ABSTRACT
This article explores the largely putative phenomenon of *penis captivus*, also known as vaginal headlock or, in colloquial parlance, a ‘sticky situation’. The article presents a thematic discussion with examples given from existing sources, rather than a chronological ordering of cases. The underlying motive is to investigate whether the phenomenon is real or no more than an urban legend, or whether, and to what extent, elements of reality or urban myths are present. Eight elements that occur in most of the narratives discussed are identified: Sexual desire, forbidden trysting places, fear of discovery, painful spasm, *cri de coeur* (cry of despair), remedial intervention, voyeuristic interest of bystanders, and possible suicide or punishment.

**Keywords:** *de cohesion in coitu*; penis captivus; sticky situation; vaginal headlock; vaginal spasm; vaginism

The term *vaginismus* (vaginism) and the expression *penis captivus* (vaginal headlock or *de cohesion in coitu*, obliquely referred to as a ‘sticky situation’ in modern parlance) are used interchangeably, but are by no means synonymous. It is therefore important to demonstrate the difference between the two concepts, paradoxically to underscore how they relate to each other. *Penis captivus* is the Latin term for ‘captivated penis’ during heterosexual intercourse. The male organ is locked in the female vagina and cannot be removed and those involved in the congress experience excruciating pain when they try to separate. The condition has frequently been reported in cases of adultery and other illicit relationships, which is perhaps why *penis captivus* is a
subject of popular superstitions and witchcraft. By contrast, *vaginismus* (vaginism) refers to the spasm of the pubococcygeus muscle that prevents sexual penetration, medical examination, insertion of tampons, menstrual cups et cetera. It can be seen as a form of sexophobia which derives from the *penis aculeatus*, the archaic fear of the ‘pricking penis’ which hurts and invades the female body (Walker, 1979). The occlusive vaginal reflex is comparable to the response of the eye which closes when approached by a foreign object. The condition affects both the *sphincter vaginae* and the *levator ani* muscles:

> The spasm may be so great that both husband and wife have the impression that there is an organic obstruction. It is a protective mechanism, and in severe forms, is accompanied by spasm of the adductor muscles of the thighs so that even the vulva becomes inaccessible. (Jeffcoate, 1973, p. 571)

According to the eminent French child psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto, who has successfully treated women affected by vaginism (*les vaginiques*), the condition is caused by trauma due to sexual abuse by the father or other male adults in the subject’s childhood. According to Dolto, Valentin, and Kouki (1996) such cases respond more readily to treatment by a female, rather than a male psychoanalyst simply because patients respond more readily to a woman than to a man. Diathermal and surgical treatment by gynaecologists tend to fail and may aggravate instead of allaying the woman’s fear of penetration. Women affected by vaginism are inclined to suck their thumbs in waking life and in sleep (Dolto et al., 1996). While penis arrest can take place during intercourse, vaginism usually takes place before penetration, and what leads to the confusion of the two concepts is that vaginism and vaginal headlock are both triggered by a spasm. Some medical experts recognise the existence of vaginism but dismiss the *penis captivus* phenomenon as a fiction of the class known as urban myths. Those who claim that *penis captivus* is a verifiable phenomenon maintain that the vaginal spasm that characterises vaginism may occur during intercourse and thus lead to the arrest of the male organ.

The German gynaecologist Stoeckel, in his book *Lehrbuch der Gynäkologie*, and Brendan Musgrave, in the *British Medical Journal*, both claimed there is conclusive evidence of the penis capituvus phenomenon (Musgrave, 1980; Stoeckel, 1933). While Stoeckel tries to provide some explanation of how it happens, Musgrave only relates a vague recollection from his youth of a couple “being taken on a single stretcher into the casualty department”. Here is Stoeckel’s account:

> Just as in animals (dogs), there are also cases called ‘penis captivus’ in human beings. The [coital] contractions [of vagina and pelvic muscles] can suddenly turn into spasms which imprison the penis and cause it to swell up excessively. The cases encountered all concerned illicit coitus, performed furtively (behind bushes or standing in doorways). Fear of detection was obviously an important aetiological factor. The event evokes ridicule, sneers, and scorn in bystanders and naturally puts those affected into a shocking position from which they can often be released by only narcosis of the woman.
Even then it is frequently still difficult to free the thickly swollen and dark-purple penis from its imprisonment, a task which is occasionally only possible through the forceful introduction of a finger. (Stoeckel, n.d. in “Penis Captivus – did it occur?, Taylor, 1979, pp. 977–978)

Hildebrandt (1872), who initially scoffed at the possibility of the captivus phenomenon, offers an interesting case of a woman who experienced the phenomenon during intercourse and had to undergo treatment:

During the course of this treatment and despite her severe nervous irritability, she had intercourse on one occasion. [The husband] described his experience on that evening, when incidentally, his wife had appeared less ill than usual, though she felt very agitated. He reported that just at the moment, when he thought the intercourse, which had been quite normal till then, had come to an end, he suddenly felt that he, or rather his glans, was held back deep in the vagina, tightly gripped and imprisoned, while his whole penis was in the vagina. All attempts at withdrawal failed. When he forced attempts, he caused severe pain to himself and his wife. Bathed in perspiration through agitation, alarm, and his failure to free himself, he was finally forced to resign himself to waiting in patience. He could not say how many minutes this lasted, his imprisonment seemed endless. Then – the hindrance vanished on its own; he was free. (Hildebrandt, 1872, in “Penis Captivus – did it occur?”, Taylor, 1979).

Unlike Hildebrandt’s account, most incidents of intercourse where such penis arrests have been reported are illicit ‘quickies’ performed in awkward positions, in forbidden locations such as on the altar of a church, near a church, in a toilet or car, etcetera. This explains the belief that the arrest of the male organ is a curse from God, contrary to the traditional belief that the penis captivus is the result of a spell cast by the cuckolded or betrayed party in order to humiliate them in public and then extort a fine from them. I shall give the recipe of this spell in my next article. For now it suffices to mention that the genitalia of a dog or cat are the main ingredients of the potion.

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF CAPTIVUS: MAGIC AND RUT

The first reason advanced for penis captivus is inordinate sexual appetite, which causes lovers to engage in intercourse for hours until the spasm that holds the male organ captive is triggered. The earliest known literary allusion to the condition of penis captivus due to overindulgence appears in Homer’s epic poem The Odyssey, where Ares and Aphrodite are entangled in the net prepared as a snare by Hephaestus, the divine blacksmith-magician who explains the situation to Zeus as follows:

Father Zeus and you other happy gods who live for ever, come here and see a comic and cruel thing. Zeus’ Daughter Aphrodite has always despised me for my lameness, and now she has given her heart to this butcher, Ares, just because he is good-looking and sound of limb, while I was born a cripple. And whom have I to blame for that, if not my
father and my mother? I wish they had never begotten me! But you shall see how these two have crept into my bed and are sleeping in each other’s loving arms. The sight cuts me to the quick. Yet I have an idea that they won’t be eager to prolong that embrace, no not for a moment, not for all their love. Theirs is a sleep that both will soon be tired of. But my cunning meshes are going to keep them just where they are, till her father hands me back every one of the gifts I made him to win this brazen-faced hussy, who may be his Daughter and a lovely creature but is the slave of her passions. (Homer, 1981, p. 130)

Note that in the above passage the cuckolded husband accuses his wife of being the “slave of her passions”: he demands that his father-in-law return the gifts he (Hephaestus) had given him. He has created the humiliating predicament of the couple to visit a punishment on them to the merriment of the immortal gods of Olympus who in fact are provoked to fits of “uncontrollable laughter” at the sight, and agree as one that Ares should pay an adulterer’s fine. The couple of adulterers are only released when Poseidon promises to pay the fine if it is not forthcoming from Ares. Even the Roman poet Lucretius, who had first-hand experience of a love potion that had driven him mad and inspired him to write poetry, confirms that amorous ardour can bind lovers together like dogs who derive pleasure in the bulbus glandis or canine penis captivus:

*Have you ever noticed, again, how couples linked by mutual rapture are often tormented in their common bondage? How often dogs at a street corner, wishing to separate, tug lustily with all their might in opposite directions and yet remain united by the constraining fetters of Venus? This they would never do unless they experienced mutual joys which mock at their efforts and hold them enchained. (Lucretius, 1955, p. 168)*

Such is the case of a Malaysian woman who took a viagra-like aphrodisiac and became “abnormally excited” so that when she made love with her husband, they found themselves unable to disengage and had to be taken to hospital where she was given an injection to relax the spasm and enable disengagement to take place (Colin, 2001).

When the belief in magic became less fashionable in Western Europe penis captivus was attributed to sexual ardour or extreme excitation of the sexual organs following prodigious coitus, and magical influence was discounted. Diemerbroek, a seventeenth century anatomist, tells the story of a just married couple who were locked together and cold water had to be poured onto their private parts to separate them:

*When I was a Student at Leyden I remember there was a young Bridegroom in that Town that being overwanton with his Bride had so hamper’d himself in her Privities, that he could not draw his Yard forth, till Delmehorst the Physician unt’y’d the Knot by casting cold water on the Part. (Quoted by Rolleston, 1991, p. 235)*

Another case of excessive wantonness is reported by Borel who attributes his penis captivus to a swollen penis due to overindulgence and the application of civet to his glans to increase sexual performance. For such cases Borel suggests the use
of clysters to heal the condition (Rolleston, 1991). In his *Histoires extraordinaires de la médecine*, Dr Pierrick Hordé also attributes penis captivus to overindulgence, offering as evidence the story of a young Frenchman, Jean-Marc, who was a conscript in Germany and had not seen his girlfriend for two months. The girlfriend, Sylvie, waited for him impatiently and at the train station they began to embrace and kiss each other with growing ardour with the result that they hurried home and engaged in sexual intercourse at once when they arrived at their apartment. Jean-Marc wanted to end their lovemaking, but Sylvie persistently urged him to continue until they eventually discovered that they could no longer disengage due to the penis captivus reflex. Jean-Marc managed to summon medical assistance on his cellphone and the physician who responded to the call managed to effect a relaxation of the spasm by means of a manipulative procedure causing dilation of the rectal muscles (Hordé, 2000).

**FORBIDDEN TRYSTING LOCI**

In many reported cases the penis captivus reflex is triggered by the position assumed by the lovers and the risk of discovery attached to the locations chosen for the tryst (e.g., ‘hot spots’ such as the altar of a church). People who perform illicit acts on forbidden premises are naturally apprehensive, hence slight events that might signal discovery (e.g., a fluttering bird) could have a startling effect that might set off the spasm. Geoffroy de La Tour-Landry, writing in the fourteenth century, relates in his *Livre pour l’enseignement de ses filles du chevalier de La Tour Landry* (*The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry: Composed for the Instruction of his Daughters*) the story of a couple who decided to desecrate the church by fulfilling their fantasy of having sexual intercourse on the altar. The further purport of this cautionary tale (translated into Modern English in the end note) is that this sacrilege called forth the Lord’s retribution with the result that they were fastened together that whole night and the next day until their evil deed was discovered by congregants visiting the church:

*Hit happe in chirche on an even of oure lady, one that was called Pers Lenard, which was sergeaunt of Candee on the night det fleshely with a woman on an auter, and God of his gret might wolde shewe that they dide evelle, tyed hem faste togedre dat night and the morw all day in the sight of the pepill that come thedir into the towne; and all the contre there about come downe and save hem. And thei might never parte, but were fast like a dogge and a biche togedre, that night and the morw all day until the tyme that pepill yode a procession about for them to pray to God that orrible sight might be ended and hide and atte the last, whanne it was night thei departed. And after the chirche was halowed or ever there were saide therein ani masse. And they that dede the dede were ioyned to penaince to go naked afore the procession thre sondayes beting him self and recording her synne tofore the pepill. And therfor here is an ensaumple that nobody shudde do no suche filthe in the chirche, but kepe it clene and worshipe God there inne* (Rolleston, 1991, p. 233)
Even before Geoffroy, the French medieval *Manuel des Pechiez* which loosely translates as *The Book of Sins*, and which Robert of Brune (alias Robert Mannyng) translated as *Handlyng Synne*, tells the story of Father Richard and his wife who were given accommodation by an abbot in a room next to the church. One night he had intercourse with his wife, thus incurring the divine wrath and punishment of being unable to separate from his wife. Monks were summoned to pray for them, God granted their prayer, and the couple were separated at last. A similar fate befell a man who had to cross a river on his way to church on a Sunday morning accompanied by his wife. After the crossing (probably the wife had to remove part or all her finery) he was so in rut that he could not wait to reach the church but succumbed to his desires and performed the act near the Church of Saint Clitaucus (Clydog or Clodock) where he was supposed to attend Holy Mass. To their surprise when they tried to separate, they were bound like dogs. He asked his friends to go and pray for him on the grave of the martyr Clitaucus and after the prayers were done he was immediately separated from his wife.

Another incident tells the story of a seducer who decides to copulate dog-style with a woman over the sarcophagus of a bishop inside the church and is soon held inside the woman’s vagina. He also cried for help and with the intercession of Saint Guignerus, the Christ liberated him.

In all the incidents referred to above we have the same pattern of a curse that binds the culprits and the intercession which liberates of them from the unfortunate malady. Since these acts are performed under stressful conditions in unsuitable localities, it seems reasonable to assume that the onset of vaginal headlock could be triggered by even a minor disturbance (e.g., a slight sound) that has a startling effect due to the guilty apprehension of those performing the illicit act. Clitaucus and Clitonus, the two names involved in the two incidents have connotations that act on the context. Clydog is suggestive of the captivus phenomenon that is normal copulatory occurrence for dogs. It is interesting to note that in Jerzy Kosinski’s novel *The Painted Bird*, the penis captivus condition is presented as punishment for a rape. A character by the name of Rainbow finds an injured Jewish girl by the railway tracks whom he rapes. In the course of this assault they become entangled and remain so until they are freed by a witch-midwife. He survives but she dies and their story becomes the talk of the town; in fact even Rainbow “when he had taken a few drinks, would tell people how the Jewess had sucked him and wouldn’t let go of him”:

Rainbow crawled to her feet, wedging them between his legs, and with a deft jerk pulled off her dress. She tried to rise and hold on to the material with her good hand, but Rainbow pushed her back. She was now naked. The light of the oil lamp threw shadows on her flesh.

Rainbow sat at the girl’s side and stroked her body with his big hands. His bulk hid her face from me, but I could hear her quiet sobbing broken occasionally by a cry. Slowly...
Rainbow took off his knee boots and breeches, leaving on only a rough shirt.

He straddled the prostrate girl and moved his hands gently over her shoulders, breasts, and belly. She moaned and whined, uttering strange words in her language when his touch grew rougher. Rainbow breathed heavily. He lifted himself in his elbows, slipped down a little, and then fell on her with a thud.

The girl arched her body, screamed, and kept opening and closing fingers trying to grasp something. Then something strange happened. Rainbow was on top of the girl, his legs between hers, but trying to break away. Every time he lifted himself, she screamed with pain; he also groaned and cursed. He tried to detach himself from her, but seemed unable to do so. He was held fast by some strange force inside her, just as a hare or fox is caught in a snare.

He remained on top of the girl, trembling violently. After a while he renewed his efforts, but each time the girl writhed in pain. He also seemed to suffer. He wiped the perspiration off his face, swore and spat. At this next try the girl wanted to help. She opened her legs wider, lifted her hips, and pushed with her good hand against his belly. It was all in vain. An invisible bond held them together. (Kosinski, 1965, p. 104–105)

In this case the penis captivus reflex was clearly caused by the girl’s traumatised response to the rape. It seems as though she had vaginismus from the beginning of the rape but Rainbow’s brutal attack managed to penetrate her anyway and they were both locked together.

Let us examine the case of a young servant enjoying herself with an elderly coachman in the backroom of a farm in Pentonville, England. The owner of a farm comes to the kitchen door to double-check if he has locked it before retiring to bed. He finds that he did not lock the door but is immediately surprised to hear a strange noise coming from the servants’ quarters which he decides to investigate:

On going in, he discovered to his horror that the man was in bed with one of the maids. She screamed, he struggled, and they rolled out of bed together and made frantic efforts to get apart, but without success. [...] he was a big burly man, over six feet, and she was a small woman, weighing not more than ninety pounds. She was moaning and screaming, and seemed in great agony, so that, after several fruitless attempts to get them apart, he sent for me. When I arrived I found the man standing up and supporting a woman in his arms, and it was quite evident that his penis was tightly locked in her vagina, and any attempt to dislodge it was accompanied by much pain on the part of both. It was, indeed, a case “De cohesion in coitu.” I applied water, and then ice, but ineffectually, and at last sent for chloroform, a few whiffs of which sent the woman to sleep, relaxed the spasm, and relieved the captive penis, which was swollen, livid, and in a state of semi-erection, which did not go down for several hours, and for days the organ was extremely sore. The woman recovered rapidly, and seemed none the worse.

I am sorry that I did not examine if the sphincter ani was contracted, but I did not think of it. In this case there must have been also spasm of the muscle at the orifice, as well as
higher up, for the penis seemed nipped low down, and this contraction, I think, kept the blood retained and the organ erect.⁶ (Davis, 1884, p. 13)

COMMON ELEMENTS IN CAPTIVUS NARRATIVES

In Davis’s account the problem is relieved with chloroform, which helps to relax the vaginal spasm but does not relieve the state of the penis which remains tumescent for several hours. The description of the male organ in this instance seems to suggest that the problem lies not only with the woman but affects the couple equally, probably because of the awkward position assumed by the illicit lovers during the intercourse and the disturbance that takes place during the amorous play. In the passage quoted above, though not spelled out clearly, it is suggested that the spasm is provoked by the sudden appearance of the master in the servants’ quarters. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi analyses the structure of the narratives on the penis captivus which he reduces to surprise and punishment:

They all contain two elements: surprise and punishment. A typical story is about a couple of co-workers using their lunch break for sex in the office, and then being surprised by somebody who came back earlier than they had expected. The result – penis captivus. Another version is about a couple of young lovers being surprised by the girl’s parents who again came home earlier than expected. The moral of the story is that illicit intercourse will be punished by a painful and embarrassing penis captivus. (Beit-Hallahmi, 1985, p. 354)

However, in this article the following common elements have emerged from the material discussed:

(i) Ardent sexual desire.
(ii) Forbidden trysting places, inappropriate time.
(iii) Startling effect of unexpected sound due to fear of discovery, triggering the spasm of the pubococcygeus muscle.
(iv) Excruciating pain in genitalia (usually experienced by the male due to constriction of male member, and by female due to attempted retraction of male member).
(v) *Cri de coeur*, crying out in pain and despair, seeking assistance.
(vi) Prurient interest of bystanders, perhaps masquerading as moral outrage.
(vii) Intervention to render assistance (provided by medical practitioner or witch) and methods used (insertion of finger to relax sphincter, or pouring of cold water over genitalia, or administering chloroform, or in intractable cases the castration, or payment of fine to cast off the spell).
(viii) Suicide (very rare instances).

In most stories involving the penis captivus phenomenon the mythical aspect is reinforced by the fact that the punishment of the culprits is not violent and the
narrators make sure that their stories do not end tragically (e.g., the lovers or adulterers are paraded naked in the streets for the entertainment of everybody). I know of only one incident where the couple end up committing suicide after penis captivus because of the ruthless exploitation of their humiliating exposure by the journalists:

_We remember a case of vaginismus with penis captivus which occurred in 1923 at Warsaw and ended by double suicide. It was in the spring, a couple of young students stayed behind in the garden after closing time. In the midst of their amorous sport a violent spasm occurred imprisoning the penis. The keeper alarmed by the desperate cries of the young man ran up. The doctor of municipal ambulance after giving an anaesthetic to the woman separated the couple. The matter might have been forgotten, but the journalists in their greed for sensational facts did not fail to publish the adventure. The next day the two revolver shots put an end to the mental sufferings of the two lovers._ (Rolleston, 1991, p. 235)

The narrator of the anecdote decides to end it tragically, but it is not clear why the two students committed suicide. In recent times incidents of penis captivus have been frequently reported though no one can provide reliable factual evidence to verify such reports. In La (Ghana) people flocked to a local police station after a radio station spread a rumour that a married woman and her lover had been discovered in the embarrassing position caused by the _penis captivus_ reflex. The commanding officer could not persuade the inquisitive locals that one could hardly expect to find the people concerned at a police station. A similar incident was rumoured to have taken place at the Agbogbloshie Market where an amorous couple purportedly found themselves unable to separate for several hours after they fell prey to the spasmodic reflex under discussion and naturally drew onlookers (Peace.FM, August 2010, pp. 1-2). The rumour proved untrue, however, and the prurient expectations of the crowd were disappointed. This incident is similar to the one reported in Dandiagas (General Santos City) in the Philippines where a crowd of wishful thinkers flocked to the clinic of a doctor, peeping through the glass louvres in the hope of seeing a couple of adulterers who were reported to have been brought by some fishermen after a one-night stand on the beach where they suddenly found themselves in the ‘sticky situation’. The cause for vaginal lock in this case was said to be _muthi_ which the wife of the man had sought from the _alburaryo_ or _herbolaryo_ (herbalist) who gave her a potion made of a penis of a sea turtle (_pawikan_) which she put on her husband’s trousers before he went to meet his lover. The husband and his lover were locked to each other during the intercourse and were taken to the clinic, where they later died of blood poisoning. Once again the narrator of the incident decides to get rid of the unidentified adulterers so that they become a mystery and the story becomes more mythical than before. In another case from Sultan Adarat in the Philippines, it was reported that a thirty-two year old married man working for the Department of Public Works and Highways and a twenty-year old woman working in a department
store had to be taken to hospital after being unable to separate for several hours. Doctors supposedly used tranquillisers to relax the man’s member, but this also took some time (GMANews.TV, 2009).

In 1908 a case of *penis captivus* reportedly occurred in a dockyard in Bremen which naturally attracted a good deal of amused interest and a good deal of discomfiture on the part of the victims of this contretemps:

_A few years ago a remarkable case of this kind occurred in Bremen. One of the dock labourers was having sexual intercourse in an out-of-the-way corner of the docks, when the woman became affected with this involuntary spasm, and the man was unable to free himself from his imprisonment. A great crowd assembled, from the midst of which the unfortunate couple were removed in a closed carriage, and taken to the hospital, and not until chloroform had been administered to the girl did the spasm pass off and free the man. (Bloch & Paul, 1908, p. 28)_

The captivus condition has been known to necessitate amputation, if press reports are to be believed, of the male member as a last resort to secure release of the victim. Some such cases have been reported from Africa and much more recently a case was reported in Jamaica where the victims eventually had to be taken to hospital, “however it was too late as oxygen and blood had stopped circulating in the man’s member for too long, hence it had to be cut off” (*The Jamaica Star Online*, 2008). Unfortunately, the author does not specify the duration of the entanglement nor is it clear why, with all the medical knowledge and technology available now, the man’s member had to be amputated. What makes the whole story mysterious is that the hospital workers admit having heard about it yet no-one had personally witnessed the event. In another event involving an illicit liaison between a 44 year old Zimbabwean man and a 38 year old woman whose husband works in South Africa, the matter ended in amputation or so it would seem from the report: “Commentators said medical science cannot intervene as it would mean cutting off the man’s male privates and could endanger the lives of both of them. Usually, to be unbolted the husband demands a herd of up to five cows” (*ZimDiaspora*, 2011). In this case the matter was complicated by the purported intervention of witchcraft which eliminated the possibility of a normal medical solution. Apparently, a common Shona muthi called “umbhobobobo” was used in this instance to trap the unfaithful wife.

*Ilanga LaseNatali* has a reputation for carrying stories of bewitched adulterers who end up having to be separated surgically. The British tabloid, *The Sun* (sharing the same name as *Ilanga*) tells the story of an Italian couple whose illicit lovemaking also ended in the embarrassing situation of being unable to separate and who were discovered in that condition by the woman’s husband:

_A pair of shop workers sneaked into the loo for sex – but got locked together when the woman suffered cramp. Naked Salvatore Mazzi, 37, and Angelina Marcelo, 26, were found by her furious husband, who had been waiting for her to finish her shift._
Medics freed the embarrassed pair at the clothes shop in Bergamo, Italy. Security guard Salvatore was kicked out by his wife and sacked for romping during work. Cashier Angelina was also dumped, but kept her job after her boss decided she had finished her shift at the time. (The Sun, 2009)

This story contains all the elements of the myth of the penis captivus: the anxiety of the waiting husband, the uncomfortable position in which the illicit act is perpetrated, and the resultant vaginal spasm that prevents separation, followed by discovery to the amusement of bystanders.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it should be noted that the condition of penis captivus is probably the result of a psychological condition induced by a trauma of the past (e.g., a fear of sex due to sexual abuse at a tender age) and can be regarded as a type of dyspareunia (difficult and painful sexual intercourse). Paradoxically, women suffering from vaginismus consciously or unconsciously have a very strong desire for sexual intercourse which tends to pose a risk for a treatment by male psychoanalysts since the patient tends to be fixated on the therapist, in which case the treatment has to be abandoned. A woman who consulted Françoise Dolto to be treated for vaginismus told in consultation that she had had a dream in childhood that she was feeding steak to her vagina. In their lengthy analysis Dolto et al. (1996) note that this dream marked the onset of the problem that led to the dyspareunia from which the patient suffered later in life. The young girl’s dream leads us to the concept of the vagina dentata, the mythical toothed vagina that becomes a devouring mouth. All in all the penis captivus phenomenon as a form of vaginismus is either the physical manifestation of a desire to castrate the male partner with a vagina dentata or a kind of penis envy that retains the male member so that she can keep it for herself. This is clearly evinced in the story of Jean-Marc and Sylvie where at first Sylvie remonstrates with Jean-Marc not to withdraw, and then in answer to an indomitable subconscious prompting, holds him captive for hours in a vise-like grip exerted by the spasmodic contraction of the vagina (i.e., the penis captivus reflex).

NOTES

1. The phrase on the title comes from the text of Geoffroy de La Tour-Landry quoted in this article.
2. On the eve of the feast of Our Lady, a man called Pers Leonard, who was sergeant of Candee had sex with a woman on the altar of a church and God in his might decided to expose their evil deed; he therefore fastened them together that night and the next day so that visitors to the town would see them in that condition; and all the inhabitants of the area came to see them. And they could not separate but were joined together like
a dog and a bitch that night and the next day until people gathered in a procession and offered prayer in supplication that God might put an end to the sacrilegious spectacle and remove it from sight. They were only parted when night had set in. A church was then reconsecrated in a cleansing ritual before Mass could once more be celebrated in it. And the guilty couple were instructed to do penance by going naked before the procession three Sundays in succession while scourging themselves and professing their sin to the people, thus serving as a cautionary example to warn people not to defile the church so shamefully, but to preserve its pristine state and worship God in it.

3. See Rolleston (1991, p. 237): “Potens quidam die dominico cum uxore ad audiendum deo servitium in ecclesia sancti Clitauci veniens, super ripam fuminis, non longe ab ecclesia positam, cum uxore sua concubuit, et peccato commisso, ab illa separari non potuit, immo iunctus uxori inseparabilis remansit. Et exclamans, e sodalibus voce magna dixit: « Ite ad sepulcrum martyris Clitauci, t partum istud, a me vi et inuise ablatum, sib restitui promittite, et pro me suppliciter queso intercedite. » «A certain man with his wife were coming on Sunday to hear the servants of God in the church of Saint Clitaucus, and on the riverbank not far from the church, he had intercourse with his wife, and having committed this sin, he could not be separated from her, indeed remained inseparably joined to his wife. So calling out to his comrades, he said loudly: “Go to the grave of the martyr Clitaucus and promise to be returned to him that very site (meadow) I had taken forcibly and unjustly, and intercede, I beg you, humbly on my behalf.” When this was done, he was immediately freed from this horrible bind”.


(Over the coffin of a certain old bishop who had been the comrade of King Clitonus, a particular corruptor was eager to invade the lap of a certain woman. As they were inseparably coupled in the fashion of dogs in this dishonourable work, they could in no way be separated from each other. At last they were led to the memory).

5. As this is the only document that describes the captivus phenomenon in detail it seems necessary to quote the outcome of the rape and Rainbow’s furtive efforts to liberate himself: “Rainbow renewed his efforts. He appealed loudly to the Virgin Mary for help. He panted and puffed. He made another big heave, trying to tear himself away from the girl. She screamed and started to hit the bewildered man’s face with her fist, scratch him with her nails, bite his hands. Rainbow licked the blood off his lips, lifted himself on one arm, and dealt the girl a powerful blow with the other. Panic must have dimmed his brain, for he collapsed on top of her, biting her breasts, arms and neck. He hammered her thighs with his fists, then grabbed her flesh as if trying to tear it off. The girl screamed with a high-pitched steady cry that finally broke off when her throat dried up – and then it started again. Rainbow went on beating her until he was exhausted.

Rainbow started crying for help. His shouts brought first a band of barking dogs, then some alarmed men with axes and knives. They opened the door of the barn and, uncomprehending, goggled at the couple on the floor. In a hoarse voice, Rainbow quickly explained the situation. They closed the door and, not letting anyone else enter, sent for
a witch-midwife who knew about such things.

The old woman came and kneeled by the locked couple, and did something to them with the help of others. I could see nothing; I only heard the girl’s last piercing shriek. Then there was silence and Rainbow’s barn grew dark. At dawn I ran to the knothole. Sunshine was coming in through the slots between the boards, lighting up sparkling beams of grain dust. On the threshing floor, close to the wall a human shape lay stretched out flat, covered from head to foot with a blanket.” (the girl). p. 106.

6. This famous letter is a renowned hoax by an inveterate prankster Sir William Osler who wrote it under the assumed name of Egerton Yorrick Davis, a fictitious personage he created to mask his identity.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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