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From the table to the bed: controlling female sexuality through food in French Renaissance literature

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Abstract: During the Renaissance, to talk of food is essentially to speak of dietetics and medicine. Moreover, when texts deal with female delight, it is more a sexual delight than a greedy one. Liebault and Brantome linked both of them and their texts are among the rare ones in French literature proposing a diet for women. In Jean Liebault's "Thresor des remedes secrets du mal des femmes" and Brantome's discourse on "Des dames qui font l'amour et leurs maris cocus", speaking of food is also a way of speaking about female sexuality and desire. The doctor as well as the chronicler of Henri III's Court both use Galen as a model in their texts, but each have different aims: Liebault wants to cure female sexual disorders and thus food becomes a remedy for excessive sexual pleasure, while Brantome shows how food is a way for women to kindle their libido in a delightful, pleasant way. In both texts, discourse on the female body reveals male perplexity and anxiety about a woman's pleasure of food and sex.

Keywords: Brantome, Liebault, female sexuality, food, Renaissance

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