

Third Sex, Third Gender

Beyond Sexual Dimorphism

in Culture and History

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Introduction:
Third Sexes and Third Genders

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Purpose and Aims

Certain individuals in certain times and places transcend the categories of male and female, masculine and feminine, as these have been understood in Western culture since at least the later nineteenth century. The bodies and ontology of such persons diverge from the sexual dimorphism model found in science and society – in the way they conceive their being and/or their social conduct. Furthermore, in some traditions – cultures and/or historical formations – these persons are collectively classified by others in third or multiple cultural-historical categories. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, such persons and categories are more common in the human condition than was once thought.

This perspective on the transcendence of sexual dimorphism guides the anthropological and historical analyses that follow in several ways. First, we reexamine and redefine studies of sex and gender in light of critiques of sexual dimorphism, which generally suggest the limitations of a reproductive paradigm. Of course, there are conceptual dangers involved in breaking precipitously with the past convention of distinguishing arbitrarily between sex (as biology and nature) and gender (as culture and nurture). However, we aim in this volume to renew the study of sexual and gender variation across time and space, critically looking at the pitfalls of continuing to objectify the dichotomy of sex and gender, which is probably culturally bound and scientifically misleading. Second, we show that, in some places and times, individuals are grouped into divergent ontological categories, identities, tasks,

roles, practices and institutions that have resulted in more than two kinds of persons, that is, what Westerners would classify as two sexes (male and female) or genders (masculine and feminine).¹ Studies of sexual "deviance" or "third genders" have typically conflated these two categories. Generally, sexual conduct has been ignored as a constitutive criterion leading to the formation of a divergent sex/gender category or the inclusion of individuals within it. Thus, to reassess these conceptual links, we examine historical and cultural associations among sexual dimorphism, social science theory and folk classifications of anatomy, erotic conduct and social relations.

Finally, while third sexes and genders are enduring categories and roles in some cultures, they are not present at all times and places, which has implications for the creation and maintenance of third sexes and third genders. On the one hand, such a non-universal status suggests an inherent tension between individual desires to *create* a third sex or gender and verities of the adaptation of human cultures to the phylogeny of *H. homo sapiens*, our species-specific "nature." On the other hand, although anatomy, sexual action and special social relations are common denominators – cultural signs – of classification into third-sex or third-gender categories in some traditions, they are neither necessary nor sufficient to *maintain* them. In short, there is no ready-made formula that will produce divergent sex or gender categories and roles, suggesting that special conditions – demographic, symbolic and historical – combine to create the necessary and sufficient basis for the conventionalization and historical transmission of the third sex or gender.

Historical Evidence and Cross-cultural Conjectures

A revolution in social-historical studies of sexuality and gender has created enormous interest in analyzing historical categories from a cross-cultural perspective.² What we are learning from these studies, and from the work of scholars influenced by them, is that a one-sex paradigm composed of a canonical male with a female body inside was predominant in Western texts until quite recently. Some time later, a three-sex system gave rise to a classi-

fication schema of four genders, evolving out of the eighteenth-century English "molly" and the Dutch "sodomite," for example, which led to a new and more complex classification of sexual natures and beings in the modern period.³

The extraordinary influence of the hermaphrodite in Western culture and art bears witness to the long-emerging tension between systems of sexual and/or gender classification and definitions of "nature" and "society." The representation of the erotic in Western art played with the dictates of sexual dimorphism in its pictorial androgyny, often heavily portrayed with the tabooed depiction of the homoerotic; this representation was later mediated, particularly after the Renaissance, through androgynous imagery in such works as Michelangelo's *Bacchus*.⁴ Such pictorial androgyny is transformed into the later imagery of the monster, in which androgyny moves closer to the sexualized human being, especially the figure of the deviant. Hence, although a significant discourse on monsters and hermaphrodites had abounded for centuries, this approach was replaced with the modern period's conception of the homosexual as a hermaphrodite of the soul.⁵ This development in turn anticipated the construction of the homosexual/heterosexual dualism with which we still live. Among the more interesting and enduring icons of the twentieth-century forms of this dualism in science and mass culture are the gender-transforming transsexual in American culture and the gay and lesbian body, especially in its biologically essentialist image.⁶

These powerful transformations in historical ideas suggest two critiques of both the cross-cultural and historical record on sexual dimorphism and multiple systems of sex and gender. First, many earlier scholars of history and culture predicated their work on the assumption of sexual dimorphism, so common in the literature since before Darwin's influence. Thus, when anthropologists first encountered individuals classified as "berdache" in the cultures of Native North America, these persons were often misinterpreted as biologically abnormal hermaphrodites or "degenerates" and, later, as deviant homosexuals, both of which categories run counter to the cultural phenomenology of berdache roles in these cultures.⁷ Likewise, a similar process of misinter-

pretation and labeling in the third-gender roles of Polynesia from the time of Captain Cook to the present can be witnessed.⁸ Second, a healthy skepticism about cross-cultural and historical claims of inclusion in dimorphic or divergent categories is justified when it comes to sex and gender; as Margaret Mead and Kenneth Read once warned, the cross-cultural record is fragmentary and inconclusive on these matters.⁹ As the history of sexuality has repeatedly shown, claims made for the absence or essence of some entity, whether for homosexuality in other cultures or innate desires in our own, must always be *interpreted* on the basis of further study rather than treated as literal realities since such claims have often proved false, exaggerated or incomplete.¹⁰

The collection of evidence on sexuality from other cultures and historical documents is thus considerably complicated by the taboo against intruding into relations that are culturally defined as inherently private, or intimate or sexual, as Mead and later Michel Foucault warned.¹¹ It does make a difference to the practicing anthropologist and historian, for instance, whether a society approves or disapproves of sexual activity in general; these strictures (e.g., the negative attitudes of erotophobia, misogyny or homophobia) influence the data-collection process through what is revealed or hidden of sexuality.¹² Cultures that institutionalize intense ideologies of sexual dimorphism, as, for instance, in cases of religious fundamentalism, raise methodological issues in social analysis.¹³ As the study of AIDS and sexuality has repeatedly shown, the investigation of alternative, marginal, illicit or illegal forms of sexual practice and social realities requires a different lens of inquiry from that of normative social science.¹⁴

Identifying individuals who diverge from the male and female categories can prove to be difficult even in cultures in which a third sex or gender role is present, because the condition may nonetheless be somewhat disparaged or considered deviant.¹⁵ Because of laws and implicit rules, divergent individuals to whom these categories of being and action apply – sodomites, berdache, women dressed in men's clothes, hermaphrodites in New Guinea and so on – may slip between male and female roles. They may engage in the act of “passing” as normatively male or female or

masculine or feminine (best understood through Erving Goffman's still-significant study of “the natural cycle of passing”).¹⁶ Through behaviors and practices that either set them apart from others or enable them to conform and to pass as normative, such persons carve out a special niche in their societies.

Thus, if the hermaphrodite bears a secret nature, there is not necessarily any reason to confess this nature, for it may offend sensibilities or spiritual and social rules. As Foucault remarked of nineteenth-century France, what the hermaphrodite Herculeine Barbin “evokes in her past is the happy limbo of a non-identity, which was paradoxically protected by the life of those closed, narrow, and intimate societies where one has the strange happiness, which is at the same time obligatory and forbidden, of being acquainted with only one sex.”¹⁷ Indeed, as I will argue later, the historical and cultural phenomenon of passing marks a significant entry into the field of identities and identity theory, whereby the conventionalized male or female is masked and re-presented as something new in cultural representations.¹⁸ Let the reader be forewarned, then, that we are dealing with matters of inherent difficulty when it comes to studying the third sex and gender.

Darwinian Sexual Dimorphism and Sexology

Over the past century it has been widely assumed, following Darwin, that sexual behavior served the purposes of reproduction and selective fitness of individuals in evolution above all. Darwin reasoned that natural selection affected males and females as a function of their roles in reproduction and/or from resource competition (especially for food), leading to dimorphism.¹⁹ By *sexual dimorphism* is typically meant a phylogenetically inherited structure of two types of human and sexual nature, male and female, present in all human groups. Although we will not be able to examine its full implications in this review, much of the historical and anthropological literature suggests that this emphasis on dimorphism reveals a deeper stress on “reproduction” as a paradigm of science and society.²⁰ The reproductive paradigm remains prominent today in studies that go far beyond evolutionary thinking, to such an extent that I will refer to this as a “prin-

ciple of sexual dimorphism," since it is represented as if it were a uniform law of nature like gravity. That is, it is believed canonical that, everywhere and at all times, sex and/or gender exist for reproduction of individuals and species. In short, reproduction, as suggested in the critiques formulated by feminist and gay and lesbian scholars for a generation, has been the "real object" of normative science, both in biology and social science, for much of the past century.²¹

This cultural achievement is all the more remarkable when we consider the many clues that suggested that dimorphism was an invention of modernism. Indeed, if one is to accept Thomas Laqueur's brilliant interpretations, from the time of Antiquity until the late eighteenth century popular culture and medical theory suggested that there was but one sex: a kind of signified male/masculine body and mind, inscribed on the incomplete and subordinate female body.²² From the book of Genesis as well — an origin myth of the Judeo-Christian tradition — we are told how Adam created a second sex from his own loin. But as Laqueur has commented, "Two sexes are not the necessary, natural consequence of corporeal difference. Nor, for that matter, is one sex."²³ This paradigm was to change by the time of the Renaissance, after which the two-sex model gained in prominence — although without completely destroying the preceding ideas of nature and desire for expressing sex and gender.

Theorists who followed Darwin's consistent emphasis on reproduction typically viewed sexual selection as an innate and natural property of our own species as well. In the social-evolutionary theories of Victorian anthropology, the Darwinian revolution was enormously influential in how it "permanently redefine[d] not only 'man's place in nature,' but also his place in time — as well as the relationship of God both to nature and to humankind."²⁴ Sexuality is problematical in this context, since it was seldom explicitly discussed, and the study of kinship and marriage as social institutions was often reduced to matters of the biological selection of mates.²⁵ Following Darwinian thought and its popular manifestations in various fields, we find many permutations of what might be called an unmarked principle of sexual dimor-

phism: the differences between male and female were innate, as supposedly demonstrated in factors as diverse as morphology, brain size, tool use and the evolution of speech. Within nineteenth-century evolutionary anthropology and anthropometry, research reports on the measurement of sexual dimorphism in human groups were legion, extending from the time of Frances Galton (Darwin's cousin) through Franz Boas, the founder of American anthropology. Racial differences and racism (including the eugenics movement) figured prominently in some corners. Well into the twentieth century we find anthropometry stressing sexually dimorphic differences between the so-called biological races, with clear implications for Social Darwinism. Today, the continued emphasis on kin selection and sexual dimorphism in vulgar sociobiology (less so than in the field's more sophisticated renditions today) must surely be seen as a continuation of the early Darwinian fascination with sexual differentiation and survival.²⁶

Human paleontology has been embroiled in debate over the past few years regarding the relation between such a reproductive paradigm and sexual dimorphism in the human fossil record. Evolutionary writers have typically followed Darwin in seeing a continuum of sexual dimorphism in lower to higher animal forms. For instance, some specialists argue that "in all human groups males average almost 1.1 times as tall as females and are correspondingly more massive."²⁷ However, paleontologists continue to question the significance of size variations in species and individuals for sexual dimorphism. Some authorities suggest that primate sexual dimorphism "corresponds closely to the degree of male competition for mates" and "human sexual dimorphism is clearly not typical."²⁸ Differences occur anatomically in fossil humans in the greater size of males and larger pelvic opening of females. But while its relevance has been projected into prehistory, as if this "followed the same pattern as today," many have questioned the uniformity of such a prehistoric dimorphism, since one trait might recede in prehistoric human beings (e.g., teeth) while another trait (e.g., epigamy) might increase.²⁹ "Sexual dimorphism can only evolve if there is dimorphism in selection

and/or dimorphism in genetic variances.”³⁰ Comparative study of species suggests that primates vary according to whether their ancestors were more dimorphic than average, the size of the species and its ecological traits.³¹ In short, sexual dimorphism may be significant for indexing matters of individual and species-specific variation, but its overall significance for sexual and gender differentiation has probably been exaggerated.

One can see in the development of later Darwinian thought and natural selection theory the elements that prodded the positive science of sexology toward an essentialism of both gender and sexual ideas. In this respect, sexology is a child of the nineteenth-century Darwinian tradition.³² It follows that the emergence of sexology forged a social and political reform movement in reaction against antiquated ideas of sexuality. Many have seen in these developments the birth of modernism, or at least its lynchpin, for its modernist practitioners, especially Havelock Ellis and Freud, were adamant “sexual enthusiasts.”³³ Concurrently, the coinage of *homosexuality* around 1870 and *heterosexuality* around 1890 had far-reaching implications for the principle of dimorphism in medical sexology.³⁴

Quite simply, sexology was to propound two powerful ideas: that “male” and “female” are innate structures in all forms of life, including human beings, and that heterosexuality is the teleologically necessary and highest form of sexual evolution. For example, Iwan Bloch, a notable German scholar and ethnological writer in the sexological tradition, argued that evolution had driven men and women into different “thought worlds.” Moreover, “heterosexuality becomes increasingly marked in the evolutionary scale of mammals and man.” Furthermore, Bloch “was convinced that the greatest cultural and creative achievements came from ‘normal,’ not homosexual people.... He firmly believed that the ‘normal’ woman and not the lesbian would advance the feminist movement.”³⁵ Freud was to struggle with these essentialist ideas and to reify many of them in his own developmental theory, including many of those that dealt with gender and sexuality. As Peter Gay writes of the sexological position of Freud in his later writings:

Freud’s anti-feminist stance was not the product of his feeling old or wishing to be outrageous. Rather, he had come to see it as an inescapable consequence of men’s and women’s diverging sexual histories: anatomy is destiny. His comparative history of sexual development may be less than wholly compelling, but it calls on the logic of human growth as he defined it in the 1920s. The psychological and ethical distinctions between the sexes, he argued, emerge naturally from the biology of the human animal and from the kind of mental work that this implies for each sex.³⁶

The two distinctive sexes and the imperative for reproduction thus combined to impel the biomedical sexological tradition toward what we might call an essentialist legacy of the paradigm.

Many of the progenitors of sexology, such as Karl Ulrichs and Magnus Hirschfeld, could not have foreseen the outcome of their efforts to establish a sexual science. They were themselves “homosexuals” and formed a hidden network of communicants throughout this period. Along with others, they began to formulate their texts on the basis of the ultimate aims of social reform, such as the liberalization of sexual laws.³⁷ They had agreed to innatist or biological positions, only to find these theories exploited by those quintessential biological reductionists, the Nazis. Hirschfeld’s favorite motto, “Justice through Knowledge,” was ultimately a defeated axiom after the Nazis’ rise to power following the collapse of the Weimar Republic.³⁸ By this time much harm was already done; but this would not do away with the powerful intellectual program of medicalized sexology, which reemerged ever more strongly after the war. Indeed, it is especially after World War II and the founding of the modern sexual clinic that we find two key expressions of essentialized dimorphism:³⁹ sex assignment at birth and the evolutionary theory of the emergence of gender identity.

Sexological writing in the nineteenth century had begun to make an implicit distinction between nature and nurture, heredity and environment, biology and society. Under the influence of Darwinian thought and the putative mechanisms of natural selection, sexual dimorphism emerged in the language of develop-

mentalism. Ultimately such dimorphism has fed into the contemporary paradigms of essentialism/constructionism, often wrongly reduced to mean biology/culture. An explicit individualism, or, more precisely, an ideology of Western individualism, strongly influences many of these early formulations of sexological writing.⁴⁰ For example, in the biomedical discourse on homosexuality and the "intermediate sex" in the late nineteenth century, the distinction between innate and acquired inversion is strongly marked between such scholars as Hirschfeld, Ellis and Freud.⁴¹ More than half a century later, this distinction, still in combination with ideological individualism, results in a new form of dualistic definition: between sex as biological elements (genes, gonads, etc.) and gender as learned cultural elements (masculinity and femininity), as formulated by John Money and Robert Stoller, respectively. Thus continues an implicit contrast between environmentalism (forces outside the organism) and innatism or naturalism (forces inside the organism) in the literature of the mid-twentieth century, reasserted in sex research by Alfred Kinsey et al. in their survey study of sexual behavior of American males. Hence, what emerges is an approach that sees the inner biological elements of sexual development, among which is the male/female dichotomy, as innate and unchangeable. Although this is not without conceptual controversies and dilemmas, its force continues to the present.⁴²

According to the canonical view in sexology, it follows that all human beings are classifiable as either male or female types at birth, through standard clinical and sexological practice.⁴³ This is accepted by all those who work both with normal and abnormal biological sexual differentiation, as is noted in my contribution to this volume. Male and female are differentiated at many different levels of biological development. Ultimately, this idea rests on the assumption of a generalized mammalian pattern of primary femaleness, out of which maleness emerges, which in his early writing Freud referred to as the "bedrock of biological bisexuality."⁴⁴ However, in modern parlance, for instance, consider these four components of standard Western clinical practice: chromosomal sex; gonadal sex; morphological sex and related

secondary sex traits; and psychosocial sex or gender identity. Notice that these criteria do not include sociocultural classification systems; instead, Money and Ehrhardt, for example, assume a strong parallelism between sexual dimorphism in anatomy and gender dimorphism in cultural traditions.⁴⁵ It remains problematic whether these biological universals are always present.⁴⁶ As I discuss in my essay on 5-alpha reductase deficiency syndrome, medical practitioners assume in all cases that a two-sex system is in operation, never questioning whether the presence of a third sex might influence sexual and gender development. This is especially puzzling since some classical clinical case studies in Western countries such as the United States refer to hermaphrodites' subjective development not as male or female identity but as "hermaphroditic identity."⁴⁷

"Critical learning theory" emerged as a potential antidote to essentialism at this time. A powerful and enduring perspective on the role of culture and society in influencing gender and sexuality, critical learning theory suggests a seeming alignment with the social construction of gender. However, this appearance is, like all varieties of essentialist and constructionist ideas, in part illusory because it assumes that learning gender identities takes place only with respect to the dimorphic two-sex system of male and female. Gendered identity as masculine or feminine is thus analogous to the imprinting phase of innate development in animals and in human phylogeny, with the effect that all human beings are either male or female in biological sex and feminine or masculine in gender identity.⁴⁸ This theory suggests that, early in development, sex assignment into either the male or female categories affects most learning in the areas of gender identity and sex role performance.⁴⁹ Sex assignment into either the male or female category is of such general importance that, after a child is approximately two and a half years old, the clinical advice for the doctor is never to suggest changing the child's sexual classification, no matter what information comes to light – even information that the original sex assignment at birth was in error and should have been to the opposite sex – because such a change will do great psychic violence to the mental health of the child.⁵⁰

The epistemology of the approach owes much to Freud's theory of psychosexual development. Thus, the putative effect of early experience in infancy molds or "imprints" a gendered identity on the child.⁵¹ A congruence of biological sex identity and social learning is assumed to create a harmonious effect in "normal and natural" child development in all cultures – notwithstanding transsexuals and hermaphrodites, who suggest a divergent or intermediate identity.⁵²

The totalizing effect of the Darwinian heritage was to represent sexual dimorphism through time and space as a binary principle of social structure. The idea of applying the male/female dyad to domains of society and culture, including the sexual division of labor, promoted by turn-of-the-century social theorists such as the French sociologist Emile Durkheim, thus became an assumptive core of social theory.⁵³ Many anthropologists, for example, began their analyses of social structure with the observation that men and women were, everywhere, not only physically distinctive but also an "objective" basis for society and the economic division of labor.⁵⁴ A fine illustration of the trend in sexology comes from Money and Ehrhardt's classic text on sex and gender, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl*, in which they reify sexual dimorphism as an essential structure of individual development in simple societies, operationalized as what they called "gender dimorphic behavior." They thus assume the existence of a two-sex and two-gender system in all times and places and argue, for instance, that in Australian Aborigine and New Guinea societies all economic and social tasks and roles are gender dimorphic; not only cooking and child care, but rituals and ceremonial practices as well. This dimorphic schema is then mapped onto social structure, culture and ecology, so that Money and Ehrhardt objectified ten quantitative "variables" (idealized culture traits) to be checked off in assessing the relative degree of dimorphism in the practices of native peoples.⁵⁵ This approach suggests in general that the biological dimorphism of male and female is projected into culture and symbolically reflected in its institutions, especially primary or objective institutions.⁵⁶

In short, the question of divergent sex and gender roles and

categories cannot be considered apart from the evolutionary perspective on sexual dimorphism. This paradigm strongly influenced sexology and generally expanded into classical social theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Classical Social Theory and Third-Sex Categories

It was not only sexology that was affected by nineteenth-century ideas of sexual dimorphism. Anthropologists and historians have emphasized reproductive functionalism in their studies of kinship, family, gender roles, sexual practices and the regulation and reproduction of society. Over the past century, the theme of sexual dimorphism has recurred throughout social theory, with the consequent relegation of the third sex to the clinical laboratory of "biological deviance" and the third gender to quaint textbooks of anthropology.

Such a marginalizing emphasis is present in major thinkers since the time of Darwin and Freud in evolutionary and sexual theory, as well as in central anthropological writings by such figures as Durkheim, Mauss and Lévi-Strauss. Today, sexual dimorphism remains central to social-scientific thought and is regarded by many anthropologists as an axiom of cultural classification. Mead formalized this position in a classic essay in the early 1960s: "In all known societies sexual dimorphism is treated as a major differentiating factor of any human being, of the same order as difference in age, the other universal of the same kind."⁵⁷ More recently, the American anthropologist Robert Edgerton, who contributed a significant early study of transsexualism in a non-Western culture, has written:

It is probably a universal assumption that the world consists of only two biological sexes and that this is the natural and necessary way of things. . . . It is expected that people will be born with male *or* female bodies and that, despite a lifetime of acts that compromise or even reverse normal sex-role expectations, everyone will continue to live in the body of either a man or a woman.⁵⁸

Because male and female are tantamount to natural categories in

social classification, it follows that the intermediate is unnatural, inverted or perverse.⁵⁹ In short, to quote Clifford Geertz on the matter: "What falls between [male and female] is a darkness, an offense against reason."⁶⁰

In general, anthropological studies of sex and gender since the early classics of Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski have assumed a two-sex system as the "normal and natural" structure of "human nature."⁶¹ Mead suggests that the ultimate purpose of sex is for "mating and reproduction by physically mature, child-rearing human beings."⁶² Reproduction in this model was problematic only in its social regulation: "Every human society," she said, must deal with two problems: "the need for reducing reproductivity in particular areas, as among unmarried women," and the aim of "ensuring or increasing reproductivity in other areas, among certain classes in the population." This model is still prominent in anthropology, and as Carole Vance has remarked of anthropological models of sex and gender, "The core of sexuality is reproduction."⁶³

However much social historians have thought to evade the imperatives of Darwinian biology, biological sexology and essentialist ideas in gender study, it has remained difficult to operate outside sexual dimorphism as a conceptual system.⁶⁴ Consciously or unconsciously, some scholars of sexuality still cling to the modernist view that nature restricts culture, that male and female are the inalienable products of biology. These scholars tend to project back into the historical and anthropological records not only the current cultural categories of identity but also the preconceptions of social relations that operated and structurally supported the categories of the past.⁶⁵ As Theo van der Meer reveals in his essay on the eighteenth-century history of the Dutch sodomite, however, while male and female were powerful categories of representation and action, they were not so encompassing as to circumscribe desire for or romantic infatuations with the same sex or the emergence of a subculture of sodomites that evaded the sexual dimorphism of the times through a hidden network of signals and spaces.

But culture is both more diverse than nature and more insidious in its potential to "play" symbolically with the classifications

of human bodies and minds. And yet, while Lévi-Strauss demonstrated this point admirably, he failed to explore and understand the result of the critique against his own work, which, in kinship studies, proposed four, not three, sexes.⁶⁶ In his *mythologiques* project as well, the binary structure of the unconscious mind was invoked to situate the dimorphic categories of male and female at a level of "deep" culture akin to Freud's unconscious.⁶⁷ To take a clue from Foucault, the very notion of human sexual types – male and female, homosexual and heterosexual – is a survival of the realist zoological penchant of nineteenth-century thought in twentieth-century thinkers – including Freud and certainly Kinsey, and recently Lévi-Strauss – who have not reflected on the received dimorphic categories of Western culture in light of the immense variability of human groups. A fuller historical answer to why this is so rests with Foucault, of course;⁶⁸ we will examine several historical texts here and consider later the implications for anthropology.

With the beginnings of the early modern period and the importance of the French Revolution in redrawing the boundaries around the individual self, the discourse on sexual dimorphism begins to shape social theory.⁶⁹ A new thematic of individualism emerges to compete with the aristocratic order, a thematic of boundaries redrawn around an autonomous body and self in an age of new cults of the self in the context of struggles for class and sexual equality.⁷⁰ Here, the work of Rousseau is critical, for his texts contain some of the earliest indications of the debate in social theory over constructs and essences in sexuality. In Rousseau's famous disquisition on education, *Emile*, the child "does not feel himself to be of any sex, of any species. Man and woman are equally alien to him... it is nature's ignorance (*Emile*, IV, p. 219)."⁷¹ Prior to sexual desire, *Emile* treats all humans instrumentally; they serve as a means to an end. But with sexual maturation, his desires become "essential" and he can no longer avoid treating others "as a means to his own end."⁷² Because it is "essential," Rousseau suggests that it is best to postpone sexual gratification in the interest of creating a moral and friendly position and for cultivating reason instead of debauchery.⁷³ Thus, "Rousseau

makes Emile moral by delaying his first sexual experience; thus he 'delays the progress of nature to the advance of reason' (*Emile*, IV, p. 316)." He states: "For the object of his desire is at first very unclear to the desirer, who 'desires without knowing what' (*Emile*, IV, p. 220)." "The first act of his nascent imagination is to teach him that he has fellows; and the species affects him before the female sex (*Emile*, IV, p. 220)." Joel Schwartz, in *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, adds, "One wants to obtain the preference that one grants. Love must be reciprocal. To be loved, one has to make oneself lovable.... The object of one's love must be a subject as well, for whom one is oneself in turn an object. For these responses Rousseau contends that 'a young man must either love or be debauched' (*Emile*, IV, p. 214, see also *Dialogues*, I, p. 688)." Thus we see the boundaries of a one-sex system being redrawn around notions of sexual equality in culture and romantic love in the shift to the modern period.

In the nineteenth century a powerful idea of the "divine savage" in a "natural" state profoundly linked the French Enlightenment thinkers, such as Rousseau and Diderot, with the formation of modernist discourse on sexuality. The notions of archaism and primitivism are obviously related to these representational systems.⁷⁴ Late Victorian anthropology was to serve as a significant intellectual link with the later sexology. As social historians such as Randolph Trumbach have written, forms of third sex and gender, first hermaphroditic and later homosexual, bridged modern versus premodern categories. For instance, Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Ellis's comparative study of sexology, Freud's armchair anthropology in *Totem and Taboo* and even the early writings of Malinowski and Mead continued to labor under the illusion of a primitive human nature in which sexuality was more simple and unrestricted than that of modern civilization.⁷⁵ This in turn hinted at the probability that sexual variations across human groups were small (despite Freud's and other sexologists' references to divergent erotic practices of archaic and non-Western societies, such as homoerotic relations among the ancient Greeks), while sexual dimorphism and reproductive heterosexuality loomed large in such "primitive" groups (i.e., those de-

fined as having less compromised, more elementary "human nature").⁷⁶ Moreover, it is still widely held that sexual dimorphism is more prominent in simple societies, especially hunting-and-gathering band societies, than in technologically complex or modern societies.⁷⁷

But twentieth-century anthropology has resisted monolithic theories that explain human nature through universal mechanisms of a common trait or characteristic, largely because such reductionism tends to explain away culture as a mere residue or frill of human life. The notion that sex might organize culture, as Freud consistently suggested, is particularly problematic, since it placed the burden of causation on biological phylogeny rather than on current social practice or function. Freud's famous thesis in *Totem and Taboo* was that a primordial group condition – a ruling tyrant father who was killed and devoured by his sons, who in turn incestuously took women from him – was a mythic/historical event, the Oedipal complex, that has unconsciously ruled over the phylogeny of human evolution ever since. In short, the Oedipal complex and incest taboos separated nature from culture and animal world from human society. The evidence for such a theory was of course nil, but Freud's genius lay in his speculative account that linked past and present in an unbroken chain. It is ironic that the two best-known anthropologists of sexuality and indeed of culture writ large (at least to an earlier generation), Malinowski and Mead, both were influenced by their attraction to and reaction against Freud's theory.

In Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, we find the view that male and female constitute the fundamental structure of society and human development. This is surprising for a number of reasons having to do with Freud's theory of the primacy of the male sex (the phallus), his theory of sexual orientation and his acceptance of hermaphroditism in human nature, as in the nineteenth-century concept of psychic hermaphroditism.⁷⁸ Freud's work is of great interest because of his presumption of innate biological bisexuality and the openness with which the fetishistic erotic interest may be attached in early human development to any social stimulus, creating possibilities for divergent sexual and

gendered relations, such as the homosexual as an intermediate sex. Thus Freud deploys physicalist metaphors of how erotic interests are "split apart" and then "soldered together" again in new combinations.⁷⁹ Although sexual orientation vis-à-vis the sexual object is not viewed as purely innate or learned, Freud nonetheless leans toward the biological determination of developmental subjectivities, as, for instance, in three key areas: anatomy, mental attitudes regarding maleness and femaleness in society and the development of choice of sex object. Nonetheless, the possibilities of an open-ended construction of a third sex and/or gender are muted by the presumption of sexual dimorphism in human phylogeny, including the dimorphism of acquired and innate traits, which Freud borrowed from ideas of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Darwin, Karl Westphal and Ellis, supposedly manifested both at the phenotypic level (anatomy) and the genotypic level (the unconscious). German philosophical essentialism strongly influenced these ideas as well.⁸⁰

Curiously, while Freud thought of the infantile human mind as "polymorphous perverse," the natural structure of development in the body was typically skewed to the male sex. Freud generally saw hermaphrodites as abnormal in mind and body, as interstitial between male and female.⁸¹ Freud could never escape the essentialist view that humans have an innate biological bisexuality that inclines society to impose a definite structure of gender roles to regulate and direct its expression toward "normal" outcomes. Freud would have probably been surprised to learn that for centuries in the Byzantine Empire there were biologically normal males who became eunuchs not from an essential desire to have a female body or from a need for sexual relations with males; instead, they sought the prestige and privilege of the eunuch's position in the Byzantine court.⁸² Thus, we see that Freud's view was too biologically driven and culturally bound to accommodate the range of variations in sex and gender development across time and space. When Freud's disciples, such as the psychoanalytic anthropologist Géza Roheim, were encouraged to study the most "primitive" of groups, such as Australian Aborigine society, it was to confirm more than to discover that the innate structures of

a biologically driven Oedipal complex were to be found in all places, albeit in a more elementary way in rude societies.⁸³

The later efforts of psychoanalysts – such as Erikson on European and non-Western societies and Sudhir Kakar on India – to "relativize" this model have met with only limited success.⁸⁴ Stages of development are seen as linear, as biologically founded, creating continuity between the drives and wishes of childhood and adulthood when in fact it is the marked discontinuities resulting from historical and cultural formations that are striking.⁸⁵ The innate structure is usually assumed to be a given; the cultural experiences are added on to it but without modification of what came before. Freud and his followers' naïveté is one thing, having come from decades past; but the contemporary ethnocentrism of psychology is startling. Witness, for instance, the continuing naïveté of some Western psychologists' stage models of sex and gender development, typically constructed without the benefit of historical and cross-cultural evidence or non-Western theories of the human condition, and the particular analysis of adolescence through assumptive structures of dimorphism.⁸⁶

Ultimately, the exigencies of biology were made into the very substance, the phenomenology and cultural ontology, of the psychic determinism according to Freud. Freud always felt that, at the bottom of human nature – which he sometimes alluded to as the biological "bedrock" of sexuality – our species could not evade the "force" of anatomy and unknown chemical and brain factors.⁸⁷ This is why Freud's last great piece, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," ends with the dour view that "unconscious resistance to insight," that is, the revelation of deep biological sexual drives and desires through psychoanalysis, was beyond the patient and the doctor because of its biological origins; hence, the Oedipal complex and differences between the sexes to which these neuroses correspond are likewise outside society's reach.⁸⁸ It is no wonder Freud clung to a dimorphic model of sex and gender despite the evidence to the contrary.⁸⁹

With the emergence of French sociology and anthropology, we find further reflections of the nineteenth-century influence of dimorphism being worked out in social theory. Beginning with

Durkheim's classic statement of primitive society, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, we find the argument that male and female are so fundamental to the structure of human society that they should be treated as equivalent to the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane.⁹⁰ I doubt whether Durkheim ever questioned the innateness of dimorphism in humans; sexual dimorphism and the duality of male and female symbolism in social action and its collective representations were central to his studies of economy, religion and society. However, we might predict that Durkheim would have subordinated the needs of the individual to the greater good of the collective, as suggested in the following quotation from his famous essay on the dualism of human social life:

Society has its own nature, and, consequently, its requirements are quite different from those of our nature as individuals: the interests of the whole are not necessarily those of the part. Therefore, society cannot be formed or maintained without our being required to make perpetual and costly sacrifices. . . . We must, in a word, do violence to certain of our strongest inclinations.⁹¹

By suggesting that the nature of social existence forced the individual always to confront the duality of being both social actor and unique individual, Durkheim added to the significant commentaries on the problem of the imperfect fit between collective categories and individual bodies, what Roland Barthes once referred to as the problem of "unclassified feelings." Durkheim the utopian socialist thinker was concerned with the moral crisis of late-nineteenth-century liberal democracy – the sense in which modern society was failing to achieve the higher dictates of providing a sound communal existence. Given such a worldview, we might speculate that the anatomically ambiguous hermaphrodite would have been treated as an anomaly that should be fitted into the general social classification of male and female for the greater good.

Faced with the relationship between individual life crises and the social rites and ceremonies for fitting individuals into collec-

tive systems, it is not surprising that Arnold van Gennep, the French ethnologist writing in the same period, strongly reified sexual dimorphism. Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* suggests in general that the two sexes are the fundamental division of society: that in "all societies and all social groups" there is a classification of the "group confined to persons of one sex or the other." Thus, we find in his argument that coitus is an act both of union and identification, such that rituals function as a "separation from the world of the asexual to the sexual."⁹² His dimorphism is even more far-reaching when he suggests that the situation is "simpler" for girls than for boys, since "the social activity of a woman is much simpler than that of a man," even in the case of puberty, where "first emission" does not automatically and intrinsically signify a change in status. There is always a distinction between male and female in these regards, he states, although a contrast must be made between physical and social maturity.⁹³

Some scholars from this period, Georg Simmel in particular, lent a different perspective to sexual dimorphism and social classification by arguing that dyads and triads are instrumental to the structure of social action. Simmel's sociology is especially notable in its insistence that dyads and triads create different phenomenologies or thought worlds.⁹⁴ In the tradition of French anthropology, Mauss hinted at the possible basis of unclassifiable sensibilities and feelings posed by the third sex or gender in his statement that "Any society will find some individuals off system – or between two or more irreducible systems."⁹⁵ Likewise, Gregory Bateson's significant study of logical types of social relations in the Iatmul *naven* ceremony (Sepik River, New Guinea) was to demonstrate how symmetrical and asymmetrical dyadic relations may teleologically create and maintain systems of social classification and action.⁹⁶ Decades later, anthropologist Francis L.K. Hsu theorized that one or another of the kin dyads, such as the husband/wife dyad, form the basis of all fundamental value orientations in kin-based social relations, an approach that causes us to question whether there is an essential structure of dyadic or symmetrical relations that underlies the conceptual representation of sexual dimorphism in social theory.⁹⁷

Sexuality poses a special case for the tribe of anthropologists; and while some ethnographies since the time of Malinowski's great book, *The Sexual Life of Savages*, have taken a critical perspective on sexuality, rarely has this been extended to the question of whether there are but two sexes. Malinowski's work shows the problems with which early anthropology was faced in conceptualizing beyond sexual dimorphism. Coming from Prussia with an aristocratic doctoral training in physics and a strong reaction against conventionalism that expressed itself in his love of the avant-garde, Malinowski pioneered field study in anthropology, beginning with his early study of the family in aboriginal Australia, followed by his famous work on the Trobriand Islands off the coast of New Guinea around the time of World War I.⁹⁸ Malinowski emerged with a functional theory of culture based on individual needs: culture exists almost as a direct expression of needs on the level of the individual to survive and reproduce across time. To his credit, Malinowski more than any other anthropologist of his generation discussed the role of pleasure in traditional society, in large part because of the kind of society in which he worked.⁹⁹ Many human customs, such as kinship practices, seem to meet no direct biological need, however; and the more symbolic such practices were, such as religious ritual or myth, the less his theory worked to explain Trobriand society, let alone the total human condition.

Consider, for example, the limitations imposed on culture theory by the Western concept of the incest taboos based on the idea of an essential nuclear family prominent in Western culture. The Trobriands became the first test of Freud's theory of the Oedipal complex applied to other cultures. At the time of Freud's great effort to popularize psychoanalysis and the theory of the Oedipal complex, anthropologists were among the first to chastise him for his insensitivity to cultural differences and his speculative reading of the early human record.¹⁰⁰ By the mid-1920s Malinowski had composed *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, a critique of the Oedipus complex as being always shaped by cultural setting; in fact he did not eliminate Oedipal development but only suggested that in a matrilineal society the object of desire was the

sister more than the mother, with the rival being the maternal uncle rather than the father. By the end of the 1920s, Malinowski's *Sexual Life of Savages*, a remarkable description of love, sexuality and kinship in the Trobriands, was making news for its rejection of the idea that "primitives" were sexually restricted.¹⁰¹ In a sense, Malinowski's great work not only justified the notion of sexual liberation in the age of flappers by suggesting that "primitives" valued pleasure; his book also implicitly attacked the received gender-dimorphic categories of masculine and feminine. Yet Malinowski (like Mead) was unable to escape the historical influence of sexual dimorphism and procreation, returning always to the reproduction ideas of the family and sex as essential needs for human society.¹⁰²

During the same period, Mead's work on gender and sexuality from Samoa was extraordinarily influential in recasting the discourse toward environmental relativism and away from the biological bases of gender and sexuality. Mead's position, as noted above, clearly rested on biological sexual dimorphism, however; in her Samoan work, this was constructed in the area of erotic and emotional differences between the sexes, reinforced by Samoan customs. In her triculture study in the Sepik River area of New Guinea, it was manifested more strongly in her social-development description of sexual "temperament" and "personality" differences, in which a biological force, much like Freud's libido, was suggested to differentiate and mold the sexes, although the baseline starting point of development was provided by culture rather than biology.¹⁰³ (The temperamental exceptions to this point, however, suggested that Mead did not move so fully away from innate biological structures as is often believed; see below.) Critiques of this work have shown the significance of neglected colonial change in the demography and political economy of gendered status and the naive ideology of American individualism that underlay it.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Mead finds that the personality traits denoted as masculine and feminine are "instrumental" but only "lightly linked" to sex differences.¹⁰⁵ Following her teacher, Ruth Benedict,¹⁰⁶ Mead consistently advocated that human nature is "unbelievably malleable" in response to culture and environ-

ment. Nonetheless, Mead, like her contemporaries, never challenged the preconception of biological sexual dimorphism. She explained instances of alternate sex and gender roles, such as the North American berdache, as signs of the "raw potential" of individual biological human nature to circumvent culture in "extreme cases."¹⁰⁷ This model of functional anthropology in the American school of the 1930s suggested plainly that the raw potentials of individuals must be biologically deviant or abnormal, with the biological inversion of the berdache a classic example. Such examples of third sex or gender were thus lumped into a vague category of congenital homosexuality that ratified the nineteenth-century sexological discourse of "natural" dimorphism and heterosexuality.¹⁰⁸

The critique of sexual dimorphism and the incorporation of nonreproductive sexuality into the cross-cultural and cross-historical record have been slow and precarious, as scholars since the emergence of feminist anthropology have suggested. Gendered analyses of kinship have been helpful: "One of the most conspicuous features of kinship is that it has been systematically stripped of its functions... it has been reduced to its barest bones — sex and gender."¹⁰⁹ But because gendered analyses have typically ignored sexual conduct and practices, they have also tended to marginalize third-sex and/or third-gender categories and representations in culture and society.¹¹⁰ More generally, Carole Vance states:

Ethnographic and survey accounts almost always follow a reporting format that deals first with "real sex" and then moves on to the "variations." Some accounts supposedly about sexuality are noticeably short on details about non-reproductive behavior; Margaret Mead's article about the cultural determinants of sexual behaviors... travels a dizzying trail which includes pregnancy, menstruation, menopause, and lactation but very little about non-reproductive sexuality or eroticism.¹¹¹

Studies of sex and gender variation across cultures and individual differences within cultures form the basis for the analysis not only of social categories inherited from the nineteenth cen-

tury but also of a twentieth-century invention: the concept of "identity." After World War II, the concept of identity emerged in contexts of new social and political formations, both in popular culture and in science. Particularly in studies of national character, child-rearing and personality in the psychoanalytic work of Erikson, the notion of identity became increasingly influential for a generation of psychological, cultural and gender theorists.¹¹²

Concurrent with this movement was the emergence of a new "social constructionist" approach that split sex and gender from biology. For instance, in gender-role study, identity research signified an emerging social science constructionism in the United States, a society that is perhaps notable for the uneasy coexistence of multiple identities of gendered relations and essentialist ideas of sexual dimorphism.¹¹³ This new constructionism was later to become "postmodernist" in character in a variety of fields, but especially in sex and gender and gay and lesbian studies. Feminist writers in the social sciences, in critiques of patriarchal society and male supremacy, have consistently attacked the imagery of sexual dimorphism without always challenging its preconceptions, at least until recently.¹¹⁴ Today, however, scholars such as Theresa de Laurentis are critical of any attempt to construct experience, especially women's experience, while others, such as Gayle Rubin and Carole Vance, are reconsidering the place of sociocultural influences in models of gender and sexuality.¹¹⁵ Much attention is directed to the analytic category of gender and how it is derived or differentiated from sexual difference.¹¹⁶ Feminist writers such as Judith Butler and lesbian theorists such as Sarah Lucia Hoagland are skeptical of notions of identity, as in the constructions of sexual identity and especially of gender identity, since these limit the enterprise of reinterpreting male, female and a third sex as historically bound entities.¹¹⁷

In sum, by emphasizing both biological and symbolic reproduction, scholars have continued a theoretical emphasis on sexual dimorphism in human life, which has marginalized the study of sexual and gendered variations in human history and society. In a parallel way, Foucault has argued persuasively the extent to which sexual and social theory has promoted reproduction over

pleasure as ultimate aims, from Attic Greece to the modern period of Freud.¹¹⁸ Many studies that assumed "male" and "female" to be the fundamental dualism of human nature and culture fan out to incorporate the assumption that two genders, masculine and feminine, are inherent building blocks in human institutions, social roles, family relations, gender and sexuality. Ultimately this imagery is based on a worldview that imagines sexual differentiation in human development to strive ultimately for biological reproduction, while the purpose of gender differentiation is to further the symbolic regeneration of society through the division of labor, social productivity, kinship and family structure and, of course, sexual relations.

Sexual Orientation: What Is a "Third Sex" Not?

Of the various forms of preconceptions that undermine the study of sexual and gender variations, we have so far ignored one that is surprisingly tenacious and often overlooked: the idea that a third sex is simply a deviant sexual orientation.

The Western debate on two- and three-sex systems has long been entangled with discussions about the dichotomous nature of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In recent years, it has fallen to gay and lesbian theorists, in particular, to question the assumption that classifications of divergent sexes and genders should be based on or explained by reference to the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy of Western culture.¹¹⁹ Whereas anthropologists once believed that the berdache or *māhū* and other forms of alternate sexes or genders were the product of temperamental variations directed into the social "niches" of deviant sexuality for social adaptation, scholars such as Barry Adam, Stephen O. Murray, David Greenberg and Walter Williams have shown that we cannot interpret these social and historical forms as biological or accidental variations of some universal "it entity" like the Western homosexual that is purported to be in the very make-up of deviant human nature.¹²⁰ Hence, while the cross-cultural forms of same-sex practice and ontology are of great importance in understanding third-sex or third-gender matters both in Western and non-Western traditions, the latter are by no means reducible to

the former, any more than the nineteenth-century homosexual can be equated with the berdache.¹²¹ Thus, I urge in this section that we not confuse desire for the same sex with a third sex per se, that gender-reversed roles are not the sole basis for recruitment into a third gender role, at least not in all social traditions; and that sexual orientation and identity are not the keys to conceptualizing a third sex and gender across time and space.

It is no mystery why sexual orientation has been lumped with the question of a third gender. As we have already noted, sexologists since the mid-nineteenth century assumed that the third sex typified a person attracted to the same sex. Sexological writers following Ullrichs and Hirschfeld (and here I would include Freud) and sexual reformers such as Edward Carpenter appealed for empathy and support of the "intermediate sex," who "suffer a great deal from their own temperament."¹²² In particular, writers in the tradition of the "congenital" theory of sexual inversion, following Richard Krafft-Ebing, tended to emphasize the supposed universals of shared hermaphroditic condition among humans, especially males, which explained how such a "temperament" was to be found in many times and places.¹²³ Twentieth-century scholars working in this tradition have sought physical and biological bases for sexual orientation, including sexual dimorphism of anatomy or brain functions, as in Simon LeVay's recent "gay brain" study.¹²⁴ Rather, the mystery is why scholars still regard homosexuality as the true or real or hidden cause of instances of third sex or gender in time and space. Surely the situation is not so simple. Recent conceptual schemas link same-sex desires to their social classification and expression by age, gender, class and egalitarian modes of social ideas and relationships.

Neither are the categories hermaphrodite or transsexual the same as third-sex and third-gender variations around the world, notwithstanding the enormous confusion surrounding the use of such terms. One is tempted, for instance, to think of the hijras of India as hermaphrodites (or homosexuals), when in fact they constitute a different kind of social person and cultural reality.¹²⁵ Likewise, the abuse of the term *hermaphrodite* in cross-cultural sexological research shows the failure of this biologically oriented

field to take seriously sex and gender variations.¹²⁶ In the category of the eunuch, there is a difference between someone who is castrated and someone who castrates himself, as Kathryn M. Ringrose shows in her essay below, and there is a further classification, such as in classical and Late Antique society, in Babylonia, China and kindred places, of men who castrated themselves in a ritualistic way.¹²⁷ These and other examples of "castrati" up to the nineteenth century in European society may constitute a potential third-sex category in such places.¹²⁸

A continuing problem in the literature is the conflation of same-sex acts with identities and thus a confusion of a third sex with a third gender. "Third gender" in this logic means a reversal of gendered relations, with males performing female roles. Attraction to the same sex, therefore, essentially reflects abnormal parenting, social learning and other forms of role behaviors that can be corrected with enough gender-typical role modeling to reverse the resulting "gender dysphoria" (the current American sexological and psychiatric nosological classification of atypical or nonconformist gender behavior).¹²⁹ But how is same-sex behavior related to third-sex traits or identity? Here a deeper biological matter is involved, usually a function of temperament or another state variable that cannot be changed. Sexologists have typically explained third-sex identity with male and female as one essential dualism linked with the other dualism of heterosexual and homosexual. By the mid-nineteenth century, Eve Sedgwick argues, this symbolic equation was so powerful that it colored virtually every domain of male sociality and masculine-defined homosocial space, such as the famous ship cabins of Melville's "Billy Budd," with the result that the threat of the homoerotic was constant enough to require an effort to suppress any sign of femaleness or desire for the same sex.¹³⁰

When categories of homosexuality have failed to fit an alternative historical or cultural tradition, bisexuality has been invoked. Beginning with the nineteenth century, as Gert Hekma suggests, sexologists (most notably Freud) began to explain the special fit between same-sex desire and social role with the putative category of biological bisexuality.¹³¹ Sexologists such as Money and

Ehrhardt continue this conceptual line, suggesting, for instance, that New Guinea men must be bisexual since the "overlap between homosexual and heterosexual phases of life" through "exclusive or obligatory homosexuality is lacking."¹³² Recently, Money also used the language of (an implicitly biological) bisexuality to describe the Sambia of New Guinea and the concept of the "Western transsexual" to compare with the hijras of India.¹³³ Such accounts are limited, relying on imported cultural schemas that bend and distort same- and opposite-sex practices in such traditions or see in such practices the essential biological desires of supposedly identical Western forms.¹³⁴ Such a textual bisexuality is at its core dogmatically biological and rests on an assumptive sexual dimorphism. Seldom have writers in the sexological tradition questioned whether, by comparison, the sexual dimorphism or the homosexual/heterosexual duality of Western culture applied to non-Western traditions.¹³⁵ Scholarly reviews over the past decade have generally agreed that, while these traditions share certain elements, they cannot in such simple ways be equated.

Neither is the endurable "androgyny" – the "confusion or conflation of the concepts of and terminology for hermaphroditism and homosexuality" so ancient, as Boswell has well remarked – the core of a universal third sex or gender.¹³⁶ Although gender transformation and symbolic inversion are at the heart of Western camp and thematic variations on men dressing as women from the onset of the early modern period to the present, cross-dressing has taken on new meanings from its earlier gendered basis.¹³⁷ Surely cross-dressing in its myriad forms is not simply another variant of homosexuality or third genders, although many scholars have viewed it this way; anthropologists after World War II, for instance, followed the authoritative lead of Clelland Ford and Frank Beach that "institutionalized homosexuality" is cross-dressing or transvestism; that is, gender-inverted homosexuality equated with a third gender.¹³⁸ It is now widely agreed that cross-gendered practices are but one form of same-sex conduct across time and space, with many variations on the theme.¹³⁹ Attraction to the same sex in many social traditions is a basis for inclusion into a category of persons who may be treated as special, marginal

or deviant, as criminals or sinners, as the case may be; but these may or may not be classified as a third category of sex or gender.

The point is that there is no absolute link between sexual orientation and a third sex or gender. But if the characteristics of a third sex or gender are not dependent on a sexual orientation for the same sex, how are we to anchor anthropological and historical models?

Sex and Gender Dichotomies

How many sexes and genders have there been? By addressing this question, the essays below are of use in thinking beyond social constructionism and essentialism, dichotomies of dimorphism that remain widely polarized in scholarly discourse.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, in view of this critique of Darwinian thought and biomedical sexology, it remains to be seen whether we must continue the conventionalized distinctions between sex as biology (sexual nature) and gender as culture (gendered society) from the past. It seems clear that, in their cultural ideals, many societies continue to reproduce dimorphic systems. However, these must not be confused with analytic concepts, and we need not accept such a dualistic system at all, for it perpetuates the false past dichotomies of nature and culture. Typically, cognitive psychological jargon regards sex as biological and “clearer,” and gender as cultural and “fuzzier.”¹⁴¹ But cognitive boundaries are not all that matter in establishing the existence of enduring third-sex and third-gender systems, particularly in non-Western and premodern societies.¹⁴² The question raises the issue of whether sex and gender are different entities or things, how we might identify them if so and how we might find them situated in bodies or cultural persons or social relations in the world.

To question the number of sexes and genders is to reconsider the perceptions and interpretations of the history of Western sexuality, with the relevant period of time currently still under dispute.¹⁴³ It is widely agreed that Western nations, especially social elites and later the nineteenth-century bourgeois class, based their understanding of sex and gender on the existence of only two biological (and especially morphological) entities that we cat-

egorize as natural sexes: male and female. Sexology, as we have seen, split apart sex as biology and gender as culture in the last century, with the “homosexual” or “Uranian” or “intermediate” sex a symbolic go-between.¹⁴⁴

Heuristically, Western social theorists and sexologists continue to divide their observations of human action into two distinct categories, one signified by anatomical sexual characteristics, usually the genitals, and the other signified by cultural, psychic or behavioral characteristics, usually instantiated in social relations. Traditionally, the former have been represented as sex factors, while the latter have been encoded as gender factors. Using these signs, the evidence reviewed here and presented in subsequent essays suggests that creating and maintaining a *third-gender* category is difficult, tenuous and problematic; yet clear examples of it are found in other times and places. Conversely, the creation of a *third-sex* category is more problematic and rarer; fewer cases have been identified in cultures and individual life-course histories.

The Darwinian revolution, as we noted, institutionalized a reproductive paradigm of sex and gender, body and mind, that – although contested by puzzling cases on the margins of normative science – remains at the center of biological and social inquiry. Nor has the paradigm of reproductive dimorphism dissipated through its failure to explain such phenomena as the forms of hermaphroditism or the gender-transforming roles of the berdache and, more recently, the Western transsexual. These “cultural objects” – previously marginalized by science – have increasingly come to the fore and pushed “normal science” into a more critical mode.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, since the 1960s – the second sexual revolution in the United States – a large measure of sex and gender research has tried to criticize and reinvent the categories of investigation, particularly by feminist and gay scholars on the periphery of such fields.¹⁴⁶

For more than fifty years a canonical view proposed that culture and nature were distinct categories of structural analysis: in symbolic structures, sex was to nature and to “female,” as culture was to gender and to “male.”¹⁴⁷ Sex and gender as ultimate causes were typically dualized as nature and nurture and traced

to correlates with social practices.¹⁴⁸ Later, critiques of such dualisms – implicitly critiques of sexual dimorphism – led to feminist gender analyses, such as the critique of Lévi-Strauss's theory of kinship.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, to circumvent the sex-equals-biology, gender-equals-society dichotomy, anthropologist Gayle Rubin once suggested combining the two: "A 'sex/gender system' is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied."¹⁵⁰ Building on these earlier critiques, scholars such as Donna Haraway argue that the models are themselves "cultural constructions," amalgams of Western science and folk belief.¹⁵¹

The "reality status" of the sex/gender dichotomy can never be one of a pure physical reality, for its meanings invoke particular social realities too. As anthropologists have been insisting for some time, these entities are symbolic as well as material, thus requiring interpretation according to the systems of meaning in which they emerge and are expressed. (Why do so many of these essentialist vs. constructionist discussions continue to be centered around the issue of homosexuality? The answer lies, in part, with the long challenge to reproductive ideology posed by same-sex desire.)¹⁵² This point helps us to elucidate the chronic confusion between medical and social science models and the folk theories of local traditions in many nations. As Stephen Murray (following Ernst Mayr) has reminded us, the history of Western biological theory is replete with examples of essentialism versus constructionism in the understanding and classification of nature.¹⁵³ Thus, Murray writes of the "recurring clash between essentialism (doctrines that maintain there are a limited, readily conceivable number of species characterized by essential, distinct features) and nominalism (doctrines positing an inter-breeding population of individual organisms grouped more or less arbitrarily by species names)."¹⁵⁴ The essentialist assumes that reality refers to the timeless condition of the body, its phylogeny and ontogeny, whereas the constructionist interprets reality as situated in social roles and lives, with knowledge and desire creating existence not in the abstract but in particular social surroundings.

Neither anthropology nor history has succeeded very well in displacing or replacing these ideas of sexual dimorphism in human culture and development, despite the long-term existence of these critiques. In large measure this is because the perspective of cultural or historical variations on a two-sex model is relatively recent and radically new, and these variations are only beginning to shape the central conceptual tendencies in these fields. For example, scholars sometimes assume that anthropologists question the epistemology of all analytical categories, at least in the sense of contextualizing them (through cross-cultural study), if not in fact deconstructing them in line with postmodern critiques of colonial and world-system factors of socioeconomic change.¹⁵⁵ However, such a critical perspective on sexual categories and practices is new and partial in the field.¹⁵⁶ In recent decades, a division of labor has resulted in the promotion of "social construction" accounts of gender in anthropology and history and the biological components of sexuality in sexology. As this paradigm breaks up, studies from all sides are challenging the assumptive structure of sexual dimorphism and the hegemony of the scientific paradigm.¹⁵⁷

The efforts of anthropologists and historians to refigure this dichotomy have been largely unsuccessful, including Rubin's (1975) essay, because of the powerful hegemony of the reproductive-dimorphism paradigm in the biomedical sciences.¹⁵⁸ However, a different perspective on the possibility of a third sex versus a third gender has emerged from the reinterpretation of sex and gender. Kessler and McKenna, for instance, in a widely cited text from the period, suggested that the categories of male and female – based on anatomical criteria – are neither universal nor valid concepts for a gendered classification system.¹⁵⁹ Instead of morphology, they suggest that, for some cultures, gender role becomes the central constituent of gender. Thus, they suggest that the berdache is "a third gender category, separate from male and female."¹⁶⁰ Not only do "they contend that a dual gender classification system is merely a cultural construction," as Bolin has noted, but they leave aside the question of whether sexual desire or practice enters in.¹⁶¹ This is significant because, in the arena

of sexuality, social pressures and power relations are never far from the expression of third-sex and third-gender roles.

Competing Cultural Systems

Anthropologists have long known that two distinct, even competing, cultural ideas may simultaneously coexist to explain how society works in everyday practice. For instance, as Edmund Leach demonstrated in his famous study of the political systems of Highland Burma, two ideologies of social relations and power may coexist as competing models or idioms for the organization of social interests: the one predominant, the other subordinate, for a time; but they may oscillate and reverse historically, changing social action "on the ground."¹⁶² Again, we know that Muslim male religious ideals of male and female roles sometimes diverge from their folk understandings, especially in domestic life.¹⁶³ In each culture, local conceptions of "human nature" are woven in and around stories about gendered social relations and desires that get expressed in practice, although open contradictions between cultural ideals and social practice sometimes prevail.¹⁶⁴

Systems of ideas about reproduction may come directly from folk or popular culture, although they are clearly influenced in the modern period by sexological science and medical notions of sex, reproduction, gender and the psychology of development.¹⁶⁵ Between science and popular culture or folk ideas, we have the basis for understanding a new moral discourse of classification relevant to the third sex and gender.¹⁶⁶ Such issues in relation to philosophy have been well studied in classical Attic culture following Socrates, wherein the rising social formation resulted in newly engendered roles and the eventual privatization of the psyche as individual self.¹⁶⁷ In short, the emergence of a historical category of the gendered self was gradually attached to sex roles, leading to more explicit sexual-dimorphic ideas crystallized in the scientific and technological (in Foucault's sense) discourse of ancient Greece.

But how do such ideas and practices influence the creation and reproduction of alternate sex and gender practices? Clearly, power is a key factor in deciding which ideas get played out in

which arenas and by which actors. Rubin once suggested that Western institutions continue to oppress and subordinate the Western "subject" to heterosexual forms and women to patriarchal forms.¹⁶⁸ This occurs, she argued, through the exaggeration of sex differences in order to suppress equality between the sexes. "The division of labor by sex can therefore be seen as a 'taboo': a taboo against the sameness of men and women, a taboo dividing the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories, a taboo which exacerbates the biological differences between the sexes and thereby *creates* gender."¹⁶⁹ Such an analysis links conceptions of sex and gender with the need, in systems of inequality, to maintain through ideas or social relations these same forms of inequality.

Power structures must be seen not only in relation to their ability to coerce and force persons into the social classification of the sexes and genders but also as systems of ideas through which such power is manifested. The role of an elite or its discourse can critically influence the maintenance of a sex and gender system, namely, in its attitude regarding symbolically potent third-sex/gender figures, such as the hijras of India or the *māhū* of Polynesia. Such responses within a hegemonic situation include how cultural ideas of male and female are related to gendered relations and sexual practice and whether there might be two or more cultural idea systems (or mythologies) for reproducing sexual and gendered relations present within the same culture during the same historical period.¹⁷⁰ Historical and social formations create for cultural actors what we might call mainstreams and margins, social arenas which cultural spaces and social places define by who does what with whom and under what normative circumstances their actions are approved or disapproved.¹⁷¹ Their actions and roles thus reflect the structure of power relations through dominant versus subordinate ideas of sexual relations during the historical period.

Certain cultures go to extreme lengths to exaggerate the differences between male and female. For example, among the peoples of New Guinea, such as the Sambia or the Bimin-Kuskusmin, sex and gender differences are prominent in myth and cultural

organization.¹⁷² Reproduction is central to all of these, but what is defined as “reproductive” varies greatly, as, for instance, in the case of Sambia men who inseminate boys to complete their “biological masculinization,” enabling the boys ultimately to become reproductively competent.¹⁷³ Such a view underlines the importance of recognizing the inherently cultural nature of the definition of reproductive processes and the fallacy of opposing real and symbolic forms of procreation.¹⁷⁴

Consider the competing idea systems within the history and sexual culture of urban Brazil.¹⁷⁵ Over several centuries, Richard Parker suggests, the local beliefs of perceived anatomical differences were transformed into culturally defined ontologies of gender, with distilled ideas about appropriate sexual action. The marked sexual dimorphism of this patriarchal system relates the local concept of same-sex desire to “a kind of symbolic equivalent of the biological female.”¹⁷⁶ However, sharply opposed idealized anatomical types produce defined realities of masculine and feminine encoded into a collective system of sexual classification that symbolically constructs social reality. Thus, what is sexually exciting to Brazilians is also forbidden or taboo, so that the violation of the taboo creates a significant subordinate ideology of state and church formations.¹⁷⁷ The classification system facilitates domination through the acceptance of sexual and gender hierarchy, because the public ideology of institutions and discourse is highly dimorphic.

In the accounts collected below these “reproductive” factors of power are expressed in variations on what might be called idea systems of human sexual nature and human sexual culture. In our own Western tradition, such conventionalized cultural definitions of human nature confront us with moral systems of the classification of bodies, persons and acts that go well beyond Darwin’s nineteenth-century sexual dimorphism, as Foucault repeatedly showed in his discussions of the “incorporation of perversions” that inverted the masculine and feminine, making the sodomite into the permanent “species” of the homosexual.¹⁷⁸ They represent a distillation of folk ideas; or, alternatively, ideologies of collective ideas of human nature crystallized into codes which tell

what a human being is and should be and that prescribe behavior in ways that create a full person across the life course.¹⁷⁹ In most traditions these pivot on male and female as fundamental types of human nature. But the fact that they are pivotal does not preclude the existence of alternate sex and gender ideas or social roles.

For example, the Bimin-Kuskusmin speak of hermaphroditic individuals and have a category for them; their autochthonous ancestor is hermaphroditic as well. Yet their sex and gender system is strongly marked for sexual dimorphism, seemingly unable to circumvent the powerful institutions that instill and reproduce male and female differences rather than blend them. (The Indonesian community studied by Cora DuBois is comparable to the Bimin-Kuskusmin in this respect; categories for hermaphrodites are not lumped together or confused with transvestite third-gender roles in these Indonesian societies, such as the *waria* role reported by Dede Oetomo.)¹⁸⁰ Cultural ideas of a third sex or gender are not to be interpreted automatically as manifestations of social reality, nor must they be confused with the schemas and practices of such peoples (a comparative principle reiterated by Mead in this context).¹⁸¹ In short, the mere existence of an idea system that exaggerates sex differences does not preclude the institutionalization of a third sex in such cultures (indeed, among both the Sambia and Bimin-Kuskusmin these coexist).¹⁸²

Power and Sexual “Passing”

Why, Goffman once asked in his influential book *Stigma* (1963) – a study of how social actors managed “spoiled” identities – does someone attempt to pass as “normal,” a categorical Other, unless it is to avoid discredit and the loss of social status?¹⁸³ In the more extreme cases, sociologists have long suggested, the deviant or forbidden third sex or gender leads individuals to avoid being identified; that is, they are forced to adapt the appearances and accoutrements of hegemonic social roles and practices.¹⁸⁴ Alternate or “deviant” third-sex and third-gender roles are thus typically displaced to the illicit, immoral or illegal margins of society.¹⁸⁵ Those who are “passing” seek to hide their sexuality and be defined as normatively male and masculine or female and feminine

(or heterosexual, e.g.; not gay or lesbian), objectifying the very categories (male and female) that stand in opposition to their hidden being and desires.¹⁸⁶ Such matters require an analysis of the embedded concepts that define and express cultural reality and how power manipulates realities and persons, as these impinge on the creation and presentation of an individual's sense of belonging to third-sex/gender categories, either overtly in public or covertly in private discourse and thought.¹⁸⁷

The key to understanding the recombination of ideas about culture and nature here rests in the relationship between social status, power and the secrecy of passing as normatively male and female and heterosexual/homosexual in the Western tradition.¹⁸⁸ However, in American culture, unlike that of India or Native North America, we do not recognize sexual or gendered transformation in categories; change may occur in the person but not in the categories of male and female. The transsexual is thus required to hide and pass under threat of punishment, which is sometimes severe.¹⁸⁹ There is a cultural logic in the emergence of these categories and identities, a structural trend that relies on hierarchy and status differences. When males have more privileged positions, so the logic goes, when their relations derive in part from principles of subordination, then males who opt out of their "biologically based" sex roles lose status and are disparaged. No one would desire a decrease in status, or so goes the rational choice theory; therefore the change and loss of status can only be motivated by biological drives beyond the conscious intentions or free will of the person.¹⁹⁰

Passing is a cultural performance but it is also a power play. With passing we come to a different problem in the creation and maintenance of a third sex or gender: the sense in which secrecy, lying, cheating and other tactics of opportunistic adaptation apply to the situation of the individual who cannot or will not conform to particular sex and gender conventions. The categorical distinctions at the cultural level are blurred or transcended at the level of social interaction, as with the cases of hermaphrodites and transsexuals. As Harold Garfinkel once insisted in his classic study of heterosexual passing among American transsexuals, the power

of conformity in American culture is great enough to create the idea of "cultural genitals":

From the standpoint of an adult member of our society, the perceived environment of "normally sexed persons" is populated by two sexes and only two sexes, "male" and "female." [Thus, it follows that] certain insignia are regarded by normals as essential in their identifying function.... The possession of a penis or a vagina as a biological event is to be distinguished from the possession of one or the other or both as a cultural event... [thus suggesting] the differences between biological and cultural penises and vaginas as socially employed evidences of "natural sexuality."¹⁹¹

One of the most powerful case studies of passing ever conducted is Garfinkel's remarkable ethnomethodological investigation of a biologically normal Southern California male changing to the social role of a female. His detailed study of "Agnes," a UCLA transsexual patient who successfully passed as female in every sphere of her life (including living with female roommates in a small apartment for two years), offers many cues for thinking about the social and moral pressures to conform to two-sex systems.¹⁹² "Passing was not her [Agnes's] desire... it was necessity," he says. Garfinkel insightfully reveals the meaning of passing by intersexed persons as either male or female in contemporary society. He shows how they are moral ascriptions and recognizes that the status, social legitimacy and freedom of the actors are constantly in peril.¹⁹³

In other times and places as well, avoidance of being forced into a cultural classification of normative sex or gender roles may require circumventing direct challenges to the authority system. Here the cultural actor may exercise the radical option of passing as a normative member of the sex or gender dyads of the hegemonic majority of the historical society in question. Biological females who dressed in men's clothes throughout Europe for centuries and females in the Balkans, especially those who aspire to the warrior role, who successfully pass as the empowered sex/gendered man are exercising such options.¹⁹⁴ They are sur-

prisingly greater in number than we might have once thought.¹⁹⁵

The social possibilities of passing offer status enhancement or decline. Hence, as power and prestige are at stake, societies may go to some lengths to survey and control social transitions between these liminal positions; indeed, the third sex and gender is a state "betwixt and between" par excellence.¹⁹⁶ Similar social and political implications apply to biological males who castrate themselves to become palace eunuchs, the male sodomites of the seventeenth century, mollies of the eighteenth century, "inverts" and "intermediate-sexed" homosexuals of the nineteenth century and other categories in which aspects of the male actor are viewed as immoral, illegal or illicit in the classification of the social order. Conversely, the logic goes, women who opt for third roles and identities are opting "up": that is, moving socially and symbolically upward in the status hierarchy system. For example, female berdache, like women who take on manly roles, especially the admired position of the Balkan warrior males, are then reared as men and gender-identified as males. They remind us of the *kwolu-aatmwol* among the Sambia of New Guinea.¹⁹⁷ This raises questions regarding the instability of third-sex/gender categories,¹⁹⁸ a matter to which I will return in the conclusion.

Cultural Reality and Ontologies of the Third Sex

To create the meaningful conditions and agency of self-motivating social actors, every culture constructs its own ontology. For a collective ontology to emerge and be transmitted across time, there must be a social condition, eventually a stable social role, that can be inhabited – marking off a clear social status position, rights and duties, with indications for the transmission of corporeal and incorporeal property and status. We have already seen the power exerted to conform to reproductive and dimorphic structures that results in passing behavior. For an individual to express sex and gender being is not in itself always sufficient to sustain the beliefs, accoutrements and social structure of third sexes or genders. Ideally, categories of being acquire greater force the longer they exist historically and are eventually transformed into social roles and practices, as hinted by the cultural ontologies of the berdache,

the hijra, the *māhū*, the Sambia *turnim-man* and other examples in this volume.

The work of culture in these famous traditions is to create ontologies that link the inside and outside of the person as a whole system.¹⁹⁹ By cultural ontologies, I mean local theories of being and the metaphysics of the world; of having a certain kind of body and being in a certain kind of social world, which creates a certain cultural reality; and of being and knowledge combined in the practice of living as a third sex or gender. Local models of ontology are concerned with the nature of being a person and of being in the world with such a nature. Such local theories implicitly ask: What drives, intentions, desires and developmental pathways characterize the nature of a person?²⁰⁰ Are these characteristics found also in other persons or in entities (such as spirits) and the social and physical surroundings? By contrast, the Western folk ontology of sexuality takes as its intentional subject the lone individual, whose sexual nature is borne in the flesh of one sex or the other, but not in both, and who is viewed quite apart from other entities of a social and spiritual sort.

In short, the third sex has, in some places and times, emerged as an ontological entity, that is, a distinctive "subject" with its own moral voice. When people identify with a category, they endow it with a meaning beyond themselves. Thus, to say, "I am berdache," is to suggest an "I" (subject) in active identification with "berdache" (categorical object); and again that the subject and categorical object are in a stable formation across time.²⁰¹ That is not the case, of course, in a culture that lacks a third-sex category, such as France of the nineteenth century, in which the sorrowful hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin ultimately destroyed himself.²⁰² In the modern period, such persons seek a shifting target, a divergent and eclectic set of people who identify with ambiguous persons but not categories and who also feel the pull of other factors of social classification, such as class.²⁰³ This is why the presence of androgynous figures, of ontological beings and entities, especially gods and spirits, is critical in understanding the emergence of culturally constituted third-sex and third-gender roles.

To take the textbook case of the ancient Greeks as a prominent starting point: it is not what you *are*, they might have said; it is what you *do* that counts in the reckoning of gender and sexuality. Thus, the erotic relations between men and boys were not a challenge to strongly dimorphic gendered roles, with masculine honor and feminine nature distinct, a view that was at once ontological and instrumental in its everyday practice of differentiating nature from desire in their view.²⁰⁴ The Greek system of desires and appetites, their taxonomy of forms of love, was indeed a curious combination of what would, in the later modern period, be referred to as social constructionism (impressionism) and essentialism (realism).²⁰⁵ Whatever the exigencies of one's body, especially the visible anatomy, we can ask: What social role does the person take, or what position do they claim: that of the first sex (male), second sex (female) or third sex (e.g., hermaphrodite)? Certainly the example of Tiresius the soothsayer was widely known, signifying mythological indications of gender transformation throughout the ancient world.²⁰⁶

Clearly, the Greek cultural signifiers of human nature were characteristically gendered as masculine or feminine, but their sex system was open to other signifiers.²⁰⁷ Plato's idea of three sexes as a part of an original human nature was prominent in the *Symposium*, and this no doubt bears to some extent on the concept of *psyche* in Greek and the very different notions of culture and human nature in the Greek tradition, which allowed a greater latitude of exceptions to the later historical gendered self that was to emerge.²⁰⁸ The god Hermaphroditus held a special meaning, often equated historically with what we would today label the folk ideology of homosexuality; and hermaphroditic images are common in Greek art (and before that, in Egyptian statuary).²⁰⁹ Here too we see the ineluctable tendency of the modern period to dimorphize classical culture.²¹⁰ This is why the example of Tiresius, the epitome of a prophet, is telling: according to myth, he was born of one sex, changed form to another, but later in life changed back again, suggesting that the soothsayer should embody both male and female qualities for greater magical power.²¹¹

Thus, the phenomenological force of the idealized form grows

the longer it exists within the traditions of a culture, which is one of the aspects of the third sex and gender hitherto ignored by anthropologists.²¹² Through time and the contextual routines and social habits of growing up, of constructing social relations around a certain identity, presentations of person and self are distilled, habituated and made into a rather enduring system of being of a third sex and/or gender.

Changing Genders and Transforming Sexes

Virtually all known forms of third sex or gender suggest transformation of being and practice: the alteration of qualities or essences of the body and person with time. This may have occurred in the womb, in early childhood or in later life. Of course, examples of alternate sex and gender categories are also known in which being of a different nature, that is, neither male or female nor masculine or feminine, is also known; but what marks the Western conception of these matters is the quality of transformation. Why this seems not at issue is that Western ontology and epistemology suggest that, while much about the individual may change, one's sex and gender (and nowadays their sexual orientation) should remain fixed and unchanging throughout the individual's life course. One indication of this comes in the context of the 1960s and what was at that time a new awareness of transsexualism. In this context, Mead once warned about the preoccupation of Americans with differentiating male from female, of placing too much emphasis on initial sex assignment rather than on subsequent gendered achievements that altered gender-role assignments, suggesting the very basis for mediating forms of sex and gender to emerge in the future. Her worry has been taken to its furthest reaches in the modern technological context, with the use of genetic screening to identify and restrict entrance of male and female athletes in competitions, especially the Olympics.²¹³

What does such change indicate for non-Western ontologies? The Western view since the time of colonial expansion has been strongly influenced by reproductive assumptions about the ultimate and unchangeable nature of gender and sexuality. These attitudes were in turn mapped onto the interpretations of sexual

activity and social roles among colonial peoples, which is evident from the responses to all forms of sodomy (here, "unnatural sexual practice") among colonized peoples from before the modern period, especially in the New World.²¹⁴

It is fitting that we consider the issues of changing genders by first referring to the congeries of roles known as "berdache" in Native North America.²¹⁵ Here the person did not remove his or her genitals but moved into the other gendered role. Some berdache were of extraordinary influence in their own local communities, as Will Roscoe has shown from a recent biographical study. Among the Zunis, Roscoe notes, the death of a berdache such as We'wha elicited "universal regret and distress."²¹⁶ But for the Spanish and Anglo-Americans who overran the Southwest, berdache often evoked dismay, disgust, anger or, at the least, ridicule. Berdache were viewed as more than anomalies; they were monsters, freaks of nature, demons, deviants, perverts, sinners, corrupters. They committed the "nefarious vice," the "abominable sin." We can now see why, in the colonial period, it is reported that the perfect berdache would pass as a person of the opposite sex in order never to be detected.²¹⁷

Notice the early tendency to identify berdache with biological abnormalities or to wonder whether there was a biological basis for their behavior.²¹⁸ Such a bias is in keeping with Western ontology, which ascribes sex and gender to biology and permits no transformation after birth, except in the recent case of transsexuals, through radical surgery. Berdache, in general, were changing genders, not sexes. The biological bias continues to the present.²¹⁹ In many such traditions, a strong inclination existed to attribute change to biological factors. This is often regarded in a negative light, although with many exceptions, as we will see. In the case of the palace eunuch, many negative qualities were attributed to the eunuch; eunuchs were anomalous, being unable to suckle but also unable to impregnate. Their association with the female world, with harems and slaves, seems to have lent them certain negative connotations, as Ringrose suggests.

The berdache was of course not singular but of many tribal forms, with different beliefs and social practices, as Roscoe shows.

The cultural ontology was legitimized by social practices, such as an initiation, folklore, a variety of social attitudes, generally approving sexual attitudes and higher-status positions for women and berdache. We will use the Mohave case as representative of selected issues here, although it is distinctive, and Roscoe's essay below illustrates more general trends.²²⁰

Several cultural and ontological features qualify the candidacy of Mohave berdache to a third-gender role.²²¹ First, Mohave recognized a distinctive ontology of the berdache, expressed in heartfelt desires, task preferences and cultural transformation, both at the level of the genitals and of personal pronouns. Second, they legitimized the role by spiritual power, an attribute lacking in our Western conception of these variations of sex and gender. Third, Mohave did not stigmatize the condition: they did not reduce the whole person to the sex act; the condition of the berdache was not illegal or immoral, only atypical; and in general social privileges were not withheld from the berdache. Nor did Mohave stigmatize the partners or lovers of the berdache, a point to which Greenberg has drawn special attention in viewing the general social support and acceptance of the third sex and gender among Native Americans.²²² Finally, they recognized that the sexual excitement of the berdache depended on being in a sexual and social formation with someone of the same biological sex but of the opposite gender. Their excitement (for "male" berdache, of being penetrated anally by their partners and having an orgasm in this way) suggests a significant basis for the personal ontology and commitment to the role throughout the life of the individual.

Furthermore, anthropological authorities tended to be reductionistic in reducing the berdache as a category to "abnormal" aspects of homosexuality or to gender inversion. Both Benedict's and A.L. Kroeber's functional theories suggested the biological abnormality of the berdache, who was unable to fulfill the warrior ideals of Native American cultures.²²³ When bravery in warfare is expected, some will not by temperament be able to produce it, they reckoned: hence, the berdache. Abnormal individuals need a social niche, just like everyone else in a culture, Kroeber argued. The berdache was no different, just a special case of fit-

ting a constitutional type to a cultural type. Kroeber expected that in any population there would be a certain number of abnormal individuals who could not fit the norm, and customs would evolve to accommodate the personal needs of the deviant nature to culture. George Devereux added the intellectual baggage of the Freudian "invert," which had its own representation of the homosexual as constitutional invert.²²⁴ Mead also epitomized this position by suggesting that homosexuality and transvestism of the berdache type were inevitable mismatches between individual temperaments and the social requirements of particular cultures.²²⁵ Bolin finds in general that the berdache category has been variously referred to as cross-cultural homosexuality, transvestism and transsexualism, with major disagreements on whether the focus of study was "sexual object choice, dress, gender role, or even identity."²²⁶

The spiritual aspects of the berdache are significant in interpreting the third sex and gender. In the case of the Mohave, for instance, the institution was sanctified by two sorts of symbols: a widespread origin myth; and dream theory, suggesting that Mohave women's dreams would influence the fetus in the womb.²²⁷ Devereux shows connections between the dream theory and uterine fantasies of the mother of the berdache; but he goes further to regard all Mohave shamans as "crazy" and as "inverts," inversion as a biological defect and homosexuality in all tribes as neurotic.²²⁸ Nor is this view entirely defunct. We find in Gisela Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg the functional notion that, where strong sexual dimorphism occurs, without the possibility of individual exceptions, "transvestism offers an institutionalized way of compensating for lack of success in a male role by assuming a female social role."²²⁹

Yet other authors have gone to the extreme of treating the berdache's capacity to change genders as a special case by virtue of its association with the role of the shaman or of magical power in general in these cultures. We know, of course, that not all shamans are berdache, any more than all berdache are shamans. Yet Mircea Eliade makes this generalization: "The majority of shamans are inverts and sometimes even take husbands; but even when they are sexually normal their spirit guides oblige them to

dress as women."²³⁰ Still, in its strongest form, as in the writings of Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, we find a general equation in which homosexuality in shamanism is viewed as the outcome and ultimate form, if not in fact the cause, of transvestism in all simple societies.²³¹ Obviously there are myriad examples of shamans who are not gender transformed.²³² There are also societies in which the prescription to change genders is a requirement of the role.²³³

One of the most curious cases is that of the Inuit Eskimo of Canada, in which is posited a complete theory of the ontology of the third sex, wherein the individual becomes a shaman as a fetus in the mother.²³⁴ Thus, the "third-sex" Inuit shaman is perceived as changing genders by reincarnating from the opposite sex or having a spiritual past life that suggests gender transformation as an intermediate form of human being.

As Devereux interpreted it, the berdache provides a fine example of how custom defined desire: by virtue of being a berdache the social actor would want to act as the opposite sex, the biologically male berdache acting as female, for example, cutting himself to bleed as though he menstruated and simulating pregnancy by being bloated from constipation. But why would the person take the role on in the first place?²³⁵ Devereux believed the reason had to do with biology, an innatism of inversion, and he used the ideal of nineteenth-century Western homosexuality through which to represent it. This was an unfortunate categorization; it violated more than it illuminated of the berdache role. Walter Williams has suggested that three Western norms were most violated by "male" berdache roles: gender reversal, passivity (male berdache in passive sexual relations with other males) and the subversion of nature by the "unnatural practices."²³⁶

But what about the cases of changing sex? Here, more radical ideas come into play, involving notions of transforming the body, its organs, fluids and reproductive capacities. The cases to consider in this book are those of the New Guinea hermaphrodites, the hijras of India and American transsexuals.

The 5-alpha reductase hermaphrodite is a rare species of biologically intersexed individuals that results in delayed anatomical maleness, with absent or tiny male genitals sometimes mistaken

for female ones.²³⁷ In the Dominican Republic, the study of such persons was conducted in the absence of a proper understanding of local ontological categories, especially the *guevedoche* ("penis at twelve"), which permits a kind of delayed third-sex or third-gender nature to emerge around the time of puberty.²³⁸ Such persons have a folk classification that permits them the flexibility to change dress and tasks, names and decorative motif, with alterations in sexual partners, albeit those of the "appropriate" sex object at that stage of their lives. My analysis rejects the biological reductionism of the biomedical interpretation of this case.²³⁹ Among the New Guinea Sambia, several criteria constitute the categorical *kwolu-aatmwol* ("female thing changing into male"). These traits include, for instance, anatomical ambiguity at birth; assignment of the infant to neither the male nor female categories but rather to the *kwolu-aatmwol* category; the existence of a lexeme and noun of the same name; a cluster of social attitudes about personal development and change; the existence of moral and social practices that constitute a different means of handling social life after puberty; and the autochthonous myth of parthenogenesis in the ancestors, whose first anatomical condition was hermaphroditic.

These criteria define a symbolic niche and a social pathway of development into later adult life distinctly different from the cultural life plan set out by a model based on male/female duality. Note again how the *kwolu-aatmwol* exists in a culture of extraordinary gender differentiation, with sexual dimorphism marked in humans and in nature, according to the Sambia worldview.²⁴⁰ That such a categorical alternative exists at all is a true accomplishment, a partial victory of nature over culture – not as complete as the American transsexual who uses the wonders of medical technology to do so, but still rather impressive – such that we might be inclined to see it as a triumph of the third sex. And yet, in the Sambia scheme of things, no classificatory distinction is tenable that separates sexual nature from sexual culture when it comes to these persons. "Thirdness" in nature exacts its social cost; like the hijras, this form of thirdness is not admired, and any evidence that persons would cling to the categorical position

must cause us to take notice. The Sambia evidence suggests that socialization into the role of a mistaken female produces such a strong learning effect that these cultural females would happily live as biological females their whole lives and never transform into the male sex, were it possible to do so. In this sense, cultural socialization of sex and gender triumphs over anatomical nature.

Certain kinds of characteristics serve to differentiate sex and gender categories in other cultures, and these are not confined to those of Western distinctions in any simple sense. For example, the forms of *bayot* and *lakin-on* reveal alternate-sex and alternate-gender persons from Cebuan society in the Philippines.²⁴¹ These two categories are synonymous for many things in local language, including homosexuality, transvestism, hermaphroditism and so on. Yet the ethnographer tells us that the

Cebuan vocabulary...distinguishes between degrees of "bayotness." A slightly effeminate man is *dalopap* or *binabaye*.... When these terms are used in reference to a chicken, they describe a rooster with henlike plumage...[whereas] *bayot-babyot* are more effeminate males, who do not cross-dress and who usually are not considered active sexual inverts. [But] male transvestites, who normally regard members of their sex as erotic objects, are "real" or "true" *bayot*.... Identification of a person as a *bayot* or *lakin-on*...is based on both physical fetuses and behavioral characteristics. Cross-dressing is not essential for such classification.²⁴²

Indeed, we learn that it is dangerous to cross-dress "in public"; cross-dressing occurs only in private or in the anonymous circumstances of large cities for migrants.²⁴³

Here again, power and passing enter the picture; but the point is that significant local traits distinguish the development of alternate-sex and alternate-gender relations in such a small society. Compare this to the account of the Indonesian "third-sex" role of *waria*, as reported by Oetomo, or the *māhū* of Tahiti, known for centuries, analyzed by Levy and here reported anew by Niko Besnier, which provides important comparisons to the Cebuan and *waria* traditions.²⁴⁴

The hijras of India are another case of changing sexes, or, to be more precise, of being ritually invested into a third sex. In India sex/gender-role pressures are sufficiently great as to have generated variations of a third kind. The best-known form is that of the hijras, hermaphroditic or castrated males, who assume a ritual caste role that we may interpret as a third sex and gender. However, another lesser-known alternate category – in this case a third gender, not a third sex – is opted for by certain women. This occurs in the case of the unmarried celibate female who visibly dresses and acts as a man in many contexts in the Kangra fringe area of the Himalayas.²⁴⁵ Although the hijra is constituted on anatomical grounds and the Indian women who dress as men are rare and created from gender-role distinctions only, the two types are significant variations on male/female dimorphism in one of the world's oldest and largest civilizations.

The hijras seek the protection and blessings of the Mother Goddess and in turn have the ritual power to bless and curse. As Serena Nanda notes, cutting off the penis defines the "ideal marker" of the hijra's role. Hijras can bless children, and curse adults, to earn a living; their powers exercise symbolic control over life and death. They legitimately claim as their own caste all children who are anatomically hermaphroditic or have a strong desire to become a hijra; that is, children who are neither male nor female and who may, as adults, be perceived either as hijra or, when apart from the caste, "pass" as biologically and socially normative females. The existence of a lower caste embodied by hijras completes the social reproduction of these persons in the collective of the social body as well. In fact, the hijra is not an entirely esteemed social category; it is perceived as somewhat discredited, as associated with fallen women, prostitutes, marginals and ritually dangerous underclasses that threaten the upper castes, from whom, incidentally, the hijras seem not to be drawn. Both sex and gender criteria help culturally to define the hijra, and we can identify the category as rather markedly "third" in nature and culture. In her extant analysis of the hijra, Nanda tends to see the dilemma and construct an account of the cultural reality of hijra; she compares the hijras with transsexuals.²⁴⁶

This analytic move, as she herself has noted and as she explores in new ways in this volume, is a problematic classification in two respects: there is no Western category of thirdness in general, and transsexuals experience an existential crisis in the definition of what Garfinkel has called their "cultural genitals."

The American transsexual displays very different ideas and social relations compared with the Indian hijras, a cultural instance that seems more fully inscribed as both a third sex and a third gender. American culture is heavily dimorphic in its sex and gender roles and institutions.²⁴⁷ Transsexuals are driven – in the nineteenth-century biological sense of the term – to the radical surgical step of altering their morphology through medical technology to conform to their ontology. Notice that the hijra, too, undergoes castration, healing and bodily and spiritual rebirth to be more like the opposite sex, but in the Indian context, a cultural reality shared in public life extends beyond the doctor's office. Thus, a mismatch between transsexuals' anatomical nature and their inner, desired being moves them, much like the berdache, to sexual bonding with the opposite sex, but opposition is here based not on the morphology but on private reality that lacks a cultural seal of approval.

Notice that, as we move closer in historical time, we find increasing numbers of historical examples of cross-dressing and of women who dress in men's clothes. Perhaps this is an artifact of a better historical record. However, these are aspects of the transition not only to modernism but possibly also to the advent of increasing sex and gender hierarchies through the gender reversals and transvestism of the early homosexual role and of the transsexual in modern times. As noted by René Grémaux, the historical formation of women who dressed in men's clothes bears a relationship to gender passing for status enhancement.²⁴⁸ In the twentieth century, one of the more remarkable examples of this genre was Jack Bee Garland (1869–1936), an American female who lived as a man. Jack claimed to enjoy the company of men more than that of women; and the biographer sees in this the evidence for Jack's being a female-to-male transsexual, although one wonders about the symbolic power and enticements of being and living

as a man in such a strongly dimorphic and patriarchal society at the time.²⁴⁹ Clearly, this leads to issues of seeing the transsexual not only as someone who senses the self to be in the wrong body and who desires to pass as the opposite sex, but of a problematical ontology of the self that has no matching social and historical category and role in which to anchor itself.²⁵⁰

Desire and the Transition to Modernism

The missing key to much study of third sexes and genders is the understanding of the desires and attractions of the individual and the role in which these influence the establishment of a social status as a third sex or the effort to pass as normative and live secretly as such. Especially in those instances of recruitment or advancement to a new position, of the Mohave child becoming a berdache or a young Indian male electing to have himself castrated, we are woefully ignorant of the reasons the individual desired such a transformation. How much of it is the product of ontology, of a sense of being that identifies with the category; and how much comes from social and sexual practices that direct individuals from the position of normative sex and gender roles and hierarchies? From anthropology and history our knowledge of these matters is limited, although the essays in this book are a notable advance.

By focusing on the concept of desire we face the challenge of linking these cross-cultural forms to the transition to modernism in our own Western tradition since the Renaissance. If my intuition is correct, this is exactly the missing element in understanding the creation and maintenance of the third sex and gender across time and space. What role do choice, free will and voluntarism play in discriminating individual and group social practices with respect to the third sex? Why, that is, does a ten-year-old Mohave select to undergo the ceremony to become a berdache, which his parents must arrange although not necessarily encourage?²⁵¹ Whatever the answers to such questions, the transition to modernism identifies the emergence of individual and private desire with the creation of third-sex and third-gender categories in culture and history.

To take a paradigmatic example from anthropology and social history, the emergence of same-sex desire and the creation of new third-sex and third-gender categories and roles are proving to be an area of immense interdisciplinary overlap in the study of the variety of "homosexualities." Where homosexuality was thought to occur in tribal societies, in the sense of same-sex desire coupled with gender transformation of social role and dress, it has been seen as the manifestation of something basic, primitive, biological: a certain kind of essential nature forcing its way out of the body.²⁵² We now see how naive such a view was.²⁵³ It is well known from the research of Trumbach that a series of emergent sex and gender forms of social role and desire were prominent by the eighteenth century in England.²⁵⁴ Later, as Hekma shows, sexologists who inherited these distinctions expressed a worldview that compressed all sex and gender variation into a two-sex-system equation of "perverse implantations," to use Foucault's term. And so often these linked biological forms to gender change as located in individual minds or bodies rather than examine any aspect of the historical or social conditions of their lives.

When might one legitimately see sexual desire or practice as a signifier of a third sex, as neither a male/female nor masculine/feminine signification? Some, such as Foucault, have wondered whether desire for the same sex creates these bases in society and psyche for the third sex (i.e., in his famous discussion of the nineteenth-century closet homosexual's "compulsion" to confess and the desires that emanate from this). As we are learning from the earliest reaches of the modern period, same-sex desires seem fundamental to the nature of some sodomites during the golden age in Holland and later to the mollies in England. While these developments were important in the formation of social classifications and hierarchy in the modern period, they also have profound implications for the emergence of moral ontological categories of sex and gender.

The moral ideology of dimorphic reproduction and its dualism of heterosexual and homosexual has changed greatly over historical time. Nearly three centuries ago same-sex desire was punished by death in many Western countries. For example, in Holland

between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the "sodomite" was tried and condemned to death, initially in secret and then in public execution, as Theo van der Meer demonstrates. Many people were executed during this 150-year period. The evidence from love letters and confessions suggests that some of these sodomites had a clear sense of desiring the same sex. Why were the early executions secret? Because sodomy was loathsome, such a crime against God and nature that it should not be discussed in public, a truly silent discourse.²⁵⁵ The gender hierarchy of the time included the manifestations of patrician power of men over women and then over the "whore." As the sodomite network of the seventeenth century came into existence, this sex and gender system began to change, with the introduction of a new fourth category, the "he-whore," as a third-sex/gender role. By 1811 the worst abuses were over, and eventually the Netherlands went on to become not only the most enlightened of countries, but with increasing secularization, the most progressive in the area of same-sex rights. By contrast, in Germany this change did not occur; and with the fall of the Weimer Republic, the Nazis enforced a naive "naturalist" ideology of reproduction that made men superior to women, abortion a crime against the state and homosexuality a moral drain and threat to the reproductive virility of the fatherland.²⁵⁶ These moralisms propped up a totalitarian order that required procreation to sustain its expanding engine.

In addition to looking at the issues of a third sex and gender from the perspective of a reproductive ideology or "technology," we might consider how desire and pleasure influence the emergence of the third sex or gender. Social history also teaches that the construction of the sexual as a morally based normative category of being and action was tantamount to the invention of sexual or gendered "normality" – especially through nineteenth-century medicine. Historically, as Foucault has detailed, the invention of normality as a social category of the nineteenth century had the greatest of consequences for emerging forms.²⁵⁷ It led to a new sexual/cultural ontology, to the production of private desires and their hidden expression in power relations.

The construction of the homosexual in the modern period

becomes an important clue to understanding the emergence of sexual and gender dimorphism in this period. As sexology creates a zoological classification of sexual types, including the "intermediate sex" or "psychic hermaphrodite" prominent in the works of such figures as Ulrichs, Ellis, Hirschfeld, Carpenter and Freud, we see the beginning of a new form of evolutionary thinking. Krafft-Ebing incorporated many of Ulrichs's ideas into his sexological works. It was to Ulrichs perhaps that the notion of the intermediate sex as a "female soul enclosed in a male body" (*anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*) – or at least its popular form – must be credited. It was believed by some medical practitioners and popular authorities that one could identify the male homosexual immediately by physical examination; he would have a large or small penis, a lopsided mouth or another anatomical mark that signified his status as a "monster" of nature, an intermediate sex.²⁵⁸ The "victims" of masturbation as a "disease" were similarly classified. Ulrichs believed that same-sex desires exist in everyone; but in the third or intermediate sex, the Uranian, these take a more intense dualistic form. From a letter of December 23, 1862, he states: "Sexual dualism, which is universally present in embryonic form in every human individual, simply reaches a higher degree of expression in hermaphrodites and Uranians than in the ordinary man and woman. With Uranians, their level of expression merely takes a different form than with hermaphrodites."²⁵⁹

The nineteenth century is an odd mixture of sexual libertarianism and excessive social classification and conformity, as historians such as Paul Robinson and Jeffrey Weeks have noted.²⁶⁰ On the one hand, we might note how theories of heritable versus acquired theories of sexual inversion, especially those forms of same-sex desire, were increasingly contested and politicized. These were considered part of the intermediate third sex. Again, Ellis argued for biologically heritable conditions, while Krafft-Ebing suggested that acquired inversion, such as from the practice of "excessive masturbation," could lead to sexual inversion.²⁶¹ On the other hand, this was the age of Oscar Wilde and sexual progressivism; "boy worship" was "conspicuous at Oxford"; John Addington Symonds advocated the ethics of the homo-

erotic Greeks while himself serving as anonymous informant in Ellis's 1894 case study of homosexuality; and the British socialist activist Carpenter pleaded (in 1907) for the rights of the "intermediate sex."²⁶² Perhaps this cultural emphasis on both sexual libertarianism and social-conforming classification is to be explained as the product of a society itself divided over the role of gender and sexuality in the modernizing family and state. Whatever the case, these controversies have continued the preconceptions of the past, such as in the nature-versus-nurture arguments regarding sexual orientation.²⁶³

Hence, by the late nineteenth century, the third sex and gender were increasingly regarded as the product of sexual dimorphism and a definite degradation of reproductive evolution. For instance, while Hirschfeld advocated an innate conception of homosexuality as a third sex, the prominent intellectual savant of the era, Iwan Bloch, admired by Freud, held another view. Both Freud and Bloch shared the idea that bisexuality was in the state of nature and a regressive feature of mammals and humans. As Wolff writes in her biography of Hirschfeld: "Bloch shared Freud's view that heterosexuality was the truer aim of human sexuality. He wrote: 'Only the differences between man and woman represent the perfect state of sexual evolution. The "third sex" is a regressive phenomenon.'"²⁶⁴

As many nineteenth-century writers, such as Ulrichs, Hirschfeld and Freud, argued, there were obviously individuals inclined to actions that suggested they were neither purely male nor masculine. Freud's biologically based idea of a "psychic hermaphrodite" perhaps bears as much of the imprint of Aristotelian sexual-difference exaggeration as it does the late Victorian obsession with the definition of what was natural and unnatural in the highly individualistic bourgeois ethic of turn-of-the-century capitalism that then dominated.²⁶⁵ We find encoded in the Freudian view in particular a consistent and strongly marked differentiation of classification on the basis of activity and passivity.²⁶⁶ Changes in the structure of society and the cultural field of sexuality were to bring about increasingly rigid forms of social classifications of functions, drives, desires, sexual objects and sexual relationships.

Here, we should cite Foucault's by-now-famous comment on this change: "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species."²⁶⁷

Third-sex/third-gender desires are more than matters of erotic arousal and more than the commitment to the social functions of gendered roles or sexual hierarchies, although they may include these matters. Desire represents a mode of being, a way of linking personal reality to cultural ontology; it represents the creation of an ontological space, situated halfway between the private and the public, between the individual and the secret side of the social person — especially one who inhabits a capitalist society with its marked ideology of individualism; and it represents a publicly defined cultural standard or institutional norm, with its symbolic expressions time honored as tradition and presented to the person and self as immutable cultural reality.²⁶⁸ With desires writ large we are dealing, then, with the more inclusive desire to be and become a third-sex and third-gendered person. It is toward this end that a new history and anthropology is required to uncover those hidden forms from other times and places that elucidate larger meanings of being and becoming an alternate-sex and alternate-gendered being.

Endings and Beginnings

One of the critical points of this review has been to show that, with the emergence of modernism, the cultural elaboration of and attention to desire as new subject/object relationship and individual desires as a content of being and action became critical to understanding the emergence of a third sex and gender. This suggests that new elements of individualism, of oscillations of conformity to and rebellion against sex and gender hierarchies, increasingly entered into the discourse of interpreting what is normative and aberrant in transcending sexual dimorphism as we come closer in historical time to the present. Passing must also be underscored as a critical, emergent concept; it implicates nor-

mal and abnormal identity and the strategies of power avoidance in the effort to live and survive as a third-sex and third-gendered being. This too may be a product of the modern period and of modernist culture in general.

I have been critical above of biologically oriented sexology and sex and gender research that slights historical and cultural factors or reduces them to the fabled pigeonhole of a blackbox. As I have made repeatedly clear, however, these problems of folk categories and scientific essentialism of sexual dimorphism are roadblocks in anthropology and history as well, in part because of the overemphasis on gender and the underdevelopment of sexuality as a subject in anthropology.²⁶⁹ But these fields, biology included, are changing. Recent biological thinking is more flexible on the question of sexual dimorphism and the possibility of a third sex "in nature." Thus we find the so-called hard-wired science investigators, those who watch birds and salamanders, and their collaborators who have made certain "hermaphroditic" fishes and "bisexual" frogs their specialties, suggesting phylogenetic plasticity instead of sexual dimorphism or heterosexual/homosexual dualism in species.²⁷⁰

All categorization involves treating dissimilar things as similar, to repeat Nietzsche's words, and such treatment is endemic in the areas of sex and gender. We are reminded of Susanne Langer's advice regarding the biological world: "The difficulty of drawing a sharp line between animate and inanimate things reflects a principle which runs through the whole domain of biology; namely, that all categories tend to have imperfect boundaries. Not only do genera or species merge into each other, but classifications made by one criterion do not cover the cases grouped together by another, so that almost all general attributions have exceptions, some of which are really mystifying."²⁷¹ A critical perspective that results from this review is that Darwin probably exaggerated the influence of sexual dimorphism in evolution. Certainly many who followed him, including sexologists, have done so; and while those of us in cultural and historical theory cannot do without these significant factors of sex and gender formation, we must be skeptical of their application to social life.

With the proposition of third sexes and genders we are dealing also with problems of duality, in Durkheim's sense, and with the problem of thirdness, as denoted by such scholars as Simmel and Mauss. But the problem is not merely one of irregular boundaries and scientific ineptitude in handling nature, as Langer implies: there is also the social and political threat of the marginal, the rebel – the person who is beyond the margins; and the problem of passing is essential to an interpretation of deviance and adaptation here. When someone is discredited, a degree of hiding is always required; and the fact that passing occurs in many instances of third sex and gender suggests that power commonly sanctions reproductive ideas and dimorphic roles.²⁷²

Such "problems" posed by the third sex and gender for an epistemology of sexual dimorphism and reproductive ideologies will not go away. In social and historical traditions of multiple-sex and multiple-gendered beings we are dealing with biological, cultural and moral classification systems of humanity. The range of cases reviewed here suggests only a small number of those available in the extant literature, and these suggest a critical need to rethink the distinction between sex and gender and between sexual nature and gendered culture. Variations in sex and gender, including the formation of third-sex and third-gender categories, roles and ontological identities are not universal; they vary across time and space: And yet it is clear that these patterns are more pervasive and significant in some cultures than in others. Why is this?

One of the findings of my own comparative work on culture, sexuality and historical change has been to demonstrate that the intentional actor in search of a new identity requires a separate social space; it is within this liminal space that culture is created and transformed.²⁷³ Secrecy is a special case of this sort.²⁷⁴ It thus follows that, for the liminal being of the third-sex or third-gendered person, categories create the possibilities of social relations; but passing as normative may be required unless the social spaces and cultural places for thirdness are structured across the course of life. Only a few societies around the world have provided this, such as the hijras of India; and these offer prime examples of the

institutionalization of third sex and gender into the social fabric of human groups.

The existence of a dualistic ontology, such as sexual dimorphism, as a principle in our worldview often predicates its antithesis and brings into being its mediators, whether at the level of ideology or social practice. Is the two-sex system of Western culture, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, a universal or a local condition of human nature? If it is universal, why does it not occur everywhere? Yet, if it is local, why do we find so many examples of it distributed around the world? Does biological reproduction force humans to work around if not to invoke the two-sex system? My hunch is that, where reproduction is considered the *sine qua non* of sexuality, as in the United States during the past century, we should expect to find the most disapproving attitudes toward the third sex. Indeed, these attitudes might be characterized as representing the horror of sexual ambiguity, noted in the early 1960s by Garfinkel in his study of transsexuals, hermaphrodites and other odd sorts who passed as "normal."²⁷⁵ We thus come to have instantiated within and on us the very signs of a two- or three-sex/gender system – onto our private parts and in the whispers of the self.

We must conclude that it is indeed rather difficult to create and maintain third-sex and third-gender categories; and perhaps the imperfect fit between personal and sexual desire and social duty or customary roles helps us to explain the reason. And yet, nonetheless, this achievement is by no means rare and is, indeed, to be expected as part of the historical, social and psychic landscape in a good number of times and places, as we have seen.

Conversely, sexual dimorphism is not inevitable, a universal structure. Certainly it is celebrated in many places but it is not privileged at all times and places. An insight that emerges from Bateson's study of the structural relations between roles and categories is the difficulty of maintaining balance between symmetrical dyadic systems.²⁷⁶ That things come in twos and not threes, and that a third category tends to mediate the other two, has long been noted by social thinkers and those in exchange theory, perhaps iterated by Simmel's classic essay.²⁷⁷ Many postmodern writ-

ers have critiqued the biological reductionism of past models of sexuality and gender. Many, such as Kessler and McKenna, for instance, treat the berdache and similar examples apart from male and female as universal categories of gender dichotomies.²⁷⁸ They see the "dual-gender classification system" of our culture as a "cultural construction." It is obvious from my critiques that I am sympathetic with this view. However, in saying this, we must return to issues of desire, of pleasure, of being, which are transformed into doing, that is, into social and historical practice. Here, it seems to me in closing, we still have much to learn and a good deal of research ahead.

As I have shown elsewhere, the sexual ontology of the berdache is remarkable, because it posits a clear form of preferred sexual excitement, which may be one basis for attraction to the role.²⁷⁹ No anthropologist has ever explained why these particular forms of social and sexual desire created the perfect fit between individual and culture among the berdache, or, indeed, why this form of sexual excitement would be attractive to them. Many of us are interested in how and why the hijra, the *māhū*, the transsexual, the *kwolu-aatmwol* and so on have become what they are and committed to their social positions. But we would like to know more about their cultural ontologies and personal realities as well as their appearances. We are in great need, therefore, of a new historical ethnography that reveals the everyday life of sexuality and power relations, including the conditions under which passing and emergence occur, as they have been revealed, for instance, in the context of gay- or lesbian-identified people who "come out" by declaring their same-sex desires to create new social relations rather than continue to pass and remain secret. We need an anthropology and social history of desire that will lead us to closer approximations of understanding the lived realities of peoples themselves.²⁸⁰ It is toward this end that this book has modestly contributed a beginning.

Third Sex, Third Gender

Beyond Sexual Dimorphism

in Culture and History

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CHAPTER ONE

Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium

Kathryn M. Ringrose

Introduction

For almost a thousand years a loosely defined group of castrated men played key roles in Byzantine society, performing courtly, ceremonial, religious and other, less elevated functions. In an apparent paradox the practice of castrating men within the confines of the empire was forbidden under Roman law.¹ Christian teachings disapproved of the practice while applauding its outcome — permanent celibacy. Sources often notice and discuss eunuchs, but frequently hide them in the shadows in a way that belies their importance to society. Careful analysis of these references can provide access to societal attitudes about a wide range of matters involving sexuality and gender. Previous work on eunuchs in the Byzantine Empire has centered on their political and social roles at court, but little has been said about how they actually fitted into other parts of society. Most studies of eunuchs have been colored by the pejorative language used about them in the sources and by modern abhorrence of the practice of castration. This interesting antipathy toward eunuchs has deep and complex roots, roots that lie in definitions of gender that can be examined by a study of language and verbal imagery.

This essay explores the social and cultural placement of eunuchs in Byzantine society, going beyond a simple catalog of the positions they held to discuss several aspects of their sexual and gender identities. It attempts to show how they were perceived by the society in which they lived and worked. In the process it also demonstrates that sexual and gender definitions changed over

time as Byzantine society changed. Finally, it raises issues regarding sex and gender as defined in current social science. A better understanding of the ways in which eunuchs were integrated into Byzantine society, in the cultural and anthropological sense as well as in political and institutional terms, will tell us more not only about the eunuchs themselves but also about the roles of men and women in Byzantine culture.²

Men, Women and Eunuchs: Some Definitions of Sex and Gender

The term *eunuch* as used in Late Antique and Byzantine sources was broader and more nuanced than the simple phrase "castrated male" seems to imply. Moreover, its definition changed within Byzantine society between the third and twelfth century. In its broadest sense the word *eunuch* refers not only to an individual who is physiologically incapable of engendering an offspring but also to one who has chosen to withdraw from worldly activities and thus refuses to procreate. Thus, until the ninth century the term encompassed anyone who did not as well as could not produce children, including men who were born sterile, men who became sterile through illness, accident or birth defect, men who were lacking in sexual desire and men and women who embraced the celibate life for religious reasons. It also encompassed men who had had themselves castrated voluntarily for personal reasons, including Christian priests who wanted to have easier contact with women parishioners, intellectuals who wanted to preserve their vital body fluids to increase their intellectual powers and men who wanted to have intercourse with women without fear of pregnancy. The term also encompassed men who had been castrated, or whose families had them castrated as children, so that they could qualify for positions at court traditionally reserved for eunuchs. Also included were castrated male slaves from the outer reaches of the empire (e.g., Cappadocia, Armenia, the Caucasus Mountains) who were castrated as young children and then brought to the empire and sold, and, finally, illegitimate offspring of the imperial house – such as Romanos's illegitimate son, Basil – who were often castrated and reared as part of the household staff.³

Thus, such a broadly used term is not very useful without a brief look at the way in which the Roman and Byzantine world conceptualized views of sex and gender.⁴

Aristotle and Galen, while taking for granted that men and women constituted polar opposites, conceptualized sexuality in terms of ascending ladders reaching toward perfection. The rungs of these ladders, some "biological" and others socially determined, were derived from theories of the humors prevalent in medical thought, ideal norms for the education and acculturation of young men and women, ideas about appropriate social behavior for the sexes and assumptions about the intellectual and moral potential of men and women. At the bottom of the ladder were women and girls, who were associated with coldness and dampness. Part of the way up the ladder were boys and adolescent males, who, having left the socialization of the women's quarters, were learning to be aristocratic men. At the top of the ladder were those men who possessed the ultimate masculine attributes – heat, dryness, activity, fertility and training in aristocratic male behavior. As they matured and were acculturated into appropriate aristocratic male behavior, young males gradually moved up the ladder.⁵ Men who were castrated before puberty were "stuck" in a kind of arrested development. They certainly were more manly than women or young male children, but they could not reach the status of sexually mature men and thus could never attain the culturally defined attributes of full masculinity.

The ladder image implies not only a hierarchy of gender but also a male and female polarity. Thomas Laqueur argues in favor of a single-sex model for antiquity in which gender was more important than biological sexuality and then goes on to suggest that the female body is therefore always culturally constructed relative to a male reference point.⁶ His argument has many merits, but it has to be reconciled with two other issues. In the Byzantine world male bodies were both culturally and physiologically constituted into individuals who were referenced positively toward men and negatively toward women. That is, when sources wanted to speak well of an individual they used positive attributes traditionally ascribed to men. When they wanted to be critical they

employed negative values traditionally ascribed to women.

Moreover, despite this orientation to the ideal male, both Aristotle and Galen are also tied to language that leads them to express themselves in terms of sexual polarities. Thus, Aristotle says that eunuchs are changed into women, or, as he puts it, into a female state.⁷ Galen, in discussing castration, says that it makes eunuchs similar to women, that is, they are lacking in heat.⁸ Thus, he tends to class eunuchs with women and boys, perhaps implying that eunuchs are changed into women. The language used seems to imply that maleness and femaleness are polar opposites.

Galen actually presents a theory that goes beyond defining the female in terms of a lack of male attributes. He suggests that biological sexuality is related to the testes and argues that both men and women have testes and produce seed. Then, in an argument that runs parallel to the modern medical understanding of hormones, he says that it is the male testes that give men their masculine attributes and the female testes that give women their feminine attributes. Galen then speculates about the existence of a third group of mature animals, once either male or female, that have been surgically altered so that they lack testes.⁹ The two types of altered animals develop similar physical traits and are "neither male nor female, but a third being different from both of the two." This passage comes close to describing a third sex, but it is one of the few sources to do so explicitly and uses pigs as the illustrative example. It is important to remember that Galen is talking here about animals, and he does not speculate directly in this way about human beings. But note, however, the underlying assumption of male/female polarity in the way that Galen presents the idea.

Following in the tradition of Aristotle and Galen, Alexander Trallianus and Aetius Amidenus Medicus, medical writers of the sixth century C.E., also discussed these issues. Using classifications based on the texture of human flesh, the appearance of the complexion in different individuals and their physical strength or hardness as opposed to bodily softness, these authors follow the earlier writings of Aristotle and Galen and classify women, children and eunuchs together while setting men aside as a separate group, lending support to Laqueur's conceptual model.¹⁰

Other authors classify the world in terms of generative powers. Clement of Alexandria separates men, women and eunuchs. For him eunuchs constitute a broad category similar to the one given at the beginning of this section. It includes those who are born sterile, those who are castrated and those who choose not to be sexual, including celibate men and women.¹¹ Eustratius the Philosopher says that a eunuch, in his lack of fertility, is to a man as a dead man is to a living man. Fertility, like life, is essential to the definition of manliness; therefore eunuchs are not fully men. Here, of course, the gender alternative is referenced to the "normal" man. Eunapios of Sardis clearly implies that eunuchs are not really men when he says, "Since he was a eunuch he passed his life as a man" or "since he was a eunuch he used force to make himself a man."¹² Gregory Nazianzos seems to accept a male-female polarity and places eunuchs in a nebulous third category as women/men, individuals who are "womanlike and, among men, are not manly, of dubious sex."¹³ Similarly John of Damascus, quoting Saint Basil, points out that a eunuch cannot suckle and therefore is not a woman and yet is also not a man.¹⁴

What we see here are several intellectual traditions occurring side by side. The medical/scientific tradition of Aristotle and Galen certainly supports a vertical continuum that attempts to explain physiological differences among men, women, children and eunuchs as a progression toward masculinity. It also offers convenient explanations for old age — elderly men move down the physiological ladder in the direction of women, children and eunuchs.

Yet despite the tidiness of this single-sex structure, a bipolar model was clearly also lurking in the language available to Late Antique and Byzantine authors.¹⁵ The very structure of the Greek language demands that individuals be either masculine or feminine. In this linguistic context eunuchs invariably took the masculine gender and were never associated with feminine or neuter grammatical forms. Greek society reflexively placed individuals in fixed masculine or feminine categories. Its language did not readily allow for a definition of individuals of indeterminate sexual categories. Aristotle, however, did use the adjective ἀμφίβολος,

meaning an individual of indeterminate gender, for eunuchs. This term continues to be applied to eunuchs throughout the Late Antique and Byzantine period. Whether the conceptualization of gender was bipolar or single-sex-oriented, however, it remained difficult to define individuals who neither conformed to accepted polarities nor progressed along the ladder that bridged the sexual polarities and led to the male ideal.

The ability to procreate was important in defining gender. Byzantine society, like the Roman society from which it grew, was patriarchal in structure. Maintenance of the family was central, and loss of the generative function placed an individual outside of the logic of conventional, family-derived social categories. All of our texts acknowledge this and set eunuchs apart from this patriarchal schema, citing their lack of procreative ability, their origins outside the empire and their servile origins.¹⁶ Yet none of them expressly states that eunuchs are a specific "third sex" or "third gender." The patterns of thought that involved sexual polarities were much too strong.

Children, because they also do not procreate, constituted a similar anomaly. But for them the condition was not permanent, and with proper societal conditioning boys became men and girls became women. Thus, while preadolescent boys were often seen as magically or spiritually distinct from adult men, they could be accommodated into the system. Ultimately the language and logic of polarity that was derived from procreation left eunuchs in limbo.

At the same time Byzantine society apparently did not rigidly link sexual activity with procreation. While eunuchs could not procreate, they could be sexually active. Eunuchs are often portrayed as engaging in sexual activity with both men and women. Since this sex act was not seen as a procreative activity and since procreation rather than sexual activity was the critical component of gender, the sexuality of eunuchs did not help place them in a clearly defined gender.

Constructing a Gender: Castration and Physiology

The inclusiveness of the term *eunuch* in the early Byzantine centuries reflects the ambiguities of definition regarding their sex-

ual status found in our sources. It also reflects the many ways in which the eunuchs who appear in our sources were castrated. The type of mutilation carried out, and the age at which it was done, varied greatly and affected the physiological outcome in ways that were evident to a society in which external appearances were important in establishing rank, status and moral worth as well as gender. We can make only educated guesses about some of the technical details of this complex problem, but in part the variety of people defined as eunuchs reflects the variety of ways in which castration could be performed and the fact that it could be done at almost any age.¹⁷

Medical texts indicate that surgeons understood the function of the *vas deferens* and knew how to cut off the supply of semen while retaining normal masculinity.¹⁸ Michael Psellus tells us that eunuchs were made by mothers and nurses crushing infants' testicles.¹⁹ Tying off of the testicles in infancy was also practiced. From about the tenth century the term for mutilated eunuchs becomes "cut," a term that probably refers to the surgical removal of the testicles, usually in childhood.²⁰ More extreme castrations, in which the penis was removed along with other genitalia, were also known, but this type of mutilation was rare in Byzantium.²¹

Late Antique and Byzantine authors speculated about the physical nature of eunuchs and their sexuality. They recognized that men castrated as adults retained most secondary male sexual characteristics and continued to be sexually active, while those castrated in infancy or childhood developed a distinctive skeletal structure, lacked full masculine musculature, body hair and beards, had an elevated voice range and rarely went bald. These physical traits came to be associated with eunuchs and provided part of the stereotypes that were ascribed to them. These authors also assumed that eunuchs, like women, could not control their sexual desires and were available as passive sexual partners for men while being, themselves, attracted to either men or women. Whatever their object of sexual choice, eunuchs were assumed to be frustrated and were objects of pity because they could not enjoy full masculine sexuality. Eunuchs in Byzantine society, at least those castrated as young children, were unique in being indi-

viduals who were physiologically altered and acculturated into a new gender role before they were old enough to have developed an idea of what their sexual object choice might be.

The physiological effects of castration were also believed to cause changes in a eunuch's temperament and moral fiber. Thus, eunuchs were thought to lack mental stability, to anger quickly and easily and to lack self-control. These societal attitudes about the moral worth of eunuchs date from the time of the Roman Empire and continue to appear in Late Antique and Byzantine sources. A common descriptive adjective used of eunuchs throughout this thousand-year period is ποικίλος, "changeable." Perhaps this is the psychological parallel to ἀμφίβολος, "ambiguous," mentioned earlier in the discussions of the physiology of eunuchs. For example, Michael Psellus comments on the changeable nature of the eunuch John the Orphanotrophos. He says that he admires John's shrewdness, his cleverness in managing money and the way he can look at people and frighten them. He acknowledges that John is hard working and devoted to the emperor, yet he finds that John's moods are changeable. He finds him a complicated, intricate man, difficult to understand.²² In an aristocratic society in which gender was strictly determined and affect was rigidly prescribed, eunuchs were believed to be able to change their psychological affect and share attributes of two genders. This perception probably contributed to the belief that eunuchs possessed special magical powers. In fact the term ποικίλος is often used for magicians.

Possibly because they retained some traits of prepubescent boys, possibly because they were incapable of wasting their vital essence in procreation and most certainly because they were often well educated and engaged in professions and activities that outsiders did not understand, eunuchs were regarded with awe and suspicion. The question of the degree to which a eunuch might represent a prepubescent boy is of great interest and is almost certainly related to the recurrent imagery in which boys, eunuchs and angels are mistaken for one another. All have a similar physical appearance and are incapable of generating offspring. I suspect that they all share similar magical powers, a topic of

great interest that I will not be able to cover in this essay.²³

Many of the traits ascribed to eunuchs also reflect the gendered polarities of language, attributing to eunuchs the opposite of behaviors and appearances that were the markers of aristocratic men and suggesting a lack of a fixed third category to which eunuchs might belong. The list of adjectives beginning with "α-" ("not") and describing eunuchs is strikingly long. To cite only a few examples, whole men are endowed with θυμός (spirit, strength, courage, heart, desire). They are καρπός (fruitful), μέτριος (measured in their actions), ἀνδρείος (manly), προσηνής (gentle, kindly), μεταδότης (generous) and σθένης (strong). Eunuchs are ἀδύμος (fainthearted), ἀκαρπός (unfruitful), ἀμετρος (immoderate), ἀνάνδρος (unmanly) or even, using the diminutive, ἀνδράριον (little men). They are ἀπηνής (unkind), ἀμειάδορες (ungenerous), and they suffer from ἀσθένεια (weakness). There is also a shorter list that begins with "δυσ" ("un"). Men are easy, agreeable, "cool" (used in its modern rather than Galenic sense), popular. They have εὐχέρεια. Eunuchs are harsh, offensive, hard to manage, difficult, unpopular and unpleasant. They are characterized by δυσχερεία. Similar pejorative language is also used about women. All of this is summed up especially well in an early medical text: "Stiff, sickly, shrill-voiced, beardless, boyish, womanlike, these traits describe eunuchs. The traits of a man are his production of semen, warmth, strength, hairiness, pleasant voice, cheerfulness, strength of intellect and accomplishment."²⁴ One early commentator even suggests that a specific personality change accompanies castration: "To eunuchs there is, by nature, a mark more evil than among other men. So they are very savage minded, deceitful, evil doers, some more than others. Some of the cut eunuchs undergo a sudden change together with the mark of the cut. Most of them retain the nature of their kind."²⁵

Thus, the sexual definitions of eunuchs in Byzantine culture were neither very consistent nor unambiguous, and most writers who referred to them left eunuchs in a nebulous place outside a conceptual scheme that linked gender and procreation and was male oriented. This did not, however, prevent society from constructing eunuchs as a distinct gender. We have already seen that

they were believed to be physically of both a male and female nature and psychologically "changeable" and that these attributes were thought to be directly related to their castration.

Constructing a Gender: Acculturation and Social Roles

Despite the linguistic constraints connected with defining them as such, Byzantine eunuchs constituted a "third gender." They were excluded from male and female procreative roles and thus could not be recognized as either. They were assigned many social roles that were accepted as necessary but that had come to be considered inappropriate for either men or women as they were gendered. They also lived with a convention that attributed to them provincial, servile and nonaristocratic origins.

Distinctive and exclusive roles were linked not only to distinctive physiology but also to learned behaviors, mannerisms and a distinctive sexual status, all adding to the construct that helps us define them as a distinct gender. This can be seen most clearly in the case of the eunuch servants and household functionaries found both at court and in aristocratic homes. Maude Gleason, in a fascinating study of Late Antique physiognomic texts, offers a catalog of traits that were believed to characterize individuals who were neither fully masculine nor fully feminine.²⁶ These traits are almost identical to those later ascribed to eunuchs and include characteristics of voice, gait, raised eyebrows, mincing steps, slack limbs, a shrill weepy voice, upturned hands, shifty eyes and inappropriately loud laughter.

The acculturation to distinctive bearing and mannerisms is attested by a number of sources. Young castrated slaves were raised in the women's quarters under the supervision of older eunuchs. They were then educated at court for career paths open only to eunuchs. A common derogatory phrase was that eunuchs were "reared in the shade."²⁷ This phrase carries a number of different and charged meanings, including the assumption that eunuchs were reared under the same circumstances as women. Men live in light and brightness, the *palaestra*; women live in the *gynaecaeum*, enclosed, secluded. Ruddy, suntanned skin is a sign of masculinity; white, soft skin, femininity.²⁸ Similar distinctions

were apparent in speech patterns. The eunuchs at court were conditioned to use characteristic speech patterns, and various texts discuss the "chattering" of eunuchs. This acculturation included facial expressions and body language. For example, the eunuch Joseph raised his eyebrows and looked haughty when he spoke to people.²⁹

Byzantine sources regularly tell us that eunuchs must be graceful and well made, a trait that Danelides was aware of when he made a gift of one hundred eunuchs to the court. "For he knew they needed eunuchs and they are like flies among them, caring for them like sheep in the fold in the spring."³⁰ Eunuchs flock, hover, swarm. They act together as a group and, in political crisis, support one another, a stereotype borne out by shadowy but unmistakable evidence of an interconnected network of eunuchs serving at court and in the great houses of the city.³¹ At least at court eunuchs also wore a distinctive costume.³²

The stereotyping of eunuchs is illustrated clearly in one of the foundation legends associated with Hagia Sophia. In the course of the story Saint Michael, the archangel, appears at the building site. Because he is beardless, youthful and wearing a long white robe, it is assumed that he is a court eunuch.³³ The prescribed costume of eunuchs also included minor adornments, especially earrings, an identifying feature of both eunuchs and women.³⁴ Thus, distinctive roles and sexual status were linked with dress, mannerisms, speech and body language in a way that identified eunuchs as a separate gender. Society had well-defined expectations about them, and it had institutionalized the process of selection and acculturation that fulfilled these expectations. Although Western society tends to establish gender categories based on choice of sexual object, many other societies, including Byzantine society, emphasize occupation and appearance in determinations of gender status while rarely mentioning sexual object choice.³⁵

Gendering also involves the assignment of specific and often exclusive roles in society. The acculturation of eunuchs prepared them for the tasks that Byzantine culture assigned to them. Many of these roles were considered to be unmasculine or else involved tasks that were performed by women outside an aristocratic soci-

ety. At court eunuchs acted as "masters of ceremonies," controlling access to the emperor; as doorkeepers; as servants in charge of traditionally female activities like cooking, serving and care of the wardrobe. Court eunuchs were also trained for tasks that aristocratic males traditionally avoided, such as bookkeeping, managing money and speculating in real estate.³⁶ Certain positions at court were reserved specifically for eunuchs. They served as go-betweens in transactions between men and women of the court and between the court and the outside world. They acted as trusted secretaries. They served as singers at court. They were very much involved in marital transactions and prepared the dead for burial.³⁷ They regularly appear in our sources as barbers, bloodletters and doctors.³⁸

Traditionally the emperor and the empress each had his or her own corps of household eunuchs. In the emperor's household they fulfilled female roles as caregivers, and sources, especially those hostile to eunuchs, often hint that they were sexual partners for the emperor.³⁹ Michael Psellus reports that the emperor Constantine VII's household was "most of all made up of those chamberlains and eunuchs of the bedchamber that he had procured. They were not among the well born nor those who are freedmen, but were provincials and foreigners. Since they owed their education to the emperor and adopted his nature, they were judged more worthy of honors than others. And they concealed the shame of their fate from people's opinion. They spoke and acted like freedmen and they were lavish with their wealth and abundant in their good works, and showed other gentlemanly qualities." Psellus, who is generally well disposed toward eunuchs, nevertheless finds them demeaned by their condition. When he talks about Michael V's actions in castrating John the Orphanotrophos's male relatives, for example, he says that their lives were made a "half death."⁴⁰

Yet in the imperial household, especially during those periods when a woman held the throne, eunuchs became trusted political advisers and powerful administrators. Well before the tenth century they had acquired roles far beyond their much older functions as guardians of the harem. Nevertheless, because of

their gendered status, eunuchs could never pose a direct threat to the crown.⁴¹

Eunuchs as Intermediaries and as Protagonists

Many of the roles and functions ascribed primarily to eunuchs involved mediations and transactions across boundaries. These roles often required that eunuchs supervise boundaries, especially those charged with religious or supernatural elements. Regulating access to the emperor also meant protecting the sacred space around him.⁴² Mediating, brokering and transmitting messages between persons who were constrained by etiquette from meeting directly all carried the same charge. Medical work and caring for the dead also required that eunuchs mediate between this world and the powers of the supernatural. Finally, there are numerous parallels between eunuchs as go-betweens and angels as messengers that suggest that eunuchs mediated between the world of immediate reality and the world of the imagination. Just as women are engendered in many cultures as the monitors of birth and death, so also eunuchs had an analogous terrain assumed to be exclusively theirs. While individual eunuchs often occupied powerful positions typically held by whole men in other cultures, their success (or failure) had to be explained with reference to their distinctive gender.

Court eunuchs also frequently appeared in important positions normally held by males in the army and the navy. The most famous of these, of course, was Narses, Justinian's great general. Procopius believed that the removal of the testicles destroyed the seat of a man's natural powers, yet he was lavish in his praise of Narses.⁴³ He marveled that a eunuch raised in the women's quarters and accustomed to a soft life could overcome his inherent traits and command so successfully. Agathias chuckles at the naïveté of the Goths, who assumed that Narses was just a feeble caricature of a man who had set his masculinity aside and thus were unprepared for his military prowess.⁴⁴ Both of these authors stress the intelligence and skill of Narses, citing his planning and execution of a large operation. Neither, however, attributes his success to traditional, courageous manliness. In a different mili-

tary context, Leo the Deacon notes that the Scyths assumed that the eunuch Peter the Patrician was a "little woman raised in the shade." Leo then tells us how Peter surpassed everyone's expectations by killing a Scythian general in hand-to-hand combat. Despite that example of manliness, however, eunuchs were normally assumed to be successful commanders because they were clever, they were good at organizing campaigns and they understood strategy.⁴⁵

By the eleventh century, as the power of the great aristocratic families grew and aristocratic male values that applauded individual courage and personal military skill increasingly colored historical accounts, we find eunuch commanders subjected to open ridicule. Nikephoros Bryennius, for example, admittedly a source prejudiced toward the Comneni dynasty, describes the events that took place when Alexius Comnenus was forced to turn his military command over to John the Eunuch, who had been sent out from court to replace Alexius. Alexius first rides out to review his troops and dazzles them with a riding display. John the Eunuch attempts to duplicate his feat and falls off his horse, at which the soldiers all shout "klu, klu," a derogatory phrase "which is customarily said to eunuchs."⁴⁶

Outside the world of the court, eunuchs occupied a number of traditional niches, some of which were associated with marginality, pollution or outcast status. Eunuch singers in the church and actors in the theater both appear in Byzantine sources, part of a long tradition in which men played female roles in the theater and castrato singers were important in musical performances. The latter tradition would last until the nineteenth century. Eunuchs were often male prostitutes, and eunuch actors and prostitutes were often criticized for "talking dirty," for dressing in a "disorderly" manner and for pretending to be men. Eunuchs also frequently appear as physicians or teachers, professions occupied by educated slaves in the Roman world and requiring intimacy with men, women and children. In an echo of the logic that reflexively links eunuchs with the harem and the care of women and children, castration has traditionally facilitated this intimacy.

Parallel Definitions of Gender and Status: Lay Society and the Church

Some Religious Views of Eunuchs

The relatively tidy and straightforward vision of the creation and engendering of eunuchs as a self-perpetuating institution is only part of the story. It is a static picture that hides important changes in the attitudes about and status assigned to eunuchs by Byzantine culture and society over time. Christianity and the Church constituted a central force in this dynamic process. Thus far this discussion of the construction of a gender for eunuchs has explored the process in the secular society of Byzantium before the tenth century. Over time, however, lay society changed the way it defined eunuchs, giving the concept a narrower and more physiologically specific connotation. At the same time, religious rationales and practices created an alternative hierarchy of status for men, one in which moral worth and celibacy, in the context of the rejection of sexual desire, replaced procreative ability as standards for masculinity. Within this alternative gender hierarchy the sexual ambiguity of eunuchs became a serious issue only in the most conservative monastic circles.⁴⁷

Throughout the history of Byzantium eunuchs occupied places at all levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. They were monks, priests, bishops and church officials.⁴⁸ Churchmen reflected secular society in their ambivalence about eunuchs, but they focused on different issues. Rather than a preoccupation with the male ideal and procreation as points of reference, clerical discussion of eunuchs tended to focus on their relationship to the ideal of celibacy. Because of their physical castration, eunuchs in the Church were assumed to be celibate. Yet ecclesiastical sources frequently suggest that, in the struggle for ascetic virtue, eunuchs had "cheated" and were not able to attain fully the celibate ideal. That is, celibacy was too easy for them because they did not have to struggle to attain it. Rather, they had achieved celibacy through the outside intervention of castration.⁴⁹

Ecclesiastical opinions about this issue varied substantially, as is illustrated by the numerous Late Antique and Byzantine

glosses on Matthew 19.12, "For while some are eunuchs from birth, others are made eunuchs by men, and others have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven."⁵⁰ Some commentators, like Gregory Nazianzos, assume that this passage should be interpreted allegorically and thus applied to all men.⁵¹ Most Late Antique and Byzantine commentators, however, assumed that it should be interpreted literally. In their interpretation, the passage is assumed to apply to three categories of men, those who are born without sexual desire, those who have been castrated and those who choose to remain celibate. When the passage is interpreted in this way those who become eunuchs through physical mutilation are often connected with the powers of evil. Epiphanius, in the *Panarion*, sets up his categories in a slightly different way when he says that the passage refers to three groups of people, those castrated by others, those who have castrated themselves, something he sees as a wicked act that is contrary to the power of Christ, and celibate men who "imitate the angels."⁵² In the same vein, Clement of Alexandria offers an elaborate classification system for eunuchs. Using the term *eunuchs* in its broad definition, he distinguishes between those men born without desire for women, those born without fully functioning sexual organs, those who are made eunuchs "of necessity" by others and those who conquer their own bodies through the practice of celibacy.⁵³ Eusebius comments that Origen took Matthew 19.12 too literally when he castrated himself as a way of achieving celibacy.⁵⁴

Athanasius glosses the passage by dividing eunuchs into two groups, those castrated by other men "for the sake of the kingdom of women, to guard them and be conspicuous over others," a worldly goal of which Athanasius disapproves, and those who castrated themselves.⁵⁵ In this context, when Athanasius talks about men castrating themselves, he is using the phrase in its metaphorical sense and saying that these individuals are electing to ignore their sexual natures and live the celibate life for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. For Athanasius this is the highest goal to which a man can aspire. Similarly, John Chrysostom divides eunuchs into two groups, those castrated by other men and those who castrate themselves, again metaphorically, and live the celi-

bate life.⁵⁶ Those in the former group, he says, deserve no reward for their virtue, since their enforced celibacy comes from having their nature imposed on them, not from their own efforts. The latter group will be crowned in heaven because its members have practiced celibacy through their own efforts, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Chrysostom goes on to suggest that castration is the devil's work since it injures God's creation and allows men to fall into sin.

It is clear, just from this brief survey, that the ecclesiastical community of Late Antiquity and the early Byzantine period was uneasy about members who were castrated and thus had not had to struggle with their own sexuality. The Church was very uncomfortable with the fact of castration, especially self-imposed castration to ensure celibacy.

At the same time, however, there is never any suggestion that castrated men lacked the qualities of gender necessary for sanctity, priesthood or high office in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Nor are castrated churchmen ever presented as members of a third sex or gender category.⁵⁷ If eunuchs fall into any stereotypical category in the world of the Church, it is one that presents castrated men as individuals for whom salvation can be more difficult than for other men but not impossible. This reflects the popular assumption that achieving celibacy is easy for castrated men and the assumed association of eunuchs with sin and worldliness, an extension of the social reality that eunuchs were associated with professions perceived as immoral, outcast or sinful by both the Church and society. Eunuchs were also associated with women in various ways that involved physical proximity, physical nature and social roles, and thus were suspect in masculine arenas. Finally, they were also associated with the courtly and aristocratic world of luxury, sexuality and earthliness.

In the end, however, the religious world of Byzantium, with its orientation toward celibacy and the ascetic, did not place eunuchs in the sort of limbo that was part of their distinctive gender in secular society. While facing some special obstacles, eunuchs could aspire to the same spiritual and celibate ideal and high position as could whole men. Since the Church was a world that

excluded procreation from its concerns, the factors at work in constructing the gender status of eunuchs in the Church were different from those constructing the gender of secular eunuchs. We can see this clearly through a remarkable twelfth-century tract discussed below and by looking at how definitions of *eunuch* evolved over time in the secular and religious contexts of Byzantium.

A Twelfth-Century Dialogue about Eunuchs

We can perceive the status of Byzantine eunuchs in the twelfth century and detect some of the changes that had accumulated over eight centuries thanks to the fascinating early-twelfth-century *Defense of Eunuchs* by Theophylaktos, archbishop of Ohrid.⁵⁸ In this document we see that secular attitudes regarding eunuchs had hardened even as the Church was developing its own definition of the male ideal, one that undermined the distinct gendering of eunuchs.

Theophylaktos was a churchman educated in Constantinople. He wrote this work as a gift to his brother, who was probably a castrated cleric at Hagia Sophia, seat of the Byzantine patriarchate. The tract is cast in the form of a dialogue between a eunuch and a whole man on the occasion of the baptism of the eunuch's nephew, who had been castrated. The author begins by establishing that, in his mind, eunuchism is a well-defined, socially sanctioned institutional entity.⁵⁹ He divides adult males into two categories, those who are testicated, or whole, and those who are eunuchs, and each group is represented by a participant in the discussion.⁶⁰

The Critique of Eunuchs

The whole man speaks first. Echoing ideas I have discussed earlier in this essay, he lists his charges against eunuchism. He points out that castration is wrong because it is forbidden under Mosaic and Roman law and that it is illegal because it destroys something that God has made. Castration spoils a child's character because it produces moral weakness. This charge is followed by the familiar litany of eunuchs' faults: they yield to passions; they are greedy, avaricious, miserly and unsociable in their behavior; they are self-

centered, licentious, ambitious, envious, quarrelsome and deceitful. Eunuchs also have bad dispositions, are easily irritated by trifling things and are generally irascible. The whole man then proceeds to a discussion of palace eunuchs, suggesting that their position of power in the palace accentuates the above faults and claiming that a predisposition to these faults is accentuated by the fact that palace eunuchs are reared by women rather than by "real" men. Thus young eunuchs lack proper role models. Women teach them to be dissembling and slothful, while their weaker moral faculties render palace eunuchs vulnerable to their passions and prone to adopting effeminate traits.

The critic then moves on to theater eunuchs, who offend by warbling and trilling. They sing pornographic songs and have even introduced them into the church service. Some eunuchs behave publicly like actors, eating dainties and drinking too much, affecting a disorderly appearance, engaging in immoral behavior and talking dirty. They even pretend to be men and attempt to achieve sexual pleasure. In a quick aside the whole man comments that the last offense was especially true of eunuchs who guarded the harem. Eunuch actors, he says, are condemned by the company they keep (other theater folk) and the dirty words they speak, since words are the shadows of deeds. Viewers are aroused by the sight of them rubbing themselves against women and this is wrong. Finally, he charges that everyone knows that eunuchs are ill omened. This cryptic remark is one of the most interesting in the tract. Many of our earlier sources have contained veiled hints that eunuchs are unlucky, in league with the forces of evil and darkness, perhaps magical. This is an interesting problem that needs further study.

In Defense of Eunuchs

Theophylaktos then gives the floor to the eunuch in his dialogue, allowing him to present a defense of the institution. The eunuch employs a number of standard rhetorical devices, for example, deflecting his opponent's criticisms by suggesting that he is retailing stereotypes that might be true of Persian and Arabian eunuchs but not Byzantine eunuchs. He reminds his critic that

many churchmen are good and holy castrated men, suggesting that his opponent does not really know what he is talking about and is deliberately presenting only negative images of eunuchs. Here Theophylaktos seems to suggest that whole men cannot easily understand eunuchs because eunuchs have their own personal experience, which whole men cannot share.

The defender of eunuchs then proceeds to ask why those who practice voluntary celibacy are less evil than eunuchs, who were given no choice in the matter. Moreover, if the genitals are not to be used for procreation, why not just get rid of them? This question is raised in the context of a discussion of natural law. Critics of eunuchs say that castration is against nature, but what is "natural"? After all, if a child is born with a sixth finger, it is cut off. The function of the testicles is to produce sperm for procreation, but the higher goal of celibacy establishes that sperm is not needed for procreation. Why not, therefore, cut the testicles off, pruning the body just as a good farmer prunes his fruit trees to make them more productive? The eunuch goes on to ask how mutilation is different from the act of the ascetic who starves his body and thus destroys it. If the laws of God decree that the body should not be harmed, is this law not equally violated by the ascetic?

Next Theophylaktos, speaking through the eunuch, attacks the validity of traditional legislation against castration, suggesting that such controls are no longer relevant for Christians. The laws of Moses, he says, were written for another time and place and should not be applied literally. After all, the Hebrews thought that an individual's moral worth was reflected in his fertility, a value system now at odds with that of the Church. The long-standing Roman laws forbidding castration date from before Justinian, when procreation was thought necessary to make soldiers "men of blood." Such laws, he suggests, were created for a society that is very different from the world of the early twelfth century and the laws of Christianity. Roman law, after all, also punished those who did not marry. Christian ideals rendered Tribonian anachronistic when he included such legislation in the Justinian Code.⁶¹ Here the author is suggesting that laws of all

kinds can become outmoded and that we must look behind the law at real intent.

Theophylaktos then provides a careful definition of the term *eunuch*, one that is much narrower than its meaning in earlier centuries. He confines the term to individuals who have had their testicles either crushed or removed surgically, thus clearly limiting his use of the term to men who have been mutilated and excluding people who were "born lacking in desire," those born with defective genitalia and those who practice voluntary celibacy. To reduce the importance society places on worldly procreation, underscore the importance of celibacy and prove that eunuchs can achieve holiness, he catalogs important Old Testament figures who were eunuchs. He quotes scripture to show that, although eunuchs cannot have descendants on earth, they can have descendants in heaven, and they can achieve salvation like any other men.

Elsewhere he argues that church law must be understood in terms of time and place and should not be applied literally. It should be honored, but we must recognize that it was written for other times and conditions. Theophylaktos then summarizes his own position regarding eunuchs and castration, perhaps expressing the opinion of the Church of his time. He says that it is wrong for young men to have themselves castrated as a contraceptive measure, in order to seduce women, because in doing so they fail to respect the purpose of ejaculation and coitus. Adult castration is also sinful because it endangers the body.

The castration of children, however, is presented differently. When castration is done to preserve a child's virginity, it is an act of legitimate parental concern. The argument Theophylaktos makes here is interesting. He suggests that there are two sorts of men in society, those who live in the world and procreate children and those who adopt the celibate life and abandon their procreative function. In either case the path toward aristocratic manliness or ecclesiastical manliness (i.e., successful celibacy) must be established while the individual is still young. Here Theophylaktos is specifically advocating two different ladders, each leading to a different conception of full masculine perfec-

tion. It is clear that the older pattern of classical Graeco-Roman society, in which young aristocratic males were acculturated with great care to ensure that they would become proper men, has now been adapted to an ecclesiastical context that emphasizes early childhood rearing and may include physical mutilation to ensure celibacy. Theophylaktos answers the charges of those who say that castration is "against nature" by saying that "a Greek [i.e., a secular individual] lives according to nature and its laws are his goal, but ascetics choose a life beyond nature."⁶²

Theophylaktos thus turns both civil and ecclesiastical legislation on its head. He accepts that castration is wrong if its goal is to allow unregulated sexuality, but it is good if it ensures celibacy. Consequently he advocates the abandonment of outdated laws designed to protect and encourage reproduction.

Theophylaktos's defender of eunuchs also argues that those who legislate against castration have not bothered to explore the origins of eunuchism. As a result those who perform castrations are forced to evade the law by pretending that they are performing this surgery to cure a disease. If the institution were evil, why would it continue to exist? If it were truly sinful to castrate, the law would not be ignored. Therefore, he continues, there must be a reason for having eunuchs, and he proceeds to explain why they are needed in society. Yet the only examples he then cites involve the eunuchs of the palace. The palace, he says, is entrusted to eunuchs because they are capable of receiving instruction, they think for themselves, in contrast to slaves, and they are not coarse and stupid as are slaves. Clearly the author has observed that palace eunuchs are educated and are acculturated into modes of behavior and personal appearance that are considered by society to be elegant and suitable for the court.

Next the apologist proceeds to answer his antagonist's specific charges about the vices of eunuchs. "You have testified to the many passions of eunuchs, which comes from their being totally crushed, reducing them to the feminine state. I will not dignify this with a reply."⁶³ His opponent's charges have angered the apologist, and yet the complexity and ambiguity of the problem of gender are such that he is reluctant to deal with it. At the same

time he is offended at the suggestion that eunuchs might be classed with women.

The defender of eunuchs then proceeds to logical arguments, confronting stereotypes with real examples. How can eunuchs be described as physically and morally weak and at the same time wielding too much power in the state? After all, he says, there are historical examples of eunuchs who have been pirates and robbers, and they were certainly not physically weak. Eunuchs, he says, are accused of being niggardly and unsocial. How can this be the case when so many have acted as the protectors of widows and orphans? Eunuchs and whole men are alike in that some are good and some bad, but when eunuchs are bad it is noticed and commented on. This is especially true of palace eunuchs, yet the best of them model themselves on the imperial family.

Theophylaktos's critique of the use of stereotypes also extends to the religious world. How can eunuchs as a group be bad when so many of them hold important positions in churches and monasteries? They are good priests and bishops. Even if some eunuchs corrupt the singing in church with bawdy songs, other amateur singers who are whole men do the same thing. Why should the example of a few bad individuals create a stereotype about all of them? Moreover, since eunuchism is a "vessel of chastity" people should be predisposed to have a favorable impression of eunuchs. Finally, regarding the charge that eunuchs are ill omened, dull-witted men say the same thing about monks.⁶⁴

Redefining Manliness: An Alternative Construction of Gender

Throughout *The Defense of Eunuchs* the author argues that eunuchs are men and that the presence or absence of reproductive organs should not be the measure of manliness. He suggests that society has recognized two complementary paths, or ladders, to male perfection. He is acknowledging the traditional ladder that referenced gender definition to an aristocratic male ideal, but at the same time he is articulating the premise that there is an equally valid path referenced to the ideal of the celibate and spiritual male. In such a mental world reproductive organs simply have a

generative function, and if that function is irrelevant or unwanted then the useless material can be removed like a superfluous digit or branch on a fruit tree.

In this way Christianity and the Church created a ladder of status and perfection that, while it remained oriented to a male ideal (only men could be priests, after all), had rendered procreation irrelevant. Thus, a key component (the ability to procreate) of the complex of factors that led to the construction of a distinct gender for eunuchs in secular and court society had been eliminated in the religious realm.

The ecclesiastical community, at least as reflected in Theophylaktos, is defining manliness in a new way – in terms of spiritual perfection rather than physical or reproductive ability. For this part of society, at least, eunuchs are neither a third sex nor a third gender; they are simply men. For the rest of society eunuchs continue to be defined as incomplete men, although not necessarily as women. They have a place in society that is based on the presence or absence of sexual organs, the degree of development of the secondary sexual characteristics and cultural conditioning based on assumed gender.

We have also seen a gradual change in definitions of both male sexuality and gender, a change that is rooted in Christian thought, evolving philosophical traditions of Late Antiquity and social change. During the classical period masculinity was determined by procreative ability and active sexual roles. Eunuchs, especially those who lacked masculine biological traits, were despised. Some people may have seen them as a third sex, and they obviously constituted a third gender. With the development of the ascetic life and the rejection, at least in ecclesiastical circles, of sexuality and procreation as defining elements in society, eunuchs became less ambiguous sexually, although those who had been gendered into behaviors negatively perceived by the Church continued to be treated as outsiders by churchmen and laymen alike. Within the Church, however, a man who was castrated as a child and reared within the Church could achieve a high degree of social acceptance.

Byzantine eunuchs were thus a feature of Byzantine culture and

society that reflected much more than the castration of men who could then safely function in the intimacy of the imperial household. If one looks past the polarity of language and male-oriented definitions of gender that are attached to eunuchs, it becomes apparent that they acquired the main attributes of a distinctive, socially constructed gender. Aside from their physical condition, they were embedded in a self-sustaining web of assumptions about their intrinsic nature and the gendered nature of their specific roles in society, external appearances, acculturation to sustain those appearances and the importance of procreation.

TRANS

gender **WARRIORS**

MAKING HISTORY

FROM JOAN OF ARC

TO DENNIS RODMAN

LESLIE FEINBERG

Beacon Press

BOSTON

I FOUND MY FIRST CLUE

that trans people have not always been hated in 1974. I had played hooky from work and spent the day at the Museum of the American Indian in New York City.

The exhibits were devoted to Native history in the Americas. I was drawn to a display of beautiful thumb-sized clay figures. The ones to my right had breasts and cradled bowls. Those on the left were flat chested, holding hunting tools. But when I looked closer, I did a double-take. I saw that several of the figures holding bowls were flat chested; several of the hunters had breasts. You can bet there was no legend next to the display to explain. I left the museum curious.

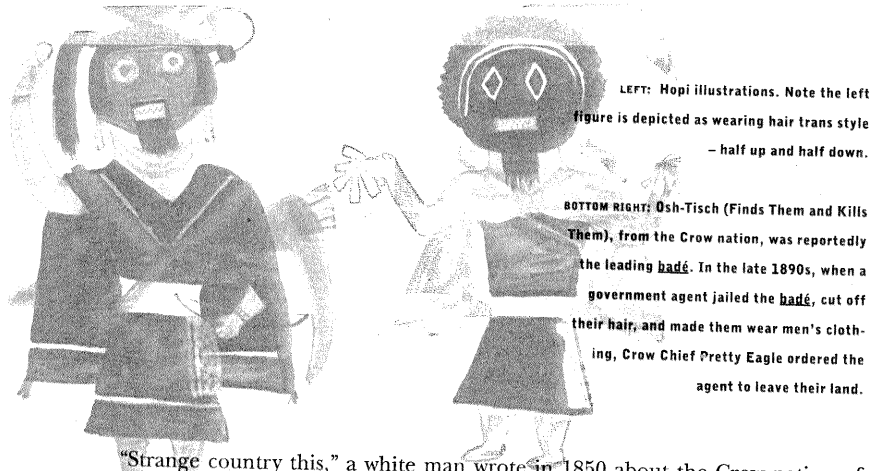
What I'd seen gnawed at me until I called a member of the curator's staff. He asked, "Why do you want to know?" I panicked. Was the information so classified that it could only be given out on a "need to know" basis? I lied and said I was a graduate student at Columbia University.

Sounding relieved, he immediately let me know that he understood exactly what I'd described. He said he came across references to these berdache* practically every day in his reading. I asked him what the word meant. He said he thought it meant transvestite or transsexual in modern English. He remarked that Native peoples didn't seem to abhor them the way "we" did. In fact, he added, it appeared that such individuals were held in high esteem by Native nations.

Then his voice dropped low. "It's really quite disturbing, isn't it?" he whispered. I hung up the phone and raced to the library. I had found the first key to a vault containing information I'd looked for all my life.

*"Berdache" was a derogatory term European colonizers used to label any Native person who did not fit their narrow notions of woman and man. The blanket use of the word disregarded distinctions of self-expression, social interaction, and complex economic and political realities. Native nations had many respectful words in their own languages to describe such people; Gay American Indians (GAI) has gathered a valuable list of these words. However, cultural genocide has destroyed and altered Native languages and traditions. So Native people ask that the term "Two-Spirit" be used to replace the offensive colonial word — a request I respect.

In a further attempt to avoid analyzing oppressed peoples' cultures, I do not make a distinction between sex and gender expression in this chapter. Instead, I use sex/gender.



LEFT: Hopi illustrations. Note the left figure is depicted as wearing hair trans style – half up and half down.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Osh-Tisch (Finds Them and Kills Them), from the Crow nation, was reportedly the leading *badé*. In the late 1890s, when a government agent jailed the *badé*, cut off their hair, and made them wear men's clothing, Crow Chief Pretty Eagle ordered the agent to leave their land.

"Strange country this," a white man wrote in 1850 about the Crow nation of North America, "where males assume the dress and perform the duties of females, while women turn men and mate with their own sex!"¹

I found hundreds and hundreds of similar references, such as those in Jonathan Ned Katz's ground-breaking *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*, published in 1976, which provided me with additional valuable research. The quotes were anything but objective. Some were statements by murderously hostile colonial generals, others by the anthropologists and missionaries who followed in their bloody wake.

Some only referred to what today might be called male-to-female expression. "In nearly every part of the continent," Westermarck concluded in 1917, "there seem to have been, since ancient times, men dressing themselves in the clothes and performing the functions of women...."²

But I also found many references to female-to-male expression. Writing about his expedition into northeastern Brazil in 1576, Pedro de Magalhães noted females among the Tupinamba who lived as men and were accepted by other men, and who hunted and went to war. His team of explorers, recalling the Greek Amazons, renamed the river that flowed through that area the *River of the Amazons*.³

Female-to-male expression was also found in numerous North American nations. As late as 1930, ethnographer Leslie Spier observed of a nation in the Pacific Northwest: "Transvestites or berdaches ... are found among the Klamath, as in all probability among all other North American tribes. These are men and women who for reasons that remain obscure take on the dress and habits of the opposite sex."⁴

I found it painful to read these quotes because they were steeped in hatred. "I saw a devilish thing," Spanish colonialist Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca wrote in the sixteenth century.⁵ "Sinful, heinous, perverted, nefarious, abominable, unnatural, disgusting, lewd" – the language used by the colonizers to describe the acceptance of sex/gender diversity, and of same-sex love, most accurately described the viewer, not the viewed. And these sensational reports about Two-Spirit people were used to further "justify" genocide, the theft of Native land and resources, and destruction of their cultures and religions.

But occasionally these colonial quotes opened, even if inadvertently, a momen-

tary window into the humanity of the peoples being observed. Describing his first trip down the Mississippi in the seventeenth century, Jesuit Jacques Marquette chronicled the attitudes of the Illinois and Nadouessi to the Two-Spirits. "They are summoned to the Councils, and nothing can be decided without their advice. Finally, through their profession of leading an Extraordinary life, they pass for Manitous, – That is to say, for Spirits, – or persons of Consequence."⁶

Although French missionary Joseph François Lafitau condemned Two-Spirit people he found among the nations of the western Great Lakes, Louisiana, and Florida, he revealed that those Native peoples did not share his prejudice. "They believe they are honored ..." he wrote in 1724, "they participate in all religious ceremonies, and this profession of an extraordinary life causes them to be regarded as people of a higher order...."⁷

But the colonizers' reactions toward Two-Spirit people can be summed up by the words of Antonio de la Calancha, a Spanish official in Lima. Calancha wrote that during Vasco Núñez de Balboa's expedition across Panama, Balboa "saw men dressed like women; Balboa learnt that they were sodomites and threw the king and forty others to be eaten by his dogs, a fine action of an honorable and Catholic Spaniard."⁸

This was not an isolated attack. When the Spaniards invaded the Antilles and Louisiana, "they found men dressed as women who were respected by their societies. Thinking they were hermaphrodites, or homosexuals, they slew them."⁹

Finding these quotes shook me. I recalled the "cowboys and Indians" movies of my childhood. These racist films didn't succeed in teaching me hate; I had grown up around strong, proud Native adults and children. But I now realized more consciously how every portrayal of Native nations in these movies was aimed at diverting attention from the real-life colonial genocide. The same bloody history was ignored or glossed over in my schools. I only learned the truth about Native cultures later, by re-educating myself – a process I'm continuing.

Discovering the Two-Spirit tradition had deep meaning for me. It wasn't that



I thought the range of human expression among Native nations was identical to trans identities today. I knew that a Crow *badé*, Cocopa *warhameh*, Chumash *joya*, and Maricopa *kwiraxame'* would describe themselves in very different ways from an African-American *drag queen* fighting cops at Stonewall or a white *female-to-male transsexual* in the 1990s explaining his life to a college class on gender theory.

What stunned me was that such ancient and diverse cultures allowed people to choose more sex/gender paths, and this diversity of human expression was honored as sacred. I had to chart the complex geography of sex and gender with a compass needle that only pointed to north or south.



Barcheeampe, the Woman Chief, was an acclaimed hunter and warrior, praised in songs composed by the Crow people. When all the chiefs and warriors assembled for council, Barcheeampe sat as a chief, ranking third in a band of 160 lodges.

You'd think I'd have been elated to find this new information. But I raged that these facts had been kept from me, from all of us. And so many of the Native peoples who were arrogantly scrutinized by military men, missionaries, and anthropologists had been massacred. Had their oral history too been forever lost?

In my anger, I vowed to act more forcefully in defense of the treaty, sovereignty, and self-determination rights of Native nations. As I became more active in these struggles, I began to hear more clearly the voices of Native peoples who not only reclaimed their traditional heritage, but carried the resistance into the present: the takeover of Alcatraz, the occupation of Wounded Knee, the Longest Walk, the Day of Mourning at Plymouth Rock, and the fight to free political prisoners like Leonard Peltier and Norma Jean Croy.

Two historic developments helped me to hear the voices of modern Native warriors who lived the sacred Two-Spirit tradition: the founding of Gay American Indians in 1975 by Randy Burns (Northern Paiute) and Barbara Cameron (Lakota Sioux), and the publication in 1988 of *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology*. Randy Burns noted that the History Project of Gay American Indians "has documented these alternative gender roles in over 135 North American tribes."¹⁰

Will Roscoe, who edited *Living the Spirit*, explained that this more complex sex/gender system was found "in every region of the continent, among every type of native culture, from the small bands of hunters in Alaska to the populous, hierarchical city-states in Florida."¹¹

Another important milestone was the 1986 publication of *The Spirit and the Flesh*¹² by Walter Williams, because this book included the voices of modern Two-Spirit people.

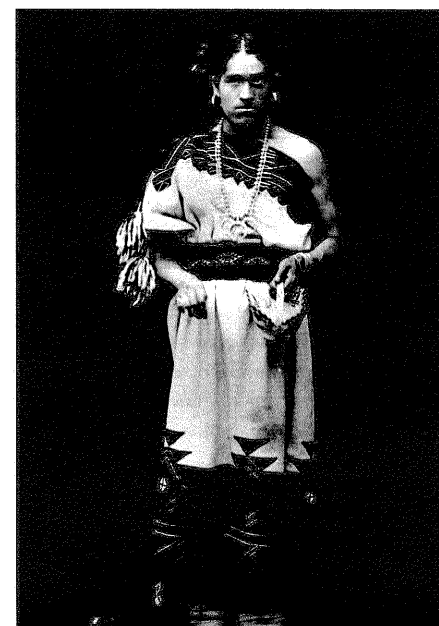
I knew that Native struggles against colonialization and genocide – both physical and cultural – were tenacious. But I learned that the colonizers' efforts to outlaw, punish, and slaughter the Two-Spirits within those nations had also met with fierce resistance. Conquistador Nuño de Guzmán recorded in 1530 that the last person taken prisoner after a battle, who had "fought most courageously, was a man in the habit of a woman. . . ."¹³

Just trying to maintain a traditional way of life was itself an act of resistance. Williams wrote, "Since in many tribes berdaches were often shamans, the government's attack on traditional healing practices disrupted their lives. Among the Klamaths, the government agent's prohibition of curing ceremonies in the 1870s and 1880s required shamans to operate underground. The berdache shaman White Cindy continued to do traditional healing, curing people for decades despite the danger of arrest."¹⁴

Native nations resisted the racist demands of U.S. government agents who tried to change Two-Spirit people. This defiance was especially courageous in light of the power these agents exercised over the economic survival of the Native people they tried to control. One such struggle focused on a Crow *badé* (*boté*) named *Osh-Tisch* (Finds Them and Kills Them). An oral history by Joe Medicine Crow in 1982 recalled the events: "One agent in the late 1890s . . . tried to interfere with Osh-Tisch, who was the most respected *badé*. The agent incarcerated the *badés*, cut off their hair, made them wear men's clothing. He forced them to do manual labor, planting these trees that you see here on the BIA grounds. The people were so upset with this that Chief Pretty Eagle came into Crow Agency, and told [the agent] to leave the reservation. It was a tragedy, trying to change them."¹⁵

How the *badés* were viewed within their own nation comes across in this report by S. C. Simms in 1903 in *American Anthropologist*: "During a visit last year to the Crow reservation, in the interest of the Field Columbian Museum, I was informed

We'Wha, a *lhamana*, wearing the ceremonial regalia of Zuni women. We'Wha was an accomplished weaver and potter and spent six months in Washington, D.C. in 1886, meeting President Grover Cleveland and others who never realized this six-foot Zuni was a *lhamana*. In 1896, We'Wha died and was buried in a woman's dress with a pair of men's pants underneath.



that there were three hermaphrodites in the Crow tribe, one living at Pryor, one in the Big Horn district, and one in Black Lodge district. These persons are usually spoken of as 'she,' and as having the largest and best appointed tipis; they are also generally considered to be experts with the needle and the most efficient cooks in the tribe, and they are highly regarded for their many charitable acts....

"A few years ago an Indian agent endeavored to compel these people, under threat of punishment, to wear men's clothing, but his efforts were unsuccessful."¹⁶

White-run boarding schools played a similar role in trying to force genera-

winktes in the 1920s and 1930s. "The missionaries and the government agents said *winktes* were no good, and tried to get them to change their ways. Some did, and put on men's clothing. But others, rather than change, went out and hanged themselves."¹⁸

Up until 1989, the Two-Spirit voices I heard lived only in the pages of books. But that year I was honored to be invited to Minneapolis for the first gathering of Two-Spirit Native people, their loved ones, and supporters. The bonds of friendship I enjoyed at the first event were strengthened at the third gathering in Manitoba in 1991. There, I found myself sitting around a campfire at the base of tall pines under the rolling colors of the northern lights, drinking strong tea out of a metal cup. I laughed easily, relaxed with old friends and new ones. Some were feminine men or masculine women; all shared same-sex desire. Yet not all of these people were transgendered, and not all of the Two-Spirits I'd read about desired people of the same sex. Then what defined this group?

I turned to Native people for these answers. Even today, in 1995, I read research papers and articles about sex/gender systems in Native nations in which every source cited is a white social scientist. When I began to write this book, I asked Two-Spirit people to talk about their own cultures, in their own words.

Chrystos, a brilliant Two-Spirit poet and writer from the Menominee nation, offered me this understanding: "Life among First Nation people, before first contact, is hard to reconstruct. There's been so much abuse of

traditional life by the Christian Church. But certain things have filtered down to us. Most of the nations that I know of traditionally had more than two genders. It varies from tribe to tribe. The concept of Two-Spirit-ness is a rather rough translation into English of that idea. I think the English language is rigid, and the thought patterns that form it are rigid, so that gender also becomes rigid.

"The whole concept of gender is more fluid in traditional life. Those paths are not necessarily aligned with your sex, although they may be. People might choose their gender according to their dreams, for example. So even the idea that your gender is something you dream about is not even a concept in Western culture – which posits you are born a certain biological sex and therefore there's a role you must step into and follow pretty rigidly for the rest of your life. That's how we got the concept of queer. Anyone who doesn't follow their assigned gender role is queer; all kinds of people are lumped together under that word."¹⁹

Does being Two-Spirit determine your sexuality? I asked Chrystos. "In traditional life a Two-Spirit person can be heterosexual or what we would call homosexual," she replied. "You could also be a person who doesn't have sex with anyone and lives with the spirits. The gender fluidity is part of a larger concept, which I guess the most accurate English word for is 'tolerance.' It's a whole different way of conceiving how to be in the world with other people. We think about the world in terms of relationship, so each person is always in a matrix, rather than being seen only as

an individual – which is a very different way of looking at things."²⁰

Chrystos told me about her Navajo friend Wesley Thomas, who describes himself as *nadleeh*-like. A male *nadleeh*, she said, "would manifest in the world as a female and take a husband and participate in tribal life as a female person." I e-mailed Wesley, who lives in Seattle, for more information about the *nadleeh* tradition. He wrote back that "*nadleeh* was a category for women who were/are masculine and also feminine males."²¹

The concept of *nadleeh*, he explained, is incorporated into Navajo origin or creation stories. "So, it is a cultural construction," he wrote, "and was part of the normal Navajo culture, from the Navajo point of view, through the nineteenth century. It began changing during the first half of the twentieth century due to the introduction of western education and most of all, Christianity. *Nadleeh* since then has moved underground."²²

Wesley, who spent the first thirty years of life on the Eastern Navajo reservation, wrote that in his initial fieldwork research he identified four categories of sex: female/woman, male/man, female/man, and male/woman. "Where I began to identify gender on a continuum – meaning placing female at one end and male on the other end – I placed forty-nine different gender identifications in between. This was derived at one sitting, not from carrying out a full and comprehensive fieldwork research. This number derived from my own understanding of gender within the Navajo cosmology."²³

I have faced so much persecution because of my gender expression that I



RIGHT: A *nadleeh* referred to as "Charlie" by photographer Adam Clark Vroman who took this photo at the Navajo hogans at Bitahoochee in 1895.

FAR RIGHT: Spotted Eagle holding grandson.



tions of kidnapped children to abandon their traditional ways. But many Two-Spirit children escaped rather than conform.

Lakota medicine man Lame Deer told an interviewer about the sacred place of the *winkte* ("male-to-female") in his nation's traditions, and how the *winkte* bestowed a special name on an individual. "The secret name a *winkte* gave to a child was believed to be especially powerful and effective," Lame Deer said. "Sitting Bull, Black Elk, even Crazy Horse had secret *winkte* names." Lakota chief Crazy Horse reportedly had one or two *winkte* wives.¹⁷

Williams quotes a Lakota medicine man who spoke of the pressures on the

also wanted to hear about the experiences of someone who grew up as a “masculine girl” in traditional Native life. I thought of Spotted Eagle, who I had met in Mani-toba, and who lives in Georgia. Walking down an urban street, Spotted Eagle’s gender expression, as well as her nationality, could make her the target of harassment and violence. But she is White Mountain Apache, and I knew she had grown up with her own traditions on the reservation. How was she treated?

“I was born in 1945,” Spotted Eagle told me. “I grew up totally accepted. I knew from birth, and everyone around me knew I was Two-Spirited. I was honored. I was a special creation; I was given certain gifts because of that, teachings to share with my people and healings. But that changed – not in my generation, but in generations to follow.”

There were no distinct pronouns in her ancient language, she said. “There were three variations: the way the women spoke, the way the men spoke, and the ceremonial language.” Which way of speaking did she use? “I spoke all three. So did the two older Two-Spirit people on my reservation.”²⁴

Spotted Eagle explained that the White Mountain Apache nation was small and isolated, and so had been less affected early on by colonial culture. As a result, the U.S. government didn’t set up the mission school system on the White Mountain reservation until the late 1930s or early 1940s. Spotted Eagle said she experienced her first taste of bigotry as a Two-Spirit in those schools. “I was taken out of the mission school with the help of my people and sent away to live with an aunt off reservation, so I didn’t get totally abused by Christianity. I have some very horrible memories of the short time I was there.”²⁵

“But as far as my own people,” Spotted Eagle continued, “we were a matriarchy, and have been through our history. Women are in a different position in a matriarchy than they are out here. It’s not that we have more power or more privilege than anyone else, it’s just a more balanced way to be. Being a woman was a plus and being Two-Spirit was even better. I didn’t really have any negative thoughts about being Two-Spirit until I left the reservation.”²⁶

Spotted Eagle told me that as a young adult she married. “My husband was also Two-Spirit and we had children. We lived in a rather peculiar way according to standards out here. Of course it was very normal for us. We faced a lot of violence, but we learned to cope with it and go on.”²⁷

Spotted Eagle’s husband died many years ago. Today her partner is a woman. Her three children are grown. “Two of them are Two-Spirit,” she said proudly. “We’re all very close.”²⁸

I asked her where she found her strength and pride. “It was given to me by the people around me to maintain,” she explained. “If your whole life is connected spiritually, then you learn that self-pride – the image of self – is connected with everything else. That becomes part of who you are and you carry that wherever you are.”²⁹

What was responsible for the imposition of the present-day rigid sex/gender system in North America? It is not correct to simply blame patriarchy, Chrystos stressed to me. “The real word is ‘colonization’ and what it has done to the world. Patriarchy is a tool of colonization and exploitation of people and their lands for wealthy white people.”³⁰

“The Two-Spirit tradition was suppressed,” she explained. “Like all Native spirituality, it underwent a tremendous time of suppression. So there’s gaps. But we’ve

continued on with our spiritual traditions. We are still attached to this land and the place of our ancestors and managed to protect our spiritual traditions and our languages. We have always been at war. Despite everything – incredible onslaughts that even continue now – we have continued and we have survived.”³¹

Like a gift presented at a traditional give away, Native people have patiently given me a greater understanding of the diverse cultures that existed in the Western hemisphere before colonization.

But why did many Native cultures honor sex/gender diversity, while European colonialists were hell-bent on wiping it out? And how did the Europeans immediately recognize Two-Spiritness? Were there similar expressions in European societies?

Thinking back to my sketchy high-school education, I could only remember one person in Europe whose gender expression had made history.



A 1594 Theodor de Bry engraving of Balboa using dogs to murder Two-Spirit Native people.

"DIDN'T JOAN OF ARC

wear men's clothes?" I asked a friend over coffee in 1975. She had a graduate degree in history; I had barely squeaked through high school. I waited for her answer with great anticipation, but she dismissed my question with a wave of her hand. "It was just armor." She seemed so sure, but I couldn't let my question go. Joan of Arc was the only person associated with cross-dressing in history I'd grown up hearing about.

I thought a great deal about my friend's answer. Was the story of Joan of Arc dressing in men's clothing merely legend? Was wearing armor significant? If a society strictly mandates only men can be warriors, isn't a woman military leader dressed in armor an example of cross-gendered expression?

All I knew about the feudal period in which Joan of Arc lived was that lords owned vast tracts of land and lived off the forced agricultural labor of peasants. But I made the decision to study Joan of Arc's life, and her story opened another important window on trans history for me.

In school, we'd quickly glossed over the facts of Joan of Arc's life. So I hadn't realized that in 1431, when she was nineteen years old, Joan of Arc was burned at the stake by the Inquisition of the Catholic Church because she refused to stop dressing in garb traditionally worn by men. And no one had ever taught me that her peasant followers considered Joan of Arc – and her clothing – sacred.

I discovered that more than ten thousand books have been written about Joan of Arc's extraordinary life. She was an illiterate daughter of the peasant class, who as a teenager demonstrated a brilliant military leadership that helped birth the nation-state of France. What impressed me the most, however, was her courage in defending her right to self-expression. Yet I was frustrated at how many texts analyzed Joan of Arc solely as an individual, removed from the dynamics of a tumultuous period and place. I was particularly interested in understanding the social soil in which this remarkable person was rooted.

Joan of Arc was born in Domremy, in the province of Lorraine, around 1412. Only half a century before her birth, the bubonic plague had torn the fabric of the feudal order. One-third of the population of Europe was wiped out, whole provinces were

depopulated. Peasant rebellions were shaking the very foundations of European feudalism.

At the time, France was gripped by the Hundred Years War. French peasants suffered plunder and violence at the hands of the marauding English occupation armies. The immediate problem for the peasantry was how to oust the English army, a task the French nobility had been unable to accomplish.

Joan of Arc emerged as a leader during this period of powerful social earthquakes. In 1429, dressed in men's clothing, this confident seventeen year old presented herself and a group of her followers at the court of Prince Charles, heir to the French throne. In the context of feudal life, in which religion permeated everything, Joan asserted that her mission, motivation, and mode of dress were directed by God. She declared her goal: to forge an army of peasants to drive out the English. Prince Charles placed her at the head of a ten-thousand-strong peasant army.

The rest is history that has been replayed again and again in text and film. Unable to read or write, Joan of Arc dictated a letter to the King of England and the Duke of Bedford, leader of the English occupying army in Orleans, demanding they leave French soil, vowing, "[I]f you do not do so, you will remember it by reason of your great sufferings."¹

On April 28, 1429, Joan led a march on Orleans. The next day, she entered the city at the head of her peasant army. By May 8, the English were routed. Over the next months, she further proved her genius as a military strategist and her ability to inspire the rank-and-file soldiers by liberating other French villages and towns and forcing the English to retreat.

Joan persuaded Charles to go to Rheims to receive the crown. It was an arduous trip – long and dangerous – through territory still occupied by English troops. Although her army was exhausted and famished along the way, they forced the English to yield still more turf. As Charles was crowned King of France, Joan stood



beside him, holding her combat banner. The French nation-state, soon to be fully liberated from occupation, was born.

On May 23, 1430, Joan was captured by the Burgundians, French allies of the English feudal lords. The Burgundians referred to her as *hommase*, a slur meaning “man-woman,” or masculine woman.² Had she been a knight or nobleman, King Charles would have offered a ransom for Joan’s freedom, since ransom was the customary method of freeing knights and nobility captured in battle. Even the sums were fixed – one could ransom a royal prince for 10,000 livres of gold, or 61,125 francs.³ Once ransom was offered, it *had* to be accepted. But Joan’s position as military leader of a popular peasant movement threatened the very French ruling class she helped lift to power. The French nobility didn’t offer a single franc for her release. What an arro-

BELOW FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

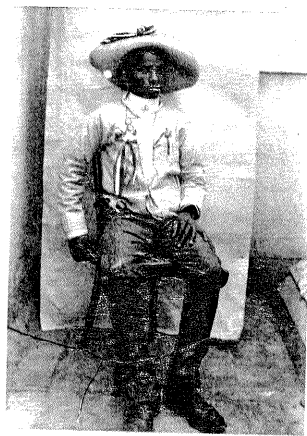
1) Joan of Arc has been claimed as a symbol by everyone from Church fathers who canonized her to French right-wing nationalists. Frequently, Joan of Arc is portrayed in art as an extremely feminine woman. Given the charges of transgender that led to her murder, it's more likely Joan looked like this rendition in a seventeenth-century painting, attributed to Jean de Caumont.

2) A virgin (center figure) of the Klementi tribe in Albania, circa 1910. Daughters had no say about when and to whom they were married. But if a virgin swore before twelve witnesses that she would never marry, that person was then recognized and ranked as a man, wore men's clothing, carried weapons, ate with other men, and worked as herdsmen of sheep and goats.

3) Catalina de Erauso was a Basque who cross-dressed and traveled to South America in the early 1600s as a conquistador. S/he and fellow soldiers slaughtered many Native peoples. While the Church and French ruling class saw Joan of Arc and her transgender expression as a threat, de Erauso, who fought on the side of colonialism, won the Pope's blessing to continue cross-dressing.

4) Liberté (Angélique Brulon) was a decorated officer in Napoleon's infantry, serving in seven campaigns between 1792 and 1799 that liberated much of Europe from feudalism. Liberté joined her husband's regiment after he was killed in warfare. Liberté “came out” during the war and became a hero to French women who wanted to replace Joan of Arc for having been so loyal to the nobility.





TOP: While this portrait of Nzinga, King of Angola from 1624 to 1653, is quite idealized, she ruled as a king, cross-dressed, and defeated the Portuguese army in many battles. BOTTOM: Afro-Mexicana revolutionary from Michoacán, one of many cross-dressed female warriors and revolutionaries who have helped make history. Another example was Chui Chin, a Chinese revolutionary, cross-dressing feminist who was tortured and beheaded in 1907 for her efforts at organizing an uprising against the Manchu dynasty. She founded a militant newspaper in Shanghai called The Chinese Women's Journal, organized an army, and helped plan an insurrection.

gant betrayal. How anxious they must have been to be rid of her.

The English urged the Catholic Church to condemn Joan for cross-dressing. The king of England, Henry VI, wrote to the infamous Inquisitor Pierre Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais: "It is sufficiently notorious and well-known that for some time past a woman calling herself Jeanne the Pucelle (the Maid), leaving off the dress and clothing of the feminine sex, a thing contrary to divine law and abominable before God, and forbidden by all laws, wore clothing and armour such as is worn by men." Buried beneath this outrage against Joan's cross-dressing was a powerful class bias. It was an affront to nobility for a peasant to wear armor and ride a fine horse. This offense was later elaborated in one of the charges against Joan that claimed she dressed "in rich and sumptuous habits, precious stuffs and cloth of gold and furs."⁴

The Burgundians sold Joan of Arc to the English, who turned her over to the Inquisition in November 1430. Joan was held in a civil prison in Rouen, France, an English stronghold at that time. She was reportedly guarded by English male soldiers who slept in her cell, in violation of the Church's own rules. She was shackled in a small iron cage "in which she was kept standing, chained by her neck, her hands and her feet," according to the locksmith who built the cage.⁵

Joan's trial began in Rouen on January 9, 1431. The Grand Inquisitors condemned Joan for cross-dressing and accused her of being raised a pagan. Church leaders had long charged that the district of her birth, Lorraine, was a hotbed of paganism and witchcraft. One of the principal accusations against Joan was that she associated with "fairies,"⁶ a charge leveled by the Church in their war against paganism. (Which, incidentally, derives from the Latin *paganus*, meaning rural dweller or peasant.) The Church was waging war against peasants who resisted patriarchal

theology and still held onto some of the old pre-Christian religious beliefs and matrilineal traditions. This was true of peasants in the area of Lorraine, even in the period of Joan's lifetime. For instance, the custom of giving children the mother's surname, not the father's, still survived there.⁷

Scapegoating Joan of Arc and the area of her birth fueled the Church's reactionary campaign. And the more Joan of Arc was idolized by her followers, the more she posed a threat to the Church's religious rule. Article III of the Articles of Accusations stated this clearly: "Item, the said Joan by her inventions has seduced the Catholic people, many in her presence adored her as a saint... even more, they declared her the greatest of all the saints after the holy Virgin..."⁸ No wonder the Church fathers feared her!

On April 2, 1431, the Inquisition dropped the charges of witchcraft against Joan, because they were too hard to prove. Instead, they denounced her for asserting that her cross-dressing was a religious duty compelled by voices she heard in visions, and for maintaining that these voices were a higher authority than the Church. Many historians and academicians view Joan of Arc's wearing men's clothing as inconsequential. Yet the core of the charges against Joan focused on her cross-dressing, the crime for which she ultimately was executed. However, the following quote from the verbatim court proceedings of her interrogation reveals it wasn't just Joan of Arc cross-dressing that enraged her judges, but her cross-gendered expression as a whole:

You have said that, by God's command, you have continually worn man's dress, wearing the short robe, doublet, and hose attached by points; that you have also worn your hair short, cut *en rond* above your ears, with nothing left that could show you to be a woman; and that on many occasions you received the Body of our Lord dressed in this fashion, although you have been frequently admonished to leave it off, which you have refused to do, saying that you would rather die than leave it off, save by God's command. And you said further that if you were still so dressed and with the king and those of his party, it would be one of the greatest blessings for the kingdom of France; and you have said that not for anything would you take an oath not to wear this dress or carry arms; and concerning all these matters you have said that you did well, and obediently to God's command.

As for these points, the clerks say that you blaspheme God in His sacraments; that you transgress divine law, the Holy Scriptures and the canon law; you hold the Faith doubtfully and wrongly; you boast vainly; you are suspect of idolatry; and you condemn yourself in being unwilling to wear the customary clothing of your sex, and following the custom of the Gentiles and the Heathen.⁹

Even though she knew her defiance meant she was considered damned, Joan's testimony in her own defense revealed how deeply her cross-dressing was rooted in her identity. "For nothing in the world," she declared, "will I swear not to arm myself and put on a man's dress."¹⁰

But by April 24, 1431, Joan's judges claimed she had recanted, after having been taken on a tour of the torture chamber, and brought to a cemetery where she was shown a scaffold that her tormentors said awaited her if she did not repent. Joan allegedly accused herself of wearing clothing that violated natural decency, and agreed to submit to the Church's authority and wear women's apparel. She was "mercifully" sentenced to life in prison on bread and water – in women's dress.

However, since Joan could neither read nor write, did she know the exact details of what she was signing? This is an important question, because cross-dressing was not a capital offense at that time. And the Inquisition did not have the power to turn a heretic over to the secular state for execution. But the church judges were empowered to condemn a *relapsed* heretic.¹¹

Did Pierre Cauchon, the Inquisitor, trick Joan into making her mark on a document that signed away more than she'd realized? Perhaps Cauchon later revealed the exact contents of the phony confession in hopes she would renege. Or were parchments switched? Witnesses described Joan making her mark on a short declaration; the confession in the court records is very long.¹²

Whatever the case, Joan recanted the alleged abjuration within days and resumed wearing men's clothes. Her judges asked her why she had done so, when putting on male garb meant certain death. According to the court record she said she had done so "of her own will. And that nobody had forced her to do so. And that she preferred man's dress to woman's." Joan told the judges she "had never intended to take an oath not to take man's dress again."¹³ The Inquisition sentenced her to death for resuming male dress, saying "time and again you have relapsed, as a dog that returns to its vomit. . . ."¹⁴

Joan of Arc was burned alive at the stake on May 30, 1431, in Rouen. She was nineteen years old. The depth of her enemies' hatred toward her transgender expression was demonstrated at her execution, when they extinguished the flames in order to prove she was a "real" woman. After her clothing was burned away and Joan was presumed dead, one observer wrote, "Then the fire was raked back and her naked body shown to all the people and all the secrets that could or should belong to a woman, to take away any doubts from people's minds."¹⁵

Joan of Arc suffered the excruciating pain of being burned alive rather than renounce her identity. I know the kind of seething hatred that resulted in her murder—I've faced it. But I wish I'd been taught the truth about her life and her courage when I was a frightened, confused trans youth. What an inspirational role model—a brilliant transgender peasant teenager leading an army of laborers into battle.

But one aspect of the information I'd gathered left me puzzled. Why did the feudal ruling class and the Church abhor her transgender so violently, while the peasants considered it so sacred? There's no question how much Joan of Arc was honored by the peasantry. Even the Church admitted that the peasants considered her the greatest of all the saints after the holy Virgin.

It's also clear that Joan of Arc's cross-dressing was central to that reverence. Gay historian Arthur Evans noted that before Joan was captured by the Burgundians: "[W]henver she appeared in public she was worshipped like a deity by the peasants. . . . The peasants believed that she had the power to heal, and many would flock

around her to touch part of her body or her clothing (which was men's clothing). Subsequently her armor was kept on display at the Church of St. Denis, where it was worshipped."¹⁶

According to Professor Margaret A. Murray, "The enormous importance as to the wearing of the male costume is emphasized by the fact that as soon as it was known in Rouen that Joan was again dressed as a man the inhabitants crowded into the castle courtyard to see her, to the great indignation of the English soldiers who promptly drove them out with hard words and threats of hard blows."¹⁷

I could not answer, yet, why the peasants venerated Joan of Arc's cross-dressing. But I thought back to a clue buried in the condemnation of Joan by her judges. What did they mean when they charged that her cross-dressing was "following the custom of the Gentiles and the Heathen?" What custom? Were there other examples of cross-dressing among the peasantry? Did the peasants consider transgender itself to be sacred? If so, why?

I had no idea where to find the answers to these questions.



Franklin Thompson (Sarah Emma Edmonds) fought for the Union Army in the Civil War. Some 400 male Civil War soldiers were discovered to have been born female. Many of them fought for the pro-slavery Confederacy; just being transgendered doesn't automatically make each person progressive. Like the old trade union song asked, it's a question of "Which side are you on?"

OUR SACRED PAST

*Concepts that have proved useful
in the constitution of an order of things
readily win such authority over us
that we forget their earthly origins
and take them to be changeless data.*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

CHAPTER 5.

I REMEMBER RIDING A BUS

in the middle of the night during a bitter snowstorm in the early months of 1976. I was traveling, along with many other activists, to a political conference in Chicago. Unable to sleep, I read a xeroxed copy of a Workers World pamphlet so new the typeset copies weren't yet back from the printers.¹ That landmark pamphlet – a Marxist examination of the roots of lesbian and gay oppression – was authored by Bob McCubbin, a gay man I worked with in our New York City branch. I had known Bob was working on that history, but I'd had no concept of how his research and analysis would impact on my life.

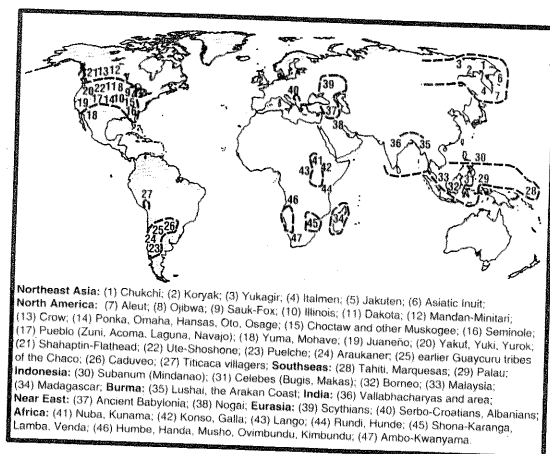
I found *myself* in those pages. For the first time since I'd acknowledged my own sexual desire to myself, I felt released from a layer of unexamined shame. Bob presented an overview of human history so I could see that same-sex love had always been part of the spectrum of human sexuality. He provided examples of early communal societies that honored all forms of human love and affection. Bob analyzed how and why the division of society into classes led to increasingly hostile attitudes by rulers towards same-sex love. And to my surprise, he included examples of acceptance of transgender in cooperative societies.

As I shivered next to a bus window thick with ice, I cried with relief. I realized how important it was for me to know I had a place in history, that I was part of the human race.

As I read and reread that pamphlet in the years that followed, I saw that I could also approach trans history from a materialist point of view. So I went back and took another look at the charge by Joan's Inquisitors that she followed "the custom of the Gentiles and the Heathen." In my family, gentiles meant non-Jews. But I remembered Engels's use of the term *gens* – and it occurred to me that the French clerics were referring to free farming communities still organized into *gens*, the family unit of cooperative matrilineal societies.

I wanted to go back further, to dig around for prehistoric evidence of transgender in communal societies in Europe. But how could I? Although these early com-

This map shows the many parts of the world where anthropologist Hermann Baumann documented male-to-female transsexual priestesses.



munities were cooperative up until about 4000 B.C.E.* – estimated to be the end of the Stone Age, or the Neolithic period – these ancient farmers and hunters left no written records.

So I combed through books, periodicals, and news clippings devoted to the history of Europe, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. I searched for the earliest written records of any forms of trans expression. Much to my surprise, I found a lot of information.

For example, I discovered abundant evidence of male-to-female transsexual women priestesses who played an important role in the worship of the Great Mother. Extensive research by scholars has revealed that this goddess, not male gods, was venerated throughout the Middle East, Northern Africa, Europe and western Asia.

The Great Mother was emblematic of pre-class communalism. Today, many scholars describe her as a female goddess. But perhaps those who revered her saw this divinity as more complex. While it's impossible today to interpret precisely how people who lived millennia ago viewed this goddess, Roman historian Plutarch described the Great Mother as an intersexual (hermaphroditic) deity in whom the sexes had not yet been split.²

The Great Mother's transsexual priestesses followed an ancient and sacred path of rituals that included castration. These transsexual priestesses continued to serve the Great Mother in societies in which class divisions were just developing. They are documented in Mesopotamian temple records from the middle of the third millennium B.C.E., and are also found in Assyrian, Akkadian, and Babylonian records.³

Many Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Near Eastern goddesses were served by transsexual priestesses, including the Syrian Astarte and Dea Syria at Hierapolis, Artemis, Atargatis, Ashtoreth or Ishtar, Hecate at Laguire, and Artemis (Diana) at Ephesus. Statues of Diana were often represented draped with a necklace made of the testicles of her priestesses.⁴

* B.C.E. stands for "Before Common Era." It's an alternative to B.C., or "Before Christ." C.E. replaces A.D., or Anno Domini, which means "in the year of the Lord."

Transsexual women priestesses known as *gallae* were found in such large numbers in Anatolia, an area which today is part of Turkey, that some classical texts report as many as five thousand in some cities.⁵ The *gallae* served the Great Mother, known to the Phrygians as Cybele, whose worship is believed to date back to the Stone Age.⁶

Was the sacred service of transsexual priestesses a practice rooted in communal matrilineal societies? Or was it an example of men, living under patriarchy, castrating themselves in order to wrest this position from women? Not all researchers and historians agree.

For example, historian David F. Greenberg's findings seem to support the first position. He concludes that evidence of trans shamans, "among peoples whose later ways of life have been very diverse, suggests that the role does date back to the late Paleolithic (if not earlier)."⁷

Feminist researcher Merlin Stone is a prominent spokesperson for the latter argument. She wrote about the transition in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures from communal to early class-divided societies. Stone argues: "It seems quite possible that as men began to gain power, even within the religion of the Goddess, they replaced priestesses. They may have initially gained this right by identifying with and imitating the castrated state of the son/lover; or in an attempt to imitate the female clergy, which originally held the power, they may have tried to rid themselves of their maleness by adopting the ritual of castration and the wearing of women's clothing."⁸

Stone's argument rests on a biological determinist definition of these transsexual priestesses as men. But how could priestesses who had "rid themselves of their maleness" expect to curry much favor with the new wealthy men who so valued males over females? Besides being bereft of "maleness," these priestesses continued the practice of matrilineal goddess worship that rivaled the patriarchal religions of new male-dominated ruling classes.

And what about the statement that the female clergy "originally held the power"? From where did women's "power" derive in cooperative societies? Was



TOP: The figure on the left is a trans *enaree* priestess. This image is from a gold plaque on a late fourth-century C.E. tiara from the Karagodeuaskh Tumulus on the Kuban River.

BOTTOM: A *galla* priestess of the goddess Cybele, from the mid-second century C.E.



TOP: Worshipping Hevioso,
in Abomey, Africa. This is the
region that is famous for
Amazon warrior women.

MIDDLE: A Sakpota dancer
in Dahomey, Africa.

BOTTOM: A Yoruba ritual in
Brazil. Note the double-edged
axe of Shangó, the deity who
is represented as all sexes.

The Amazons also reportedly
carried double-edged axes.

OPPOSITE: A young male dressed
as a Hindu deity at the Kumbh

Mela festival in Allahabad,

India in 1989.

it based on holding the spiritual reins?

Anthropologists have reconstructed patterns of life in Stone Age Europe, in much the same way as paleontologists have rebuilt models of dinosaurs. The Stone Age was a span of human development before the use of metals, when tools and hunting implements were fashioned from stone. Humans lived by hunting and food gathering; group labor was cooperative.

In these early societies, most men hunted while most women developed a division of labor in large centers of production and shared the responsibility of child-care. Women didn't rule *over* men, the way men dominate women in a patriarchal society. There were no signs of pharaohs and emperors, queens or presidents, who lived in luxury while others toiled in squalor. Leadership could not be coerced or bought, so it had to be earned through group respect.

The family structure of these societies was matrilineal and matrilocal – meaning women headed the family groupings and the collective homes. Blood descent and inheritance were traced through women. In these Stone Age societies, women were so respected that anthropologist Jacquetta Hawkes concluded, "Indeed, it is tempting



to be convinced that the earliest Neolithic societies throughout their range in time and space gave woman the highest status she has ever known."⁹

But did these cooperative societies only have room for two sexes, fixed at birth? It has become common for social scientists to conclude that the earliest human division of labor between women and men in communal societies formed the basis for modern sex and gender boundaries. But the more I studied, the more I believed that the assumption that every society, in every corner of the world, in every period of human history, recognized only men and women as two immutable social categories is a modern Western conclusion. It's time to take another look at what we've long believed was an ancient division of labor between only two sexes.

Our earliest ancestors do not appear to have been biological determinists. There are societies all over the world that allowed for more than two sexes, as well as respecting the right of individuals to reassign their sex. And transsexuality, transgender, intersexuality, and bigender appear as themes in creation stories, legends, parables, and oral history.

As I've already documented, many Native nations on the North American continent made room for more than two sexes, and there appeared to have been a fluidity between them. Reports by military expeditions, missionaries, ethnographers, anthropologists, explorers, and other harbingers of colonialism cited numerous forms of sex-change, transgender, and intersexuality in matrilineal societies – societies where men were not in a dominant position. In these accounts – no matter how racist or angrily distorted by the colonial narrative voice – it is clear that transsexual priestesses and other trans





ABOVE: A *nat* dancer in Myanmar (Burma). RIGHT: A Two-Spirit Tolowa medicine person.

spiritual leaders, or medicine people, have existed in many ancient cultures.

It's not possible in many of the following examples to make a distinction between transsexual, transgender, bigender, or mixed gender expression. However, trans spiritual leaders played a role in far-flung cultures all over the world.

For example, African spiritual beliefs in intersexual deities and sex/gender transformation among their followers have been documented among the Akan, Ambo-Kwanyama, Bobo, Chokwe, Dahomeans (of Benin), Dogon, Bambara, Etik, Handa, Humbe, Hunde, Ibo, Jukun, Kimbundu, Konso, Kunama, Lamba, Lango, Luba, Lulua, Musho, Nuba, Ovimbundu, Rundi, Shona-Karonga, Venda, Vili-Kongo, and Yoruba.¹⁰

Transgender in religious ceremony is still reported in the twentieth century in west Africa. And cross-dressing is a feature of modern Brazilian and Haitian ceremonies derived from west African religions.¹¹

In addition, male-to-female shamans have been recorded among the Araucanians in southern Chile and parts of Argentina.¹² They are also reported among the Guajire, a cattle-herding people of northwest Venezuela and northern Colombia,¹³ and the Tehuelche, who were hunter-gatherers in Argentina.¹⁴

Transgender historian Pauline Park, who is Korean American, wrote to me about trans spiritual expression in Asia:¹⁵

Transgendered identities and practices have been documented in every traditional Asian society. In some Asian traditions, transgendered figures perform religious or quasi-religious functions. One such example is the *basaja* of the Indonesian island of Sulawesi (the

Celebes).¹⁶ The *hijra* of India also can be understood in a religious context, in relation to the mother-goddess *Bahuchara Mata*, though some *hijras* also worship the Hindu god Shiva in his manifestation as the half-man, half-woman *Ardhanarisvara*.¹⁷

Finally, the *mudang* must be mentioned. The Korean *mudang* was a shaman or sorceress who frequently was a transgendered male, and like many other shamanic traditions, the idea that combining the characteristics of both sexes and both genders could connect one to a transcendent spiritual realm seemed to underlie the practice.¹⁸

In ancient China, the *shih-niang* wore a combination of female, male, and religious garb.¹⁹ In Okinawa, some shamans took part in an ancient male-to-female ceremony known as *winagu nati*, which means, "becoming female."²⁰ And trans shamans were still reported practicing in the Vietnamese countryside in the mid-1970s.²¹

Female-to-male priests also exist – and most importantly, even co-exist with male-to-female shamans. Among the Lugbara in Africa, for example, male-to-females are called *okule* and female-to-males are named *agule*.²² The Zulu initiated both male-to-female and female-to-male *isangoma*. While male-to-female shamans have been part of the traditional life of the Chukchee, Kamchadal, Koryak, and Inuit – all Native peoples of the Arctic Basin – Inuit female-to-males serve White Whale Woman, who was believed to have been transformed into a man or a woman-man.²³ And female-to-male expression is part of rituals and popular festivals with deep matrilineal roots in every corner of the world – including societies on the European continent.

Women and trans spiritual leaders continue to coexist in this century. Although South African Zulu diviners are usually women, some are male-to-female diviners.²⁴ Among the Ambo people of southern Angola, even in this century, women – including trans women – serve the deity Kalunga.²⁵

And in several areas of the world, the replacement of trans shamans with non-trans women spiritual leaders was a result of patriarchal pressure. For example, Walter Williams wrote that in South America, "Among the precontact Araucanians, the Mapuche, and probably other people, shaman religious leaders were all berdaches. When the Spanish suppressed this religious institution because of its association with male-male sex, the Indians switched to a totally new pattern. Women became the shamans."²⁶

Although these brief examples of trans expression are limited to spiritual con-





texts, thousands of books, essays, and field research cite transgender, bigender, transsexuality, and intersexuality in societies on every continent, in every stage of development. I'm not arguing that all of these examples from diverse cultures are identical to modern Western trans identities. Nor am I trying to unravel the matrix of attitudes and beliefs around trans expression in these societies. The importance for me is the depth and breadth of evidence underscoring that gender and sex diversity are global in character, and that trans people were once revered, not reviled. How else could a trans person be a sacred shaman? In communal societies, where respect could not be bought or sold or stolen, being a shaman, or medicine person, was a position of honor.

So how and why, I wondered, did attitudes towards trans people plummet so drastically?



LEFT: The African male youth on the left is representing a female.

RIGHT: A Haitian march through Brooklyn, New York, in 1993.

Making **SEX**

BODY AND GENDER FROM THE GREEKS TO FREUD

THOMAS LAQUEUR

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England

Of Language and the Flesh

The first thing that strikes the careless observer is that women are unlike men. They are "the opposite sex" (though why "opposite" I do not know; what is the "neighboring sex"?). But the fundamental thing is that women are more like men than anything else in the world.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS
"THE HUMAN-NOT-QUITE-HUMAN"

An interpretive chasm separates two interpretations, fifty years apart, of the same story of death and desire told by an eighteenth-century physician obsessed with the problem of distinguishing real from apparent death.¹

The story begins when a young aristocrat whose family circumstances forced him into religious orders came one day to a country inn. He found the innkeepers overwhelmed with grief at the death of their only daughter, a girl of great beauty. She was not to be buried until the next day, and the bereaved parents asked the young monk to keep watch over her body through the night. This he did, and more. Reports of her beauty had piqued his curiosity. He pulled back the shroud and, instead of finding the corpse "disfigured by the horrors of death," found its features still gracefully animated. The young man lost all restraint, forgot his vows, and took "the same liberties with the dead that the sacraments of marriage would have permitted in life." Ashamed of what he had done, the hapless necrophilic monk departed hastily in the morning without waiting for the scheduled interment.

When time for burial came, indeed just as the coffin bearing the dead girl was being lowered into the ground, someone felt movement coming from the inside. The lid was torn off; the girl began to stir and soon recovered from what proved not to have been real death at all but only a

coma. Needless to say, the parents were overjoyed to have their daughter back, although their pleasure was severely diminished by the discovery that she was pregnant and, moreover, could give no satisfactory account of how she had come to be that way. In their embarrassment, the innkeepers consigned the daughter to a convent as soon as her baby was born.

Soon business brought the young aristocrat, oblivious of the consequences of his passion but far richer and no longer in holy orders because he had come into his inheritance, back to the scene of his crime. Once again he found the innkeepers in a state of consternation and quickly understood his part in causing their new misfortune. He hastened to the convent and found the object of his necrophilic desire more beautiful alive than dead. He asked for her hand and with the sacrament of marriage legitimized their child.

The moral that Jacques-Jean Bruhier asks his readers to draw from this story is that only scientific tests can make certain that a person is really dead and that even very intimate contact with a body leaves room for mistakes. But Bruhier's contemporary, the noted surgeon Antoine Louis, came to a very different conclusion, one more germane to the subject of this book, when he analyzed the case in 1752.² Based on the evidence that Bruhier himself offered, Louis argues, no one could have doubted that the girl was not dead: she did not, as the young monk testified, look dead and moreover who knows if she did not give some "demonstrative signs" in proof of her liveliness, signs that any eighteenth-century doctor or even layperson would have expected in the circumstances.

Bruhier earlier on in his book had cited numerous instances of seemingly dead young women who were revived and saved from untimely burial by amorous embraces; sexual ecstasy, "dying" in eighteenth-century parlance, turned out for some to be the path to life. Love, that "wonderful satisfactory *Death* and . . . voluntary Separation of Soul and Body," as an English physician called it, guarded the gates of the tomb.³ But in this case it would have seemed extremely unlikely to an eighteenth-century observer that the innkeepers' daughter could have conceived a child without moving and thereby betraying her death.⁴ Any medical book or one of the scores of popular midwifery, health, or marriage manuals circulating in all the languages of Europe reported it as a commonplace that "when the seed issues in the act of generation [from both men and women] there at the same time arises an extra-ordinary titillation and delight in all members of the body."⁵ Without orgasm, another widely

circulated text announced, "the fair sex [would] neither desire nuptial embraces, nor have pleasure in them, nor conceive by them."⁶

The girl *must* have shuddered, just a bit. If not her rosy cheeks then the tremors of venereal orgasm would have given her away. Bruhier's story was thus one of fraud and not of apparent death; the innkeepers' daughter and the monk simply conspired, Louis concludes, to escape culpability by feigning coma until the last possible moment before burial.

In 1836 the tale was told again, but now with a new twist. This time, the reality of the girl's deathlike comatose state was not questioned. On the contrary, her becoming pregnant under these conditions was cited by Dr. Michael Ryan as one among many other cases of intercourse with insensible women to prove that orgasm was irrelevant to conception. (In one story, for example, an ostler confesses that he came to an inn and had sex with, and made pregnant, a girl who was so dead asleep before the fire that he was long gone before she awoke.) Not only need a woman not feel pleasure to conceive; she need not even be conscious.⁷

Near the end of the Enlightenment, in the period between these two rehearsals of the tale of the innkeepers' daughter, medical science and those who relied on it ceased to regard the female orgasm as relevant to generation. Conception, it was held, could take place secretly, with no telltale shivers or signs of arousal; the ancient wisdom that "apart from pleasure nothing of mortal kind comes into existence" was uprooted.⁸ Previously a sign of the generative process, deeply embedded in the bodies of men and women, a feeling whose existence was no more open to debate than was the warm, pleasurable glow that usually accompanies a good meal, orgasm was relegated to the realm of mere sensation, to the periphery of human physiology—accidental, expendable, a contingent bonus of the reproductive act.

This reorientation applied in principle to the sexual functioning of both men and women. But no one writing on such matters ever so much as entertained the idea that male passions and pleasures in general did not exist or that orgasm did not accompany ejaculation during coition. Not so for women. The newly "discovered" contingency of delight opened up the possibility of female passivity and "passionlessness."⁹ The purported independence of generation from pleasure created the space in which women's sexual nature could be redefined, debated, denied, or qualified. And so it was of course. Endlessly.

The old valences were overturned. The commonplace of much contemporary psychology—that men want sex while women want relation-

ships—is the precise inversion of pre-Enlightenment notions that, extending back to antiquity, equated friendship with men and fleshliness with women. Women, whose desires knew no bounds in the old scheme of things, and whose reason offered so little resistance to passion, became in some accounts creatures whose whole reproductive life might be spent anesthetized to the pleasures of the flesh. When, in the late eighteenth century, it became a possibility that “the majority of women are not much troubled with sexual feelings,” the presence or absence of orgasm became a biological signpost of sexual difference.

The new conceptualization of female orgasm, however, was but one formulation of a more radical eighteenth-century reinterpretation of the female body in relation to the male. For thousands of years it had been a commonplace that women had the same genitals as men except that, as Nemesius, bishop of Emesa in the fourth century, put it: “theirs are inside the body and not outside it.”¹⁰ Galen, who in the second century A.D. developed the most powerful and resilient model of the structural, though not spatial, identity of the male and female reproductive organs, demonstrated at length that women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat—of perfection—had resulted in the retention, inside, of structures that in the male are visible without. Indeed, doggerel verse of the early nineteenth century still sings of these hoary homologies long after they had disappeared from learned texts:

though they of different sexes be,
Yet on the whole they are the same as we,
For those that have the strictest searchers been,
Find women are but men turned outside in.¹¹

In this world the vagina is imagined as an interior penis, the labia as foreskin, the uterus as scrotum, and the ovaries as testicles. The learned Galen could cite the dissections of the Alexandrian anatomist Herophilus, in the third century B.C., to support his claim that a woman has testes with accompanying seminal ducts very much like the man’s, one on each side of the uterus, the only difference being that the male’s are contained in the scrotum and the female’s are not.¹²

Language marks this view of sexual difference. For two millennia the ovary, an organ that by the early nineteenth century had become a synecdoche for woman, had not even a name of its own. Galen refers to it by the same word he uses for the male testes, *orchēis*, allowing context to

make clear which sex he is concerned with. Herophilus had called the ovaries *didymoi* (twins), another standard Greek word for testicles, and was so caught up in the female-as-male model that he saw the Fallopian tubes—the spermatic ducts that led from each “testicle”—as growing into the neck of the bladder as do the spermatic ducts in men.¹³ They very clearly do not. Galen points out this error, surprised that so careful an observer could have committed it, and yet the correction had no effect on the status of the model as a whole. Nor is there any technical term in Latin or Greek, or in the European vernaculars until around 1700, for vagina as the tube or sheath into which its opposite, the penis, fits and through which the infant is born.

But then, in or about the late eighteenth, to use Virginia Woolf’s device, human sexual nature changed. On this point, at least, scholars as theoretically distant from one another as Michel Foucault, Ivan Illich, and Lawrence Stone agree.¹⁴ By around 1800, writers of all sorts were determined to base what they insisted were fundamental differences between the male and female sexes, and thus between man and woman, on discoverable biological distinctions and to express these in a radically different rhetoric. In 1803, for example, Jacques-Louis Moreau, one of the founders of “moral anthropology,” argued passionately against the nonsense written by Aristotle, Galen, and their modern followers on the subject of women in relation to men. Not only are the sexes different, but they are different in every conceivable aspect of body and soul, in every physical and moral aspect. To the physician or the naturalist, the relation of woman to man is “a series of oppositions and contrasts.”¹⁵ In place of what, in certain situations, strikes the modern imagination as an almost perverse insistence on understanding sexual difference as a matter of degree, gradations of one basic male type, there arose a shrill call to articulate sharp corporeal distinctions. Doctors claimed to be able to identify “the essential features that belong to her, that serve to distinguish her, that make her what she is”:

All parts of her body present the same differences: all express woman; the brow, the nose, the eyes, the mouth, the ears, the chin, the cheeks. If we shift our view to the inside, and with the help of the scalpel, lay bare the organs, the tissues, the fibers, we encounter everywhere . . . the same difference.¹⁶

Thus the old model, in which men and women were arrayed according to their degree of metaphysical perfection, their vital heat, along an axis

whose telos was male, gave way by the late eighteenth century to a new model of radical dimorphism, of biological divergence. An anatomy and physiology of incommensurability replaced a metaphysics of hierarchy in the representation of woman in relation to man.

By the late nineteenth century, so it was argued, the new difference could be demonstrated not just in visible bodies but in its microscopic building blocks. Sexual difference in kind, not degree, seemed solidly grounded in nature. Patrick Geddes, a prominent professor of biology as well as a town planner and writer on a wide range of social issues, used cellular physiology to explain the "fact" that women were "more passive, conservative, sluggish and stable" than men, while men were "more active, energetic, eager, passionate, and variable." He thought that with rare exceptions—the sea horse, the occasional species of bird—males were constituted of catabolic cells, cells that put out energy. They spent income, in one of Geddes' favorite metaphors. Female cells, on the other hand, were anabolic; they stored up and conserved energy. And though he admitted that he could not fully elaborate the connection between these biological differences and the "resulting psychological and social differentiations," he nevertheless justified the respective cultural roles of men and women with breathtaking boldness. Differences may be exaggerated or lessened, but to obliterate them "it would be necessary to have all the evolution over again on a new basis. What was decided among the pre-historic Protozoa cannot be annulled by an act of Parliament."¹⁷ Microscopic organisms wallowing in the primordial ooze determined the irreducible distinctions between the sexes and the place of each in society.

These formulations suggest a third and still more general aspect of the shift in the meaning of sexual difference. The dominant, though by no means universal, view since the eighteenth century has been that there are two stable, incommensurable, opposite sexes and that the political, economic, and cultural lives of men and women, their gender roles, are somehow based on these "facts." Biology—the stable, ahistorical, sexed body—is understood to be the epistemic foundation for prescriptive claims about the social order. Beginning dramatically in the Enlightenment, there was a seemingly endless stream of books and chapters of books whose very titles belie their commitment to this new vision of nature and culture: Roussel's *Système physique et moral de la femme*, Brachet's chapter "Etudes du physique et du moral de la femme," Thompson and Geddes' starkly uncompromising *Sex*. The physical "real" world in

these accounts, and in the hundreds like them, is prior to and logically independent of the claims made in its name.

Earlier writers from the Greeks onward could obviously distinguish nature from culture, *phusis* from *nomos* (though these categories are the creation of a particular moment and had different meanings then).¹⁸ But, as I gathered and worked through the material that forms this book, it became increasingly clear that it is very difficult to read ancient, medieval, and Renaissance texts about the body with the epistemological lens of the Enlightenment through which the physical world—the body—appears as "real," while its cultural meanings are epiphenomenal. Bodies in these texts did strange, remarkable, and to modern readers impossible things. In future generations, writes Origen, "the body would become less 'thick,' less 'coagulated,' less 'hardened,'" as the spirit warmed to God; physical bodies themselves would have been radically different before the fall, imagines Gregory of Nyssa: male and female coexisted with the image of God, and sexual differentiation came about only as the representation in the flesh of the fall from grace.¹⁹ (In a nineteenth-century Urdu guide for ladies, based firmly in Galenic medicine, the prophet Mohammed is listed at the top of a list of exemplary women.²⁰ Caroline Bynum writes about women who in imitation of Christ received the stigmata or did not require food or whose flesh did not stink when putrifying.²¹ There are numerous accounts of men who were said to lactate and pictures of the boy Jesus with breasts. Girls could turn into boys, and men who associated too extensively with women could lose the hardness and definition of their more perfect bodies and regress into effeminacy. Culture, in short, suffused and changed the body that to the modern sensibility seems so closed, autarchic, and outside the realm of meaning.

One might of course deny that such things happened or read them as entirely metaphorical or give individual, naturalistic explanations for otherwise bizarre occurrences: the girl chasing her swine who suddenly sprung an external penis and scrotum, reported by Montaigne and the sixteenth-century surgeon Ambroise Paré as an instance of sex change, was really suffering from androgen-dihydrotestosterone deficiency; she was really a boy all along who developed external male organs in puberty, though perhaps not as precipitously as these accounts would have it.²² This, however, is an unconscionably external, ahistorical, and impoverished approach to a vast and complex literature about the body and culture.

I want to propose instead that in these pre-Enlightenment texts, and even some later ones, *sex*, or the body, must be understood as the epiphenomenon, while *gender*, what we would take to be a cultural category, was primary or “real.” Gender—man and woman—mattered a great deal and was part of the order of things; sex was conventional, though modern terminology makes such a reordering nonsensical. At the very least, what we call sex and gender were in the “one-sex model” explicitly bound up in a circle of meanings from which escape to a supposed biological substrate—the strategy of the Enlightenment—was impossible. In the world of one sex, it was precisely when talk seemed to be most directly about the biology of two sexes that it was most embedded in the politics of gender, in culture. To be a man or a woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes. Sex before the seventeenth century, in other words, was still a sociological and not an ontological category.

How did the change from what I have called a one-sex/flesh model to a two-sex/flesh model take place? Why, to take the most specific case first, did sexual arousal and its fulfillment—specifically female sexual arousal—become irrelevant to an understanding of conception? (This, it seems to me, is the initial necessary step in creating the model of the passionless female who stands in sharp biological contrast to the male.) The obvious answer would be the march of progress; science might not be able to explain sexual politics, but it could provide the basis on which to theorize. The ancients, then, were simply wrong. In the human female and in most other mammals—though not in rabbits, minks, and ferrets—ovulation is *in fact* independent of intercourse, not to speak of pleasure. Dr. Ryan was right in his interpretation of the story of the innkeepers’ daughter in that unconscious women can conceive and that orgasm has nothing to do with the matter. Angus McLaren makes essentially this case when he argues that, in the late eighteenth century, “the rights of women to sexual pleasure were not enhanced, but eroded as an unexpected consequence of the elaboration of more sophisticated models of reproduction.”²³ Esther Fischer-Homberger suggests that a new understanding of an independent female contribution to reproduction accompanied the devaluation of procreation. Its status declined as it became, so to speak, exclusively women’s work. Thus, one might argue, new discoveries in reproductive biology came just in the nick of time; science seemed nicely in tune with the demands of culture.²⁴

But in fact no such discoveries took place. Scientific advances do not entail the demotion of female orgasm. True, by the 1840s it had become clear that, at least in dogs, ovulation could occur without coition and thus presumably without orgasm. And it was immediately postulated that the human female, like the canine bitch, was a “spontaneous ovulator,” producing an egg during the periodic heat that in women was known as the menses. But the available evidence for this half truth was at best slight and highly ambiguous. Ovulation, as one of the pioneer twentieth-century investigators in reproductive biology put it, “is silent and occult: neither self-observation by women nor medical study through all the centuries prior to our own era taught mankind to recognize it.”²⁵ Indeed, standard medical-advice books recommended that to avoid conception women should have intercourse during the middle of their menstrual cycles, during days twelve through sixteen, now known as the period of *maximum* fertility. Until the 1930s, even the outlines of our modern understanding of the hormonal control of ovulation were unknown.

In short, positive advances in science seem to have had little to do with the shift in interpreting the story of the innkeepers’ daughter. The reevaluation of pleasure occurred more than a century before reproductive physiology could come to its support with any kind of deserved authority. Thus the question remains why, before the nineteenth century, commentators interpreted conception without orgasm as the exception, an oddity that proved nothing, while later such cases were regarded as perfectly normal and illustrative of a general truth about reproduction.

Unlike the demise of orgasm in reproductive physiology, the more general shift in the interpretation of the male and female bodies cannot have been due, even in principle, to scientific progress. In the first place, “oppositions and contrasts” between the female and the male, if one wishes to construe them as such, have been clear since the beginning of time: the one gives birth and the other does not. Set against such momentous truths, the discovery that the ovarian artery is not, as Galen would have it, the female version of the vas deferens is of relatively minor significance. The same can be said about the “discoveries” of more recent research on the biochemical, neurological, or other natural determinants or insignia of sexual difference. As Anne Fausto-Sterling has documented, a vast amount of negative data that shows no regular differences between the sexes is simply not reported.²⁶ Moreover, what evidence there does exist for biological difference with a gendered behavioral result is either highly

suspect for a variety of methodological reasons, or ambiguous, or proof of Dorothy Sayers' notion that men and women are very close neighbors indeed if it is proof of anything at all.

To be sure, difference and sameness, more or less recondite, are everywhere; but which ones count and for what ends is determined outside the bounds of empirical investigation. The fact that at one time the dominant discourse construed the male and female bodies as hierarchically, vertically, ordered versions of one sex and at another time as horizontally ordered opposites, as incommensurable, must depend on something other than even a great constellation of real or supposed discoveries.

Moreover, nineteenth-century advances in developmental anatomy (germ-layer theory) pointed to the common origins of both sexes in a morphologically androgynous embryo and thus not to their intrinsic difference. Indeed, the Galenic isomorphisms of male and female organs were by the 1850s rearticulated at the embryological level as homologues: the penis and the clitoris, the labia and the scrotum, the ovary and the testes, scientists discovered, shared common origins in fetal life. There was thus scientific evidence in support of the old view should it have been culturally relevant. Or, conversely, no one was much interested in looking for evidence of two distinct sexes, at the anatomical and concrete physiological differences between men and women, until such differences became politically important. It was not, for example, until 1759 that anyone bothered to reproduce a detailed female skeleton in an anatomy book to illustrate its difference from the male. Up to this time there had been one basic structure for the human body, and that structure was male.²⁷ And when differences were discovered they were already, in the very form of their representation, deeply marked by the power politics of gender.

Instead of being the consequence of increased specific scientific knowledge, new ways of interpreting the body were the result of two broader, analytically though not historically distinct, developments: one epistemological, the other political. By the late seventeenth century, in certain specific contexts, the body was no longer regarded as a microcosm of some larger order in which each bit of nature is positioned within layer upon layer of signification. Science no longer generated the hierarchies of analogies, the resemblances that bring the whole world into every scientific endeavor but thereby create a body of knowledge that is, as Foucault argues, at once endless and poverty-stricken.²⁸ Sex as it has been

seen since the Enlightenment—as the biological foundation of what it is to be male and female—was made possible by this epistemic shift.

But epistemology alone does not produce two opposite sexes; it does so only in certain political circumstances. Politics, broadly understood as the competition for power, generates new ways of constituting the subject and the social realities within which humans dwell. Serious talk about sexuality is thus inevitably about the social order that it both represents and legitimates. "Society," writes Maurice Godelier, "haunts the body's sexuality."²⁹

Ancient accounts of reproductive biology, still persuasive in the early eighteenth century, linked the intimate, experiential qualities of sexual delight to the social and the cosmic order. More generally, biology and human sexual experience mirrored the metaphysical reality on which, it was thought, the social order rested. The new biology, with its search for fundamental differences between the sexes, of which the tortured questioning of the very existence of women's sexual pleasure was a part, emerged at precisely the time when the foundations of the old social order were shaken once and for all.

But social and political changes are not, in themselves, explanations for the reinterpretation of bodies. The rise of evangelical religion, Enlightenment political theory, the development of new sorts of public spaces in the eighteenth century, Lockean ideas of marriage as a contract, the cataclysmic possibilities for social change wrought by the French revolution, postrevolutionary conservatism, postrevolutionary feminism, the factory system with its restructuring of the sexual division of labor, the rise of a free market economy in services or commodities, the birth of classes, singly or in combination—none of these things *caused* the making of a new sexed body. Instead, the remaking of the body is itself intrinsic to each of these developments.

This book, then, is about the making not of gender, but of sex. I have no interest in denying the reality of sex or of sexual dimorphism as an evolutionary process. But I want to show on the basis of historical evidence that almost everything one wants to *say* about sex—however sex is understood—already has in it a claim about gender. Sex, in both the one-sex and the two-sex worlds, is situational; it is explicable only within the context of battles over gender and power.

To a great extent my book and feminist scholarship in general are inextricably caught in the tensions of this formulation: between language on

the one hand and extralinguistic reality on the other; between nature and culture; between "biological sex" and the endless social and political markers of difference.³⁰ We remain poised between the body as that extraordinarily fragile, feeling, and transient mass of flesh with which we are all familiar—too familiar—and the body that is so hopelessly bound to its cultural meanings as to elude unmediated access.

The analytical distinction between sex and gender gives voice to these alternatives and has always been precarious. In addition to those who would eliminate gender by arguing that so-called cultural differences are really natural, there has been a powerful tendency among feminists to empty sex of its content by arguing, conversely, that natural differences are really cultural. Already by 1975, in Gayle Rubin's classic account of how a social sex/gender system "transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity," the presence of the body is so veiled as to be almost hidden.³¹ Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead further erode the body's priority over language with their self-conscious use of quotation marks around "givens" in the claim that "what gender is, what men and women are . . . do not simply reflect or elaborate upon biological 'givens' but are largely products of social and cultural processes."³² "It is also dangerous to place the body at the center of a search for female identity," reads a French feminist manifesto.³³

But if not the body, then what? Under the influence of Foucault, various versions of deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and poststructuralism generally, it threatens to disappear entirely.³⁴ (The deconstruction of stable meaning in texts can be regarded as the general case of the deconstruction of sexual difference: "what can 'identity,' even 'sexual identity,' mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged?" writes Julia Kristeva.³⁵) These strategies have begun to have considerable impact among historians. Gender to Joan Scott, for example, is not a category that mediates between fixed biological difference on the one hand and historically contingent social relations on the other. Rather it includes both biology and society: "a constitutive element of social relationships based on *perceived differences between the sexes* . . . a primary way of *signifying* relationships of power."³⁶

But feminists do not need French philosophy to repudiate the sex/gender distinction. For quite different reasons, Catharine MacKinnon argues explicitly that gender is the division of men and women caused "by

the social requirements of heterosexuality, which institutionalizes male sexual dominance and female sexual submission"; sex—which comes to the same thing—is social relations "organized so that men may dominate and women must submit."³⁷ "Science," Ruth Bleier argues, mistakenly views "gender attributions as *natural* categories for which biological explanations are appropriate and even necessary."³⁸ Thus some of the so-called sex differences in biological and sociological research turn out to be gender differences after all, and the distinction between nature and culture collapses as the former folds into the latter.

Finally, from a different philosophical perspective, Foucault has even further rendered problematic the nature of human sexuality in relation to the body. Sexuality is not, he argues, an inherent quality of the flesh that various societies extol or repress—not, as Freud would seem to have it, a biological drive that civilization channels in one direction or another. It is instead a way of fashioning the self "in the experience of the flesh," which itself is "constituted from and around certain forms of behavior." These forms, in turn, exist in relation to historically specifiable systems of knowledge, rules of what is or is not natural, and to what Foucault calls "a mode or relation between the individual and himself which enables him to recognize himself as a sexual subject amidst others." (More generally, these systems of knowledge determine what can be thought within them.) Sexuality as a singular and all-important human attribute with a specific object—the *opposite* sex—is the product of the late eighteenth century. There is nothing natural about it. Rather, like the whole world for Nietzsche (the great philosophical influence on Foucault), sexuality is "a sort of artwork."³⁹

Thus, from a variety of perspectives, the comfortable notion is shaken that man is man and woman is woman and that the historian's task is to find out what they did, what they thought, and what was thought about them. That "thing," sex, about which people had beliefs seems to crumble. But the flesh, like the repressed, will not long allow itself to remain in silence. The fact that we become human in culture, Jeffrey Weeks maintains, does not give us license to ignore the body: "It is obvious that sex is something more than what society designates, or what naming makes it."⁴⁰ The body reappears even in the writings of those who would turn attention to language, power, and culture. (Foucault, for example, longs for a nonconstructed utopian space in the flesh from

which to undermine "bio-power": "the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures."⁴¹

In my own life, too, the fraught chasm between representation and reality, seeing-as and seeing, remains. I spent 1980–81 in medical school and studied what was *really* there as systematically as time and circumstances permitted. Body as cultural construct met body on the dissecting table; more or less schematic anatomical illustrations—the most accurate modern science had to offer—rather hopelessly confronted the actual tangles of the human neck. For all of my awareness of how deeply our understanding of what we saw was historically contingent—the product of institutional, political, and epistemological contingencies—the flesh in its simplicity seemed always to shine through.

I remember once spending the better part of a day watching doctors and nurses trying vainly to stem the flow of blood from the ruptured esophageal varices of a middle-aged dentist, who that morning had walked into the emergency room, and to replace it pint by pint into his veins as they pumped it out of his stomach. In the late afternoon I left to hear *Don Giovanni*—I was after all only an observer and was doing the patient no good. The next morning he was dead, a fact that seemed of an entirely different order from Mozart's play on the body or the history of representation that constitutes this book. ("I know when one is dead, and when one lives. / She's dead as earth," howled Lear.)

But my acquaintance with the medical aspect of bodies goes back farther than 1981. I grew up the son of a pathologist. Most Sunday mornings as a boy I went with my father to his laboratory to watch him prepare surgical specimens for microscopic examination; he sliced up kidneys, lungs, and other organs preparatory to their being fixed in wax, stained, and mounted on slides to be "read." As he went about this delicate carving and subsequent reading, he spoke into a dictating machine about what he saw. Bodies, or in any case body parts, seemed unimpeachably real. I remember reading his autopsy protocols, stacked on the kelim-covered divan in his study, resonant with the formulas of what to me seemed like medical epic: "The body is that of a sixty-five-year-old Caucasian male in emaciated condition. It was opened with the usual Y-shaped incision." "The body is that of a well-nourished fifty-seven-year-old female. It was opened with the usual Y-shaped incision."

Three months before my father died of cancer, and only weeks before

brain metastasis made it impossible for him to think, he helped me in interpreting the German gynecological literature cited in Chapters 5 and 6, some of which was by his own medical-school teachers. More to the point, he tutored me on what one could actually see, for example, in the cross section of an ovary with the naked eye or through the microscope. "Is it plausible," I would ask, "that, as nineteenth-century doctors claimed, one could count the number of ovulatory scars [the corpus albicans] and correlate them with the number of menstrual cycles?" My father was the expert on what was *really* there.

But he figures also in its deconstruction. As a recent medical-school graduate, he could not continue his studies in Nazi Germany. In 1935 he took a train to Amsterdam to ask his uncle, Ernst Laqueur, who was professor of pharmacology there, what he ought to do next.⁴² Some difficulties with a German official made my father decide not to go back to Hamburg at all. Ernst Laqueur presumably secured for him the position at Leiden that he was to hold for the next year or so. I knew little of what he did there, and nothing of what he published until I went through his papers after he died. (This was well after I had completed much of the research for this book.) In his desk I found a bundle of his offprints; the earliest one, except for his "Inaugural Dissertation," is entitled "Weitere Untersuchungen über den Uterus masculinus unter dem Einfluss verschiedener Hormone" (Further Studies of the Influence of Various Hormones on the Masculine Uterus).⁴³

I had already written about how Freud the doctor severed familiar connections between the manifest evidence of bodies and the opposition between the sexes. I had read Sarah Kofman on the power of anatomy to "confuse those who think of the sexes as opposing species."⁴⁴ But my father's contribution to the confusion was a complete revelation, genuinely uncanny. It was hidden and yet so much of the home—*heimlich* but also *unheimlich*—the veiled and secret made visible, an eerie, ghostly reminder that somehow this book and I go back a long way.⁴⁵

There are less personal reasons as well for wanting to maintain in my writing a distinction between the body and the body as discursively constituted, between seeing and seeing-as. In some measure these reasons are ethical or political and grow out of the different obligations that arise for the observer from seeing (or touching) and from representing. It is also disingenuous to write a history of sexual difference, or difference generally, without acknowledging the shameful correspondence between par-

ticular forms of suffering and particular forms of the body, however the body is understood. The fact that pain and injustice are gendered and correspond to corporeal signs of sex is precisely what gives importance to an account of the making of sex.

Moreover, there has clearly been progress in understanding the human body in general and reproductive anatomy and physiology in particular. Modern science and modern women are much better able to predict the cyclical likelihood of pregnancy than were their ancestors; menstruation turns out to be a different physiological process from hemorrhoidal bleeding, contrary to the prevailing wisdom well into the eighteenth century, and the testes *are* histologically different from the ovaries. Any history of a science, however much it might emphasize the role of social, political, ideological, or aesthetic factors, must recognize these undeniable successes and the commitments that made them possible.⁴⁶

Far from denying any of this, I want to insist upon it. My particular Archimedean point, however, is not in the real transcultural body but rather in the *space* between it and its representations. I hold up the history of progress in reproductive physiology—the discovery of distinct germ products, for example—to demonstrate that these did not cause a particular understanding of sexual difference, the shift to the two-sex model. But I also suggest that theories of sexual difference influenced the course of scientific progress and the interpretation of particular experimental results. Anatomists might have seen bodies differently—they might, for example, have regarded the vagina as other than a penis—but they did not do so for essentially cultural reasons. Similarly, empirical data were ignored—evidence for conception without orgasm, for example—because they did not fit into either a scientific or a metaphysical paradigm.

Sex, like being human, is contextual. Attempts to isolate it from its discursive, socially determined milieu are as doomed to failure as the *philosophe's* search for a truly wild child or the modern anthropologist's efforts to filter out the cultural so as to leave a residue of essential humanity. And I would go further and add that the private, enclosed, stable body that seems to lie at the basis of modern notions of sexual difference is also the product of particular, historical, cultural moments. It too, like opposite sexes, comes into and out of focus.

My general strategy in this book is to implicate biology explicitly in the interpretive dilemmas of literature and of cultural studies generally.

"Like the other sciences," writes François Jacob, winner of the 1965 Nobel Prize for medicine,

biology today has lost its illusions. It is no longer seeking for truth. It is building its own truths. Reality is seen as an ever-unstable equilibrium. In the study of living beings, history displays a pendulum movement, swinging to and fro between the continuous and the discontinuous, between structure and function, between the identity of phenomena and the diversity of being.⁴⁷

The instability of difference and sameness lies at the very heart of the biological enterprise, in its dependence on prior and shifting epistemological, and one could add political, grounds. (Jacob is of course not the first to make this point. Auguste Comte, the guiding spirit of nineteenth-century positivism, confessed that "there seems no sufficient reason why the use of scientific *fictions*, so common in the hands of geometers, should not be introduced into biology."⁴⁸ And Emile Durkheim, one of the giants of sociology, argued that "we buoy ourselves up with a vain hope if we believe that the best means of preparing for the coming of a new science is first patiently to accumulate all the data it will use. For we cannot know what it will require unless we have already formed some conception of it."⁴⁹ Science does not simply investigate, but itself constitutes, the difference my book explores: that of woman from man. (But not, for reasons discussed below, man from woman.)

Literature, in a similar way, constitutes the problem of sexuality and is not just its imperfect mirror. As Barbara Johnson argues, "it is literature that inhabits the very heart of what makes sexuality problematic for us speaking animals. Literature is not only a thwarted investigator but also an incorrigible perpetrator of the problem of sexuality."⁵⁰ Sexual difference thus seems to be already present in how we constitute meaning; it is already part of the logic that drives writing. Through "literature," representation generally, it is given content. Not only do attitudes toward sexual difference "generate and structure literary texts"; texts generate sexual difference.⁵¹

Johnson is careful to restrict the problem of sexuality to "us speaking animals," and thus to rest content that, among dumb animals and even among humans outside the symbolic realm, male is manifestly the opposite sex from female. But clarity among the beasts bespeaks only the very

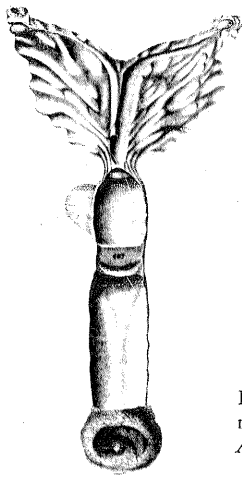


Fig. 1. Genitalia of a female elephant drawn from a fresh specimen by a nineteenth-century naturalist. From *Journal of the Academy of Natural Science*, Philadelphia, 8.4 (1881).

limited purposes for which we generally make such sexual distinctions. It matters little if the genitals of the female elephant (fig. 1) are rendered to look like a penis because the sex of elephants generally matters little to us; it is remarkable and shocking if the same trick is played on our species, as was routine in Renaissance illustrations (figs. 15–17). Moreover, as soon as animals enter some discourse outside breeding, zoo keeping, or similarly circumscribed contexts, the same sort of ambiguities arise as when we speak about humans. Then the supposedly self-evident signs of anatomy or physiology turn out to be anything but self-evident. Questions of ultimate meaning clearly go well beyond such facts. Darwin in 1861 lamented: “We do not even know in the least the final cause of sexuality; why new beings should be produced by the union of the two sexual elements, instead of by a process of parthenogenesis . . . The whole subject is as yet hidden in darkness.”⁵² And still today the question of why egg and sperm should be borne by different, rather than the same, hermaphroditic, creature remains open.⁵³

Darkness deepens when animals enter into the orbit of culture; their sexual transparency disappears. The hare, which figures prominently in so much myth and folklore, was long thought to be capable of routine sex change from year to year and thus inherently androgynous. Or, as the

more learned would have it, the male hare bears young on occasion. The hyena, another animal with prolific cultural meanings, was long thought to be hermaphroditic. The cassowary, a large, flightless, ostrich-like, and, to the anthropologist, epicene bird, becomes to the male Sambian tribesman a temperamental, wild, masculinized female who gives birth through the anus and whose feces have procreative powers; the bird becomes powerfully bisexual. Why, asks the ethnographer Gilbert Herdt, do people as astute as the Sambia “believe” in anal birth? Because anything one says, outside of very specific contexts, about the biology of sex, even among the brute beasts, is already informed by a theory of difference or sameness.⁵⁴

Indeed, if structuralism has taught us anything it is that humans impose their sense of opposition onto a world of continuous shades of difference and similarity. No oppositional traits readily detected by an outsider explain the fact that in nearly all of North America, to use Lévi-Strauss’s example, sagebrush, *Artemesia*, plays “a major part in the most diverse rituals, either by itself or associated with and at the same time, as the opposite of other plants: *Solidaga*, *Chrysothamnus*, *Gutierrezia*.” It stands for the feminine in Navaho ritual whereas *Chrysothamnus* stands for the masculine. No principle of opposition could be subtler than the tiny differences in leaf serrations that come to carry such enormous symbolic weight.⁵⁵

It should be clear by now that I offer no answer to the question of how bodies determine what we mean by sexual difference or sameness. My claims are of two sorts. Most are negative: I make every effort to show that no historically given set of facts about “sex” entailed how sexual difference was in fact understood and represented at the time, and I use this evidence to make the more general claim that no set of facts ever entails any particular account of difference. Some claims are positive: I point to ways in which the biology of sexual difference is embedded in other cultural programs.

Chapter 2 is about the oxymoronic one-sex body. Here the boundaries between male and female are primarily political; rhetorical rather than biological claims regarding sexual difference and sexual desire are primary. It is about a body whose fluids—blood, semen, milk, and the various excrements—are fungible in that they turn into one another and whose processes—digestion and generation, menstruation and other

bleeding—are not so easily distinguished or so easily assignable to one sex or another as they became after the eighteenth century. This “one flesh,” the construction of a single-sexed body with its different versions attributed to at least two genders, was framed in antiquity to valorize the extraordinary cultural assertion of patriarchy, of the father, in the face of the more sensorily evident claim of the mother. The question for the classical model is not what it explicitly claims—why woman?—but the more troublesome question—why man?

Chapter 3 is the first of two chapters that examine explicitly the relationship between a model of sexual difference and scientific learning. It shows how the one-flesh model was able to incorporate new anatomical knowledge and new naturalistic forms of representation. Chapter 4 concentrates on the cultural interests that various writers had in what seems to us a manifestly counterintuitive model of sexual difference. It exposes the immense pressures on the one-sex model from the existence of two genders, from the new political claims of women, and from the claims of heterosexuality generally. I suggest through readings of legal, juridical, and literary texts that it is sustained by powerful notions of how hierarchy worked and how the body expresses its cultural meanings. At stake for the men involved in this struggle was nothing less than the suppression of the basis for a genuine, other, sex.

Chapter 5 gives an account of the breakdown of the one-sex model and the establishment of two sexes. Like Chapter 3 it maintains that these constructions were not the consequence of scientific change but rather of an epistemological and a social-political revolution. Again, the negative argument—that the scientific is not natural and given—is more forcefully put than the affirmative, in part because I am reluctant to frame my story in terms of a specific set of causes for the increasing prominence of the two-sex model. My strategy instead is to suggest, example by example, the ways in which particular struggles and rhetorical situations made men and women talk as if there were now two sexes. These contexts were of course the results of new social and political developments, but I do not draw out the connections in great detail. More detailed studies are needed to create a locally nuanced account of “Politics, Culture, and Class in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Body.”⁵⁶

Chapter 6 functions much like Chapter 4 in that it engages the science of sex—two this time—with the demands of culture. I show specifically how cornerstones of corporeally based sexes were themselves deeply im-

plicated in the politics of gender. But in this chapter I also present evidence for the continued life of the one-sex model. It lived on even in the midst of the most impassioned defense of two sexes, of ineradicable “organic difference . . . proved by all sound biology, by the biology of man and of the entire animal species . . . proved by the history of civilization, and the entire course of human evolution.” The specter of one sex remains: the “womanliness of woman” struggles against “the anarchic assertors of the manliness of woman.”⁵⁷ In some of the rhetoric of evolutionary biology, in the Marquis de Sade, in much of Freud, in slasher films, indeed in any discussion of gender, the modern invention of two distinct, immutable, and incommensurable sexes turns out to be less dominant than promised.⁵⁸ (Here I differ from Foucault, who would see one *episteme* decisively, once and for all, replacing another.) I illustrate the openness of nineteenth-century science to either a two- or a one-sex model with a discussion first of how denunciations of prostitution and masturbation reproduced an earlier discourse of the unstable individual body, open and responsive to social evil, and then of Freud’s theory of clitoral sexuality in which efforts to find evidence of incommensurable sexes founders on his fundamental insight that the body does not of itself produce two sexes.

I have not written this book as an explicit attack on the current claims of sociobiology. But I hope it is taken up by those engaged in that debate. A historian can contribute little to the already existing critical analysis of particular experiments purporting to demonstrate the biological basis of gender distinctions or to lay bare the hormones and other chemicals that are meant to serve as a sort of ontological granite for observable sexual differences.⁵⁹ But I can offer material for how powerful prior notions of difference or sameness determine what one sees and reports about the body. The fact that the giants of Renaissance anatomy persisted in seeing the vagina as an internal version of the penis suggests that almost any sign of difference is dependent on an underlying theory of, or context for, deciding what counts and what does not count as evidence.

More important, though, I hope this book will persuade the reader that there is no “correct” representation of women in relation to men and that the whole science of difference is thus misconceived. It is true that there is and was considerable and often overtly misogynist bias in much biological research on women; clearly science has historically worked to “rationalize and legitimize” distinctions not only of sex but also of race

and class, to the disadvantage of the powerless. But it does not follow that a more objective, richer, progressive, or even more feminist science would produce a truer picture of sexual difference in any culturally meaningful sense.⁶⁰ (This is why I do not attempt to offer a history of more or less correct, or more or less misogynistic, representations.) In other words, the claim that woman is what she is because of her uterus is no more, or less, true than the subsequent claim that she is what she is because of her ovaries. Further evidence will neither refute nor affirm these patently absurd pronouncements because at stake are not biological questions about the effects of organs or hormones but cultural, political questions regarding the nature of woman.

I return again and again in this book to a problematic, unstable female body that is either a version of or wholly different from a generally unproblematic, stable male body. As feminist scholars have made abundantly clear, it is *always* woman's sexuality that is being constituted; woman is the empty category. Woman alone seems to have "gender" since the category itself is defined as that aspect of social relations based on difference between sexes in which the standard has always been man. "How can one be an enemy of woman, whatever she may be?" as the Renaissance physician Paracelsus put it; this could never be said of man because, quite simply, "one" is male. It is probably not possible to write a history of man's body and its pleasures because the historical record was created in a cultural tradition where no such history was necessary.

But the modern reader must always be aware that recounting the history of interpreting woman's body is not to grant the male body the authority it implicitly claims. Quite the contrary. The record on which I have relied bears witness to the fundamental incoherence of stable, fixed categories of sexual dimorphism, of male and/or female. The notion, so powerful after the eighteenth century, that there had to be something outside, inside, and throughout the body which defines male as opposed to female and which provides the foundation for an attraction of opposites is entirely absent from classical or Renaissance medicine. In terms of the millennial traditions of western medicine, genitals came to matter as the marks of sexual opposition only last week. Indeed, much of the evidence suggests that the relationship between an organ as sign and the body that supposedly gives it currency is arbitrary, as indeed is the relationship between signs. The male body may always be the standard in the

game of signification, but it is one whose status is undermined by its unrepentant historical inconstancy.

Although some tensions inform this book, others do not. I have given relatively little attention to conflicting ideas about the nature of woman or of human sexuality. I have not even scratched the surface of a contextual history of reproductive anatomy or physiology; even for scientific problems that I explore in some detail, the institutional and professional matrix in which they are embedded is only hurriedly sketched. There is simply too much to do in the history of biology, and too much has already been done on the condition-of-woman question or the history of ideas about sex, for any one person to master.

I want to lay claim to a different historical domain, to the broad discursive fields that underlie competing ideologies, that define the terms of conflict, and that give meaning to various debates. I am not committed to demonstrating, for example, that there is a single, dominant "idea of woman" in the Renaissance and that all others are less important. I have no interest in proving conclusively that Galen is more important than Aristotle at any one time or that a given theory of menstruation was hegemonic between 1840 and 1920. Nor will I be concerned with the gains and losses in the status of women through the ages. These are issues I must ask my readers to decide for themselves, whether the impressions they derive from these pages fit what they themselves know of the vast spans of time that I cover. My goal is to show how a biology of hierarchy in which there is only one sex, a biology of incommensurability between two sexes, and the claim that there is no publicly relevant sexual difference at all, or no sex, have constrained the interpretation of bodies and the strategies of sexual politics for some two thousand years.

Finally, I confess that I am saddened by the most obvious and persistent omission in this book: a sustained account of experience in the body. Some might argue that this is as it should be, and that a man has nothing of great interest or authenticity to say about the sexual female body as it feels and loves. But more generally I have found it impossible in all but isolated forays into literature, painting, or the occasional work of theology to imagine how such different visions of the body worked in specific contexts to shape passion, friendship, attraction, love. A colleague pointed out to me that he heard Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with new ears after reading my chapters about the Renaissance. I have felt a new poi-

gnancy in the tragicomedy of eighteenth-century disguise—the last act of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, for example—with its questioning of what it is in a person that one loves. Bodies do and do not seem to matter. I watch Shakespeare's comedies of sexual inversion with new queries, and I try to think my way back into a distant world where the attraction of deep friendship was reserved for one's like.

Further than that I have not been able to go. I regard what I have written as somehow liberating, as breaking old shackles of necessity, as opening up worlds of vision, politics, and eros. I only hope that the reader will feel the same.

TWO

Destiny Is Anatomy

Turn outward the woman's, turn inward, so to speak, and fold double the man's [genital organs], and you will find the same in both in every respect.

GALEN OF PERGAMUM (c. 130–200)

This chapter is about the corporeal theatrics of a world where at least two genders correspond to but one sex, where the boundaries between male and female are of degree and not of kind, and where the reproductive organs are but one sign among many of the body's place in a cosmic and cultural order that transcends biology. My purpose is to give an account, based largely on medical and philosophical literature, of how the one-sex body was imagined; to stake out a claim that the one-sex/one-flesh model dominated thinking about sexual difference from classical antiquity to the end of the seventeenth century; and to suggest why the body should have remained fixed in a field of images hoary already in Galen's time, while the gendered self lived a nuanced history through all the immense social, cultural, and religious changes that separate the world of Hippocrates from the world of Newton.

Organs and the mole's eyes

Nothing could be more obvious, implied the most influential anatomist in the western tradition, than to imagine women as men. For the dullard who could not grasp the point immediately, Galen offers a step-by-step thought experiment:

Think first, please, of the man's [external genitalia] turned in and extending inward between the rectum and the bladder. If this should happen, the scrotum would necessarily take the place of the uterus with the testes lying outside, next to it on either side.

The penis becomes the cervix and vagina, the prepuce becomes the female pudenda, and so forth on through various ducts and blood vessels. A sort of topographical parity would also guarantee the converse, that a man could be squeezed out of a woman:

Think too, please, of . . . the uterus turned outward and projecting. Would not the testes [ovaries] then necessarily be inside it? Would it not contain them like a scrotum? Would not the neck [the cervix and vagina], hitherto concealed inside the perineum but now pendant, be made into the male member?

In fact, Galen argued, "you could not find a single male part left over that had not simply changed its position." Instead of being divided by their reproductive anatomies, the sexes are linked by a common one. Women, in other words, are inverted, and hence less perfect, men. They have exactly the same organs but in exactly the wrong places. (The wrongness of women, of course, does not follow logically from the "fact" that their organs are the same as men's, differing only in placement. The arrow of perfection could go either or both ways. "The silliest notion has just crossed my mind," says Mlle. de l'Espinasse in Diderot's *D'Alembert's Dream*: "Perhaps men are nothing but a freakish variety of women, or women only a freakish variety of men." Dr. Bordeu responds approvingly that the notion would have occurred to her earlier if she had known—he proceeds to give a short lecture on the subject—that "women possess all the anatomical parts that a man has.")¹

The topographical relationships about which Galen writes so persuasively and with such apparent anatomical precision were not themselves to be understood as the basis of sexual hierarchy, but rather as a way of imagining or expressing it. Biology only records a higher truth. Thus although Galen, the professional anatomist, clearly cared about corporeal structures and their relation to the body's various functions, his interest in the plausibility of particular identifications or in maintaining the manifestly impossible implosion of man into woman and back out again, was largely a matter of rhetorical exigency.

On some occasions he was perfectly willing to argue for the genital oppositions he elsewhere denied: "since everything in the male is the opposite [of what it is in the female] the male member has been elongated to be most suitable for coitus and the excretion of semen" (UP 2.632). At other times Galen and the medical tradition that followed him were

prepared to ignore entirely not only the specifically female but also the specifically reproductive quality of the female reproductive organs, not to speak of their relationship to male organs. His systematic major treatment of the uterus, for example, treated it as the archetype for a group of organs "which are especially hollow and large" and thus the locus of a generic body's "retentive faculties." The uterus was singled out not because of what we moderns might take to be its unique, and uniquely female, capacity to produce a child but because it formed the embryo in leisurely fashion, more so than a comparable organ like the stomach digested food, and was therefore "capable of demonstrating the retentive faculty most plainly."²

Subsequent ways of talking about the uterus reproduced these ambiguities. Isidore of Seville, the famous encyclopedist of the seventh century, for example, argued on the one hand that only women have a womb (*uterus* or *uterum*) in which they conceive and, on the other, that various authorities and "not only poets" considered the uterus to be the belly, *venter*, common to both sexes.³ (This helps to explain why *vulva* in medieval usage usually meant vagina, from *valva*, "gateway to the belly.")⁴ Isidore, moreover, assimilates this unsexed belly to other retentive organs with respect precisely to that function in which we would think it unique: during gestation, he said, the semen is formed into a body "by heat like that of the viscera."⁵ A great linguistic cloud thus obscured specific genital or reproductive anatomy and left only the outlines of spaces common to both men and women.⁶

None of these topographical or lexical ambiguities would matter, however, if instead of understanding difference and sameness as matters of anatomy, the ancients regarded organs and their placement as epiphenomena of a greater world order. Then what we would regard as specifically male and female parts would not always need to have their own names, nor would the inversions Galen imagined actually have to work. Anatomy—modern sex—could in these circumstances be construed as metaphor, another name for the "reality" of woman's lesser perfection. As in Galen's elaborate comparison between the eyes of the mole and the genital organs of women, anatomy serves more as illustration of a well-known point than as evidence for its truth. It makes vivid and more palpable a hierarchy of heat and perfection that is in itself not available to the senses. (The ancients would not have claimed that one could actually feel differences in the heat of males and females.)⁷

Galen's simile goes as follows. The eyes of the mole have the same structures as the eyes of other animals except that they do not allow the mole to see. They do not open, "nor do they project but are left there imperfect." So too the female genitalia "do not open" and remain an imperfect version of what they would be were they thrust out. The mole's eyes thus "remain like the eyes of other animals when these are still in the uterus" and so, to follow this logic to its conclusion, the womb, vagina, ovaries, and external pudenda remain forever as if they were still inside the womb. They cascade vertiginously back inside themselves, the vagina an eternally, precariously, unborn penis, the womb a stunted scrotum, and so forth.⁸

The reason for this curious state of affairs is the purported telos of perfection. "Now just as mankind is the most perfect of all animals, so within mankind the man is more perfect than the woman, and the reason for his perfection is his excess of heat, for heat is Nature's primary instrument" (UP 2.630). The mole is a more perfect animal than animals with no eyes at all, and women are more perfect than other creatures, but the unexpressed organs of both are signs of the absence of heat and consequently of perfection. The interiority of the female reproductive system could then be interpreted as the material correlative of a higher truth without its mattering a great deal whether any particular spatial transformation could be performed.

Maleness Aristotle, paradoxically for someone so deeply committed to the existence of two radically different and distinct sexes, offered the western tradition a still more austere version of the one-sex model than did Galen. As a philosopher he insisted upon two sexes, male and female. But he also insisted that the distinguishing characteristic of maleness was immaterial and, as a naturalist, chipped away at organic distinctions between the sexes so that what emerges is an account in which one flesh could be ranked, ordered, and distinguished as particular circumstances required. What we would take to be ideologically charged social constructions of gender—that males are active and females passive, males contribute the form and females the matter to generation—were for Aristotle indubitable facts, "natural" truths. What we would take to be the basic facts of sexual difference, on the other hand—that males have a penis and females a vagina, males have testicles and females ovaries, females have a womb and males do not, males produce one kind of germinal product, females another, that women menstruate and men do not—were for Aristotle

contingent and philosophically not very interesting observations about particular species under certain conditions.

I do not mean to suggest by this that Aristotle was unable to tell man from woman on the basis of their bodies or that he thought it an accident that men should fulfill one set of roles and women another. Even if he did not write the *Economics* he would certainly have subscribed to the view that "the nature both of man and woman has been preordained by the will of heaven to live a common life. For they are distinguished in that the powers they possess are not applicable to purposes in all cases identical, but in some respects their functions are opposed to one another." One sex is strong and the other weak so that one may be cautious and the other brave in warding off attacks, one may go out and acquire possessions and the other stay home to preserve them, and so on.⁹ In other words, both the division of labor and the specific assignment of roles are natural.

But these views do not constitute a modern account of two sexes. In the first place, there is no effort to ground social roles in nature; social categories themselves are natural and on the same explanatory level as what we would take to be physical or biological facts. Nature is not therefore to culture what sex is to gender, as in modern discussions; the biological is not, even in principle, the foundation of particular social arrangements. (Aristotle, unlike nineteenth-century commentators, did not need facts about menstruation or metabolism to locate women in the world order.) But more important, though Aristotle certainly regarded male and female bodies as specifically adapted to their particular roles, he did not regard these adaptations as the signs of sexual opposition. The qualities of each sex entailed the comparative advantage of one or the other in minding the home or fighting, just as for Galen the lesser heat of women kept the uterus inside and therefore provided a place of moderate temperature for gestation. But these adaptations were not the basis for ontological differentiation. In the flesh, therefore, the sexes were more and less perfect versions of each other. Only insofar as sex was a cipher for the nature of causality were the sexes clear, distinct, and different in kind.

Sex, for Aristotle, existed for the purpose of generation, which he regarded as the paradigmatic case of becoming, of change "in the first category of being."¹⁰ The male represented efficient cause, the female represented material cause.

Under

the female always provides the material, the male that which fashions it, for this is the power we say they each possess, and *this is what it is for them to be male and female* . . . While the body is from the female, it is the soul that is from the male. (GA 2.4.738b20–23)

the male and female principles may be put down first and foremost as the origins of generation, the former as containing the efficient cause of generation, the latter the material of it. (GA 2.716a5–7)

This difference in the nature of cause constitutes fully what Aristotle means by sexual opposition: “by a male animal we mean that which generates in another; by a female, that which generates in itself”; or, what comes to the same thing since for Aristotle reproductive biology was essentially a model of filiation, “female is opposed to male, and mother to father.”¹¹

These were momentous distinctions, as powerful and plain as that between life and death. To Aristotle being male *meant* the capacity to supply the sensitive soul without which “it is impossible for face, hand, flesh, or any other part to exist.” Without the sensitive soul the body was no better than a corpse or part of a corpse (GA 2.5.741a8–16). The dead is made quick by the spark, by the incorporeal *sperma* (seed), of the genitor. One sex was able to concoct food to its highest, life-engendering stage, into true sperma; the other was not.

Moreover, when Aristotle discusses the capacity of the respective sexes to carry out the roles that distinguish them, he seems to want to consider bodies, and genitals in particular, as themselves opposites, indeed as making possible the efficient/material chasm itself. Males have the capacity, and females do not, to reduce “the residual secretion to a pure form,” the argument runs, and “every capacity has a certain corresponding organ.” It follows that “the one has the uterus, the other the male organs.” (These distinctions are actually more striking in translation than in the Greek. Aristotle uses *perineos* to refer to the penis and scrotum here. He uses the same word elsewhere to refer to the area “inside the thigh and buttocks” in women. More generally he uses *aidoion* to refer to the penis, but in the plural, *aidoia*, it is the standard word for the “shameful parts,” the Greek equivalent for the Latin *pudenda*, which refers to the genitals of both sexes.¹²)

Nevertheless, despite these linguistic ambiguities, Aristotle does seem committed to the genital opposition of two sexes. An animal is not “male

or female in virtue of the whole of itself,” he insists, “but only in virtue of a certain faculty and a certain part,” that is, the uterus in the female, the penis and testes in the male. The womb was the part peculiar to the female, just as the penis was distinctive of the male.¹³ No slippery inversions here as in Galen. No elisions of difference or hints of one sex. “The privy part of the female is in character opposite to that of the male. In other words, the part under the pubes is hollow, and not like the male organ, protruding” (HA 1.14.493b3–4). Aristotle even adduced what he took to be experimental evidence for the fact that anatomy was the foundation of the opposing male and female “principles” of activity and passivity. A castrated male, he pointed out, assumed pretty well the form of a female or “not far short of it . . . as would be the case if a first principle is changed” (GA 1.2.716b5–12). The excision of the “ovaries” in a sow caused them to get fat and quenched their sexual appetite, while a similar operation in camels made them more aggressive and fit for war service.¹⁴

None of this is very surprising, since the physical appearance of the genital organs was and remains the usually reliable indicator of reproductive capacity and hence of the gender to which an infant is to be assigned.¹⁵ But what is surprising is the alacrity with which Aristotle the naturalist blurs the distinctions of “real” bodies in order to arrive at a notion of fatherhood—the defining capacity of males—that transcends the divisions of flesh. Like Galen’s, and unlike that of the dominant post-Enlightenment tradition, Aristotle’s rhetoric then becomes that of one sex.

First, Aristotle’s passion for the infinite variety of natural history constantly undermines the form-follows-function precision of the texts I have cited. A large penis, which one might think would render a man more manly, capable of generating in another, in fact makes him less so: “such men are less fertile than when it [the penis] is smaller because the semen, if cold, is not generative.”¹⁶ (Aristotle’s biology is here playing on broader cultural themes. A large penis was thought comic in ancient Greek art and drama, appropriate to satyrs, while the preferred size was small and delicate: “little prick” (*posthion*) was among Aristophanes’ terms of endearment. Young athletes in Athens tied down the glans with a leather string, apparently for cosmetic reasons, to make the male genitals look small and as much like the female pudenda as possible.¹⁷) Detail after detail further undermines the penis/male connection in Aristotle’s

texts: human males and stallions do indeed have proportionately large penises outside their bodies, but the male elephant's is disproportionately small—he also has no visible testes—while the dolphin has no external penis at all. (The situation is doubly confused with elephants because supposedly the female “organ opens out to a considerable extent” during intercourse (HA 2.1.500a33–35 and 2.1.500b6–13). Among insects, Aristotle claims, the female actually pushes her sexual organ from underneath *into* the male (HA 5.8.542a2ff). Indeed, the male's having a penis at all seems to depend on nothing more than the placement or indeed existence of the legs: snakes, which have no legs, and birds, whose legs are in the middle of their abdomens where the genitals ought to be, simply lack a penis entirely (HA 2.1.500b20–25 and GA 1.5.717b14–19).

As for the testes being a “first principle” in the differentiation of the sexes, little is left rhetorically of this claim when faced with specific observations and metaphors (GA 1.2.716b4). Aristotle demotes them in one text to the lowly task of bending certain parts of the body's piping (HA 3.1.510a13–b5). Like the weights women hang from the warp on their looms—a less than celebratory simile, which suffers from a curious mixing of genders—the testicles keep the spermatic ducts properly inclined (GA 1.4.717a8–b10). (Thread that is not properly held down results in a tangle; tangled seminal ducts that go back up into the body convey impotent generative material.)

These “facts” led Aristotle still further away from specific connections between opposing genitals and sex and ever deeper into the thicket of connections that constitute the one-sex model. He, like Galen five centuries later, aligned the reproductive organs with the alimentary system, common to all flesh. Animals with straight intestines are more violent in their desire for food than animals whose intestines are convoluted, Aristotle observed, and likewise those with straight ducts, creatures without testes, are “quicker in accomplishing copulation” than creatures with crooked ducts. Conversely, creatures who “have not straight intestines” are more temperate in their longing for food, just as twisted ducts prevent “desire being too violent and hasty” in animals so blessed. Testes thus end up serving the lowly but useful function of making “the movement of the spermatic secretion steadier,” thus prolonging intercourse and concoction in the interest of hotter, finer sperma.¹⁸ Aristotle makes much less of the female plumbing, but his concern to identify the ovaries as the seat

of woman's specific reproductive capacity was never very serious and the one passage where he makes the case crumbles under close scrutiny.¹⁹ Natural history, in short, works to diminish the pristine purity of testes and ovaries, penis and vagina, as signifiers of sexual opposition—of efficient versus material cause—and situates them firmly in a larger economy of the one flesh.

Moreover, when Aristotle directly confronted the question of the anatomical differences between the sexes, he unleashed a vortex of metaphor every bit as dizzying and disorienting, every bit as committed to one sex, as Galen's trope of the mole's eyes. All of the male organs, he said, are similar in the female except that she has a womb, which presumably the male does not. But Aristotle promptly assimilates the womb to the male scrotum after all: “always double just as the testes are always two in the male.”²⁰

This move, however, was only part of a more general conflation of male and female parts, specifically of a tendency to regard the cervix and/or vagina as an internal penis:

The path along which the semen passes in women is of the following nature: they [women] possess a tube (*kaulos*)—like the penis of the male, but inside the body—and they breathe through this by a small duct which is placed above the place through which women urinate. This is why, when they are eager to make love, this place is not in the same state as it was before they were excited. (HA 10.5.637a23–25)

The very lack of precision in this description, and especially the use of so general a term as *kaulos* for a structure that in the two-sex model would become the mark of female emptiness or lack, suggests that Aristotle's primary commitment was not to anatomy itself, and certainly not to anatomy as the foundation for opposite sexes, as much as it was to greater truths that could be impressionistically illustrated by certain features of the body.

A brief excursus on *kaulos* will help to make this case. The word refers to a hollowish tubular structure generally: the neck of the bladder or the duct of the penis or, in Homeric usage, a spear shaft or the quill of a feather (to take four charged and richly intertwined examples). In the passage I just quoted it clearly designates some part of the female anatomy though which, significantly, is unclear: the cervix [neck] of the uterus, the endo-cervical canal, the vagina, some combination of these or

even the clitoris which like the penis would have been construed as hollow. But whatever *kaulos* means in this text, the part in question is spoken of elsewhere as if it functioned in women like an interior penis, a tube composed, as are both penis and vagina, of "much flesh and gristle" (HA 3.1.510b13).

By the time of Soranus, the second-century physician who would become the major source of the gynecological high tradition for the next fifteen centuries, the assimilation of vagina to penis through language had gone much further. "The inner part of the vagina (*tau gynaikeiou aidouin*, the feminine private part)," Soranus said, "grows around the neck of the uterus (*kaulos*, which I take here to mean cervix) like the prepuce in males around the glans."²¹ In other words, the vagina and external structures are imagined as one giant foreskin of the female interior penis whose glans is the domelike apex of the "neck of the womb." By the second century *kaulos* had also become the standard word for penis. The "protruding part" of the *aidouin* (private part) "through which flows liquid from the bladder" is called the *kaulos*, says Julius Pollux (134–192) authoritatively in his compilation of medical nomenclature.²² Aristotle—or the pseudo-Aristotle who wrote book 10 of the *Generation of Animals*—must have imagined something like this when he wrote of the womb during orgasm violently emitting (*proiesthai*) through the cervix into the same space as the penis, i.e., into the vagina.²³ If we take this figure seriously, we must come to the extraordinary conclusion that women always have one penis—the cervix or *kaulos*—penetrating the vagina from the inside and another more potent penis, the male's, penetrating from the outside during intercourse.

There is, as G. E. R. Lloyd said, "an air of shadow boxing" about Greek debates on male and female physiology, and even a certain lunatic confusion if various claims are pushed to their limits.²⁴ Matters were ordinarily much clearer to the ancients, who could undoubtedly tell penis from vagina and possessed the language with which to do so. Latin and Greek, like most other tongues, generated an excess of words about sex and sexual organs as well as a great abundance of poetry and prose praising or making fun of the male or female organs, joking or cursing on the theme of what should be stuck where. I deny none of this.

But when the experts in the field sat down to write about the basis of sexual difference, they saw no need to develop a precise vocabulary of genital anatomy because if the female body was a less hot, less perfect,

and hence less potent version of the canonical body, then distinct organic, much less genital, landmarks mattered far less than the metaphysical hierarchies they illustrated. Claims that the vagina was an internal penis or that the womb was a female scrotum should therefore be understood as images in the flesh of truths far better secured elsewhere. They are another way of saying, with Aristotle, that woman is to man as a wooden triangle is to a brazen one or that woman is to man as the imperfect eyes of the mole are to the more perfect eyes of other creatures.²⁵ Anatomy in the context of sexual difference was a representational strategy that illuminated a more stable extracorporeal reality. There existed many genders, but only one adaptable sex.

Blood, milk, fat, sperm

In the blood, semen, milk, and other fluids of the one-sex body, there is no female and no sharp boundary between the sexes. Instead, a physiology of fungible fluids and corporeal flux represents in a different register the absence of specifically genital sex. Endless mutations, a cacophonous ringing of changes, become possible where modern physiology would see distinct and often sexually specific entities.

Ancient wisdom held, for example, that sexual intercourse could alleviate conditions—mopish, sluggish behavior—caused by too much phlegm, the moist clammy humor associated with the brain: "semen is the secretion of an excrement and in its nature resembles phlegm."²⁶ (This already hints of the idea that conception is the male having an idea in the female body.) But more to the point here, ejaculation of one sort of fluid was thought to restore a balance caused by an excess of another sort because seminal emission, bleeding, purging, and sweating were all forms of evacuation that served to maintain the free-trade economy of fluids at a proper level. A Hippocratic account makes these physiological observations more vivid by specifying the anatomical pathways of interconversion; sperm, a foam much like the froth on the sea, was first refined out of the blood; it passed to the brain; from the brain it made its way back through the spinal marrow, the kidneys, the testicles, and into the penis.²⁷

Menstrual blood, a plethora or leftover of nutrition, is as it were a local variant in this generic corporeal economy of fluids and organs. Pregnant women, who supposedly transformed otherwise superfluous food into

nourishment for the fetus, and new mothers, who nursed and thus needed to convert extra blood into milk, did not have a surplus and thus did not menstruate. "After birth," says the omniscient Isidore, passing on one millennium of scholarship to the next, "whatever blood has not yet been spent in the nourishing of the womb flows by natural passage to the breasts, and whitening [hence *lac*, from the Greek *leukos* (white), Isidore says] by their virtue, receives the quality of milk."²⁸ So too obese women (they transformed the normal plethora into fat), dancers (they used up the plethora in exercise), and women "engaged in singing contests" (in their bodies "the material is forced to move around and is utterly consumed") did not menstruate either and were thus generally infertile.²⁹ The case of singers, moreover, illustrates once again the extent to which what we would take to be only metaphoric connections between organs were viewed as having causal consequences in the body as being real. Here the association is one between the throat or neck through which air flows and the neck of the womb through which the menses passes; activity in one detracts from activity in the other. (In fact, metaphorical connections between the throat and the cervix/vagina or buccal cavity and pudenda are legion in antiquity and still into the nineteenth century, as fig. 2 suggests. Put differently, a claim that is made in one case as metaphor—the emissions that both a man and a woman deposit in front of the neck of the womb are drawn up "with the aid of breath, *as with* the mouth or nostrils"—has literal implications in another: singers are less likely to menstruate.³⁰)

Although I have so far only described the economy of fungible fluids with respect to sperm and menstrual blood, seemingly gendered products, it in fact transcended sex and even species boundaries. True, because men were hotter and had less blood left over, they did not generally give milk. But, Aristotle reports, some men after puberty *did* produce a little milk and with consistent milking could be made to produce more (*HA* 3.20.522a19–22). Conversely, women menstruated because they were cooler than men and hence more likely at certain ages to have a surplus of nutriment. But, even so, menstruation in women was thought to have functional, nonreproductive, equivalents, which allowed it to be viewed as part of a physiology held in common with men. Thus, Hippocrates held, the onset of a nosebleed, but also of menstruation, was an indication that a fever was about to break, just as nosebleeding was a prognostic sign that blocked courses, amenorrhea, would soon resolve. Conversely,

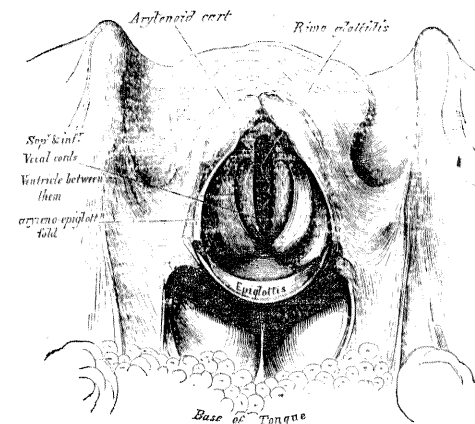


Fig. 2. Nineteenth-century illustration of a view into the aperture of the larynx which makes it look like the female external genitalia. Galen had pointed out that the uvula, which hangs down at the back of the soft palate—center view as one looks into the mouth—gives the same sort of protection to the throat that the clitoris gives to the uterus. From Max Muller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*.

a woman vomiting blood would stop if she started to menstruate.³¹ The same sort of substitution works with sweat: women menstruate less in the summer and more in winter, said Soranus, because of the different amounts of evaporation that take place throughout the body in warm and cold weather. The more perspiration, the less menstrual bleeding.³²

What matters is losing blood in relation to the fluid balance of the body, not the sex of the subject or the orifice from which it is lost. Hence, argued Araeteus the Cappadocian, if melancholy appears after "the suppression of the catemenial discharge in women," or after "the hemorrhoidal flux in men, we must stimulate the parts to throw off their accustomed evacuation." Women, said Aristotle, do not suffer from hemorrhoids or nosebleeds as much as men do, except when their menstrual discharges are ceasing; conversely, the menstrual discharge is slight in women with hemorrhoids or varicose veins presumably because surplus blood finds egress by these means.³³

The complex network of interconvertibility implicit in the physiology of one sex is even wider than I have suggested and encompasses flesh as well as fluid. Aristotle, for example, finds confirmation for the common

residual nature of sperm and menstrual fluid in the observation that fat creatures of *both* sexes are “less spermatic” (*spermatika*) than lean ones. Since “fat also, like semen, is a residue, and is in fact concocted blood,” fat men and women have less left over to be released in orgasm or as catamenia. Lean men, on the other hand, produce more semen than fat men and for the same general reason that humans produce proportionally more semen *and* more menstrual fluid than other animals: lean men do not use up nutriment for fat; humans retain, as a surplus, material that in animals goes into their horns and hair.³⁴

This sort of analysis can be extended indefinitely. Fair-complexioned men and women ejaculate more copiously than darker ones, Aristotle says, without even bothering to make explicit the assumption that this is because the latter are generally more hirsute; those on a watery and pungent diet discharge more than they would on a dry bland diet (*HA* 7.2.583a10–14). Both men and women are tired after ejaculation, not because the quantity of material emitted is so great but because of its quality: it is made from the purest part of the blood, from the essence of life (*GA* 1.18.725b6–7).

If, as I have been arguing, the reproductive fluids in the one-sex model were but the higher stages in the concoction of food—much like the lighter-weight products in the fractional distillation of crude oil—then the male and female seed cannot be imagined as sexually specific, morphologically distinct, entities, which is how they would come to be understood after the discovery of little creatures in the semen and of what was presumed to be the mammalian egg in the late seventeenth century.³⁵ Instead, the substances ejaculated by the “two sexes” in the one-sex body were hierarchically ordered versions of one another according to their supposed power.

The difference between so-called two-seed and one-seed theories—Galen versus Aristotle—is therefore not an empirical question that could be resolved by reference to observable facts. Even in Aristotle’s one-seed theory, *sperma* and *catemenia* refer to greater or lesser refinements of an ungendered blood, except when they are used as ciphers for the male and female “principles.”³⁶ What one sees, or could ever see, does not really matter except insofar as the thicker, whiter, frothier quality of the male semen is a hint that it is more powerful, more likely to act as an efficient cause, than the thinner, less pristinely white, and more watery female ejaculate or the still red, even less concocted, menstrea. Like reproductive organs, reproductive fluids turn out to be versions of each other; they are

the biological articulation, in the language of a one-sex body, of the politics of two genders and ultimately of engendering.

The Hippocratic writer illustrates this point vividly and without the philosophical complexity we find in Aristotle’s so-called one-seed theory. Perhaps, if we accept the views of Aline Rousselle, he even speaks for the otherwise silenced empirical wisdom of women.³⁷ Hippocrates argues for pangenesis, the view that each part of the body of each parent renders up some aspect of itself; that the representatives of the various parts form a reproductive fluid or seed; and that conception consists of a blending, in various proportions and strengths, of these germinal substances. Hippocrates abandons any effort to attribute strong or weak seed respectively to actual males or females. Although males must originate from stronger sperm, “the male being stronger than the female,” both are capable of producing more or less strong seed. What each emits is the result not of any essential characteristic of male or female, but of an internal battle between each sort of seed: “what the woman emits is sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker; and this applies also to what the man emits.”³⁸ Hippocrates insists on this point by repeating the claim and generalizing it to animals: “The same man does not invariably emit the strong variety of sperm, nor the weak invariably, but sometimes the one and sometimes the other; the same is true in the woman’s case.” This explains why any given couple produces both male and female offspring as well as stronger and weaker versions of each; likewise for the beasts.³⁹

If both partners produce strong sperm, a male results; if both produce weak sperm, a female is born; and if in one partner the battle has gone to the weak and in the other to the strong, then the sex of the offspring is determined by the quantity of the sperm produced. A greater quantity of weak sperm, whether produced by the male or the female, can overwhelm a lesser quantity of strong sperm, of whatever origin, in the second round when the two meet in front of the uterus for renewed combat. Hippocrates is at pains to emphasize the fluidity of the situation and the interpenetration of male and female. The contest for supremacy between the sperm is,

just as though one were to mix together beeswax and suet, using a larger quantity of the suet than of the beeswax, and melt them together over a fire. While the mixture is still fluid, the prevailing character of the mixture is not apparent: only after it solidifies can it be seen that the suet prevails quantitatively over the wax. And it is just the same with the male and female forms of the sperm.⁴⁰

Male and female "forms" of sperm thus correspond neither to the genital configuration of their source nor to that of the new life they will create, but rather to gradations on a continuum of strong to weak.⁴¹

I think that, if pushed on the point, the Hippocratic writer would have to admit that there was something uniquely powerful about male seed, the fluid that comes from an actual male, because otherwise he would have no answer to the question with which two-seed theorists were plagued for millennia: if the female has such powerful seed, then why can she not engender within herself alone; who needs men? The Hippocratic texts, however, resolutely resist correlating the gender of the seed, its strength or weakness, with the sex of the creature that produced it. Instead, in their version of the one-sex economy of fluids, the more potent seed is by definition the more male, wherever it originated.

For Galen too each parent contributes something that shapes and vivifies matter, but he insists that the female parent's seed is less powerful, less "informing," than the male parent's because of the very nature of the female. To be female *means* to have weaker seed, seed incapable of engendering, not as an empirical but as a logical matter. "Forthwith, *of course*, the female *must* have smaller, less perfect testes, and the semen generated in them must be scantier, colder, and wetter (for these things too follow *of necessity* from the deficient heat)" (UP 2.631). Thus, in contrast to Hippocrates, Galen holds that the quality of the respective seeds themselves follows from the hierarchy of the sexes. Man's seed is always thicker and hotter than a woman's for the same reason that the penis is extruded and not, like the uterus and the mole's eyes, left undeveloped inside the body: humans are the most perfect animal, and man is more perfect than woman because of an "excess of heat." In opposition, however, to what he took to be Aristotle's view, Galen insisted that women did produce semen, a true generative seed. If this were not the case, he asks rhetorically, why would they have testicles, which they manifestly do? And if they had no testicles (*orcheis*) they would not have the desire for intercourse, which they manifestly have.⁴² In other words, the female seed, like woman herself, "is not very far short of being perfectly warm" (UP 2.630).

Male and female semen, more and less refined fluids, thus stand in the same relationship to blood that penis and vagina stand to genital anatomy, extruded and still-inside organs. As the medieval Arabic physician Avicenna (ibn-Sina, 980–1037) puts it in his discussion of these Galenic

texts, "the female seed is a kind of menstrual blood, incompletely digested and little converted, and it is not as far away from the nature of blood (*a virtute sanguinea*) as is the male seed."⁴³ He assimilates digestion and reproduction, food, blood, and seed into a single general economy of fluids driven by heat. The female in the one-sex model lacks the capacity, the vital heat, to convert food to the very highest level: sperm. But she comes close.

Aristotle and the Aristotelian "one-seed" tradition, with its radical distinction between the male and female generative materials (*gonimos*), would seem to make the Galenic intermediate position impossible and would thus also seem to provide a basis in the body for two biologically distinct and incommensurable sexes, much in the way that egg and sperm would come to function in theories like Geddes' in the nineteenth century. Males, in Aristotle's account, produce *sperma*, which is the efficient cause in generation, and females do not. Females provide instead the *catamenia*, which is the material cause and thus of an entirely different nature. But this *a priori* formal distinction entirely exhausts what Aristotle means by *sperma* and *catamenia*. Just as the bodies of males and females fail to provide fixed anatomical correlatives for his theory of generative causality, so too the reproductive fluids "in the world" do not sustain a radical two-sex account of sexual difference. Nor would Aristotle want them to.

Obviously Aristotle and his contemporaries could tell semen from menstrual blood. Men and sanguineous male animals, they knew, generally emitted a visible, palpable substance that was white because it was foam composed of invisible bubbles and thick because it was a compound of water mixed with breath (*pneuma*), the tool through which the male principle worked. Although Aristotle usually referred to this stuff as *sperma*, its distinguishing characteristics were not in principle aspects of the seed itself.⁴⁴ The ejaculate, he makes absolutely explicit, was but the vehicle for the efficient cause, for the *sperma*, which worked its magic like an invisible streak of lightning. As experience proved, it ran out of or evaporated from the vagina; it no more entered into the *catemenia*, into what would become the body of the embryo, than any active agent enters into passive matter when one thing is made from two. After all, no part of the carpenter merges with the bed he crafts, nor does the swordsmith's art enter the sword he is fashioning, nor does rennet or fig juice become part of the milk they curdle into cheese. Indeed the efficient cause, the

artisanal, informing principle, can apparently be carried on the breeze alone, as with the Cretan mares who are "wind impregnated."⁴⁵

All of Aristotle's metaphors discount a physically present ejaculate; sperma as artisan works in a flash, more like a genie than like a shoemaker who sticks to his last. His images bring us back to the constellation of phlegm/brain/sperm: conception is for the male to have an idea, an artistic or artisanal conception, in the brain-uterus of the female.⁴⁶

But the female, the material, contribution to generation is only slightly more material and thus recognizable by the physical properties of menstrual blood. Aristotle is at pains to point out that catamenia, the menstrual residue itself, is not to be equated with the actual blood that one sees: "the greater part of the menstrual flow is useless, being fluid" (*GA* 2.4.739a9). But he leaves the relationship between the catamenia, wherein the sperma works its magic, and anything visible—the "useless" menstrual discharge or the fluid that moistens the vagina during intercourse—unexplored largely because it does not matter in a world in which claims about the body serve primarily as illustrations of a variety of higher truths.⁴⁷ His dominant image is of a hierarchy of blood: "The secretion of the male and the menses of the female are of a sanguinous nature."⁴⁸ Semen from men who have coitus too often reverts to its earlier bloody state; semen in boys and often in older men is, like the catamenia, unable to impart movement to matter.⁴⁹ For Aristotle, therefore, and for the long tradition founded in his thought, the generative substances are interconvertible elements in the economy of a single-sex body whose higher form is male. As physiological fluids they are not distinctive and different in kind, but the lighter shades of biological chiaroscuro drawn in blood.⁵⁰

All of this evidence suggests that in the construction of the one-sex body the borders between blood, semen, other residues and food, between the organs of reproduction and other organs, between the heat of passion and the heat of life, were indistinct and, to the modern person, almost unimaginably—indeed terrifyingly—porous. "Anyone who has intercourse around midnight," warns a text attributed to Constantinius Africanus, "makes a mistake." Digest (concoct) food first before straining the body to give the final concoction to the seed.⁵¹ Fifteen hundred years after Aristotle and a thousand after Galen, Dante in the *Purgatorio* still plays on the fungibility of the body's fluids and the affinities of its heats. "Undrunk" blood, perfect like a dish (*alimento*) that is sent from the table, is redistilled by the heat of the heart, sent down to the genitals, from

which "it sprays in nature's vessel, on another's blood."⁵² *The Secrets of Women*, compiled from ancient lore during the later Middle Ages and still popular in the eighteenth century, speaks of the appetite for intercourse as a direct result of the buildup of residue from daily food. Menstrua refined from the blood heats up a woman's vulva through an "abundance of matter" and causes her greatly to desire coition.⁵³

The fluid economy of the one-sex body thus engenders the desires and the heat through which it will be perpetuated. But more generally I hope it is becoming clear that the physiology and even the anatomy of generation are but local instances of a way of talking about the body very different from our own. Visible flesh and blood cannot be regarded as the stable "real" foundation for cultural claims about it. Indeed, the interpretive problem is understanding the purchase of "real" and the degree to which biology is only the expression of other and more pervasive truths.

Orgasm and desire

"I must now tell why a great pleasure is coupled with the exercise of the generative parts and a raging desire precedes their use," Galen wrote (*UP* 2.640). However else orgasm might be tempered to fit the cultural needs of the private and the public body, it signaled the unsocialized body's capacity to generate. A basically matter-of-fact, specifically genital urge led to a grander, systemic heating of the body until it was hot enough to concoct the seeds of new life. Serous residues, exquisitely sensitive skin, and friction were the proximal causes of sexual delight and desire; "that the race may continue incorruptible forever" was their ultimate purpose. The process of generation might differ in its nuances as the vital heats, the seeds, and the physical qualities of the substances being ejaculated differed between the sexes—but libido, as we might call it, had no sex.

There was, of course, the age-old issue of whether men or women enjoyed the pleasures of Venus more, a question posed most famously in Ovid, who offers an ambiguous answer. (Ovid's account would become a regular anecdote in the professorial repertory, told to generations of medieval and Renaissance students to spice up medical lectures.) True, Tiresias, who had experienced love as both a man and a woman, was blinded by Juno for agreeing with Jupiter that women enjoyed sex more. But his qualifications for judging already suggest the slipperiness of the question: he knew either one or the other, or both, aspects of the femi-

nine *Venus* rather than of the masculine *amor*. And the story of his "mirror" metamorphosis from man to woman, the result of his striking two copulating serpents, and back to man by striking them again eight years later, further undermines his authority on the sexual differentiation of pleasure. Snakes famously give no outward sign of their sex; they curl around one another in coition and reflect back and forth the most ambiguous and ungendered of images. Though differing perhaps in nuance, orgasm is orgasm in the one-flesh body, Ovid's story seems to say.⁵⁴

A common neurology of pleasure in a common anatomy, it was thought, bore witness to this fact. Galen, for example, notes that "the male penis . . . as well as the neck of the uterus and the other parts of the pudendum" are richly endowed with nerves because they need sensation during sexual intercourse and that the testes, scrotum, and uterus are poorly endowed because they do not. Animal dissections prove, he says, that the "genital areas," in common with the liver, spleen, and kidneys, have only small nerves while the pudenda have "more considerable ones." Even the skin of the relevant organs is more irritated by the "itch" of the flesh than would be the skin of the body's other parts. Given all these adaptations, "it is no longer to be wondered at that the pleasure inherent in the parts there and the desire that precedes it are more vehement."⁵⁵

Aristotle too is at pains to point out that "the same part which serves for the evacuation of the fluid residue is also made by nature to serve in sexual congress, and this alike in male and female."⁵⁶ Both sperma and catamenia generate heat in the genital regions, both put pressure on the sexual organs that are prepared to respond to their stimuli, though in the case of women's parts the heat seems to serve primarily to draw in semen, like a cupping vessel, and not to spur coition (GA 2.4.739b10).

"Semen" in this economy of pleasure is not only a generative substance but also, through its specific action on the genitals, one of the causes of libido. It is a serous, irritating humor that produces a most demanding itch in precisely that part of the body contrived by Nature to be hypersensitive to it.⁵⁷ (Or in parts not contrived for it. The only ancient text to discuss the physical causes of passive homosexuality—the unnatural desire of the male to play the socially inferior role of woman by offering his anus for penetration—attributes it both to an excess of semen and to a congenital defect that shunts this excess to an inappropriate orifice, the anus, instead of allowing it to simply build up in the proper male organ.⁵⁸) Needless to say, great pleasure is to be had from scratching.

Orgasm thus dovetails nicely with the economy of fluids discussed in the previous section. One of Galen's arguments for the existence of a true female seed, for example, was its link to desire: it offered "no small usefulness in inciting the female to the sexual act and in opening wide the neck of the womb during coitus" (UP 2.643). He might actually have meant that it works like a penis. The part in question, extending out to the "pudenda" (the cervix?, the vagina?) is, he says, sinewy and becomes straight during intercourse. He does not actually claim that the womb or vagina has an erection, but he describes the penis also as a sinewy, hollow body that becomes erect when it is filled with pneuma, with breath. And elsewhere still he develops the labia/foreskin association.⁵⁹ The medieval commentator Albertus Magnus, writing still very much in this tradition almost a millennium later, makes the link explicit: a *ventositas*, a gaseous, perhaps also liquid modification of vital heat, engorges the genital organs of both sexes.⁶⁰ Organs and orgasms thus reflect one another in a common mirror.

Meanwhile Avicenna, the influential Arabic physician, broadens the discussion of the semen/pleasure nexus by explicitly connecting the anatomy and physiology of sexual pleasure in the one-sex body. An irritation of a common human flesh, caused by the acute quality or sheer quantity of sperm—again common to both sexes—engenders a specifically genital itch (*pruritus*) in the male's spermatic vessels and in the mouth of the womb (*in ore matricis*), which is relieved only by the chafing of intercourse or its equivalent. In this process the vagina, or in any case the cervix, becomes erect like the penis and is "thrust forward up against its mouth as though moving forward through the desire of attracting sperm."⁶¹ In the telling absence of a precise technical vocabulary, it is difficult to be sure exactly what part of a woman's genital organ is moving where; but the critical general claim, that irritation by a serous fluid loosely called sperm or semen causes women like men to experience desire and erection, is made unambiguously.

Intercourse in the one-sex body, however, is not construed primarily as a genital occasion. (Nor, of course, is desire purely the product of physical forces independent of the imagination.) The genitals, to be sure, are the most sensitive gauge of the presence of residues, the point of their release, and the immediate locus of pleasure, but coitus is a generalized friction culminating in a corporeal blaze. Intercourse and orgasm are the last stage, the whole body's final exaggerated huffing and puffing, violent,

stormlike agitation in the throes of producing the seeds of life. The rubbing together of organs, or even their imagined chafing in an erotic dream, causes warmth to diffuse via the blood vessels to the rest of the body. "Friction of the penis and the movement of the whole man cause the fluid in the body to grow warm," the Hippocratic writer reports; "an irritation is set up in the womb which produces pleasure and heat in the rest of the body."⁶² Then, as warmth and pleasure build up and spread, the increasingly violent movement of the body causes its finest part to be concocted into semen—a kind of foam—which bursts out with the uncontrolled power of an epileptic seizure, to use the analogy Galen borrowed from Democritus.⁶³ Sexual heat is an instance of the heat that makes matter live and orgasm, which signals the explosive release of the seed and the heated *pneuma*, mimics the creative work of Nature itself.

Although specific interpretations of the male and female orgasm might differ, certain facts were generally not in dispute: both sexes experienced a violent pleasure during intercourse that was intimately connected with successful generation; both generally emitted something; pleasure was due both to the qualities of the substance emitted and to its rapid propulsion by "air"; the womb performed double duty in both emitting something and then drawing up and retaining a mixture of the two emissions. Of what deeper truths these facts spoke was much debated.

In the first place, the way orgasm felt was adduced as evidence for particular embryological theories. Pangenesisists could argue as follows: "the intensity of pleasure of coition" proves that seed comes from every part of both partners because pleasure is greater if multiplied and that of orgasm is so great that it must result from something happening everywhere rather than just in a few places or in one sex only. But even if this reasoning was not universally accepted, most writers nevertheless regarded orgasm as a most weighty sign.

Why, asked an ancient text, did someone having sexual intercourse, and also a dying person, cast his or her eyes upward? Because the heat going out in an upward direction makes the eyes turn in the direction in which it itself is traveling.⁶⁴ Conversely, sexual heat is the most intense form of the heat of life and so is the sign of successful generation. The early Christian writer Tertullian, for example, grounded his heterodox theory of the soul—its material origin, its entry into the body at the moment of conception, its departure at death—on the phenomenology of orgasm:

In a single impact of both parties, the whole human frame is shaken and foams with semen, in which the damp humor of the body is joined to the hot substance of the soul . . . I cannot help asking, whether we do not, in that very heat of extreme gratification when the generative fluid is ejected, feel that somewhat of our soul has gone out from us? And do we not experience a faintness and prostration along with a dimness of sight? This, then, must be the soul producing seed, which arises from the outdrip of the soul, just as that fluid is the body-producing seed which proceeds from the drainage of the flesh.⁶⁵

This "heat of extreme gratification," however, is open to quite different secular interpretations. Lucretius regarded it as the blaze of battle in the war of sexual passion and conception. Young men are wounded by Cupid's arrow and fall in the direction of their injuries: "blood spurts out in the direction of their wound." (In context this can only be semen, pure blood and not the blood of virginity.) Then both bodies are liquefied in rapture, and their ejaculates engage in a synecdochic version of the two bodies' combat. Offspring resemble both parents, for example, because "at their making the seeds that course through the limbs under the impulse of Venus were dashed together by the collusion of mutual passion in which neither party was master or mastered."⁶⁶

In contrast to these positions, Aristotle wants to isolate orgasm from generation so as to protect the difference between efficient and material cause from an untidy world in which both sexes have orgasms that feel as if the same process had gone on in each of them. (As it turns out, Aristotle was right but not for the reasons he gave.) Thus for him it *has* to be "impossible to conceive without the emission of the male"; whether he feels pleasure during ejaculation is irrelevant. On the other hand women *must* be able to conceive "without experiencing the pleasure usual in such intercourse" because, by definition, conception is the work of the male emission on material in, or produced by, the body of the female. (Females usually do emit something but need not do so; there can be just enough catamenial residue resting in the womb for conception to take place but no extra that needs to be expelled.) Aristotle's argument is asymmetrical here—males must emit, women need not feel—because he wants to stick to the essentials. It makes no difference how one interprets male pleasure; he must insist, however, that female pleasure—he discusses only humans in this regard—has no implication for his theory of the separation of

causes. His real interest is not in interpreting orgasm, but in *not* interpreting it.⁶⁷

It follows from this position that Aristotle would make no effort to ground two sexes in radically different passions and pleasures. Though women clearly could, in his view, conceive without feeling anything, he regarded this as a freak occurrence that resulted when "the part chance to be in heat and the uterus to have descended," that is, when the womb and vagina were warmed by something other than the friction of intercourse and experienced their internal erection without concomitant sexual excitement. "Generally speaking," he said, "the opposite is the case"; discharge by women is accompanied by pleasure just as it is in men, and "when this is so there is a readier way for the semen of the male to be drawn into the uterus."⁶⁸

Aristotle's many allusions to sexual pleasure are clearly not directed at distinguishing the orgasms of men and women but in keeping their similarities from being relevant. What he takes to be contingent sensations must not be construed as evidence for what he regards as metaphysical truths about generation. He denies that orgasm signals the production of generative substances even for the male; "the vehemence of pleasure in sexual intercourse," he maintains, is not at all due to the production of semen but is the result instead of "a strong friction wherefore if this intercourse is often repeated the pleasure is diminished in the persons concerned."⁶⁹ The rhetorical force of this convoluted sentence is to stress the fading of feeling that comes from repetition. Elsewhere he says that pleasure arises not just from the emission of semen but from the *pneuma*, the breath, with which the generative substances explode. The point is simply that the phenomenological correlative of the generative act signifies nothing about its essence: there need be no seed, no efficient cause itself, for there to be an orgasm—as in young boys and old men who are not potent but nevertheless enjoy emission.⁷⁰ Conversely, both men and women can emit their respective generative products and feel nothing, as in nocturnal wet dreams.⁷¹

Whatever else orgasm might be or not be, mean or not mean, in various philosophical or theological contexts, it was at the very least understood as the *summa voluptas* that normally accompanied the final blast of a body heated so hot that it expelled its generative essences or, in any case, was in a state to conceive. As such, it dwelled at the intersection of nature and civilization. On the one hand, orgasm was associated with

unrestrained passion, warmth, melting, rendering, rubbing, exploding, as qualities of the individual body; aspects of the process of individual generation. On the other hand, orgasm also bore witness to the power of mortal flesh to reproduce its kind and thus assure the continuity of the body social. It and sexual pleasure generally were therefore cultural facts as well: the biology of conception was at the same time a model of filiation; the effective elimination of the distinct ontological category woman in the one-sex model and the doctrine that "like seeks like" made it difficult to explain heterosexuality upon which generation depended; the unruly body spoke of the unruly heart, of the fall from grace and weakness of the will; microcosmic creation mirrored the macrocosmic. Though the social and the corporeal cannot be disentangled, for purposes of exposition I will discuss orgasm first as the physicians confronted it—as a clinical problem of fertility or infertility—and then briefly turn in the next section to its relation to the demands of culture.

Physicians and midwives needed to know how to make men and women fertile—or more covertly, how to make them infertile—and how to tell if their therapeutic interventions were on the right track. If, as was commonplace, one believed that the body gave signs through its pleasures of the capacity to generate, then these could be read and the underlying processes manipulated to ensure or prevent conception. So, for example, Aetios of Amida, physician to Justinian who summarized for the emperor much ancient medical learning, interpreted a woman's orgasmic shudder as a prognostic sign of conception. If "in the very coitional act itself, she notes a certain tremor . . . she is pregnant." (Aetios also transmitted to the Christian world the old saw that women who are forced to have intercourse against their will are sterile while those "in love conceive very often.") A woman's shiver would not have been understood simply as a sign of her "semination"; it would register also the closing off of her womb at the appropriate time, after it had drawn up her seed mixed with that of the male.⁷²

Because the womb was thought to close after its orgasmic ejaculation, correct coital rhythm between partners during intercourse was thought critical for conception. If the woman is too excited before intercourse begins, the Hippocratic writer points out, she will ejaculate prematurely; then not only will her further pleasure diminish—a conclusion clearly based on men observing themselves—but also her womb will close and

she will not become pregnant. In exemplary reproductive heterosexual intercourse, then, both partners reached orgasm at the same time. Like a flame that flares when wine is sprinkled on it, the woman's heat blazes most brilliantly when the male sperm is sprayed on it, Hippocrates rhapsodized. She shivers. The womb seals itself. And the combined elements for a new life are safely contained within.⁷³

Orgasm in this account is thus common to both sexes but, like anatomy and the seeds themselves, it is hierarchically ordered. The man determines the nature of woman's pleasure, which is more sustained but also, because of her lesser heat, less intense; the man feels a greater pang at the secretion of bodily fluids because a greater violence accompanies their being wrenched from his blood and flesh. Feelings mirror the cosmic order and at the same time suggest the sparkling of a candle in a mist of resinated wine.

Clinically, therefore, the problem is how to manipulate the pace of passion and the heat of the body so as to produce the desired results, conception or nonconception. Aristotle (or the pseudo-Aristotelian author of book 10) gives elaborate directions for determining in cases of barrenness which partner's coital rhythms or corporeal environment was at fault. During intercourse the woman's womb should become moist but "not often or excessively too moist," lubricated as the mouth is with saliva when we are about to eat (once again a neck-of-the-womb/throat connection).⁷⁴ More natural history: if a man ejaculates quickly and "a woman with difficulty as is often the case," this prevents conception since women do contribute "something to the semen and to generation." The observation that women and men who are barren with each other are "fertile when they meet with partners who keep pace with them during intercourse" provides this further evidence for the importance of suitable coital rhythms.⁷⁵ Fifteen hundred years later, and in the very different context of prescriptions for birth control and abortion, the tenth-century Arabic writer Rhazes suggested that "if the man discharges sooner than the woman [discharges] she will not become pregnant."⁷⁶

Anything that might diminish coital heat could also cause infertility. Insufficient friction during intercourse, for example, could keep either partner from "seminating." Thus Avicenna argues—again this is a commonplace notion—that the smallness of a man's penis might cause a woman not to be "pleased by it . . . whereupon she does not emit sperm (*sperma*), and when she does not emit sperm a child is not made." As if to

raise male anxiety still further, he warns that unsatisfied women will remain in the thrall of desire and "have recourse to rubbing, with other women (*ad fricationem cum mulieribus*), in order to achieve amongst themselves the fullness of their pleasures" and to rid themselves of the pressures of seminal residue.⁷⁷

But even if the actual pang of a woman's orgasm was regarded as a sign without the specific physiological referent of semination, sexual pleasure or at the very least desire was still regarded as part of the general care of the body that made reproduction, and hence the immortal body of the race, possible. Control of the sexual body was, as Foucault points out in his *History of Sexuality*, an aspect of more general dietary and other corporeal disciplines. Nowhere is this aspect of the domestication of sexual heat clearer than in Soranus' *Gynecology*, which was written in the second century but which in various fragments and translations was one of the most widely cited texts until the late seventeenth century.

Soranus was not much interested in female ejaculation because he remained in doubt as to whether women actually contributed an active principle, a true seed. "It seems not to be drawn upon in generation since it is excreted externally," he concluded cautiously. He nowhere denied the everyday existence of the sharp crisis of orgasm in women, but it was not of primary clinical concern. What mattered in women as in men, Soranus thought, was "the urge and appetite for intercourse." Making the body ready for generation was like making it ready to put food to best use. The physiological affinity between generation and nutrition, eating and procreation, and in later Christian formulations between gluttony and lust, are nowhere clearer: "as it is impossible for the seed to be discharged by the male, in the same manner, without appetite it can not be conceived by the female." A woman ingesting and a woman conceiving are engaged in analogous functions; food eaten when one has no appetite is not properly digested, and seed received by a woman when she has no sexual urge is not retained.⁷⁸

But appetite alone is clearly not enough, since lecherous women feel desire all the time but are not always fertile. The body—Soranus is writing for midwives who ministered to ladies of the Roman governing class—must be properly cultivated to prepare for the civic task of procreation. They ought to be well rested, appropriately nourished, relaxed, in good order, and hot. Just as a Roman magistrate should eat only such foods as would maintain his sound judgment, so a woman should eat

appropriately before sex “to give the inner turbulence an impetus toward coition” and to be sure that her sexual urges were not diverted by hunger. She should be sober. A rubdown before intercourse would be indicated, since it “naturally aids the distribution of food, [and] also helps in the reception and retention of the seed.”⁷⁹ The fungibility of fluids, the equivalences of heat, are here registered in the social discipline of the body for procreation.

The demands of culture

The one-sex body would seem to have no boundaries that could serve to define social status. There are hirsute, viral women—the virago—who are too hot to procreate and are as bold as men; and there are weak, effeminate men, too cold to procreate and perhaps even womanly in wanting to be penetrated. “You may obtain physiognomic indications of masculinity and femininity,” writes an ancient authority on interpreting the face and body, “from your subject’s glance, movement, and voice, and then, from among these signs, compare with one another until you determine to your satisfaction which of the two sexes prevails.”⁸⁰ “Two sexes” here refers not to the clear and distinct kinds of being we might mean when we speak of opposite sexes, but rather to delicate, difficult-to-read shadings of one sex. There is, for example, no inherent gendering of desire and hence of coupling. It was in no way thought unnatural for mature men to be sexually attracted to boys. The male body, indeed, seemed equally capable of responding erotically to the sight of women as to attractive young men, which is why physicians forbade sufferers of satyriasis (abnormal sexual craving characterized by unceasing erection and genital itch) to consort with either, regardless of their respective genital formations.⁸¹ Insofar as sexual attraction had a biological basis—as opposed to a basis in the naturalness of the social order and the imperative to keep it going—it seemed more genealogical than genital. In Aristophanes’ story of the origins of men and women from two aboriginal, globular creatures who had either two male organs, two female organs, or one of each, only those who descended from the hermaphroditic form would “naturally” seek the “opposite” sex in order to achieve union. Otherwise, as Aristotle pointed out in the context of “what is natural is pleasant”: like loves like, jackdaw loves jackdaw. In fact, reproductive heterosexual intercourse seems an afterthought. The original globular creatures had

their genitals on the outside and “cast their seed and made children, not in one another but on the ground, like cicadas.” In the new cut-up state they did nothing but longingly embrace their missing halves and thus died from hunger and idleness. Zeus hit upon the idea of relocating the genitals of one half of the new creatures, “and in doing so he invented interior reproduction, *by men in women*.” This had the great advantage that when the new male embraced the new female, he could cast his seed into her and produce children and that when male embraced male, “they would at least have the satisfaction of intercourse, after which they could stop embracing, return to their jobs, and look after their other needs in life.” Genitals are very hard to picture in the first part of this account and subsist only to make the best of a bad situation. “Love is born into every human being,” the story concludes; “it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound in human nature.” But what we would call the sex of that human being seems of only secondary importance.⁸²

But where honor and status are at stake, desire for the same sex *is* regarded as perverse, diseased, and wholly disgusting. A great deal more was written about same-sex love between men than between women because the immediate social and political consequences of sex between men was potentially so much greater. Relatively little was directly at stake in sex between women. Yet whether between men or between women, the issue is not the identity of sex but the difference in status between partners and precisely what was done to whom. The active male, the one who penetrates in anal intercourse, or the passive female, the one who is rubbed against, did not threaten the social order. It was the weak, womanly male partner who was deeply flawed, medically and morally. His very countenance proclaimed his nature: *pathicus*, the one being penetrated; *cinaedus*, the one who engages in unnatural lust; *mollis*, the passive, effeminate one.⁸³ Conversely it was the *tribade*, the woman playing the role of the man, who was condemned and who, like the *mollis*, was said to be the victim of a wicked imagination as well as an excess and misdirection of semen.⁸⁴ The actions of the *mollis* and the *tribade* were thus unnatural not because they violated natural heterosexuality but because they played out—literally embodied—radical, culturally unacceptable reversals of power and prestige.

Similarly, when power did not matter or when a utopian sharing of political responsibility between men and women is being imagined, their respective sexual and reproductive behavior is stripped of meaning as

well. Aristotle, who was immensely concerned about the sex of free men and women, recognized no sex among slaves. "A 'woman,'" as Vicky Spellman puts it, "is a female who is free; a 'man' is a male who is a citizen; a slave is a person whose sexual identity does not matter."⁸⁵ For Aristotle, in other words, slaves are without sex because their gender does not matter politically.

Plato, on at least one occasion, also dismissed a distinction between the sexes which in other circumstances is critical. When in the *Republic* he wished to make a case for the absence of essential public differences between men and women, for equal participation in governance, gymnastic exercises, and even war, he supported his claim by downplaying the difference in their reproductive capacities. If something characteristic of men or women can be found which fits one or the other for particular arts and crafts, by all means assign them accordingly. But no such distinction exists, he maintains, and what Aristotle would take to be the critical difference between bearing and begetting counts for nothing.

But if it appears that they differ only in this respect that the female bears and the male begets, we shall say that no proof has yet been produced that the woman differs from the man for our purposes, but we shall continue to think that our guardians and their wives ought to follow the same pursuits.⁸⁶

Begetting and bearing are not radically opposed, or even hierarchically ordered. Plato uses a decidedly unphilosophical verb for begetting, the verb *ochenein*, to mount; Aristotle uses the same verb when he says that the victor among bulls "mounts" the cow and then, "exhausted by his amorous efforts," is subsequently beaten by his opponent (*HA* 6.21.575a22). Nothing more is at stake, Plato implies, than the brutish practice of man mounting woman. The macrocosmic order is not made imminent through the sexual act; the respective roles of man and woman in generation, though different, do not constitute a decisive difference.

But within the same tradition of the one sex, and in widely varying contexts, such differences could matter a great deal and were duly registered. Sperma, for Aristotle, makes the man *and* serves as synecdoche for citizen. In a society where physical labor was the sign of inferiority, sperma eschews physical contact with the catemenia and does its work by intellection. The *kurios*, the strength of the sperma in generating new life, is the microcosmic corporeal aspect of the citizen's deliberative strength,

of his superior rational power, and of his right to govern. Sperma, in other words, is like the essence of citizen. Conversely, Aristotle used the adjective *akuros* to describe both a lack of political authority, or legitimacy, and a lack of a biological capacity, an incapacity that for him defined woman. She is politically, just as she is biologically, like a boy, an impotent version of the man, an *arren agonos*. Even grander differences are inscribed on the body; the insensible differences between the sexual heat of men and women turns out to represent no less a difference than between heaven and earth. The very last stage in the heating sperma comes from the friction of the penis during intercourse (*GA* 1.5.717b24). But this is not like the heat of a blacksmith's fire, which one might feel, nor is the pneuma produced like ordinary breath.⁸⁷ It is a heat "analogous to the elements of the stars," which are "carried on a moving sphere" and are themselves not fired but create warmth in things below them.⁸⁸ Suddenly the male organ in coition is a terrestrial instance of heavenly movement, and the sexed body, whose fluids, organs, and pleasures are nuanced versions of one another, comes to illustrate the major political and cosmic ruptures of a civilization.⁸⁹

The most culturally pervasive of these ruptures is that between father and mother, which in turn contains a host of historically specific distinctions. I want to illustrate the extent to which biology in the one-sex model was understood to be an idiom for claims about fatherhood by examining three different accounts of the nature of seed put forward by Isidore of Seville, who in the sixth and seventh centuries produced the first major medieval summary of ancient scientific learning. Although the social context of a Christian encyclopedist was of course very different from that of an Athenian philosopher or an imperial Roman doctor, the structure of Isidore's arguments is paradigmatic for what is a very long-lived tradition of understanding sexual difference.

Isidore simultaneously holds three propositions to be true: that only men have sperma, that only women have sperma, and that both have sperma. It takes no great genius to see that these would be mutually contradictory claims if they are understood as literal truths about the body. But they would be perfectly compatible if they are seen as corporeal illustrations of cultural truths purer and more fundamental than biological fact. Indeed, Isidore's entire work is predicated on the belief that the origin of words informs one about the pristine, uncorrupted, essential nature of their referants, about a reality beyond the corrupt senses.⁹⁰

In making the first case—that only man has seed—Isidore was explaining consanguinity and, as one would expect in a society where inheritance and legitimacy passes through the father, he was at pains to emphasize the exclusive origins of the seed in the father's blood.

Consanguinity is so called by that which from one blood, that is from the same semen of the father, is begotten. For the semen of the male is the foam of blood according to the manner of water which, when beaten against rocks, makes white foam, or just as dark wine, which poured into a cup, renders the foam white.

For a child to have a father means that it is “from one blood, that is from the same semen as the father”; to be a father is to produce the substance, semen, through which blood is passed on to one's successors. Generation seems to happen without women at all, and there is no hint that blood—“that by which man is animated, and is sustained, and lives,” as Isidore tells us elsewhere—could in any fashion be transmitted other than through the male.⁹¹

But illegitimate descent presents a quite different biology. In his entry on the female genitalia, Isidore argued:

Contrary to this child [one born from a noble father and a plebian mother] is the illegitimate (*spurius*) child who is born from a noble mother but a plebian father. Likewise illegitimate is the child born from an unknown father, a spouseless mother, just the son of spurious parents.

The reason Isidore gives for why such illegitimate children, those who do not “take the name of the father” and are called *spurius*, is that they spring from the mother alone. “The ancients,” he explains, “called the female genitalia the *spurium*; just as *apo tou sporou* (from the seed); this *spurium* is from the seed.” (Plutarch reported that the adjective *spurius* derived from a Sabine word for the female genitalia and was applied to illegitimate children as a term of abuse.) So, while the legitimate child is from the froth of the father, the illegitimate child is from the seed of the mother's genitals, as if the father did not exist.⁹²

Finally, when Isidore is explaining why children resemble their progenitors, he is vague on the vexed question of female sperm. “Whichever of the two parents bestows the form,” he says cavalierly, “the newborn are conceived after equally being mixed in the maternal and paternal seed.” “Newborns resemble fathers, if the semen of the fathers is potent, and resemble mothers if the mothers' semen is potent.”⁹³ (Both parents then

have seeds that engage in repeated combat for domination every time, and in each generation a child is conceived.)

These three distinct arguments about what we might take to be the same biological material are a dramatic illustration that much of the debate about the nature of the seed and of the bodies that produce it—about the boundaries of sex in the one-sex model—are in fact not about bodies at all. They are about power, legitimacy, and fatherhood, in principle not resolvable by recourse to the senses.

Freud suggests why this should be so. Until the mid-nineteenth century, when it was discovered that the union of two different germ cells, egg and sperm, constituted conception, it was perfectly possible to hold that fathers mattered very little at all. Paternity, as in Roman law, could remain a matter of opinion and of will. Spermatozoa could be construed as parasitic stirring rods whose function, in a laboratory dish, might be fulfilled by a glass rod.⁹⁴ And while the role of fathers generally in conception was settled more than a century ago, until very recently it was impossible to prove that any particular man was father to any particular child. In these circumstances, believing in fathers is like, to use Freud's analogy, believing in the Hebrew God.

The Judaic insistence that God cannot be seen—the graven-image proscription—“means that a sensory perception was given second place to what may be called an abstract idea.” This God represents “a triumph of intellectuality over sensuality (*Triumph der Geistigkeit über die Sinnlichkeit*), or strictly speaking, an instinctual renunciation.” Freud briefs precisely the same case for fathers as for God in the analysis of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* that immediately follows his discussion of the second commandment. Orestes denies that he has killed his mother by questioning whether he is related to her at all. “Am I then involved with my mother by blood-bond?” he asks. “Murderer, yes,” replies the chorus, pointing out quite rightly that she bore and nursed him. But Apollo saves the day for the defense by pointing out that, appearances notwithstanding, “the mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed that grows,” “a stranger.” The only true parent is “he who mounts.”⁹⁵

Here in the *Oresteia* is the founding myth of the Father. “Fatherdom (*Vaterschaft*), Freud concludes, “is a supposition” and like belief in the Jewish God is “based on an inference, a premiss.” Motherhood (*Mutterschaft*), like the old gods, is evident from the lowly senses alone. Father-

dom too has "proved to be a momentous step"; it also—Freud repeats the phrase but with a more decisive military emphasis—is "a conquest (*cinen Sieg*) of intellectuality over sensuality." It represents a victory of the more elevated, the more refined over the less refined, the sensory, the material. It is a world-historical *Kulturforschritt*, a cultural stride forward.⁹⁶

The one-sex model can be read, I want to suggest, as an exercise in preserving the Father, he who stands not only for order but for the very existence of civilization itself. Ancient authorities make both philosophical and empirical arguments for the self-evident greater potency of the male over the female, for the absolute necessity of the genitor. If the female's seed were as potent as the male's, "there would be two principles of motion in conflict with one another," argued Galen. If woman had as much as possible of the "principle of motion," her seed would then essentially be the male's and act as one with it when mixed. Women would be men, and nature would be unnecessarily mixing two seeds. Or, if a female seed as strong as the male's need not be mixed to cause conception, then there would be no need for men at all (*UP* 2, pp632–33). (A late medieval alternative argument holds that if woman's semen were as strong as men's, then either parthenogenesis is possible—which it is not—or woman's contribution to generation would be greater than man's because she would be providing not only an active agent but also the place for conception. This, in a hierarchical world, is *ex hypothesis* impossible.⁹⁷) If women had seed as potent as males, they could inseminate themselves and "dispense with men," Aristotle argued. A manifest absurdity (*GA* 1.18.722b14–15).

It is empirically true, and known to be so by almost all cultures, that the male is necessary for conception. It does not of course follow that the male contribution is thereby the more powerful one, and an immense amount of effort and anxiety had to go into "proving" that this was the case. Evidence based on observation of "wind eggs" (*hupenemia*)—eggs that are seemingly produced without the power of the male but that are consequently not fertile—and of *mola*—monstrous products of the womb attributed to self-insemination—seemed to bear testimony to the hierarchical ordering of the one sex. Her sperma could not ensoul matter; his could. Perhaps the confident assertions that "there needs to be a female," that the creator would not "make half the human race imperfect and, as it were, mutilated, unless there was to be some great advantage in

such a mutilation," hides the more pressing but unaskable question of whether there needs to be a male. After all, the work of generation available to the senses is wholly the work of the female.⁹⁸

But being male and being a father, having what it takes to produce the more powerful seed, is the ascendancy of mind over the senses, of order over disorder, legitimacy over illegitimacy. Thus the inability of women to conceive within themselves becomes an instance—among many other things—of the relative weakness of her mind. Since normal conception is, in a sense, the male having an idea in the woman's body, then abnormal conception, the *mola*, is a conceit for her having an ill-gotten and inadequate idea of her own. Seeds of life and seeds of wisdom might well come to the same thing. Plutarch cautioned that

great care must be taken that this sort of thing does not take place in women's minds. For if they do not receive the seed[s] (*spermata*) of good doctrines and share with their husbands in intellectual advances, they, left to themselves, conceive many untoward ideas and low designs and emotions.

Her mind and her uterus are construed as equivalent arenas for the male active principle; her person is under the rational governance and instruction of her husband for the same reason that her womb is under the sway of his sperm. Similarly, he should be able to control his own passions and manage hers while being able at the same time to "delight and gratify" her sufficiently to produce children. A man who is "going to harmonize State, Forum, and Friends" should be able to have his "household well harmonized."⁹⁹

Christianity made the possibility of such harmony between good social order and good sexual order far more problematic than it had been in Roman antiquity. It radically restructured the meanings of sexual heat; in its campaigns against infanticide, it diminished the power of fathers; in its reorganization of religious life, it altered dramatically what it was to be male and female; in its advocacy of virginity, it proclaimed the possibility of a relationship to society and the body that most ancient doctors—Soranus was the exception—would have found injurious to the health.¹⁰⁰

It is also true that Augustine, as Peter Brown has argued, discovered "the equivalent of a universal law of sexuality," which represents a shift in the whole relation of human beings to society. It might stand as a metaphor for the end of the classical age and for the remaking of community

associated with the rise of Christianity.¹⁰¹ One's intimate experiences of sex, in this new dispensation, were the result not of an ineluctable heating of the body but of the fall and of the estrangement of will that the fall brought. Impotence, far from being paradigmatically innocent, could be construed, even more than erection, as *the* sign of the soul's alienation from God.¹⁰² Augustine could image intercourse in paradise in which the violence, the falling on wounds, the blood gushing, the crashing of bodies that informs an account like Lucretius', would be replaced by the image of intercourse as a gentle falling asleep in the partner's arms. Uncontrolled passion would be replaced by actions no more uncontrollable than the lifting of an arm. Indeed, everything about postlapsarian sex could thus be felt as continual reminders in the flesh of the tensions of the fundamentally flawed human condition. All of this was new with the coming of Christianity.

But Augustine's images for how "impregnation and conception" might be "an act of will, instead of by lustful cravings," were very much still of the old one-sex body found in the classical doctors. Such control of the body is conceivable, he suggested, and offered as an example people who "produce at will such musical sounds from their behind (without any stink) that they seem to be singing from that region." But the more telling case is that of a presbyter named Restitutus in the diocese Calama who, "whenever he pleased (and he was often asked to perform the feat by people who desired first-hand experience of so remarkable a phenomenon) he would withdraw himself from all sensations." He would, after some initial lamentations, lie unresponsive like a corpse. But one feature of this presbyter's trance makes it a particularly apt model for the phenomenology of intercourse in paradise. When he was burned "by the application of fire he was quite insensible to pain," until of course he emerged from his state and the normally occurring wound occasioned the usual pain.¹⁰³

Here is a model for having the *calor genitalis* without concupiscence. But it is also a lesson in the physiology of the old Adam. Bodies, when exposed to fire, burn and except in rare circumstances, feel pain. Similarly with reproduction. Augustine did not envisage the modern body in which ovulation, conception, and even male ejaculation are known to be independent of whatever subjective feelings might accompany them. Heat and pleasure remained an ineradicable part of generation. It would be a miracle, said a fifteenth-century writer of confessionals, "to stand in

the flame and not feel the heat." Intercourse, argued Pope Innocent III in a diatribe against the body, is never performed without "the itch of the flesh, the heat of passion, the stench of the flesh."¹⁰⁴

Thus, after Augustine as before, the body was thought to work much as pagan medical writers had described it. Augustine's new understanding of sexuality as an inner, and ever present, sign of the will's estrangement by the fall did create an alternative arena for the generative body. As Brown says, it "opened the Christian bedchamber to the priest."¹⁰⁵ At the same time, it kept the door open for the doctor, the midwife, and other technicians of the old flesh.

Christian and pagan notions of the body coexisted, as did the various incompatible doctrines of the seed, of generation, and of corporeal homologies, because different communities asked different things of the flesh. Monks and knights, laity and clergy, infertile couples and prostitutes seeking abortion, confessors and theologians in myriad contexts, could continue to interpret the one-sex body as they needed to understand and manipulate it, as the facts of gender changed. It is a sign of modernity to ask for a single, consistent biology as the source and foundation of masculinity and femininity.

My purpose in this chapter has been to explain what I mean by the world of one sex: mind and body are so intimately bound that conception can be understood as having an idea, and the body is like an actor on stage, ready to take on the roles assigned it by culture. In my account sex too, and not only gender, is understood to be staged.

Since I have been unwilling to tie the one-sex model to any particular level of scientific understanding of the body, and since it seems to have persisted over millennia during which social, political, and cultural life changed dramatically, the question I raised at the beginning of this chapter should perhaps be rephrased: why did the attractions of this model fade at all? I suggested two strong explanations for its longevity. The first concerns how the body was understood in relation to culture. It was not the biological bedrock upon which a host of other characteristics were supposedly based. Indeed, the paradox of the one-sex model is that pairs of ordered contrarities played off a single flesh in which they did not themselves inhere. Fatherhood/motherhood, male/female, man/woman, culture/nature, masculine/feminine, honorable/dishonorable, legitimate/illegitimate, hot/cold, right/left, and many other such pairs were read into

a body that did not itself mark these distinctions clearly.¹⁰⁶ Order and hierarchy were imposed upon it from the outside. The one-sex body, because it was construed as illustrative rather than determinant, could therefore register and absorb any number of shifts in the axes and valuations of difference. Historically, differentiations of gender preceded differentiations of sex.

The second explanation for the longevity of the one-sex model links sex to power. In a public world that was overwhelmingly male, the one-sex model displayed what was already massively evident in culture more generally: *man* is the measure of all things, and woman does not exist as an ontologically distinct category. Not all males are masculine, potent, honorable, or hold power, and some women exceed some men in each of these categories. But the standard of the human body and its representations is the male body.

T H R E E

New Science, One Flesh

The books contain pictures of all parts inserted into the context of the narrative, so that the dissected body is placed, so to speak, before the eyes of those studying the works of nature.

VESALIUS, 1543

Across a millennial chasm that saw the fall of Rome and the rise of Christianity, Galen spoke easily, in various vernacular languages, to the artisans and merchants, the midwives and barber surgeons, of Renaissance and Reformation Europe. Various Latin translations, compendia, and Arabic intermediaries transmitted the one-sex body of antiquity into the age of print. “La matrice de la femme,” writes Guillaume Bouchet in one late sixteenth-century potpourri of learning, “n’est que la bourse et verge renversée de l’homme” (The matrix of the woman is nothing but the scrotum and penis of the man inverted). A German doctor of no great fame pronounced, “Wo du nun dise Mutter sampt iren anhangen besichtigst, So vergleich sie sich mit allem dem Mannlichen glied, allein das diese ausserhalb das Weiblich aber inwendig ist” (Viewing the uterus along with its appendages, it corresponds in every respect to the male member except that the latter is outside and the former inside). Or “the likeness of it [the womb] is as it were a yarde reversed or turned inward, having testicles likewise,” as Henry VIII’s chief surgeon says in a matter-of-fact way. There was still in the sixteenth century, as there had been in classical antiquity, only one canonical body and that body was male.¹

The various vernaculars also replicated in new voices the Latin and Greek linguistic complex of connections between organs to which we, in our medical texts, would give precise and distinctive names. *Bourse*, for example, Bouchet’s word for scrotum, referred not only to a purse or bag but also to a place where merchants and bankers assemble. As bag, purse,

or sack it bridges male and female bodies handily. "Purse" could mean both scrotum *and* uterus in Renaissance English.² An anonymous German text declares in a commonplace simile, "the uterus is a tightly sealed vessel, similar to a coin purse (*Seckel*)."³ The womb "shuts like a purse (*bursa*)" after it draws up the male and female ejaculate, says the Pseudo-Albertus Magnus in his immensely popular and much translated *De secretis mulierum*.⁴ Scrotum also links up with womb through its more social, economic meaning. *Matrice*, Bouchet's term for uterus, as well as the English variant *matrix*, had the sense of a place where something is produced or developed, as in "mountains are the matrices of gold." There is a suggestion here of the common trope of the uterus as the most remarkable, miraculously generative organ of the body. The "matrice" is thus the place where a new life is produced while "bourse" is a place where a different, and culturally less valued, kind of productivity, an exchange, takes place. Two different kinds of bags, two different ways of making and keeping money, link organs that today have no common resonances.

The body's pleasures also remained as intimately bound with generation as they had been for Hippocrates. "Much delight accompanies the ejection of the seed, by breaking forth of the swelling spirit, and the stiffness of Nerves," says the most ubiquitous sex guide in the western tradition.⁵ Through a physiology shared with man, woman "suffers both wayes," the sixteenth-century physician Lemnius points out, and feels a double pleasure: "she drawes forth the man's seed, and casts her own with it," and therefore "takes more delight, and is more recreated by it."⁶

But amid these echoes of antiquity, a new and self-consciously revisionist science was aggressively exploring the body. In 1559, for example, Columbus—not Christopher but Renaldus—claims to have discovered the clitoris. He tell his "most gentle reader" that this is "preeminently the seat of woman's delight." Like a penis, "if you touch it, you will find it rendered a little harder and oblong to such a degree that it shows itself as a sort of male member." Conquistador in an unknown land, Columbus stakes his claim: "Since no one has discerned these projections and their workings, if it is permissible to give names to things discovered by me, it should be called the love or sweetness of Venus."⁷ Like Adam, he felt himself entitled to name what he found in nature: a female penis.

Columbus' account is significant on two levels. First it assumes that looking and touching will reveal radically new truths about the body. The discoverer of the clitoris had nothing but contempt for his predecessors,

who either did not base their claims on dissection at all or failed to report accurately and courageously what they had seen. Mondino de' Luzzi (1275–1326), for example, the premier medieval anatomist, was made the butt of heavy irony for his perfectly commonplace though relatively novel claim that the uterus had seven cells; he "might as well have called them the porches or bedrooms."⁸ Columbus' colleagues, meanwhile, attacked him with equal vigor. Gabriel Fallopius, his successor at Padua, insisted that he—Fallopius—saw the clitoris first and that everyone else was a plagiarist.⁹ Kaspar Bartholin, the distinguished seventeenth-century anatomist from Copenhagen, argued in turn that both Fallopius and Columbus were being vainglorious in claiming the "invention or first Observation of this Part," since the clitoris had been known to everyone since the second century.¹⁰

The somewhat silly but complicated debate around who discovered the clitoris is much less interesting than the fact that all of the protagonists shared the assumption that, whoever he might be, someone could claim to have done so on the basis of looking at and dissecting the human body. A militant empiricism pervades the rhetoric of Renaissance anatomists.

Columbus' discovery would also seem to be fatal, or at the very least threatening, to the ancient representations of the one-sex body. Within the constraints of common sense, if not logical consistency, women cannot have a full-size penis within (the vagina) *and* a small homologue of the penis without (the clitoris). But Renaissance writers drew no such inference. Jane Sharp, a well-informed seventeenth-century English midwife, asserts on one page that the vagina "which is the passage for the yard, resembleth it turned inward" and, with no apparent embarrassment, reports two pages later that the clitoris is the female penis: "it will stand and fall as the yard doth and makes women lustful and take delight in copulation."¹¹ Perhaps these positions can be reconciled in that the vagina only resembles the penis whereas the clitoris actually is one; both maintain the one-sex model's insistence on the male as the standard. But Sharp had no interest in the question. Two seemingly contradictory accounts coexisted quite neatly, and the old isomorphism dwelt in peace with the strange new homologue from another conceptual galaxy.

Just when Columbus threatens to offer a new understanding of sexual difference, his text returns to the old track and the old tensions. Woman disappears, whether the vagina or the clitoris is construed as the female penis. Sexual delight continues to flow from the homoerotic rubbing of

like on like; pleasure is decoupled from the will so that her mind does not matter. "If you rub it [the clitoris] vigorously with a penis, or touch it even with a little finger, semen swifter than air flies this way and that on account of the pleasure, even with them [women] unwilling."¹² There remains but one sex, or in any case only one kind of body.

The discovery of the clitoris and its easy absorption by the one-sex model raises the central question of this chapter. Why did competent observers, self-consciously committed to new canons of accuracy and naturalistic illustration, continue to think of reproductive anatomy and physiology in a manner that is manifestly wrong and egregiously counterintuitive to the modern sensibility? In the first place, much of what is at stake is not empirically decidable. Whether the clitoris or the vagina is a female penis, or whether women have a penis at all, or whether it matters, are not questions that further research could, in principle, answer. The history of anatomy during the Renaissance suggests that the anatomical representation of male and female is dependent on the cultural politics of representation and illusion, not on evidence about organs, ducts, or blood vessels. No image, verbal or visual, of "the facts of sexual difference" exists independently of prior claims about the meaning of such distinctions.¹³

But there are empirically decidable contentions in Columbus' report and in the one-sex model generally. The clitoris (*dulcedo amoris*) he rightly says is the primary locus of venereal pleasure in women. On the other hand, he maintains—wrongly from a modern perspective—that semen, which looks very much like the male's, flies this way and that when it is stimulated and, were it not to do so, women would not conceive.¹⁴ These are meant to be verifiable claims with the body as proof text:

You who happen to read these laboriously produced anatomical studies of mine know that, without these protuberances [the clitoris] which I have faithfully described to you earlier, women would neither experience delight in venereal embraces nor conceive any fetuses.

This is truly noteworthy: testes are produced in women so that they may produce semen. Indeed I myself can bear witness that, in the dissection of female testicles, I have sometimes found semen that is white and thick and very well concocted, as all the spectators have acknowledged with one voice.¹⁵

The specific claim that female orgasm was necessary for conception was, moreover, known to be vulnerable since antiquity.

Aristotle had pointed out that women in some circumstances could conceive "without experiencing the pleasure usual in such intercourse" and that conversely "the two sexes could reach their goal together" and the woman still not conceive.¹⁶ Giles of Rome, a thirteenth-century scholar who was known even in that age of prolixity as "the verbose doctor," had argued at great length, on theoretical grounds, that the so-called female seed was essentially irrelevant to conception and that female orgasm was still more irrelevant. But he also offered empirical evidence of various sorts. Women purportedly told him that they had conceived without emission and presumably orgasm. Moreover, a clinical report by no less an authority than Averroës (ibn-Rushd, 1126–1198), the Arabic philosopher and author of a major medical encyclopedia, tells of a woman who became pregnant from semen floating in a warm bath. If, as this case is meant to show, penetration itself is only incidental to fertilization, how much more irrelevant still is female sexual pleasure?¹⁷ And two thousand years after Aristotle, William Harvey repeated the old argument (though based, he says, on the evidence of "an infinite number" or at least "not a few" cases): the "violent shaking and dissolution and spilling of humours" which frequently occurs "in women in the ecstasy of coitus" is not required for the real work of making babies.¹⁸

It is also hard to believe that the consumers of vernacular medical literature—a wide swath of the literate public and those who might listen to them—needed the weight of tradition and learning to tell them that female orgasm did not always accompany conception.¹⁹ Modern studies are quite consistent in showing that one third and perhaps as many as one half of women never have orgasm from intercourse alone, and certainly nowhere near such a proportion were infertile.²⁰ Maybe a higher percentage were orgasmic in an age in which what is now called "foreplay" was taken as a requisite prelude to procreative intercourse, but a great deal of everyday experience must nevertheless have belied the purported link between female orgasm and conception. Yet neither the evidence of the learned nor the actual experiences of marriage overturned the old model of bodies and pleasures.

Of course, some might say: those who knew—women—did not write and those who wrote—men—did not know. But this is not so telling a point. In the first place, the Hippocratic corpus and book 10 of Aristotle's *History of Animals*, for example, may well represent the voices of women, and other works give accounts much like these. Moreover, when women beginning in the Renaissance did publish on midwifery and reproduc-

tion, their views regarding the physiology of generation were entirely mainstream: Louise Bourgeois, Jane Sharp, and Madame de la Marche all propounded the common wisdom linking pleasure, orgasm, and generation. The occasional first-person account by women addressing these intimate matters, such as the remarkable autobiography of a seventeenth-century Dutch clergyman's wife, Isabella De Moerloose, further suggests that the literature I am citing reports commonly held beliefs.²¹ Despite the growing tendency of the learned tradition to distance itself from "popular errors," my sense is that doctors, lay writers, and men and women in their beds shared a broad view on how the body worked in matters of reproduction.²² The sort of highly politicized split between women's views of their bodies and that of a medical establishment would have to await the consolidation of a science-based profession beginning in the eighteenth, but not fully in place until the late nineteenth, century.²³

Finally, there is modern evidence to suggest that women in the past might well have had no more or no less understanding of the timing and physiology of conception than did their doctors. Certainly, if advice columns are any indication, the view that orgasm is necessary for conception lives on today; physicians, both male and female, who in the early twentieth century attempted through interviews to determine the timing of ovulation during the menstrual cycle, failed to come up with consistent answers. And anthropological evidence suggests that living women whom one can interrogate actually hold views similar to those propounded by Renaissance midwifery and health guides. Thus an informant in Suyé Mura told a Japanese-speaking woman anthropologist that "she [thought] that if a woman does not reach climax, she cannot conceive because her womb remains shut."²⁴ The Samo of Burkino Faso give an account of semen—"sex water" discharged by both men and women—blood, milk, and menstruation that is eerily like the one that dominated the western tradition.²⁵

None of this argues against the fact that there must have been much local wisdom and a florid oral tradition among women in early modern Europe, which printed sources, no matter how popular, and modern evidence, no matter how wide-ranging, can never recapture. They are forever lost to historians. Nor does it prove that ordinary people, men or women, thought very much in terms of the anatomical isomorphisms of the one-sex model. Nevertheless, it does suggest that the sort of literature

on which I base these chapters—the only sort we are ever likely to have—shares the same conceptual universe of Renaissance people and even of "those who knew (women)," even if it does not speak in their voices.

Evidence bearing on the empirically testable claims of the one-sex model failed to dislodge them not because such data were silenced but because these claims were part of a far more general, intricate, and many-stranded conception of the body which no observations, singly or in combination, could directly falsify. Willard Quine suggests why this should be the case on philosophical grounds. The totality of our beliefs "is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges." So-called knowledge, switching metaphors,

is like a field [which] is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude as to what statements to reevaluate in the light of any contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field.²⁶

The ancient account of bodies and pleasure was so deeply enmeshed in the skeins of Renaissance medical and physiological theory, in both its high and its more popular incarnations, and so bound up with a political and cultural order, that it escaped entirely any logically determining contact with the boundaries of experience or, indeed, any explicit testing at all.²⁷

This is by now so standard an argument in the history and philosophy of science that it even has a name: the Quine-Duhem thesis. But it is worth making again for two reasons. The empirically testable claims of the old model, which represent and are represented by the transcendental claim that there exists but one sex, are so farfetched to the modern scientific imagination that it takes a strenuous effort to understand how reasonable people could ever have held them. It is an effort worth making, if only to unsettle the stability of our own constructions of sexual difference by exposing the props of another view and by showing that the differences that make a difference are historically determined.

Second, by making manifest the web of knowledge and rhetoric that supported the one-sex model, I am setting the stage for its challengers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If its stability can be attributed to its imbrication in other discursive modes, its collapse will not need to be explained by a single dramatic discovery or even by major social upheavals. Instead, the construction of the two-sex body can then be viewed

in the myriad new, and new kinds of, connections between, and within, sexual and other discourses.

The practices of anatomy

“When you meet a human being,” said Freud in his comments on “Femininity” in *New Introductory Lectures*, “the first distinction you make is ‘male or female?’ and you are accustomed to making the distinction with unhesitating certainty.” Anatomical science at first seems to support this certainty but upon further reflections turns out to be far less authoritative: “what constitutes masculinity or femininity is an unknown characteristic anatomy cannot lay hold of.” The more Renaissance anatomists dissected, looked into, and visually represented the female body, the more powerfully and convincingly they saw it to be a version of the male’s.

The body speaks itself. In large measure the new science greatly strengthened the old model simply because it proclaimed so vigorously that Truth and progress lay not in texts, but in the opened and properly displayed body.²⁸ A rhetoric of bad-mouthing reinforced the idea that only error and misguided adherence to authority stood in the way and that with care one could *see*, among many other things, that women were inverted men. Vesalius publicly denounced the whole lot of his predecessors, including his teacher Jacobus Sylvius, for considering Galen infallible, and Columbus could write of the “by no means negligible corrections” he had to make in Vesalius to produce a dissecting guide that “will tell the truth about the human body.”²⁹ Fallopius announced that he would refute the accounts of ancient and more modern writers and completely overturn some of their doctrines, “or at least make them totter.”³⁰

More important, the new, extravagantly public theatrical dissection and its visual representations advertised the conviction that the opened body was the font and touchstone of anatomical knowledge.³¹ What had been hidden before—there was very little if any human dissection in antiquity and no anatomical illustration—and what had been practiced only occasionally and quietly—anatomy in medieval universities—was now made available for general consumption. One need no longer imagine Galen’s topographical transformations; one could verify them by sight. As Harvey Cushing argues, the famous frontispiece to Vesalius’ *De humani corporis fabrica*, the founding work of modern anatomy (fig. 3), stands as

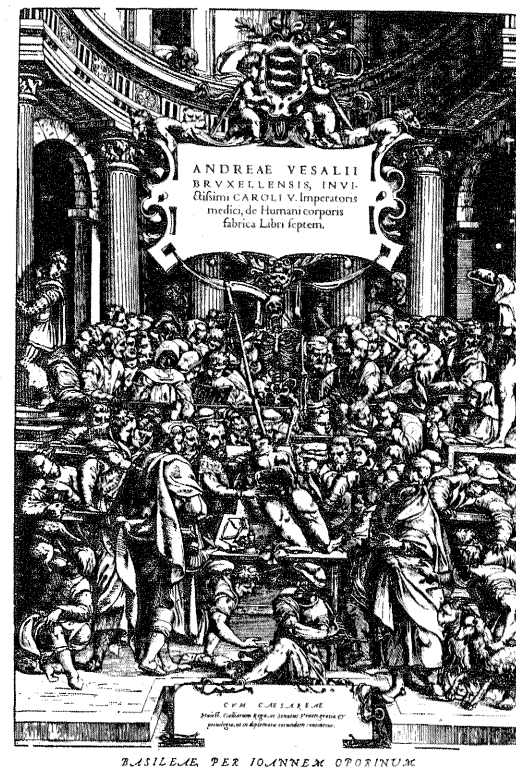


Fig. 3. Sixteenth-century dissection scene from the frontispiece to Vesalius’ epochal *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543).

a rebuke to those who only read ancient texts while barber surgeons did the dissection. Compare it, for example, to the frontispiece to Mondino’s *Anathomia* (figs. 4 and 5), the medical-school standard before Vesalius. Text, in the form of the name of the book, or a reader expounding *ex cathedra* dominate the earlier pictures. The body seems almost an afterthought, lying passively within the picture’s plane. The anatomist’s gaze in fig. 5 lights on the cadaver’s face, not on its exposed viscera, as if its humanity, not its value as dead material to be studied, demands attention. Vesalius must have imagined scenes like these when he condemned ana-



Fig. 4. Frontispiece to Johan Ketham, *Fasciculus medicinae* (Venice, 1550), a reworking of Mondino's *Anathomia*.



Fig. 5. Frontispiece to Mondino [Mundinus], *Anathomia* (1493).

tomists who “from a lofty chair arrogantly cackle like jackdaws about things they have never tried.” A butcher in his meat market could teach a doctor more.³²

By contrast, in fig. 3 the opened body is the unquestioned font of authority, enforced by the lordly skeleton that presides over the scene. Unlike the bodies in earlier representations, it comes out at us from the plane of the picture; its exposed entrails occupy dead center between the title and the bottom of the picture. An imaginary line passes down the spine of the skeleton, between its breasts and through the viscera, bisecting the image and dividing the magnificent rotunda in which the cadaver lies. Classical statues lend dignity, as they will later in the book, when the viscera are displayed in them, mediate the violence of dissection, and define the features displayed as those of a normative, median body. And, as in the frontispieces to many Renaissance anatomies, a great concourse of assorted observers looks on. This is a picture, in short, about the majestic power of science to confront, master, and represent the truths of the body in a self-consciously theatrical and public fashion.³³



Fig. 6. Frontispiece to a 1642 Dutch edition of Vesalius' *Epitome* (1543).



Fig. 7. Frontispiece to G. Cassario, *Anatomische Tafeln* (1656), which is a reworking of the scene in fig. 6.

The picture may seem to be, more narrowly, an assertion of male power to know the female body and hence to know and control a feminine Nature.³⁴ Vesalius presides here over an assemblage of men who peer into a woman's helpless, naked, and revealed body before them. The cadaver in the frontispiece (fig. 6) to a later Dutch edition of Vesalius' *Epitome*, a sort of student guide to the larger *Fabrica*, is still more shapely, her generative organs more clearly shown, her face mysteriously veiled so as to emphasize the accessibility to her body to the male gaze. Even the banner bearers are men, the sex of the skeleton evident from his cape and gravedigger's shovel.

But the politics of gender in anatomical illustration is not so simple. The frontispiece to Cassario's *Anatomische Tafeln* (fig. 7) takes the engraving used in fig. 6 and substitutes a man's body for the woman's. His face is also draped, his body is if anything more subject to domination by the instruments behind him and by the knife resting on his thigh. The young and extraordinarily eroticized cadaver being dissected in fig. 8, the frontispiece to John Riolan's text, is clearly a man though androgynously del-



Fig. 8. Frontispiece to Jean Riolan, *Les Oeuvres anatomiques* (1629). The male cadaver is if anything more erotically portrayed than either the male or female in figs. 6 and 7.

icate in his features. More generally, it simply is not true that women, sensual or not, were particularly identified with the object of anatomical study. In the frontispieces of fourteen anatomy books published between 1493 and 1658, the body being dissected is male in nine cases, female in four, and indeterminate in one. Perhaps the availability of material rather than sexual politics determined the sex of the generic cadaver.³⁵ In any case, the body qua body is what matters, and the programmatic point of the Renaissance anatomical frontispiece is clear: anatomists have the power to open the temple of the soul and reveal its inner mysteries (fig. 9 is paradigmatic on this point).³⁶

The bodies of women must be seen in the context of two further representational strategies, both of which emphasize the theatrical display of bodies as testimony for the anatomist's claims. In the first place, even when medieval anatomies—and indeed even Renaissance books before Jacopo Berengario da Carpi's *Isagoge brevis* in 1522—were illustrated, that is, rarely, what pictures they did contain were at best superficially connected with the text, whose authority rested in the words and reputation of the author. In Berengario, however, something novel was happening. He was committed to an *anatomia sensibilis*, an anatomy of what

could be seen, and illustrations were to be its printed aspect, the graphic substitute for actually seeing the structures in question and thereby vouchsafing the anatomist's words.³⁷ The frontispieces and the many spectacular engravings in Vesalius and subsequent works continued to invoke the authority, first, of a dramatically opened, exposed body and then, derivatively, of naturalistic representation itself.³⁸

Even without words, these new illustrations were advertisements for their own truth. In them the dead act as if they were still somehow alive—not cadavers at all—and thus able to certify personally the facts that the anatomist presents and the epistemological soundness of anatomy generally. The thoroughly classical muscle man in Juan de Valverde's *Anatomia* (fig. 10) flays himself to reveal his surface structures, holding



Fig. 9. Frontispiece, after a drawing by Paolo Veronese, to Columbus, *De re anatomica* (1559).

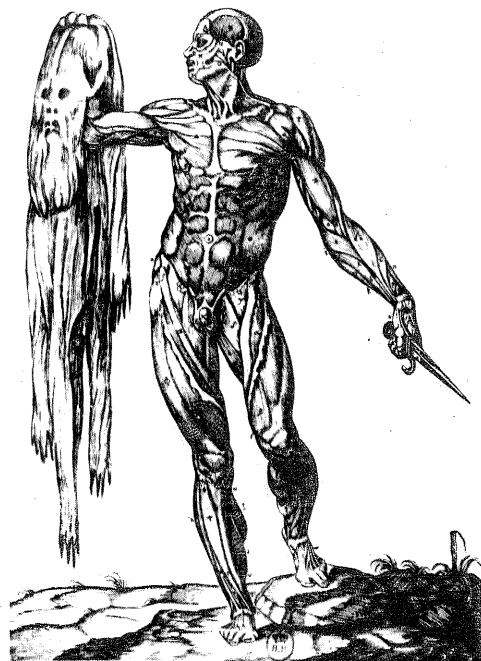


Fig. 10. Classical figure, having flayed himself, displays both his skin and his surface musculature. From Juan de Valverde, *Anatomia del corpo umano* (1560).



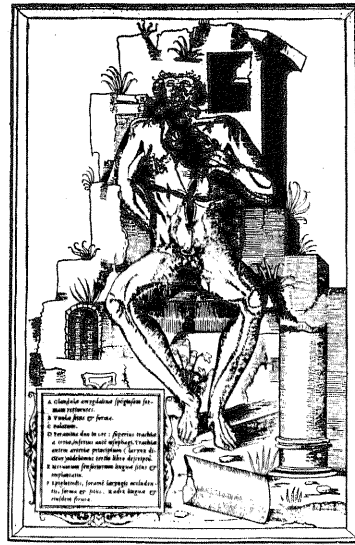
Fig. 11. Three figures in various tortured poses of revealing themselves to the readers of an anatomy text. From Valverde, *Anatomia*.

up his skin—an allusion to Michelangelo's self-portrait, part Marsias, part St. Bartholomew, from the *Last Judgment*—for extra emotional appeal.³⁹ Later in Valverde's book a rather self-absorbed creature calmly lifts up his belly's fat and skin to show off his abdominal fascia; for our viewing convenience, the next figure holds up still more of his fleshly clothes to reveal the omentum beneath. He gestures with his left hand and turns, as if modeling or rehearsing on stage, to ask the artist or director who hired him whether this pose or gesture will do. A third fellow needs both his hands and his teeth—they hold up the omentum—to assure us an unobstructed vista of his viscera (fig. 11). In a Belgian edition of the *Epitome* (fig. 12) an opened anatomist—no greater sacrifice in the interests of science is possible—looks heavenward as his fingers resect the ribs of a Vesalian Apollo Belvedere or perhaps himself. Various well-proportioned men in Estienne's *La Dissection des parties du corps humain*, the most lavishly produced of the pre-Vesalian anatomies, look more or less pleased, pained or pathetic, as they tear themselves apart for their viewer's somewhat minimal anatomical edification (figs. 13–14).

The art and rhetoric of Renaissance anatomies thus proclaim the authority of seeing and the power of dissection. Various stratagems for cre-



Fig. 12. One anatomized cadaver dissecting another who is represented as a fleshly version of a broken classical statue. Original also from Valverde's *Anatomia* but borrowed by a 1559 Bruges edition of Vesalius' *Epitome*.



Figs. 13–14. Two male figures ripping themselves open for the edification of viewers. The “martyrdom” on the right reveals the tongue and tonsils, the one on the left the lower abdomen and genitals. From Charles Estienne, *La Dissection des parties du corps humain* (1546).

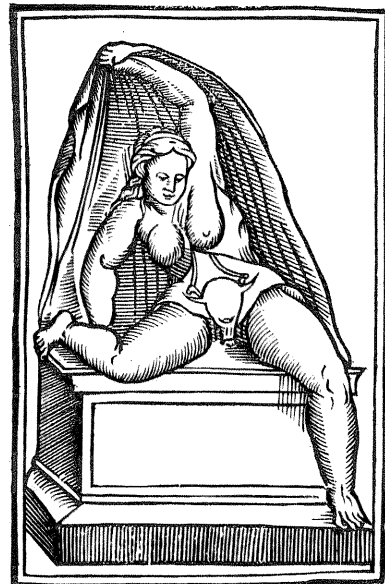


Fig. 15. A female sculpture has suddenly come alive and is leaving her pedestal to demonstrate the text’s claim that the uterus is like the penis and that testicles and various vessels also correspond. From Jacopo Berengario, *Isagoge brevis* (1522).



Fig. 16. The model has left her pedestal and gestures flamboyantly to her uterus. “You see,” she says, “how the neck of the womb resembles a penis.” From Berengario.

ating the “reality effect” make pictures stand in for bodies themselves and witness the truths of texts that viewers are invited to construe as only one remove from the cadaver itself. Seeing is believing the one-sex body. Or conversely.

Believing is seeing. The new anatomy displayed, at many levels and with unprecedented vigor, the “fact” that the vagina really is a penis, and the uterus a scrotum.⁴⁰ Berengario makes absolutely sure that his readers do not miss or doubt the point: “the neck of the uterus is like the penis, and its receptacle with testicles and vessels is like the scrotum.”⁴¹ In the first of the pictures accompanying this by now familiar assertion, a classical statue of a decidedly feminine woman seems miraculously to have come alive; she is in the process of throwing off her wrap and stepping carefully down to confront the reader with proof (fig. 15). In the next one (fig.

16) she flamboyantly tosses her cloak over her head with one hand, while with the other she directs her audience's gaze to what has been removed from her open belly and placed on the pedestal from which she descended: her uterus. She—the now animated cadaver whose voice has become indistinguishable from the anatomist's—gestures epideictically and announces with obvious authority: “you see how the neck [of the uterus] . . . resembles a penis” (p. 78). Finally, a third close-up illustration

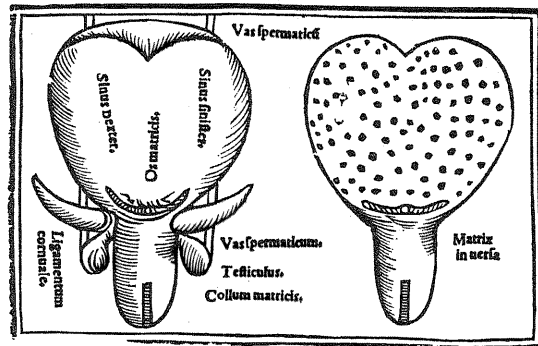


Fig. 17. The uterus and attached vessels labeled so as to make clear once again—“because a tenfold repetition is wont to please”—the correspondences between male and female organs. From Berengario.

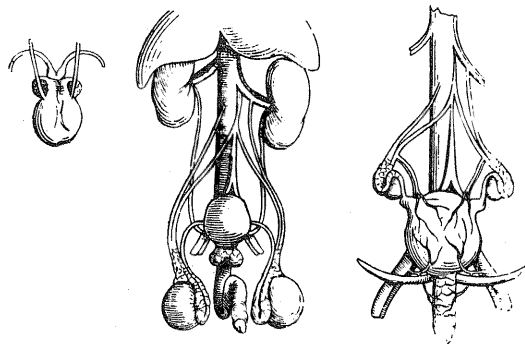


Fig. 18. Male and female organs displayed to demonstrate their correspondences. From Vesalius, *Tabulae sex* (1538).

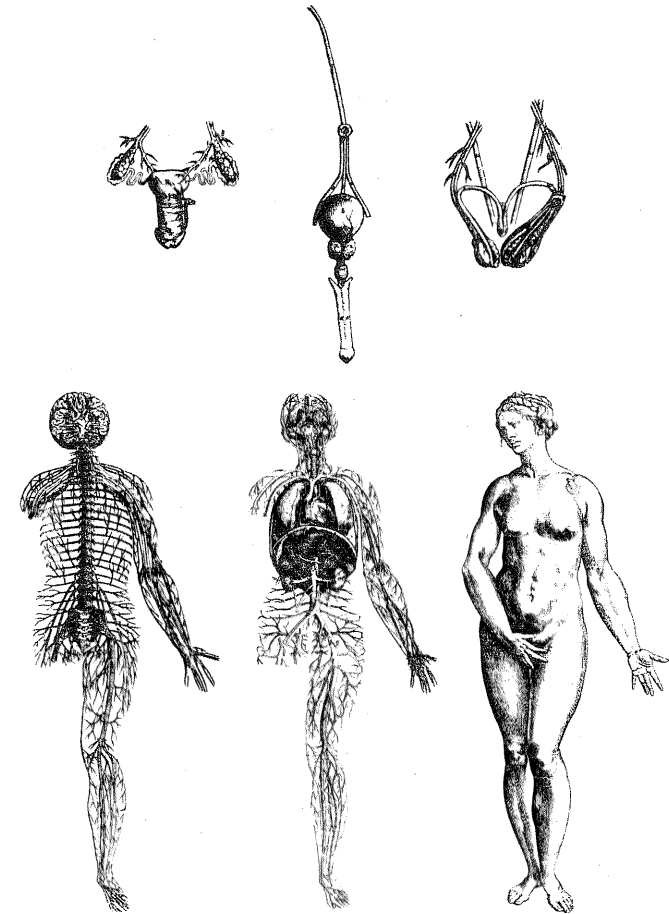


Fig. 19a-d. Top row (19a): the shorter penislike structure is the “uterus with the testes and seminal vessels”; the longer one is the male genitalia to which the student is then asked to attach the male testes. Both male and female organs were then to be glued onto fig. 19b, which in turn fit under 19c and then under 19d, a classical female nude. From Vesalius, *Epitome*.

hammers home the point visually and through labels that identify the ovaries as testicles and the Fallopian tubes as spermatic ducts (fig. 17).

Women's organs are represented as versions of man's in all three of Vesalius' immensely influential and widely plagiarized works. Among the

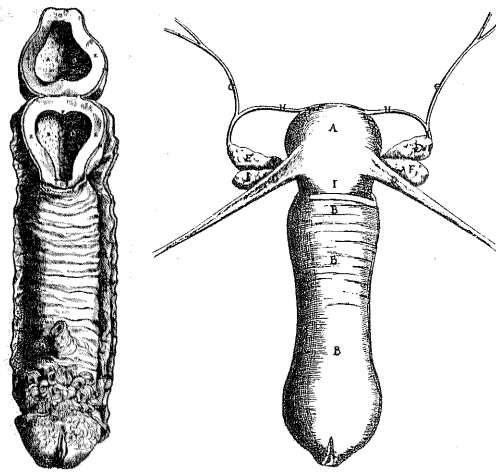


Fig. 20. (left) Vagina as penis from Vesalius, *Fabrica*.

Fig. 21. (right) The vagina and uterus from Vidus Vidius, *De anatome corporis humani* (1611)

founding images of modern anatomy is a powerful new register for the old ordering of bodies. His most reprinted image of the vagina as penis, and also the most explicit, is one of the illustrations (fig. 18) from the *Tabulae sex*, a set of cheaply printed pictures, so-called fugitive plates prepared for medical students or for lay consumption. In the *Epitome*, engravings of almost indistinguishable male and female reproductive organs are included for students to cut out and glue onto figures provided for that purpose (fig. 19).⁴² But the most visually striking of Vesalius' pictures on this theme is in the *Fabrica* itself. Here (fig. 20) the uterus, vagina, and external pudenda of a young woman are not specifically arrayed, as in the *Tabulae* or the *Epitome*, to demonstrate that these structures are isomorphic with those of the male; they are just *seen as* such.

I emphasize "seeing as" because these images, and many more like them, are neither the result simply of representational conventions nor the result of error. A whole world view makes the vagina look like a penis to Renaissance observers. Of course a representational convention, a schema, is at work; Renaissance anatomical illustrators learned to depict the female genitalia from other pictures and not from nature alone (see figs. 21–24). But this does not mean that stylistic concerns kept them from seeing genital anatomy "as it really is," or as moderns see it.⁴³

Nor is the strange quality of images in figs. 15–24 the result of someone's efforts to make the female body conform to some erroneous text or to distort women's genitalia so that they become a caricature of men's. The draftsman who produced fig. 21, for example, is not guilty of clandestinely substituting animal for human anatomy, as Vesalius coyly accuses Galen of doing in the *Fabrica*'s famous juxtaposition of a woodcut of a canine premaxillary bone and suture with those of a man (fig. 25). He is, moreover, innocent of what Vesalius himself did on occasion: "seeing" something that does not exist because an authority declares it to be present.⁴⁴ There are gross errors of this sort in Renaissance illustrations of the female genitalia, but they are irrelevant to the rhetorical purposes of the illustrations. In fact, if they were more accurate, they would make their point even more powerfully. If, for example, in figs. 16–17 the nonexistent "cotyledons"—the dots representing the anastomosis of veins in the uterus—were rubbed out, the suggestion of two chambers eliminated, and the vagina drawn in correct proportion to the uterus, the organs would resemble a female scrotum and penis more closely. Expung-

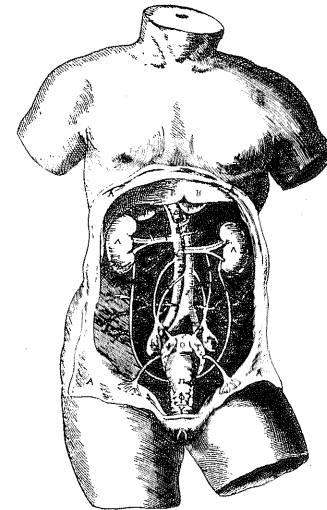


Fig. 22. The female torso, in the form of a piece of broken classical art, from which the penis-like vagina in fig. 21 was taken, following the artistic and scientific conventions of the time.



Fig. 23. This reworking of Vesalius in a 1586 edition of Valverde follows the same convention illustrated in figs. 21–22. On the left is a structure that looks like a penis; on the right are the classical female forms from which it was taken.

ing the “horns of the uterus” (GG) from John Dryander’s representation of the female reproductive organs (fig. 26) or from other Renaissance illustrations (figs. 32–33 for example) would make the uterus and vagina look more, not less, like a bladder and penis; and redrawing, in the interests of accuracy, the ovarian artery and vein EE in fig. 26 so that they appear less like the epididymis, II in fig. 27, would, at worst, leave the overall effect the same.⁴⁵

However grotesque or monstrous the woodcut of the female genitalia

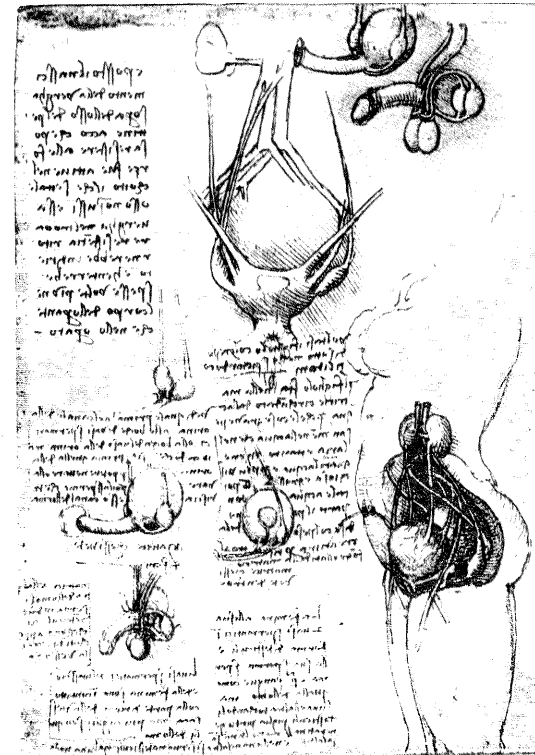


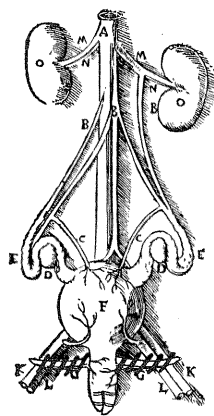
Fig. 24. Leonardo’s version of the isomorphism between the womb and scrotum—upper right and lower left—is peculiar in that he renders it by making the vas deferens of the male curve around to resemble the shape of the uterus. The penis/vagina imagery is more conventional.

depicted in the *Fabrica* has appeared to some modern commentators, it is not incredible or “wrong.” Its proportions are roughly those of “accurate” nineteenth-century engravings (fig. 28) and illustrations from a modern text (fig. 29), though these of course were not drawn to illustrate the isomorphism between male and female organs.⁴⁶

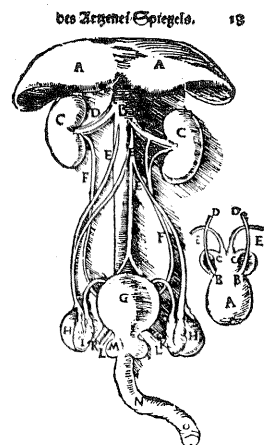
Subsequent discoveries that would force changes in the labels of illustrations are of equally minor importance in the history of “seeing as.” The *Zeuglin*, or testes, and the *Samadern*, seminal vesicles, did not exist, as



Fig. 25. "We have placed," Vesalius says in this polemic illustration from the *Fabrica*, "the skull of a dog beneath that of a man so that anyone may understand Galen's description of the bones of the upper jaw without the slightest difficulty."



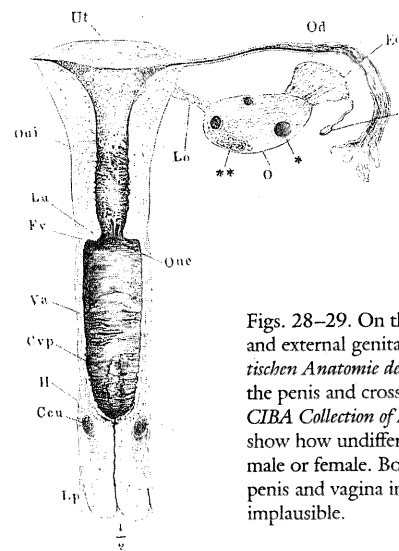
Q. Dift Siquerege an die innerliche gefaltene weibliche sampe den geburt gilden / gefalt des samens / vnd andern berichte. A. Debeue die großblutader / daher alle andere glieder nahrung haben. D. Ist die weisse samaden. C. C. Aber so die befruchteter begreifen / daher die frucht auch nahrung bekompt. D. D. Sind weibliche seuglin. E. Da me werden die weibliche seuglin vmbgeben / sendet ein theil samens vnd ein theil der bergaden. J. Die befruchteter gleich der blauen gefalt. G. Die gefalt der befruchteter. daran sie dem rucken vnd nebst angehefft. S. Das innerliche mündloch der befruchteter. T. Das ruckel der befruchteter. die idem K. Stämm oder ist der blutaden der schenkel. M. T. Ganggang vnn den Tieren. O. Das Vieren.



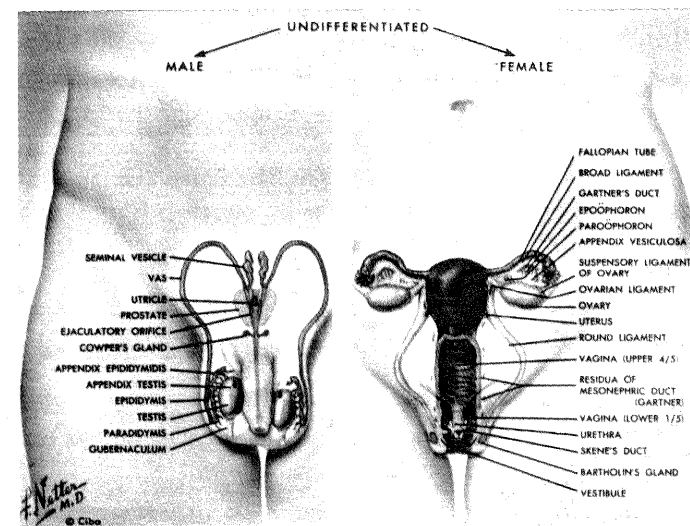
Das neben Klein gürtlin / ist die blase / mit sampe der harn vnd same adern.

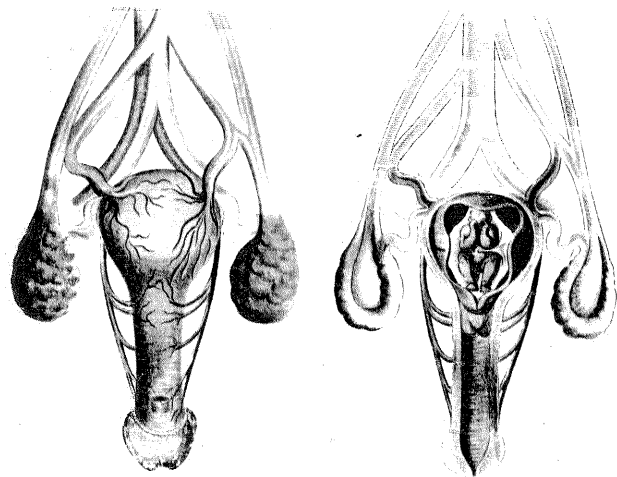
Figs. 26–27. The male and female reproductive systems adapted from Vesalius' *Epitome* in Johan Dryander, *Der Gantzen Artzney* (1542). In fig. 26 I have blocked out the nonexistent horns of the uterus to show that making a drawing like this more accurate would also make them more convincing as illustrations of the penis/vagina isomorphism. Elongating the vagina so that it is in proper proportion to the uterus would have the same effect.

Dryander's labeling claims, in both men and women; nineteenth-century histology would teach that nothing of interest follows from the observation that the uterus, labeled F in fig. 26, has the same shape as the male bladder, G in fig. 27. But these advances pale beside facts that Renaissance anatomists did know and that did nothing to discredit the whole representational convention of seeing the female genital anatomy as an interior version of the male's. The uterus bears children but the scrotum



Figs. 28–29. On the left is a frontal section of the uterus, vagina, and external genitalia from Jakob Henle, *Handbuch der systematischen Anatomie des Menschen*, vol. 2 (1866). Below is a drawing of the penis and cross section of the female genitals by Frank Netter, *CIBA Collection of Medical Illustrations*, vol. 2 (1954), made to show how undifferentiated embryological structures end up as male or female. Both show that the geometrical relations between penis and vagina in Renaissance engravings are not intrinsically implausible.





Figs. 30–31. On the left are the penislike female organs of generation from Georg Bartisch, *Kunstbuche* (1575). On the right the front of the uterus is cut away to reveal its contents.

does not; babies are delivered through the vagina and not through the penis. So what? The organ in fig. 30, for example, might be a vagina from a woman or a penis from a man. Fig. 31 relieves the suspense. It is a vagina, we now know, because what might have been either a scrotum or a uterus turns out to contain a child! The womb with its penislike extension in Walther Ryff's popular and widely translated book plays the same trick, as it becomes strangely transparent to allow readers a view of the fully formed baby within (fig. 32). A little window has been cut into the female scrotum, the uterus, in figs. 33–34, an illustration from another well-known midwifery book, to show a fully formed child, its back turned to intruders and to the penile vagina through which it will pass.

The history of the representation of the anatomical differences between man and woman is thus extraordinarily independent of the actual structures of these organs or of what was known about them. Ideology, not accuracy of observation, determined how they were seen and which differences would matter.

Seeing difference differently. Renaissance “common sense,” and critical observation directed against the view of woman as man turned outside in,

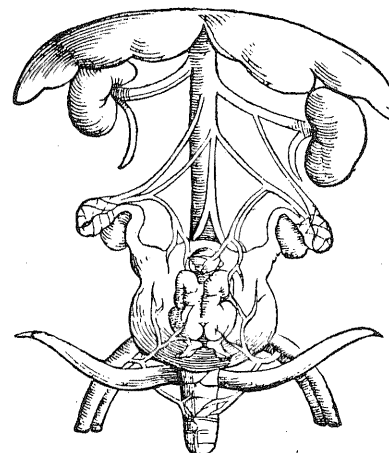


Fig. 32. The female organs of generation from Walther Ryff, *Anthomia* (1541). In this and the next illustration note that the vagina and uterus would look more like a penis and scrotum if the horns were expunged and the vagina drawn in correct proportion, that is, if they were more accurate.

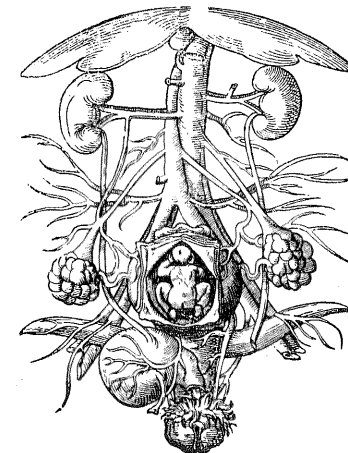


Fig. 33. The female organs of generation from Jacob Rueff, *Habammenbuch* (1583), which appeared in English as the widely plagiarized and popular *The Expert Midwife* (1637). Note that the left ureter has been cut and the bladder pushed to the right from its natural position so that we might look into the window of the womb and see the child.

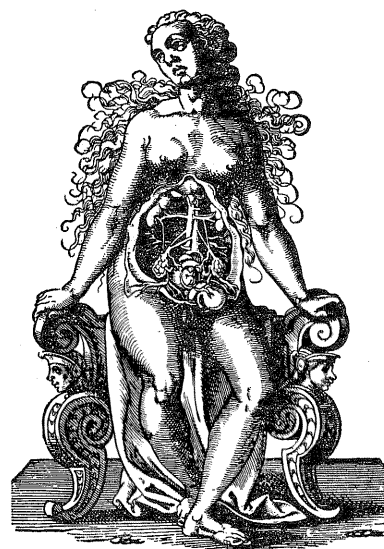


Fig. 34. The gravid uterus with its penile vagina of fig. 33 *in situ*. The bladder has been pushed left, and the child shows its profile.

failed to make a dent in the one sex-model. Arguments against the vagina as penis, for example, are to the modern imagination stranger even than the claim itself. At the simplest level, an apparent failure to find equivalences between men and women could be saved by the sort of wishful thinking that daily saves phenomena in normal science. Except in moments of revolutionary crisis, there is always a way out. Women may not seem to have a scrotum, and indeed other parts of man might be difficult to find in woman or vice versa. But these difficulties, argues Charles Estienne, can be resolved by reference to position: "You would agree this is true: if you turn a womb removed from the body inside out (quoth Galen) you will find testicles bulging out from its outer surface, by which the womb itself, by outer appearances is as a scrotum."⁴⁷ We might or might not be able to find what this anatomist claimed if we followed his instructions, but the exercise would be entirely irrelevant to a world that believes in two sexes. No pushing or pulling of surfaces would convince us to see the womb as a scrotum, any more than a topologist could make us regard a tea cup as a doughnut even if her procedures were sound, which Estienne's were not.

Conversely, perfectly sound anatomical observations adduced against the old homologies seem, from a modern perspective, so curiously peripheral—even perverse—that they serve only to cast further doubt on the whole enterprise of searching in bodies for any transcultural signs of difference. The distinguished English anatomist Helkiah Crooke argued, for example, against "any similitude betweene the bottome of the womb inverted [the cervix], and the scrotum or cod of a man," on the grounds that the skin of the "bottom of the wombe is a very thicke and tight membrane, all fleshy within" while "the cod is a rugous and thin skin." (True, but scarcely compelling, and not among the more telling differences that spring to mind between the cervix and the sack that holds the testicles.) Crooke's rejoinder to the claim that the vagina really is a penis is still more amazing. "Howsoever the necke of the wombe shall be inverted, yet it will never make the virile member," he proclaims. Why? Because "three hollow bodies cannot be made of one, but the yard consisteth of three hollow bodies" and, as we have already been told, "the necke of the womb hath but one cavity." (As figs. 35–36 make clear, Crooke is anatomically correct, however strange his argument seems to the modern sensibility.) Furthermore: "neither is the cavity of a man's yard so large and ample as that of the necke of the wombe." In short, the



Fig. 35. Table 24 from Kaspar Bartholin, *Anatomy* (1668), showing "the parts of the yard." The drawing on the lower left shows the corpus spongiosum penis through which the urethra passes. In the drawing upper left, this passage is left intact and one of the two corpora cavernosa penis, the "nervous bodies" that were thought to produce erection, is excised: three hollows in all.

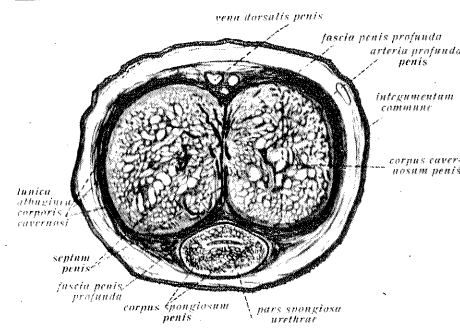


Fig. 36. Cross section of the penis from a modern atlas showing that indeed the penis does have three hollows, as Crooke said.

penis is not a vagina either because it is thrice hollow or because it is not hollow enough.⁴⁸

But for others the hollowness test figured on the opposite side—in support of the Galenic isomorphisms—or at worst as irrelevant:

Whatever you see as a kind of opening in the entrance to the vulva [vagina] in women, such indeed is found in the foreskin of the male pudenda, like a

kind of outgrowth hollow inside. The only difference between them is that this hollowness in much greater in woman than in the man.⁴⁹

At work here is a sensibility radically different from that of doctors in the world of two sexes.

Even when the broader cultural context of the one-sex model was clear to a critic of the Galenic isomorphisms, a web of significance kept the attack narrowly focused and harmless to overarching structures. Bartholin, for example, understood Galenic sexual politics perfectly. "We must not," he argued, "think with Galen . . . and others, that these female genital parts differ from those of Men only in Situation," because to do so would be to fall prey to an ideological plot "hatched by those who accounted a Woman to be only an imperfect Man." Its perpetrators, in talking about how the woman's "coldness of temper" kept female organs inside, were simply articulating their prejudices in the language of science. (One would like to know how and why Bartholin developed so political and so astute a critique.) But, quite apart from politics, Bartholin criticized Galen and his followers for not getting their story straight. Was the "neck of the womb" or the clitoris the female penis; was the womb the female scrotum, or was at least part of it her version of the "nut of the yard"? And the spermatic preparatory vessels, he pointed out, differed in number, origin, and function in men and women, and the male has a prostate, which the female does not have.⁵⁰ Finally, illustrations hammered home the point. The clitoris is clearly rendered as *the* female penis while the womb and the vagina are portrayed in an unambiguously unpenile fashion (fig. 37).

But despite these well-developed and thoroughly articulated criticisms, Bartholin seemed incapable of transcending the ancient images he explicitly rejected. The orifice, or inner mouth of the womb (the cervix), he explained, functions "like the Hole of the Nut of the Yard," so that "no hurtful thing may enter in." The "neck of the womb"—note the use of the conventional term for the vagina—"becomes longer or shorter, broader or narrower, and swells sundry ways according to the lust of the woman." Its substance "is of a hard and nervous flesh, and somewhat spongy, like the Yard." The vagina, in other words, became once again in his imagination a penis. But the clitoris too, like the vagina, was also like the penis. It is "the female yard or prick," because it "resembles a man's yard in situation, substance, composition, repletion with spirits, and erec-

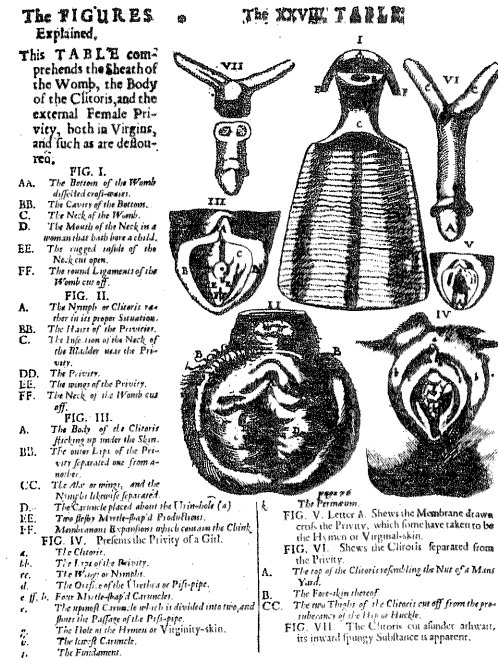


Fig. 37. Table 28 from Bartholin's *Anatomy* in which the vagina (I) is shown with its wall open and folded back so as to emphasize its hollowness. The external pudenda are no longer represented to look like the foreskin of the penis, and the clitoris (VI and VII) is clearly rendered as the female penis. These images were stolen by Venette and reprinted in his *Art of Conjugal Love* and its many translations.

tion" and because it "hath somewhat like the nut and foreskin of a Man's Yard."⁵¹ Clearly Bartholin was caught up in a way of looking that kept him tied to the images of one sex. Indeed, the more he looked, the more he saw and the more muddled the picture became for him, with not one but two female penises to accommodate.

It did not, moreover, escape Renaissance observers that Galen's topological inversions led to ludicrous results. Again, nothing followed. The one-sex model absorbed yet another category of simile. Jacques Duval, a prominent seventeenth-century physician, for example, tried Galen's thought experiment and concluded quite rightly that "If you imagine the

vulva (*vulve*) completely turned inside out . . . you will have to envisage a large-mouthed bottle hanging from a woman, a bottle whose mouth rather than base would be attached to the body.”⁵²

This bottle then “would bear no resemblance to what you had set out to imagine.” To some, however, a bottle shaped like the vagina and womb hanging by its mouth *did* resemble a penis or scrotum enough to serve as the basis for a descriptive metaphor. William Harvey, discoverer of the blood’s circulation, described a prolapsed uterus as “so rough and wrinkled as to take on the appearance of scrotum”; it hangs down, he said a few paragraphs later, “like the scrotum of a bull.”⁵³

Rabelais, in describing how Gargantua was dressed, also elided the distinction between the womb or, as in George Gascoigne’s verse quoted below, a childbearing cradle, on the one hand, and the codpiece containing the penis and scrotum on the other.⁵⁴ True, the orange-sized emeralds on Gargantua’s codpiece are said to be appropriate because “this fruit has an erective virtue.” But then the pouch begins to appear as a finely embroidered and bejeweled horn of plenty, like that given by Rhea to the nymphs who nursed Jupiter. It is, the narrator says, while promising more in his forthcoming *On the Dignity of Codpieces*, “always brave, sappy, and moist, always green, always flourishing, always fructifying, full of humours, full of flowers, full of fruit, full of every delight.”⁵⁵ The codpiece seems, in short, to have been transformed into the womb, which is not so odd given the ancient notion of the uterus as a belly and the late medieval sense of cod as a belly or bag. (Chaucer’s Pardoner in *The Canterbury Tales* proclaims: “O wombe! O bely! O stynkyng cod.”)

Moreover, the womb that to Duval seemed like a bottle hanging by its neck, and thus not a good candidate for the penis inverted, is the precise form of the codpiece, an obvious phallic sign in clothing whose visual representations are at the same time often decidedly unphallic (figs. 38–39). The codpiece tended to be, like Duval’s bottle, broader at the end than at the base, blunt not sharp, decorated with ribbonlike braids. In the portrait of an unknown young aristocrat (fig. 40), it remains ambiguous whether the flower of betrothal he holds is an allusion to the hoped-for generative power of his penis or of the uterine structure in which it is coddled.⁵⁶ The codpiece indeed seems to bear a remarkable resemblance not just to a prolapsed uterus but to a swaddled child.

And this of course completes the circle back to Galen, to the womb as



Figs. 38–39. Jacobo Pontormo, *Albadiere* (1529–30). The codpiece in these pictures (close up on right) very much resembles Jacques Duval’s bottle.



Fig. 40. Detail of *Portrait of a Young Man Before a Broad Landscape*, anonymous German painting of the 1530s, in which the codpiece is a sort of bundle for the penis. The boy holds the flower in his right hand; the bloom is to the right of his penis in the picture.

unborn penis, and to the Renaissance trope to the male organ as infant. Here is Gascoigne’s “The Lullaby of a Lover”:

Eke Lullaby my loving boye,
My little Robyn take thy rest . . .
With lullaby now take your leave,
With Lullaby your dreams deceive,
And when you rise with waking eye,
Remember then this Lullaby.⁵⁷

Duval's argument thus turns in on itself and in a curious way makes the case against which it was directed. Seeing opposition in organs before the eighteenth century was far more problematic than would seem possible later.

The language of difference and sameness. I want to shift now from images to words. The absence of a precise anatomical nomenclature for the female genitals, and for the reproductive system generally, is the linguistic equivalent of the propensity to see the female body as a version of the male. Both testify not to the blindness, inattention, or muddleheadedness of Renaissance anatomists, but to the absence of an imperative to create incommensurable categories of biological male and female through images or words. Language constrained the seeing of opposites and sustained the male body as the canonical human form. And, conversely, the fact that one saw only one sex made even words for female parts ultimately refer to male organs. There was in an important sense no female reproductive anatomy, and hence modern terms that refer to it—vagina, uterus, vulva, labia, Fallopian tubes, clitoris—cannot quite find their Renaissance equivalents. (I think anatomy, more than physics, provides the paradigmatic case of Thomas Kuhn's argument that one cannot translate between theories across the chasm of revolution.)

There has, of course, always been in most languages a vast metaphoric elaboration of terms for organs and functions that are risqué or shameful. (When adolescent boys talk today about "getting a piece of ass," they are not referring to the anus.) Until the late seventeenth century, however, it is often impossible to determine, in medical texts, to which part of the female reproductive anatomy a particular term applies.⁵⁸

"It does not matter," says Columbus with more insight that he was perhaps aware of, "whether you call it [the womb] matrix, uterus, or vulva."⁵⁹ And it does not seem to matter where one part stops and the other starts. He does want to distinguish the true cervix—the "mouth of the womb (*os matricis*)," which from the outside "offers to your eyes . . . the image of a tenchfish or a dog newly brought to light," which in intercourse is "dilated with extreme pleasure," and which is "open during that time in which the woman emits seed"—from what we would call the vagina, "that part into which the penis (*mentula*) is inserted, as it were, into a sheath (*vagina*)."⁶⁰ (Note the metaphoric use of "vagina," the standard Latin word for scabbard, which was otherwise never used for the

part to which it applies today.) But he offers no other term for "our" vagina, describes the labia minor as "protuberances (*processus*), emerging from the uterus near that opening which is called the mouth of the womb," and calls the clitoris, whose erectile and erotogenic qualities he is in the process of extolling, "this same part of the uterus (*hanc eadem uteri partem*)."⁶¹ The precision Columbus sought to introduce by calling the cervix the true "mouth of the womb" vanishes as the vaginal opening becomes the mouth of the womb and the clitoris one of its parts. The language simply did not exist, or need to exist, for distinguishing male from female organs. This same sort of tension is evident in other anatomists. Fallopius is anxious to differentiate the cervix proper from the vagina, but has no more specific name for it than "female pudenda," a part of a general "hollow" (*sinus*). The Fallopian tubes, as he describes them, are not the tubes that convey eggs from the ovaries to the womb, but twin protuberances of sinews (*nervei*), which do penetrate the peritoneum, are hollow, and do not have an opening into the uterus. Fallopius remained committed to the male-centered system and, despite his revolutionary rhetoric, assumed the commonplace that "all parts that are in men are present in women."⁶² Indeed if they were not, women might not be human.

Gaspard Bauhin (1560–1624), professor of anatomy and botany in Basel, sought to clear up the nomenclature, but with equal lack of success. The drive to see all genital organs with reference to man is too deeply embedded in language. "Everything pertaining to the female genitalia is comprehended in the term 'of nature' (*phuseos*)," he declares, but then informs his readers that some ancient writers called the male genitalia *phuseos* as well. Among the words for the labia he cites is the Greek *mu-tocheila*, meaning snout, with its obvious phallic connection, or more explicitly translated, "penile lips."⁶³ This in turn fits the usual conflation of labia with foreskin that goes back at least to the tenth-century Arabic writer who points out that the interior of the vagina—a curious description—"possesses prolongations of skin called the lips," which are "the analogue of the prepuce in men and has as its function protection of the matrix against cold air."⁶⁴ According to Mondino, the labia guard the "the neck of the womb" in the same way that "the skin of the prepuce guardeth the penis," which is why "Haly Abbas calleth them *praputia matricis* [prepuce of the uterus, of the vagina?]."⁶⁵ Berengario simply uses the word *nymphae* to refer to both the foreskin of the penis and the fore-

skin of the vagina, the labia minora.⁶⁶ (And when a new female penis appears, the labia become its foreskin as well. So John Pechy, a popular English writer during the Restoration, describes the “wrinkled membranous production cloath the clitoris [not the vagina] like a foreskin.”⁶⁷)

Much of the controversy around who discovered the clitoris arises out of just such a blurring of metaphorical and linguistic boundaries, the consequence of a model of sexual difference in which unambiguous names for the female genitals do not matter. I will offer only one example here. When Thomas Vicary, writing in 1548 before Columbus published, reports that the vulva “hath in the midst a Lazartus pannicle, which is called in Latin *Tentigo*,” the reference would seem to be unambiguous. Moreover, *tentigo* in early seventeenth-century English means “a tensesness or lust; an attack of priapism; an erection.” There is even less question that the structure in question is the female penis, the clitoris. But when Vicary reports on the functions of this part, its “two utilities,” he seems to be discussing an entirely different organ. There is no mention of pleasure. “The first [utility] is that by it goeth forth the urine, or else it should be shed throughout al the Vulva: The seconde is, that when a woman does set hir thies abroad, it altereth the ayre that commeth to the Matrix for to temper the heate.” What the name led us to expect, a female penis, turn out to be a pair of workaday flaps, a dual-purpose female foreskin.⁶⁸ But whatever Vicary means, it is impossible to translate across the chasm that divides this world from ours.

A web of words, like the constellation of images discussed in the previous sections, was redolent with a theory of sexual difference and thus sustained the one-sex model against more general testing. There was in both texts and images a quality of obsessive insistence, a constant circling around, always back to the male as standard. An almost defensive quality suggests that the politics of gender off the page might well have engendered the textual insistence that there really were no women after all.

The truth of the one-sex model

As I said, parts of the one-flesh model were in principle open to empirical verification and hence also to falsification. But it remained untested, not only for the reasons mentioned above but also because it was woven into a whole fabric of interpretation, clinical practice, and everyday experience

that protected it from exposure to what we would construe as contrary evidence.

Orgasm and conception. It is scarcely surprising that men and women should think that there was a phenomenological correlative to so awesome and mysterious a process as generation. (Orgasm remains even today linked to conception in the imaginations of many people.) On the other hand, counterevidence must have been readily at hand that women frequently conceived without it. For a number of reasons, however, the old view survived. Systematic evidence on the subject is very difficult to gather and, even if women had been asked, it is more than likely that they would have answered what tradition dictated. They would have misremembered the night of conception or misreported their feelings because it is all too easy to dismiss a nonorgasmic conception as an anomaly or, many months later, simply to have forgotten the circumstances of conception, especially when to do otherwise would have been to fly in the face of accepted wisdom. Experience, in short, is reported and remembered so as to be congruent with dominant paradigms.

On a more technical level, it was not difficult to refute, or push to the margins, unwelcome facts. Aristotle, for example, was easy game. His own dictum that “nature never makes anything without a purpose and never leaves out what is necessary” was routinely turned on him.⁶⁹ Since women have organs that resemble the male testicles, and since they obviously experience sexual orgasm—“ye shall observe the same delight and concussion as in males”—there seemed no reason to deny them as active a role in human generation as men. “Why should we suppose Nature, beyond her custome, should abound superfluidities and useless parts,” asks the progressive Oxford physician Nathaniel Highmore rhetorically.⁷⁰ Or, as Lemnius put it in 1557, in a simile that would have resonance in an increasingly commercial society, a woman’s womb is not simply “hired by men, as merchant ships are to be fraited by them.” And even if—as he denied—female semen had no other purpose “but only to excite, move and stir the woman to pleasure,” it would be immensely important because without the “vehement and ardent lust and appetite” for carnal union, neither man nor woman would follow God’s injunction to multiply and be fruitful. Thus the fact that women had gonads like men, that they had sexual desires, that they generally produced fluid during intercourse, and presumably showed signs of “delight and concussion,” all

confirmed the orgasm/conception link that Aristotle, at least in his philosophical persona, had sought to deny.⁷¹

To be sure, the fluid women produced did not look like the male ejaculate, but that was precisely what was to be expected. In the first place, a thing did not have to look like something else in order to be it, as in the bread and wine at communion. More prosaically, the Galenic model of hierarchically ordered sexes would have predicted differences in the quality of the two. Patriarchy itself was predicated on the fact that when, "by the labour and chafing of the testikles or stones," blood is turned into sperm, the man's would be "hote, white and thicke" while the woman's would be "thinner, colder, and feebler."⁷²

The heat (orgasm) conception nexus was also deeply entwined in medical practice and theory generally. As we have seen, the one-flesh-model, and the role of orgasm in it, is represented in the bodily economy of fluids generally and redounds throughout the entire structure of Galenic-Hippocratic medicine. The experience of patients would have supported it, if only out of the universal tendency of people to believe in, even as they ridicule, the efficacy of their healers.

But heat, and orgasm specifically, was integral to the more mundane therapeutics of infertility, amenorrhea, and related conditions, not to speak of sexual dysfunctions whose physiological causes are the same as theirs. A physician, surgeon, midwife, wisewoman or other healer consulted regarding any of these, and especially barrenness, would immediately have suspected some caloric pathology. And since the statistical analysis of conception has evolved only very recently, and since doing nothing therapeutically has a remarkable chance of success in curing infertility, it seems probable that almost any advice Renaissance healers happened to give their patients regarding sexual heat and pleasure must have appeared to work often enough to confirm the model on which it was based.⁷³

Even suspected anatomical defects might be regarded as damaging because of their effect on pleasure. If, as was thought, the generative body during coitus "shakes out" the semen, then irregularities in the actual physical contact between bodies would be among the first possibilities investigated by doctors in patients who consulted them for infertility.⁷⁴ If the penis fails to rub properly, either or both partners might fail to have an orgasm and hence to produce seed. Fallopius argues that a malformed foreskin needs to be corrected less for cosmetic reasons than because a penis without one is not "naturally lubricated"; "lubricity" is necessary

for sexual pleasure and "when the pleasure is greater, the woman emits seed and suitable material for the formation of the foetus and for the production of membranes."⁷⁵ No foreskin, less friction, no female orgasm, sterility. Too short a penis could have the same result for the same reason: inability to satisfy the woman. (Avicenna was the authority on this point.) And so too could an excessively large member by diminishing female pleasure, though one sixteenth-century German doctor is skeptical: "Perhaps you have not heard too many complaints about the penis being too long," he says; "I say unto you, the longer a weed grows, the better."⁷⁶

But genital heat, from the rubbing genitals, was in fact construed as part of the larger caloric economy, just as semen was part of a more general traffic in fungible fluids. Thus the excess heat that was thought to cause nocturnal emissions or premature ejaculation might be assuaged by cutting back on spicy foods, suppressing "images of a desired woman," or not sleeping on one's back too long (because sleeping on one's back led to warmer kidneys, which increased the production of excrement generally and therefore also of semen).⁷⁷

These were serious matters. In a society in which one in five children died before the age of one, and even prosperous families could consider themselves fortunate if they reproduced themselves, any waste of semen was a matter of the most poignant seriousness. A French physician tells of a man who came to see him in March 1694 because "whenever he was inclined to approach his wife, the emission followed the erection so fast, that he had no ability to penetrate. This hindered him from having children; and, as he had but one left, was afraid of being left without any at all." De la Motte prescribed cooling medicines and suggested that his patient abstain from wines, ragouts, and other heating foods. His condition improved, but his wife remained barren "though very young."⁷⁸

The problem of too much heat in women was also part of any Renaissance differential diagnosis of the causes of infertility. Excessive desire; curly, dark, and plentiful hair (in men hair was a sign of virility, bravery, and of the vital heat that arose in adolescence and distinguished them finally from women); a short or absent menses (the hot body burned off the excess materials that in normal women were eliminated in the monthly courses), and so forth, all indicated a problem of excessive warmth that would burn up the seed. Cooling drugs were called for in these situations.⁷⁹

Insufficient heat, however, loomed far larger in the literature than did its surplus. The absence of sexual desire in men, but with minor adjustments also in women, could be cured by rubbing the loins with calorific drugs or through lascivious talk; other drugs, coquetry, and more talk could cure a "defect of spirit," the inability to have an erection when desire itself was sufficient. In women, adversity and indisposition "to the pleasures of the lawful sheets," especially when accompanied by a slow pulse, little thirst, thin urine, "no pleasure and delight" during coition, scant pubic hair, and similar signs were diagnostically important indicators of excessive coolness in their testicles and thus of insufficient heat to concoct their seed. As Jacob Rueff put it in discussing the problem of frigidity, "the fruitfulness of man and wife may be hindered very much for want of desire to be acquainted with Venus."⁸⁰

Desire then was a sign of warmth and orgasm a sign of its sufficiency to ensure "generation in the time of copulation." To produce sufficient heat in women, talk and teasing were regarded as a good beginning.⁸¹ They "ought be prepared for sweet embraces with lascivious words mixed with lascivious kisses," because if "the man is quicke and the woman too slow, there is not a concourse of both seeds at the same instant as the rules of conception require."⁸² (Men are invariably presumed to be more quickly aroused than women.) Ambroise Paré, the foremost surgeon of his day, opens his widely translated account of generation by emphasizing the importance of flirtation, caressing, and excitement. (The audience for his advice is clearly male.) In his account, men had literally to coax the seed out of women. When a husband comes into his wife's chamber, "he must entertain her with all kinde of dalliance, wanton behaviour, and allurements to venery." If he finds her "to be slow, and more cold, he must cherish, embrace, and tickle her"; he should "creepe" into the "field of nature," intermix "wanton kisses with wanton words and speeches," and caress her "secret parts and dugs [nipples] until she is afire and "enflamed in venery." Rhythm and timing are all-important, he counsels, and if the two seeds are to come together, the man must be aware that his partner is not "all that quick in getting to that point" as he; and he must not leave the woman too soon after her orgasm "lest aire strike the open womb" and cool the seeds so recently sown.⁸³

If all this failed, the Renaissance pharmacopoeia, like earlier compilations, was full of drugs that were thought to work either directly or by sympathetic magic. Paré recommended "fomenting her secret parts with

a decoction of hot herbes made with muscadine, or boiled in other good wine," or that civet or musk be rubbed into her vagina. Juniper and camomile, the heart of a male quail around the neck of a man and the heart of a female around the neck of a woman—presumably because of the lecherous character of birds generally and of quails in particular—ale hoof and pease straw, were all available to manipulate the one-sex body's heat.⁸⁴ Thus savin (juniper, readily available in gin) might be prescribed to allow an impotent man to have erections, to warm an infertile woman's genitals, and to produce an inhospitably warm womb in a Somerset prostitute who sought to end her pregnancy. The same goes for mugwort (wormwood or artemesia), calamint, spices like ginger or cinnamon, and concoctions made from various animal parts.⁸⁵

A vast body of clinical practice and learning was thus bound up with heat, orgasm, and generation. It was and remains difficult to evaluate the efficacy of particular therapies, and it should not seem strange that the experiences of patients, unchallenged by modern survey techniques and statistical analysis, would confirm the notion that more intensely pleasurable intercourse was also more fecund.

The fungibility of fluids. The economy of fluids discussed in Chapter 2 was partly ideology—a way of talking about women as colder, less well-formed, and more protean than man—and partly a way of understanding the body generally as much less bounded and restrained than we would today. But it was also a way of organizing empirical observations, which strengthened it and the vision of sexual difference it formed.

To begin with, certain anatomical discoveries that improved upon Galenic anatomy actually seemed to confirm the basic physiology of the one-sex model, though no one would have thought such testing necessary. Vesalius, for example, correctly noted that, contrary to Galen, what we would call the left ovarian and testicular veins take their origin not from the vena cava but from the left renal vein (fig. 41). From this he concluded that while the right vein may "carry the pure blood to the testis," the left one, coming as it did from nearer the kidney, might specialize in carrying a more watery, serous blood whose "salty and acrid quality may bring about an itching for the emission of the semen." What was thought to be a significant correction of Galen thus fitted nicely with the thoroughly Galenic notion of genital puritus, of sexual feeling being at least in part the result of the corrosive qualities of certain body fluids.⁸⁶

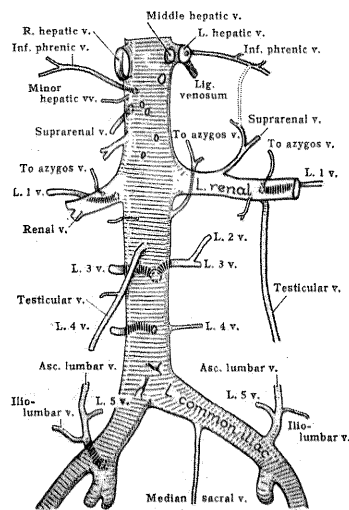


Fig. 41. This shows the left testicular vein, called the ovarian vein in women, coming off the left renal vein and not from the vena cava, the trunk running down the center of the picture.

Conversely, a finding that might have militated against the economy of fluids in the one-sex body—for example, the discovery, known already to Leonardo, that the epigastric vessels going to the breast did not originate from the uterine vessels and that therefore blood from the womb might not be so easily converted to milk and vice versa—was easily ignored. A novel bit of plumbing paled in the face of clinical and folk wisdom stretching back to Hippocrates and of the whole macrocosmic order of which such wisdom was a part.⁸⁷ “And is it not the same blood, which, having been in the womb, is now in the breasts, whitened by the vital spirit through its natural warmth?” Laurent Joubert, one of the great medical popularizers of the sixteenth century, asks rhetorically. Of course. It was common knowledge that women who were lactating usually did not menstruate, and, as Joubert said, women who had excessive menstrual flows (evidence for lots of surplus material) were also likely to have a great deal of milk once the flow stopped. (This discussion is in the context of a self-conscious effort to bring observation to bear on questions of natural history so as to get the answers right. Joubert, for example, denies the claim, made by Paré, that excess menstrual blood can produce birthmarks.⁸⁸)

Doctors continued to write as if the actual vascular pathways simply did not matter. New clinical observations seemed to confirm the view that menstruation was simply a way of ridding the body of excess and not something specific to a female organ or single route. So one doctor offered a case-by-case list of all the places and various forms blood went when it could not go out its usual place: in a Saxon woman it came from her eyes; in a nun through her ears; a woman from Stuttgart got rid of stuff by vomiting; a slave through her spittle; a woman from Trent through her bellybutton; in others from the breasts; and finally (even he thinks it “most amazing”) through the index and little fingers of one Monica.⁸⁹ Christopher Wirsung, a popular German writer, argued that the menstrual flow took three separate pathways during pregnancy, even if he did not know precisely how the body effected this division: the most refined and tender was reserved for the fetus, the middle grade went “by various veins to the breasts” to be made into milk, and the coarsest remained behind to be discharged when the child is born. The route from womb to breast is clearly less relevant than the poetics of milk and blood. Someone as thoroughly up to date as the English anatomist Helkiah Crooke, who must have known that there were no connections between the vessels of the uterus and those of the chest, nevertheless argued that the breasts were uniquely well situated to “alter and labor” blood into milk because of their proximity to the heart, the “shop of heate.”⁹⁰ So even if anatomy did not support the blood/milk nexus, conceptions of the heart as the body’s furnace did.

Observations on the periphery of western civilization and under pathological conditions did seem to provide direct new evidence for the interconvertibility of fluids and the underlying identity, between and among men and women, of various forms of bleeding. Brazilian Indian women “never have their flowers,” writes a seventeenth-century English compiler of ethnographic curiosities, because “maids of twelve years old have their sides cut by their mothers, from the armpit down unto the knee [and] some conjecture that they prevent their monthly flux in this manner.” Joubert likewise thought that Brazilian women “never menstruate, no more than do female animals,” while Nicholas Culpepper, the indefatigable seventeenth-century English writer and publisher, uses the fact that at least some “never have any flowers” but nevertheless are fertile as evidence for the general claim that hot women can conceive even if they do not menstruate.⁹¹

Conversely, in the one-sex fluid economy, strange or feminine men might lactate. Hieronymus Cardanus, court physician to the king of Denmark, says on the basis of travelers' accounts that in some places "almost all the men have great quantity of milk in their breasts."⁹² (An Italian commentator cites one of Cardanus' nearer-to-home cases: "Antonio Benzo, age 34, pale, fat and scarcely bearded, had so much milk in his breasts that he could feed a baby."⁹³) Men, if they were "of a cold, moist, and feminine complexion," were quite likely to have milk in their breasts thought an English doctor, a view shared by Joubert, who adds that such men are to be found primarily in the east. He gives, in addition to the evidence in Aristotle, the example of a Syrian count who nourished his child for more than six months.⁹⁴

This is not to say that a metaphorically lactating Christ, whose blood nourishes his church as Mary's milk had nourished him, or an infant Jesus depicted with female breasts ready to spurt milk, are to be interpreted as more ethnographic examples of the sort just cited. But they do suggest that, in the world of one sex, the body was far less fixed and far less constrained by categories of biological difference than it came to be after the eighteenth century. The boundary between a more motherly, more feminine Christ lactating in religious imagery and men with milk in prosaic ethnography and clinical reports is by no means clear.⁹⁵

Obviously the cases of amenorrhea among Indians or the more bizarre reports of lactating men need not be interpreted as confirmation of the economy of fungible fluids. The absence of the menses during lactation would today be attributed to hormonal changes and not to the conversion of surplus blood to milk. It will therefore take a certain leap of the imagination to understand how Renaissance doctors and midwives interpreted a large body of clinical material as confirmation of a very different theoretical understanding of the body. But they did; what we would imagine as distinct, sexually specific, fluids were metaphorically conflated in the one-sex model. The "irregularity" (*Gebrechen*) that "women call white stuff and doctors *menstrua alba*" was understood by a sixteenth-century German physician, for example, not as an abnormal vaginal discharge but as a fluid that "has much in common with the flow of male semen" and that arose when disordered heat, excess warmth or cold, turned the menses into something like "the male semen."⁹⁶ (The German word for regularity or law, *Regel*, which is being broken in this case is also the word for menses.)

Similarly, discharges of blood by men, occurring naturally or through phlebotomy, were interpreted not as simple instances of bleeding but as a male substitute menses in what was merely a contingently gendered economy of fluids. Men were routinely bled, usually in the spring—more often for those who exercised little—to get rid of a plethora that in women would be lost every month. Well into the eighteenth century, certain pathological bleeding in men was still likened to menstruation. Albrecht von Haller thought nosebleeds got rid of extra blood in some pubescent boys which in girls found "a more easy vent downward," and Hermann Boerhaave reported the case of a "certain merchant here at Leyden, a Man of Probity, who discharges a larger Quantity of Blood every month by the hemorrhoidal arteries than is discharged from the Uterus of the most healthy woman."⁹⁷ (This association goes back at least to Aristotle.)

Indeed, the whole matrix of medical practice connected the physiology of fluids, orgasm, conception, and heat. Cold men, less desirous, less potent, and less fecund, were more likely to suffer menstrual-like bleeding and a whole host of mental and physical ails as well; cold women were thought more likely to suffer retention of the seed or of surplus blood, amenorrhea, which in turn might have a variety of clinical sequels: depression, heaviness of limb, barrenness, green sickness, hysteria. Caloric drugs, a midwife rubbing the genitals (in the case of women), or the ardors of coition itself could warm up the cool and clammy body to normality and restore its fluid balance. The issue was warmth.

Renaissance audiences would have taken as physiologically unremarkable the case of one girl, in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, who was supposedly deranged by reason of a delayed menses and who, by some stroke of good fortune—from Burton's perspective—landed in a brothel where she lay with fifteen men in a single night. The experience cured her amenorrhea and restored her sanity. On the other hand, normal or even vicarious menstruation in women was interpreted as a sign of normal body heat and sexual receptivity. The knight in George Gascoigne's *Adventures of Master F. J.* has a terrible time wooing a lady until one day she gets a torrential nose bleed. When with his help her epistaxis resolves, he finally makes it into the lady's bed.

An entire clinical tradition thus embraced the testable parts of the one-flesh model. Specific discoveries and observations—that orgasm did not always accompany conception, that there were no direct routes between

uterus and breast, that the vaginal secretion of women did not look anything like the semen of men—could not, even taken together, shake ancient beliefs so deeply embedded in how men and women regarded and ministered to their bodies. And a variety of observations or putative observations, when interpreted within the constraints of the model, only confirmed its tenets.

Bodies and metaphors

Although my next chapter will consider explicitly the extraordinarily fraught relationship between the social world of two genders and the one-sex body, I do not want to end this one without briefly exploring an alternative rhetoric of difference to the anatomy of isomorphisms and the physiology of fungible fluids I have been emphasizing, one that proclaims the *unique* qualities of a woman's body and the supposed role of these corporeal attributes in determining women's health and social standing. Dr. Rondibilis in chapter 32 of Rabelais' *Tiers livre de Pantagruel*, for example, says that nature has "placed in a secret and interior place" of women's bodies "an animal, an organ, that is not in men." The seventeenth-century midwife Louise Bourgeois leaves the problem of male infertility to male doctors but argues that specifically in women it is most frequently caused by wetness of the womb, that women would be as healthy in both body and spirit as men were it not for this organ, and more generally that God created its uniquely pathogenic qualities—its tendency to wander and cause hysteria, for example—so as to prevent envy between the sexes and to lead man to pity and love woman.⁹⁸ Moreover, there is an enormous literature that relates the cold, wet humors said to dominate women's bodies to their social qualities—deceptiveness, changeability, instability—while the hot, dry humors in men supposedly account for their honor, bravery, muscle tone, and general hardness of body and spirit.

Both ways of talking, of course, unambiguously proclaim difference. Both array sexual difference on a vertical axis of hierarchy. Both acknowledge the obvious: women have a womb and men do not. Both ways of talking, to paraphrase Ian Maclean on the Aristotelian logic of sexual opposition, refer at times to an opposition "of privation," at other times to an opposition of contraries that may or may not admit intermediaries,

and sometimes—I would say always—to other parts of a cognitive system, other "correlative opposites."⁹⁹

But these ways of talking also differ in two important respects. The first is rhetorical. The anatomists, physicians, and even midwives I have cited were writing to make their readers understand the body and its fluids in a particular way. They were articulating a set of representational or semiotic claims: that the womb must be *understood* as an interior penis, that menstruation must be *understood* as women ridding themselves of a plethora which the warmer, more active bodies of men consumed in the course of everyday life. These understandings were fraught with cultural significance, but they were not expounded primarily to make points about the corporeal foundations of the social order. On the other hand, certain midwifery and medical books, by authors who wished to emphasize their specialist knowledge, as well as a vast array of books about women, for and against, treated the body as if it contained the necessary and sufficient reasons for the medical problems and behavioral characteristics with which they were specifically concerned.

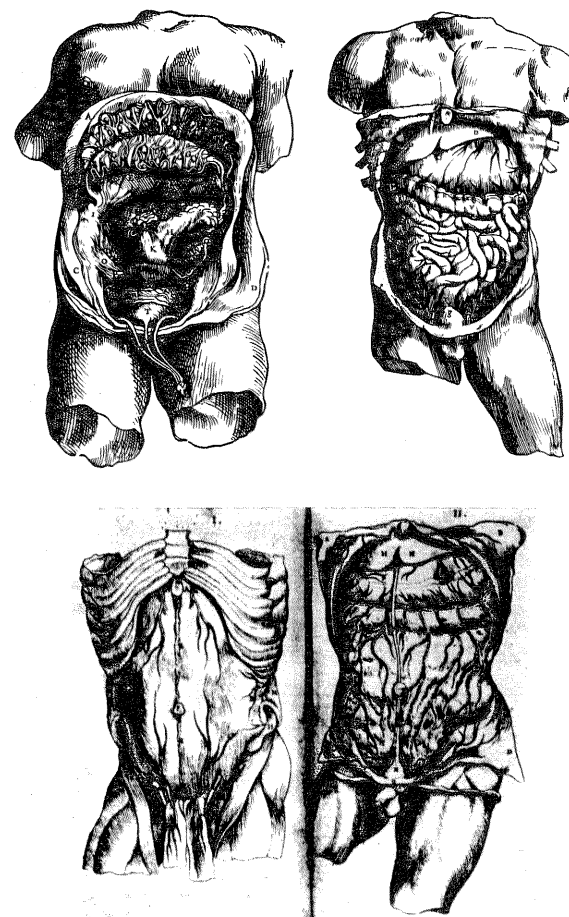
The second difference (but at the same time affinity) has to do with how these two Renaissance discourses construed the body in relation to its cultural meanings. In neither is the ranking of the sexes on the great chain of being just metaphorical—nothing in this cultural system is *just* metaphor—but it is not just corporeal either. The one-flesh discourse I have been explicating seems to regard organs and the qualities of bodies generally as ways of expressing hierarchy, as elements in a network of meaning. On the other hand, the discourse on female uniqueness seems to be postulating an almost modern reductionist theory of corporeal causation, even if it does not carry the notion of incommensurable corporeal opposition as far as would post-Enlightenment writers. Yet, and this is the critical point, the metaphorical and the corporeal are so bound up with one another that the difference between the two is really one of emphasis rather than kind.

Even an apparently straightforward claim about the body like the one that Rabelais puts in the mouth of Dr. Rondibilis turns in on itself and becomes about something else as well: the womb comes once again to sound like a penis. Only women have a womb, Rondibilis says, with no hint of literary shiftiness. But the womb is "an animal," he continues, a move to metaphor and an allusion to *Timaeus* (91b-d), where Plato refers

to *both* the male and female genital organs as animals prone to wander unless they are satisfied.¹⁰⁰ And then, in the usual Renaissance manner of piling on similes, this organ, the womb, which is said not to exist in man, becomes “un membre,” a term that can of course mean simply an organ but that referred more specifically in the sixteenth century to an appendage—an arm or leg—or when used alone, as in “his member,” to the penis. There was no sense in which *membre* ever referred to “her member.”¹⁰¹ The point here is not that Rondibilis is making a controversial claim in saying that only women have a womb; no one denied this. It is rather that once again a female organ is attracted into the metaphorical orbit of the male, not in order to make a claim about likeness but to assert that all difference is figured on the vertical scale of man.

It is also precisely in those contexts in which the womb seems most solidly the organic source of disease, as in the argument that hysteria is caused by a wandering womb, that it becomes most profoundly bound up with extracorporeal meaning. Even in classical writings it is difficult to comprehend the purchase of the claim that the womb wanders and *causes* hysteria. Herophilus in the third century B.C. discovered the uterine ligaments, and Galen merely repeated old arguments when he said that “those who are experienced in anatomy” would recognize the absurdity of a moving womb: “totally preposterous.”¹⁰² Someone must have believed literally in a rampant uterus—a folk belief perhaps—or the doctors would not have felt it necessary to keep attacking the view, and the prevalent fumigation therapies suggest that their adherents subscribed to this literal interpretation. But by the sixteenth century there was manifestly no place in the body for the womb to move to.

The new anatomy, and more specifically the widespread distribution of anatomical illustrations (such as figs. 42–44) well beyond the bounds of the learned community to midwives, barber surgeons, and laypeople, showed that not only was the uterus kept more or less in place by very broad ligaments but that the space between it and the throat was full of other organs and divided by thick membranes. Galen had already pointed out that the peritoneum covered the bladder and the uterus, but now this fact was there for anyone to see, splendidly displayed in the usual, slightly ruined classical torso.¹⁰³ The new anatomy thus made literal interpretation of a wandering womb impossible; but it did not produce a modern rhetoric of disease. Like Paracelsian iatro-chemistry, which seems to be



Figs. 42–44. Fig. 42, top left, shows the female torso from which the vagina in fig. 20 was removed. Vesalius tells us that the attachments of the uterus are in place but that he has removed the abdominal wall and intestines to present this view. Fig. 43 shows a male torso, a few pages before this one, opened to show the intestines still in place. Clearly this figure was meant to be applicable to women. Two still earlier plates from the *Fabrica* (fig. 44, bottom row) showing the abdominal wall of a male torso still in place were combined and used as the opening and illustration of a leading sixteenth- and seventeenth-century midwifery manual by Raynald, *The Byrth of Mankind* (1545).

but is not a version of modern medical chemistry, the new anatomy lures us into thinking that Renaissance writers must have spoken of organs as we do, which they did not. Whatever they were debating when they pondered whether the womb wandered, it was not a discussion about the actual travels of an organ from its ligamentary anchor below, up through a foot and a half of densely packed body parts.

By the eighteenth century, this was perfectly evident. When Tobias Smollett, author of *Humphrey Clinker* as well as a surgeon and ghost-writer of Smellie's famous treatise on midwifery, ridiculed the English midwife Elizabeth Nihell for citing Plato's wandering womb, Mrs. Nihell countered that *of course* she had meant it only figuratively. Smollett, she said, had quoted her out of context to make her look bad.¹⁰⁴

Though less intractable, difficulties of translation also arise when interpreting the humors. Doctors as well as laypeople in the Renaissance believed that the humorial balances of the sexes differed along the axis of hot and cold, wet and dry, that such differences had implications for anatomy as well as for behavior, and that humorial imbalance caused disease. They spoke as if there were warm or cold qualities somewhere in the body whose presence was made known by observable features; skin color, hair, temperament. On the other hand, no one believed that a quantifiable amount of some humor caused someone to be male or female. There were thought to be hot, hirsute viragos and effeminate, cold and hairless men, colder than exceptionally hot women. The claim was rather that men as a species were hotter and drier than women as a species. Nor was it claimed that one could actually feel the wetness or the coldness that distinguished women from men or that, on occasion, caused female complaints.¹⁰⁵ The humors were not like organs and did not play the parts organs would play in eighteenth-century nosology or social theory. Though humors were "more real" than a wandering womb and were certainly not "just metaphors" or ways of talking, they were not just corporeal attributes either.

Perhaps the most telling feature of both ways of talking about sex in the Renaissance, however, is the extent to which all talk about sex is determined contextually. In the same texts from which women are excluded and denied both separate existence and subjectivity, they enter as subjects. There they are, where most egregiously absent. Consider again Columbus' discovery of the clitoris, this time with the Latin text:

Hanc eadem uteri partem dum venerem appetunt mulieres et tanquam oestro percitae, virum appetunt, ad libidinem concitae: si attinges, duriusculam et oblongam comperies . . .

If you touch that part of the uterus while women are eager for sex and very excited as if in a frenzy, and aroused to lust they are eager for a man, you will find it rendered a little harder and oblong . . .

If "you" (man) touch a certain part of a woman, "you" will find it harder. Women, in one of the few instances in which they are made the grammatical subject, are literally surrounded in the temporal clause by desire, *her* desire. *Appetunt*, "are eager for," is repeated, to flank *mulieres*, women; *percitae* and *concitae*, redundant predicate adjectives, attest further to *her* sexual arousal. But then the sentence takes an unexpected turn, and the scientifically objective, presumptively male reader is told that the part of the female anatomy in question will become hard and oblong if touched . . . making her semen flow "swifter than air."¹⁰⁶ Thus woman has entered as a separate, desiring being in what seems to be an all-male world.

This tension is everywhere, not only in the anatomy theater but at the Globe Theater, not only in medical texts but in the essays of Montaigne. The cultural politics of at least two genders is never in equilibrium with the "biology," or alternative cultural politics, of one sex. We shall see that context determines sex in the world of two sexes as well.

FOUR

Representing Sex

Sebastian [To Olivia]

So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.
But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived:
You are betrothed both to a maid and man.

SHAKESPEARE, *TWELFTH NIGHT*

In the absence of an Archimedean point in the body that assures the stability and nature of sexual difference, one sex is, and has always been, in tension with two: stark polarities poised on the edge of chiaroscuro shadings. Specific social, political, and cultural circumstances, revealed in anecdotal moments and rhetorical contexts, favor the dominance of one or the other view, but neither is ever silent, neither is ever at rest.

We have seen that the one-sex model was deeply imbricated in layers of medical thinking whose origins stretched back to antiquity. Advances in anatomy and anatomical illustration as well as further clinical evidence, far from weakening these attachments, made the body ever more a representation of one flesh and of one corporeal economy. The considerable cultural prestige of medical learning, if not of actual practice, thus continued to weigh in on the side of one sex. But the one-sex body subsisted also, easily or not so easily, in the midst of other discourses, other political demands, other social relations, even other medical ways of speaking. It might be perfectly embedded in allegories of cosmic order, but deeply at odds with rigid gender boundaries and the social body's imperative to ensure reproductive mating.

Somehow if Olivia—played by a boy of course—is not to marry the maid with whom she has fallen in love, but the girl's twin brother Sebastian instead; if Orsino's intimacy with "Cesario" is to go beyond male bonding to marriage with Viola, "masculine usurped attire" must be

thrown off and woman linked to man. Nature must be "to her bias" drawn, that is, deflected from the straight path. "Something off center, then, is implanted in nature," as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, which "deflects men and women from their ostensible desires and toward the pairings for which they are destined." But if that "something" is not the opposition of two sexes that naturally attract one another—as it came to be construed in the eighteenth century—then what is it?¹

The answer is nothing, or at least nothing specifically and fundamentally corporeal peculiar to each sex. Having a penis does not make the man just as, to quote Feste, "cucullus non facit monachum" (the cowl does not make the monk). And yet men and women were sorted out by the configurations of their bodies—having a penis outside or inside—into their required procreative and multitudinous other gender-specific roles. The one-sex body of the doctors, profoundly dependent on cultural meanings, served both as the microcosmic screen for a macrocosmic, hierarchic order and as the more or less stable sign for an intensely gendered social order. A whole matrix of interpretive strategies and assumptions about how things come to have meaning kept the one-sex model in place, and their relative eclipse constituted the shift to an understanding of male and female as opposites. The nature of sex, I argue in this and the next two chapters, is the result not of biology but of our needs in speaking about it.

One sex and the macrocosm

We are not allowed by our Renaissance and medieval sources to forget that the word "cosmos" in both English and Greek has a double meaning. It denotes, as Angus Fletcher reminds us, both a *large-scale order* (macrocosmos) and the small-scale *sign of that order* (microcosmos). Modern science, he points out, works to reduce the metaphoric connections between various orders of the world to one, to explain man and nature, the heavens and the earth, in one neutral mathematical language and not, as in the cultural world with which we are concerned here, by adumbrating a complex structure of resemblances, creating levels upon levels of connectiveness between and within the micro- and the macrocosm, engendering correspondences as the demands of meaning dictate.²

The new anatomy was for most purposes firmly in the old metaphorical tradition. Vesalius, for example, builds his entire account of "how nature

provides for the propagation of the species" on the image of a city whose founder "does not wish to reside there," but who "still provides a plan whereby it may endure for eternity or a very long time." The human body, he begins, is necessarily subject to death and because of its very material cannot be immortal, at least not physically. All cities, even the most fortunate, have gone to ruin over the ages. But God's earthly city has endured for thousands of years, having been contrived by him "with a certain marvelous skill so that new men always succeed in place of those that waste away, and the conservation of the species becomes perpetuated."

Generation mirrors both earthly hierarchy and the wonders of creation. The male, as we might expect by now, "puts forth the most potent proportion of the principle of the fetus," but the female, having testicles and appropriate vessels as well, "adds some proportion of the primary principle," which is conceived in her womb. Pleasure, Vesalius affirms, drives humankind and indeed all animals to use their organs of generation to initiate the "miracle of nature." The creator has given them "a great desire for the uniting of bodies and a particular force of delight . . . a certain marvelous and unspeakable appetite" for their employment. The self-perpetuating macrocosmic order is, in a sense, assured by the qualities of merely mortal bodies.³

This constant interplay between images of the body and the world beyond it, at the same time biological and rhetorical, is so pervasive that we tend to take it for granted. Somehow the stars dictate that on certain days in April, August, and December one ought not to be bled, nor eat goose or peacock, nor take drugs (fig. 45). Heavenly bodies, one popular English tract declares, "are the forms and matrices of all Herbs . . . representing the like of every vegetable in the earth." Conversely, "every Herb is a Terrene star growing toward Heaven." From this set of correspondences followed scores of others that bring the cosmos into the body. All the species of the plant *Orchis*, for example, excite the "Venereal appetite" and aid in conception because of "their similitude of the Testicles" and because "they also have the odour of the Seed." The grapestone represents the genitals of both sexes, and wine, made of course from the grape, is therefore conducive to passion: "The Ancients, not without cause, said: Without Bacchus, Venus waxeth cold." Countless illustrations of "zodiacal man"—the male body as usual stands for generalized humanity—specify which stars correspond to which parts of the body. And between heaven and earth are countless bonds of signification.⁴

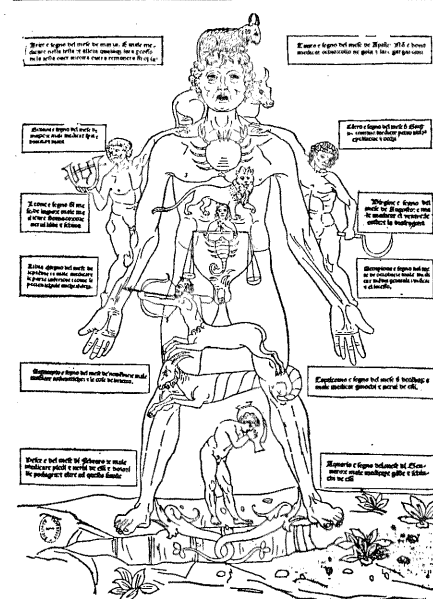


Fig. 45. Late fifteenth-century Italian zodiac man. Captions linking the zodiacal sign to organs and parts of the body also gave dietary prescriptions, directions for blood letting, and other information regarding how the heavens affected the body.

In the way that the moons of Jupiter provided for Galileo a model of the truths of Copernican astronomy, so the human body could represent the fecundity of nature and the power of the heavens. One could view the world and capture its essence by training one's instrument on Man. As the astrologer and physician John Tanner put it: "In man, as in a perspective glasse, may our Mother Earth, with her innumerable offspring, be discovered; in him may the unruly, and restless waves of the Ocean be delineated. Nor does he only epitomize the Elementall world, but also the Celestiall."⁵ I need not belabor the obvious, that the stars were thought capable of influencing human life. But I do want to draw specific attention again to the connection between generation and the cosmos, between the body and the cycles of life outside it.

Popular medical works moved vertiginously from great ontological claims to specific potions whose efficacy depends upon the macrocosmic order. Robert Bayfield's *Enchiridion medicum*, for example, begins with the Renaissance commonplace that man is an "epitome or map of the universe" and that the fall reflects a ruin upon both worlds—"upon the great world calamities and upon the little world disease and death"—and

moves immediately to a kind of social *mise-en-scène*. The book is written, its author proclaims, for those who cannot afford the books of great men but who nevertheless need to learn medicine, God's help in time of pain. It is a treasury of palliatives for the ills encountered along the way to the destiny of all men, rich as well as poor, "to return to dust, and become as though he had never been." In the text itself the actual remedies proposed curiously mimic this movement from macro- to microcosm. To cure hysteria, for example, Bayfield suggests everything from physically heating the body in the ardor of intercourse to having a midwife rub the genitals, to applying bags of mugwort to them, to procuring "the mosse that groweth on a malefactor's scull," mixing it with the powder of that skull, and using the amalgam to alleviate seizures. The entire universe, living and dead, is brought to bear on the body in distress.⁶

The more general form of these easy movements from macro- to microcosm is in the poetics of biology itself, specifically in the language through which men and women thought about the succession of generations. This web of metaphor does not simply mirror some set of beliefs about their bodies, though it does that as well. It has a life of its own which in some measure constitutes the connections between the body and the world. That is to say, the images through which bodies and pleasures were understood in the Renaissance are less a reflection of a particular level of scientific understanding, or even of a particular philosophical orientation, than they are the expression of a whole fabric or field of knowledge. Myriad discourses echo through the body.

Thus to imagine female semen after its mixing with the male's as "expanded into filmy integuments" that surround the "new kindled deity"; to think of it as weaving a texture, "farre too fine and cunning for the fingers of Arachne," is of itself to fashion a fine network of connections. The epigenesis of the fetus is likened to godlike creation and to the making of gods, to the young Arachne who wove a picture of Europa carried across the waters by Jupiter as bull which was so realistic that "you would have thought that the bull was a live one, and that the waves were real waves," and to the humble spider, into which Arachne was changed for her hubris, spinning her webs.⁷ To point out that menstruation is called *die blume* by Germans or *the flowers* by the English because "a tree in bloom is likewise regarded as capable of bearing fruit" metaphorically opens woman's bodies to all of nature.⁸

A poetry of biology similarly enables Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie*

Queene to bring the heat of the heavens into the virgin body of Chrysogonee for the "wondrous" begetting of Belpheobe and Amoret.⁹ On a hot summer's day

In a fresh fountaine, farre from all mens vew,
She bath'd her brest, the boyling heat t' allay;
She bath'd with roses red, and violets blew,
And all the sweetest flowres, that in the forrest grew.

Chrysogonee then falls asleep, naked, on the pool's bank:

The sunne-beames upon her body play'd,
Being through former bathing mollified,
And pierst into her wombe, where they embayd
With so sweet sence and secret power unspide,
That in her pregnant flesh they shortly fructified.

Spenser does not claim, nor do I, that biology makes this virgin birth seem like an ordinary occurrence, that medicine naturalizes what is meant to be a wondrous virgin birth of "the wombe of Morning dew." But biology gives the metaphors of this passage resonance, and the poetry in turn envelops biology in its images. Chrysogonee's conception is not meant to seem miraculous in the sense of working through means unknown to earth. Instead Spenser writes:

But reason teacheth that the fruitful seades
Of all things living, through impression
Of the sunbeames in moyst complexion,
Doe life conceive and quickned are by kynd.

"Infinite shapes of creatures," he points out by way of example, are informed by the sun's rays in the mud of the Nile. These images of generative heat, the body's and the sun's, are not simply expressions of now outdated scientific theories that, once reproduction is more fully understood, would become trivial, incomprehensible, or so implausible as to be silly.¹⁰ But neither was biology understood only as a form of poetry: "merely" language. Rather, it is the constant back and forth, the interpretive dialogue between the corporeal and the linguistic, which itself constitutes the meanings of the body in the one-flesh model.

The absorptive powers of the whole linguistic field I have been describing are nowhere more evident than in a pair of accounts of generation which encompass within a few paragraphs the grandness of creation and

the tragedy of the fall, the fruitfulness of the earth and the mundane details of producing grain and baking bread. The two are distant in time and born of very different contexts, but they share the special language of corporeal openness. The first is from the extraordinary twelfth-century nun, Hildegard of Bingen. She imagines the making of Eve as the archetypal creation of new life through the power and sweetness of the sex act:

When God created Adam, Adam experienced a sense of great love in the sleep that God instilled in him. And God gave form to that love of the man, and so woman is the man's love. And as soon as woman was formed God gave man the power of creating, that through his love—which is woman—he might procreate children.

If his love is like “a fire on blazing mountains,” while hers is a small wood fire, easily quenched, hers is also “like a sweet warmth proceeding from the sun, which brings forth fruit.” After the fall, their love is not so sweet, but more passionate, more violent, more human, more of this world:

And so, because a man still feels this great sweetness in himself, and is like a stag thirsting for the fountain, he races swiftly to the woman and she to him—she like a threshing floor pounded by his many strokes and brought to heat when the grains are threshed inside her.

Within two paragraphs we move from the creation of Eve out of the sleep of Adam to ordinary human generation likened to grain coaxed into fertility through the heat of sexual ardor.¹¹

A sixteenth-century German account likewise creates a matrix of metaphor in which the boundaries between the natural and the spiritual world and between the human body and the rest of creation are constantly being elided. Semen, it argues, works as a spume or froth that has the power through the movement of its spiritual, natural, and vivifying essence (*seelichen, natürlichen und lebendigen Geyst*) to create in matter a breath of air (*ein Blast*) that prepares the way for the heart. Then, like the waters parting at the creation, the two outer parts of the foam are driven to the sides, and various parts of the body arise in the space between, the spirits each producing particular parts. Thus the spiritual or psychic essence (*seelisch Geyst*) acts at the upper part of the fissure to produce the head. These extraordinary occurrences become profoundly human and mundane when we are told that a further force of nature (*naturlische Krafft*) makes a little bag (*ein Buetlin*) in which “the fruit is guarded from destruction as the bread crust protects the crumbs (*Brosam*).”¹²

These two images of bread and generation link the philosophically sophisticated notions of a great chain of being with what the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin has called “the grotesque mode of representing the body and bodily life,” which “prevailed in art and creative forms of speech over a thousand years.” The model of bodies and pleasures I am explicating is embedded in both, in the rhetoric of metaphoric resemblance and in an image of the body whose borders with the world are porous and protean. It will fall with their political and aesthetic collapse.¹³

By “grotesque body” Bakhtin means one “in the act of becoming” (or dissolving), a body fecund, open, in the process of reproducing itself. The primary organs in this act of self-creation are those that conceive new bodies or more generally break the bounds of their host. Bakhtin identifies these as the bowels and the penis, inexplicably omitting the womb. The “main events in the life of the grotesque body” are those carried on by these organs: ingestion, elimination from all the orifices of the body, copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment. Conversely, Bakhtin argues, the “logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body.” The inner body, its blood and excrement, indeed its entire inner economy, is externally manifest. Moreover, this image of the body is one in which particular parts—especially blood—provide a link between generations, a bond between the death of an individual body and the continuance of the corporeal body social. Finally, the grotesque body is “cosmic and universal.” That is, the functions and configurations of the body not only reflect the cosmic order, but are to a great extent determined by it.¹⁴

Not everyone will share Bakhtin's cheerful acceptance of corporeal openness, dismemberment, and mutilation; his blindness to the brutality of the language directed against women; his romanticization of the role of the carnivalesque in creating a “life of the people.” For women bearing children in particular, it must have been considerably less than joyful to experience a world in which any perturbation of accepted order—wicked thoughts, moral culpability, chance encounters with people or things, untimely or improperly positioned intercourse—could imprint itself disastrously on the flesh of their children in utero.

John Winthrop in 1638 provides an excruciating and dramatic glimpse into this world. He reports on a child born horribly deformed to one of the followers of the outcast Anne Hutchinson. The stillborn baby “had a face but no head, and the ears stood upon the shoulders and were like an

ape's; it had no forehead, but over the eyes four horns, hard and sharp . . . the navel and all the belly, with the distinction of sex, were where the back should be, and the back and hips before, where the belly should have been." In short, everything about the child was as perverted as its mother's religious beliefs: front to back, animal instead of human, hard instead of soft; when it died in the mother's body two hours prior to birth, "the bed whereon the mother lay did shake, and withal there was a noisome savor," so obnoxious that women in attendance vomited and their children for the first time in their lives had convulsions. Everywhere was corruption. The midwife, suspected of being a witch, "used to give young women oil of mandrakes and other stuff to cause conception." Moreover, "coming home at this very time," the father of the "monster" was on the next Sunday "questioned in the church for divers monstrous errors."¹⁵

Altogether, the reproductive biology and these representations of male and female bodies are part of a specific literary mode that Bakhtin characterizes in other registers. The attacks on the grotesque which he finds in writers like Erasmus and which Norbert Elias has identified as the essence of the "civilizing process," and has associated with the rise of the absolutist state, also become attacks on the Renaissance model of sex and gender.¹⁶ A new cultural politics will, by the eighteenth century, entail new metaphors of reproduction and new interpretations of the female body in relation to the male.

Representing one sex in a two-sex world

Talk about biological sex always threatens to collapse into theatrical gender, but it does so with special urgency and rhetorical virtuosity in the world of one sex. Elizabeth I brilliantly exploited the tensions between her masculine political body and her feminine private body in creating an erotics of court life that both engendered factions of the great men of her realm and bound them to her and to each other. She could play the alluring but inaccessible virgin queen and the warrior prince. In her famous speech to the troops at Tilbury in 1588 she proclaimed that she had "the body but of a weak and feeble woman but the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too." Her rhetoric later in her life became still more reliant on masculine images. She began referring to herself more often as king, as the nation's husband rather than its virgin mother.

The nation, she said, should cast its eyes on no other *prince* as she played its Aeneas, St. George, and David. (Francis I also played on the theme of the androgyne, appearing in one painting with the head of a virago.¹⁷ And in quite another tradition men are represented as the appropriation of female power of women by Adam, the first man, who is depicted as *really* pregnant.¹⁸)

These sorts of slippage occur everywhere in the literature of early modern Europe. There is the fabliau in which a count cures his mother-in-law of prideful meddling in the affairs of men by claiming that her misbehavior resulted from her "balls" having descended to her loins: "You have balls like ours, and that is why your heart is so proud. I would like to feel them. If they are there, I'll have them removed." His servants stretched her out on the ground; he cut a long gash into her hip; he tugged, "removed," and displayed to his victim a huge testicle from a bull that he had earlier hidden. "After this, she thought it was real."¹⁹ Really? And of course stories of women who actually changed sex and suddenly sprouted a penis circulated widely in both medical and other literature.

Men's bodies too could somehow come unglued. "Effeminacy" in the sixteenth century was understood as a condition of instability, a state of men who through excessive devotion to women became more like them: in one of the OED's examples, from 1589, "The king was supposed to be . . . very amorous and effeminate." Romeo, having refused to fight Tybalt, blames his softness on women:

O Sweet Juliet,
Thy beauty has made me effeminate
And in my temper soft'ned valour's steel!
(3.1.111-113)

Of course, none of these texts demands to be read as pertaining to real bodies and, therefore, to the collapse of sex into gender. And if they do, as in the case of the sex-change stories, the language of sixteenth-century texts might be readily translated into the plain naturalistic terms of modern science. Elizabeth's language is simply metaphorical; she is *like* a king or a husband but is really a queen and a maid. The fabliau plays on the commonplace that women have testicles inside, and thus the storyteller can *figure* women as becoming malelike through a slipping down of those interior balls. The mother-in law might credulously believe the bull testicle to be hers, but the count and the reader know them to be fake.

Stories of men becoming effeminate are more problematic, and it is difficult to ask of them what their authors thought “really” happened. In one sense they might be regarded as expressions of concern for the boundaries of what we would call gender roles. But this does not quite work in the textual contexts I want to consider because, if bodies were open to a wide array of astral and earthly influences, then why not open also to transgressions of gender? Bodies actually seem to slip from their sexual anchorage in the face of heterosexual sociability; being with women too much or being too devoted to them seems to lead to the blurring of what we would call sex.

As for women changing into men, naturalistic explanations are also problematic. First, they presume what ought to be questioned: that early modern men and women talked about and understood the body as we do and that their categories are readily translatable into ours. When early modern texts speak about women turning into men or receiving the stig-mata or fasting for months on end—they are not doing so in neutral scientific language. To read them as such is to miss their historical specificity. Second, they presume also a fixed and modern, base-superstructure connection between gender and sex, which is again precisely what is at issue.

Instead, the texts I will consider here—those at the corporeal end of the spectrum as well as those at the metaphoric—presume a very different relationship. So-called biological sex does not provide a solid foundation for the cultural category of gender, but constantly threatens to subvert it. Foucault suggests an explanation when he argues that in the Renaissance and before there was no such thing as the one and only true sex and that a hermaphrodite could be regarded as having two, between which he/she could make a social and juridical choice. He is perhaps utopian in his political claim; gender choice was by no means so open to individual discretion, and one was not free to change in midstream. But he is right that there was no true, deep essential sex that differentiated cultural man from woman.²⁰ But neither were there two sexes juxtaposed in various proportions: there was but one sex whose more perfect exemplars were easily deemed males at birth and whose decidedly less perfect ones were labeled female. The modern question, about the “real” sex of a person, made no sense in this period, not because two sexes were mixed but because there was only one to pick from and it had to be shared by everyone, from the strongest warrior to the most effeminate courtier to the most aggressive virago to the gentlest maiden. Indeed, in the absence of

a purportedly stable system of two sexes, strict sumptuary laws of the body attempted to stabilize gender—woman as woman and man as man—and punishments for transgression were quite severe.

In this world, the body with its one elastic sex was far freer to express theatrical gender and the anxieties thereby produced than it would be when it came to be regarded as the foundation of gender. The body is written about and drawn as if it represented the realm of gender and desire; its apparent instability marked the instability, indeed impossibility, of an all-male world with only male homoerotic desire. An open body in which sexual differences were matters of degree rather than kind confronted a world of real men and women and of the clear juridical, social, and cultural distinctions between them.

Two hundred years after the fabliaux, the all-male world of the aristocratic warrior class had waned. Courts were still overwhelmingly male, but more was required of the courtier now than military prowess and naked brutality. Political and social success depended not only on might and cunning but on the gentler skills of courtesy, dress, conversation, and all the skills of “self-fashioning.”

Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier* is rampant with anxiety, expressed in the language of the body, that men engaged in such pursuits—in consortng closely with women—could become like them and, even more threateningly, that women could become like men. Much of this appears in commonplace discussion in book 3 about the worth of woman, a replay of the misogynist and antimisogynist arguments of the *querelle des femmes*.²¹ But the concern that courtiers will become women also appears elsewhere in the treatise. Men can gain a “soft and womanish” countenance through overrefinement—curling their hair, plucking their brows, pampering “themselves in every point like the most wanton and dishonest women in the world.” Men of this sort seem to lose the hardness and stability of male perfection and melt into unstable but protean imperfection. Becoming effeminate becomes a sort of phantasmagoric dissolution: “their members were readie to flee from one an other . . . a man woulde weene they were at that instant yielding up the ghost.”²²

Music, Castiglione’s misogynist Lord Gasper proclaims, is a pastime for women and for those that have the likeness of men but not their deeds, for those who would make their minds womanish and “bring themselves in that sort to dread death.” He speaks as if the body is unable to resist the pressures of blurred gender and can at any moment actually change to match its social perversion. Gasper goes so far as to suggest

that heterosexuality itself can bring about man's undoing as a man. Citing Aristotle, he notes that a woman always loves the first man she has intercourse with—she after all “receiveth of the man perfection”—while a man hates his first, since “the man of the woman [receives] imperfection.” By extension he hates all subsequent female lovers because “every man naturally loveth the thing that maketh him perfect, and hateth that maketh him unperfect.”²³

There is also the converse danger that thoughts or actions inappropriate to their gender could turn women into men. Lord Julian, one of Castiglione's moderates on the woman question, warns them against undertaking “manly exercises so sturdie and boisterous,” against their using “swift and violent trickes [movements], or even singing or playing upon their instruments “hard and often divisions.”²⁴ The concern here goes beyond women playing unladylike music, beyond transgressing the bounds of gender; it seems that inappropriate behaviors might really cause a change of sex. I want to strengthen this interpretation by setting Castiglione beside near contemporaneous accounts—from Michel Montaigne and from the chief surgeon to Charles IX, Ambroise Paré—of a girl whose “swift and violent movements” or other masculine activities did lead, or are reported to have led, to just the sort of sex change Julian the courtier feared.

Paré's Marie-turned-Germain story is found in a collection of clinical tales and observations: a girl, another Marie, who became Manuel when she sprouted a penis “at the time of life when girls begin their monthlies”; a young man in Reims who lived as and anatomically seemed to be a girl until the age of fourteen, when he/she, “while disporting him[/her]self and frolicking” with a chambermaid, suddenly acquired male genital parts. It is as if making love as a man suddenly gave her the organs to do it “properly.” (Perhaps he was all along a man in a woman's body so that his gender, if not his sex, made the encounter, in spirit, a heterosexual one that the flesh subsequently confirmed. Or perhaps he was a woman with a homoerotic passion for a fellow servant, who was saved from sin by a last-minute sex change.) One cannot tell, and this is precisely the point. A bit more heat or acting the part of another gender can suddenly bestow a penis, which entitles its bearer to the mark of the phallus, to be designated a man.

Paré's story in which violent movement plays a major causal role—this is the one Montaigne picks up—is about Germain Garnier, christened

Marie, who was serving in the retinue of the king when the famous surgeon encountered him/her. The servant Germain was a well-built young man with a thick red beard who, until the age of fifteen (twenty-two in Montaigne's version), had lived and dressed like a girl, showing “no mark of masculinity.” Then once, in the heat of puberty, the girl jumped across a ditch while chasing pigs through a wheatfield: “at that very moment the genitalia and the male rod came to be developed in him, having ruptured the ligaments by which they had been held enclosed.”²⁵ Marie, soon to be Marie no longer, hastened home to her/his mother, who consulted physicians and surgeons, all of whom assured the somewhat shaken woman that her daughter had become her son. She took him to the bishop, who called an assembly which decided that indeed a transformation had taken place: “the shepherd received a man's name: instead of Marie . . . he was called Germain, and men's clothing was given him.” (Some persisted in calling him Marie-Germain as a reminder that he had once been a girl.) Montaigne in both his *Travel Journal* and the *Essays* tells the same story, adding the observation that there was in the area still “a song commonly in the girls' mouths, in which they warn one another not to stretch their legs too wide for fear of becoming males, like Marie-Germaine.” The girls' answer to the dangers of effeminacy.²⁶

Paré offers the following, entirely naturalistic, explanation for Marie's transformation: the fact that “women have as much hidden within the body as men have exposed outside; leaving aside, only, that women don't have so much heat, nor the ability to push out what by the coldness of their temperament is held bound to the interior.” So puberty, jumping, active sex, or something else whereby “warmth is rendered more robust” might be just be enough to break the interior-exterior barrier and produce on a “woman” the marks of a “man.” Succinctly put by the learned Gaspard Bauhin: “women have changed into men” when “the heat, having been rendered more vigorous, thrusts the testes outward.” But the reason heat works in this way and not in reverse—men cannot be physically transformed into women—is as much metaphysical as physiological in any modern sense. Movement is always up the great chain of being: “we therefore never find in any true story that any man ever became a woman, because Nature tends always toward what is most perfect and not, on the contrary, to perform in such a way that what is perfect should become imperfect.”²⁷

Paré, Montaigne, and Bauhin are of course writing in a long tradition

stretching back to antiquity. They all cite Pliny, who asserts that "transformation of females into males is not an idle story" and that, in addition to various reliably reported cases, he himself "saw in Africa a person who had turned into a male on the day of marriage to a husband."²⁸ (There is another tale in the Greek corpus about a thirteen-year-old girl who developed a severe stomachache on the eve of her marriage and was saved from becoming a child bride when four days later she emitted a great cry and produced male genitals.) The celebrated seventeenth-century English physician and author Sir Thomas Browne concluded in his *Vulgar Errors*—an attack on a variety of false popular beliefs—that one could not deny the transition from one sex to another in hares, "it being observable in Man." Man, after all, is in an "androgynal condition."²⁹

To the protagonists of the *Courtier*, or even to the count who castrated his mother-in-law in the fabliau, the lesson of Paré's stories and of the tradition going back to the Greeks is not that a woman is at any moment likely to change sex and become a man or, worse, that a man will lose his member and become a woman. Male anxiety about effeminacy or about the acquisition of masculine traits by women might find resonance in the tale of Marie-Germain but cannot have been caused, or even given credence, by the genre it represents. Real sex changes are, in other words, not the objective correlatives of imagined ones. If the only danger were such extraordinary transformations, then the terrifying erosions of sex/gender boundaries would not figure as prominently as they do in so many kinds of literature.

The problem is rather that in the imaginative world I am describing there is no "real" sex that in principle grounds and distinguishes in a reductionist fashion two genders. Gender is part of the order of things, and sex, if not entirely conventional, is not solidly corporeal either. Thus the modern way of thinking about these texts, of asking what is happening to sex as the play of genders becomes indistinct, will not work. What we call sex and gender are in the Renaissance bound up in a circle of meanings from which escape to a supposed biological substratum is impossible.

Montaigne's recounting of Germain's transformation in his essay "Of the Force of the Imagination" illustrates this point. Whatever Montaigne thinks really happened to the girl who jumped the fence, the essay resolutely obscures; it simply refuses to come to rest on the question of what is imaginative and what is real. The force of the imagination brings forth

horns on the head of Cyppus, king of Italy, who had attended and assisted at a bull baiting and had "dreamed of hornes in his head." Montaigne cites Pliny's reports of having seen women turn into men on their wedding night.

Finally, just before the story of Germain, Montaigne alludes to another example—this time from Ovid—of getting a penis: "Iphis a boy, the vowes then paid,/Which he vow'd when he was a maid."³⁰

This is the happy ending to the story of a girl who was born and raised as a boy, who was engaged by her father to be married to a beautiful girl, and who just in the nick of time—in response to her virtuous mother's prayers—did actually turn into a boy: her features sharpened, her strength grew, and presumably she gained a penis to match the phallus she already carried within.

Montaigne never makes clear what this myth has to do with the girl chasing her pigs in Vitry to whose transformation he next bears personal witness.³¹ Nor is it clear how we are to take the following extraordinary claim, which seems to normalize what happened to Iphis and Marie on the grounds that we men may as well grant all women penises since they will get them anyway:

It is not so great a marvel that this sort of accident is frequently met with. For if the imagination has power in such things, it is so continually and vigorously fixed on this subject that in order not to relapse so often into the same thought and sharpness of desire, it is better that once and for all it incorporates this masculine member in girls.³²

Is it that women would like to have a penis, intensely desire a penis, and consequently will get one? Do they want one of their own, or is this a joke that plays on Montaigne's certainty that they want a man's (his) penis? Why is it better "once and for all" to give them a penis? Because they will get one anyway? The supposed real and the imaginary, the representational and the actual, phallus and penis, are hopelessly jumbled.

Perhaps Montaigne's penis is at stake. After various other quick tributes to the power of the imagination—the stigmata, the scars on King Dagobert, his friend fainting and being subsequently prone to fits after hearing about someone else with these afflictions—he settles into the only sustained topic of the essay: impotence and the power of the imagination, and of women, to cause it. Certain women of Scythia supposedly had the power to kill men who had provoked them with their looks;

others could set “us” afire only to “extinguish us”; tortoises and ostriches hatch their eggs with looks alone, “a sign they have ejaculative virtues”; women transfer marks to their children in utero; an unusual young girl from Pisa was presented to Charles of Bohemia because she was shaggy in consequence of her mother’s having a picture of John the Baptist over her bed when the girl was conceived. And so on.

Perhaps there is much of Montaigne the ironist here. But the essay does not allow of certainty on the bounds of sex. His impotency—finding “himself so short”—Germain’s new real penis, and incorporating “this virile part into women,” who already have it within, are all part of the same discursive whirl. An intensely gendered discussion—this is a man writing about his organ—seems to float over a chasm of fabled sex in which penises come and go at the mind’s command.

I want to illustrate the fluid boundaries of sex and the more rigid distinctions of gender in one more context: the court of the lascivious Francis I. It is a powerfully gendered cultural venue. This was the court in which the Diana in Cellini’s famous *Nymph of Fontainebleau* was uncomfortably posed over the entrance of the palace, the object of an unmistakably male gaze and especially of the privileged gaze of the king. Here men wrote blazons and counterblazons for one another’s enjoyment on the subject of women’s parts, ideological constructions of the female body. The beautiful breast—ivory, rose, a fruit—poetically confronts the ugly breast—black, sagging, stinking, shapeless—in this discourse between men.³³

And courtly anatomy was similarly gendered. The artistically magnificent, if scientifically nugatory, work of the king’s physician Charles Estienne is the product of an implicitly male science. Male intellect and male hands open up bodies and reveal nature’s secrets, even as the illustrations show bodies of male sex tearing themselves apart for the male viewer’s edification (figs. 13–14). Estienne cautions his students to hide the face and private parts of their cadavers so as not to divert the attention of spectators.³⁴

There is in all of this a powerful homoerotic quality as women seem to mediate and create bonds between men. But still the women in Estienne’s anatomy text are aggressively conventional in their heterosexual appeal. The first engraving (fig. 46) from a series illustrating the female reproductive system proclaims the “voluptuous” feminine erotic qualities of its model. And why not? It is, in fact, a reworking of the Florentine Perino



Fig. 46. A female figure from Charles Estienne's *La Dissection des parties du corps humain* (1546) in which the abdominal wall has been resected to reveal the placenta. The anatomically relevant section has in fact been inserted into a figure borrowed for this purpose.



Fig. 47. Perino del Vaga's engraving *Venus and Cupid* from which Estienne took his anatomical model in fig. 46.

del Vaga's *Venus and Cupid* (fig. 47).³⁵ A curtain sack, which at least in northern art of the period was an icon for the womb, has been added to fig. 47 in the process of refurbishing Venus so that she might serve the scientific purpose of fig. 46. A vase has replaced the cherub. It too may represent the womb—the uterus with handles as “seminal vessels” and the bearded men as ovaries—both linguistically and because of its shape (Latin *vas*, French *vase*, container or vessel). A few surgical tools are strewn in the foreground, and a little window has been carved out of Venus' belly into which a woodcut of the placenta has been set. Looking through it we see that the goddess of love, in her new incarnation as an anatomy model, is pregnant.³⁶ Another engraving (fig. 48) shows her in a slightly different though no less alluring pose, reclining on luxuriant

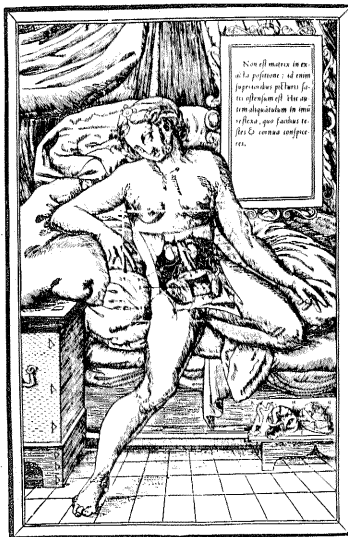


Fig. 48. This nude from Estienne's *Dissection* shows the womb opened, the kidneys, and the major vessels. The placenta that had been revealed in fig. 46 is now lying on the footstool. Again the anatomically relevant sections have been inserted into a figure produced for another purpose.



Fig. 49. The last in the series of female nudes from Estienne's *Dissection*. This one shows the womb with its "neck" (the vagina and its folds) and its "mouth" (the external pudenda).

bolsters, this time with an engraver's window displaying her womb into which a second window has been cut. The placenta, seen from the outside in fig. 46, now lies on the table where a cupid once sat.

Finally, in the most alluring pose of the series (fig. 49), Venus seems to be writhing in ecstasy on her plush cushions. Her hand holds onto the pillow, her foot seeks the trunk for support as she balances on the edge of the bed. We need to remember that this is only the background for an anatomical drawing: her liver and intestine are in full view, her genitals brazenly exposed. But these genital organs, which in a jurisprudential context even Renaissance anatomists would regard as distinguishing male from female, turn out to be just like a man's. Estienne is thoroughly, indeed obsessively, Galenic:

so that what is inside women, likewise sticks out in males, but what is the foreskin in males is the pudendum in women. For, says Galen, whatever you see as a kind of opening in the entrance to the vulva in women, such indeed is found in the foreskin of the male pudendum.

He continues in this fashion for several more paragraphs, to be sure that his readers understand that the overtly eroticized female figures he has presented really have the same genitals as men: "we call the throat of the womb that which is the shaft of the male's penis; it is like it nearly . . . what is a small covering in the opening of the vulva, such appears as a circular outgrowth of the male genitals."³⁷ Even in their tiny compartment we can see both the cervix and the vulva represented as glans-like structures. The notion, so powerful after the eighteenth century, that there was something concrete and specific inside, outside, and throughout the body that defined male as opposed to female, and provided the foundation for the attraction of opposites, was absent in the Renaissance.

In one of the illustrations (fig. 50) in Estienne's book, a man—perhaps Everyman—stands on a balcony overlooking a public square strewn with debris (perhaps ruins). His head is tilted slightly upward, he looks through a glass into the distance, and he fails to notice a naked, pregnant, opened-up, and most uncomfortable woman enthroned below. Despite its appearance in an anatomy book, this picture, and the others I have discussed from Estienne, are about what happens on the surface. They are about theater, about appearances, about erotic fetishes. Writhing St. Sebastians, ripped-apart men, naked women in courtyards, and similar dramatic tableaux capture the eye, while the organs themselves whimper for attention. In short, these are anatomical pictures about gender and not about what we would call sex, or the structures in the body that mark male and female. About these they are remarkably uninformative.

The prostitute Nanna in one of Pietro Aretino's erotic dialogues delights in precisely this theatricality of sex. Obviously she is a woman, different from man but as much because of artifice as biology. A "luscious pair of buttocks"—displayed in men more than in women by the clothes of the period—is the source of her power. The "mysteries of enchantment" lie between her legs, she says, shifting ground. But then what is between her legs? A vaginal opening "so finely cleft that one could barely find the place where it was."³⁸ Her erotic powers are not those of sexual anatomy but of an immensely powerful erotization of surface. Gender, not sex, is what matters. The tiny, invisible, closed cleft, not the vagina



Fig. 50. A pregnant woman with open womb enthroned in a courtyard as a man on the balcony, upper left, dangles a scroll from the window and looks heavenward. From a Latin version of Estienne's *Dissection*.

and organs within, defines Nanna as desirable, and considerable art has to go into making nature be "to her bias drawn."

Sex, gender, doctors, and law

Renaissance doctors understood there to be only one sex. On the other hand, there were manifestly at least two social sexes with radically different rights and obligations, somehow corresponding to ranges or bands, higher and lower, on the corporeal scale of being. Neither sort of sex—social or biological—could be viewed as foundational or primary, although gender divisions—the categories of social sex—were certainly construed as natural. More important, though, biological sex, which we generally take to serve as the basis of gender, was just as much in the domain of culture and meaning as was gender. A penis was thus a status symbol rather than a sign of some other deeply rooted ontological essence: *real* sex. It could be construed as a certificate of sorts, like the

diploma of a doctor or lawyer today, which entitled the bearer to certain rights and privileges. In this section I will explore how, in difficult cases, sex was determined so as to fit a person for clear and unambiguous categories of gender. By showing how sex was fixed at the margins, perhaps I can shed light on its cultural nature at the core and on the tensions between an unbounded one sex and gender boundaries that mattered deeply.

In the ordinary course of events, sexing was of course no problem. Creatures with an external penis were declared to be boys and were allowed all the privileges and obligations of that status; those with only an internal penis were assigned to the inferior category of girl. In a world where birth mattered desperately, sex was another ascriptive characteristic with social consequences; being of one sex or another entitled the bearer to certain social considerations, much as being of noble birth entitled one to wear ermine under sumptuary laws governing clothing. Dress, occupation, and particular objects of desire were allowed to some and not to others, depending on whether they had sufficient heat to extrude an organ. The body thus seemed to be the absolute foundation for the entire system of bipolar gender.

But sex is a shaky foundation. Changes in corporeal structures, or the discovery that things were not as they seemed at first, could push a body easily from one juridical category (female) to another (male). These categories were based on gender distinctions—active/passive, hot/cold, formed/unformed, informing/formable—of which an external or an internal penis was only the diagnostic sign. Maleness and femaleness did not reside in anything particular. Thus for hermaphrodites the question was not "what sex they are *really*," but to which gender the architecture of their bodies most readily lent itself. The concern of magistrates was less with corporeal reality—with what we would call sex—than with maintaining clear social boundaries, maintaining the categories of gender.

Hermaphrodites "are called either male or female," Columbus says, "from their superabundance, as they are more suited or are believed to be more suited for forming humans or receiving one."³⁹ Sex is assigned as a consequence of formative capacity; once again, to be male is to be a father, which is to be the author of life. The nearer a creature approaches "creativity," the more it is male. Conversely, Columbus notes that the difficulties in diagnosing the sex of one woman he had seen arose from her being "unable to be either *rightly active or passive*." The reason for

uncertainty is presented as organic: "her penis did not exceed the length or thickness of a little finger," while "the opening of her vulva was so narrow that it scarcely left the space of the tip of a little finger."⁴⁰ And Columbus, were he before a court of law, would apply widely accepted medical criteria for deciding which organ ought to decide sex. But he does not do so here; he does not say which organ is real. This person is deemed a woman because she is socially and juridically a woman, but one who can neither "rightly" act the passive role nor play the active one that would constitute a serious violation of sexual sumptuary laws, a woman pretending to be a man, a woman dressing above her station. It is almost as if the more general early modern concern about comporting oneself above one's place, born of the breakdown of patronage networks, the insidious workings of money, and the rise of new state-sponsored positions, was transferred to the world of gender.

By the nineteenth century, behavior is irrelevant. The question of sex is biological, pure and simple, writes the leading French forensic physician Ambroise Tardieu. It is "a pure question of fact that can and ought to be resolved by the anatomical and physiological examination of the person in question." Any notion of genuine sexual ambiguity or neutrality is nonsense because sex is absolutely there in and throughout the body.⁴¹ In the late sixteenth century, the situation was very different; a woman taking the man's role in lovemaking with another woman was assumed to be a tribade (*fricatrice*), one who illicitly assumed the active role, who did the rubbing when she ought to have been primarily the one rubbed against. She stood accused as a woman who had violated a law of gender by playing the man's part during intercourse.

Marie de Marcis came close to being burned at the stake for this transgression.⁴² She was baptized with a girl's name and grew to what appeared to be normal adulthood in a village near Rouen. Her master and mistress testified that she had regular periods, and medical testimony at her trial confirmed that she was indeed what she had been gendered from birth. But she fell in love with a female servant with whom she shared a bed, revealing to her that she had a penis and was therefore a man. They sought to marry.

Instead of being publicly acknowledged as a man once she had sprung a penis, as happened to Marie-Germain in Montaigne's story, Marie de Marcis was tried for sodomy—no assumption of natural heterosexuality here—and convicted; he/she could not produce the necessary organ

under the pressure of a trial. But then Dr. Jacques Duval entered the case, found the missing member by probing his/her vulva, and proved that it was not a clitoris by rubbing it until it ejaculated a thick masculine semen. (Since the emphasis in this case was on illicit penetration, attention was focused not on whether Marie had an internal penis—a vagina—but whether her candidate for an external penis entitled her to the prerogatives of penis possession.) Duval's intervention saved Marie from the stake but did not immediately entitle her to a new gender. The court ordered that she continue to wear woman's clothing until she was twenty-five—as if the transition to maleness had to be made gradually—and that she refrain from having intercourse with either sex while she continued life as a woman.

The serious concern of the judges in this case seemed to be not with underlying sex but with gender: what signs of status, what clothes, what postures could Marie legitimately assume? Despite the court's obvious concern with organs, the central question is whether someone not born to the more elevated station, someone who had lived all her life as a woman, had what it took to legitimately play a man and more generally whether a "person" is entitled to a certain place in the social order.⁴³

Women playing, or becoming, men is the dominant trope. In early seventeenth-century Holland there is, for example, Henrika Schuria, a "woman of masculine demeanor who had grown weary of her sex." She dressed as a man, enlisted in the army, and passed in her new role until she was caught taking the man's part in sexual intercourse. When she returned from the wars, she was accused of "immoral lust":

For sometimes even exposing her clitoris outside the vulva and trying not only licentious sport with other women . . . but even stroking and rubbing them . . . so that a certain widow, who burned with immoderate lusts, found her depraved longings so well satisfied that she would gladly—except for legal prohibition—have married her.⁴⁴

Her clitoris, it was said, "equalled the length of half a finger and in its stiffness was not unlike a boy's member." Schuria was tried, convicted, and sentenced to be burned as a tribade, but a merciful judge recommended that she be "nipped in the bud, and sent into exile." She was, in other words, relieved of the organ that she supposed would allow her to leave the "sex of which she had grown weary"; but she was punished with exile, a man's sentence. (This case shows that only one of the female penis

isomorphisms really counts; her internal penis has to descend, as did Marie-Germain's, if she is to be entitled to a change. An enlarged clitoris does not count.) Her partner, the widow and the woman in their trans-action, was chastised in an unspecified way and allowed to remain in the city. Having played the woman, she could be assumed to be less culpable, less dangerous, and less deserving of severe punishment. There are other cases, real or imagined, like this.⁴⁵

But there are also cases that work the other way around, of men playing women for their own advantage. In 1459, the story goes, there was born a creature who "had the kinds of both male and female," though "man's nature did prevail." But because his "disposition and portraiture of body represented a woman," he/she? was able to find work as a maid servant and in this capacity to share a bed with his master's daughter, who became pregnant by him. For setting himself out to be a woman, this "monstrous beast" of a man was burned at the stake. Just how "a man's nature did prevail" when his body "represented" a woman's is not made explicit. Nor is it clear whether the offender lived as a woman generally or only on the occasions of bedding the daughter of the house. Whether the "damsel" understood the encounter to be with a woman throughout or only initially is also left ambiguous: was she deceived into allowing this man into her bed as a woman and then accepted him sexually as a man, or did she think until near the end that she was making love with a woman? There is no doubt, however, that someone used the ambiguities of his body to live as a woman—bad enough perhaps—but then reverted to having sex as a man. He was burned, as was the false Martin Guerre, for flouting the conventions that make civilization possible.

It seemed to matter little in any of these cases what sex the protagonists felt themselves to be, what they were inside. One of the disconcerting and poignant aspects of cases like Marie de Marcis' is how little regard was paid, in the accounts themselves and in the final determination of sex, to what we would call core gender identity, the sense that infants acquire very early on of whether they are girls or boys. No one probed what gender a person thought herself or himself to be before a change occurred or an accusation was made (I use the words "sex" and "gender" interchangeably here precisely because the distinction has now broken down). As long as sign and status lined up, all was well. Or, conversely, gender as a social category was made to correspond to the sign of sex without ref-

erence to personhood. The authorities assumed that the transformation from one to another state was absolutely precipitous, like moving from being married to being unmarried. Subjects were assumed to change from being socially defined girls to being socially defined boys with no difficulty or inner turmoil. Indeed, if instantaneous conversion was not forthcoming, the full penalties of the law were.

Montaigne recounts in his *Travel Journal* the story of a group of girls in Chaumont-en-Bassigni "who plotted together a few years ago to dress up as males and thus continue their life in the world." One of them came to Vitry, where Montaigne was visiting, worked as a weaver, and made friends. *He* became engaged to a woman with whom he subsequently fell out; still earning his living at the said trade, *he* fell in love with another woman, whom *he* actually did marry and live with for four or five months, "to her satisfaction, so they say." But then the weaver was recognized by someone from home. Just as abruptly as the social sex of the protagonist changed, so Montaigne changes his use of the personal pronoun: "*she* was condemned to be hanged . . . *she* said she would rather undergo [it] than return to a girl's status." And she was hanged "for using illicit devices to supply her defect in sex."⁴⁶

Like Iphis, the girl in this story was gendered as a boy; she was every bit as much a boy as her mythical counterpart. But unlike Ovid's character, the French girl was able to consummate her love with a woman, without recourse to a penis and without the emotional storms Iphis suffered because he lacked one. But the gods did not come to the young weaver's rescue and did not bring forth the penis that would have entitled her to continue life as a man. The fact that he felt himself a man, that he had the skills of a man, and that he had lived as one was only more evidence of his crime: he lacked the birthmark of acquired status. For this he died a woman.

This does not seem very remarkable. Renaissance doctors and lay-people differentiated between the genital organs of males and females, and those with a penis were designated men. Sex then, as today, determined status, gender. But one also has the distinct feeling that in texts like Montaigne's, somehow "there is no there," no ontological sex, only organs with assigned legal and social status. At the very moment when genitals seem to display their full, unambiguous extralinguistic reality—when the language of one sex collapses—they also assume their fullest civil status, their fullest integration into the world of meaning. Corporeal

solidity is shaken when it seems most stable, and we enter the shoals of language.

I want to illustrate this point with mention of how Paolo Zacchia's *Questionum medico-legalium*, the major Renaissance medical-jurisprudential text and one of the founding works of the discipline, treats the question of assigning sex.⁴⁷ It is, Zacchia argues, first of all a matter for the doctors and not for poets, soothsayers, quacks, or others among the medically ignorant. Hermaphrodites, he insists, are not dangerous, portentous monsters or prodigious inhabitants of the lands of Prester John, but rather people with ambiguous sexual organs who raise serious legal questions. Their deformations can be classified: three primary sorts in the male hermaphrodite, one in the female. There are true hermaphrodites who have both kinds of organs, and apparent hermaphrodites in whom, for example, a prolapsed uterus or an enlarged clitoris is mistaken for a penis. All this can be satisfactorily sorted out by an experienced professional observer.⁴⁸ Zacchia spends the remaining nineteen folio pages explaining who is to be called woman and who man.

The clinical and professional tone of the *Questionum*—case histories, taxonomies, learned reviews of the literature on various points—would lead one to assume that organs will be treated as the sign of something solidly corporeal, something that thoroughly informs its subject and determines its identity. But Zacchia, like Montaigne, treats organs as if they were contingent certificates of status: “members conforming to sex are not the causes that constitute male or female or distinguish between them . . . Because it is so, the members of one sex could appear in someone of the opposite sex.”⁴⁹

Zacchia's language, most blatantly in his discussion of clitoral hypertrophy, reveals his fundamentally cultural concerns. “It should be enough now to observe” he argues, “that, in regard to women who have turned into males, in the most, this has followed a promotion (*beneficium*) of the clitoris, as several anatomists think.” He does not use the obvious noun for what might have happened, *incrementum* or *amplification*, an enlargement, and writes instead of *beneficium*, a kindness or favor, especially in the political sense of an advancement or a grant that endows ecclesiastical property or a feudal right. An enlarged clitoris must not be mistaken for a promotion on the scale of being, although, as in the case of Marie-Germain, having an internal penis pop out just might. Getting a certifica-

ble penis is getting a phallus, in Lacanian terms, but getting a large clitoris is not.⁵⁰

Similarly, when Zacchia is discussing hermaphrodites with both sets of organs, he distinguishes, following Aristotle, the valid sex (*sexum ratum*) from the ineffectual, invalid, useless sex (*inritum*). Again the sense is political—valid or invalid testaments or laws—and not morphological. Political judgments, the claims of gender, are already contained in judgments about sex because politics is already contained in the biology of generation. Thus, when Zacchia is arguing that humans cannot have two valid sexes, he is alluding less to a biological fact than to a social or cultural fact: males inform and women bear, and it is impossible for any one creature to do both, however his/her organs might be configured. In the absence of evidence regarding actual generation, the old Pythagorean oppositions, not some alternative anatomical or physiological criteria, come into play: the organ on the right (in the case of hermaphrodites with side-by-side genitals) or the organ on top (in the case of those with organs arranged vertically along the body's axis) is the one that counts.⁵¹

Even when there are no genital organs visible at all, there are signs to indicate which sex is the more potent and which is less so or impotent (*potentior ab impotentior*). Again the language is at least as much political as biological: the secondary sexual characteristics to which one would have reference in lieu of genital organs are the consequence of the greater or lesser vital heat that defines man and woman. Heat, for Renaissance doctors, was of course supposed to have physical correlatives. But heat was also so inextricably bound up with the great chain of being that it is difficult to unpack its meaning from the meaning of perfection itself.

For example, women can turn into men, Zacchia maintains, but men cannot turn into women. Why? He offers a straightforward anatomical reason—no room inside a man for a penis to invert into—but this throw-away line carries little conviction. His main lines of argument are metaphysical. Generally speaking, most authorities agree that “nature always tends towards the more perfect.” But more specifically, if a transformation of sex does take place, it occurs because of what men have, heat. Heat, he says, “drives forward, diffuses, dilates; it does not compress, contract, or retract.” The active principle therefore works so that “members which project outwards will never recede inwards.” (Male heat, in other words,

obeys the laws of thermodynamics.) Men cannot become women by expulsion because, as he has already shown, this works in the opposite direction, and they cannot become women by attraction because "this, when it works properly, draws together that which is favorable for the animal," and becoming more imperfect is clearly not more favorable.⁵²

Biology, in other words, is restrained by cultural norms just as much as culture is based on biology. In the one sex-world generally, and specifically in the work of Zacchia, when the talk turns—for good, everyday, practical legal reasons—to the biology of two clear and distinct foundational sexes, it becomes at the same time enmeshed in the body/gender continuum of the one-sex model. During much of the seventeenth century, to be a man or a woman was to hold a social rank, to assume a cultural role, and not to *be* organically one or the other of two sexes. Sex was still a sociological, not an ontological, category.

Imagining generation in Harvey's work

Live Modern Wonder and be read alone,
Thy brain have issue though thy Loins have none.
Let fraile Succession be the Vulgar Care,
Great Generation's Selfe is now thy Heire.⁵³

The childless "Live Modern Wonder" whose brain had issue was William Harvey, the man who discovered that the blood circulated, the man credited with being the first to say that all life comes from an egg, the man who thought that conception was the having of an idea, sparked by sperm, in the womb. I close this chapter with a brief discussion of his *Disputations Touching the Generation of Animals*⁵⁴ because it is the last major story about generation and the body still deeply embedded in the political aesthetics of the one-sex model with, at the same time, its claims to epistemological authority, its experimental strategies, and its ontology of reproduction—Harvey claims to be talking, for the first time in history, about a specific germ product, the egg—cast overtly in the language of the new biology. In Harvey we can begin to glimpse what will become clearer in the next two chapters: not only that theories of sexual difference help to determine what scientists see and know but, more important, that the opposite is not the case. What scientists see and know at any given time does not circumscribe how sexual difference is understood or limit the aesthetics of its expression. Quite to the contrary, observations and

the prestige of science generally lend the art of difference new weight without affecting its content.

The question of this section can be posed formally. Harvey's *On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals*, like other great scientific texts, powerfully achieves closure. Cleanly, crisply, and economically it destroys two thousand years of physiology and establishes beyond a doubt that whatever else the heart is, it is a pump, and whatever else the blood does, it must circulate even if the passages through which it goes from arteries to veins, the capillaries, could not yet be demonstrated. The far longer *Disputations*, on the other hand, endlessly defers coming to an end; stories multiply but go nowhere. The book corrects a few relatively minor errors in previous accounts of the embryology of the chick, makes a strong but inconclusive case for epigenesis, suggests experimentally but does not prove the important point that fertilization is not the merging of a mass of semen with a mass of menstrual blood, and fails after desperate efforts to understand the mystery of generation.⁵⁵ Why this lack of closure?

The book's length and narrative openness are not due primarily to scientific failures that no degree of clearheadedness and lack of cultural baggage could have avoided. The fact that Harvey, lacking a microscope, could not see egg or sperm was not the reason that he could come to no closure on the issue of conception, just as the discovery of egg and sperm in the eighteenth century also could offer no convincing solution. By the last half of the nineteenth century, cell theory allowed conception to be understood as the fusion of two distinct cells, which suggested the view that recognizable males and females were the projections somehow of radically different germ products. But then the DNA revolution has once again taken sex out of conception; strands of DNA do not sustain a vision of sexual dimorphism. Molecular biology has begun to illuminate with a precision unimaginable in Harvey's day—or indeed before the late 1940s—how epigenesis works. It has not provided answers to the "mystery of life" in relation to a socially sexed world.

The peculiar narrative openness of the *Disputations* is also not the result of Harvey's particular political agenda, if for no other reason than that his perfectly conventional positions on matters of gender have deeply ambiguous and inconsistent resonances in his other work. One can argue that Harvey emphasizes the passivity of women and matter in reproduction and that this is consistent with "new scientific values based on the control of nature and women integral to the new capitalist modes of pro-

duction," and more generally with the "cultural biases" or "prevailing cultural ideas of male superiority."⁵⁶ His declaration to his anatomy students—as if it were a law of nature—that "Men *woe allure make love*; female *yield condescend suffer*; the contrary *preposterous*" is certainly evidence for the spilling over of politics into science.⁵⁷ And when clinical evidence fails him on why women do not produce semen, he resorts to the genital teleology of the one-sex model: it is unthinkable that "such imperfect and inconspicuous parts" as the genital apparatus of the female could produce a semen "so concocted and so vital" as to be able to share influence with that of the male, "so concocted with quickening heat, refined in so many vessels and leaping with so much spirit."

Yet Harvey did abandon a traditional Aristotelian account of the active male who acts upon the passive female. The female "primordium," in his account of generation, was *both* a material and an efficient cause of generation.⁵⁸ The form and the matter of the fetus come from the mother whose womb, once ignited, has within it, specifically within the primordium or egg, the "spirit" or idea of new life. Indeed, Harvey's account borders on parthenogenesis and lays so much stress on the female's having the idea of new life inside her that it prompted one wag to remark that, if it were true, women should be able to conceive by just thinking about it.⁵⁹ The point, however, is not which of Harvey's stories about generation is the dominant one, but rather that there are so many stories to be told.

The William Harvey who wrote on biological and social sex relies on the authority of nature and experiment for these tales just as aggressively as the William Harvey who wrote on the blood's circulation and who is, for that work, much admired by those exploring the origins of modern science. Narratives about sex in the *Disputations* are presented as if they were self-evident in Nature, "herself the most faithful interpreter of her own secrets." (A feminine Nature is here both scientist and object.) What is obscure in one species, Nature exhibits clearly in another, and now "that the whole theater of the world" lies open, only willful sloth would make one rely on the wisdom of others: it is "sweet not only to grow weary but even to faint away" in following Nature's lead down the path she chalks till at last we are "received into her closest secrets." One could, Harvey believed, actually get at the thing itself, which was perforce more real than any image or representation of it (its *eidōs*). Thus what one discovers through the senses is clearer than what one might discover in

books, and it is a sign of moral degeneracy, of baseness, "to be tutored by other men's commentaries without making trial of the things themselves, especially since Nature's book is so open and so legible."⁶⁰ By extension we are invited to regard Harvey's account of generation as morally and epistemologically superior to one based on the ratiocination of Galen or on blind submission to the authority of the ancients, even of Aristotle. Harvey expounds the triumphant empiricist epistemology, the new reductionism of the new science.

To Harvey the crowning glory of his entire enterprise was his famous demonstration to Charles I that the Galenists were wrong in holding that male and female matter actually mixed at conception and that Aristotle was wrong in holding that menstrual blood was the material basis for new life. This exercise, in Harvey's view, speaks not only of the particular truth in question but of the very power of formal experimental procedures to adjudicate between theories.⁶¹ He had shown the king a deer's uterus in the early stages of pregnancy and "made clear to him that no trace of seed or conception could be found in the hollow of the womb." When Charles communicated this news to some of his followers, they declared that Harvey had been deceived and had led the king into error. They declared that a conception forming "without any trace of the male's seed surviving," with nothing remaining in the uterus after coitus, "ranked among the *adunata*, the things impossible." To settle the matter and "in order that this finding of so great moment might be understood more clearly by posterity," the king ordered an experiment, which Harvey devised. A dozen does were isolated in Richmond Park after the rutting season and kept away from bucks after an initial mating. Harvey dissected some of them—presumably fertile, as shown by the fact that those remaining alive did become pregnant "as if by some contagion, and gave birth to their fawns in due season"—and found that there were "no remains in the uterus either of the semen of the male or female . . . nothing produced by any admixture of these fluids . . . nothing of the menstrual blood present as 'matter' as Aristotle will have it."⁶²

Never mind that this experiment was deeply flawed, that by the time Harvey looked he would not have found sperm even if he had the lens necessary to see it. Never mind that the demonstration for Charles made the search for semen in the wombs of postcoital females a new research problem in an already overcrowded field. (The great Dutch anatomist Frederik Ruysch (1638–1731) is said to have gone out in the middle of

the night to dissect a woman, caught and murdered by her husband in the act of adultery, only to have his discovery of semen in her uterus discounted because the room was dark and his eyes were weakened by age.) Harvey's experiment makes an important negative case. Menstrual blood does not, in fact, go into making a fetus, and the great bulk of the male ejaculate is indeed irrelevant to actual conception, although of course a sperm does materially enter an egg.⁶³ More important, it provides the materials out of which one can imagine the profound truth and mystery of epigenesis, of making a complex organism from unformed matter which somehow assumes the shape and characteristics of the creature it came from.

But Harvey, like his predecessors and successors, was incapable of writing about sexual reproduction outside an already gendered language, in his case that of the one-sex model. Generation by the union of two sexes must be made *to have meaning* beyond itself, involving the social realm that such a union sustains. Having argued convincingly that the hen's egg—by extension the human female's—is not produced, contra Galen, from any female outpourings at coitus, Harvey nevertheless felt compelled to render culturally significant a chicken's, and a woman's, post-coital behavior. The hen's acting "as one ravished with gentle delight," though not a sign of semination, is a sign of gratitude toward the male for his godlike act:

She shakes herself for joy, and, as if she had now received the greatest gift, preens her feathers as if giving thanks for the blessing of issue granted by Jove the creator. The dove . . . expresses her joy in coitus in wondrous wise; she leaps and spreads her tail and with it sweeps the earth below her, and combs her feathers with her beak and settles them, as if the gift of fertility did lead to the greatest glory.⁶⁴

Somehow the female primordium, with its mysterious capacity to form itself sequentially into an ordered body, must be ignited and given life. Somehow the unfathomable drama of generation must have its objective correlative in the social world. Enter the male. Sperm acts by "contagion" to ignite the egg. Indeed, sperm is prolific in some measure because it is "permeated with spirit by the fervency of coitus or desire and froth with the nature of spume [foam]." The heat of intercourse corresponds to no earthly blaze but to the stars, so that sperm bears, Prometheus-like, the celestial fire while fertilization itself is the male's reenactment of what

God wrought at the moment of creation. Impregnation for Harvey becomes metaphorically the igniting of women, setting them aflame as if struck by lightning. Or, in a metaphor even more evocative of the Word, of the Logos "informing" the world, it is like the formation of a conception in the brain. Here the image gets a bit more complex because the sperm alone is definitely not the idea, even though the uterus alone is the brain: "the generation of things in Nature and the generation of things in Art take place in the same way . . . Both are first moved by some conceived form which is immaterial and *is produced by conception*." The brain is "the instrument of conception" in producing art because it is the instrument of the soul, "without the intervention of matter"; meanwhile, the "uterus or egg" is the brain or the instrument of conception in Nature. But the idea in question seems to be not, as in Aristotle, the sperm alone but rather the thing "produced by conception" which generates the living work of art.

Harvey had earlier prepared the way for the uterus-as-brain metaphor. The pregnant uterus of the deer swells up, "and a most soft and pulpy substance, like that of the brain, fills the cavity." A few sentences later he writes that the interior of the uterus is so delicate and smooth that "you might think it the softness of the ventricles of the brain." Elsewhere: "the appearance or form of the chick is in the uterus or egg without any material, just as the concept of the house is in the brain of the builder." In other words, sperm might act "as if the Almighty should say, 'Let there be offspring,' and straightaway it is so," but only insofar as it allows an idea—the primordium or egg—to be generated in the uterine brain of woman.⁶⁵

While rejecting Galen's interpretation of female orgasm as a sign of semination, Harvey saw sexual passion as deeply significant, an expression of the body's vital force. The sheer carnality of intercourse bespeaks life's energy and tragically prefigures its end: "And it is clear that parents are youthful, beautiful, perfected and live joyously no longer than they can beget eggs and fecundate them, and by the mediation of these eggs, bear their own like." Males and females, Harvey told his students in 1616, are "*never more brave sprightly blithe valiant plesant or bewtiful* than now that coitus is about to be performed."⁶⁶

But when "this office of life is once ended, alas!" Just as a man is sad after coition, so all animals are sad unto death when the spark, of which orgasm is the sign, is exhausted: "even he flags after long use of venery

and like a soldier time expired grows weary, and the hens too, like plants, become past laying and are exhausted." Only now do we realize that Harvey's account of life's drama has been flitting between the barnyard and the bedroom. Thus for Harvey, as much as for the confirmed Galenist, the heats and passions of the body express the hierarchy of creation.

Harvey's new epistemology and substantive discoveries led right back to new versions of old stories. Generation, the body's most social function, remained beyond the reach of a nonexistent neutral language of organs and functions. Desperate to understand how it all worked, Harvey spun story after poignant story about sexual difference, always pretending that it was Nature herself who spoke.

In the eighteenth century, the voice of Nature would be heard more loudly. Meaning, it would be thought then, existed not in the echoes of macrocosm and microcosm but in the thing itself. The mechanical world picture promised truth from the material world. But a new epistemology would not shield sexual anatomy and reproduction from the demands of culture. While the one flesh did not die—it lives today in many guises—two fleshs, two new distinct and opposite sexes, would increasingly be read into the body. No longer would those who think about such matters regard woman as a lesser version of man along a vertical axis of infinite gradations, but rather as an altogether different creature along a horizontal axis whose middle ground was largely empty.

FIVE

Discovery of the Sexes

The bicycle's triumph . . . necessitates an androgynous outfit worn by its adepts of the weaker sex . . . Will we never make our skirted publishers and sociologists in dresses understand that a woman is neither equal nor inferior nor superior to a man, that she is a being apart, another thing, endowed with other functions by nature than the man with whom she has no business competing in public life? A woman exists only through her ovaries.

VICTOR JOZÉ, 1895

Sometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented. The reproductive organs went from being paradigmatic sites for displaying hierarchy, resonant throughout the cosmos, to being the foundation of incommensurable difference: "women owe their manner of being to their organs of generation, and especially to the uterus," as one eighteenth-century physician put it.¹ Here was not only an explicit repudiation of the old isomorphisms but also, and more important, a rejection of the idea that nuanced differences between organs, fluids, and physiological processes mirrored a transcendental order of perfection. Aristotle and Galen were simply mistaken in holding that female organs are a lesser form of the male's and by implication that woman is a lesser man. A woman is a woman, proclaimed the "moral anthropologist" Moreau in one of the many new efforts to derive culture from the body, everywhere and in all things, moral and physical, not just in one set of organs.²

Organs that had shared a name—ovaries and testicles—were now linguistically distinguished. Organs that had not been distinguished by a name of their own—the vagina, for example—were given one. Structures that had been thought common to man and woman—the skeleton and the nervous system—were differentiated so as to correspond to the cul-

tural male and female. As the natural body itself became the gold standard of social discourse, the bodies of women—the perennial other—thus became the battleground for redefining the ancient, intimate, fundamental social relation: that of woman to man. Women's bodies in their corporeal, scientifically accessible concreteness, in the very nature of their bones, nerves, and, most important, reproductive organs, came to bear an enormous new weight of meaning. Two sexes, in other words, were invented as a new foundation for gender.

Woman's purported passionlessness was one of the many possible manifestations of this newly created sex. Female orgasm, which had been the body's signal of successful generation, was banished to the borderlands of physiology, a signifier without a signified. Previously unquestioned, the routine orgasmic culmination of intercourse became a major topic of debate. The assertion that women were passionless; or alternatively the proposition that, as biologically defined beings, they possessed to an extraordinary degree, far more than men, the capacity to control the bestial, irrational, and potentially destructive fury of sexual pleasure; and indeed the novel inquiry into the nature and quality of female pleasure and sexual allurements—all were part of a grand effort to discover the anatomical and physiological characteristics that distinguished men from women. Orgasm became a player in the game of new sexual differences.

This did not happen all at once, nor did it happen everywhere at the same time, nor was it a permanent shift. When in the 1740s the young Princess Maria Theresa was worried that she had not immediately become pregnant after her marriage to the future Hapsburg emperor, her physician responded with advice that was no different from what Soranus might have offered a Roman matron: "Ceterum censeo vulvam Sanctissimae Majestatis ante coitum esse titillandum" (Moreover, I think the vulva of Her Most Holy Majesty should be titillated before intercourse.) She bore more than a dozen children.³ Physicians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries could offer little more, and even today doctors disabuse patients of beliefs as old as Hippocrates:

Dear Dr. Donohue: I am ashamed to ask my doctor: Do you only get pregnant when you have an orgasm?

Answer: Pregnancy results when sperm meets and fertilizes an egg. Orgasm has nothing to do with it.⁴

As for the one-sex model, it too lived on. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, books like *Aristotle's Masterpiece* and Nicholas Venette's

The Art of Conjugal Love, or to a lesser extent the Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' *Secrets of Women*, transmitted Galenic learning to hundreds of thousands of lay readers, whatever their doctors might have thought. And in a variety of contexts, physicians themselves also spoke in the language of the one-sex model (such as those who feared that German women workers engaged in unfeminine occupations would become *Mannweiber*, male women).⁵

There are two explanations for how the two modern sexes as we imagine them were, and continue to be, invented: one is epistemological and the other is, broadly speaking, political.⁶ The epistemological explanation in turn has at least two articulations. The first is part of the story in which fact comes to be more clearly distinguished from fiction, science from religion, reason from credulity. The body is the body is the body, said a new group of self-appointed experts with ever more authority, and there are only certain things it can do. Lactating monks, women who never ate and exuded sweet fragrance, sex changes at the whim of the imagination, bodies in paradise without sexual difference, monstrous births, women who bore rabbits, and so on, were the stuff of fanaticism and superstition even if they were not so far beyond the bounds of reason as to be unimaginable. Skepticism was not created in the eighteenth century, but the divide between the possible and the impossible, between body and spirit, between truth and falsehood, and thus between biological sex and theatrical gender, was greatly sharpened.

The second part of the epistemological explanation is essentially the one given by Foucault: the episteme "in which signs and similitudes were wrapped around one another in an endless spiral," in which "the relation of microcosm to macrocosm should be conceived as both the guarantee of that knowledge and the limit of its expansion," ended sometime in the late seventeenth century.⁷ All the complex ways in which resemblances among bodies, and between bodies and the cosmos, confirmed a hierarchic world order were reduced to a single plane: nature. In the world of reductionist explanation, what mattered was the flat, horizontal, immovable foundation of physical fact: sex.

Or, put differently, the cultural work that had in the one-flesh model been done by gender devolved now onto sex. Aristotle did not need the facts of sexual difference to support the claim that woman was a lesser being than man; it followed from the *a priori* truth that the material cause is inferior to the efficient cause. Of course males and females were in daily life identified by their corporeal characteristics, but the assertion that in

generation the male was the efficient and the female the material cause was, in principle, not physically demonstrable; it was itself a restatement of what it *meant* to be male or female. The specific nature of the ovaries or the uterus was thus only incidental to defining sexual difference. By the eighteenth century, this was no longer the case. The womb, which had been a sort of negative phallus, became the uterus—an organ whose fibers, nerves, and vasculature provided a naturalistic explanation and justification for the social status of women.

The context for the articulation of two incommensurable sexes was, however, neither a theory of knowledge nor advances in scientific knowledge. The context was politics. There were endless new struggles for power and position in the enormously enlarged public sphere of the eighteenth and particularly the postrevolutionary nineteenth centuries: between and among men and women; between and among feminists and antifeminists. When, for many reasons, a preexisting transcendental order or time-immemorial custom became a less and less plausible justification for social relations, the battleground of gender roles shifted to nature, to biological sex. Distinct sexual anatomy was adduced to support or deny all manner of claims in a variety of specific social, economic, political, cultural, or erotic contexts. (The desire of male for female and female for male was natural—hence the new slogan “opposites attract”—or it was not.) Whatever the issue, the body became decisive.

But no one account of sexual difference triumphed. It may well be the case that almost as many people believed that women by nature were equal in passion to men as believed the opposite.⁸ We simply do not know how many people believed, with the eighteenth-century moral anthropologist Pierre Roussel and the nineteenth-century English feminist Elizabeth Wolstenholme, that menstruation was a contingent pathology of civilization and how many believed the opposite, that menstruation showed the power of the uterus over women's lives and hence was a natural foundation for gender difference.⁹ For everyone who thought that women of color were especially responsive sexually because of the structure of their genitalia, someone else thought that their coarse nervous systems and dry mucous membranes resulted in a “want of genital sensitivity.”¹⁰

Studies of the micropolitics of these alternative accounts would be rewarding, but we should not lose sight of the fact that the very terms of the debates are new: difference that had been expressed with reference to

gender now came to be expressed with reference to sex, to biology. There were no books written before the late seventeenth century with titles like *De la femme sous ses rapports physiologiques, moraux et littéraires* or *De la puberté . . . chez la femme, au point de vue physiologique, hygiénique et médical* that argued so explicitly for the biological foundations of the moral order. There were hundreds if not thousands of such works in which sexual differences were articulated in the centuries that followed.

Scientists did far more than offer neutral data to ideologues. They lent their prestige to the whole enterprise; they discovered or bore witness to aspects of sexual difference that had been ignored. Moreover, the politics of gender very clearly affected not only the interpretation of clinical and laboratory data but also its production.²⁰ On the other hand, a number of new research traditions did produce considerable knowledge about the developmental and mature anatomy of the male and female body, about the nature of ovulation and the production of sperm, about conception, menstruation, and in the 1920s and 1930s the hormonal control of reproduction generally. By the early decades of this century, the power of science to predict and effect successful mating in humans and animals was considerably enhanced. In short, reproductive biology progressed in its understanding of sex and was not merely an “immature” enterprise that served competing social interests.

But my point here is that new knowledge about sex did not in any way entail the claims about sexual difference made in its name. No discovery or group of discoveries dictated the rise of a two-sex model, for precisely the same reasons that the anatomical discoveries of the Renaissance did not unseat the one-sex model: the nature of sexual difference is not susceptible to empirical testing. It is logically independent of biological facts because already embedded in the language of science, at least when applied to any culturally resonant construal of sexual difference, is the language of gender. In other words, all but the most circumscribed statements about sex are, from their inception, burdened with the cultural work done by these propositions. Despite the new epistemological status of nature as the bedrock of distinctions, and despite the accumulation of facts about sex, sexual difference in the centuries after the scientific revolution was no more stable than it had been before. Two incommensurable sexes were, and are, as much the products of culture as was, and is, the one-sex model.

In this chapter and the next I will primarily be making the negative

case that new scientific discoveries did not bring down the old model and enshrine the new. One sex, I want to emphasize again, did not die. But it met a powerful alternative: a biology of incommensurability in which the relationship between men and women was not inherently one of equality or inequality but rather of difference that required interpretation. Sex, in other words, replaced what we might call gender as a primary foundational category. Indeed, the framework in which the natural and the social could be clearly distinguished came into being.

Biological sex

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, science fleshed out, in terms acceptable to the new epistemology, the categories "male" and "female" as opposite and incommensurable biological sexes. One can sense this in subtle turns of phrase. Buffon, the encyclopedic Enlightenment naturalist, translates back and forth as if he senses that he is on the cusp of a momentous transformation: the peculiar correspondence between the parts of generation and the rest of the body might be called (with the ancients) "sympathy" or (with the moderns) "an unknown relation in the action of nerves."¹¹ A notion of order and coherence is replaced by corporeal wiring.

More generally, by the end of the seventeenth century the various intellectual currents that made up the transformation of human understanding known as the scientific revolution—Baconianism, Cartesian mechanism, empiricist epistemology, Newtonian synthesis—had radically undermined the whole Galenic mode of comprehending the body in relation to the cosmos.¹² This meant the abandonment, among other things, of the anatomical isomorphisms between man and woman and also the purging from scientific language of the old metaphors that had linked reproduction to other bodily functions, to the natural world, and to the great chain of being itself. Generation could now less plausibly be seen in terms of rennin and cheese; iron and loadstone lost their resonance as metaphors for semen and womb. The penis as plowshare and the womb as field did not quite capture Enlightenment views of fruitful intercourse. Hoary images drawn from agriculture—the vagina as an organ "inwardly wrinkled, like the inner skin of the upper jaw of a cow's mouth"—disappeared from works intended for a self-consciously sophisticated audience.¹³ Indeed the term "generation" itself, which suggested

the quotidian repetition of God's act of creation with all its attendant heat and light, gave way to the term "reproduction," which had less miraculous, more mechanistic connotations even if it did not quite capture the virtuosity of nature. As Fontanelle said, "Put a Dog Machine and a Bitch Machine side by side, and eventually a third little Machine will be the result, whereas two Watches will lie side by side all of their lives without ever producing a third Watch."¹⁴ The importance in the eighteenth century of new theories of knowledge generally, and with respect to the body particularly, is a commonplace. Scientific race, for example—the notion that either by demonstrating the separate creation of various races (polygenesis) or by simply documenting difference, biology could account for differential status in the face of "natural equality"—developed at the same time and in response to the same sorts of pressures as scientific sex.¹⁵ Claims of the sort that Negroes have stronger, coarser nerves than Europeans because they have smaller brains, and that these facts explain the inferiority of their culture, are parallel to those which held that the uterus naturally disposes women toward domesticity.¹⁶ I want here simply to acknowledge that my particular story is part of what would be a more comprehensive history of exclusive biological categories in relation to culture.

Poullain de la Barre, one of the earliest writers in the new vein, illustrates the turn to biology when an old ordering of man and woman collapses. In his case the impetus to biology is twofold. In the first place de la Barre is committed to the Cartesian premise that the self is the thinking subject, the mind, and that it is radically not body. From this it follows that the mind, this decorporealized self, has no sex and indeed can have no sex. Gender, the social division between men and women, must therefore have its foundation in biology if it is to have any foundation at all. His version of Descartes' radical skepticism leads him to the same conclusion. He lists a number of views that the ignorant hold as unquestionable: that the sun moves around the earth; that traditional religion is true; that the inequality of man generally is evident in the "disparity of Estates and Conditions." And, "amongst these odd opinions," he writes, "there is not any mistake more Ancient, or Universal" than "the common Judgment which men make of the Difference of the two Sexes, and all that depends thereon"; ignorant and learned alike seem to think it "a paradox and piece of singularity" that woman might not be inferior to man in "capacity and worth."¹⁷

In other words, the usual views on sexual difference might simply be a mistake, like seeing a square tower as if it were round. It is not a Cartesian "clear and distinct" idea, as it would have been for Aristotle, but rather a question that can be decided on the same grounds as one judges whether the sun is the center of the solar system.¹⁸ Given then that sexual difference is an empirical matter, even the most firmly held and seemingly secure views about women might turn out, upon further scrutiny, to be false. Moreover, de la Barre goes on, one can even demonstrate the precise, historically explicable causes of erroneous views: because the subject has been "but very lightly discoursed of"; because of "partiality"; because of the lack of "trial or examination." Once bias and superficiality have been dealt with, sexual difference is a question of biology that solely constitutes the category "sex." Specifically for de la Barre, the task is to demonstrate that the organic differences corresponding to the social categories of man and woman do not, or ought not to, matter in the public sphere. For others the project was quite the opposite. But whatever the political agenda, the strategy is the same: indeed, sex is everywhere precisely because the authority of gender has collapsed.¹⁹

Political theorists beginning with Hobbes had argued that there is no basis in nature, in divine law, or in a transcendent cosmic order for any specific sort of authority—of king over subject, of slaveholder over slave, or, it followed, of man over woman. For Hobbes, as for Locke, a person is essentially a sentient being, a sexless creature whose body is of no political relevance. Still, for both, males do end up being the head of households and nations. Men, not women, make the social contract. The reason for subordination, they want to hold, is not built into the world order; it does not arise from old-fashioned reasons like the superiority of spirit over matter or the historical dominance God granted Adam. Nor do they seem to want to attribute it to "mere nature," where a child would be more likely to obey its mother than its father. Instead it seems to have arisen in historical time as a consequence of a series of struggles that left women in the inferior position. Locke says simply that since "the last Determination, the Rule, should be placed somewhere, it naturally falls to the Man's share, as the *abler and the stronger*."²⁰ In Hobbes it is much less clear, and one can only surmise that a woman's having a child puts her in a vulnerable situation, which allows the man to conquer her and her children and thereby create paternal rights by contract, by conquest in Hobbesian terms.²¹ In any case he is adamant that paternal rights do

not, as in the old model, arise from generation. However problematic, the tendency of early contract theory is to make the subordination of women to men a result of the operation of the *facts* of sexual difference, of their utilitarian implications. What matters is the superior strength of men or, more important, the frequent incapacity of women because of their reproductive functions.²² Bodies in these accounts are not the sign of but the foundation for civil society.

Rousseau, arguing against Hobbes, takes a similarly biological tack. Hobbes, he says, erred in using the struggle of male animals for access to females as evidence for the natural combativeness of the primitive human state. True, he concedes, there is bitter competition among beasts for the opportunity to mate, but this is because for much of the year females refuse the male advances. Suppose they were to make themselves available only two months out of every twelve: "it is as if the population of females had been reduced by five-sixths." But women have no such periods of abstinence—love is "never seasonal" among the human species—and they are thus not in short supply; even among savages there are no "fixed periods of heat and exclusion" that produce in animals such "terrible moment[s] of universal passion."²³ Reproductive physiology and the nature of the menstrual cycle bear an enormous weight here, as the state of nature is conceptualized in terms of the supposed differences in the sexual receptivity of women and beasts.

And, to give a final example, Tocqueville argued that in the United States democracy had destroyed the old basis for patriarchal authority and that it was necessary to trace anew and with great precision "two clearly distinct lines of action for the two sexes."²⁴ In short, wherever boundaries were threatened or new ones erected, newly discovered fundamental sexual differences provided the material.

Their provenance was science. In the late eighteenth century, anatomists for the first time produced detailed illustrations of an explicitly female skeleton to document the fact that sexual difference was more than skin deep. Where before there had been only one basic structure, now there were two.²⁵ The nervous system assured, in still another realm, that the body "would be an observable and internally consistent field of signs," that female sympathy would be the result of female fibers.²⁶

Gradually the genitals whose position had marked a body's place on a teleologically male ladder came to be rendered so as to display incommensurable difference. We can, already by the late seventeenth century, trace

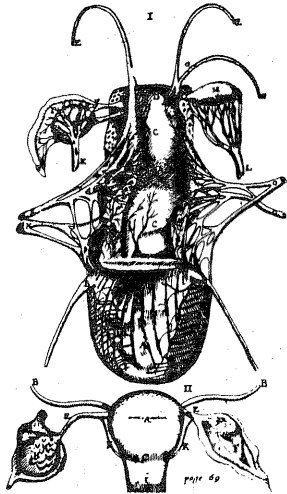


Fig. 51. The top drawing (I) shows a womb opened in relation to the “stones” and bladder. The lower drawing (II) shows the body of the uterus and the stones but, unlike earlier drawings, no vagina. From Bartholin, *Anatomy*.

the collapse of the old representations. Bartholin, who on occasion explicitly opposed the Galenic isomorphisms, produced in 1668 three separate drawings of the female genitalia: one that showed the whole generative system and pointedly left out the vagina and external pudenda; another that showed the womb open in relation to the “stones” (ovaries), again without a vagina; and finally one that showed the clitoris as a penis but rendered the vagina open so that it looked as little as possible like a penis (compare figs. 37 and 51). Even though these images belie the ancient construction of woman as an inferior, internalized man, their labels are still very much those of the old order: the “stones of woman” for the ovaries, the “deferent vessels” for the Fallopian tubes, the curiously metaphoric “sheath or scabbard of the womb” for what had been the neck of the womb and would become the vagina. Though the old representations were clearly no longer viable, genitals here were not yet doing the work of signification they would perform in the illustrations of the next century.

Just how shaky the new images still were is clear in the work of Regnier de Graaf (1641–1673). His discovery of the ovarian follicle provided the basis for much future discussion of sexual difference, but his illustrations of the female genitalia were more old-fashioned than Bartholin’s. The

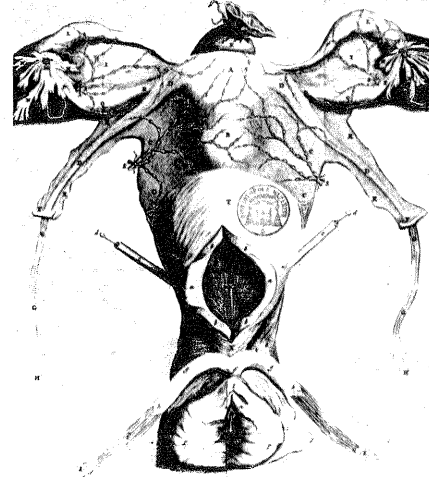
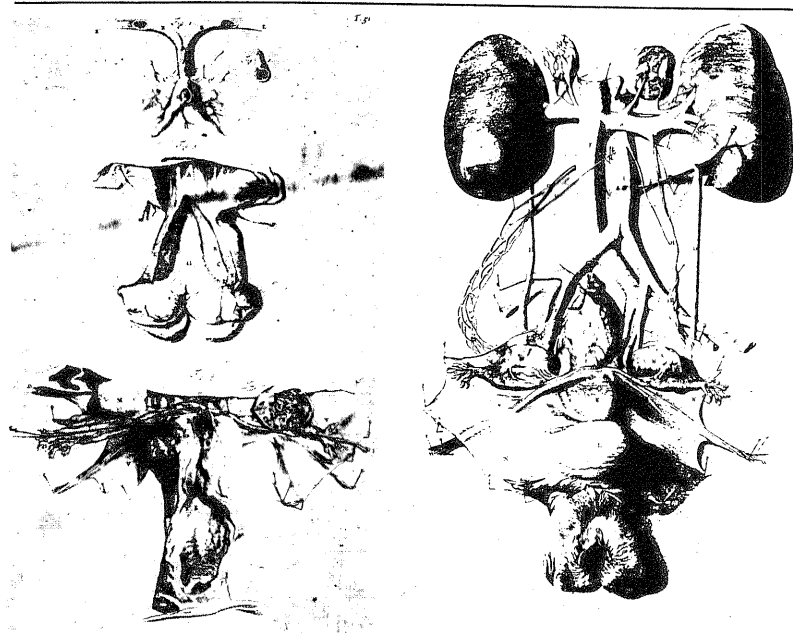


Fig. 52. The uterus, vagina, and ovaries—still labeled female testicles—from Regnier de Graaf, *De mulierum organis generationi inservientibus* (1672). If the vagina were not sectioned open, the picture would resemble earlier drawings produced to show the male and female organs as isomorphic.

entire vagina is still shown attached to the cervix, as in Renaissance texts, but de Graaf’s depiction of the vagina opened just below the cervix and of the ovaries firmly attached to their ligaments tends to make the ensemble look considerably less penislike than its sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century counterparts (fig. 52).

By the late seventeenth century, the English anatomist William Cowper, like Bartholin, had separate drawings for the clitoris, for the pudendum and “fore part of the *vagina uteri*,” and for the uterus, ovaries, and Fallopian tubes. The only hints of the old formula are that he includes part of the vagina, albeit “divided so as to show its rouge,” in his image of the uterus (thereby detracting from the penis effect) and that he has not quite adopted what would become modern nomenclature (figs. 53–54).

Indeed, “vagina” or equivalent words (*schiede*, *vagin*) standing alone to designate the sheath or hollow organ into which its *opposite*, the penis, fits during coition and through which the young are delivered only entered the European vernaculars around 1700. Other genital nomenclature also became more specific and laden with meaning. In a pornographic fantasy-travel book published in 1683, for example, the author describes a female-shaped island that had power over its male inhabitants through its



Figs. 53–54. The various parts of the female reproductive system and external genitalia are disaggregated. The vagina is opened so that it does not have the penislike effect of the closed organ shown in Renaissance illustrations. The clitoris, left top, is shown separately, and no effort is made to render the external pudenda as a female foreskin as before. On the right the uterus is shown in relation to the kidneys and their vasculature; the vagina is not shown. From William Cowper, *The Anatomy of Humane Bodies* (1697).

“soyl” and “mould” but definitely not through its sexual parts. Only the pregnant belly and what must be the urethra—it is never named—get specific references. But by the 1740s this erotic island is replete with the obvious modern genital landmarks: “the two forts called Lba”; “a metropolis called Cltrs.”²⁷ Precisely during the intervening period, the hoary linguistic web in which words for womb and scrotum, penis and vagina, prepuce and vulva were entangled came unraveled. Whatever was there before, our forebears felt no need to name. Whatever came later is inseparable from the languages, largely scientific, through which it entered our subjectivity.

Organs that had been common to both sexes—the testicles—came as

a result of the discovery of sperm and egg to have each its own name and to stand in synecdochal relationship to its respective sex. Sometime in the eighteenth century “testicle” could stand alone to designate unambiguously the male gonad; it no longer carries the modifiers “masculine” or “feminine.” “Ovary,” not “female stones” or “testicle feminine,” came to designate its female equivalent. Moreover, the overtly political language of some earlier anatomical descriptions—Zacchia’s description of a *beneficium* of the clitoris as leading to a false diagnosis of hermaphroditism, for example—gave way to the more clinical, organ-centered language of nineteenth-century medicine: “spurious” hermaphroditism due to “abnormal development or magnitude of the clitoris” reads a heading in one early nineteenth-century encyclopedia.²⁸

The new relationship between generation and sexual pleasure, and hence the biological possibility of a passionless female, also had its origins in the late eighteenth century. In the 1770s the famous experimentalist Lazzaro Spallanzani succeeded in artificially inseminating a water spaniel, which suggested that in a dog, at least, orgasm was not necessary for conception.²⁹ Syringes could not “communicate or meet with joy,” as a Scottish doctor observed.³⁰ (The surgeon John Hunter had earlier used a similar instrument to introduce the semen of a patient who suffered from a urethral defect into the vagina of the man’s wife. But since the procedure took place after intercourse and with semen that had been ejaculated at the usual time, if not place, the experiment proved little about the role of female orgasm in conception.³¹)

Pregnancy from rape provides the limiting case for a woman’s conceiving without pleasure or desire. Samuel Farr, in the first legal-medicine text to be written in English (1785), argued that “without an excitation of lust, or enjoyment in the venereal act, no conception can probably take place.”³² Whatever a woman might claim to have felt or whatever resistance she might have put up, conception in itself betrayed desire or at least a sufficient measure of acquiescence for her to enjoy the venereal act. This is a very old argument. Soranus had said in second-century Rome that “if some women who were forced to have intercourse have conceived . . . the emotion of sexual appetite existed in them too, but was obscured by mental resolve,” and no one before the second half of the eighteenth or early nineteenth century questioned the physiological basis of this judgment.³³ The 1756 edition of Burn’s *Justice of the Peace*, the standard guide for English magistrates, cites authorities back to the *Institutes* of Justinian to

the effect that "a woman can not conceive unless she doth consent." It does, however, go on to point out that as a matter of law, if not of biology, this doctrine is dubious.³⁴ Another writer argued that pregnancy ought to be taken as proof of acquiescence since the fear, terror, and aversion that accompany a true rape would prevent an orgasm from occurring and thus make conception unlikely.³⁵

In practice it is doubtful whether these views had much effect on courts of law.³⁶ To begin with, some legal authorities held that the maxim "it can be no rape, if woman conceive with child" seemed not to form a law.³⁷ Then, because of the difficulty in proving rape, and more generally the common law's leniency in matters of personal assault, only the most egregious and repugnant rapes ever came to trial: attacks on young girls or pregnant women, violations of mistresses by servants, cases in which venereal disease was transmitted or the victim mutilated.³⁸ In such instances the niceties of whether orgasm occurred were probably not relevant. Finally, the pregnancy defense was known not to be entirely reliable. One doctor argued in 1823 that conception was possible even when intercourse had been involuntary or with a man for whom the woman felt repugnance because both states may lead to "so high a tone of constitutional orgasm" as to make ovulation possible. The orgasm in question here—a turgescence of the reproductive organs—need not have been felt or desired for it to do its work.³⁹

But by the 1820s the medical doctrines upon which legal definitions of rape were based had changed dramatically. The view that rape was incompatible with pregnancy was proclaimed in a much-cited text as "an extraordinary dictum of the ancient lawyers," a "vulgar idea, from which some ignorant persons might still infer that a woman had consented, because she was proven pregnant," thus adding unmerited stigma to the other burdens of the unfortunate victim of crime.⁴⁰ While the eighteenth-century edition of Burn quoted above was vague on the scientific question of whether conception ruled out rape, its nineteenth-century version stated unequivocally that the notion was absurd, that it would be surprising if "any whose education and intellect were superior to those of an old nurse" still believed it. Whatever the vulgar might have believed—and, as suggested earlier, ordinary people might very well have continued to subscribe in a deep, inarticulate way to old notions still widely circulating in books and gossip—the learned world firmly rejected the connection of female pleasure and conception. This does not mean that experts em-

braced the hypothesis, which remained controversial for another century, that women could ovulate independently of intercourse. The point is rather that women could experience the tension of sexual intercourse and even orgasm, in the nineteenth-century sense of the word as a turgescence or pressure, without any concomitant sensation. The ovarian system, in other words, could work not only without the influence of the conscious self but without any phenomenal sign. "Physical constraint . . . sufficient to induce the required state" was all the ovaries needed.⁴¹

Even in the late eighteenth century, some writers had said that there was no relationship between the erogenous qualities of the external female genitalia and the serious work that went on within. One argued that the "lascivious susceptibility" of the external organs was materially useless to generation; another noted the "organization of the vagina for the purpose of exciting titillation and pleasure" only to follow this observation with the non sequitur that "it can and does accommodate itself to whatever size is necessary closely to embrace the penis in the act of copulation."⁴² A major obstetrics textbook remarked casually that it would not dwell on the clitoris and other external organs because they were irrelevant to midwifery.⁴³ So, even if doctors in these and many similar texts did not directly address the question of whether women had sexual feelings or experienced orgasm, they considered these sensations as contingent to the order of things. No longer necessary for conception, they became something that women might or might not have, something to be doggedly and inconclusively debated rather than, as had been the case for so long, taken for granted.

And we must not take for granted the terms in which science defined the new sexes. It claimed that the body provided a solid foundation, a causal locus, of the meaning of male or female. The trouble here lies not with the empirical truth or falsity of specific biological views but with the interpretive strategy itself. Sexual difference no more followed from anatomy after the scientific revolution than it did in the world of one sex.

The aporia of biology

The aesthetics of anatomical difference. Anatomy, and nature as we know it more generally, is obviously not pure fact, unadulterated by thought or convention, but rather a richly complicated construction based not only on observation, and on a variety of social and cultural constraints on the

practice of science, but on an aesthetics of representation as well. Far from being the foundations for gender, the male and female bodies in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anatomy books are themselves artifacts whose production is part of the history of their epoch.

This is not to say, as we have seen in Chapter 3, that an anatomy text or illustration cannot be judged more or less accurate. There is progress in anatomy. There are bounds to the scientific imagination. Vesalius *was* wrong in depicting the *rete mirabile* in humans, although his eagerness to see it is understandable within the context of Galenic physiology. There are normally no holes in the septum of the heart as Renaissance anatomists thought, although again it is not difficult to see how a patent *foramen ovales*, present in a quarter of cases, and the myriad spaces between the *trabeculae carneae* that anchor the valves might not be mistaken for vents between the right and left sides. The ovaries *are* structurally dissimilar from the testicles, although not so much in their gross surface appearance as the early texts would have it.

But all anatomical illustrations, historical and contemporary, are abstractions; they are maps to a bewildering and infinitely varied reality. Representations of features that pertain especially to male or female, because of the enormous social consequences of these distinctions, are most obviously dictated by art and culture. Like maps, anatomical illustrations focus attention on a particular feature or on a particular set of spatial relationships. To fulfill their function they assume a point of view—they include some structures and exclude others; they strip away the plenum of sheer stuff that fills up the body—fat, connective tissue, and “insignificant variations” that are not dignified with names or individual identities. They situate the body in relation to death, or to this world, or to an identifiable face—or, as in most modern texts, they do not. As figs. 10–16 suggest, the social situation of cadavers was once far richer and more varied than it became in the nineteenth century. The compilers of anatomical texts use or eschew various techniques of the engraver or painter to gain specific effects. Anatomical illustrations, in short, are representations of historically specific understandings of the human body and its place in creation and not only of a particular state of knowledge about its structures.

Thus, for example, figs. 20–26, which make the vagina look like the penis, are not incorrect because they emphasize a relationship between the female reproductive organs that anatomists since the late seventeenth

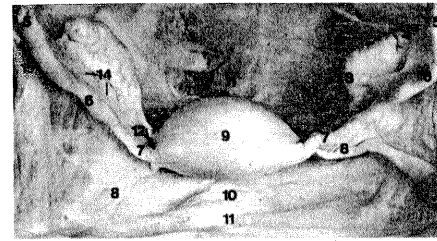


Fig. 55. Photograph of the uterus and ovaries from above, using embalmed material.

century have chosen to deemphasize; nor conversely are eighteenth-century illustrations (figs. 51–54) more correct because they do not emphasize this relationship. One could (figs. 28–29) produce a Renaissance look-alike from modern plates.

But the extent of interpretation inherent in any anatomical illustration is evident in less controversial contexts. Consider, for example, fig. 55, a photograph of the uterus and ovaries from above and in front. It is in no sense “ideological,” but it is enormously selective. There is no blood or other fluid in the picture; most of the fat and connective tissue has been stripped away; the body in which the organ resided is scarcely in evidence; the tone is cool and neutral. Contrast this to two drawings of the same subject. The first (fig. 56), prepared to illustrate what was wrongly believed to be a human egg, looks almost like a Caspar David Friedrich landscape. Shaded valleys furrow the broad ligaments of the uterus; the trumpets of the Fallopian tubes look like exotic flowers growing out of a bank of billowing clouds. The second (fig. 57) is from a modern text and is in the tradition of schematic, almost architectural drawing introduced by the great German anatomist Jacob Henle, to show only particular features of an organ, salient for the occasion. There is almost no shading or sense of texture; the tone, as in the photograph, is detached and scientific; no affect mars its supposed objectivity; there is no sense of its being the organ of an individual. The final illustration of the same organ (fig. 58) operates at an even greater level of abstraction. Here is a blueprint, drawn to show a specific feature of the structure in question with no effort to situate it further, as if the organ were a machine. I do not want to maintain that these pictures are ideological in that they overtly distort observation in the interest of one political position or another. I simply want

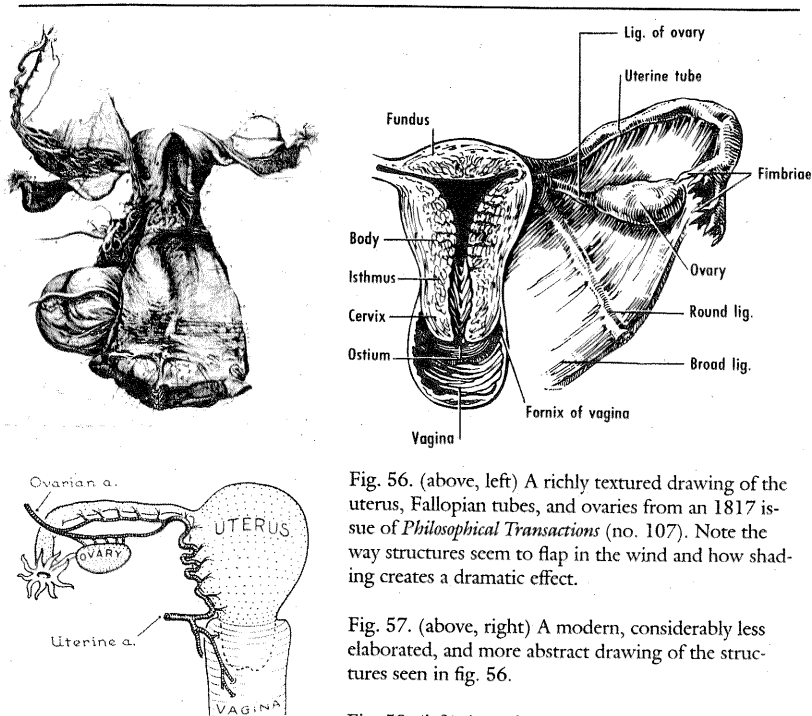


Fig. 56. (above, left) A richly textured drawing of the uterus, Fallopian tubes, and ovaries from an 1817 issue of *Philosophical Transactions* (no. 107). Note the way structures seem to flap in the wind and how shading creates a dramatic effect.

Fig. 57. (above, right) A modern, considerably less elaborated, and more abstract drawing of the structures seen in fig. 56.

Fig. 58. (left) A modern schematic drawing of the uterus, ovaries, and Fallopian tubes.

to point out what is already well established in the criticism of high art: pictures are the product of the social activity of picture making and bear the complex marks of their origins.

Still, anatomical illustrations that claim canonical status, that announce themselves to represent *the* human eye or *the* female skeleton, are more directly implicated in the culture producing them. Idealist anatomy, like idealism generally, must postulate a transcendent norm. But there is obviously no canonical eye, muscle, or skeleton, and therefore any representation making this claim does so on the basis of certain culturally and historically specific notions of what is ideal, what best illustrates the true nature of the object in question. Some texts, like the enormously successful Gray's *Anatomy*, blithely and unselfconsciously represent the general

case of every feature as male. All the surface anatomy is demonstrated by male, though curiously unmuscular, subjects and thereby belies whatever objective claim one might want to make for the advantages of the male body in illustrating surface articulations. Even the schematically drawn cleavage lines that divide thorax from abdomen and the markings to show the course of blood vessels are shown on a male model; the hands in various stages of dissection are all male hands; the distribution of cutaneous nerves are shown on the schematic drawing of a man. It is simply assumed that the human body is male. The female body is presented only to show how it differs from the male.⁴⁴

Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring, who produced one of two competing canonical illustrations of the female skeleton in the nineteenth century, was more straightforward in articulating his principles of selection. The anatomically normal was for him, as for much anatomy in the idealist tradition, the most beautiful. An anatomist was thus engaged in the same deeply serious task as a painter: to render the human form, and nature generally, in accord with the canons of art. In his comment on his illustration of the eye, Soemmerring argues:

Just as, on the one hand, we assume that all works of art representing the human body and claiming ideal beauty for themselves must needs be correct from an anatomic point of view, so, on the other hand, should we as readily expect that everything that the dissector describes anatomically as a normal structure must needs be exceptionally beautiful.⁴⁵

Like the distinguished anatomist Bernard Albinus, who counseled his colleagues to be like artists who "draw a handsome face, and if there happens to be a blemish in it, they mend it in the picture," Soemmerring promised to avoid anything in his representations that was "distorted, dried, shriveled, torn or dislocated."⁴⁶ Anything that failed to meet the highest aesthetic standards was banished from his representations of the body; the grand tradition of Sir Joshua Reynolds' prescriptions to painters in his *Discourses* was mirrored in the seemingly alien world of scientific illustration.

Soemmerring was dissatisfied with the d'Arconville/Sue female skeleton, the only alternative available in the 1790s, and set to construct an alternative based on the highest standards of observation and aesthetic judgment. Finding no skeleton in his collection suitable, he acquired one of a twenty-year-old girl of proven femininity (she had given birth); to

this skeleton he apparently appended the well-known skull, from Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's collection, of a Georgian woman. He then went to great lengths to determine the appropriate pose, seeking the advice of artists and connoisseurs; he posed live models; and eventually he compared his product with the Venus de Medici and the Venus of Dresden. The canonical skeleton had to seem plausible as the foundation of the canonical female form.

All of this bears an uncanny resemblance to Alberti's account of the Athenian painter Xeuxis (fifth century B.C.):

He thought that he would not be able to find so much beauty as he was looking for in a single body, since it was not given to a single one by nature. He chose, therefore, the five most beautiful young girls from the youth of the land in order to draw from them whatever beauty is praised in women. He was a wise painter.⁴⁷

Thus the making of *the* female skeleton, or indeed of any ideal representation, is an exercise in a culturally bound aesthetic. And, as it happened, Soemmerring's beauty failed to meet the political standards of its day; the d'Arconville/Sue skeleton triumphed. Why? According to the Scots anatomist John Barclay, "although it is more graceful and elegant and suggested by men of eminence in modelling, sculpture and painting, it contributes nothing to the comparison which is intended."⁴⁸ The missed comparison of course was between men and women, and the specific mistake of which Soemmerring stood accused was his failure to represent with sufficient specificity the female pelvis, the most significant sign in the bones of sexual difference. To be sure that his readers fully comprehended the point, Barclay reproduced Albinus' male skeleton with George Stubbs's rendering of the musculature of a horse in the background and the Sue skeleton of the female with a skeletal ostrich looking on.⁴⁹ The iconography of the horse was transparent in a world in which the beast was bred for its speed, power, and endurance, in which a man on horseback still represented authority. The ostrich was a less usual sign, but it too must have been readable. Its enormous pelvis in proportion to its body directs the viewer's attention to the analogous feature in the accompanying human female, and its long neck must have been an allusion to the claim of phrenology that the characteristically long neck of women bore witness to their low "amativeness," their lack of passion.

Anatomical science was thus itself the arena in which representation of

sexual difference fought for ascendancy. The manifest anatomical differences between the sexes, the body outside of culture, is known only through highly developed, culturally and historically bound paradigms, both scientific and aesthetic. The notion that scientific advance alone, pure anatomical discovery, could account for the extraordinary late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century interest in sexual dimorphism is not simply empirically wrong—it is philosophically misguided.

Embryogenesis and the Galenic homologues. A stranger surveying the landscape of mid-nineteenth-century science might well suspect that incommensurable sexual difference was created despite, not because of, new discoveries. Careful studies of fetal development would give credence not to new differences but to old androgynies, grounded this time not in myth or metaphysics but in nature. It had been known since the eighteenth century, for example, that the clitoris and the penis were of similar embryological origin. An early nineteenth-century textbook on forensic medicine, in a section on hermaphroditism and the difficulties of telling the sex of newborns, points out that at birth the clitoris "is often larger than the penis, and has frequently given rise to mistakes." The writer cites the *Memoirs de l'Academy Royal des Sciences de Paris* for 1767 to the effect that the seemingly disproportionate number of male miscarriages in the third and fourth months is due to the size of the clitoris in female embryos and the resulting confusion of sexual identification. (The error is understandable, as fig. 59 suggests.) More generally the triumph in embryology, during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, of epigenesis (the view that complicated organic structures arise from simpler undifferentiated ones rather than from preformed entities inherent in the sperm or the egg) would seem to undermine root and branch difference. Science revealed an embryo in which the Wolffian duct, named after Kaspar Friedrich Wolff, was destined to become the male genital tract, and the Mullerian ducts, after Johannes Müller, would become the Fallopian tubes and the ovaries. Until about the eighth week, the two structures coexist. Furthermore, it was known by the middle of the nineteenth century that the penis and the clitoris, the labia and the scrotum, the ovary and the testes, begin from one and the same embryonic structure. The scrotal sac, for example, is a modification of the labia majora, a version of the embryonic labiscrotal swelling in which the lips grow longer, fold over, and join along the scrotal raphe.⁵⁰ Here, even more powerfully than

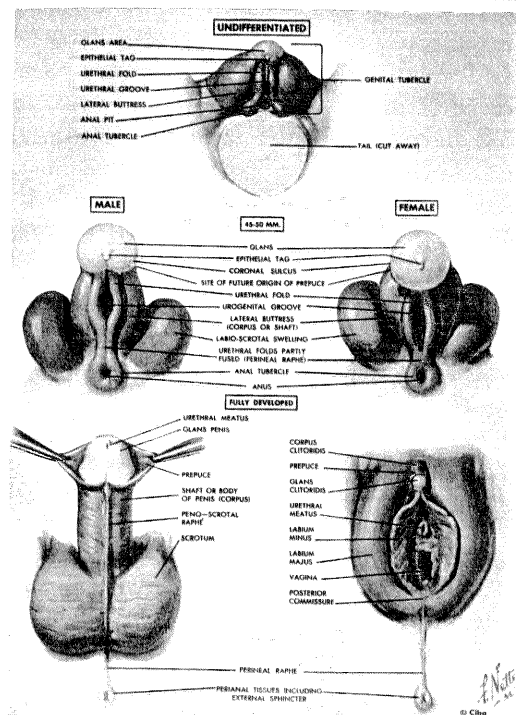


Fig. 59. At 40–55 mm in length, around two and a half months into gestation, the male and female genitalia are almost indistinguishable. Gradually, after the third or fourth month, it becomes easier to tell the sexes apart. Drawing by Frank Netter, *CIBA Collection of Medical Illustrations*.

in the early coexisting two ducts, the old Galenic homologies seem to find new resonance. Modern representations of the development of the external genitalia bear a remarkable resemblance to Vesalius' or Leonardo's illustrations, and modern charts of genital embryology seem faithfully to reproduce Galen's lecture on woman as inverted male.

Moreover, the idea of common embryological origins of various male and female organs, in the very different political climate of the 1980s, has engendered a modern version of ancient thought. One psychoanalyst in an effort to rehabilitate the vagina for its erotic and indeed erectile functions, after two decades of what he calls "clitorocentricity," marshals con-

siderable evidence for the homology of male and female ejaculation. There are, he says, immunohistochemical homologies between the secretions of the male prostate and the female paraurethral glands, structures whose common roots in the embryonic urogenital sinus have been known since the nineteenth century. In fact, as he points out, the secretory glands that empty into the female urethra were known as prostates in both sexes until in 1880 they took the name of A. J. C. Skene, who extensively investigated them.⁵¹ Thus a vast scientific literature—indeed, embryological investigation was the glory of nineteenth-century descriptive biology—provided a great repertoire of new discoveries, which, far from destroying old homologies, could well have strengthened them. My point, however, is not to argue that scientific advances did somehow give greater credence to the ancient model. New cultural imperatives of interpretation simply had a larger field out of which to construct, or not construct, a biology of sexual difference.

Sperm and egg. The claim by Harvey in 1651 that all life comes from an egg; the subsequent announcement by de Graaf in 1672 that he had discovered the ovarian follicle that was thought to be, or to contain, that egg; and the revelation by Leuwenhoek and Hartsoeker, also in the 1670s, that semen contained millions of little animalcules: all this seemed to provide, in the microscopic generative products, an imaginatively convincing synecdoche for two sexes. The vaginal secretions that had for millennia been taken to be a thin, cooler, less perfect version of the male ejaculate turned out to be something entirely different: "since the discovery of the egg . . . that Liquor which has been taken by all preceding Ages for the Seed in [women], is found to be only a mucous Matter, Secreted from the Glands of the *Vagina*." For a time it seemed, in fact, that the newly discovered egg would detract "much from the dignity of the Male sex" since it "furnish'd the matter of the Fetus," while the male only "actuated it." But then Anton van Leuwenhoek discovered that the male ejaculate was not just a thick liquid seed: "by the help of his Exquisite microscope . . . [he] detected Innumerable small Animals in the Masculine sperm, and by this Noble Discovery, at once removed that Difficulty."⁵² Sperm and egg could now stand for man and woman; male dignity was restored.

Social sex thus projected downward into biological sex at the level of the microscopic generative products themselves. Very quickly the egg

came to be seen as a merely passive nest or trough where the boy or girl person, compressed in each animalcule, was fattened up before birth. Fertilization became a miniaturized version of monogamous marriage, where the animalcule/husband managed to get through the single opening of the egg/wife, which then closed and "did not allow another worm to enter."⁵³ In other words, old distinctions of gender now found their basis in the supposed facts of life.

Moreover, the discoveries of egg and sperm marked the beginning of a long research program to find sexual reproduction everywhere.⁵⁴ For a time it succeeded in doing just that. Whether one believed that the egg or the sperm contained the new life already preformed, or that each contributed elements toward the epigenetic development of succeeding generations, sexual reproduction and the nature of sexual difference dominated thinking about generation.⁵⁵

Very quickly sex also filtered down from animals to plants. The pistil, a word from the Latin *pistillum* (pestle), became an unlikely name for the seed-bearing ovary. The stamen—actually the anther at its end—from which the pollen emanates, became the botanical penis. Instantly plants were gendered, and sex was assimilated to culture: "hence it seems rational to denote these apices by a more noble name and attribute to them the importance of masculine sexual organs; it is there that the semen, the powder that constitutes the subtlest part of the plant, accumulates, and it is from there that it later flows forth."⁵⁶ The sexual nature of plants became the basis for Linnaeus' famous classificatory system. Further investigation found sexual products up and down the living world; beginning in the 1830s spermatozoa, for example, were located in every invertebrate group except Infusoria. The *Naturphilosophen* thus seemed to be right in viewing sexual difference as one of the fundamental dichotomies of nature, an unbridgeable chasm born not of the Pythagorean opposites but of the reproductive germs themselves and the organs that produced them.

As it turned out, however, the new discoveries were of only fitful utility. In the first place, the immediate, promiscuous projection of gender onto sex in Linnaeus' sexual system made even contemporaries blush. The group of plants classed as Monoecia, meaning "one house," took its name and character from the fact that "Husbands live with their wives in the same house, but have different beds [leaves]." The class Polygamia aequalis meaning "equal polygamy," was seen to "consist of many marriages with promiscuous intercourse."⁵⁷ Plant sex was so extremely gen-

dered at its core that in his own day Linnaeus' taxonomy seemed quite indecent.

Furthermore, even in humans and other creatures in which egg and sperm were understood to be the distinct products of different sexes, the meanings of the terms were in constant flux. There was, in other words, no consensus as to what sperm and egg actually were or did, until the turn of the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ The synecdochic imagination was thus unfettered by the supposed discovery of distinctive generative products; the incommensurability of the sexes rested uneasily on microscopic bodies whose significance was much debated. Preformationists were unevenly divided between a majority who were ovists and a minority of animalculists. The choice between them was often ideological: among the main arguments against the animalculists was that God would never have devised so profligate a system that millions of preformed humans had to die in each ejaculation so that one might, on occasion, find food for growth in the egg. Insofar as observation had anything to do with theory—Haller, for example, was in part converted to preformationism and particularly to ovism because he thought that he could trace the continuity of the membranes of a chick embryo's intestines from the membranes of the yolk sac—gender played little role.⁵⁹

So, even if some contemporaries spoke of the respective dignities of male and female being reflected in the two respective preformationist theories, the debate was really on different grounds. And in fact neither ovism nor animalculism suggested a world of two sexes but rather a world of no sex at all. Both bespoke parthenogenic reproduction: either the egg contained the new life and the sperm was just a living version of the glass rod that could make frog eggs develop on their own, or the sperm contained the new life and the egg was just a food basket. Technical developments in the explosively developing study of generation also undermined the supposed ubiquity of sexual reproduction. Charles Bonnet's proof in 1745 that aphids reproduced by parthenogenesis—a term coined by the great comparative anatomist Richard Owen in 1849—was the first step in finding that the development of unfertilized eggs from sexually mature females was far more widespread than had been thought possible. Abraham Trembley's demonstration, at about the same time, of the regenerative powers of hydra had general repercussions in discussions not only of sexuality but of generation at the theoretical level. Other developments and tendencies—the discovery of alternation of generations

in 1842 and the increasing interest in hermaphroditic reproduction—also tended to push eighteenth-century models of universal sexual reproduction, insofar as such models existed, to the sidelines.⁶⁰

I do not want to rehearse the long history of sperm-or-egg but only to point out that the gender claims made on their behalf were constantly being undermined by these sorts of controversies.⁶¹ Until the 1850s it was unclear whether sperm merely stirred the semen—a wormlike mixer—stimulated ovulation, touched the egg, or actually penetrated it. The conceptual triumph of cell theory and advances in microscopy and staining finally allowed Oskar Hertwig, in 1876, to demonstrate that the sperm did indeed penetrate the egg and that the actual joining of the egg and sperm nuclei was fertilization. (As I said, this seemed to provide an unassailable microscopic model for incommensurable sexual difference, until a move to the molecular, DNA level made it all less clear again.) Well into the twentieth century, the debate continued on whether all or only some of the nuclear material blended.

For much of the period under discussion here, the role and nature of the sperm remained obscure. Spallanzani had proven in the late eighteenth century that no amount of vapor from semen would fertilize frog eggs, that Harvey's *aura seminalis* was insufficient to cause the female mold to produce tadpoles, and that increasing filtrations of semen eventually rendered it impotent. He showed that naked male frogs mounting a female fertilized her eggs but that frogs wearing little taffeta trousers did not; he went on to demonstrate, furthermore, that the residue on their ludicrous garb was potent. (He had previously shown—by killing a female frog in the act of copulation and noting that the eggs still inside her did not develop while those that had been in contact with the sperm were fertile—that the eggs were fertilized outside the body.) Despite all of this, he continued to think that the little creatures in semen were mere parasites and that semen worked by stimulating the heart of a preformed fetus released from the ovary after fertilization.⁶²

The debate between preformationists—ovists or animalculists—on the one hand and epigenesists on the other provides further evidence for just how irrelevant research on germ substances was to thinking about two sexes. The choice between preformation and epigenesis was made on philosophical rather than empirical grounds, but quarrels about gender played no part. Albrecht von Haller differed from Christian Wolff not on the interpretation of this or that piece of data—indeed they generally

talked right by each other—but on basic issues in the philosophy of science: a mechanistic, Newtonian preformationism in which embryological development works out God's plan as against a rationalist, somewhat more vitalist epigenesis in which matter was not merely inert substance to be worked upon by God's laws.

Among epigenesists, a major figure like Buffon could still write in the cadences of the old biology of generation, as if nothing had happened, almost a century after the discovery of sperm and egg: "the female has a seminal liquor which commences to be formed in the testicles" and that "the seminal liquors are both [male and female] extracts from all parts of the body, and in the mixture of them there is everything necessary to form a certain number of males and females." The point is not that Buffon was wrong in his theories of pangenesis or right, for the wrong reasons, that there is a "moule intérieur" in the particles of male and female "semen" which organize matter into organic structures.⁶³ Rather I want to suggest that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and indeed today, at any given point of scientific knowledge a wide variety of contradictory cultural claims about sexual difference are possible. Pierre de Maupertuis, one of the major opponents of preformationism—he believed that atoms arranged one another according to some plan—in 1756 was still writing, as had Democritus in ancient Greece, about orgasm: "it is that moment, so rich in delight, which brings to life a new being."⁶⁴ Neither the level of scientific knowledge nor its "correctness" restrains the poetry written in its name.

But even if Maupertuis or other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientists had arrived at what we consider to be the correct interpretation of the data at hand, observation and experiment would still not have created a metaphor for maleness or femaleness. Translating facts about reproduction into "facts" about sexual difference is precisely the cultural sleight of hand I want to expose.

The ovary and the nature of woman. The most egregious instance of anatomical aporia, and the clearest case in which cultural assumptions fueled a research tradition whose results in turn confirmed those views, involved the ovary. "Propter solum ovarium mulier est id quod est" (it is only because of the ovary that woman is what she is), wrote the French physician Achille Chereau in 1844, forty years before there would be any evidence for the real importance of the organ in a woman's life. Here is a

synecdochic leap to incommensurability that would in any circumstances be unsupportable.⁶⁵ But it is particularly ironic because the large role of the ovary in the biological lives of women—though certainly not making woman “what she is”—was finally established in the late nineteenth century by assuming that which was yet to be proven and using it as justification for the surgical removal of histologically normal ovaries. Bilateral ovariectomy—the removal of healthy ovaries—made its appearance in the early 1870s and became an instant success to cure a wide variety of “behavioral pathologies”: hysteria,⁶⁶ excessive sexual desires, and more mundane aches and pains whose origins could not be shown to lie elsewhere. (The procedure was also called in German “die castration der Frauen,” in French “castration chez la femme,” or eponymously “Battey’s or Hegar’s operation” after Robert Battey and Alfred Hegar, the American and German surgeons who popularized it. It should be distinguished from what were usually called ovariectomies, the removal of cancerous or cystic ovaries for therapeutic reasons that would be regarded as medically sound today. The number of these operations also grew dramatically, as indeed did the number of all operations in the late nineteenth century, especially after the acceptance of Lister’s aseptic techniques.⁶⁷)

Removing healthy ovaries in the hope of curing so-called failures of femininity went a long way toward producing the data from which the organ’s functions could be understood. The dependence of menstruation on the ovary, for example, was shown by assuming that the swelling of the ovarian follicle produced heatlike, estrous symptoms in some women and that removal of the organ would therefore halt such sexual excesses.

There is a further irony in all of this because the operation both assumes and does not assume incommensurable sexual difference; it purports to create women who both are and are not more like men than they were before the procedure. The name itself, female castration, suggests the old view that the ovaries are female testicles, much like the male’s. But doctors were quick to deny that ovariectomy was anything like castration in its psychological and social effects. There are no pictures comparable to fig. 60 in which roles are switched, in which instead of men, scalpel in hand, seen poised over the prostrate body of a woman, men (or more inconceivably yet, women) surgeons are preparing to castrate a man. There was no male castration, no removal of healthy testes, except in a few rare and quite specific instances for criminal insanity or to treat cancer of the prostate. While the female gonad was assumed, like its male coun-

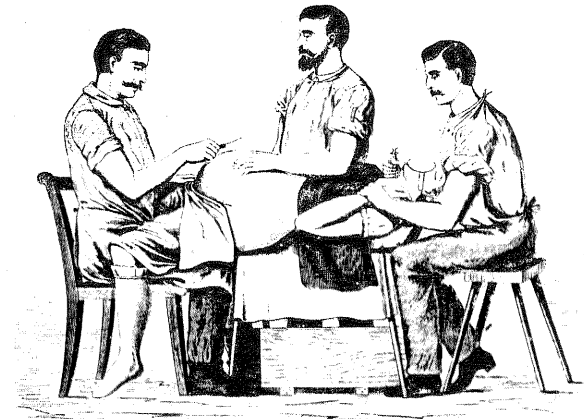


Fig. 60. Three male surgeons, c. 1880, performing an ovariectomy on a patient with a large cyst.

terpart, to have profound effects on various parts of the body, ovaries were not testicles in any cultural or metaphorical sense in the minds of the overwhelmingly male medical profession. They, unlike testicles, were not sacrosanct.

Yet the theoretical justification for “female castration” was that the ovaries, a woman’s “stones” (once understood as a cooler version of the testes), were in fact the master organs of the female body so that if she lost them she would become more malelike, just as castrated males would become more femalelike. Ovariectomy did cause women to stop menstruating and did effect other changes in secondary sexual characteristics that made them more like men. On the other hand, removing the ovaries also made a woman more womanly, or at least more like what the operation’s proponents thought women ought to be. Extirpating the female organs exorcised the organic demons of unladylike behavior.

All of this speculation about the synecdochic relationship between an organ and a person—a woman is her ovaries—or even between the ovary and some observable physiological or anatomical change was ideological hot air. Up to the late nineteenth century no one knew what removing the ovaries would do. (Even today the effects of postmenopausal ovariectomy are not well understood.) Far more was known about the effects

of removing the testes. Aristotle and other ancient writers had recognized the physiological, and what they took to be psychological and behavioral, consequences of both pre- and postpubertal castration in men. Eunuchs figure prominently in medical and moral writings, in a variety of both Christian and pagan religious practices, and there are many observations on the effects of castration in male domestic animals.⁶⁸ But there are, as far as I know, no commentaries on the removal of ovaries in women and only a single reference to the procedure in animals: "The ovaries of sows are excised with the view of quenching in them sexual appetites and of stimulating fatness," wrote Aristotle; female camels, he continues, are mutilated to make them more aggressive for "war purposes" and to prevent their bearing young.⁶⁹

Nothing was written on the relevance of such observations to humans until the advent of ovariectomy in the 1870s. For two millennia, from ancient Greece to late eighteenth-century London, there was no human case reported in medical or popular literature. Then Percival Pott, a distinguished surgeon at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London, announced that he had examined a woman, age twenty-three, with two small soft masses, "unequal in their surface," one in each groin. She appeared healthy, menstruated regularly, and suffered no pain except when she stooped. Eventually she became "incapacitated from earning her bread" and, when nothing else alleviated her distress, agreed to have the growths removed. To Pott's apparent surprise, they were her ovaries. He notes that his patient returned to good health but that she appeared thinner and more muscular; "her breasts, which were large, are gone; nor has she menstruated since the operation, which is now some years." He offers no account of why all this happened.⁷⁰

When in 1843 Theodor von Bischoff, the discoverer of spontaneous ovulation in dogs, wrote that the ovaries govern the human female reproductive cycle, he had but one further piece of evidence: the account of one Dr. G. Roberts, a medically trained traveler who claimed to have seen "castrated" women in India, aged about twenty-five, whose breasts were undeveloped, whose external pudenda lacked the usual fat deposits and covering hair, whose pelvises were deformed and buttocks male-like, who showed no signs of menstruation or any compensatory process, and who had absolutely no sexual drive.⁷¹ Even if one credits this report and adds to it a series of casual clinical observations correlating malformation of the ovaries with absence of menstruation, the evidence available by the

middle of the nineteenth century for the function of the ovary in the reproductive physiology of women remains slight.

The rise of "justifiable" ovariectomy after 1865—mostly for cysts, tumors, or other obvious pathologies—began to provide some quasi-experimental evidence for the ovary's functions, but since the workings of a healthy organ could not in many cases be reliably deduced from the effects of excising its diseased counterpart, such material was less than conclusive. Though an authoritative German handbook argues that there were so many cases on record attesting to the connection between the ovary and menstruation that further cases were scarcely worth noting, it still refers to Bischoff's by now forty-year-old citations of Roberts and Pott (whose report itself had by then been around for a century). Moreover, it proceeds to note that considerable weight was currently being placed on instances of menstruation continuing after removal of the ovaries and that, should a recent attack on such evidence prove inconclusive, one might have to reconsider whether the intimate relationship postulated between the uterus and the ovary had not been exaggerated.⁷² In 1882 a French handbook cites both new material and much older evidence which suggested that the role of the ovary in menstruation and indeed in the whole reproductive cycle might well be as passive as that of the uterus.⁷³

No one bothered to adduce age-old practical experience with oophorectomy in animals before 1873 when, a year after Battey began to advocate removal of the ovaries for various neurotic ills, a French physician remarked that in cows and pigs in which the operation was "commonly done during the first two months of life, the uterus ceases to grow and its volume remains stationary."⁷⁴ In short, when Battey and Hegar began removing healthy ovaries, and at the height of popular belief in the life-determining role of the organ, almost nothing was known of its function in women and no effort had been made to exploit what little veterinary experience existed. Here is a question not of the indeterminacy of anatomical and physiological knowledge but of willful ignorance.

Twenty years and the removal of thousands of healthy ovaries later, some of the assumptions on which the operation had been predicated finally rested on experimental evidence. It was Alfred Hegar, the distinguished professor of gynecology at Freiburg and the main European advocate of female castration, who brought the wisdom of generations of farmers together with his own clinical practice. Curious to know the

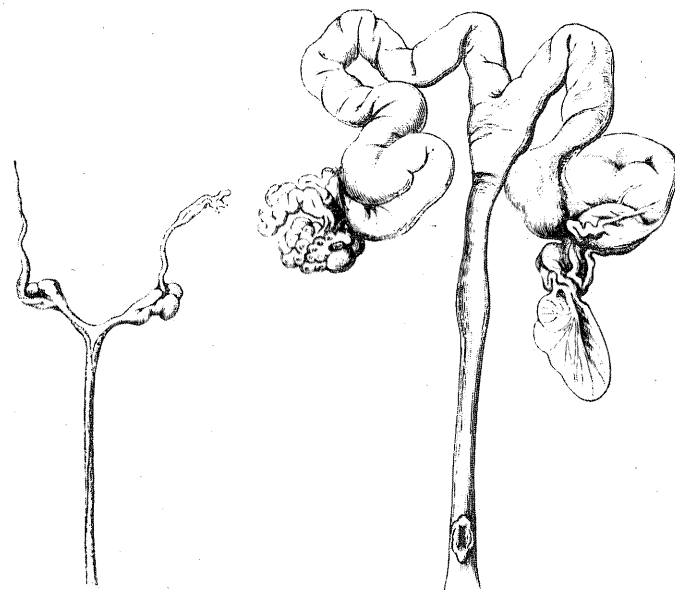


Fig. 61. Alfred Hegar's "first illustration of castrate atrophy of the uterus ever published."

long-term effects of the operations he was already performing, he searched the literature and found that female castration in animals was an ancient practice. He discovered that the castration of cows was popular in France in the 1830s but that the practice had fallen out of favor because the cows got too fat and stopped lactating. Veterinarians in his own day still removed ovaries but only when medically indicated: for "desire for the bull, a sort of nymphomania" (*Steiersucht, eine Art Nymphomanie*), which afflicted some 10 percent of the cows in certain regions!⁷⁵

Not to be deterred in his quest for knowledge, Hegar went back to the classics and to Aristotle's account of cutting out a sow's ovaries. He then sought out a *Schweine-Schneider*, "a cutter of pigs," whose basic technique, it turned out, was indistinguishable from that of his Greek predecessor, though from a nineteenth-century bourgeois perspective much more disgusting. The man took out a dirty knife, made a two-centimeter incision, put his dirty fingers around the ovaries, tubes, and ligaments, and cut

them out. He then sewed up the incision with a needle and thread drawn from his "evil-smelling" trousers. (It has never been clear to me why, with such an exquisite sense of dirt and propriety, the idea of aseptic surgery did not occur to Hegar and his contemporaries in the decade before Lister. Hegar, by his own account, lost a third of his patients to sepsis.)

Having watched the pig cutter at work, Hegar tried the operation himself. He bought two female piglets and proceeded to remove both ovaries from one and only one from the other. When they had grown to maturity, he had them butchered and found that the completely spayed pig showed dramatic aplasia of the uterus, a uterus of infant size. He made a drawing of this specimen, had it engraved, and proudly published it as the "first illustration of castrate atrophy of the uterus ever published."⁷⁶ One need not deride the genuine contribution to knowledge that Hegar's experiments represents in order to condemn him, Battey, or other doctors for the mutilations they practiced in the name of therapy. The important point, however, is not simply that they were driven by a particular vision of woman to regard the ovary as the source of illnesses whose origins lay more in culture than in the body, but rather that they subscribed to an epistemology that regarded anatomy as the foundation for a stable world of two incommensurable sexes. Ovaries were removed not because they made women what they were, nor even just because of physicians' anti-feminism, but because some doctors took literally the synecdoches they had invented. Ironically their practices did yield new knowledge about the ovaries' physiological functions. But their symbolic role, their function as a sign of difference, was untouched by progress.

Orgasm and sexual difference

On May 15, 1879, Mabel Loomis Todd—later the lover of Emily Dickinson's brother—carried out an extraordinarily precise experiment. Her hypothesis was that she would be fecund only at the moment of climax because afterwards her womb would close off, and "no fluid could reach the fruitful point." To test this proposition she allowed herself, she says, "to receive the precious fluid at least six or eight moments after my highest point of enjoyment had passed and when I was perfectly cool and satisfied." She got up and, since all of her husband's semen had apparently escaped, considered herself vindicated; their daughter Millicent, born nine months later, proved her wrong.⁷⁷

Mabel Todd was very wrong. Unlike questions of anatomy and sexual difference, the question of whether women can conceive without orgasm—however culturally desirable “passionlessness” might be—can be definitively answered. So can the question of whether female orgasm closes off the womb. Empirical evidence can address even more complicated and problematic matters: whether women generally have orgasms during intercourse, or whether they have strong sexual—I mean here heterosexual—drives at all.⁷⁸ But, though science certainly articulated new views about female passionlessness as part of the making of two sexes, it provided only inconclusive and fragmentary evidence on orgasm until the early twentieth century, more than a century after the abandonment of the universally held view linking orgasm to generation and women to passion. New information, much less a coherent new paradigm in reproductive biology, did not render ancient wisdom out of date. (I will show, in some technical detail, that nothing about the discovery of the ovaries or their functions required major revisions in the physiology of pleasure and conception. Readers willing to accept this without elaborate documentation might want only to skim this section, especially the pages on the corpus luteum.)

De Graaf's careful dissections, which established that “female testicles should rather be called ovaries,” inadvertently strengthened the link between intercourse and female “emission” because they showed that in rabbits the follicles, which de Graaf took to be eggs, “do not exist at all times in the testicles of females; on the contrary, they are only detected in them after coitus.” Like other observers for at least the next century and a half, he was sure that ovulation occurred *only* as a result of intercourse, which simply by the nature of things had to be pleasurable: “if those parts of the pudendum [the clitoris and labia] had not been supplied with such delightful sensations of pleasure and of such great love, no woman would be willing to undertake for herself such a troublesome pregnancy of nine months.” De Graaf's was the standard Renaissance account, except for his views on the female ejaculate: instead of being understood as weaker, more watery semen, it was construed as an egg in its surrounding liquid.⁷⁹

There were actually very little new data on reproductive physiology. “The modus of conception,” as the obstetrician William Smellie noted in 1779, “is altogether uncertain, especially in the human species, because opportunities of opening pregnant women so seldom occur.”⁸⁰ One had

to take the cases when they came along and make up a narrative as best one could.

Albrecht von Haller, for example, one of the giants of eighteenth-century biological science, simply projected male sexual experience onto women. He did this not because he had any particular interest in maintaining the skewed symmetry of the Galenic model, but because the analogy of the sexually aroused woman to the sexually aroused man seemed so commonsensical:

When a woman, invited either by moral love, or a lustful desire of pleasure, admits the embraces of the male, it excites a convulsive constriction and attrition of the very sensible and tender parts, which lie within the contiguity of the external opening of the vagina, after the same manner as we observed before of the male.

The clitoris grows erect, the nymphae swell, venous blood flow is constricted, and the external genitalia become turgid; the system works “to raise the pleasure to the highest pitch.” A small quantity of lubricating mucus is expelled in this process but, more important, “by increasing the heights of pleasure, [it] causes a greater conflux of blood to the whole genital system of the female,” resulting in an “important alteration in the interior parts.” Female erection, inside and out. The uterus becomes hard with inflowing blood; the Fallopian tubes engorge and grow “so as to apply the ruffle or fingered opening of the tube to the ovary.” Then, at the moment of mutual orgasm, the “hot male semen” acting on this already excited system causes the extremity of the tube to stretch still further until, “surrounding and compressing the ovarium in fervent congress, [it] presses out and swallows a mature ovum.” The extrusion of the egg, Haller points out finally to his learned readers, who would probably have read this torrid account in the original Latin, “is not performed without great pleasure to the mother, nor without an exquisite unrelatable sensation of the internal parts of the tube, threatening a swoon or fainting fit to the future mother.”⁸¹ The evidence for this scenario was scanty, but there is some in the literature. An English anatomist in 1716, for example, dissected a woman who had just been executed and purportedly found one tube “clasped around the ovarium”; upon investigating how this might have come about, he learned that “she had enjoyed a man in prison, not long before execution.”⁸²

Intercourse continued to be linked to ovulation and to an inner drama

that, as in Haller's account, could be plausibly marked by pleasure. W. C. Cruickshank, searching for rabbit ova in 1797, found the corpus luteum only after coition, from which he concluded that "the ovum is formed in and comes out of the ovarium after conception." (The corpus luteum, the "yellow body," is formed after an ovarian follicle releases the egg. It is now known to secrete progesterone, which maintains the uterine lining in a state suitable for implantation. In most mammals it forms "spontaneously," independent of intercourse or conception, because ovulation occurs spontaneously; but in rabbits, which are generally coitally induced ovulators, it would not be present except in the circumstances Cruickshank describes.) But, more important, there seemed to be evidence for a real battle in wresting the egg from the ovary. The Fallopian tubes, he thought, "twisted like wreathing worms . . . [which] embraced the ovaria (like the fingers laying hold of an object) so closely, and so firmly, as to require some force, and even some laceration, to disengage them." Of course rabbits are not women, but Cruickshank clearly thought that his findings were applicable to humans, and so it would be surprising if so stormy a scene had no sensory correlative. The evidence would thus suggest that ovulation, like male ejaculation, would occasion some pleasurable feeling.⁸³

C. E. von Baer (1792–1876), the German-Estonian biologist who was the first actually to see the mammalian ova, was still convinced when he reported on his extraordinary series of observations in 1828 that only a bitch who had recently mated could produce the egg he was seeking.⁸⁴ Indeed up to the early 1840s almost all authorities believed that coitally induced ovulation in humans as well as in other mammals was the norm. Thus in the two-sex model, as before, the generative substances in *both* men and women were believed to be produced only during intercourse; only now it was thought by some that these events could routinely occur, in women, without sensation.

This does not mean that no one advocated the view that ovulation occurred spontaneously. (If it did take place without intercourse, then a sort of mechanical, passionless conception would seem likely.) But what were later taken to be critical data against coitally induced ovulation in humans were, until the second half of the nineteenth century, interpreted as anomalous. There was nothing decisive in the existence of scars or "cicatrices," that is, the remains of the corpus luteum in the ovaries of virgins; burst follicles in the ovaries of women who died during or just after menstruation; or simply more scars in the ovary than could be ac-

counted for by fruitful coition. Biologists seemed unwilling to let go of the idea that somehow the excitement of intercourse and sexual arousal was relevant to conception even if, miraculously, women did not feel any. Anesthetic conception, in other words, in no way followed from observation.

Thus John Pulley, an obscure eighteenth-century Bedfordshire doctor, found corpora lutea in virgins but argued that these scars were the result of uterine excitation induced through the unnatural "gratification" of desires, one presumes masturbation. Evidence from the dissection of "hysterical women" whose ovaries showed the signs of ovulation provided further proof, according to Pulley, for the role of sexual excitement in causing the extrusion of the egg.⁸⁵ Though forensic texts during the first half of the nineteenth century were generally skeptical of the notion that heightened pleasure signaled either conception or ovulation, and made much of the possibility of conception from nonconsensual intercourse, it remained perfectly plausible that ovulation did require the Sturm und Drang of coition or a reasonable facsimile. J. G. Smith wrote in a standard 1827 textbook that he could not deny that "there may be a sensible impulse conveyed by the excitement into which the uterine system appears to be thrown," when conception takes place. But, he said, many women are apt to imagine, out of hope or fear, that they have conceived—their reports on this matter are not to be trusted and can be of no practical concern.⁸⁶

On the other hand, the question of whether a corpus luteum is evidence of past pregnancy or of intercourse *was* of considerable significance to forensic physicians: "it is a celebrated question, of great importance both in physiology and forensic medicine, and much agitated in recent years."⁸⁷ The answer was a qualified and complicated no. Women did show signs of ovulation without pregnancy or even intercourse, the majority view held, but only because the female reproductive system could be coaxed into action by lesser stimuli, strong desire for example. So, while generally speaking the presence of a corpus luteum could be taken as evidence for a woman's having had intercourse or a pregnancy, it was far from conclusive proof. Since "all those causes which excite greatly the sexual organs" can cause ovulation, the presence of corpus luteum is not "taken alone . . . a certain sign of sexual union having occurred"; but taken together with other signs it must be regarded as good presumptive evidence.⁸⁸ "A jury ought to be cautious," said one authority in jumping to the conclusion, based on signs of ovulation, that a woman had not

been a virgin despite the “fact” that ovulation was generally occasioned only by fertile intercourse.⁸⁹ “Upon certain occasions,” advised another, “excessive salacity may detach the ovum” and leave the scars in question.⁹⁰ (There is added confusion here because nineteenth-century doctors could not distinguish between the larger and more visible scars of the *corpus luteum verum*—the much enlarged corpus luteum that remains until the fifth or sixth month of pregnancy—and the smaller remains of the *corpus luteum spurium*, which fades rapidly after two weeks if pregnancy does not occur.⁹¹)

A great deal rests on these controversies over the corpus luteum because they suggest that, as late as the early 1850s, no one had a clear idea of the circumstances governing the production of the egg. The evidence pointed to an even larger role for venereal excitement than in the old model of bodies and pleasures. Thus Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), professor of medicine at Göttingen and one of the most distinguished physicians of Europe, noted that ovarian follicles could burst without the effects of semen or even “without any commerce with the male,” but concluded from this simply that on occasion “venereal ardor alone . . . could produce, among the other great changes in the sexual organs, the enlargement of the vesicles” and even cause their rupture. Far from undermining the old orgasm-conception link, Blumenbach’s observations strengthened it; desire alone was enough to excite ovulation in certain sensitive systems. His English translator added supplementary anecdotal evidence: Valisneri’s report of finding vesicles protruding from the ovaries of an eighteen-year-old woman who had been brought up in a convent and gave every appearance of being a virgin, a situation “frequently observed in brutes during heat”; Bonnet’s report of a young woman who died “furiously in love with a man of low rank, and whose ovaria were turgid with vesicles of great size.” Though not too confident of his position, Blumenbach ended up even more committed to the importance of sexual excitement than Galen was:

On this point I find it difficult in the present state of knowledge to make up my mind; but I think it pretty evident that, although semen has no share in bursting the ovarium, the high excitement which occurs during the heat of brutes and the lascivious states of the human virgin is sufficient frequently to effect the discharge of ova. It is perhaps impossible otherwise to explain the fact that ova are so commonly expelled from the ovaria, and impregnated whenever a connection is arbitrarily or casually brought about.⁹²

Johannes Müller (1801–1858), a brilliant teacher and a leading proponent of physiological reductionism, also downplayed the evidence that might have suggested spontaneous ovulation in women. He argued that the presence of scars in the ovaries of virgins were merely signs of anomalous ovulation and not of normal ovulation independent of coition and conception. Though the exact forces that caused the thrusting of the egg into the Fallopian tube remained obscure, most of the evidence suggested that the egg itself was generated only as an immediate part of the process of fertilization itself. Humans worked like that ubiquitous experimental creature of the nineteenth century, the rabbit. Something spectacular was still thought to happen in coition, and medicine lent little technical support for the rise of passionlessness.⁹³

Nineteenth-century accounts of the mechanics of conception also offered no technical support for the notion of anesthetic intercourse and conception. What emerges is a new and vastly inflated role for semen, which somehow pushes, squeezes, or otherwise excites a woman’s insides and which, judging from the silence on the matter, is able to do so without her feeling anything. The distinguished Edinburgh physician John Bostock argued that in women “certain causes and especially the excitement of the seminal fluid” produced “an unusual flow of blood to the ovaria”; amid all the “excitement” a vesicle bursts and discharges a drop of albuminous fluid (the egg was still only imprecisely imagined), which is picked up by the erect Fallopian tubes embracing the ovary and carried down to the uterus.⁹⁴ Once again, we have a projection of male physiology inward. Another eminent obstetrician thought that the male sperm worked like an electric current coursing through the Fallopian tubes and causing the expression of the ovum; a major English medical handbook in 1836 postulated the swelling of the follicle as a consequence of sexual excitement and its bursting as the result of “an action which begins usually during sexual union, but which may also occur without any venereal orgasm.”⁹⁵

The remarkable thing about all these accounts is not that they are wrong by modern standards—humans ovulate, and the corpus luteum is formed, independent of intercourse, orgasm, or conception—or even that they are so rich in what today seem like improbable metaphors, but rather that they grant so large a role to female sexual excitement and genital arousal. More remarkable still is that they say so little about the accompanying sensations. Orgasm continues to play a critical part in conception but now those who suffer it need feel nothing.

In part this has nothing specifically to do with women or with intercourse. Sexual pleasure was not the only subjective quality to lose its place in the new medical science. The power of the anatomical-pathological model, as it emerged from Paris hospitals in the late eighteenth century, lay in its capacity to strip away individual differences, affective and material, so as to perceive the essence of health or disease in organ tissues. The autopsy, not the interview, was the moment of truth; corpses and isolated organs could not speak of pleasures.

The nineteenth century was the great age of the post-mortem, of pathology's ascendancy. During his career as pathological anatomist, Karl von Rokitansky, one of the founders of the discipline, is said personally to have made some 25,000 diagnoses. His department at the Vienna General Hospital performed some 2,000 autopsies a year during his tenure—over 80,000 by this estimate—probably more than had been performed in the entire previous history of medicine.⁹⁶ Because of the advent of large teaching hospitals with an almost endless supply of poor patients in most of the major cities of Europe, and because of increasing state interest in the causes of death, the number of bodies and organs available to the medical profession for research was almost unlimited. A new kind of medicine, and the new institutions in which it was practiced, made subjectively reportable states, such as pleasure, of relatively little scientific interest. The state of organs was what mattered, and indeed almost all of the evidence for the reproductive physiology of women prior to the end of the nineteenth century came from the ovaries, uteruses, and tubes removed from the dead or from surgical patients: "I now send for your inspection the ovaries of a young unmarried woman who died a few days ago," wrote the surgeon Mr. Girdwood to his colleague Robert Grant; on July 2, 1832, Sir Astley Cooper sent Robert Lee the ovary of a woman who died from cholera while menstruating; Emma Bull, who had only one period and who died of dropsy on May 23, 1835, was opened in the morning to reveal one smooth ovary and one with a single scar; a twenty-year-old virgin's ovaries showed all the stages of ovulation, thus providing still more evidence, a French doctor thought, for the independence of the process from sexual feeling.⁹⁷

The erasure of women's orgasm from accounts of generation is also not the simple result of male ignorance of, or willful blindness to, female genital anatomy. One of the obstetricians quoted above notes that the clitoris is "strictly analogous" to parts of the penis and that it contributes "a large share, and perhaps the greater part, of the gratification which the

female derives from sexual intercourse."⁹⁸ The 1836 handbook cited says straightforwardly that the "lower part of the vagina and the clitoris are possessed of a high degree of sensibility" but then claims, with no supporting evidence, that in "*some* women, but not in all" they are "the seat of venereal feelings from excitement" and that "in many women such feelings are altogether absent." Feelings were considered irrelevant to both the "fecundating power" of the male and the "liability of conception" of the female, but our author makes no similar claim about the absence of male pleasure. The argument seems to be that only women have an orgasm—how else does the egg get out?—but do not feel it. They have this capacity, as I reconstruct the argument, because human sexual feelings are under "the intellectual and moral powers of the mind." Civilization in all its political, economic, and religious manifestations mercifully leads mankind from "scenes and habits of disgusting obscenity among those barbarous people whose propensities are unrestrained by mental cultivation" to a state in which "the bodily appetites or passions, subject to reason, assume a milder, less selfish, and more elevated character."⁹⁹ In the literature I have examined, women's bodies in particular bear the marks of this civilizing process. The physiology of their bodies—in this instance, in many like it, and most powerfully in Freud—adapts to the demands of culture. Although women, like men, were held to experience erection (both of the clitoris and of the internal organs) excitement, and ejaculation, "many" could somehow do so without feeling anything. Again, the point is not to sort out what is, by modern standards, right or wrong about these propositions, but rather to note that culture and not biology was the basis for claims bearing on the role and even the existence of female sexual pleasure. As in the one-sex model, the body shifted easily in the nineteenth century from its supposedly foundational role to become not the cause but the sign of gender.

If one regards the question of female passionlessness as an essentially epidemiological question, about the correlation between orgasm and ovulation or conception, there was equally little known on either side of the issue. No one before the twentieth century had inquired into the incidence of women's pleasure during heterosexual intercourse and, as Havelock Ellis pointed out in 1903, "it seems to have been reserved for the nineteenth century to state that women are apt to be congenitally incapable of experiencing complete sexual satisfaction, and peculiarly liable to sexual anesthesia." He proceeds to cite scores of studies that purport, on the basis of almost no evidence, to speak to this novel is-

sue.¹⁰⁰ Adam Raciborski, the French physician who claimed to have discovered spontaneous ovulation in women, simply declares that three quarters of all women merely endure the embrace of their husbands, just as William Acton in the midst of his book about men thought that he need do no more to make his case than pronounce, "the majority of women are not much troubled by sexual feeling of any kind."¹⁰¹

No one knew the answer. One English writer pointed out in his chapter on "the relative amorousness of males and females" that in a field "so characterized by delicacy and silence," most people "judge others in the light of their own limited experiences." Or, as he might more accurately have observed, according to what they would have liked to believe. His own answer, with no supporting data, is that there are three, roughly equal classes of women: (1) those as passionate and responsive as the average man; (2) those less passionate but still taking pleasure "in sexual congress—*especially just preceding menstruation and immediately following its periodical cessation*"; and (3) those who experience no physical passion or pleasurable sensation and who endure sex out of duty. He concludes, disagreeing with his initial hypothesis, that category two is probably the largest after all, category one the smallest.¹⁰² Otto Adler, a late nineteenth-century German expert on these matters, presents an even less ingenuous case of passing off personal or social prejudice for scientific fact. He concludes that as many as 40 percent of women suffered "sexual anesthesia," among whom he included ten who reported that they either masturbated to orgasm or were subject to unconsummated but nevertheless powerful sexual appetites, and one who actually had an orgasm on the examining table as the good doctor examined her genitalia.¹⁰³

The peculiar problems of research in relating sexual pleasure to reproduction were due not only to biases but to professional politics and to the very doctrines of female passionlessness and delicacy that science was called upon to support. The comparative anatomist and birth-control advocate Richard Owen lamented that all theories of generation were "mere speculation": "Would more time have been spent on collecting the actual experiences of human beings." But such work was too difficult for the ignorant and beneath the dignity, or so they thought, of the learned.¹⁰⁴ A German physician, puzzled over how the ovaries became involved in reproduction, surmised that perhaps "libido" was after all the primary agent. In animals, he reasoned, the ovaries changed in time of heat; from a fellow physician he learned that a colleague's wife had long been barren

and "bore the masculine embrace without pleasure" but that "she felt libido once and immediately became pregnant." On the other hand, he also knew from his own practice that women became pregnant without feeling anything. There must be "many supremely interesting confidences" told to doctors by their patients, which if correlated would provide the answer. But, alas, politics and prudery stood in the way of epidemiology.¹⁰⁵ A Sicilian physician reported that patients spoke of nothing so much as sex, but that reporting to the profession on such matters was out of the question.¹⁰⁶

If the respectable physician had no direct access to information about the sexual experiences of women, they could sometimes report on what the husbands of these women had to say. An English writer with a determined empirical streak did just this. Forty out of fifty-two men said that the sexual feelings of their wives had indeed been dormant prior to marriage. This is no surprising result, given each man's presumed pride in his own awakening powers; more surprising is that fourteen out of the fifty-two husbands reported that their wives continued to feel no sexual desire.¹⁰⁷ Clearly the data are flawed by a less than satisfactory survey technique.

The first systematic modern survey of normal women's sexual feelings was one conducted by Clelia Duel Mosher starting in 1892. Based on the answers of some fifty-two respondents, it was inconclusive. True, 80 percent reported having orgasms, leading one historian to argue against the stereotype of the sexually frigid Victorian woman.¹⁰⁸ But as Rosalind Rosenberg points out, most of the women also reported considerable reluctance to have sex and that they would be happier left alone.¹⁰⁹ In short, almost nothing was known about sexual responsiveness among women in general, much less about its relation to ovulation or conception. (There was perhaps even less known about the sexual responsiveness and habits of men, but that is another story.)

Similarly, the epidemiology of infertility in relation to orgasm remained a cipher. In the old model, an ungendered absence of heat as suggested by lack of sexual desire or orgasm was regarded as a common and remediable cause of barrenness. In the new model, which questioned the very existence of female sexual desire, such matters ought to have been irrelevant. They were not. The first systematic survey on the subject, published in 1884, accepts the ancient account as its initial hypothesis. Matthews Duncan, a well-known London gynecological surgeon, was

convinced that the absence of sexual pleasure was a major cause of infertility. Yet he found that 152 out of 191 sterile women who consulted him (79 percent) said that they desired sex and that 134 out of 196 (68 percent) reported sexual pleasure, if not orgasm, in coition. Without comparable statistics for fertile women, these numbers mean little, but they seem to suggest quite the opposite of his initial hypothesis and also, incidentally, that English women did not merely lie back and think of Empire.¹¹⁰

Other than Duncan's survey, there is little except for a few impressionistic reports, all of which support not the new view of passionlessness but the old link between desire and conception. E. H. Kisch, a German specialist and spa doctor, was convinced that sexual excitement in women was "a necessary link in the chain that leads to impregnation." This conviction derived from his research into 556 cases of first pregnancy, which he found occurred seldom after first coition and most often between ten to fifteen months after marriage (a dubious claim) and from his personal experience that an unfaithful wife was more likely to conceive with her lover than with her husband. The inference from date of first pregnancy to the role of passion depended on the more fundamental observation that most women were sexually unawakened until marriage and that their capacity for erotic pleasure flowered slowly. Presumably, pregnancy coincided with full bloom.¹¹¹ B. C. Hirst, in a leading American obstetrics text from 1901, repeated the sort of impromptu clinical lore that had been around for centuries: the ideal condition for conception was mutual synchronous orgasm; conversely, in one of his cases a married woman had endured six years of frigid, infertile intercourse but had become pregnant when coitus and orgasm finally coincided.¹¹² But how this was to be interpreted remained problematic. Commenting on female pleasure, the *Reference Handbook of Medical Sciences* (New York, 1900–1908) casually states: "Conception is probably more likely to occur when full venereal excitement is experienced."

In short, there was almost no specific new epidemiological information available during the nineteenth century on the incidence of female sexual desire or on its relation to conception. Indeed, as the next chapter will show, "moral" causes of infertility and other repercussions in the body of "good order" gone awry make their way into the world of scientific sex.