

# Why be so Attached to your Penis?

A fellow creature that gives new meaning to the phrase, “going both ways”

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“I haven’t seen anything like this before.”

– Bernard Picton, Curator of Marine Invertebrates, National Museum of Northern Ireland

Could the surreal imagination of even Karel Capek in his most biting satirical novel, *War With The Newts*, ever have conceived of a game-changer the likes of *chromodoris reticulata*, a red and white sea slug that can actually shed its own penis after mating and then replenish said appendage the very next day.

This disappearing penis trick is not the angst-ridden male nightmare erected by King Missile in their 1992 single, “Detachable Penis,” or the liberating sexual fantasy of temporary phallic disposability as a matter of choice which also pops up in that same song. Rather, it is a verifiable fact of nature recently discovered by Japanese researchers.

The astounding results of their study were published in the Royal Society’s *Biology Letters* journal in February 2013.

The unassuming thumb-sized shell-less mollusk in question, which inhabits the same warm waters of South East Asia as those in which Capek’s fictionalized newts were first discovered, has single-handedly turned “civilized” notions of phallogocentric sexuality inside out. Practicing a sex life that is quite unnerving to the border cops of sexual repression, it seems that this shape-shifting creature is a “simultaneous hermaphrodite” or, in plain language, it has male and female sexual organs which it can use at the same time when mating.

So much for antiquated notions like penis envy! This versatile switch-hitting sea slug, with its exuberant double-barreled sexuality, might just be the most highly evolved creature in the animal world. During copulation, since both of the randy slugs involved can freely give and receive sperm, there can be two distinct parallel penises and vaginas at play in any mating situation.

Fancy that!

After copulation, each sea slug simply drops, ejects or snaps off its thread-like organ as the grand finale. Ouch, you might say! While geckos are willing to part with their tails, few animals would be willing to part with their penises.

No problem though, since each slug has two internally-coiled backup penises, each of which it can use about twenty-four hours after a sexual liaison. Then, to top it off, once all three penises have been spent, the creature is capable of eventually growing new ones.

At one level, such a unique sexuality is all about the none-too-liberating goal of continuously breeding more slugs. Yet, at another, the creature’s transcendence of normative gender categories upsets the Adam and Eve apple-cart and questions the dualistic assumptions of Noah’s Ark. At this latter level, its sluggish defiance of conventional male/female biology is positively blasphemous.

Maybe, as Canadian journalist Tabatha Southey has wittily opined, the discovery of the sex life of *chromodoros reticulata* is even the real reason for Pope Benedict XVI's unprecedented resignation.

If he believes, as did his papal predecessor, John Paul II, that animals have souls, then what's a pontiff to do? Southey writes:

“Consider the moral issues a detachable penis raises: If one of God's creatures uses a different penis every time he has sex, is he a virgin each time? Would any sea slug drawn into the service of the Lord have to stop being a priest for the 24 hours she didn't have a penis?

“All of this would be enough to throw any pontiff into spiritual crisis, but, what's more, the sea slug penis in question appears to be covered with tiny spines that scrape out any competing sperm inside the vagina-like organ of his/her partner as he himself attempts fertilization.

“What Pope wouldn't feel overwhelmed?”

Perhaps then it is only appropriate to end this inspiringly unsettling story by hereby formally nominating the humble sea slug for surrealist “anti-sainthood.” And, fortunately for these lively creatures, Luciferian logic does not require the nominee to be dead as Catholic church dogma does for sainthood.

As an anti-authoritarian bearer of light, *chromodoris reticulata* illuminates our wildest dreams like an impossible anarchic silhouette shining brightly against the dark landscape of religious fundamentalism.

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