

OPENING THE BODY OF FLUIDS: TAKING IN AND POURING OUT IN RENAISSANCE READINGS OF CLASSICAL WOMEN

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In this chapter I would like to offer a concluding perspective on the transmission and appropriation of classical ideas about the female body in Renaissance and early modern Europe, drawing together a number of the key themes which have emerged in this volume: gender and fluidity; the permeation of boundaries; classification of fluids and fluid classification; the interface between literary and visual representations; age and decay; excretion and regeneration. My theme here is the nature of virginity and of the virgin body in classical and Renaissance Europe, as represented in the story of how the Vestal Virgin Tuccia carried water in a sieve. Tuccia's sieve is most commonly thought simply to offer a paradigm for the integrity of the 'whole unimpaired body' of the virgin, in contrast to the openness and unpredictable flows of the mature woman.¹ By looking at later appropriations of the image of this sieve, including a pair of sixteenth-century images – Mantegna's 'Two exemplary women of antiquity' – as well as the better-known 'sieve portraits' of Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen, I shall suggest that Tuccia's receptions return us to the ancient versions of the story with fresh questions about the role of this piece of agricultural or cooking technology in representing the body. Is it intended to retain the good while letting out the bad, or to refine the contents to improve them? Is this, in our terms, a sieve or a strainer?

Many contributors to this volume have already considered the extent to which fluids have their own identities, and their capacity for transformation within the body. In looking at Tuccia, I shall be investigating not only the movement of bodily fluids around the body, but also the means of control when they move out into the external world. What is it that Tuccia's sieve, and the virgin body itself, does not let out? Bearing in mind the wider issues of the control of fluids in the female body, in particular the role of urination in virginity tests, I shall suggest that, while the virginal sieve may relate to the organs of reproduction, it more strongly references the bladder.

In the process of exploring sixteenth-century images through classical texts, I shall also raise the question of the different methodologies which scholars of the classical worlds use to address their questions, which are revealed very clearly in this volume. Depending on their backgrounds in literature, history or archaeology, two responses are made, and need always to be held in tension: the close reading of a single text or image with little attention to social context, and the synthetic method of creating a single picture from a few scattered sentences featuring in texts far apart in time or in genre. The nature of the evidence may lead to us focusing on one of these responses but, at the very least, we should be aware of our methods. Here, I shall concentrate on detailed study of just a few examples, but I shall also be assuming some level of continuity in the representation of the virginal body; continuity which exists despite different religious and social contexts. By the sixteenth

¹ Phrasing from Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The allegory of the female form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985), p.242, from the chapter 'The Sieve of Tuccia'.

century, allusions to Tuccia's sieve play with a range of meanings and those who make these allusions are aware not only of the classical texts but also of later ideas about the workings of the body. What is constant is a pre-modern interest in fluids as more important than organs in understanding the body.

Fluid bodies in history

Characterisation of the pre-modern body as what I have elsewhere called a 'body of fluids' took off after Gail Kern Paster's 1993 book *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, which started from the insight that our apparently fixed, biological bodies can only be understood 'in terms of culturally available discourses'.² Early modern people approached their bodies through humoral theory; because this understanding of the body in terms of fluids was not merely 'metaphor', but represented how the body was experienced, as scholars we should try to appreciate 'the formative effects of physiological theory on the subject' rather than regarding the four humours as an intellectual curiosity and relegating them to a few footnotes in our work.³ While Paster never suggested that this humoral 'body of fluids' should be gendered as female – men, too, were composed of fluids – she noted that the belief that women were wetter or more leaky than men was 'a given of contemporary scientific theory'.⁴ An important element of this was control; women were presented as less able to control their fluids, and thus as more like children, and this formed part of the argument for patriarchy.⁵

The body of fluids was, however, not only a humoral body. Its contents included fluids which we no longer recognise, or to which we attribute very different roles, as well as parts of the body in which we no longer believe. For example, Michael Stolberg has drawn attention to the pre-modern idea of a space between the flesh and the skin, linked to sweat then being given a more important role in the body, and has pointed out just how many different kinds of sweat there were in early modern medicine.⁶ Fluids were not only spoken about with overlapping language, but were also presented as transforming into each other; Paster mentioned the proverb 'Let her cry, she'll piss the less', repeated by Ambroise Paré.⁷

A particularly powerful example of transformation is the production of breast milk from menstrual blood. In the famous image from Leonardo da Vinci, created before he dissected any complete human cadavers, an imagined male and female body meet in generation.⁸

² Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.4; Helen King, 'Inside and outside, cavities and containers: the organs of generation in seventeenth-century English medicine' in Patricia A. Baker, Han Nijdam, Karine van 't Land (eds.), *Medicine and Space: Body, Surroundings and Borders in Antiquity and the Middle Ages; Visualising the Middle Ages* (4) (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 37–60.

³ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, pp.4, 7.

⁴ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p.39. See also p.24 on 'the weaker vessel as leaky vessel'.

⁵ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p.25.

⁶ Michael Stolberg, 'Sweat: learned concepts and popular perceptions, 1500-1800' in Manfred Horstmanshoff, Helen King and Claus Zittel (eds), *Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe, Intersections* 25 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 503-522: p.513.

⁷ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p.40.

⁸ Royal Collection Trust, RL 19097v; Denis Noble, Dario DiFrancesco and Diego Zancani, 'Leonardo da Vinci and the origin of semen', *Notes and Records (Royal Society Journal of the History of Science)* 68 (2014), 391–402

Leonardo's hemisected man, his spine clearly visible and linked to his seed production, recalls the Hippocratic *Airs Waters Places* description of the Scythians, who cut the channels behind the ears and thus prevent their semen from moving properly down the body; in the male body, the head and the spine are thus also considered relevant to generation.⁹ In the much sketchier figure on the left – the woman – there is an imaginary channel from womb to nipple to carry the blood-which-becomes-milk. In 1993 Paster had noted the early modern view that breast milk was 'blood made white'.¹⁰ Barbara Orland has since discussed how, while milk could be seen as 'white blood', blood could be regarded as 'slightly coloured' milk: each fluid uses the language of the other.¹¹ In Leonardo's drawing, we can see a flow between gendered bodies, from the male head to the woman's breasts, as fluids transform into each other and mingle to create a new life.

Alongside blood and milk, urine also featured prominently. Michael McVaugh has drawn attention to the sixteenth-century Berengario da Carpi combining sweat, urine and milk when trying to understand the body, so that urine 'is sweated out like milk from the breast'.¹² Less prosaically, in 1518 Lorenz Fries wrote that urine is 'water that is strained from blood and other humours'.¹³ The image of the strainer here is important here, and I shall be returning to it below. As Karine van 't Land notes, Aristotle's description of the formation of the embryo is that it is like turning milk into cheese, another straining/sieving process.¹⁴ Within blood, serum is named for the Latin word for 'whey', the liquid by-product of cheese manufacture. Urine, Greek *οὔρον*, may also be related to a Greek word for whey, *ὀρός*.¹⁵ The imagery of the fluids of agriculture and the household pervades the body's history.

Testing Tuccia

<http://rsnr.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/68/4/391> argue that in 1508 Leonardo corrected his views and removed any connection between the spinal cord and the channels carrying the seed. They attribute the erroneous view to one of the books probably owned by Leonardo, Alessandro Benedetti, *Anatomice sive historia corporis libri V* (Venice, 1498), chapter 18 'De semine'.

⁹ AWP 22, on the explanation for some Scythians dressing as women and taking women's roles as being due to cutting behind the ears to cure varicose veins: 'such treatment is destructive of the semen owing to the existence of the vessels behind the ears, which, if cut, cause impotence and, it seems to me that these are the vessels they divide'.

¹⁰ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p.40.

¹¹ Barbara Orland, 'White blood and red milk. Analogical reasoning in medical practice and experimental physiology (1560-1730)' in Manfred Horstmanshoff, Helen King and Claus Zittel (eds), *Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe, Intersections 25* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 443-478.

¹² Michael McVaugh, 'Losing ground: the disappearance of attraction from the kidneys' in Manfred Horstmanshoff, Helen King and Claus Zittel (eds), *Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe, Intersections 25* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 103-137: p.117.

¹³ Lorenz Fries, *Spiegel der Artzney* (Strasbourg, 1518), p.LXIIIv, cited by Michael Stolberg, *Uroscopy in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), p.49.

¹⁴ Karine van 't Land, 'Sperm and blood, form and food. Late medieval medical notions of male and female in the embryology of *membra*' in Manfred Horstmanshoff, Helen King and Claus Zittel (eds), *Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe, Intersections 25* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 363-392: pp.379-80.

¹⁵ Stolberg, *Uroscopy in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), p.49.

Tuccia, famously, carries water in a sieve in order to prove that she is still a virgin. Nor does she simply carry the water; when she reaches the forum, she pours it out at the feet of the priests. Kathleen Coyne Kelly opened her 2000 book on *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* with an extract from Robertson Davies' novel *The Rebel Angels*, in which the character Maria Theotoky describes how, when teaching first-year engineering students the history of science and technology, she told the story of how Vestal Virgins could carry water in a sieve and challenged the few girls in her class to repeat this miracle. After they all failed, Maria succeeded, because 'mine was greased, which proved that the Vestal Virgins had a practical understanding of colloid chemistry'.¹⁶ For Maria Theotoky, any Vestal could achieve this result, but in the ancient myths Tuccia stands alone. Tuccia's action is not some established procedure or ordeal applied to women accused of unchastity but, as presented in the sources, it is her own idea to clear her name.

In attributing agency to Tuccia, this story contrasts with the long tradition of 'virginity tests' or 'ordeals' administered in Western medicine, literature and popular tradition, even though these too involved fluids. Many ways to detect a virgin were proposed in the pre-modern world – by her demeanour, her sensitivity to touch or smell, the size of her breasts, her modesty, posture, or voice – but some could easily be counterfeited. As Kathleen Coyne Kelly observes for the Middle Ages in particular, 'It seems that virginity is so overdetermined that apparently just about anything can signify its presence or absence'.¹⁷ Challenges to the existence of the hymen by medical writers from antiquity onwards, and comments about how bleeding at intercourse could, for example, be menstrual rather than hymeneal, took one potential physical marker out of the debate.¹⁸ A possibility mentioned by Helkiah Crooke in 1615 was to measure the distance from the tip of the nose to the sagittal suture and check whether the diameter of the woman's neck was greater than this. This test draws on the classical idea that a loss of virginity widens the neck and deepens the voice.¹⁹

Some virginity tests involved walking over fire. The tests involving fluids seem far less dangerous than these, but their aim too is to go beyond the appearance of the body in order to avoid any suspicion that the virgin is merely acting the part. In the tests found in literature, two fluids in particular feature. One of these is water. For example, in the thirteenth century the romance *Floris and Blancheflur* involves a magic fountain in which, if an unchaste woman should wash her hands, the water screams out and becomes 'red as blood'.²⁰

The other fluid is urine. Some tests assume that you can tell a virgin by the way in which she passes urine, or simply by giving her a lot of water to drink and seeing if she can hold it. The urine of virgins may be seen as distinctive in some way; according to a medical text of 1580,

¹⁶ Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p.1, quoting Davies, *The Rebel Angels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.52.

¹⁷ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p.66.

¹⁸ Marie H. Loughlin, *Hymeneutics. Interpreting virginity on the early modern stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1997), pp.31-32 on the 'fiction of the hymen as the guarantee of virginity' in Ambroise Paré; pp.195-6, n.78 on the doubts over bleeding at defloration; Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 10 on the hymen as a 'notoriously unstable and ambiguous concept, with an anxious and uncertain history'.

¹⁹ Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia: A Description of the Body of man* (London: William Jaggard, 1615); Ann Hanson and David Armstrong, 'Two notes on Greek tragedy: The virgin's voice and neck: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 245 and other texts', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 33 (1986), 97-102.

²⁰ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, pp.8-9.

it is 'clear and lucid, sometimes white, sometimes sparkling'.²¹ Guilielmus de Saliceto described what Laurent Joubert later called a woman's 'manner of pissing' as evidence of virginity; a virgin 'urinates with a subtle hiss' while, for Joubert, before she is deflowered a virgin pisses 'straight and far'.²² In a medieval commentary on pseudo-Albertus Magnus, sniffing 'the fruit of a lettuce' would make a corrupted virgin pass urine immediately.²³ The fifteenth-century Niccolò Falcucci copied out some tests from Gilbertus Anglicus which suggested that non-virgins will urinate as soon as they drink anything containing coal or cockles. According to Falcucci, virgins also become pale if fumigated with dock flowers.²⁴ Laurent Joubert – chancellor of the Faculty of medicine at Montpellier from 1556 – challenged other writers' enthusiasms for virginity tests involving drinking lignum aloe or smelling the smoke of dock leaves to see if the woman immediately passed urine.²⁵

'Holding your water', then, was evidence of virginity in medieval and early modern virginity tests and, in a different way, for Tuccia. In the absence of any faith in anatomical structures to provide the answers, there is something interesting here about the reality, the materiality, of the fluids as providing true evidence. The ability to hold one's water demonstrates the bodily integrity of the virgin. This should direct our interpretation of another holder of Tuccia's quite unusual, but not unique, name: in Juvenal's sixth satire, where, watching the performance of the *pantomimus* Bathyllus, '*Tuccia vesicae non imperat*', Tuccia can't control her bladder.²⁶ Jim Adams suggested that these fluids are sexual.²⁷ Perhaps; certainly, Tuccia is excited by watching this man play a woman being raped by Jupiter.²⁸ But perhaps not; we could be moving here towards what Paster called 'not the relatively comfortable subject of women but its much less comfortable analogue – bladder incontinence'.²⁹ What is important here is the moisture; this Tuccia is wet, not dry, leaking, not contained. Unlike her Vestal namesake, she is not in control of the moment when she pours out her fluids at the feet of the priests.

Following Tuccia

In the original ancient context, as Amy Richlin noted in her 1994 chapter 'Carrying water in a sieve: class and the body in Roman women's religion', Tuccia demonstrates that 'Roman women's cults show a preoccupation with the female body ... and with the class divisions relevant to the female body: *matron*, slave, prostitute'.³⁰ Richlin argued that the Tuccia

²¹ *De secretis mulierum* tr. Helen Rodnite Lemay, *Women's Secrets: A translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magus' De Secretis with commentaries* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), p.128, cited in Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p.29.

²² *Summa conservationis*, f. i3ra, cited in Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p.29. On Joubert, see Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, pp.43-44; Joubert states that invasive virginity tests can damage a virgin's 'womb pipe' by widening it (*Popular Errors*, tr. Gregory David de Rocher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), pp.210-11).

²³ Lemay, *Women's Secrets*, p.127.

²⁴ Lemay, *Women's Secrets*, p.127; Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, pp.29-30.

²⁵ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p.43-44; Joubert, *Popular Errors*, p.46.

²⁶ *Sixth Satire*, line 64. There is also Tuccia daughter of Caeso in Valerius Maximus 4.10.

²⁷ James Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, p.92.

²⁸ Erik Gunderson, 'The libidinal rhetoric of satire', in Kirk Freudenberg (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 224-240; p.235.

²⁹ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p.23.

³⁰ Amy Richlin, 'Carrying water in a sieve: class and the body in Roman women's religion' in Karen L. King (ed.), *Women and Goddess Traditions in Antiquity and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p.331; reprinted in

story shows that women's bodies are permeable, but must become impermeable: as they live their lives, all Roman women, therefore, 'must carry water in a sieve'.³¹ Is that the case? Where does this position the virgin body?

The story of Tuccia is told in a number of sources; set in around 230 BCE, the first extant account appears to be that of Livy, as the first books of his history were composed in the early 20s BCE.³² It is in the epitome of Livy's Book 20 that we find the simple statement: 'Tuccia, a Vestal Virgin, was convicted of unchastity' (*incesti damnata est*).³³ This is the only surviving version in which her trial has proceeded as far as the point where she could be found guilty, which Robin Lorsch Wildfang has suggested supports the idea that, as the outlier here, Livy is 'reworking ... Vestal history to suit his own purposes'.³⁴

The fullest version is that of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 2.69.1, perhaps written in 9 BC; his account and that of Livy are independent. Here, Tuccia is innocent. The story comes immediately after another Vestal miracle; Aemilia, who throws a band from her clothing on to the 'cold ashes' to make the sacred fire burn. Tuccia's story is introduced with the rider that it is 'even more like a myth' than this previous miracle.

They say someone unjustly accused one of the holy virgins, whose name was Tuccia, and although he was not able to point to the extinction of the fire as evidence, he advanced false arguments based on plausible proofs and depositions; and that the virgin, being ordered to make her defence, said only this, that she would clear herself from the accusation by her deeds (τοῖς ἔργοις). Having said this and called upon the goddess to be her guide, she led the way to the Tiber, with the consent of the pontiffs and escorted by the whole population of the city; and when she came to the river, she was so hardy as to undertake the task which, according to the proverb, is among the most impossible of achievement: she drew up water from the river in a sieve (ἀρυσσάμενην ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ κοσκίνῳ), and carrying it as far as the Forum, poured it out at the feet of the pontiffs. After which, they say (φασί), her accuser, though great search was made for him, could never be found either alive or dead.³⁵

Richlin, *Arguments with Silence. Writing the history of Roman women* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press, 2014), 197-240; p.202 for a slightly revised version of this quotation and p. 197 for the date of writing.

³¹ Richlin, 'Carrying water in a sieve' (1997, p.357 and 2014, p.232).

³² Epitome of Book 20; C.B. Champion, 'Livy and the Greek historians from Herodotus to Dionysius' in Bernard Mineo (ed.), *A Companion to Livy* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), p.201. Holt N. Parker provides what remains a useful chronology of Vestal history in 'Why were the Vestals virgins? On the chastity of women and the safety of the Roman state' in Bonnie M. MacLachlan and Judith Fletcher (eds), *Virginity Revisited: Configurations of the unpossessed body* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 66-99: pp.85-88.

³³ Robin Lorsch Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins. A study of Rome's Vestal priestesses in the late Republic and early Empire* (Routledge, 2006), p.54; *incestum* is 'an older form of *in-castum*, the negation and antonym of *castum*' or purity

³⁴ Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, p.90 n.37.

³⁵ κατηγορησαί τινά φασιν ἀδίκως μιᾶς τῶν παρθένων τῶν ἱερῶν Τυκκίας ὄνομα, ἀφανισμόν μὲν πυρὸς οὐκ ἔχοντα προφέρειν, ἄλλας δέ τινας ἐξ εἰκότων τεκμηρίων καὶ μαρτυριῶν ἀποδείξει φέροντα οὐκ ἀληθεῖς: κελευσθεῖσαν δ' ἀπολογεῖσθαι τὴν παρθένον τοῦτο μόνον εἰπεῖν, ὅτι τοῖς ἔργοις ἀπολύσεται τὰς διαβολάς.

The reference ‘according to the proverb’ covers a number of sayings in which either the impossibility or the pointlessness of using a sieve to carry water is picked up; for example ‘It’s no more use than pouring water into a sieve’, used in Plautus, *Pseudolus* 102.³⁶

In contrast to Aemilia, who made a formal prayer to Vesta and asked her to confirm that she had served chastely, here Tuccia says very little: ‘only this, that she would clear herself from the accusation *by her deeds* (my italics)’ followed by a request to the goddess to ‘be her guide’. The story is about action and materiality, not words and arguments. It is also unusual in other ways. It explicitly lacks the classic sign of Vestal unchastity: the fire at the temple going out.³⁷ Recalling the later tests for virginity by using urination, Tuccia can most definitely ‘hold her water’ and she is in complete control of when and where it comes out.

Tuccia on display

Turning now to the Mantegna Tuccia, its original location is not known, but Renaissance images of Tuccia were found in a range of settings: from public spaces to bedrooms.³⁸ At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Mantegna represented ‘Two exemplary women of antiquity’ on two panels painted to look like gilt bronze against marble.³⁹ The lighting is interesting and suggests they may have been positioned in a room in such a way that each of them appeared to be correctly lit by the natural light. Were these designed as a pair or part of a larger set for a bedroom? We know that Mantegna painted four *donne illustri* in all: ‘Tuccia’, ‘A Woman Drinking’, ‘Dido’ and ‘Judith’. The surviving ‘Dido’ and ‘Judith’ are done in a different way to the other pair of ‘exemplary women’; there is no painted marble background, no paint made to look like bronze in the figures themselves. So we could perhaps see this as two sets of two, not one set of four.

Mantegna was the court artist at the time when Isabella d’Este, born in Ferrara in 1474, had moved to Mantua on her marriage at sixteen to Francesco Gonzaga. Mantegna painted *Minerva Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue* (c. 1499–1502) for Isabella’s *studiolo*, the room where she read and where she received guests. This painting survives.⁴⁰ He also painted for her *studiolo* an image in ‘feigned bronze’. It is not clear what this was; would it be too far a stretch to suggest this was the pair of images from which we have Tuccia? Isabella was one of the most educated women of her day, able to read both ancient Greek and Latin (although there is scholarly disagreement as to how well she knew these languages⁴¹). She used the ancient world as part of constructing herself as exceptional and innovative; unlike similar women of her period and status, she collected antiquities rather

³⁶ *non pluris refert quam si imbrim in cribrum geras*. See also W.F. Hansen, *Ariadne’s Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p.71.

³⁷ Holt Parker, ‘Why were the Vestals virgins? Or the chastity of women and the safety of the Roman state’, *American Journal of Philology* 125 (4), 2004, 563-401: p.581 n.72.

³⁸ Nancy Edwards, ‘The vestal virgin Tuccia’ in Andrea Bayer (ed.), *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008,) 313-4: p.314.

³⁹ <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/andrea-mantegna-the-vestal-virgin-tuccia-with-a-sieve>.

⁴⁰ The contents of the *studiolo* are scattered across the museums of Europe. On the paintings see in particular Egon Verheyen, *The Paintings in the Studiolo of Isabella d’Este at Mantua* (New York: New York University Press, 1971).

⁴¹ Barbara Furlotti and Guido Rebecchini, ‘Isabella d’Este and the Culture of the Studiolo’, trans. A. Lawrence Jenkins, *The Art of Mantua: Power and Patronage in the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), 92.

than commissioning religious works.⁴² What would she have made of Tuccia? I suspect that her reading of the image would depend on whether it hung in her *studiolo* or in her bedroom. The contents of her *studiolo* were intended to ‘display refinement of taste and learning’; what one displayed there could be used to defend oneself against any accusation that humanist education in a woman brought her virtue into question.⁴³ Subtle uses of classical mythology demonstrated that learning and chastity could go together.

Isabella had access to several of the Renaissance collections of lives or stories of famous women; several of these were in the Biblioteca Estense in Ferrara and another, Jacopo Foresti’s *De claris selectisque mulieribus* – a 1497 Latin continuation of Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus* – was in her personal library.⁴⁴ She is on record as writing that one of these collections, Sabadino degli Arienti’s 1483 *Gynevera de le clare donne*, which the author himself sent to her, was useful for those who would ‘attempt to follow in the footsteps of those illustrious ladies’; this is interesting because Sabadino specified that his work was intended to entertain, rather than to offer exemplars.⁴⁵ The modern women he describes are characterised by their ‘chastity, charity, and devotion to family’, and include women rulers, soldiers – and scholars.⁴⁶ In contrast to some of the other Italian defences of women, Sabadino does not see illustrious women as ‘exceptional’ women, somehow going beyond normal women, but rather as capable of doing what men do, using ‘talents that are natural to all women’.⁴⁷ The source for Tuccia with which Isabella would be most likely to have known well is Petrarch, who in *Triumph of Chastity* 1.148-151 (1355) wrote ‘Amongst others the pious Vestal Virgin who ran boldly to the Tiber and to exonerate herself from wicked blame brought water from the river to the temple in a sieve’.⁴⁸ Although he did not name Tuccia, this could be because she was so famous that he had no need to do so. Tuccia’s place as exemplar of chastity reached its peak at the end of the sixteenth century, when she was even compared to the Virgin Mary in the 1591 *Se pur sù ne li stellanti chiostri* by Leonora Bernardi.⁴⁹

Returning to the question of how Isabella d’Este and other sixteenth-century women would have read Tuccia’s story if it was represented in their bedroom or *studiolo*, the pairing with ‘A woman drinking’ is also relevant. While Tuccia has ‘a steady gaze fixed on something or

⁴² Margaret A. Franklin, *Boccaccio’s Heroines: Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp.149 ff.; Barbara Furlotti and Guido Rebecchini, ‘Isabella d’Este and the Culture of the Studiolo’, trans. A. Lawrence Jenkins, *The Art of Mantua: Power and Patronage in the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), 92-115: pp.95-99; Rose Marie San Juan, ‘The court lady’s dilemma: Isabella D’Este and art collecting in the Renaissance’, *Oxford Art Journal* 14. 1 (1991): 67-78.

⁴³ San Juan, ‘The court lady’s dilemma’, pp.69-70.

⁴⁴ Pamela J. Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The challenge of female independence in the literature and thought of Italy and England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p.33.

⁴⁵ Franklin, *Boccaccio’s Heroines*, p.152 citing Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, p.41 n.16. Sabadino’s work is online at https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Gynevera_de_le_clare_donne.

⁴⁶ Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, pp.41-2.

⁴⁷ Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, pp.33 and 41.

⁴⁸ Quoted for example in 1601 by Lucrezia Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women, and the Defects and Vices of Men*, ed. and tr. by Anne Dunhill (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p.103; Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, pp.242-3; Doris Adler, ‘The riddle of the sieve: the Siena Sieve Portrait of Queen Elizabeth’, *Renaissance Papers* 1978, p.3.

⁴⁹ Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women’s Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp.67-8.

someone in the spectator's space',⁵⁰ 'A woman drinking' is looking up. She has been identified as Sophonisba, who also features in Petrarch, drinking poison sent, or actually administered, to her by her husband as her escape route from being enslaved; unlike Tuccia, then, she is not an active subject.⁵¹ Tuccia carries (and in Dionysius then pours out) fluid: Sophonisba takes in. But there are some questions about the identification of the second Mantegna figure as Sophonisba. In art, she can be shown about to drink, drinking or having drunk, as for example in Giambattista Pittoni's 1730 *La morte di Sofonisba*.

As the 'Woman Drinking' is, indeed, shown specifically in the process of drinking, a better pairing for Tuccia could be Artemisia, who drank the ashes of her husband Mausolus, thus becoming the perfect widow who is also her husband's tomb, a link made explicit by Aulus Gellius who describes how she drank his ashes with spices and water (*ossa cineremque eius mixta odoribus contusaque in faciem pulveris aquae indidit ebibitque*)⁵² in what Valerius Maximus calls a 'potion' 'to become a living and breathing tomb (*vivum ac spirans sepulcrum fieri*)'.⁵³ Drinking ashes also provides a suggestive contrast to Tuccia who, in Valerius Maximus' version of her story – popular in the Middle Ages⁵⁴ – carries water in a *cribrum*, a sieve, which she 'snatched up'. This sounds like the bronze sieve in which the Vestals carried fire to the temple when the flame was renewed each year on March 1.⁵⁵ Ash and fire, death and life, thus unite the two stories. The fire has been seen as a symbol of male fertility; perhaps the greater internal heat which enables men to convert blood into semen. The presence of fire in the temple may be saying that masculinity depends on women to maintain it, echoing Richlin's point that Roman religion is 'an organic system that involved men and women together'.⁵⁶

In structuralist terms, if Tuccia's sieve full of water veers too far towards the wet, Artemisia's consumption of ash is located too far towards the dry. This is replicated in the contrast between the purity of Tuccia and the excessive passion of Artemisia – in Aulus Gellius she is 'inflamed with grief and with longing for her spouse' and he writes of the 'violence of her passion'. Artemisia is unduly consumed by desire; it becomes ash. Like the virgin Tuccia, but in a negative way, the widow Artemisia is 'exemplary'. However, that does not mean that either should be emulated. So the juxtaposition of Tuccia and Artemisia may concern chastity versus lust, as framed by bodily fluids. The message is that the good wife (recalling the bedroom setting of such images), no longer a virgin but not yet a widow, is positioned between the poles of chastity and lust, feeling just the right amount of chaste desire for her husband. Before considering another dimension of these stories – the ease with which Tuccia moves from model of chastity to dangerous witch – let us explore further the different roles of the sieve, and its later uses.

The place of the sieve

⁵⁰ Franklin, *Boccaccio's Heroines*, p.153.

⁵¹ Livy 30:15, Petrarch 'Triumph of Love'.

⁵² Aulus Gellius 10.18.

⁵³ Valerius Maximus 4.6.1.

⁵⁴ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p.63.

⁵⁵ Valerius Maximus, 8.1.5; John W. Stamper, *The Architecture of Roman Temples: The Republic to the Middle Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.35.

⁵⁶ Richlin, 'Carrying water in a sieve' (2014), p.199.

What was the sieve in which Tuccia carried water, and why does she use it? There is no reference to the sieve in the summary of Livy (where there is no mention of her going on to prove her innocence) but, as I have already noted, it features in Valerius Maximus's version of the story, from the time of Tiberius. Here, Tuccia's story is told in a list of reasons why 'ill-famed defendants were acquitted or condemned':

the chastity of the Vestal Virgin Tuccia, charged with impurity, emerged from an obscuring cloud of ill fame. In the certain knowledge of her innocence she dared to seek hope of salvation with an argument of doubtful issue. Seizing hold of a sieve (*arrepto enim cribro*), 'Vesta,' she said, 'if I have always brought pure hands to your sacred service, make it so that with this I draw water from the Tiber and bring it to your temple.' To the priestess' prayer thrown out boldly and rashly the Nature of Things gave way (8.1.5).

The *cribrum*, which is also the word used in Latin sieve proverbs, has as its core meaning 'divider' or 'separator', as does Dionysius's *koskinon*.⁵⁷ Its normal use is certainly not to carry fire, as happens in the context of Vestal ritual, but to assist in various agricultural processes. In the Renaissance visual images, Tuccia carries a large flat sieve like those still used in improving soil quality by retaining stones and releasing fine earth, although Marina Warner's description of her 'panning' in the Tiber suggests the variant in which the sieve retains what is valuable and lets out what is not.⁵⁸ The *koskinon* can come in other sizes; it features in Galen, *Method of Medicine* 5.10 (355K), in preparing a remedy which 'has been pounded and sifted thoroughly with a very fine sieve and then ground down until it becomes a fine powder'. Here, the idea is again that passing something through a sieve improves its quality.⁵⁹

An alternative focus is on losing what one should retain. In Plato's *Gorgias* (493c), the soul of the thoughtless person is like a sieve, *koskinon*, as it is unable to hold anything; again, letting out the 'good stuff', but not to a good end. In an earlier book of *Method of Medicine*, Galen uses *koskinon* in this way: 'It is a statement filled with so many errors that for me it stands comparison with the dullard when he said to the sieve that he could not discover what would plug it up and what would not' (*Method of Medicine* 1.9, 68K). This otherwise unknown proverb may recall Plato. Athenaeus, always a good source for anything related to cookery, refers twice to a bronze *koskinon* through which mashed-up cheese is pushed; here again, the purpose of the sieve is to improve what passes through it, to refine it.⁶⁰ The word *koskinon* is also used for the sieve in which the Danaids carry water; a typical punishment in Hades is to 'fetch water in a *koskinon*' and, while the husband-murdering Danaids have to

⁵⁷ Jane E. Harrison, 'Mystica Vannus Iacchi', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 23 (1903), 292-324: p.310. Harrison's illustrations of winnowing tools from traditional agricultural societies across Europe are particularly useful.

⁵⁸ Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p.242.

⁵⁹ In Plutarch *Moralia* 7 (699b) the lung is made like a sieve (ἡθμοειδής) 'for the sake of the liquids and the solids that slip in with them'.

⁶⁰ Athenaeus 647e, quoting from Chrysippus, *The Art of Baking*. Athenaeus also mentions sieve-sellers at the market (126f).

carry water to put in a jar full of holes, at some point the vessels in which they carry the water are also described as having holes in them.⁶¹

When *cribrum* refers to an agricultural sieve, it explicitly lets through the fine earth and retains the stones and larger chunks of earth, as in Cato, *On Farming* 151 (quoted by Aulus Gellius 3.14.17), describing sowing the seeds of the cypress tree: 'Over it sift earth from a sieve (*cribrum*), to the depth of a halved finger'. *Cribrum* is also used for a sieve in Columella (5.6.6), on planting elm seeds: 'we shall thickly cover the beds all over with the seed and scatter crumbling earth over them with a sieve to the depth of two inches'. This contrasts with another device, the *liknon*, a winnowing tool which is open at one side. In winnowing, the woman may shake the grain in a sieve so that small seeds and dust pass through the holes, while stalks, husks and lumps of earth collect at the top and can be picked off or, in a particular kind of sieve, are allowed to slide over one, lower, part of the edge of the sieve.⁶² The *liknon* retains the good and lets out the bad, while the *cribrum* retains the bad and lets out the good.

What is retained can be the good, or the bad, material. The *liknon* is used in harvesting – the end of the process – and the *cribrum* in planting – the beginning of the process. This may be significant in terms of the *cribrum* as virginal body; remembering that Vestal Virgins could, and did, go on to marry, their bodies would in time need to retain the male and female fluids of generation rather than letting out this 'good stuff'. Recalling Aristotle on generation as being like making cheese (above, p.xx), the womb as a sieve can solidify the fluids that make a baby.⁶³ In ancient Greek medical texts, there is a κρησέρης in the Hippocratic *Barren Women* 10, translated in the Loeb as 'flour sieve'.⁶⁴ Its use here is to strain some mare's milk which is going to be used to clean out pus from the womb of a woman who is unable to become pregnant because the pus is melting the male seed; 'She should then remove the covering and insert the syringe in the direction of her uterus, knowing herself where to put it'. Like the *cribrum* used in soil preparation – and of course, in a dominant image of the female body, women are the earth in which men plant seed⁶⁵ – the Hippocratic use of sieving here is about retaining the bad, to let through the good: sometimes, retaining the solids, so the fluid is purer. The same is true of the Greek κιναχύρα in Aristophanes (*Assemblywomen* 730) translated as 'bran sieve' – the sieve retains the bran so the flour is finer.

The *cribrum* lets out the good; Tuccia retains her water. Bearing in mind the Western interest in virgins and urine, relevant here is the work of Michael McVaugh.⁶⁶ Writing about the history of the kidney, he extended the image of sieves to body parts, asking whether the

⁶¹ As a typical punishment: Plato, *Rep.* 2, 363d; Basil, *To young men*, 9 (both using *koskinon*). On the Danaids, Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 47. C. C. N. Costa and E. W. Whittle, 'Holed pitchers for the Danaids: A first allusion in Seneca?', *Mnemosyne*, 26. 3 (1973), 289-291 argue that the first reference to the carrying vessels having holes is found in Seneca. See in general Eva Keuls, *The Water Carriers in Hades: A study of catharsis through toil in Classical Antiquity* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1974). The point at which the 'holed pitchers' enter the story is still debated.

⁶² Harrison, 'Mystica Vannus Iacchi', p.309.

⁶³ *Vimen* is used for a wicker sieve which is used in cheese making to remove the whey, as in Ovid *Fasti* 4.770.

⁶⁴ This is chapter 222 in the edition of Emile Littré (vol.8 p.430) and chapter 10 in the Loeb edition of Paul Potter (vol.10 p.356).

⁶⁵ E.g. Page DuBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and ancient representations of women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp.39-64.

⁶⁶ McVaugh, 'Losing ground'.

kidney was seen historically as a strainer (separating the solid from the liquid), or a sieve (here, removing smaller solid particles and not the larger ones). In Galen, the kidneys allow only the thinnest part of the blood and bile to pass through; the density of the kidney holds the thicker part. Galen discusses why this thicker part does not act as a barrier preventing more blood coming forward for filtration. Blood moves through the kidneys 'as if through an *êthmos*'; the Greek term *êthmos* designates a woven, usually reed, basket used to filter juice from grapes or olives, or a metal, pierced tray used to filter wine as it is served. The purpose here is to separate liquid from solid, and this distinguishes the *êthmos* from the *kostikon*, a woven tray used to separate different sized solids, such as grades of flour. So, here, the kidneys are more like a strainer than a sieve.

Returning to Tuccia's *cribrum*, this is the sort of sieve that is used in planting, not harvesting, but it remains unclear whether it holds back, or releases, the 'good'. In *Greek Virginity* (1990), Giulia Sissa drew a structuralist parallel between the jar and the sieve:

There are rewards to be gleaned from delving into the technical details of agricultural literature: jar and sieve are part of the indispensable equipment of civilized life, forever used for storing what is necessary and for getting rid of what is unnecessary. The twin expressions *tetrêmenos pithos* (leaky jar) and *koskinôî antlein* (to draw [liquid] with a sieve) literally invert these fundamental actions of storing and separating. A jar that allows its contents to leak out, a sieve used as a container: what better way to suggest improvidence in the head of a family?⁶⁷

While I am drawn to the opposition jar/sieve, this does not seem to me to represent what the *cribrum* tends to signify. It is not about 'getting rid of what is unnecessary', so much as improving the material, retaining the bad to let out the good. Furthermore, in Tuccia's story, using a sieve as a container to carry water is about providence, rather than improvidence.

I have not yet mentioned the womb, but Sissa's comments evoke its representation as a jar in the Hippocratic *Diseases of Women*.⁶⁸ In a 2014 BA thesis, Rachel Smith suggested that 'Like all women, the Vestals were imagined as "sieves." Just as water typically slips through the holes in a sieve, women are vulnerable to penetration by men. It is a woman's duty to protect the boundaries of her body, allowing access only to her husband.'⁶⁹ I am not persuaded by this: being a sieve is not about letting in a marital penis, but about fluids. One fluid being referenced here may be menstrual blood, and menarche, defloration and the lochia transformed the ancient Greek *parthenos* into a mature woman.⁷⁰ The virgin can hold her water, but perhaps her womb is also being evoked in that the jar needs to retain the woman's blood and the man's seed, while the process of sieving is also linked to the production of a foetus.

⁶⁷ Giulia Sissa, *Greek Virginity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 139-40.

⁶⁸ Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the female body in ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.35-35.

⁶⁹ Rachel A. Smith, *Vestals Remembered: An Examination of the Myths of Rhea Silvia, Tarpeia, and Tuccia* (BA thesis, Baylor University, Texas 2014), pp.64-5.

⁷⁰ King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, pp.72-73.

Elizabeth and Tuccia

In the sixteenth century, Tuccia's story could be evoked by the mere presence of a sieve. But does this mean that all sieves are Tuccia's sieve? Portraits of Elizabeth I are recognised as highly complex, with 'a distinctively "linguistic" orientation'; they use metaphor and allegory, as well as including text within the image. But, as Mary Hazard has shown, they also use images to 'convey attitudes that were too bold to be expressed in words'.⁷¹ In her portraits, particularly during and immediately after the ultimately unsuccessful negotiations to marry her to François, Elizabeth I was often depicted with a sieve.⁷² She also had sieve motifs on her clothing and jewellery.⁷³

Were the 'sieve portraits' an assertion of Elizabeth's virginity and thus an objection to the idea of this marriage, or could they support the union? François, Duke of Alençon, was Elizabeth's 'Frog Prince'; this was how he signed his letters to her and, while he remained a possible husband, she was given presents with the frog theme.⁷⁴ Doris Adler has linked this to a folk story circulating at the time, 'The well at the world's end', in which a girl who has been sent by her wicked stepmother to collect water in a sieve is told by a frog the secret she needs: she must 'Stop it with moss, daub it with clay'.⁷⁵ The frog turns out to be a prince, so the presence of the sieve in portraits could be because Elizabeth had found her prince.⁷⁶

Even if we accept this connection, this was not the full extent of the symbolism. The 'sieve portraits' themselves contain many clues as to their interpretation. In the Siena sieve portrait now dated to 1583, two years after the marriage negotiations had ended, the Queen holds the sieve, on the rim of which is inscribed A TERRA IL BEN / MAL DIMORA IN SELLA (The good falls to the ground while the bad remains in the saddle). We could read this as a good *cribrum* message, suggesting not just that the Queen can tell the good from the bad, but that she acts on her knowledge. The sieve itself is empty, not in use.

While the sieve references Tuccia,⁷⁷ it also connects with another series of images, associated with the virtue of Prudence. For example, in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Prudentia* (1559), everyone is preparing for the future, salting meat, putting out a fire, having both a

⁷¹ Mary A. Hazard, 'The case for "case" in reading Elizabethan portraits', *Mosaic* 23/2 (1990), 61-88; p.61.

⁷² A connection first made by Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), pp.97-99: the portraits as 'symbolic arguments against the Anjou match'. Cf. Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 121-122. Cleaning of a portrait of the Queen held at Eton College revealed a sieve there too; H. McBurney and C.S. Kimbriel, 'A newly discovered variant at Eton College of the Queen Elizabeth I Sieve portrait', *The Burlington Magazine* 156, October 2014, 64-69.

⁷³ McBurney and Kimbriel, 'A newly discovered variant', p.642 nn.10-11.

⁷⁴ Adler, 'The riddle of the sieve', pp.1-2.

⁷⁵ Adler, 'The riddle of the sieve', p.2.

⁷⁶ In some variants of this folk tale, the virgin is sent by her mother to fetch water in a sieve because she has broken the only pitcher they own. In return for the frog teaching her how to make the sieve watertight, she has to sleep with the frog for two nights, and he then becomes a prince. See <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/frog.html> from James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps, *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales: A Sequel to the Nursery Rhymes of England* (London: John Russell Smith, 1849), pp. 43-47.

⁷⁷ Although the statement that this portrait shows Elizabeth 'as Tuccia' seems to be going too far; e.g. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Metsys_Elizabeth_I_The_Sieve_Portrait_c1583.jpg.

priest and a physician at the sickbed; and the cardinal virtue of Prudence herself is shown with a mirror (for self-knowledge) and carrying a sieve on her head to separate good from bad.⁷⁸

Gail Paster suggested that the sieve

is a paradoxical symbol of Elizabeth's virginity. Full of holes, the sieve refers unmistakably to the symbolically leaky, hence unreliable nature of ordinary women's bodies even as it asserts, through its link to Tuccia, the queen's transcendence as virgin monarch of ordinary women. For Elizabeth in her capacity as ruler, the sieve is an emblem not of leakiness but of discernment, of the good judgment requisite in rulers.⁷⁹

So is Elizabeth's sieve referencing both her virginity and her prudence, and are these two connected? Is it that by maintaining her virginity Elizabeth is also a better ruler? Her motto, seen in the Plimpton sieve portrait on the coat of arms, is 'semper eadem', always the same. This portrait, which also includes a quotation from Petrarch, dates to 1579. What is exceptional in the Plimpton sieve representation is that the sieve is tied to the Queen's dress by a ribbon. In another of Livy's Vestal Miracle stories, Claudia pulled a ship up the Tiber by tying it to her girdle, so this could be a double Vestal reference. Furthermore, the ribbon is coming out at a point which suggests the sexual organs, in what Louis Montrose called 'a displacement of the Queen's sexuality'.⁸⁰ She appears to be showing us, very precisely, that she has a non-leaky sieve. To me this recalls a 1522 image of the womb turned inside out, in Berengario da Carpi.⁸¹ In this inside-out womb image, the many black dots show the cotyledons, which end in the orifices through which the menses flow into the womb. But showing us something that evokes her womb would hardly be a chaste thing for Elizabeth to do.

Does the sieve relate not to her virginity but to the rumours of her sexual appetites (particularly in relation to Dudley), which had scandalised Europe?⁸² Constance Jordan proposed that the presentation of the sieve as a 'saddle' in the Siena portrait adds a further level of complexity here; being in the saddle suggests riding, and thus sexual passion.⁸³ Is the rider in control of the passions or giving them rein? Is this 'being in the saddle' about a dominance that is more masculine than feminine? 'To ride on a saddle-sieve is to rule with and through passions that the ruler/lover has the power both to express and to deny'.⁸⁴ The

⁷⁸ <https://www.pieterbruegel.net/object/prudence-prudentia>.

⁷⁹ *Body Embarrassed*, p.50.

⁸⁰ Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth*, p.124.

⁸¹ Jacopo Berengario da Carpi, *Isagogae breves* (Bologna: Benedictus Hectoris, 1522): https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/Berengario_p24r.jpg.

⁸² Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth*, pp.126-7.

⁸³ C. Jordan, 'Representing political androgyny: more on the Siena Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I', in A.M. Haselkorn and B.S. Travitsky (eds), *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 157-176.

⁸⁴ Jordan, 'Representing political androgyny', p.167.

fluid in the sieve 'falls to the ground' in a way that Tuccia's Tiber water did not, and water to the earth suggests fertilisation, not virginity.

In the Siena sieve portrait, the roundels on the column at the top left show scenes from the story of Dido and Aeneas; from Aeneas fleeing from Troy to his departure from Dido. Scholars interpret this as showing Elizabeth as a superior version of Aeneas, abandoning entirely any possible sexual relationships in order to meet her destiny as founder of a new empire. However, this is complicated too. While Elizabeth was known as 'Dido' in her own time, this was a reference to Petrarch's version in the *Triumph of Chastity*, where the emphasis was not on her lack of chastity by surrendering to Aeneas, but on her death in order to remain true to her husband – not for Aeneas (11.10-11). By keeping her body pure, Dido kept Carthage independent (168).

So is this about celebrating Elizabeth's chastity while at the same time acknowledging the rumours of her unchastity?⁸⁵ Tuccia too used the sieve to challenge a rumour of unchastity.

Tuccia as witch

Elizabeth retained control of her own imagery; Tuccia's story was open to interpretations in which her exemplary nature was denied. How did she achieve her reversal of forces of Nature? In one sixteenth-century tradition, Tuccia could demonstrate the 'vertue of unstain'd virginity', as in the list of exemplars given in Thomas Cranley's 1635 poem, 'Amanda: or, The reformed whore'.⁸⁶ However, in a contrary interpretation, she was a witch. In Thomas Twyne's chapter on virgins, in a work written in 1576 and thus within Elizabeth's reign:

Valerius in the seventh book and third chapter, writeth of a certain vestal virgin in Rome called Tuccia, whose chastity being obscured with a sinister report of incontinency, and she her self being privy of her own innocency, took into her hands a sieve, and thus prayed unto the goddess Vesta, saying: Vesta, if I have always touched thy sacrifices with chaste and undefiled hands, command that I may take water out of the river Tyber with this Sieve, and carry it into thy Temple. Which indeed she accomplished, the common course of Nature giving place to her bold attempts.⁸⁷

Why should Nature 'give place' to her? One possibility in the sixteenth century was witchcraft; Elizabeth passed a witchcraft law in 1563, the 'Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witch Craft', and the 1590s were the period of the largest number of

⁸⁵ Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth*, p.127.

⁸⁶ Thomas Cranley, *Amanda: or, The reformed whore* (London, 1635), a 'key text in the history of pornography' couched as a description of converting a prostitute to virtue; Katherine A. Craik, *Reading Sensations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.126.

⁸⁷ Thomas Twyne, *The schoolmaster, or teacher of table philosophy*, 1576, ch.31 'Of virgins', p. 36. The structure of Tuccia's powerful and answered prayer – invocation of a named deity, claim for divine favour, specific request – is identified by Hans-Friedrich Mueller as one which 'conforms in structure to Roman practice'; *Roman Religion in Valerius Maximus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.52.

accusations of witchcraft during her reign.⁸⁸ Quoting Cotta's *Discovery of Witchcraft*, published 13 years after Elizabeth's death in 1603, Richard Bovet in 1684 linked Tuccia to Livy's account of that other Vestal,

Claudia, who (unassisted by any humane help) did (only with a small string fastened thereunto) draw a mighty Ship along the River of Tyber; which by reason of its vast weight and greatness, could not be moved by the force of many strong Men, assisted by Cattle that were used to draw heavy burthens, which with good reason he concludes she could not have performed without the co-operation of some evil Spirit. He likewise mentions Tuccia, another of that Sister-hood, who by muttering some Invocation, or Inchantment, could take up water in a Sieve, and carry it at a good distance from the River Tyber, without spilling a drop.⁸⁹

In the passage to which Bovet refers here, Cotta makes it clear that pulling a heavy object is 'supernatural and above her power and nature'; he describes Tuccia as 'reported by mumbling of a certain prayer, to keep water within a sieve, or a riddle, as witnesseth not only Pliny, but even Tertullian'.⁹⁰ There is no connection between these two women and witchcraft or magic in **Roman** sources.

In the trials of witches, one of the grounds for conviction was confession. Another was to produce witnesses who would swear to the accused person speaking or acting in a way that only those familiar with the Devil could do. In Increase Mather's account of the 1692 Salem witch trials, which states this principle, we read that 'Claudia was *seen* by witnesses enough, to draw a ship which no human strength could move. Tuccia a Vestal Virgin was *seen* to carry water in a sieve: the Devil never assists men to do supernatural things undesired' (my italics).⁹¹ Tuccia is included in a discussion of the power of words to affect matter.⁹² This is also the context of the reference to Tuccia in Pliny.⁹³ It comes in a section on 'the remedies derived from man', and specifically on whether words and chants work; people think they do but, Pliny writes, the wisest men say no. After giving examples of how very formal patterns of prayer have been used, for example to stop something being omitted, Pliny gives the example, 'extant too is the plea of innocence uttered by the Vestal Tuccia when, accused of unchastity, she carried water in a sieve in the year of the City six hundred and nine' (145 BC). So for Pliny, this is not Cotta's 'mumble', but a properly patterned prayer.

The Tuccia stories, then, are far more complex than they may at first appear. The various brief versions in ancient literature are incomplete, but rich in possible signification. Mantegna's alignment of Tuccia with what may be Artemisia brings out further meanings:

⁸⁸ C. Levin, *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, Palgrave, 2002, p. 108.

⁸⁹ Richard Bovet, *Pandaemonium, or, The devil's cloyster* (London, 1684), p.110.

⁹⁰ John Cotta, *The trial of witch-craft*, second edition (London, 1625), pp.32-33. The juxtaposition of Claudia and Tuccia is also found in Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.16.2, where Tuccia is not named but is clearly the person meant in his 'a Vestal virgin suspected of unchastity removed all doubt when she filled a sieve with water from the Tiber and it did not run out through the holes'. See also 22.11.3.

⁹¹ Increase Mather, *A further account of the trials of the New England witches* (London, 1693), p.38.

⁹² Philemon Holland's 1634 translation of Pliny, p.295, has it as a 'charm'.

⁹³ *NH* 28.12.

fire and ash, chastity and lust, agency and lack of agency. Yet the presence of fire is already hinted at in Tuccia's 'snatching up' of an implement that may have been used in ritual to carry fire. This implement, the sieve, has taken us into the complexities of both agricultural tools and the workings of bodily organs. While it concerns separation of good and bad, and thus discernment, the sieve may be more like a strainer, letting through what is good, or used more to retain the good things. In early modern literature, while Tuccia can be a model of Christian womanhood suitable for display to respectable women, her invocation of Vesta can become evidence of her witchcraft, so that this otherwise exemplary woman becomes a villain.

The body's fluids are presented here to sexual and social identity. As a way of thinking about the female body, the *cribrum*-sieve normally refines materials, improving the quality of what passes through it. Virgins retain rather than release, unlike the uncontrolled body of the leaking Tuccia of Juvenal. The Vestal Tuccia, however, does not let anything pass through until she is at the feet of the priests; if the sieve is a sort of womb, she is perhaps showing that she will suppress and then use her fertility in the service of the state, but she also makes one think of later virginity tests which depend on the resistance of the virgin bladder to pour out its contents. Elizabeth's sieve, too, which references both chastity and the potential for reproduction, is about knowing when to keep bodily fluids in, and when to let them out; only at the proper time, and only in the interests of the greater good.