



## Witchcraft and Sexuality in the Italian Renaissance: The Magical Rarity of Female Pleasure

Ciera Merli

John Cabot University, Italy

### Abstract

During the fifteenth century in Renaissance Italy, the Catholic Church had relentless enmity towards sex. To the point where Europeans were persecuted into admitting they had sex with the devil. Masturbation became a sin as it was equivalent of having sex with a demon, the devil or a waste of reproduction. Using the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Marcantonio Raimondi's *Woman with a Dildo* (ca.1500) and *I Modi*, this essay explores the questions; As witches were often used as a warning or a mystical example of what not to do as a good Christian, how is female pleasure displayed in witchcraft prints associated with the demasculinization of the Renaissance man? How did "penis stealing" in the *Malleus Maleficarum* have a place in this? How is female pleasure associated with nymphomania and sin? What is the justification? This subject is approached in a feminist lens using art historical practices, as female masturbation in the Renaissance is a subject not investigated in art history.

**Keywords:** Art History, Feminism, Gender Study, Masturbation, Witchcraft