INTRODUCTION

# Body and Generation in the Early Modern Period

For the man is not of the woman; but the woman is of the man.

—SAINT PAUL, 1 Corinthians 12.8

Conception is indeed a dark business . . . full of shadows.

—W. HARVEY, *Disputations Touching the Generation of Animals*

Where were ferments and microbes before Pasteur? One can make sense of the world after Pasteur, as well as of the world before him, only through what Bruno Latour calls a "work of retrofitting—which includes history telling, textbook writing, instrument making, body training, and the creation of professional loyalties and genealogies."[1] I want to take Latour's critical urge to retrofit the past and bring it to bear on the issues of sex and generation by examining a time before words such as "genetics" and "ovulation" had entered the vocabulary, a time when medical books in the vernacular were, nevertheless, already teaching people how to reproduce "right" (or not to reproduce), and when newly fashionable conduct books were explaining how to behave correctly according to society's expectations and embedded class values.

For this purpose I plan to assemble, interpret, and contextualize the array of discourses on masculinity and paternity, as well as femininity and maternity, that informed Italian literature and culture from roughly the late fifteenth through the middle of the seventeenth century, with occasional forays into earlier and later times. I will examine plays, novellas, treatises, travel journals, *historiae,* poems, anecdotes, myths, and chivalric romances, because literature, being a reflection of the culture to which it belongs, has always displayed an interest in sexuality and in the organization of gendered identities. Given that it routinely gives a sexual meaning to a sexual act, literature has also been a fertile ground for the definition of what at any given time can be considered "normal" or otherwise. Since a practice of deductive inquiry was brought to bear in the early modern period on all epistemology and the gap between scientific and aesthetic knowledge was narrow, I will use medicine, theology, juridical law, and other culturally pregnant but historically "insignificant" incidents to make sense of my examples. Those among us who have a sense of history as providential can easily agree that it took too long for science to refute the notion that women are sexually poisonous or to dispel the anxiety about spontaneous generation that gripped the imagination of people at the dawn of our age. On the other

1. Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 170. Latour continues: "Without beginning to rework part of the philosophy of technology and part of the myth of progress, we won't be able to shake off the moral and political burden that the modernist settlement has so unfairly placed on the shoulders of nonhumans" (172).

hand, the study of how our predecessors dealt with these issues, and why they were obsessed with them, can be both illuminating and humbling, especially for those who see them as hardly different from modern fears—that expectant mothers can, for example, imprint on their unborn babies the sign of what they desire and that airborne germs cause disease.

It has become axiomatic that gender is constructed, that is, that masculinity and femininity are not fixed but are aligned with historical contingencies and prevalent sociocultural values through a process of constant retooling and watchfulness.[2] The standards, of course, are by definition shifting, because they hinge on social, religious, medical, juridical, philosophical, and historical variables. In the West, masculinity has been routinely identified with the universal—a definition that puts a great deal of pressure on men to behave "like men," while conferring some obvious advantages. Conversely, women have been the object of constant vigilance to make sure that they understand what is culturally expected of them within the limits of their sex. Ironically, proper gender alignment has been more relevant to men than to women, no matter the discrepancy in the amount of legislation meant to enforce decorum on maidens, wives, widows, and nuns (the four possible states of womanhood in the period that is my focus in this book). We know that men rarely dressed in women's clothes, unless in jest or during the Carnival season. We also know that women used male disguise, although not how many did so. For example, a successful play of the period, Gl'Intronati's *Gl'ingannati* (*The Deceived*), tells the audience almost offhandedly that nuns cross-dressed often, that convents were notoriously full of male clothing, and that women wore male clothes to go about their affairs at night.[3] In the city of Ferrara a statute authorized any man to check under a woman's dress to see whether she was wearing pants ("calzoni"). To control possible improprieties, however, the statute ordered the man's hand cut

2. Criticism on the subject is vast. See, for example, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), esp. 28–52.

3. In *Gl'ingannati,* the main female character, an adolescent called Lelia, chooses, for safety while traveling, to wear a male outfit lent to her by her relative, the mother superior, when she moves out of the convent where her father was temporarily keeping her. See Gl'Intronati, *Gl'ingannati,* ed. Ireneo Sanesi (1538; Bari: Laterza, 1912), 1.3. Gl'Intronati were a group of intellectuals from Siena who wrote under this collective (and self-deprecating) name.

off ("tagliata la mano") if he was wrong.[4] Never shy about divulging his sexual practices, the poet Pietro Aretino in a letter of 1547 thanked the generous Zufolina—a courtesan with a name her mother certainly did not give her—for having come to his house dressed once as a male and once as a female, with the objective of playing both.[5] But then in Venice it was a common practice for prostitutes to wear male clothes under their more gender-specific accoutrements, since they were paid more when they wore outrageous costumes.

Renaissance culture liked to project a fully empowered and virilized image of masculinity and encouraged frequent gestures toward male self-fashioning. Paintings of the time, for example, portray men in short hair and plumed hats, beards and rigid collars, their bodies erect and stiff, their eyes firmly beholding the onlooker. Gentlemen, courtiers, merchants, and youths often dressed in black, wore codpieces, and carried daggers pointing suggestively upward and swords placed firmly between their legs. In fact, all fashionable young men in the 1530s, we are told by the character Gherardo in *Gl'ingannati*, swagger around town with plumes in their caps (standing up stiffly in the Guelph style), their swords at their sides, and their daggers behind.[6]

This display of a strong erotics of masculinity contrasts with the representation of men frequently seen after the 1640s, when the Spanish style gave way to more ornamented and ostentatious French fashions. In the upper classes, this shift meant long, blond, powdered wigs, tight stockings, high heels, makeup, powder, beauty spots, and plucked eyebrows.[7] Extravagant as it may seem, the redundant, bewildering, hedonistic, baroque, bombastic poetry of, say, Giam-

4. See Alessandro Luzio and Rodolfo Renier, "Il lusso di Isabella d'Este marchesa di Mantova," *Nuova Antologia* 68 (1986): 463.

5. "Due volte la mia sorte bona ha mandato la vostra persona bella in casa mia e d'altri: una vestita da uomo, essendo donna, e l'altra, vestita da donna, essendo uomo. . . . Certo che la natura vi ha in modo composta in l'utriusque sesso, che in uno istante vi mostrate maschio, ed in subito femina . . . il favellar di voi è di donzella, e il proceder vostro di garzone." Aretino's letter is quoted in Lynne Lawner, *Le cortigiane* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1988), 23.

6. *Gl'ingannati*, 1.1.

7. The first French wig was introduced in Venice in 1665. See Rosita Levi Pisetzki, *Storia del costume italiano*, 3 vols. (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1964), 3:319–23. Arcangela Tarabotti gives a satirical catalogue of the feminized male lifestyle in *Antisatira in risposta al lusso donnesco* (Venice: Valvasense, 1644; reprinted in *Satira e antsatira*, ed. Elissa Weaver (Rome: Salerno Ed., 1998). See also Gabriele Martini, *Il "vitio nefando" nella Venezia del Seicento: Aspetti sociali e repressione di giustizia* (Rome: Jouvence, 1988), 95–97.

battista Marino, was liked because it provided an escape from an existence marked by political submission, rampant poverty, waves of epidemics, and the plague. The feelings of disempowerment and of demasculinization that these events must have created nourished in turn a divide between illusion and reality and encouraged fantasies of frivolity and impermanence. A new desire for the unusual started to inform a semiotics of masculinity that proclaimed the beauty of excess, the sensuality of the effeminate, the magic of the artificial, and the lure of caprice. To wit, the new fashion for opera theater, which began at that time, propelled to the forefront the languorous figure of the castrato, dressed at times as a woman and at times as a man, as the most successful and sought-after man on the Italian stage.

But then the sixteenth century too was concerned with gender slippages, so much so that cross-dressing became one of the most common features in both plays (for some critics, *the* most common feature) and chivalric romances. The newly invented genre of conduct books constantly reiterated what it takes for a man to behave like one or to be taken for one; and sumptuary legislation, although usually concerned with class prerogatives, offered repeated glimpses on what rituals confirmed or had to be followed to assure proper gender alignment. No matter how much men liked to project themselves as take-charge *pater familias,* the early modern period constantly showed fissures in this construction.

And then there was the castrato. As I will argue in the last chapter, the castrato started to be manufactured by surgeons and barbers for the sake of a voice uncannily and studiedly feminine, not in the "decadent" seventeenth century but as early as the middle of the supposedly manly sixteenth century. The presence of these sexually mutilated men in courts and in churches before they took the stage in large numbers problematizes not only the issue of how much men who call themselves men truly possess all characteristics of the male sex but also the issue of the gender with which castrati could or would align themselves. Their presence must have fostered a high level of sexual panic in men who had apparently little reason to worry about their own masculinity, at least in public, for a strong revulsion against the practice of prepubertal castration was often recorded. Castrati were known to wear items of feminine clothing in public, such as corsets and veils, especially at the height of their fashion; they carried makeup and rouge and were often called "prima donna" or "signora."[8] What gender were

8. See, for example the film *The Castrato Farinelli* (1995), an Italian and French coproduction directed by Gérard Corbiau, which reconstructs liberally the career of the most

they embodying or performing, and how much did surgical manipulation of their sex impinge, if at all, on their object choice?

Unlike gender, sex has been given in culture as something stable, that is, a man is a man when he possesses male and not female sexual organs. In cases when nature seems to have been more ambiguous, surgeons now literally carve a sex most resembling that which best follows an individual's predominant characteristics. But in the early modern period the stability of sexual categories was always at risk, and I am not talking here of castrati. Doctors were able to explain with more credibility than would be imaginable in our times how, for example, by running after a pig and jumping over a ditch, a fifteen-year-old French woman called Marie Germain became a man (later known as Germaine Garnier), recognized and certified as such upon medical investigation.[9] Responsible for the mishap were changes in bodily heat caused by Marie's unfeminine chase. Apothecaries, charlatans, midwives, and barbers were all called upon, alongside medical experts, to interpret and possibly correct the mechanisms of bodies in which fluctuating humors could produce havoc, where fears of engendering through putrefying and fermenting matter could infect the psyche even of educated men, and individuals whose femininity or masculinity had previously appeared unproblematic could suddenly discover themselves in limbo.

Genitalia, in short, did not constitute a clear-cut sign of difference, and a sex could always assume the features and the functions of the other: a man could, in effect, be constructed. Such is literally the claim that Angelo Dovizi da Bibbiena makes, as we will see in chapter 5, when he shows the character Calandro in *La calandria* to be made of detachable parts and prosthetic additions. The fact that the episode is awash in compensatory irony does not dispel the anxiety that sexual difference may be difficult to pinpoint or to secure. Such is also the evidence suggested by the practice of castration, which in freely "remaking" male sexuality invited questions on what the input of socialization was in making a man a man and whether beliefs in biological determinism were tenable.

As I concentrate on identity and generation in this book, I am aware that it is difficult to destabilize the male body as the site of sexual difference, since

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famous castrato singer ever and consistently shifts between representations of Farinelli as a man with, on the one hand, strong heterosexual interests and, on the other, a fascination for feminine bric-a-brac.

9. See Ambroise Paré (1517–90), *On Monsters and Marvels,* trans. Janis Pallister (1573; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), ch. 7.

through the centuries it has been constituted as the standard, because of the sexism inherent in much philosophical and biological enquiry. Still, I think it fruitful to investigate the performative nature of masculinity to show how problematic indeed it is for men to be virile, phallic, and active. Women's bodies have always been constructed as marked and incapable of fitting any cultural mold for good, even when restrained to their most deterministic function of bringing a pregnancy to fruition. Women, that is, unlike men, have always been supposed to perform femininity and construct their selves in accordance with a masculine ideal of what "women" are like. As Jacques Lacan famously put it, womanhood and masquerade are made for each other: "It is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the *Other,* that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved."[10] But then, should we not ask who is in charge in such a masquerade?

## *Engendering in the Early Modern Period*

Let me pause here and contextualize my argument by tracing the discourse on the functions of the male and female bodies as they were reflected in texts on reproduction in the early modern period. We know that medical pronouncements on engendering contained in the Hippocratic corpus, a collection of information dating from the end of the fifth century to the beginning decade of the fourth century B.C., still influenced Renaissance thought. The major Greek voice on the subject was of course Aristotle, specifically the Aristotle of *Generation of Animals,* as read in the early Middle Ages by the Arabic doctor Avicenna.[11]

10. Jacques Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus," in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne,* ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982), 74–85, esp. 84. For a fuller analysis of the masquerade of femininity focused on the Italian Renaissance and for a reconstruction of the critical thinking on the subject, from Joan Rivière to Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, Luce Irigaray, and Mary Ann Doane, see Valeria Finucci, "The Female Masquerade: Ariosto and the Game of Desire," in *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature,* ed. Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 61–88.

11. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), *Generation of Animals* [hereafter *GA*], trans. A. L. Peck (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Avicenna (ibn-Sina, 980–1037), *Canon* (*Liber Canonis*) (Venice, 1507; facsimile, Hildesheim: Olms, 1964). For Avicenna's influence in the period, see Nancy Siraisi, *Avicenna in Renaissance Italy: The Canon and Medical Teaching in Ital-*

Roman gynecological thought also weighed in with Soranus of Ephesus, who wrote in the second century A.D.[12] Medieval Latin treatises on generation and obstetrics attributed to Trotula and the school of Salerno and heavily influenced by Soranus had a large circulation and were translated into a number of vernacular languages before they were printed in 1544.[13] But the figure towering above all practitioners and influencing every single aspect of embryology at the time was undoubtedly Galen of Pergamum, personal physician to the Roman emperor Commodus, who united the Hippocratic and Aristotelian traditions and forcefully impacted the West after the translation of his work (almost 120 medical treatises) into Latin in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[14] Galen's views were held and confirmed through newly fashionable anatomical explo-

*ian Universities after 1500* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). The widest circulation of the *Canon* occurred between 1470 and 1520.

12. Soranus, *Gynecology* (*Gynmaeciorum libri IV*), trans. Owsei Temkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956).

13. Trotula, *The Disease of Women* (*De mulierum passionibus*), trans. Elizabeth Mason-Hohl (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1940). See also Monica Green, "Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe," *Signs* 14 (1989): 434–73.

14. Galen (130?–199?), *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (*De usu partium corporis*), 2 vols., ed. and trans. Margaret May (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), vol. 1, bk. 14: "Reproductive Tract." The *Opera Galeni* was produced in Venice, first in Greek (the Aldine edition) in 1525 and then in Latin (the Giunta edition) in 1541–42, and was soon rendered in a number of vernacular languages. Robert Durling assesses 630 editions or translations between 1473 and 1600. See Durling, "A Chronological Census of Renaissance Editions and Translations of Galen," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 24 (1961): 230–305. Galen's *De anatomicis administrationibus* became important for the anatomical studies of Vesalius in the 1540s; his *Thrasybulum,* however, impacted only later. Although by the end of the sixteenth century, as a result of anatomical observations and following attacks by Vesalius, Paracelsus, and Fracastoro, Galen's influence on medical thought started to wane, the best medical university in Italy, Bologna, still made him the only authority in surgery in 1586 through a change in curriculum. See Durling, "A Chronological Census," 245. The three major medical texts taught in Italian medical schools from the sixteenth century through the eighteenth were Hippocrates's *Aphorisms,* Galen's *Ars medica,* and Avicenna's *Canon*. The standard medical book, *Articella,* which appeared continuously after 1476 and from which all students studied, favored Galen over the other two. When Paracelsus's work became known, Hippocratic medicine gained favor. See Siraisi, *Avicenna*. Another influence on medical teaching was Cornelius Celsus's *De medicina* (first century A.D.), rediscovered in the fifteenth century, which contained sections on pharmacy, dietetics, and surgery.

rations by the majority of Renaissance doctors, including Andreas Vesalius.[15] Highly respected were the *praecepta* on fertility by Albertus Magnus, who combined Aristotelian and Galenic sources; and at the local level the observations of the fifteenth-century Paduan doctor Michele Savonarola.[16] In general, Aristotelian thought dominated philosophy and Galenic thought influenced medical research.

For Aristotle, woman was a passive creature who desired sexual union with man in order to complete herself.[17] Her body was a vessel that received and

15. Andreas Vesalius (1514–64), *On the Fabric of the Human Body* (*De humani corporis fabrica*), trans. William Richardson (1543; San Francisco: Norman, 1998). See also Prospero Borgarucci, *Della contemplazione anatomica, sopra tutte le parti del corpo humano* (Venice: Valgrisi, 1564); and Giovanni Valverde (1525–88) *Anatomia del corpo humano* (Rome: Salamanca et Lafréry, 1560). Dissection was forbidden in earlier times but was possible by the fourteenth century, although embalming was not. Male bodies were more easily available than females, since the cadavers permitted for dissection were those of criminals. Doctors preferred drowned subjects to those hanged because they were thus assured that the bone structure had not been compromised. See Roger French, *Dissection and Vivisection in the European Renaissance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999). Since dissection was performed to instruct on known human physiology rather than to discover more about it, it did very little to displace philosophical givens on bodily functions. See Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 89; and William Brockbank, "Old Anatomical Theatres and What Took Place Therein," *Medical History* 12 (1968): 371–84.

16. Albertus Magnus (1193?–1280), *De secretis mulierum* (Lyons: De Marsy, 1595); Michele Savonarola (1385–1466?), *Practica Major Jo Michaelis Savonarolae* (Venice: Giunta, 1559); and *De regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium,* now in *Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico in volgare,* ed. Luigi Belloni (Milan: Stucchi, 1952). For a voluminous excursus on medical opinions on the uterus and its function from Greek times to the beginning of this century, see Felice La Torre, *L'utero attraverso i secoli: Da Erofilo ai giorni nostri* (Città di Castello: Unione Arti Grafiche, 1917).

17. For the Renaissance medical discourse that I put forward in these pages, I am particularly indebted to the work of Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study on the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages,* trans. Matthew Adamson (Princeton: Princeton

cultivated the male seed until it discharged a fully formed infant. The importance of the mother for Aristotle was therefore accidental: she provided the "matrix," but her mate gave everything else: seed, a sensitive and rational soul, and physical features. The man, because he was hotter than the woman, also determined the sex of the newborn — the better sex being male, of course, since only male fetuses were complete for Aristotle, though females were necessary to the reproduction of humans. Even in the middle of the sixteenth century the Venetian anatomist Niccolò Massa took pains to explain that the word "matrix" does not come, as we would imagine, from the Greek noun *meter* (mother) but from *metra,* "resembling a vessel which preserves the foetus."[18] For Aristotle the signs of man were the penis and scrotum and the active principle to generate, that is, the seed; those of woman were the uterus and a passive, nongenerating principle, the *catamenia,* that is, menstrual discharge. Although both seed and *catamenia* are identified as surplus bodily productions, only men were able to produce a secretion potent enough for engendering. Paternity is what defines men, and maternity what defines women: he reproduces in her, and she hosts the generated embryo.[19]

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University Press, 1988); Stephen Greenblatt, "Fiction and Friction," in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 66–93 and 175–84; and Helen Lemay, "Human Sexuality in Twelfth- through Fifteenth Century Scientific Writings," in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church,* ed. Vern Bullough and James Brundage (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1982), 187–205. For a visual excursion into discourses of the body, see Zirka Z. Filipczaz, *Hot Dry Men, Cold Wet Women: The Theory of Humors in Western European Art, 1575–1700* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1997). Rudolph Bell's book *How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) (see esp. chs. 2 and 3) unfortunately appeared after I had completed the relevant medical sections of this book but should certainly be consulted.

18. Niccolò Massa (1485–1569), *Introductory Book of Anatomy* (*Liber introductorius anatomiae*) (Venice, 1536), reprinted in *Studies in Pre-Vesalian Anatomy: Biography, Translations, Documents,* ed. Levi Robert Lind (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1975), 174–253, esp. 204. For a hilarious survey of literature on the activity of the male sperm and the passivity of the female ovum, see Emily Martin, "Body Narratives, Body Boundaries," in *Cultural Studies,* ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 409–19.

19. See Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Aristotle and Women," *Journal of the History of Biology* 9.2 (1976): 183–213; and Vern Bullough, "Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women," *Viator* 4 (1973): 485–501.

Unlike Aristotle, the Hippocratics believed that women contributed to generation, although because of their relative lack of body heat their contribution was not exactly equal: the male produced a stronger sperm and the female a weaker one. But males and females tended to produce differently at any given time, which explained the difference in sexes. Quantity was also important, and abundant albeit weak sperm could still produce a boy. It all depended on the mixture. For Galen, women, like men, produced semen, but theirs was colder and therefore less determinant than male semen, given that women's nature was cold and humid, in contrast to the hot, dry nature of men. He thus clearly assigns a role in generation to women, although not as strongly as the Hippocratics before him.

These views were reflected widely in the learned literature of the period. Dante described procreation as a sequence of events in which male activity meets female passive materiality. The semen mingled with menstrual blood, as in Aristotle:

> Ivi s'accoglie l'uno e l'altro insieme,
> l'un disposto a patire e l'altro a fare
> per lo perfetto loco onde si preme.
>
> There the one is mingled with the other, one designed to be passive, the other to be active, by reason of the perfect place whence it springs.[20]

In the most influential treatise on the politics of court life in the Renaissance, Baldassarre Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano,* the view expressed is predominantly Aristotelian on issues of form and matter, but Galen creeps in: Castiglione assigns to a misogynist character by the name of Gasparo the view that the birth of a woman constitutes a mistake or defect and is contrary to nature's wishes; he then counters this view with another, assigned to a liberal, the Magnifico Giuliano, who answers that both man and woman are necessary to engendering:

> nè so come possiate dire che la natura non intenda produr le donne, senza le quali la specie umana conservar non si po. . . . Perciò col mezzo di questa compagnia di maschio e di femina produce i figlioli; . . . [e] l'una e l'altro

20. Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio,* in *The Divine Comedy,* ed. and trans. Charles Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 25.46–48.

> insieme vengono a generare, la qual cosa far non possono alcun di loro per se stessi.
>
> You cannot possibly argue that Nature does not intend to produce the women without whom the human race cannot be preserved. . . . For by means of the union of male and female, she produces children; . . . both join together for the purpose of procreation which neither can ensure alone.[21]

In Giovan Battista Gelli's *La Circe,* women are unable to generate, but they provide the "vegetative soul" ("l'anima vegetativa") that makes the new being grow. The process is identical to that of a hen, which can make, as well as grow, the egg, but cannot bear offspring unless she has consorted with a cock.[22]

As many historians of science have pointed out, the issue of who contributed what was important, not because it was biological but because it was political: woman needed to be postulated as inferior and man as superior, no matter what a scientific investigation might prove.[23] The issue, in short, had nothing to do with women as real beings. Emilia Pio, who directs the courtiers' conversation in the *Cortegiano,* recognizes that much when she asks the courtiers to stop their useless debate on matter and form: "Per amor di Dio, — disse, — uscite una volta di queste vostre 'materie' e 'forme' e maschi e femine e parlate di modo che siate inteso" (3.17.222; "In heaven's name, leave all this business of matter and form and male and female for once, and speak in a way that you can be understood"). Undaunted, the men resume the conversation and start expounding on hot men and frigid women. In fact, although Galen's theory that women were needed in

21. Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528; Milan: Mursia, 1972); translated as *The Book of the Courtier,* ed. and trans. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1976), 3.14.220; and 3.16.222 [hereafter in the text; the numbers refer to book, section, and page number]. For Gasparo's ideas on women, see 3.11.218.

22. Giovan Battista Gelli (1498–1563), *La Circe,* in *Trattatisti del Cinquecento,* 2 vols., ed. Mario Pozzi (Milan: Ricciardi, 1978), 1:1067–1158, esp. 1117. No matter the import of this observation, Renaissance medicine did not know the female ovum. It was discovered in 1651; spermatozoa were identified in 1670. William Harvey, the father of modern embryology (*De generatione animalium,* 1651), thought that the ovum was the result, and not the cause, of conception. He also noticed that women could conceive without emission of fluids. See Angus McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals: The Perception of Fertility in England from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1984), 22.

23. See, for example, Laqueur, *Making Sex;* Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?;* Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine;* and Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex.*

procreation because they provided more than passive semen was already quite modest, thinkers such as Taddeo Alderotti and Cesare Cremonini, both Neo-Aristotelians, downplayed the woman's role further. Kaspar Hoffman, a Galenist, denied woman had semen at all.[24] A woman who could produce semen—like a man—and also provide the body for the fetus to develop—which man could not—had too much power. So these early theorists devised a weakness: her organs were inferior to those of the male because she had less body heat and higher humidity. This view that the male body was superior to the female's persisted as late as the eighteenth century, even though available data, dissection, and study of both male and female cadavers (including their brains), seemed to show otherwise.[25]

If medical thought was adamant in denying woman too much importance in procreation even while postulating the two-seed theory, it was even more adamant in denying that woman's body, and therefore her functions, could be independent from men's. Male and female organs were considered homologous—as a number of medical treatises of the time reiterated, even those written in the vernacular, which the middle class preferred—no matter what visual, medical, and anatomical surveys could reveal. The only difference between the organs of women and men was that female organs were inside the body (because women lacked heat) and those of males were outside.[26] Since the standard was male, it was woman's body, not man's, that had ostensibly to be constructed and explained. The vagina was considered a "spermatic vessel," like the penis, and was in fact thought to be an inverted penis cavity; the ovaries stood for male testes

24. On Alderotti (1223–1303), see Nancy Siraisi, *Taddeo Alderotti and His Pupils: Two Generations of Italian Medical Learning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 188–200; on Cremonini and Hoffman, see Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman,* 36.

25. In *The Anatomy of the Human Bones,* Alexander Munro, for example (already in 1726), wrote that "The Bones of Women are frequently incomplete, and always of a Make in some parts of the Body different from those of the robust Male." See Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?,* 193. A favorite bone was the pelvis, for its relation to woman's maternal functions. Plenty of explanations had to be given to the fact that female craniums appeared larger than those of the males; doctors and cultural historians who had argued that women were naturally predisposed to maternity, given the relative largesse of their pelvises, had now to come up with creative reasons to justify what difference in brain size meant for this sex.

26. As Galen put it, "All the parts, then, that men have, women have too, the difference between them lying in only one thing . . . that in women the parts are within [the body], whereas in men they are outside." See *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body,* 2.14.628.

and were called *testiculi* well into the eighteenth century; the female prepuce was compared to the foreskin; and the uterus corresponded to the scrotum.

Whatever men did, women did as well: since conception required that men had an orgasm and ejaculated, women had to experience the same. Female secretions thus were thought to be female sperm; they were necessary to conception—up to a point.[27] Only at the end of the sixteenth century did women

27. New discoveries did not dislodge the firmly held view of the one-sex body: as Laqueur writes, Vesalius's realization that the left testicular vein comes from the kidney and not from the vena cava, and therefore that the watery fluid it carried might have some bearing on conception, made no difference to the then current theory; the fact that Leonardo da Vinci found that uterine vessels did not lead to the breast and that milk could not be concocted from blood in the womb to form a fetus also made no impact; the discovery (or recovery) of the clitoris in 1559 by Realdo Colombo or Gabriele Falloppio and Fallopio's discovery of the Fallopian tubes also changed nothing. Neither did the discovery of the prostate, which would have proved male and female bodies different. Drawings of the period show the two sexes as identical. In fact, even observations made during dissection of female cadavers generally did not challenge those postulated theoretically: the anatomist Alessandro Achillini (1463–1512) dissected two women and still did not see where the left seminal vessel enters the kidney, a discovery that would have disproved the view that females were inferior to males because their blood was not cleansed when exiting the vena cava. See *Anatomical Notes* (*Annotationes anatomicae,* 1520) in Lind, *Studies in Pre-Vesalian Anatomy,* 49; and Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex,* 138. At other times anatomists added to the female body what was not there. Vesalius, for example, even though he had, by his own recognition, access to a good number of female cadavers for dissection, thought for a while that horns came from the side of the womb, just as Galen had asserted. See Andreas Vesalius, *Tabulae anatomicae,* in *The Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels,* ed. J. B. de C. M. Saunders and Charles O'Malley (1538; Cleveland: World Publishing, 1950), pl. 87, fig. 2–4. Also inaccurate is the uterus drawn by renowned anatomist Jacopo Berengario da Carpi (pseud. Giacomo Barigazzi, ca. 1460–ca. 1530) in his *Carpi commentaria cum amplissimus additionibus super Anatomia Mundini* (Bologna: De Benedictis, 1521). See Loris Premuda, *Storia dell'iconografia anatomica* (Milan: Martello, 1957), 98. Recently Gianna Pomata has contested the theory of the one-sex body by demonstrating that the naturalness with which men accepted spontaneous bleeding—often confused with menstruation when it had a certain regularity, no matter from which part of the body blood was exiting—speaks for a way of constructing the male body not as the standard but as modeled on the female (considered here as better because able to get rid of extra blood). See "Menstruating Men: Similarity and Difference between the Sexes in Early Modern Europe," in *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity to Early Modern Europe,* ed. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 109–52. Janet Adelman's objection to Laqueur's

cease to be seen as failed men, and only in the late seventeenth century were the sexes considered no longer homologous and hierarchically placed but simply different, with the movement toward preformationism (as embodied, for example, by Nicolas Malebranche and Marcello Malpighi) and the concept that fully formed individuals existed within ova or spermatozoa.[28]

The rules of generation were relatively simple: in the economy of anatomical similarity, women conceived when there was suitable heat, correct body position, adequate arousal, sufficient rest, proper food, satisfactory concoction of semen, fitting psychological state, right moment of the month and of the day, and appropriate phase of the moon. When the combination was optimal, a male child was the guaranteed outcome.[29] For Aristotle, male sperm equaled female menses. Both came from blood, but due to their heat deficiency females were less able than males to reduce its quantity and purify it; males, by contrast, had the heat to make it turn whitish. Women contributed no semen, since they discharged it all in their menses. True, they seemed to have a discharge following genital stimulation, but not all women, only the fair-skinned and the most femi-

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model—that theories advocated by Galenist doctors of continental Europe were not really received in England—obviously does not apply to Italy. But her point, that "the elevation of the one-sex model to hegemonic status . . . sometimes turns out to be only the most recent way of reinforcing lack," is well taken. See her "Making Defect Perfection: Shakespeare and the One-Sex Model," in *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*, ed. Viviana Comensoli and Ann Russell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 23–52, esp. 25.

28. Even then the struggle between proponents of ovism (who thought that the female ovum contained a preformed being) and proponents of animalculism (who thought that the male sperm held within itself a miniature being) settled in favor of the male. In fact, the view that females are colder than males still has its committed followers today. In psychological parlance, for example, a woman can be characterized as a sexually frigid creature. Freud himself, reflecting the nineteenth-century obsession with the uterus, had no problem in connecting vaginal frigidity "to the essence of femininity" and in considering woman, as a result of humors induced by her uterus, more prone to melancholia, mood shifts, and depression. See Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," *Standard Edition* [hereafter *SE*], 24 vols., ed. and trans. James Strachey (1905; London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 7:125–243 (1953), esp. 221.

29. How to do it was even illustrated by that singular reporter of bodies, limbs, and musculature, Leonardo da Vinci. In "Coitus" he carefully sketched how copulation works from inside the body. See *Leonardo nelle biblioteche milanesi: Edizioni e riproduzioni*, ed. Giulia Bologna (Novara: Istituto Geografico de Agostini, 1983), 78.

nine types.[30] Women could also conceive without experiencing pleasure: they simply needed to be excited. According to Galen, a baby's sex was determined by both parents in tune with their body temperature. Male seed produced from the right testis combined with female seed produced from the right ovary and deposited in the right side of the uterus engendered a boy; the process was reversed for a girl.[31] Male fetuses were also formed faster than female fetuses and moved earlier. Conception could take place only if the man actively aided the woman.[32]

Premature ejaculation or having a uterus too moist or too dry constituted a problem. How to explain then that some women became pregnant even without having an orgasm or as a result of being raped? Soranus and many doctors after him argued that such women must have somehow enjoyed intercourse, even if they were unaware of it in their desire to keep the experience out of their mind.[33] The degree of wishful thinking that the theory of necessary female

30. *GA* 1.20.728a.

31. Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body,* 2.14.626–28. In the pseudo-Galenic *De spermate* (*The Seed*) in circulation during the Middle Ages, the combination of weak or strong male and female seed was fraught with risk: a weak male and a strong female seed could engender a hermaphrodite; a strong male and a weak female seed could give the same results. See Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine,* 141. For a sense of how haphazard and complicated the combination of humors of men and women could be at any given time, see the treatise on how to engender an intelligent boy from an intelligent father—not an easy task—by Juan Huarte de San Juan (1529?–1588), *Essamina de gl'ingegni de gli huomini accomodati ad apprendere qual si voglia scienza* (Venice: Barezzi, 1600). The original Spanish text, *Examen des ingenios para la ciencias,* was published in 1575; the first Italian edition in 1582. The book was placed in the Index after the Jesuit Antonio Possevino criticized its determinism.

32. The woman must enjoy sex in order to conceive, as Michele Savonarola notes, "la dona engravidare non se può senza suo gran dilecto recevuto in tal acto." See *Trattato utilissimo di molte regole, per conservare la sanità, dichiarando qual cose siano utili da mangiare, e quali tristi, e medesimamente di quelle che si bevono in Italia* (Venice: Eredi di Gioanni Paduano, 1554), 40. See also Realdo Colombo (1515?–59), *De re anatomica* (Venice: Bevilacqua, 1559), 242–43 and 246. Unfortunately for women, early in the nineteenth century female orgasm started to be considered irrelevant to conception; later it came to be understood that women ovulate whether or not intercourse has taken place. Ovulation was discovered in the nineteenth century.

33. Soranus, *Gynecology,* 36. See also Ann Hanson, "The Medical Writers' Woman," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World,* ed. David Halperin, John Winkler, and Froma Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 309–37, esp. 315. McLaren notices that only from the nineteenth century on, did courts of law no

orgasm requires is indeed staggering. Were philosophers and theoreticians so out of touch with reality as not to know what was going on in the bedroom? Or were women just as experienced in the art of faking it as they seem to be today? The only difference between the sixteenth and the twenty-first centuries is in their agenda: in the Renaissance, orgasmic behavior would have shown that they were "real" women, that is, proper procreative partners; in our days, that they are "real" women, that is, sexually liberated companions.[34]

In his treatise on gynecology, Antonio Guainerio recommended not only that women be submitted to some amount of foreplay for the purpose of conceiving, but that men too, if necessary, use stimulants; an example was crushed pepper, to be chewed and then spread with saliva on the penis before intercourse.[35] Reflecting the culture of his times, the Venetian doctor Giovanni Marinello suggested that men prepare themselves with sweet-smelling "suffumiges" and oil their penises with civet, musk, or other substances one hour before going to bed. They should avoid cold drinks to avoid chilling the sperm.[36] Gabriele Falloppio urged parents to work early with their hands on their boy's penis to assure that it would become sufficiently long and serviceable with an eye to future adult engagements.[37] Another doctor, Girolamo Cardano, recommended that men remain active, eat roasted rather than boiled food, recharge themselves with good bread, and drink wine.[38] Giambattista della Porta extolled the power of satyrion (orchid), because it gave men plenty of sperm, lengthened intercourse, and excited women, though lettuce had to be avoided, he warned, and saffron

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longer assume that a pregnant rape victim had enjoyed forced intercourse. See *Reproductive Rituals,* 27.

34. For a witty discussion on the pleasures of faking it in the Renaissance, see Marjorie Garber, "The Insincerity of Women," in Finucci and Schwartz, *Desire in the Renaissance,* 19–38.

35. Antonio Guainerio (Anthonius Guainerius, d. 1448), *Tractatus de matricibus (Treatise on the womb)*, in *Opera Ommia* (Pavia: n.p., 1481), fol. z4va–b. On Guainerius, see Helen Lemay, "Anthonius Guainerius and Medieval Gynecology," in *Women of the Medieval World,* ed. Julius Krishner and Suzanne Wemple (London: Blackwell, 1985), 317–36.

36. Giovanni Marinello (d. ca. 1576) *Le medicine partenenti alle infermità delle donne* (Venice: Francesco de' Franceschi, 1563), 2.1 and 2.8; abridged version in *Medicina per le donne nel Cinquecento: Testi di Giovanni Marinello e di Girolamo Mercurio,* ed. Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi et al. (Turin: UTET, 1992).

37. Gabriele Falloppio (1523–62), *Secreti diversi e miracolosi* (Venice: Bonfad, 1658).

38. Girolamo Cardano (1501–76), *De subtilitate libri XXI: De hominis natura et temperamento* (Basel: Henricpetri, 1582), 376.

could kill conception altogether.[39] Niccolò Machiavelli too believed in satyrion to further male virility. Fantasizing in the play *Clizia* on the best way to fortify himself for his upcoming encounter with the virginal Clizia, the character Nicomaco announces that he will take "satirione" and a dinner of onions, fava beans, spices, and pigeon meat cooked rare.[40]

Woman's position in assuring conception was also deemed important. To nobody's surprise, all doctors and commentators agreed that what has come to be known as the missionary position was most conducive to the purported goal: the woman was to lie below the man, but in such a way as to allow her body to participate in the sexual act. Showing some penchant for gymnastics, Guainerio recommended that the woman put her head low, her hips high, her left foot under her hip, and her right leg extended.[41] Reading the position positively for women, Lodovico Domenichi argued that it was nobler for women, after all, to look toward heaven during intercourse than down below, like men, which was more like what beasts do ("come le bestie fanno").[42] Michele Savonarola was specific on what parts of the woman's body needed to be touched: breasts, nipples, and everything below, plus clitoral stimulation, he said, were

39. Giambattista Della Porta (1535–1615), *Magiae naturalis* (Naples: S. Abbati Stampatori, 1558; reprint, Palermo: Il Vespro, 1979), 113–14. Satyrion was the root of choice to restore sexual desire and potency in men because its form mirrored the male organ. Paracelsus (1493?–1541) recommended it. See Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (New York: Karger, 1958), 149.

40. Nicolò Machiavelli, *Clizia,* in *Mandragola/Clizia,* ed. Riccardo Bacchelli (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1995), 4.2.

41. Guainerio, *Tractatus de matricibus,* fol. z4va–b. See also Lemay, "Anthonius Guainerius," 332. Sins against nature were harshly condemned by canon and civil law. Augustine had specifically called the sin worse in a wife than in a prostitute: "when a man seeks to exploit a woman's sexual parts beyond what is granted in this way, a wife becomes more basely if she allows herself rather than another to be used in this way." See Augustine, *The Good of Marriage,* in *De bono coniugali, De sancte virginitate,* ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 27.12. Thomas Aquinas also spoke against unnatural intercourse like onanism, sodomy, and bestiality. He deemed those acts worse than rape of a virgin because they entailed the use of the wrong vessel, the wrong body, and the wrong species respectively. See *Summa Theologica,* trans. Fathers of English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 2.2, qu. 154, arts. 11 and 12. See also Vern Bullough, "The Sin against Nature and Homosexuality," in Bullough and Brundage, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church,* 55–71.

42. Lodovico Domenichi (1515–64), *Della nobiltà delle donne* (Venice: Giolito, 1551), 112r.

good spots on which to concentrate in order to have woman "spermatize" ("spermatizare").[43] Girolamo Ruscelli suggested that the couple follow a collaborative technique. Insertion in the vagina of essences such as incense, for example, immediately after intercourse was a proven therapy. A woman could also increase her chances for pregnancy by eating tiny *polpi* (octopuses) roasted without oil.[44] In his *Secreti medicinali,* Pietro Bairo advised women to lie still for an hour after intercourse with their thighs together. Then for three days they had to treat the vagina with a solution of tar, frankincense, and oil to ensure conception.[45] Consumption of complicated apotropaic preparations, such as uteruses of rabbits and hares, was deemed effective, but drinking something as simple and ubiquitously available as cold water had to be avoided because it could cause barrenness or the birth of a female.[46] In general it was recommended that woman lie on her right side during or at least after intercourse to ensure conception of a boy and on the left when a girl was desired. Falloppio also advised women to keep their legs up as an extra insurance for proper engendering. By touching his wife's neck after intercourse, a husband could also know whether he had made his partner pregnant: a hot neck was a good sign.[47]

43. "Se debeno tocare l'uno l'altro, specialiter l'huomo la dona, quella tochendo e frichendo cum le decta il luoco fra il sexo e la natura: il perchè quello è il luoco exteriore nel quale le done ricieve più piacere, per la proximità di quello al collo de la matrice, dove hanno tuto el suo delecto; e per tal fricare se iritano più facilmente a spermatizare. Da puo' prolungare la coniunctione, quella tochendo pur cum le mane le mamelle e lezieramente i capi de quelle, iungendo basso a baxo per le galte, buocha et altri lochi, tochare spetialmente il luoco di sotto l'omblico." In *Il trattato ginecologico,* 41. For intriguing Renaissance recipes on how to stimulate sexual passion in men and women, see Emanuela Renzetti and Rodolfo Taiani, "Le cure dell'amore: desiderio e passione in alcuni libri dei segreti," *Sanità, scienza e storia* 2 (1986): 33–86; and Enrico Malizia, *Ricettario delle streghe: Incantesimi, prodigi sessuali e veleni* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1992).

44. Girolamo Ruscelli (d. ca. 1566), *De secreti del R. D. Alessio Piemontese* (Venice: Bonsadino, 1611), bk. 1, 16v and bk. 2, 8r.

45. Pietro Bairo (1468–1558), *Secreti medicinali* (Venice: Tebaldini, 1602), 194v. See also Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore,* trans. Tania Kroft-Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 233.

46. For example, Della Porta recommends the uterus of a hare, to be used eight or ten days after the onset of a woman's period. See *Magiae naturalis*. For other recipes, see Malizia, *Ricettario delle streghe,* 260. On the effects of cold water in Aristotle, see *GA* 4.2.767a. On cold water affecting heat in men's semen, see Marinello, *Le medicine partenenti,* 2.1.

47. Falloppio, *Secreti diversi,* 3:300–1. See also Ruscelli, *De secreti,* 3, 46v.

Men too were encouraged to assume a lifestyle that would help to make their wives pregnant. Too much sex was counterproductive, the philosopher and doctor Marsilio Ficino felt, since each ejaculation wounded the mind ("ferisce la mente").[48] In Castiglione's *Cortegiano* it is explicitly stated that men dry out more than women in copulation; as a result, they do not live as long as their companions (3:18.224). Prospective fathers, Savonarola wrote, following Avicenna, should be neither too young nor too old and not drunk or too sexually active.[49] Guainerio was more specific: to engender a son men must be robust, with large testicles (especially large right ones), and produce plenty of hot seed.[50] Penis size seemed to have something to do with conception. Perhaps addressing unspoken male fears, Aristotle asserted that shorter penises were better than longer ones because with short penises semen would have had less chance to cool when traveling down to the uterus.[51] Lean men also produced more sperm than fat ones because their nutrients did not become fat but were used up in copulation.[52] Avicenna, however, warned that too small a penis was perhaps insufficient to guarantee pleasure in women: the result could be disastrous for reproduction, since lack of female ejaculation meant no procreation. Moreover, he added, women might be left tempted to relieve themselves otherwise.[53] For Giovanni Marinello the problem was technical: a short penis, he worried, might be unable to get to the neck of the "matrix" (cervix) to engender, regardless of what the woman did.[54]

The time of the year most conducive to impregnation was spring; the best time of the day was six or seven hours after digestion had started. Savonarola suggested the very early morning hours ("la hora dil matutino").[55] Moon phases

48. Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), *Della religione christiana* (Florence: Giunti, 1563), 16. See also Antonio Dal Fiume, "Medici, medicine e peste nel Veneto durante il secolo XVI," *Archivio veneto* 62 (1981): 33–58. Intercourse was specifically discouraged at times of disease or sickness in order to conserve energy.

49. Savonarola, *Il trattato ginecologico,* 9.

50. See Lemay, "Anthonius Guainerius," 333.

51. *GA* 1.7.718a.

52. *GA* 1.19.727a.

53. Avicenna, *Canon,* 3.20.1.44. See also Laqueur, *Making Sex,* 50.

54. Marinello, *Le medicine partenenti,* 2.1.

55. Savonarola, *Trattato utilissimo,* 23. For hours, see also also Inge Botteri, "Ars amandi: Il galateo della procreazione responsabile," in *Educare il corpo, educare la parola nella trattatistica del Rinascimento,* ed. Giorgio Patrizi and Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Bulzoni, 1998), 123–63.

were also important, and those who wanted to become pregnant were advised to avoid engaging in sex when there was no moon. For Tommaso Campanella, not only should men and women wait for the right conjunction of stars and planets but also the uterus had to be clean, so that it would not taint the semen ("non ammorbi il seme col menstruo").[56]

Most doctors agreed that woman's best time for conceiving was at the very end of her menstrual cycle, when the vaginal canal was still moist but she was dry, when no corrupted blood was in circulation and the "matrix" was clean—and, as Savonarola describes it, hungry for man's semen ("il seme cum più apetito e dilecto riceve").[57] Timing intercourse for the second week after menstruation (as we now know, the time women actually ovulate) was considered a poor choice for couples hoping to have a boy; Girolamo Mercurio deemed eight or ten days before a woman's period the best for engendering males, because there was plenty of hot and humid blood in the uterus.[58]

Unfortunately, even in the best of circumstances, some women would not conceive. Sterility was considered mostly a female problem, and beautiful women were assumed to be less fertile than plain ones. Those least likely to engender were women who had not restrained themselves from having too much sex, Guglielmo de Conches wrote, for repeated use of the vagina caused inter-

56. Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639), *Del senso delle cose e della magia*, ed. Antonio Bruers (Bari: Laterza, 1925), 4.18.305.

57. Savonarola, *Trattato utilissimo*, 24–25. Among Savonarola's many contributions to gynecology, it pays to mention his invention of the "sella perforata," a half-moon-shaped birth chair that became widely used. See Ynez Violè O'Neil, "Giovanni Michele Savonarola: An Atypical Renaissance Practitioner," *Clio Medica* 10.2 (1975): 77–93, esp. 86.

58. Girolamo Mercurio (Scipion Mercurii, d. 1615), *La commare o riccoglitrice* (Venice: Ciotti, 1596), 1.13. An abridged version of this treatise is in Altieri Biagi, *Medicina per le donne nel Cinquecento*. Women were recommended to have sex at the end of their menses to maximize their chances of conceiving as late as the turn of this century. See McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals*, 46. Of course, if engendering had so many rules, keeping a woman from aborting was a never-ending preoccupation. Sperone Speroni instructed his pregnant daughter, Iulia, not to eat fresh cheese, not to have fish and fowl, not to get her legs cold, and not to warm her kidneys unduly by overdressing or by sleeping on her back. While garlic, fennel, and parsley were good, carrots and capers had to be cooked first, and lettuce, radicchio, endive, and pears had to be avoided altogether. See Sperone Speroni (1500–88), "Alla Magn. M. Iulia De' Conti a Padova," letter 16 (1561) in Pozzi, *Trattatisti del Cinquecento*, 1:809.

nal incrustations, which in turn made the sperm leak out.[59] There were saints invoked expressly to help against infertility in women, but none to plead for furthering the male generative potential.[60] To enhance chances of pregnancy, doctors concentrated first and foremost on menses or a lack thereof. Problematic periods were not an uncommon phenomenon at the time, since amenorrhea (*madrazza*) was rampant, due to improper or substandard nourishment. It is difficult to imagine today the depth of past physicians' concern with fluids that remained inside the body when they were supposed to be expelled; only too often they reverted to esoteric therapies to avoid, as Niccolò Massa put it, "the suffocation of the matrix" due to retention of the menses.[61]

Menstruation was theorized as discharge of impure blood or, better, as discharge of plethora unnecessary to woman at a time in which she was neither pregnant nor breast-feeding. Being traditionally connected with uncleanliness, especially from a religious point of view (during the Middle Ages menstruating women were not allowed in church and could not receive communion), women with menses were considered carriers of disease, especially smallpox.[62] The connection between woman and unpleasant smell was invoked straight from Latin: "foemina" came from "foetidas," the lore went, just as man had inscribed in his name his own virtue: "vir"/"virtus."[63] Sex had to be avoided during menses

59. Guglielmo de Conches, *Dialogus de substantiis physicis* (Strasbourg: Rihelius, 1567), 253.

60. See Evelyne Berriot-Salvadore, "The Discourse of Medicine and Science," in *A History of Women in the West: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes,* ed. Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 348–88. According to Marinello, a man might seem sterile but in fact be perfectly able to procreate with a different woman, and a better combination of humors. He also wrote that semen could be inactive if it was too liquid or if the man was melancholic, and therefore too cold. See *Le medicine partenenti,* 3.3.

61. See *Introductory Book of Anatomy,* 207. Massa declares that he saw this suffocation in the year 1526. Therapies to bring on menses were often herbal; radicchio and chamomile were recommended; more invasive practices included bloodletting and manual dilation of the uterus. See Maria Pia Casarini, " 'La madrazza': Malattia o occultamento della gravidanza," in *Il corpo delle donne,* ed. Gisela Boch and Giuliana Nobili (Bologna: Transeuropa, 1988), 87–101, esp. 94–95. Men were thought to expel their humors through sweat.

62. See Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 91 (1981): 47–73, esp. 60–61.

63. Changing the etiology around in order to defend women, Galeazzo Flavio Capra (1487–1537) argued instead that woman is not "foetida" but is ritually purged every month

because the male seed would not attach itself properly to female blood and a monstrous birth or leprosy in the infant could occur.[64] A number of Renaissance doctors, following the Hippocratics, recommended that to stabilize their menses girls should marry early and married women have regular intercourse.

One reason why some women were not fertile, physicians postulated, was that their wombs might have become displaced. Lack of intercourse, for example, caused problems, because a womb that was not kept sufficiently moist might wander in order to attach itself to moister organs such as the liver, the heart, and the brain. The womb was like an independent animal within a woman's body for Plato, though not for Galen.[65] Galen thought that the uterus moved as muscles contract and relax; it also influenced women's mood (*hystera,* whence "hysteria," is Greek for "womb") and made them desire sex. A good way of drawing the womb back to its proper position was through fumigations, Guainerio recommended: a midwife would have a woman smell substances with foul odors and the womb that had been, for example, attached to the head would draw away as a result. Sweet-smelling substances were to be positioned in the meantime close to the vagina to attract the uterus back to its proper place. Rest and a therapeutic bath were to follow.[66] For Aristotle, lack of intercourse could not only displace a womb upward but also downward, since a prolapsed womb could be the result of lack of moisture, that is, of intercourse.[67] A displaced womb could also be the result of chills.

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"d'ogni ribaldaria e d'ogni altra cosa che la potesse macchiare per sì fatta via." See *Della dignità e eccellenza delle donne,* ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (1525; Rome: Bulzoni, 1998) 110. An abnormally large and dark "menstrual vein" was deemed responsible for the homicidal behavior of a woman improbably named Sancta who, having suffocated her twins, was condemned to die by the same method. When the anatomist Colombo dissected her, he had no problem in connecting her psychical disorder to her physical monstrosity. See Colombo, *De re anatomica,* 173.

64. See Ottavia Niccoli, "*Menstruum quasi monstruum:* Monstrous Births and Menstrual Taboo in the Sixteenth Century," in *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective: Selections from Quaderni Storici,* ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 1–25, esp. 2. At the very least, Jacquart and Thomasset write, a child conceived during a woman's period would have red hair. See *Sexuality and Medicine,* 73.

65. Plato, *Timaeus,* 91b–d.

66. Guainerio, *Tractatus de matricibus,* fol. y2ra.

67. Aristotle, *The History of Animals* [hereafter *HA*], in *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* 2 vols., ed. J. Barnes, trans. A. W. Thompson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984),

Even with the womb in the right place and with menstrual flow regular, women might be unable to become pregnant, it was feared, because their body passages were not correctly open. Since all passageways were connected, whatever could be smelled through the nose or mouth should also have been smelled through the vaginal canal. Thus, one way to check for proper opening, Marinello suggested, was to have the woman sit over something strongly smelling; the doctor would try to detect that odor directly from her mouth. If that was unsuccessful, pessaries were recommended.[68] Thorough cleansing of the vagina with fumigations, baths, and ointments were also highly advised to combat sterility. Bairo's counsel was to put a bag of "mercury herb" inside the vagina for three days and then to take a bath containing sufficient herbs to titillate any apothecary's greed: "feverfew, wormwood, oregon, wild mint, motherwort, camomile flowers, cloves, wild rue, storax, wood of a balsam tree, costmary, fruit of balsam, madder."[69] Another solution for Bairo was to fumigate the vagina with a concoction of dried testicles of fox, boar, or male pig combined with rennet and the wombs of hares, mixed with half that quantity of sugar and ground ivory. This potion had to be taken on an empty stomach.[70] Ruscelli recommended a vaginal fumigation of boiled mint repeated ten or twelve times to guarantee results; Leonardo Fioravanti opted for a purge, a syrup for the uterus, an electuary, and a bath. Sex had to follow right away.[71]

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7.582b. The fact that by the sixteenth century anatomists had clearly shown that there was no place in the body for the uterus to move had very little impact on either practitioners or lay people. See Laqueur, *Making Sex,* 110.

68. A woman with bad breath had of course problems in this respect. Pessaries were also used to cause abortions, with remedial pessaries then recommended to stop pain or heal ulcerations in the uterus. To precipitate an abortion in a woman who was afraid that she was pregnant, a Hippocratic practitioner recommended that she jump up and down, heels touching her bottom seven times, because she had not felt the semen slip out, unlike other times. This she did, whereupon "there was a noise, the seed fell out on the ground, and the girl looked at it in great surprise" (quoted in Hanson, "The Medical Writer's Woman," 322).

69. Bairo, *Secreti medicinali,* 193r–v. Translation in Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh,* 231–32.

70. Bairo, *Secreti medicinali,* 914r.

71. Ruscelli, *De secreti,* 3.38v–39r; Leonardo Fioravanti (1517–88), *De capricci medicinali* (Venice: Avanzi, 1573), 1.50. See also Domenico Furfaro, *La vita e l'opera di Leonardo Fioravanti* (Bologna: Società Tipografica Editori, 1963), 152.

No matter the amount and the detail of medical counsel available to rich and middle-class people, generation was at times feared as taking place beyond the control of both mothers and fathers, beyond the help of magical engendering herbs, and beyond God's providential plan. Many people—not just the uneducated—believed that a child could be born without a paternal imprimatur, or through a woman's encounter with an animal, or as a result of an incorrect disposal of semen, or by fiendish couplings and "chemical" concoctions. Sexual practices aimed at reproduction have been notoriously difficult to control, more so at a time in which the environment was thought to proliferate with insects and animals born without mothers and fathers, straight out of fermented and putrefied matter, and godly or devilish interventions in human affairs were believed to determine fetal abnormalities and the most worrisome changes in a newborn's physical features. Even the psyche of expectant mothers, it was widely believed, could play tricks, willed or unwilled, on the baby being formed, to say nothing of unfavorable climatic changes, unreliable menstrual patterns, or interracial and interspecies couplings.

Registered at all levels of the populace, such fears of ever present pollution and uncontrolled generation were less strange than they may appear to our eyes, since they were based on apparently sound scientific principles. For Aristotle locomotion is eternal, as is generation, which, by being necessary, is cyclical for simple bodies.[72] In the presence of heat, matter is continuously formed, and thus generation, even unorganized spontaneous generation, can be put in motion at any time, for act is potency. When the sun is near, what is generated is superior to what gets destroyed; the opposite happens when the sun moves further away from matter.[73] Aristotle, who deemphasized the importance of male orgasm in postulating that it did not by itself produce generative matter, did

72. Aristotle, *De generatione et corruptione,* in Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* 2.9.335b and 2.11.338a.

73. Beside *De generatione,* see Aristotle, *On the Heavens,* in *The Complete Works,* 2.7.289a; and *GA,* appendix A, n. 7. Pneuma for Aristotle is both internal and external and its presence "heats air. . . . For air, by nature, is moist and cold. . . . Add heat to this and one has a substance that is hot, moist, and frothy." Quoted in Michael Boylan, "The Digestive and 'Circulatory' Systems in Aristotle's Biology," *Journal of the History of Biology* 15 (1982): 89–118, at 96.

however say that it produced the most heat, which in turn caused generation (boys and old men could also have orgasms, he argued, but did not generate because their sperm was insufficiently heated). But lower beings, including some animals and fish, lack heat and are born without coital congress, from putrefying and fermenting substances.

Following the Stoics, ancient medical theorists believed that something they called pneuma was carried with the blood through arteries and veins, imparting motion and sensation. But at times the mixture of inner and outer pneuma caused problems. As Dale Martin writes,

> The whole body is endangered when the pneuma is corrupted by the inhalation of bad air, and the pneuma may be affected by poison from things like snakebites. . . . The pneuma was considered the stuff of rationality, thought, and sensation, and as such it was dangerously susceptible to pollution and corruption . . . ; it permeated other forms of nature and therefore could be acted upon, damaged and even altered by other natural elements.[74]

When the balance among various fluids present in humans (bile, phlegm, blood, water) is disturbed, or the mechanisms of hot and cold, dry and humid are disrupted, when one's unstable, fluid body is affected by the environment, the body loses its equilibrium. Changes in temperature, improper digestion, delay in appropriate purging, contact with polluted substances, alteration of internal factors, invasion of hostile outside elements, inhalation of miasmic air, immoderate use of the flesh, and a frenetic lifestyle—all contributed to corruption, degeneration, and disease.

The problem was worse in women because their flesh was thought more humid, wet, porous, and penetrable than men's, and they had too many orifices; thus they were more able to pollute and be polluted. But then male semen, being refined blood, was theoretically always putrefiable (female semen, of course, was already putrefied as menstrual blood); and blood too could become corrupted through mixture with, say, bile.[75] Even mother's milk, so necessary to guarantee

74. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 23–24. I am indebted to Martin for my understanding of pneuma.

75. On corrupted semen, see Jacobus Silvius (Jean Dubois, 1478–1555), in *Hippocratis et Galeni physiologiae partem anatomican isagoge* (1542; Basel: Derbilley, 1556). Like some doctors of the period, Silvius held that semen was manufactured by the whole body.

a newborn's survival, was thought to be another version of putrefied blood. To ensure growth, the lore went, male children had to be given to nurse to mothers who had generated boys and had the best milk; lactating mothers of girls were traditionally offered lower wages.[76] Books on putridity and the horrors of corruption were everywhere, from Gerolamo Accoramboni's *Tractatus de putredine* (Venice, 1534) to Mario Sanbarolitano's *Degressio de putredine* (Venice, 1535) and *De simplici generatione, putredine, coctione, concretione et liquefactione mistorum corporum et perfectorum* (Mondovì, 1565), on to Giuseppe Daciano, *Trattato della peste* (Venice, 1576).

The excremental quality of natural conception, as defined by medicine, was easily buttressed by the Church's reading of sex as a degraded act, of the sexual organs as polluted and dirty (female genitals were commonly referred to as *turpitudo foeminarum* or *pudenda,* from Latin *pudere,* to be ashamed), and of engendering as taking place, so to speak, in *spurcitia* and next to fecal matter. Doctors did not know about the urethra, as separate from the vagina or birth canal, so every birth could be seen as analogous to a release of urine; it was common lore that menstrual blood could kill and sterilize, so every child concocted from it is flawed; the fetus was believed to be nourished in the fermentation and miasma of a womb, where worms self-generated even during pregnancy (because women had more phlegm), so all humankind seems indeed to have been fully punished for the sin of Adam.[77]

76. As in this song by Giulio Cesare Croce (1550–1609) in which wet nurses advertise their skills in their search for newborns to breastfeed: "Chi ha bambini da lattare? / Tanto più, state a udire, / fian migliori i nostri latti, / poichè tutte al partorire / figli maschi abbiam fatti." In "Mascherata Terza," in *Storie di vita popolare nelle canzoni di piazza di G. C. Croce,* ed. Monique Rouch (Bologna: Cooperativa Libraria Universitaria, 1982), 203. Breast milk was also a cure for deafness, earaches, and fevers. In Germany it was used to procure abortions. See Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 60. To keep women young, as well as to cure all sorts of skin disease ("lepra"), Caterina Sforza has a recipe that requires a mixture of metals such as silver, gold, iron, lead, and bronze to be kept one night in warm white wine, one night in juice of fennel, a third night in the milk of a mother feeding a male infant ("in lacte de donna che dia lacte a putto maschio"), and so on. See Caterina Sforza (1463–1509), *Ricettario di bellezza di Caterina Riario Sforza,* ed. Luigi Pescasio (Verona: Wella italiana, 1971), 67.

77. As Giovan Battista Codronchi (1547–1628) wrote on a treatise on the legions of worms infesting the city of Imola, "many unrefined humours are to be found in them [women] as a result of imperfect digestion; and these humours give rise to worms." See *De*

Until the discovery of modern genetics the biological connection between a father and a son could not be confirmed. Thus legal and philosophical practices provided whatever links were missing in the medical and religious discourses on reproduction. In nature, many wild beasts do not have fathers with which they are connected through social structures; they have mothers. But in human society men have asserted their link to the children their female companions were bearing through the invention of the family unit and the legal enforcing of the institution of marriage. As Pierre Vernant argues, marriage allows men to "have legitimate children who 'resemble their father' despite being the issue of their mother's womb, and who will thus be able, on the social and religious level, to continue the line of their father's house to which they belong."[78] To counter the notion that women could inseminate themselves, Aristotle declared that children in principle will resemble both mothers and fathers.[79] Eunuchs presented a special problem. Since what distinguishes men is their ability to father, Aristotle classified castrated males as "almost" female, because the active male principle that would have distinguished them from women had been lost through surgery.[80] Every philosopher, in fact, has given paternal right legal value as well a religious or quasi-religious status.

But here is the rub. If all hinges on appearing like one's father, how can a progenitor fully control the reproductive process that is so central to his being considered manly in his cultural milieu? Legally this issue was hardly problematic, since in Roman (and soon in Italian) law it was incontrovertibly stated that a father, but not a mother, had a legitimate tie (*legitima cognatio*) with his offspring, a tie that could also be natural, like that of mother and child, but not necessarily so. Only men, in short, had *patria potestas*, because only men had rights of *consanguinitas* (consanguinity) and *agnatio* (agnation, male line of descent) and could as a result bequeath property, name, and lineage.[81]

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*morbis qui Imolae* (Bologna: n.p., 1603), 22. Translation in Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh,* 82. It seems that the Hippocratics knew of women's urethra but that knowledge had been lost until dissections of the early modern period found it again.

78. Jean Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece,* trans. Janet Lloyd (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 138.

79. *GA* 1.18.722b. For the influence of this idea among Italian doctors, see Siraisi, *Taddeo Alderotti,* 197–98.

80. *GA* 1.2.716b.

81. *Corpus juris civilis: Digesta,* ed. Theodor Mommsen (Berin: Weidmann, 1895), 38.10.4.

In reality the issue was more complicated. When property was divided among brothers — mostly until the first half of the sixteenth century, after which a new regime of patrilinear descent started to be implemented — it was perhaps less important for a father to know which of the children he thought he had generated were in fact legitimate than it was later, when property started to be bequeathed to the first son.[82] This may explain the profusion of early modern literary texts centered on the male fear of cuckoldry, or the amount of sumptuary legislation enacted to condemn instances of unwarranted, feminine acts of freedom; it even perhaps explains the publication and sale of popular medical texts on reproductive technologies, written in Italian for an audience without the sophistication and learning needed to read Latin treatises but with plenty they needed to know on the topic. A casual affair could lead to engendering, but paternity and maternity were generally complicated businesses: legal matters, inheritance practices, and social standing were all, one way or another, connected with the practice and the externalization of desire.

82. Sisters inherited differently in Italy. Unlike brothers, who could legally divide their father's property among themselves, sisters relied on dowries accessible to them at the time of marriage or at their entrance in a convent — although administrative matters were usually left to their husband or guardian, since women were neither emancipated through marriage nor when they reached a specific age. Their legal incapacity was decreed in both civil and canon law. Dowries could occasionally be more substantial than the share of a brother's inheritance, because a sister's marriage above her social class through a tempting dowry could be important to a family's strategic alliance, but there was no assurance that all sisters would be provided for equally, and in fact such cases were rare. Dowries were usually made up of liquid assets so that the family ancestral "casa" and all landed property could remain bequeathed to the household's males. For Florentine customs, see Christiane Klapisch-Zuber; *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 230–46; for the Venetian, see Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). For family structures in general, see Marzio Barbagli, *Sotto lo stesso tetto: Mutamenti della famiglia in Italia dal XV al XX secolo* (Bologna: Mulino, 1984), ch. 4; for issues of *patria potestas,* inheritance, and legal guardianship concerning women, see Thomas Kuen, *Law, Family and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. 197–257; and Samuel Cohn, *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). For the Veneto region, see Sergio Lavarda, *L'anima a Dio e il corpo alla terra: Scelte testamentarie nella terraferma veneta, 1575–1631* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 1998), ch. 5.

All the themes I have outlined, from how to control engendering to when to enforce proper gender choices, will play their part in this book as I examine paradigmatic literary texts. My first and last chapters take a free-wheeling, high-speed ride through an array of sources (mostly novellas) on all sides of the issues; the other four chapters explore complementary problems by centering on single literary texts. The problems I study are present in almost all works of Italian literature of the period, so I have chosen texts with an eye to their exemplary quality and canonical status. The two plays I examine, for example, Niccolò Machiavelli's *La mandragola* and Bernardo Bibbiena's *La calandria,* were the best known and most frequently reprinted plays of the sixteenth century; from the two chivalric romances I consider, Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata,* both sixteenth-century bestsellers, I chose two well-known stories: the episode of King Astolfo and the knight Jocondo in Ariosto was among the most imitated in the Renaissance, and the story of the woman warrior Clorinda in Tasso has been the prototype for numberless representations of womanhood in the early modern period.

The genre that lent itself most readily to an investigation of sex and generation, then as now, is undoubtedly the novella. Even Renaissance plays were derived from the novelistic tradition (for example, the story that Shakespeare used for his *Romeo and Juliet* traces back to novellas by Masuccio Salernitano, Luigi Da Porto, and Matteo Bandello). Machiavelli's *La mandragola* and Bibbiena's *La calandria* have clear ties to Boccaccio's fool Calandrino in the *Decameron* (in Bibbiena's case, this connection is inscribed in the name of the main character as well as in the title). The plot of Ariosto's story of Astolfo and Jocondo comes from a series of novellas about the two men; and the story of Clorinda's origin is indebted to a work by Heliodorus, *An Aethiopian Romance,* recovered and translated in the sixteenth century. But the place where the novelistic tradition is strongest is in the material I explore in chapters 1 and 6; the topics dealt with there were not accorded a higher literary treatment by contemporary authors because civic and ecclesiastical printing norms would not have allowed it. Chapter 1 looks at cases of self-engendering and births attributed to putrefaction, which come to us from the low genre of the novella. Along the same lines, the figuring of real castration, which I trace in chapter 6, is restricted to the novella, although representations of psychological castration are found in all genres (in this book castration anxiety is a recurring theme, whether in dis-

cussing the pains of paternity in Machiavelli's *Mandragola* or the surgical jokes in Bibbiena's play). Here again Bandello, as in chapter 1, proves a rich source, together with other fantasized accounts coming from travel literature.

My book begins by looking at reproductive issues during the Renaissance and then turns to a deeper examination of masculinity in this period. The first three chapters treat, in turn, the widespread preoccupation that a child could be born without a fully "normal" maternal and paternal sexual participation, the way in which a man's desire to produce an heir could be fulfilled through an unorthodox contract, and how a mother's contribution to the reproductive process appears to cancel the father's imprimatur. Chapter 1, "The Useless Genitor: Fantasies of Putrefaction and Nongenealogical Birth," concentrates on miscegenation and fears of violating species distinctions in an unstable, humor-based, and pneuma-controlled world. Building on contemporary philosophical and medical discourses, I give examples of strange births and engenderings, of male gestation, and spontaneous generation from putrefaction and fermentation, as they are registered in popular texts.[83]

Some people may just have laughed at these notions, but many scholars and lay people believed that peculiar ways of conceiving were possible, because in their world the boundaries between male and female biology were permeable, and miasma, inner fermenting matter, misuses of the body, or interacting humors imbued every sexual act with unknowns. We cannot be sure to what extent noncoital reproduction was part of the cultural imaginary, but it is clear that these fears were not found only among the uneducated—among, for example, people like the inquiring miller Menocchio trying to make sense of chaos.[84] In fact, philosophers and doctors often reported specific cases and argued for the possibility of birth without seed more than popular literature itself did.

Chapter 2, "The Masquerade of Paternity: Cuckoldry and Baby M[ale] in

83. Until the publication of Johannes Joachimi Beccheri's *Physica subterranea profundam subterraneorum genesim* (1669), there was no sure understanding of the difference between putrefaction and fermentation. See Piero Camporesi, *The Anatomy of the Senses: Natural Symbols in Medieval and Early Modern Italy,* trans. Allan Cameron (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 1994), 42.

84. For the idea (as theorized by Menocchio, a miller condemned by the Inquisition) that the world, God, and man were created from chaos and this creation was intimately linked to spontaneous generation, see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

Machiavelli's *La mandragola,*" focuses on an example of surrogate parenthood in an Italian comedy so bawdy that it ended up in the Index of Forbidden Books, and the morality of its main female character had to be defended as recently as the play's first representation after World War II.[85] My purpose is to see what is, culturally speaking, behind Machiavelli's construction of the story, in which a man becomes a father without sexual intercourse with his wife, by delegating the risky business to another man. The story feeds on and amplifies the mysogynistic legend of the venomous "spider woman," who can kill while making love, while she herself, unaffected by the poison in her body, can produce a child—a male one, at that, as her cuckolded husband wistfully hopes. Arachnophobia reached epidemic proportions in Italy in the sixteenth century, and doctors outdid themselves to invent cures for it (one cure was vigorous dancing, which gave the *tarantella,* still danced today, its name).

Recommendations on how to control maternal imagination to ensure proper development of the fetus, and therefore proper lineage, are examined in chapter 3, "Performing Maternity: Female Imagination, Paternal Erasure, and Monstrous Birth in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*." In this chapter, my interest is on the vagaries of pregnancy. Specifically I examine the fear that a mother with a too active imagination can engender a child not resembling her husband (or her lover, for that matter) and give birth to a baby with the wrong racial features and a monstrous body. The woman warrior Clorinda in Tasso's epic is a monstrous, disorderly woman, whose utter otherness comes from the "fact" that her father's generative input was canceled by maternal fancy during pregnancy, thus she was born white though her parents were black Ethiopians. But being "Ethiopian" had just as many cultural as geographical connotations at the time of Tasso's writing. Tasso makes Clorinda's womanhood so unconventional, her nature so "hermaphroditic," in the sense given at the time to the word, that he has to kill her off before she marries and has children. Writers whose theme is dynasty (and in the *Liberata* Tasso was celebrating the Este family) could not associate the lineage of the ruler employing them with anything like miscegenation, so Clorinda has to exit the story.

In chapters 4 through 6 I consider constructions of masculinity and its

85. The defender was no less than the secretary of the communist party, Palmiro Togliatti. See Mario Baratto, *La commedia del Cinquecento: Aspetti e problemi* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1975), 26.

variants, with the goal of connecting masculinity to maleness and fathering. Chapter 4, "The Masquerade of Masculinity: Erotomania in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*," focuses on an embedded novella in Ariosto's romance of chivalry, in which two men, Astolfo and Jocondo, merrily crisscross Europe with the purpose of making love to more than a thousand women in revenge for having been betrayed by their respective wives. I concentrate on issues of narcissism, fantasy, doubling, and repetition to show that just as femininity in culture is something women put on to conform to social requirements, so masculinity is not only unstable but unhinged, both a performance and a masquerade, even (or especially) in sexually obsessed men.[86] My two Don Juans abruptly end their heterosexual adventures after they realize that even by triangulating desire they cannot control its effects. What I find interesting in Ariosto's characterization of masculinity is that constant sexual activity ends up making men less manly, as if expenditure of that "dramma" of concocted blood uncoupled from an imperative to reproduce not only weakens the body but also has the power to feminize.[87] The two men regain their power only when they stop performing masculinity and keep the phallus veiled. Back home, they maintain their self-deluding fantasies free from the disruption and emasculation — the metaphorical castration — that heterosexual desire brought them in the past and reassume control over their environment.

Chapter 5, "Androgynous Doubling and Hermaphroditic Anxieties: Bibbiena's *La calandria*," explores the moment in late adolescence when cross-dressing allows challenges to gender arrangements before a "proper" adult object choice is made, marriage is entered, and lineage comes into the picture. I examine the unsteadiness of sexual and gender categories in a story of eighteen-year-old twins of opposite sex, each of whom likes to pass for the other. *Calandria* mourns a loss — of parents, of country, of identity, of social standing — by visualizing it as a lack: lack of truth, lack of a sexual core, lack of place, thus the almost out-

86. For femininity as a masquerade, see Joan Rivière, "Femininity as a Masquerade," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 35–44.

87. For Daciano, an orgasm was worthy forty bloodlettings of equal quantity: "la vacuazione fatta per un coito più noce et più indebolisce il corpo che se quaranta volte tanta quantità di sangue li fussi dalla vena estratto." See Giuseppe Daciano, *Trattato della peste et delle petecchie* (Venice: Zanetti, 1576), 55.

of-control use of fetishistic cross-dressings that defines it. In this chapter I use psychoanalysis as well as medical accounts of hermaphroditism to see what to make of moments in the action when sexual organs are lost and recuperated or dizzily taken away in imaginary crossings and then put back. Building on Peter Stallybrass's examination of prostheses in the construction of an unstable gender, I claim that sex too is unstable in this play full of *membra disjecta* and then work through the complex restructuring that drives and sublimations undergo as a consequence.

Obsessive sex only metaphorically unmans the men in *Orlando furioso,* and body parts are lost only in jest in *La calandria,* but organs are lost for good and sexual performance becomes questionable in chapter 6, "The Masquerade of Manhood: The Paradox of the Castrato." Here I reconstruct the beginning of the phenomenon of castration of singers that swept Italy from the late sixteenth through the eighteenth century, when an interest in soprano voices required the collaboration of doctors to create another kind of "man." Symbolic, rather than literal, castration has always been at the forefront of psychoanalytical criticism, since, as Freud states, "the *castration complex* . . . is of the profoundest importance in the formation alike of character and of neuroses," and any individual of whatever sex needs to journey through it to reach adulthood.[88] Following Freud, Jacques Lacan makes castration not only the signifier of a man's or woman's entry into subjectivity, but also the sine qua non of gender difference and desire.[89]

Yet, how can one theorize castration when it is literal rather than — or as well as — symbolic? And within literal castration, how does one reconcile what is important within culture: the castrato's scrotum or the Freudian penis, manhood or the "legal" visibility of manhood? Until recently male researchers in cultural studies have been unwilling to uncover forms of "debilitated" masculinity, more so since *evirati* (castrated boys) had often little choice in the matter and this practice was repudiated at the start of modernity.[90] Women critics, for their part, have not had much at stake in examining castrati's sexual choices and gender

88. Sigmund Freud, *An Autobiographical Study,* in *SE* 20:7–74, esp. 37. See also *Symptoms and Anxiety,* in *SE* 20:87–175.

89. Jacques Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus," in Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality,* 74–85.

90. Castration for musical purposes was outlawed by Napoleon as soon as he conquered Italy. By then, in any case, the phenomenon was on the wane, and impresarios were no longer venturing everything on feminized male voices.

alignment, given their more important task of questioning and redefining their own position within the Law of the Father.

In focusing on what makes a man a man—not a penis, in my reading, but testicles; that is, not phallic potency but the power to make progeny for society's sake—I turn my attention to the first ecclesiastical pronouncement addressing specifically male sexuality in the late sixteenth century. A 1587 papal bull in which canon law has been interpreted with more *frisson* and historical freedom than a literary text legislated that men unable to emit seminal fluid because they lacked testicles could not marry, although they may have been able to have sex, may have desired only a partner of the opposite sex, and may have provided sexual satisfaction.[91] Unlike gender, which was consistently legislated and impugned in the period, sex had not been a significant preoccupation for the Church until this specific edict. By equating male impotence with male sterility and by making sexuality coterminous with reproduction, the Church thus disqualified castrati from entering a marriage contract. A new subject, the unmanned man, was produced and legitimated in Italy as it became the focus of the law.[92] Through an examination of "rejected" men, those denied the possibility of signifying their own masculinity through fathering, I challenge in this chapter the social link between one's experience of the body and one's given sexuality and reconstruct the shifts and realignments that object choices and gender preferences undergo in men for whom such reassignments of sex meant a life in limbo, or perhaps in culture's hell.

My discourse on sex and gender, it turns out, is a discourse on power, identity, lineage, paternal right, and patriarchal might. Needless to say, as it moves from procreation without a genitor and without sex, to sex without identity, and from there to sex without procreation, it is also a discourse on anxiety and decay, on faddish medical interventions and on gender-biased philosophical cover-ups, on the disorder that manufactured and fantasized sexual parts create, on the

91. Archivum Secretum Vaticanum, Fondo Secretariatus Brevium, Spagna, vol. 129, fol. 82. I thank Giuseppe Gerbino for first alerting me to the importance of this document and for our many conversations that followed.

92. As Foucault has repeatedly argued, sex is always the effect of a regime of sexuality created by society through language ("sex is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations and pleasures"). See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol. 1: *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 155.

panic that fear of castration and metamorphosis engenders, and on the regulatory regimes of sexuality that are put in place to keep behaviors on track. Thus it is thoroughly and always a discourse on women.

To return to the discovery of the microbes by Louis Pasteur with which I started, we have always known that fermentation and putrefaction were among the greatest fears of people of the early modern period, who were unable to distinguish between the two. They dreaded aerial, "miasmic" transmission to the point of washing rarely in order not to open skin pores; they worried that "decaying substances" in the air would shorten their lives; they imagined hell in terms of the pungent smells of cheese factories and the fumes of tanneries and abandoned family duties and parental practices when plagues and choleric epidemics struck home.[93] In this sense Pasteur discovered nothing. But only with Pasteur's research on lactic acid did fermentation and putrefaction become friends, life-givers rather than death warrants. With Pasteur it became possible to historicize the event and finally put to rest, two centuries after it had been scientifically demonstrated as impossible, the theory of self-generation.[94]

Discarding a theory does not mean that the psychic trauma connected to its application can be dismantled. It took centuries, after all, for bloodletting to be discredited as a health-bestowing technique; just as the modish and ubiquitous practice of tonsillectomy has passed away, though many adults still wear the scar on their psychoses as well as on their throats. In these post-Pasteur times, to reread ancient and early modern texts that describe male and female orgasm as corruption ("corrompimento"), and semen as polluted ("sperma foetidum") by the time it was used for engendering; that claim that women could impregnate themselves by concocting *molae* from putrefied menstrual blood and that they were themselves poisonous; that believed that castrated boys were necessary to society because their angelic voices uplifted people's spirits—to reread all this is to walk through the web-like myth of progress and the time-tested culture of solidarity with open eyes and a wondering mind.

93. "It is clear and obvious to the natural physicists," Immanuel ben Salomon of Rome boasted, "that air that is pure and free from impurities, and bright and cleansed of the ill effects of decaying substances, is a powerful factor in the length of life." See *On Longevity,* in Robert Goldstein, "Longevity, the Rainbow and Immanuel of Rome," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 42 (1971): 244.

94. On Louis Pasteur's study of lactic fermentation, see James Bryant Conant, *Pasteur's Study of Fermentation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957).