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The Lesbian Phallus in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*

Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* have surprisingly little to say about sex. The fifth dialogue is the only one that even approaches an overt description of a courtesan's sexual exploits, and significantly, it describes the events of a post-symptotic night of three-way lesbian sex. In this paper, I propose to explore why it is that Lucian disappoints erotic expectations in the *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, and why it is that when he does describe a sexual encounter it is of a kind that is usually excluded from classical Greek sexual discourse. In the course of the fifth dialogue, Leaina, a courtesan, tells of her experience with the wealthy Megilla and her partner, Demonassa. Having been invited to join the couple, Leaina begins to inquire about the mechanics of sex without a penis. She presses Megilla, who says she "plays the man". Leaina wonders if she is a transsexual, or a hermaphrodite. Megilla tells her that she has a penis substitute: *ékḥ gár ti antí tou andréiou* (5.4). Classical scholars have suggested that the substitute that Megilla has could be an overdeveloped clitoris, or maybe even an *olisbos*, although these implements are generally associated with masturbation, and are not represented as being used during intercourse. In my paper, I will argue that what is crucial about Megilla's penis substitute is that it is only alluded to but not described. We are forced to consider it abstractly: it is a lesbian phallus.

This dialogue represents one of few instances that sex between women is discussed in Greek literature, perhaps the most obvious precursor being Plato's *Symposium*. David Halperin has read Lucian's use of *hetairístría* as a deliberate gloss on *Symposium* 191e 2–5. Furthermore, Megilla bears the feminized name of one of Plato's interlocutors in the *Laws*. I suggest that these references invite the reader to consider this dialogue against Plato's construction of the lesbian and exclusion of the penetrating female. Following Judith Butler, I will argue that Lucian invokes the image of feminine penetration of the feminine as part of a larger project in which he aims to destabilize received notions of power hierarchies, and to imagine the possibilities for the transference of power.