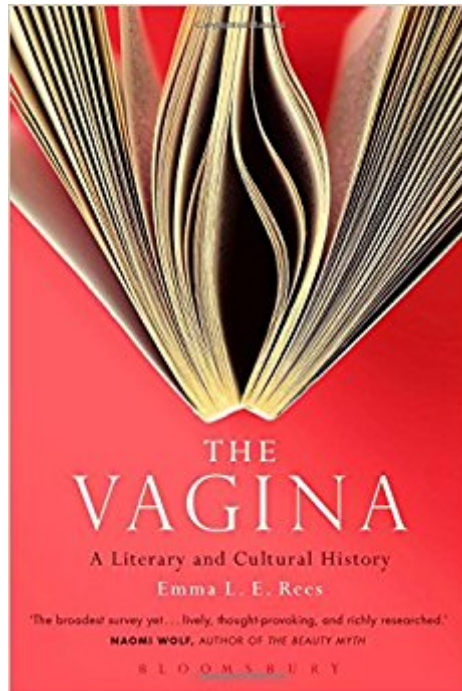


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# The Vagina: A Literary And Cultural History



## Synopsis

From South Park to Kathy Acker, from Lars Von Trier to Sex and the City, women's sexual organs are demonized. In *The Vagina: A Literary and Cultural History*, Emma L.E. Rees investigates the evolution of this demonization: she considers how writers, artists and filmmakers contend with the dilemma of the vagina's puzzling 'covert visibility' and how the 'c-word' is an obscenity that both legitimates and perpetuates the fractured identities of women globally. In our postmodern, porn-obsessed culture, vaginas appear to be everywhere, literally or symbolically but, crucially, they are as silenced as they are objectified. Even common slang terms for the vagina can be seen as an attempt to divert attention away from the reality of women's lived sexual experiences: slang offers a convenient distraction from something taboo. *The Vagina: A Literary and Cultural History* is an important contribution to the ongoing debate in understanding the feminine identity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Don't be fooled by the playful pink cover—this book is not for the faint of heart. Ranging from Indian folktales of vagina dentata to the surprising popularity of vaginas in postmodern art, Rees's book is a whirlwind tour of the literary and cultural history of the treatment (and mistreatment) of female genitalia. Helpful parenthetical asides define the more esoteric academic language. However, the casual reader may be discouraged by the overwhelmingly dense nature of the information that is presented, with regrettably minimal analysis. Still, the excellent citations and quality of the information offered will appeal to scholarly readers.

Best for academic libraries. --Rebecca Hayes --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“The Vagina is exactly what it purports to be: a literary and cultural history of impressive breadth and frequently rewarding depth. The Vagina remains an informative and considered book: it is a resource, and a source of power. A polyphonic mixture of high and low, it will engage the feminist philosopher at home with Kristeva, as well as those comparably new to these ideas. The Vagina is not, to borrow a term from Laurie Penny, the feminism-as-spectacle that Wolf and many others who court the mainstream gaze are so keen to offer us; rather it is feminist writing of the best kind, that which comes from genuine engagement and real political concern.” Jane Cleasby, Review31

I saw this book reviewed in our local Sydney newspaper and it received excellent reviews. As a doctor (and a man) I was interested by this book on professional and personal levels. It gave an excellent insight into the myths and taboos surrounding the female organ. We should all respect it, after all over fifty percent of the population have one, and most of us came out of one! Sadly, medical school (in the 1980s) did not teach female medicine well. The anatomy and physiology of the female genitalia perhaps, but this excellent book looks at the social and cultural aspects as well. I think this should be a required text for any doctor dealing with females. Well done Ms. Rees!

Rees moves effortlessly here through a variety of historical periods and a wide genre of art to demonstrate her points about the female anatomy. From artists such as the Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi (and her Judith paintings) to Georgia O'Keefe (Black Iris) and from writers such as Chaucer (Canterbury Tales) and Rabelais (Gargantua and Pantagruel) to Denis Diderot (Les Bijoux Indiscrets), William Burroughs (The Naked Lunch), and Susanna Kaysen (Girl, Interrupted); and from photographers such as Renée Cox and Zoe Leonard, Rees draws conversantly on both the familiar and the arcane. At the same time, Rees calls on the work of early psychologists, philosophers, theorists and critics, such as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. In a highly fascinating study, the author explicates with skill historical, literary, and artistic concepts, such as the vagina dentata myths (from Aztec tales to Native American Hopi Indians, for example) and contemporary medical and emotional concerns related to FGM. Anyone interested in Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, Women's History, Pop Culture, and Social

and/or Literary History should absolutely read Rees's book. It ought to be on every woman's reading list. Although this topic may seem intimidating to some, Rees tackles it with amazing clarity and careful study--the seriousness of the study frequently giving way to wonderfully rollicking humor. An absolutely terrific read!

I haven't even read it yet, but hey, you gotta love the cover. I'm a gynecologist, and I just leave it out because it is so awesome!

fine

Written by a British author it appears to be a college paper as it features a 40 page introduction and each chapter has pages of notes. Contains black and white photos and 8 pages of color photos. Mentions movies, plays, and television programs where the topic is discussed. Mentions the impact of words and the mysteries enclosed.

A displeasing approach which I wouldn't call feminist, from the very start.

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The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition  
Vagina: A New Biography  
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The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory: Fifth Edition  
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