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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–symptic 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: ékh_gár ti antî toû andreíou (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 *hetairístria* 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.