsay, folklore and fiction is convoluted and murky. Guido Ruggiero's microhistories of Renaissance Italy emphasise the importance of understanding poetics in history. In his attempt to understand the identity of two women, Lucretia and Elena, he opines:

The many-layered tales that they, their supporters, and their enemies constructed create a web of words behind which it is almost impossible to uncover the truth of their deeds. But that web, much like a spider's web, both disguises and builds; in this case, it builds a complex vision of the interrelationship between marriage, honor, and reputation in the lives of women and men in late sixteenth-century Italy.⁵⁶

Ruggiero suggests that for the late Renaissance 'rather than logic and metaphysics, perhaps their dominant cultural paradigm was poetic, as poetry was more suited for building a culture out of the highly complex, layered world of resonant repetition that they encountered in the everyday'.⁵⁷

Real events, rumours and folktales are indistinguishable. Therefore, the question of the source of the penis market is perhaps not important: it could be 'real', a folktale and simultaneously be a rumour attached to an individual. This humorous tale of the penis market is part of a tradition of tales where sexual prowess was crucial for constructing character and to measure a man.

⁵⁴ McClive 2009, 46.

⁵⁵ Matthews-Grieco 2014, 36.

⁵⁶ Ruggiero 1993, 87.

⁵⁷ *ibid*, 225.

‘Come women to the good fruits’

‘Ai BONA FRUTTI DONE’ is the inscription on the maiolica dish from Deruta (Figure 3). The pun is part of a wider tradition which uses metaphors for genitalia, so popular in the Renaissance. The pun ‘FRUTTI’ for the penis provides the artist with the opportunity to place the phallus within the frameworks associated with fruit: an edible good within the market place that is harvested, bought, tasted, and sold. Learned erotica often employed elaborate rhetoric, metaphor puns and scholarly devices: Castiglione in his catalogue of the many forms of wit wrote that some humour had hidden meanings different from the one we seem to intend as ‘when one thing is said another is tacitly understood.’⁵⁸

These puns manifested visually in erotic still lives. Caravaggio’s *Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge* (Figure 16) has a large, white, long, phallic, probing gourd dominating the painting. Another famous example is Giovanni da Udine’s suggestive depictions of fruit and vegetables bordering Raphael’s *Loggia di Psyche*, painted in 1517-18 (Figure 14). This chapter will explore the effect of separating male genitalia from the bodily context and bringing the penis into the syntactic and semantic realms of animals, husbandry, agriculture and trade and will identify how this transmogrification serves to change perceptions of sexual roles.

Page duBois carried out a similar linguistic task in her chapter ‘Dildos’ in *Slaves and Other Objects*. She explores the semantic field of the word ‘dildo’ or the *olisbos* in Ancient Greece.⁵⁹ She argued that ‘The dildo might then be understood as an instrument and even eventually as a commodity, a product of artisanal labor, just as much as an element of possible invective or as a figure in erotic discourse.’⁶⁰ Like duBois, I will ask what is the web, the cultural and semantic field, the syntax, within which genitalia, in particular the penis and its euphemisms, sit in Renaissance discourses.⁶¹ I will argue that through these cultural webs, in particular that of the field of trade and the market, the penis becomes a sexual object, commodified and objectified.

⁵⁸ ‘quando si dice una cosa e tacitamente se ne intende un’altra’ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), 220, II.72 tr. Castiglione, Singleton and Mayhew 1959, 2:169.

⁵⁹ ‘Dildos’ in duBois 2008, 82-100.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 92.

⁶¹ Ibid, 90.

In effect, these puns allow one to reverse the traditional social order. The deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) argued that we live in a world subject to 'phallogocentrism': 'the system of metaphysical oppositions' predominant in male-authored Western literature.⁶² This theory states that the Western world has been and continues to be both culturally and intellectually subjugated to 'logocentrism' and 'phallocentrism', and that language has a phallogocentric and patriarchal agenda. Furthermore, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) argued that language is a symbolic order that precedes and makes possible human subjectivity.⁶³ According to Lacan the imaginary (intelligibility offered by images) and symbolic (the manner in which reality takes on meaning and significance through words) are modes of representation that help in making intelligible the world and the self. The mediation of the world by images and words structures reality and establishes both subjectivity and social relations.⁶⁴

Studies of the language of sex in the ancient world reveal how language defines our understanding of sexual roles. Holt Parker sums up:

The active one, the one who penetrated, who moved, who fucked, was 'male', and was acting the role of a free man, whether he used as object a woman, a boy, or a man. The passive one, who was penetrated, who did not move, was fucked, was 'female', and servile, whether woman, boy, or man.⁶⁵

Maclean uses ancient polarities established by Aristotle, fundamental to western thought and the subject of an enlightening investigation by G. E. R. Lloyd, to explain the man/woman dichotomy in the Renaissance:⁶⁶

The male principle in nature is associated with the active, formative and perfect characteristics, while the female is passive, material and deprived, desiring the male in order to become complete. The duality male/female is therefore paralleled by the dualities active/passive, form/matter, act/potency, perfection/imperfection, completion/incompletion.⁶⁷

In oppositions like these, one term is always thought superior to the other. Human subjectivity and agency are usually associated with the mind. The devalued term, the

⁶² Derrida 1978, 20.

⁶³ Lacan and Miller 1994.

⁶⁴ Lacan and Granoff 1956.

⁶⁵ Holt Parker in Richlin 1992, 99.

⁶⁶ Lloyd 1966.

⁶⁷ Maclean 1980, 8.

one identified with the body, is usually associated with women. The opposition between mind and body maps on to other distinctions: reason/emotion, culture/nature, rational/irrational. Therefore, women are devalued as human subjects and agents.⁶⁸

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) in his famous dialogue *De la causa, principio ed uno* (1584), has Polinino say 'a woman is but matter. If you do not know what a woman is because you do not know what matter is, study the Peripatetics a little; they will teach you what a woman is by teaching you about matter.'⁶⁹ Bruno satirically continues:

In the first book of the *Physics*, at the end, here the philosopher, wishing to elucidate what primary matter is, compares it to the female sex – that sex, I mean, which is intractable, frail capricious, cowardly, feeble, vile, cold, misshapen, barren, vain, confused, senseless, treacherous, lazy, fetid, foul, ungrateful, truncated, mutilated, imperfect, unfinished, deficient, insolent, amputated, diminished, stale, vermin, tares, plague, sickness, death.⁷⁰

Aristotle compared matter to a sexually aroused woman, longing for the male form:

In fact, however, form cannot desire itself, because it is not in need of anything... it is matter which does the desiring. You might liken it to a woman longing for a man, or what is ugly longing for what is beautiful, if it were not for the fact that matter is not in its own right something that is either ugly or female.⁷¹

Aristotle's passage emphasises the metaphorical connection of the desiring female and matter. Sergius Koderer argues that 'The matter/desiring woman metaphor was more than just an 'innocuous' example because it established a connection that fit all too well into the social and political contexts of patriarchal societies.'⁷² He comments on Bruno's equation of woman and matter within his discussion of the prostitute as a metaphorical description of the material world in Renaissance philosophy. The associative power of the image of the promiscuous woman as a metaphor for matter became constitutive of

⁶⁸ Ian MacClean, 'The Notion of Women in Medicine, Anatomy, and Physiology' in Hutson 1999, 127ff.

⁶⁹ 'La donna non è altro che una materia; studiate alquanto gli Peripatetici che con insegnarvi che cosa è materia, te insegneranno che cosa è donna.' Giordano Bruno *De la causa principio et uno*, 1534 ed. Bruno and Canone 1999, 95–96, tr. Lucca, and Blackwell 1998, 74.

⁷⁰ 'Del primo della *physica*, in *calce*. Dove volendo elucidare de cosa fosse la prima materia; prende per specchio il sesso femminile, sesso dico, ritroso, fragile, incostante, molle, pusillo, infame, ignobile, vile, abietto, negletto, indegno, reprobo, sinistro, vituperoso, frigido, deforme, vacuo, vano, indiscreto, insano, perfido, neghittoso, frigido, deforme, vacuo, vano, indiscreto, insano, perfido, neghittoso, putido, sozzo, ingrato, trunco, mutilo, imperfetto, inchoato, insufficiente, preciso, amputato, attenuato, ruggine, eruca, zizania, peste, morbo, morte.' ed. Bruno and Canone 1999, 93 tr. Bruno, Lucca, and Blackwell 1998, 72.

⁷¹ Aristotle, *Physics* 192a20-24: 'Impossible est ut forma appetat se, quoniam non est diminuta, neque appetit suum contrarium,... sed materia appetit formam, sicut foemina mare, & turpe pulchrum: non quia in se est turpis, sed per accidens; neque quia est foemina, sed per accidens'. Aristotle et al. 1962, vol 4, fol 45v-r, tr. Aristotle, Waterfield and Bostock 1996, 31.

⁷² Sergius Koderer, 'Nymphomaniac Matter' in Hairston and Stephens 2010, 111.

the imagination of the bodies of women in an often aggressively misogynistic discourse. The woman/prostitute as body/matter/material creates the image of the desirable body that willingly submits and objectifies itself to the formative and cognitive power of any man.⁷³

The traditional sexual role of the man as subject, mind, form, active and penetrating, and the woman as object, body, matter, passive and penetrated, are muddied and complicated within these new linguistic and imaginary contexts for genitalia. Below I have listed some of the terms and the sentence context used for the penis and its parts in Dolfo's letter:

...where there were vessels of **pricks** [*li cazi*] for sale (14-15)

And since many women crowded competing to buy the **desired merchandise** [*la desiata mercantia*], they boldly shoved each other, fearing that they would lack that **enormous fruit** [*fructi smisurati*]. (15-18)

... seeing the multitude of **welcome wares** [*la gratissima merce*]... (39-40)

[the good woman] spied in the vessel a beautiful large one, big, long and white, she saw that in the vessel there was a **beautiful large prick** [*uno bello cazo*], long and white... (41-42)

Another woman, wanting to buy one, came to the market to furnish herself with a **little beast** [*uno bestiolo*] and casted an eye to this same **virile member** [*cerse*]. Simultaneously, they quickly grabbed the member, one clutching the **scrotum** [*bursa*], the other the **head** [*testa*], and they pulled, each with all their might... (45-50)

But after a long dispute, having left that **little animal** [*animaleto*] in peace... (53-4)

The contexts within which Dolfo places the penis are culinary (implied by *fructi*); commercial (implied by *merce* and *fructi*), husbandry (*bestiolo* can imply a domestic animal), and animals in general (*animaleto*), all of which have different and diverse effects on our conceptions of sexual roles.

The Little Animal

The concept of the penis as a creature and a living thing with its own intelligence and agency are found in the pages of Leonardo Da Vinci's Windsor anatomical notes:

⁷³ Ibid, 120.

[The male member] confers with the human intelligence and sometimes has intelligence itself, and although the will of the man desires to stimulate it, it remains obstinate and takes its own course, and moving sometimes of itself without license or thought by the man, whether he is sleeping or waking, it does what it desires; and often the man is asleep and it is awake, and many times the man is awake and it is asleep; many times the man wishes to practice, and it does not wish it; many times it wishes it and the man forbid it. It seems therefore that this creature has often a life and intelligence separate from the man...⁷⁴

The belief that a penis has a mind of its own fits in with the metaphor of the penis as an animal.⁷⁵ One of the most common creatures the penis is equated with is the bird – *ucello* appears on the back of a manuscript of the *Codex Atlanticus* from Leonardo's notebooks (Figure 17), and on an anonymous copperplate of the later fifteenth-century of two lovers with a phallic bird (Figure 18). This is a Europe-wide phenomenon: the English word *cock*; the Spanish *paloma* [pigeon or dove]; the German *Volgelin* [bird]; the Latin *passer* [sparrow].⁷⁶

Bird imagery is used as a way of describing male genitalia, female genitalia and carnal concourse.⁷⁷ Giovanni di Michele Savonarola (1385-1468), a well-known Renaissance physician, humanist and scientist, writes on the prostitutes of Ferrara. They were permitted to uncover their breasts to fight the 'corrupt vice against nature [male homosexuality]' and 'invite the bird [*oxelazo*] onto the path so that it will find its way back to the nest.'⁷⁸ The bird signifies the penis and also the man. Ludovico Ariosto states: 'Once you will have taken a wife, leave the nests of others and stay with your own, so that some bird [*augello*] not finding yours unoccupied, decides to nest in it.'⁷⁹ Female genitalia is usually described as a 'nest' or cotes. These puns manifest visually with representations of the phallus-bird and winged penises. Many of these animal associations have ancient archetypes (Figure 19).

⁷⁴ Leonardo da Vinci, *The Note books of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. and tr. Da Vinci and McCurdy 1958.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the penis as its own agent see Anthony Colantuono, 'The Penis Possessed' in Hairston and Stephens 2010.

⁷⁶ The bird as a metaphor for genitalia is explored in 'From roosters to cocks: Italian Renaissance fowl and sexuality' by Allen Grieco in Matthews-Grieco 2010, 89–140. Other bird terms for genitalia can be found in Moira Smith 2002, 98.

⁷⁷ Matthews-Grieco 2010, 91.

⁷⁸ '...corrupto al vizio contra natura... per invitare lo oxelazo a la vi per la quale avesse a ritorno al suo nido' *Il tratto ginecologico-pediatrico in volgare Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium*, ed. Savonarola and Belloni 1952, tr. Allen Grieco in Matthews-Grieco 2010, 93.

⁷⁹ '... Tolto che moglie avrai, lascia li nidi degli altri, e sta' sul tuo; che qualche augello trovandol senza te, non vi s'annidi.' *Le Satire*, in *Opere minori*, ed. Sagre 1954, satira 5, v.251, quoted in Matthews-Grieco 2010, 93.

Verbs associated with animals are adopted as sexual euphemisms: sexual intercourse is often described as 'to nest' [*annidarsi*] and 'to peck' (*beccare*). The verb 'cacciare' or 'ucelare' was popular for amorous pursuit.⁸⁰ But as animals are hunted, trapped and eaten, so are phalluses: a medieval manuscript illumination (c.1500), from Pierre Sala's *Petit Livre de Amour*, attributed to the Master of Lyons represents women catching winged hearts in a net strung between two trees (Figure 20).⁸¹ Sisto Baldocchi (1581/85-1621), a younger artist who worked with Annibale Carracci, portrays skimpily clad women in a landscape, hunting and playing with various species of birds (Figure 21).⁸² There are five separate activities: in the background women are hunting with the *parete* net; to the right two women are dancing perhaps celebrating while holding a bird up; in the middle a woman is reaching out to catch a bird in flight; in the right foreground, a woman is in an unambiguous pose, with her hands in between her legs and a bird captive on the end of a string; in the left foreground, there is a large basket full of bright red penises. The erotic juxtaposition of the bird and female desire is made. This painting is not an isolated phenomenon and most likely has a literary precedent.⁸³

The hunting motif reoccurs with the cat and mouse. A Venetian print by an anonymous engraver from the early seventeenth-century has a leering old woman holding a cat, having caught a mouse, symbolising the hags own carnal appetites (Figure 22).⁸⁴ In a print in the Rijksmuseum, dated 1555, the cat runs away from an old woman with a penis in its mouth.⁸⁵ The nun is trying to give the cat a fish (Figure 23). The inscription is 'Flaisch macht Flaisch' which is probably from the old German proverb 'Fleisch macht Fleisch, fisch macht nisch'. It would literally translate to 'meat gives meat, fish gives nothing'.⁸⁶ Fleisch in German is also connected to 'Fleischeslust', which means carnal desire. Perhaps the nun wants to hand over the fish (a symbol of the church and therefore her abstinence) in exchange for the meat (or the penis) in the cat's mouth.

⁸⁰ Matthews-Grieco 2010, 94–99.

⁸¹ Pierre Sala, *Maids and Winged Hearts*, c.1500, British Library Stowe 955, f.12b-13,

⁸² Matthews-Grieco 2010, 106–108.

⁸³ A possible literary precedent is a poem by a man called Guglielmo or Il Giuggola. The poem is called the *Canzona delle parete* [Song of the *parete* nets] (Matthews-Grieco 2010, 107).

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 34.

⁸⁵ Renilde Vervoort mentions several illustrations of cats holding a phallus in their mouth. Cats could be or be a symbol of the devil or a witch. Cats were thought to attack the male sex and steal their penises at night (Vervoort 2008).

⁸⁶ Arthaber 1972, 182.

The Enormous Fruit

There is a universal tradition of eroticising food and plants: the associations appear in art, literature, medicine and also in ethics. The sixteenth-century burlesque poetry of Berni and others employ the phallic symbols of eels, sausages, fruit, beans and eggs.⁸⁷ Niccolò Frangipane (1565–97) made something of a specialty in depicting allegorical and musical scenes containing overt sexual metaphors. His *Allegory of Autumn* in the Museo Civico in Udine depicts a leering satyr, poking his finger into a split melon and with his other hand grasps a sausage. His gestures presumably evoke the contents of the dream of the youth sleeping beside him (Figure 24).

Literary games were played within the Italian academies where participants had to eulogise the mundane or objects with sexual connotations. We find poems in praise of figs (vaginas), melons, apples and peaches (buttocks), string beans and thistles (penises), urinals, and syphilis.⁸⁸ Berni addresses his peach:

Oh fruit blessed above all others
Good before, in the middle and after the meal,
But perfect behind.⁸⁹

Similarly in medical literature, aphrodisiacs subscribed to the ‘doctrine of signatures’: all plants and animals had a purpose or virtue inscribed in their shape colour or appearance. Hence, the phallic plants such as leeks and orchids had medicinal properties beneficial to male genitals.⁹⁰

Beyond their medical properties, food and sex have been intrinsically linked within ethics in the western world. Foucault argued ‘This association between the ethics of sex and the ethics of food was a constant factor in ancient culture’.⁹¹ Sexual desires were often defined by their association to eating habits. Sex manuals and cook books were censured, since, according to Plato, they do not counsel moderation as doctors and

⁸⁷ Matthews-Grieco 2010, 42ff.

⁸⁸ Frantz 1989, 29.

⁸⁹ ‘O frutto sopra gli altri benedetto,/ buono inanzi, nel mezzo e dietro pasto;/ ma inanzi buono e di dietro perfetto.’ in *Rime Facete* ed. Berni 1959, 32, tr. Frantz 1989, 30.

⁹⁰ Matthews-Grieco 2014, 105; Michel Foucault described the wider usage of the doctrine of signatures. Allegory was more real than in the modern day: ‘Up to the end of the sixteenth-century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them.’ Foucault 2005, 19.

⁹¹ Foucault and Turley 1985: 50.

dietetics do, but simply list possibilities.⁹² Moderation and resisting the passions were of crucial importance to Athenian culture.⁹³ This battle is also inscribed to Christian beliefs and therefore Renaissance culture: birds, a symbol of lust, were also a symbol of gluttony. Fowl became a symbol of gastronomic and sexual excess: a long ‘powerful and unequivocal sign of moral dissolution’ and a standard *topos* in moral representations.⁹⁴

Culinary metaphors place the penis in the world of eating and appetite, subject to variations of taste.⁹⁵ The ‘fructi smusirati’ in the *bona donna*’s dream is to be consumed and tasted: just as Kant said ‘sexual love makes of the loved person an Object of appetite’.⁹⁶ Nanna, Aretino’s protagonist, disparages an errant wife as ‘the insatiable Swallower-of-Parsnips’.⁹⁷ Aretino’s *Ragionamenti* (1534) introduces the glass dildos known as the *pastinache muranese* (parsnips of Murano), one of which is being put to use by a woman in an erotic print by Marcantonio Raimondi (Figure 25).⁹⁸

Classical scholarship on Athenaeus - who lived in the second and third-century - and his construction of ‘The Edible Woman’ can enrich this discussion. Madeleine M. Henry’s observes that Athenaeus offers a ‘sophisticated though implicit concept of the pornographic’.⁹⁹ As food, women are represented as usable and consumable, and to be enjoyed in nearly identical terms. Edible women are silent in Athenaeus’ *deiphnosophistae*, and if they do speak, they would reinforce their own status as objects.¹⁰⁰ The penises in these aforementioned culinary cases are constructed in the same way, thus superficially subverting gender norms.

The Welcome Wares

The market is the final context to discuss. Evelyn Welch argues that representations of peddlers, markets and shops are charged with potential meanings and symbolic associations: fecundity, abundance and wealth, worldliness, sensuality, dirt and disease.

⁹² Plato *Symp.* 187e; Richlin 1992, 98.

⁹³ Karras 2000, 1258.

⁹⁴ Matthews-Grieco 2010, 110–122.

⁹⁵ In seventeenth-century France, the concept of taste [gout] had shifted from its literal, corporeal sense to that of judgement of the beautiful. See for further information ‘Taste: Corporal Delectation and Judgement – La Mothe Le Vayer, Mere, and Morvan de Bellegarde’ in Koch 2008, 179ff.

⁹⁶ Kant and Infield 1963, 163.

⁹⁷ *The Secret Life of Wives*, ed. Aretino and Brown 2006, 58.

⁹⁸ *The Secret Life of Nuns*, ed. Aretino and Brown 2004, 58; Bayer 2008, 53.

⁹⁹ Richlin 1992, 252.

¹⁰⁰ Richlin 1992, 253–4.

Images often emphasised the role of exchange in enhancing human existence.¹⁰¹ However, the Venetian writer Tommaso Garzoni argued that seductions of the market place caused social degeneration: the mixing of nobility and peasantry and distraction by trinkets was a precondition of social and moral degradation. He warned that the city of Venice was in danger of a decline caused by consumer delights, sexual seduction and fine foods.¹⁰² Brothels were often located near central market areas. Paolo Cortesi warned against placing a cardinal's palace near the market place so that senses such as touch, taste and smell would not be aroused since 'gluttony and lust are fostered by perfumers, vendors of delicacies, poultry-sellers, money vendors and cooks and savoury foods'.¹⁰³ For the moralists the exchange of merchandise thus was tainted.¹⁰⁴ Florence, the merchant city, was 'la citta mercatrice, ma che dico, meretrice'.¹⁰⁵ The market, food and sex collided in the world of ethics.

The theme of trade is essential to Bodel's *Li Sohaiz des Vez*: the husband is a merchant. The husband's long absence is usually indicative of the adulterer's arrival. On his return the wife creates an excellent meal for his home coming. Sex becomes an economic transaction between wife and husband. She makes sure to provide 'the best pieces of meat ... the lady was anxious to give him her very best because she was expecting to have his in return and to receive her own welcome-home gift.'¹⁰⁶ The phallus becomes the object of trade, of consumption and taste much like food within the household.

In Dolfo's penis market, the *cazzi* are on display for the *bona donna's* perusal and judgement.¹⁰⁷ The *bona donna* finds the penis of her dreams: 'a beautiful large one, big, long and white' (41-42). The prescription of the ideal penis can be found in *Li Sohaiz de vez*. The *prode fame* selects a long and thick penis with enormous glands: so large is the eye [urethra] that it can accommodate a cherry. The wife in the *fabliaux* 'The Four Wishes of Saint Martin' describes her husband's dissatisfactory penis as 'soft as fur'. She wishes that her husband was covered in penises with balls from his eyes, nose and

¹⁰¹ Welch 2009, 23–24.

¹⁰² Tommaso Garzoni *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, ed Garzoni, Cherchi and Collina 1996, II 1294.

¹⁰³ Weil-Garris and D'Amico 1980, 73.

¹⁰⁴ The *meretrice* (whore) and the *mercanzia* (trade) came one after the other in the discussion of human inventions by Polydore Vergil 1997, 236–242.

¹⁰⁵ Mazzi 1991, 370, n.9.

¹⁰⁶ White 1982, 196–197.

¹⁰⁷ Bayer 2008, 49.

arms, head, sides, front to back. She wishes them large, black, white and crimson. Each is long and possesses an eye large enough to admit a bean.¹⁰⁸ The significance in Old French *fabliaux* of large urethra for a woman's satisfaction is unclear, perhaps it could imply he has plenty of semen. These women at the penis market are judging the penis' value according to their visual beauty (colours) and the pleasure they could receive (size and shape). The phallus becomes a sex object as defined by Mackinnon: "... A sex object is defined on the basis of its looks, in terms of its usability for sexual pleasure, such that both the looking—the quality of gaze, including its points of view—and the definition according to use become eroticised as part of the sex itself."¹⁰⁹

The language for genitalia creates a web of cultural contexts within which it can be placed. Within these new contexts, trade and culinary in particular, gender roles that are usually subject to the language of sex (penetrator/penetrated) can naturally be complicated beyond the traditional patriarchal narrative. The semantic range for penises is huge: trade, agriculture and husbandry and hunting. In each case, the penis is the object/product/cultivated/hunted/sold/consumed. The woman/cultivator/hunter/market-seller/merchant/consumer is the syntactic subject. This reversal of social order enabled by these metaphors has influenced countless images of female agency. The particular use of the penis market motif and the commodification of the phallus makes it the sex-object, traditionally the place of a woman within linguistic syntax. The man is dismembered, not permitted a body nor a mind. In a sense, men are thus pornographised.

¹⁰⁸ The *fabliaux* woman's ideal penis is discussed in Baldwin 1996, 109.

¹⁰⁹ MacKinnon 1987, 173.

The Female Consumer

A basic summary of the sexual roles within Dolfo's narrative would go something like this: the penis market provides a subject/object dichotomy reflecting the active/passive roles of the female consumer and the male sexual organ respectively. Women are, in this depiction, the primary consumers of sex. Male pleasure is of no significance. As Manuela Mourao suggested in reference to early modern pornographic texts, this consideration of female desire demonstrates that erotica is not wholly misogynistic. However, she admits that 'specific representational practices and rhetorical devices combine to create a voyeuristic reading in which both sexual objectification and sexual subjectivity are interchangeably gendered'.¹¹⁰ I will argue that the same is relevant here: the female subject is ultimately experiencing total objectification. This chapter will discuss the complex construction of the female consumer: firstly through a discussion of their subjectivity through their disruption of the male narrative and sexual agency; then the manner in which this agency is conveyed; and finally, the effect of this construction of the desiring female has on her subjectivity.¹¹¹

The Loquacious Woman

Women rarely talk in Renaissance history. Bernardino of Siena (1380 – 1444), an Italian priest, Franciscan missionary, and Catholic saint, advises women on proper behaviour:

O you girls, learn how you should stay at home, and beware of whoever enters the house, as you will see that the Virgin Mary stayed shut away at home... Isn't it better if you stay shut away, and don't get familiar with men and even with women: watch for whether they are good, or otherwise.¹¹²

A woman should be silent, passive, avoid attention, and stay indoors, segregated from men and even other women. This was especially the case among the elite classes.

Joan Kelly's famous article 'Did women have a Renaissance?' argued that unlike in medieval tales of courtly love, in which sexual desire and reciprocity between the sexes was encouraged, the literary works of Castiglione, Dante and Petrarch constructed love

¹¹⁰ Mourão 1999, 575.

¹¹¹ A similar discussion has been taken up in the studies of Old French fabliaux and will be greatly influential in this chapter. See Burns 1993; White 1982; Baldwin 1996.

¹¹² tr. Rogers and Tinagli 2005, 45

as divorced from sexuality. The Renaissance woman was not real but an ideal: ones beloved 'may just as well be dead'.¹¹³ Joan Kelly concluded:

All the advances of Renaissance Italy, its proto-capitalist economy, its states, and its humanistic culture, worked to mould the noblewoman into an aesthetic object: decorous chaste and doubly dependent - on her husband as well as the prince.¹¹⁴

This suggests that Renaissance culture was increasingly oppressive to the female sex: chastity and fidelity demanded more than ever. The institutionalisation of sex in Christian society was part of a discourse on civic morality. It was a society based on the family whose purpose was to build a morally disciplined citizen. Consequently, the correct result of sex, legitimate children, was placed in a moral context.¹¹⁵ Leon Battista Alberti argues that procreation was not merely a private matter but had implications for 'counties, regions and the whole world'. The family unit works together not just to procreate but also to guarantee continuity of future generations and citizens.¹¹⁶

The *bona donna's* vocalisation of her opinions and sexual desire seems to disrupt traditional female silence. As mentioned, there are very few female voices in the Renaissance Italy. The few women that did speak with their own voices, often uttered their discontent with their allotted situation as women.¹¹⁷ The Venetian voices, Veronica Franco (1546-91), the most important *cortigiana onesta* in Venice, and Moderata Fonte (1555-92) - pseudonym of Modesta di Pozzo di Forzi (or Zorzi), also known as Modesto Pozzo - were from very different social situations. The former was a widow, and the later was forced into prostitution for economic reasons like her mother before her. Their works denounced social practices that they had suffered from, the subjugation of female bodies for male pleasure. Franco writes eloquently in a letter to a friend on the lower class woman's economic peril and the plight of the impoverished courtesan. Her description of sexual tyranny 'literalises the complaint by stressing the physical horrors of economic destitution and intensifies it by focusing on women's fears of physical violence':¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Joan Kelly, 'Did women have a Renaissance' in (Hutson 1999), 37ff.

¹¹⁴ Kelly in Hutson 1999, 45.

¹¹⁵ Turner 1993, 11-13.

¹¹⁶ Alberti, *The Book of the Family*, ed. and tr. Alberti and Watkins 1994, 58.

¹¹⁷ A study on women writers in the Renaissance has been carried out by Virginia Cox (2008) in women's *Writing in Italy 1400-1650*.

¹¹⁸ Turner 1993, 117.

It is the most wretched thing, contrary to human reason, to subject one's body and industriousness to a servitude, whose very thought is most frightful. To become the prey of so many, at the risk of being despoiled, robbed killed, deprived in a single day of all that one has acquired from so many over such a long time. [...] Believe me, of all the world's misfortunes, this is the worse; but moreover, if to the concerns of the world you add those of the soul, could there be greater doom and certainty of damnation.¹¹⁹

Both women privileged a reciprocal sharing love between the sexes. Fonte 'rejects the institution of marriage - which she argues [...] enslaves a woman to the rule of the *paterfamilias* - and then favours chastity, redefined as *virtù*'.¹²⁰ Even Pietro Aretino makes a cynical survey of the options available to women (nun, wife or whore) in a series of dialogues between the aged prostitute Nanna, her friend Antonia and her daughter Pippa, a nurse, and a midwife. In the later dialogues, the mother educates her daughter in the violence of men and the vulnerability of the prostitute.¹²¹ These loquacious women disturb 'the male-constructed virginal icon that watches over female propriety' and validates a discourse of female discontent.¹²² In a similar manner, the *bona donna* and her voicing of female desire validate women as a consumer of sex for pleasure rather than just for procreative purposes. In this tale, the experience of female sex is of utmost importance.

The Erotic Dream

The *bona donna's* voice is articulated through her dream, her laughter and her response to her husband's question about the monetary value of his penis. The employment of the dream, is not just the simple equation: dream = internal musings. Dreams in the Renaissance are intertwined with understandings of desire, asceticism, and women. Representations of women sleeping are part of a long tradition: the attic vase depicts

¹¹⁹ 'Troppo infelice cosa e troppo contraria al senso umano è l'obligar il corpo a l'industria di una tal servitù che spaventa solamente a pensarne. Darsi in preda di tanti, con rischio d'esser dispogliata, d'esser rubbata, d'esser uccisa, ch'un solo un dí ti toglie quanto con molti in olto tempo hai acquistato, con tant'altri pericoli d'ingiuria e d'infermità contagiose e spaventose; mangiar con l'atrui bocca, dormir con gli occhi altrui, muoversi secondo l'altrui desiderio, correndo in manifesto naufragio sempre della facoltà e della vita; qual maggiore miseria? Quai ricchezze, quai commodità, quai delizie posson acquistar un tanto peso? Credete a me: tra tutte le sciagure mondane questa è l'estrema; ma poi, se s'aggiungeranno ai rispetti del mondo quei dell'anima, che perdizione e che certezza di dannazione è questa?' from letter 22 in Franco and Croce 1949, 38 tr. Margaret Rosenthal in Turner 1993, 177-118.

¹²⁰ Turner 1993, 108.

¹²¹ An analysis of Pietro Aretino's attitude to marriage the plight of women can be found in Guido Ruggiero's 'Marriage, love, sex, and Renaissance civic morality' in Turner 1993, 13ff. The dialogues discussed are from *Sei giornate* ed. Aretino and Aquilecchia 1969.

¹²² Margaret F. Rosenthal 'Venetian women writers and their discontents' in Turner 1993, 128.

two satyrs with erections creeping up on a sleeping maenad (Figure 26), *The Dream of a Young Girl* (Figure 27), and Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (Figure 28).

In assessing what an erotic dream might mean and its purpose, we are confronted with a multitude of questions about cause and interpretation. Each society has its own understanding of erotic dreams, offering insight into ideas about the self, desire and self-control. Charles Stewart wrote that the meanings of erotic dreams have been modified through various strategies of 'self-making' and that historically these have been produced by different regimes of self-knowledge such as Christian asceticism medicine or philosophy.¹²³

For Aristotle, dreaming was situated in relation to perception. In normal perception, appearances are judged in order to resolve whether something was or was not the case. During sleep, judgement is suspended.¹²⁴ Other codes of interpretation of erotic dreams were laid down in the *Oneirocritica* of Artemidorus, a professional diviner who lived in the second-century (and incidentally was published throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance). Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica* used erotic dreams as a diagnostic of more important issues such as wealth and social status and affairs of the city.¹²⁵

Conversely, there is a tradition of the 'nightmareisation' of erotic dreams and nocturnal emissions within European history.¹²⁶ Nocturnal emissions and erotic dreams posed dangers to monks, the clergy and the Christian laity. In the early Christian period, control of the inner passions was a prominent part of spiritual progress and pleasurable dreams were demonised.¹²⁷ For example, fifth-century writings of John Cassian stated that:

It [an emission] is a sign of some sickness hidden inside, something hidden in the inmost fibres of the soul, something that night-time has not produced anew but rather has brought to the surface of the skin by means of sleeps restorative powers.¹²⁸

¹²³ Stewart 2002, 279.

¹²⁴ Aristotle, *On Dreams*, 462a5.

¹²⁵ For Artemidorus, the dream of sex with one's mother was not problematic but rather a good dream for politician's: the mother represented ones native country and to make love is to govern the obedient and willing body of ones partner. The dream would thus control the affairs of the city (Artemidorus, *Interpretation of Dreams* 1.79); Stewart 2002, 284; Winkler 1990, 27ff.

¹²⁶ Stewart 2002, 180; Considerable scholarship has been given to these dreams in relation to the middle-ages and the Renaissance. See Elliott 1999 and Brakke 1995.

¹²⁷ Stewart 2002, 288-9.

¹²⁸ Cassian, *Institutions* 6.11, tr, Brakke 1995, 449.

Sleeping visions were mistrusted, even considered satanic.

Dreams were part of the private conscience which was forcefully invaded and repressed by judicial systems throughout the witch hunts and the protestant and catholic reformations.¹²⁹ Different terminologies were used in popular vocabulary for the erotic dream in the Renaissance. Very generally, *incubus* was a ready label for the erotic nightmare; *phantasia* implied mental perception image or representation; and the general term for demonic interference in a dream *inlusio* [illusion] developed erotic overtones in succeeding generations.¹³⁰ Witch-hunts were based on the concept of illusions: witches were burned for having copulation with the devil, although many, including the clergy, deemed these as false visions. Renaissance theologians disputed whether witches' transformations, flights and Sabbaths were merely dreams and, if so, whether it warranted prosecution for believing them. People conceded that women underwent demonic molestation but merely spiritually rather than physically. However, folk credulity aroused by these tales did not distinguish between imagined and real experience.¹³¹

The *Malleus Malificarum* informs that such erotic episodes with demons occurred more often with women as women's minds were weak, credulous and subject to their desires, whereas men were much more controlled and subject to reason. Sleep throughout the ages has been more pervasively associated with the feminine, a place for the irrational, a place where reason (a masculine quality) is absent.¹³²

However, a recent paper on women's dreams in early modern England provides thoughts on the role of the dream for Renaissance woman. Patricia Crawford argues that there were various uses for a woman's dream narrative which benefited the woman: they could offer a key to self-knowledge; enhance a woman's reputation for godliness; or could have prophetic significance.¹³³ Dreams were of more use to women than they were to men, providing women with a medium to express their wishes and

¹²⁹ Stewart 2002, 292.

¹³⁰ *Incubi* were employed in Augustine writings about concupiscence and original sin. They were thought to be demons who had sexual relations with women, sometimes producing a child by the woman. *Succubi*, by contrast, were demons thought to have intercourse with men. Charles Stewart argues that the tenth-century canon *episcopi* emphasised that uncertainty of the *imagina* was at the centre of European witchcraft (Stewart 2002, 291–293).

¹³¹ Stewart 2002, 292–293.

¹³² Broedel 2003, 157.

¹³³ Crawford 2000; It was recognised that women might have special access to supernatural thought dreams, ministers physician justices and male relatives might record and seek meaning in women's dreams (Stewart 2002, 130).

fears. The dream of the *bona donna* is a means in which she can find self-knowledge, released from the constraints of society, repression and rationality. The *bona donna*'s dream narrative is a means to express sexual frustration.

The Glorification of the Penis

What the *bona donna* dreams of is the penis. Representations of reclining women suggest similar erotic subjects: Giorgione's *Dresden Venus* (Figure 28) and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (Figure 29) curl their fingers around their crotch, not conforming to the traditional straight fingers of the *Venus Pudica*. This is indicative of her desires and even may signal masturbation.¹³⁴ Burns argues in relation to the *Li Sohaiz Desvez* that 'the woman's dream is not only about enjoying a larger, stiffer penis. Her dream world allows her to have sex on her own terms.' The sleeping woman wants the penis that will provide more sex and better sex. In addition, women want choice in sexual partner or sex object (that which men already have).¹³⁵ The *bona donna* dreams of having a choice, of possessing the phallus and being both the penetrator and penetrated.

However, the result of this construction of desire is that man remains central to women's desire. Page duBois argued that dildos were present in Greek art because the ancient Greek male imagination found it difficult to conceive of sex taking place without penetration. The same occurs in Dolfo's penis market: the possibility of relief through female clitoral masturbation or homosexual sex is ignored. The *bona donna* can only be satisfied by an artificial phallus.¹³⁶

Renaldus Columbus in 1559 announced his 'discovery' of the clitoris: 'If it is permissible to give names to things discovered by me, it should be called the love or sweetness of Venus'.¹³⁷ In his treatise on *Des monstres et prodiges*, first published in 1573, the French surgeon Ambroise Paré concluded his chapter on hermaphrodites with a detailed description of female genitals: 'Extremely monstrous that occurs in the labia of some women'. He wrote that the clitoris could be erect when stimulated, i.e. the male penis, so that they can be used to play with other woman.' The French sources were the first post-classical European medical texts to record the visibility of lesbian desire. The

¹³⁴ Goffen 1997, 152.

¹³⁵ Burns 1993, 59.

¹³⁶ duBois 2008, 89.

¹³⁷ Columbus, *de re anatomica* Venice 1559, 11.16, 447-448. See Thomas Laqueur, 'Amor Veneris, vel Dulcedo Appeletur' in Feher, Naddaff, and Tazi 1989, 91-131; Katherine Parks, 'The Rediscovery of the Clitoris' in Hillman and Mazzio 1997, 171ff.

knowledge of the clitoris has been lost to late medieval authors although it had been known to Greek writers.¹³⁸

Female homosexuality incited the fear that men would no longer be necessary for sex. Pierre de Bourdeille de Brantôme (c.1540–1614) imagined the possibility of women interested exclusively in sex with one another. They could give each other real pleasure and would be ‘unwilling to suffer men’.¹³⁹ A French vernacular name for the clitoris was *le mespris des hommes* [the contempt of men].¹⁴⁰ The more that became known about the clitoris and the more it became a sexual and social threat; it imperilled not only marriage and reproduction but also the natural position of men as heads of the household.

Dolfo’s narrative validates only heterosexual, penetrative sex. Masturbation, the clitoris and homosexual sex is not considered a viable option to satisfy the *bona donna*, thus eliminating any possibility of satisfaction through any means other than the phallus and therefore the man. The penis is glorified, represented as the only source and signifier of pleasure for both women and men.

The Cold Consuming Body

The *bona donna*’s desire for the penis is hysterical. Dolfo describes the women fighting over phalluses at a market: two women have a tug of war, ‘one grabbing its balls, and the other its head’. The Massa Marittima appears to depict a similar scene: two women seem to scrap over a penis plucked from a tree.¹⁴¹ The behaviour is unruly, unbridled. Dolfo compares the desire of a woman to a young married couple:

It was like a new groom (or lover), who for the first time enjoys his passion with his lusting bride (or lover): so that by day and night, standing up and lying down, either in their rooms, or in the corridors, [...] wherever it is easy and comfortable, with kisses, caresses and deeds, in every way he enjoys his very ardent love, as if a spring was lacking water, not knowing that the desire of a woman is infinite and can never have a conclusion or end (thus naturalists say that man has only two testicles and the woman has seven, and therefore is incredibly greedy). (24-36)

¹³⁸ Hillman and Mazzio 1997, 172.

¹³⁹ Brantome 1876, 10.195; tr. Parks in Hillman and Mazzio 1997, 186.

¹⁴⁰ Hillman and Mazzio 1997, 186.

¹⁴¹ Matthew Smith 2009, 56.

Sex is innate like a 'thirst', a desire that needs to be satiated in order for women to function. The consequence for the inattentive husband is dominating, aggressive, insatiable, female sexual desire and agency.

Dolfo's relates female desire to female anatomy, claiming that women have seven testicles and are consequently greedy for the marital union. Minutelli found similar claims in his other letters and other Renaissance and ancient medical sources including Savonarola and Galen, the number of female testicles often coinciding with the number of ovaries and glands.¹⁴² Female sexual organs were often described with vocabulary for male organs: the clitoris was described as a penis and the ovaries as testicles. The medieval opinion was that women had testes, but that these are residual and not functional. In Aristotelian and Galenic terms, woman is less fully developed. Because of lack of heat in generation, her sexual organs have remained internal. She remains incomplete, colder and moister in dominant humours and unable to concoct perfect semen from blood.¹⁴³ There were those who still used the Aristotelian-Galenic ideas of the 'one-sex' model. However, this was not necessarily the view of leading thinkers of the time and became folklore by 1600, if not before. The one-sex model was attractive because it had possible syncretism with Gen. 2:23: 'And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man' (King James Version).¹⁴⁴

The one-sex model and sex change posed a problem to the idea of the distinct separation of the sexes. The concept appeared in Pliny and Hippocrates and fascinated Renaissance doctors.¹⁴⁵ The few clinical cases are women changing into men, since whatever is perfect (man) is unlikely to degenerate.¹⁴⁶ The emerging consensus was that sex change could be explained through natural causes: latent development of males or as an unusual enlargement of the female sex organ. People were fascinated by the cases of mistaken sexual identity caused by anatomical anomalies, tribadic practices and the social and legal implications of hermaphroditism.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Minutelli and Dolfo 2002, 374.

¹⁴³ Maclean 1980, 8.

¹⁴⁴ Maclean 1980, 138ff

¹⁴⁵ Discussions of sex change appear in Pliny *Natural History*, VII.4 (1994) and Hippocrates *Epidemics 6*, 8.32 (1994). For a discussion of the Renaissance fascination with sex change see Beecher 2005.

¹⁴⁶ Hutson 1999, 139.

¹⁴⁷ Beecher 2005, 992.

The 'naturalists' whom Dolfo refers to construct the woman as *tanto fortarda* [very greedy]. Galen, still an authority in the Renaissance, characterised women as cold and moist causing her to desire completion by intercourse with the male, dry and warm.¹⁴⁸ This desiring characteristic is also explained by the uterus. The uterus causes a woman to desire to procreate [*avidum generandi*]. Plato's *Timaeus* 91A describes the uterus as an *animal avium generandu*. Galen, conversely, did not believe the uterus was an animal as animals have powers of independent movement and a sense of smell.¹⁴⁹ Renaissance anatomists treated the Platonic doctrine as a sort of metaphor and were scornful of the anatomical description of Galen. Despite this, the craving womb accords with the ideas that the imperfect desires the perfect, as matter desires form and as the female desires the male. Notably, Luigi Bonacciuoli in his *Enneas muliebris* (c.1480) etymologically derives the word *vulva* from *volens* [wanting/ desiring].¹⁵⁰ The etymological association of hysteria from the Greek *usteria* [uterus] is well known; and the common cause of hysteria was considered an uncontrollable desire for sex. Consequently, sexual intercourse was often prescribed in Renaissance jokes as a solution to female illness.¹⁵¹

The abundant, repetitious and multifaceted discourse on women established a hierarchy of the sexes. It was shaped by a need to hold them in check.¹⁵² Satirical and facetious texts promoted the conception of the woman as a monstrosity, often referring to Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*: 'Plato seems to doubt whether woman should be classed with brute beasts or rational beings'.¹⁵³ Establishing sexual difference was a way of constructing social order in the church, law, philosophy and medicine. The anxiety around sexual indeterminacy such as true hermaphrodites and the performative clitoris manifested in theatrical productions, in the romance conventions of cross gender disguise, and became cathartic operations.¹⁵⁴ Ian Maclean argued that the Doctor's explanation for the weaker mental powers of women and their desiring nature in relation to men was 'a natural justification to withhold their subjectivity, exclusion from

¹⁴⁸ Hutson 1999, 131.

¹⁴⁹ Galen, *On the affected parts* IV.5. ed. Galen and Siegel 1976.

¹⁵⁰ Bonacuolli, *Enneas Muliebris* ed. Bonacuolli and Longo 1976, 109.

¹⁵¹ Frantz 1989, 17-18

¹⁵² Duby et al. 1995, 1.

¹⁵³ 'Plato dubitare videtur, utro in genere ponat mulierem, rationalium animantium an brutorum' as quoted in Hutson 1999, 131. This is most likely in reference to Plato *Timaeus* 91A, although in the case of Plato it is applicable to both men and women.

¹⁵⁴ Beecher 2005, 1016.

public office and provide coherence with the central argument of theology and an important foundation from which arguments in ethics politics and law are based'.¹⁵⁵ If men give up their subjective stronghold, they will fall into the feared category of object, the object of the female's unpredictable and chaotic desire. There was no dominant authoritarian position that accounted for sexual difference. Therefore, there is no concrete reason for male authority. The representation of the *bona donna* as subject to her carnal desires is a cautionary tale, providing incentive for male intervention and domination.

Feared, Ridiculed and Shamed

Images of female agency are manipulated to inspire fear and ridicule. Giacomo Franco's print with the two old ladies, one holding a salami (Figure 30), and the other an anonymous print of the *Sausage Vendor* (Figure 31) might seem to threaten men with castration but instead more powerfully ridicule old women for their voracity. Giacomo Franco's print has the inscription 'DI QUESTA SORTE SONO I BUON SALAMI' [This is a good kind of salami].¹⁵⁶ Old women are ridiculed for their taste for 'raw' meat. Perhaps the raw connotes youth and the salami represents the dildo or the lover they cannot attain. The female figures derive from the sixteenth-century figure of the *duchesse laide* or *ugly duchess*. She is ridiculed for her amorous attentions, normally only appropriate for younger women. The elderly desiring woman is repressed through ridicule.¹⁵⁷

The more ridiculous the desiring woman, the more we detect the motivation for that ridicule stems from fear of a frightening creature, demonic even. Kramer devotes a chapter of the *Malleus Malificarum* to explaining why superstition and witchcraft are chiefly attributed to women: 'All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is, in women, insatiable'.¹⁵⁸ From women's unsatisfied sexual desires sprang their unequalled malice. Kramer and Sprenger believe themselves to be living in an age of adultery and of witchcraft.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Maclean in Hutson 1999, 142.

¹⁵⁶ tr. Matthews-Grieco 2010, 40.

¹⁵⁷ Matthews-Grieco 2010, 40–41.

¹⁵⁸ Summers 2012, 47.

¹⁵⁹ Broedel 2003, 177ff.

Witches could prevent erections, inhibit the flow of semen, cool the desire necessary for satisfactory performance, or disable a man from performing sexually with anyone other than a witch. A particularly compelling example can be found the *Malleus Malificarum*: a witch has the ability to cause a man's penis to vanish into thin air. The witches could steal the penis and keep it alive and well in a birds nest, fed on a diet of oats.¹⁶⁰ The loss of the penis commonly happened to adulterers who were not sufficiently attentive to their mistresses' needs, or a man who had spurned his lover.¹⁶¹

Some suggest the penis theft of Kramer is 'a cultural *hapaxlegomenon*'.¹⁶² Moira Smith, taking the line of the folklorist, assumes the limited capacity of the individual imagination for innovation, operating unaided in a cultural vacuum. She argues that the nest of penises rests on underlying beliefs.¹⁶³ Mary O'Neil suggests that much of the evidence for penis snatching was from a tradition of humour in witch-trials misunderstood by the inquisitor.¹⁶⁴ The humorous images of women with penises were transformed into a terrifying image of witchcraft (Figure 32). The reversal of gender roles becomes satanic, female sexual desire becomes perverse. The trial records of Jonett Grant and Jonett Clark (August 1590) charges them with 'gewing and taking of power fra sindrie mennis memberis'.¹⁶⁵ Fortunately, this is only an illusion.¹⁶⁶ The concept of witches was useful: confused, difficult and fearful concepts of female agency were replaced with artificial relationships that were safer, more logical and, importantly, more readily controlled.¹⁶⁷ Witchcraft as sexual deviance provided a useful cognitive map: the diabolical and sexual sins are closely identified.¹⁶⁸

Burns' describes the *fabliaux* husband's fear of female subjectivity and authority, of being swallowed up by his wife's 'desiring and devouring vaginal lips'.¹⁶⁹ The result of this fear is the hijacking by male authors of the female subjectivity. The employment of

¹⁶⁰ The recognition of a man from his penis is an ongoing tradition in humour (Moira Smith 2002, 102ff).

¹⁶¹ Broedel 2003, 27.

¹⁶² A *hapaxlegomenon* describes a term of which only one instance of use is recorded.

¹⁶³ Moira Smith 2002, 87.

¹⁶⁴ O'Neil 1995.

¹⁶⁵ Pitcairn 1833, 206.

¹⁶⁶ Moira Smith connects Kramer's tale of penis theft to the confusion between literal and metaphorical emasculation that exists in twentieth-century African American speech about magically induced impotence. She also relates all these stories to Genital Retraction Syndrome. In China, this is explained as attacks by dangerous female ghosts who collect penises from the living in order that they might return to human form (Moira Smith 2002, 94ff).

¹⁶⁷ Broedel 2003, 183–184.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 178–179.

¹⁶⁹ Burns 1993, 59.

the female voice is most explicit in erotica and sex manuals. This is almost without exception in Ancient Graeco-Roman sex manuals.¹⁷⁰ Pietro Aretino's Nanna is his female voice and the Renaissance archetype: the nun was the stereotypical sexually frustrated woman and the nunnery was the comic home for licentious activities.¹⁷¹ Holt Parker argues: 'This woman is a male created mask which authorises and privileges a male created text'.¹⁷²

Dolfo's use of the dream is the first stage of hijacking the female narrative. The reader invades the sleeper's mind without her permission. The sleeper is passive: her control over their lives is lessened or destroyed.¹⁷³ To look into the *bona donna's* dream provides an invasive and voyeuristic reading of the truth and passions of the individual. But, the woman's dream is 'not revealed but invented.'¹⁷⁴ And as Parker said 'comfortingly, for the readers, the woman wants unsurprisingly what the reader wants them to want.'¹⁷⁵

Women are proven through their own mouths to be sex obsessed. Burns argues that the desiring wife in the *fabliaux* 'The Four Wishes of Saint Martin' is a parodic version of Luce Irigaray's similar logic. The representations of female desire in the Western literature often amounts to a 'sham': a parody 'of male speech and imagining about woman'.¹⁷⁶ The female is purely desiring, lacking rational ability, privileging the male head. Burns summarises: 'The unnamed wife of this *fabliau* [The Four Wishes] is essentialised into erotic parts, reduced to an amorphous heap of cunts crying out for male penetration, she seems to speak more as a body than mind.'¹⁷⁷ The *bona donna* is constructed in the same way. The inner recesses of the female mind and desire have been observed and they have nothing meaningful to say. Helene Cixious summarises in 'Castration and Decapitation': 'If man operates under the threat of castration, if masculinity is culturally ordered by the castration complex, it might be said that the

¹⁷⁰ Richlin 1992, 105.

¹⁷¹ Levy 2010, 81.

¹⁷² Holt Parker in Richlin 1992, 92.

¹⁷³ McNally 1985, 153.

¹⁷⁴ Duby et al. 1995, 1.

¹⁷⁵ Parker in Richlin 1992, 106.

¹⁷⁶ Burns 1993, 52 referencing Irigaray 1985, 9–12.

¹⁷⁷ Burns 1993, 53.

backlash, the return on women of this castration anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution, of women, as loss of her head'.¹⁷⁸

The penis market is part of a web of stories and motifs that are used to map out female sexuality. In each version, whether that be at Massa Marittima, Giacomo Franco's print or Dolfo's letter, the female consumer is insatiable. The woman in her subjectivity is made hysterical, ridiculous or demonic. The assumption of female linguistic and narrative subjectivity in no way lessens the pornographic structure. These narratives totally objectify the female. The male creditors of these images are constructing themselves as the passive victim in their own stories.¹⁷⁹ Even today, the study of women comes hand in hand with the study of sexuality and homosexuality. The historical woman is a purely sexual being.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Cixious 1981, 43.

¹⁷⁹ Kappeler 2013, 90.

¹⁸⁰ Karras 2000, 1260.

Conclusion

Male authorship and craftsmanship can be assumed for the images and texts we have encountered in this dissertation.¹⁸¹ We are therefore seeing the complex twists and turns of the male gaze as it constructs a pornographic heterosexual narrative around female desire and the male sexual organ, a narrative which negotiates the realities of age, deterioration and impotence.

Just as the Renaissance woman is - silent, passive and obliging - so is the disembodied penis. There is no cognitive engagement between the sexes: the relationship is only expressed physically. The literary and visual construction of the penis market maps female desire and women's relationship to man onto the emotionless consumer-goods relationship. This metaphor describes a loquacious female sexual agent and a silent phallic sex-object, disrupting the traditional male pornographic narrative. However, this is not a wholly unproblematic nor empowering representation of female agency. This penis market is part of a discourse that constructs the female as solely desiring and greedy. The yearning female is an object of fear and derision: she is both dangerous and ridiculous. These stories and images of female sexual agency, ranging from attic fifth-century pottery to Renaissance satirical prints, are normative, only reinforcing the need to subdue the unruly, irrational female sex and supporting patriarchal power structures.

.....

Remarkably, the penis market can be found in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries: one of a series of postcards titled 'Postcards from Pompeii' (c.1880) depicts an old woman handing a flying phallus, taken from a vessel, to a young woman (Figure 33); a drawing by Martin Van Maele, *The Great Danse Macabre of the Quick (Prick)* from 1907 depicts a woman feeding phallus geese (Figure 7). The Czech surrealist Toyen sketched *The Dreamer* (1930), which can be seen as a twentieth-century embodiment of the topic of this dissertation (Figure 34). A woman lies on a couch, dreaming, wearing a shirt with her lower half naked. Around her float penis heads in thought-balloons. Karla Tonine Huebner wrote:

¹⁸¹ An exception is the risqué marginalia on the manuscript of *Roman de la Rose* from a Parisian atelier run by a husband and wife team, Richard and Jeanne de Montbaston. Jeanne, continuing the operation after Richard died in 1353, is thought to be the sole creator of the humorous and illicit illuminations in this particular manuscript (Rouse and Rouse 2000, 235-260).

Toyen's own 1930s pictures of disembodied penises sometimes look like straightforward signifiers for the male, sometimes like fantastical items that bring to mind the phallic objects found in Pompeii. [... However] Toyen usually rendered the male genitalia as human, purely sexual, organs; while they signify desire, their signification is human and almost always a bit comic, not that of a mystic, all-powerful, unattainable, Lacanian 'primary signifier of all desire'. The role of 'signifier of all desire' in Toyen's work goes more plausibly to the image of the vaginal opening.¹⁸²

This is an image of the desiring female as imagined and illustrated by herself. The context of Toyen's *The Dreamer* is not one of ridicule or fear but one that empowers the 'desiring and devouring vaginal lips'. In the twentieth-century, female artists attempted to find their own visual and linguistic language, with which to capture their subjectivity. Surrealist women set the tone for post-war feminist art.¹⁸³ In *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979), Judy Chicago famously displayed the women of history as vulva-shaped ceramic dishes at a dining table.¹⁸⁴ Yayoi Kusama in *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field* (1965), created a field of phallic, soft stuffed protrusions.¹⁸⁵ Finally, 'The Phallic Woman', Louise Bourgeois, used the symbolic value of the severed phallus to craft her own artistic language and fame and has finally succeeded in turning the penis market on its head (Figure 35).¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Huebner 2009, 142.

¹⁸³ Chadwick 1991.

¹⁸⁴ Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974-1979, Brooklyn Museum 2002.10

¹⁸⁵ This artwork was first exhibited in the exhibition, 'Floor Show', in the Richard Castellane Gallery in New York. See Applin 2012.

¹⁸⁶ Kuspit 2015.



Figure 1: Hasselman Painter, *A woman tends to her phalli, set upright in the ground*, 440-430 BCE.



Figure 2: Anonymous, *A hetaira leaps into a vessel full of dildos*, fifth-century BCE.



Figure 3: Anonymous, *Plate with a Woman and a Basket of 'Fruits'*, early sixteenth-century.



Figure 4: Anonymous, *Phallus bird*, fifth-century BCE.



Figure 5: Anonymous, fresco known as the *Tree of Women* [L'albero delle donne], located in the public washhouse of Massa Marittima, Tuscany. c.1265-1300.



Figure 6: Detail of the *Tree of Women*.



Figure 7: Martin Van Maele, *The Great Dance Macabre of the Quick (Prick)*, 1907.



Figure 8: Anonymous, *Priapus*, fresco from Pompeii, first-century CE.



Figure 9: Pan Painter, *Woman carrying a large phallus*, crater, 470 BCE.



Figure 10: Anonymous, *A woman exposes her genitals to a winged phallus*, early seventeenth-century.



Figure 11: Anonymous, German trinket box, early fifteenth-century.

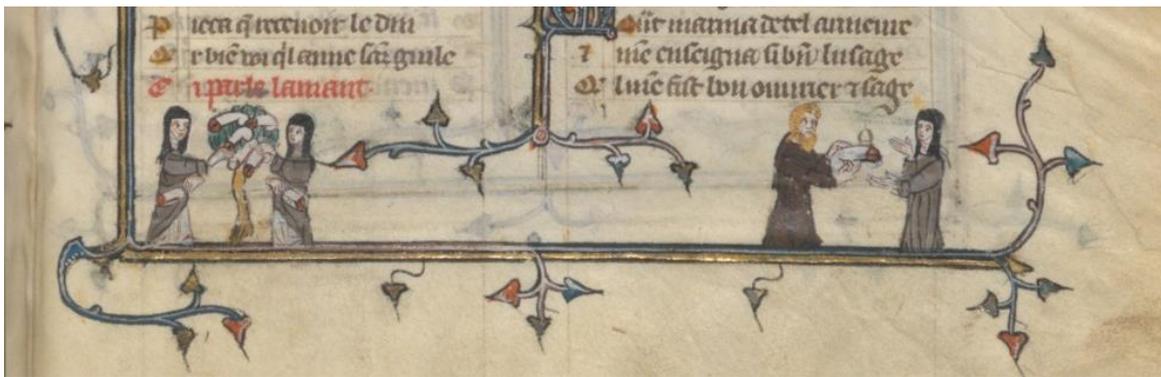


Figure 12: Jeanne de Montbaston, *Nuns plucking penises from a tree*, fourteenth-century.



Figure 13: Jeanne de Montbaston, *A nun plucks phalluses from a tree and puts them in her basket*, fourteenth-century.

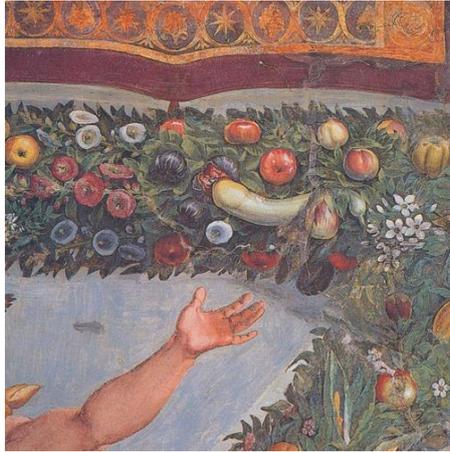


Figure 14: Giovanni da Udine, border surrounding Raphael's *Cupid and Psyche*, Villa Farnesina. 1511-13.



Figure 15: Francesco Paciotti(?), *Leda and the Swan*, 1571.



Figure 16: Caravaggio, *Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge*, 1601-5.

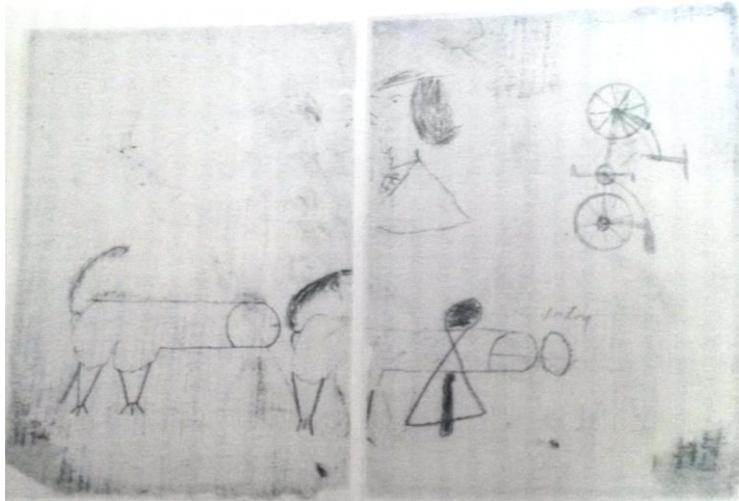


Figure 17: Anonymous, *phallus birds* in Leonardo da Vinci's *Codex Atlanticus*, early sixteenth-century.



Figure 18: Anonymous Italian artist, *Lovers with Phallus Bird*, late fifteenth-century.

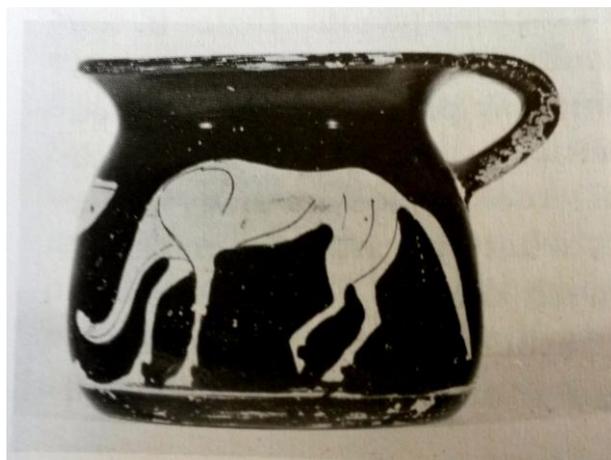


Figure 19: Berlin Painter, *Phallous horse*, fifth-century BCE.

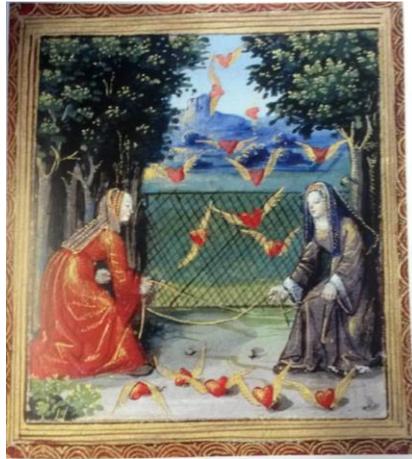


Figure 20: Master of Lyons(?), *Two women catching winged hearts in a parete net*, from Piere Sala, *Petit Livre d'Amour*, c.1500.



Figure 21: Sisto Badalocchi, *Women Hunting Birds*, late sixteenth-century.



Figure 22: Anonymous Venetian engraver, *Leering woman holding a cat which has caught a mouse*, early seventeenth-century.



Figure 23: Anonymous, *Nun offers Fish to the Cat in Exchange for a Penis*, 1555.

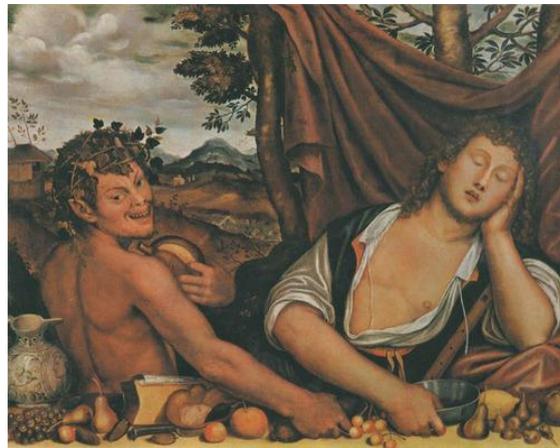


Figure 24: Niccolò Frangipane, *Allegory of Autumn*, 1597.



Figure 25: Marcantonio Raimondi, *Woman with a Dildo*, 1525.

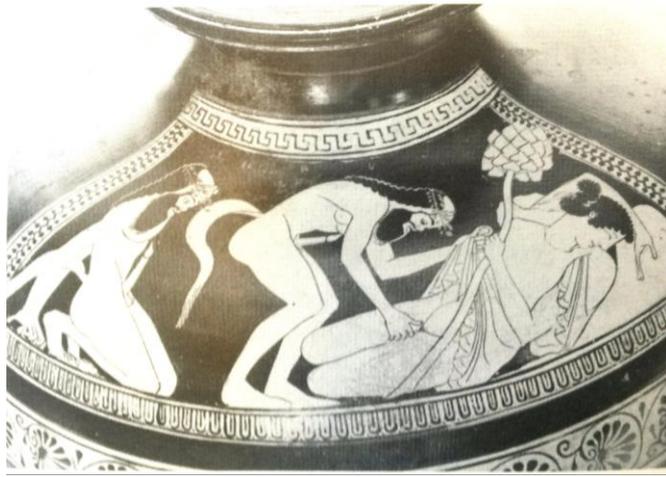


Figure 26: Kleophrades Painter, *A satyr prepares to rape a sleeping maenad*, fifth-century BCE.



Figure 27: Lorenzo Lotto, *Dream of a young girl*, 1505.



Figure 28: Giorgione, *Sleeping Venus*, c.1510.



Figure 29: Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538.



Figure 30: Giacomo Franco, *Da questa sorte sono i buon salami*, 1580-90.



Figure 31: Anonymous, *The Sausage Vendor (Danza moresca)*, c.1475-90.



Figure 32: Parmigianino, *Witches Sabbath*, 1530.



Figure 33: One of a series of 'Postcards from Pompeii' c.1880.

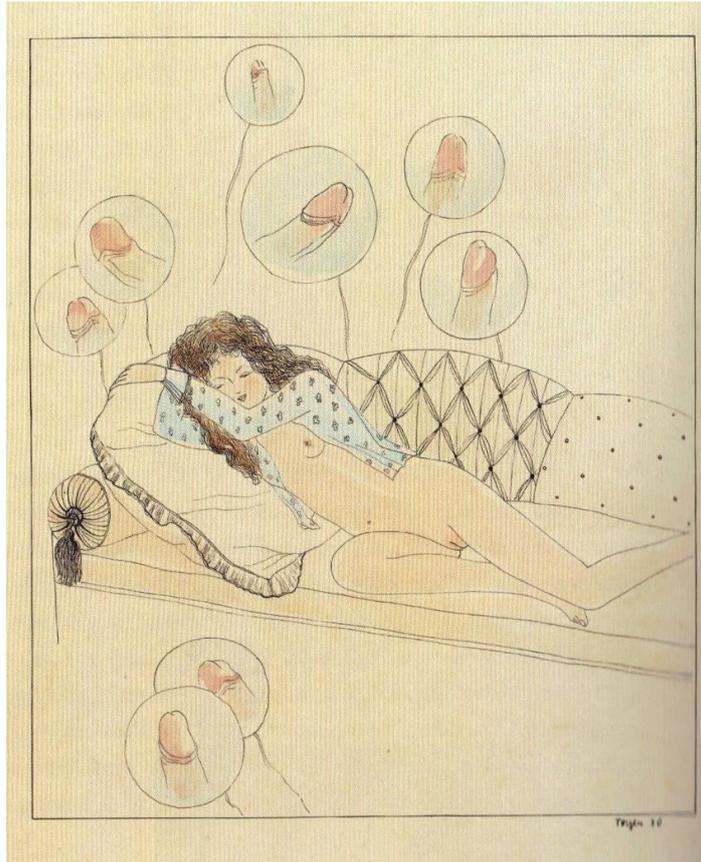


Figure 34: Toyen, *The Dreamer*, 1930.



Figure 35: Robert Mapplethorpe, portrait of Bourgeois holding her phallic sculpture *Fillete (1968)*, 1982.