

You don't have to worry about what the adjective modifies in the title of the book *The Big Penis Book* (Taschen). The book is big. It is twelve inches square, and weighs over seven pounds, with almost four hundred heavy, glossy pages. It is just the sort of book that can go on your coffee table, if you have such a table to support it, and if you like penises. Big penises. For the penises are big, too. Page after page here, hundreds of photographs, show men who, relaxed or erect, have penises ranging from remarkably large, to gargantuan, to (literally) fantastically huge. Dian Hanson, who previously brought out the less-ambiguously-titled but still similarly-themed *The Big Book of Breasts*, has edited what is mostly a book of photographs, with text that is generally reminiscences of photographers who were shooting models during the 1960- 1990 period, pictures that would go into small distribution magazines or private collections. The pictures, however, are the show, and they are a treat to look at.

As Hanson points out in her introduction, there is no denying the allure of a large penis. "Flaccid or erect, it is aesthetically stunning - commanding every onlooker to consider capacity and consequence." She points out how evolution has formed penises to be big in our species but also to be the objects of our candid regard. We walk upright, for instance, and so a penis is out in the open if there are no clothes in the way. Most people think gorillas have huge penises, but they have the smallest of any great ape. You see, gorillas have a dominant male system, whereby the one chief gorilla can mate with all the females. There is no need for show penises in such an environment. Chimps have much bigger penises than gorillas, because females can pick their own mates, and so chimps are really into penis displays. "Since humans have the largest penises by far among the primates," Hanson says, "we may speculate that man was showing off long before the codpiece came along." (She dates the codpiece to around 1420, but explains that covering the penis didn't make us lose interest in it; codpieces, over their 150-year fashion history, got bigger and bigger, so keen are we to show off.)

So how big is a big penis? The "most prolific penis measurer in history" was probably Professor Alfred Kinsey, who collected statistics from 3,500 men by giving them a blank card they were supposed to put along the top of their erections, mark, and send in. It is hilarious that the results in this study, when compared to measurements by subsequent researchers who actually laid rulers to erections scientifically, were greatly exaggerated. Even when sending in an anonymous marked card, men liked to make themselves seem bigger than they actually were. Kinsey's average had a mean length of just over six inches; the more objective average is around 5.5 inches. Kinsey didn't find anyone with a penis longer than nine inches, but there are plenty bigger on display here. The most famous is that of John Holmes, reputed to be thirteen inches, but actually closer to 11 inches (even those giants, it seems, can't help fudging their statistics). The other famous name here is Long Dong Silver, photographed for a 1979 "Sex Freaks Special" article in *Club International*. The photographer, interviewed in a chapter here, says that the model "... was immensely endowed, thank you very much. A lovely penis, if you're into penises, which I'm not particularly." For "Freaks", though, this was not enough. In-camera effects enabled the penis to be made even longer, but eventually he and his model went to the same prosthetic-maker who did the make-up for *The Elephant Man*, for a remarkably lifelike but exaggerated appendage that could even be tied into a knot. Freaks, indeed.

The interviews are with the photographers rather than the models because many of the models aren't around any more, dead like John Holmes from AIDS, or running businesses or heading families that preclude participating in or reminiscing about their photogenic days. The photographers themselves have moved on, to advertising shots, art production, or launching a quarterly magazine on ancient Egypt. They talk about their models from long ago with fondness (some were lovers); one says, "I'm a frustrated father and I take an interest in a number of these young men - not because I fancy them, but because they've had nightmare childhoods." Some of the photographers remember the models complaining about having too much of a good thing, yearning for penis-reduction surgery because either they attracted only lovers who just wanted a big penis, or because a big penis restricted some of the activities that normal penises routinely enjoy. This is a good message for those of us who know they'll never measure up to the examples in the photos here, or will never have a lover of these dimensions. Hanson writes that fretting over size is silly: "Why should we invest all this anxiety in a couple of inches when we can simply sit back, pop a beer, and let the big boys entertain us like a good game of baseball?"

The photographs are certainly entertaining. There are bound to be those who like to see the possessor of a large penis wearing boots and a leather cap and belt; others are going to find the props pretty silly. Why does this one have a cowboy hat and cap pistol, for instance, and why does this other one think it is time to serenade us on his guitar? One of them gives an emphatic answer to the old question of what a Scotsman has under his kilt. The guys are handsome (often in styles that are already dated), usually with good physiques, and many of the photographs have been fussed over as would befit any studio production. The men who smile at the camera, as if they were playing a happy prank or as if they were sincerely enjoying themselves, look endearing (but maybe that's just my kink). The penises are not just big; flaccid they might do anything, but in erection they are straight, curved, even bent; they are circumcised or not; some look smooth and others look textured; some have a big glans, some small. The differences are remarkable, and probably all the more noticeable because we don't often look at lots of penises the way this book enables us to do. And while they are not just big, they are indeed big, and because they are big, they are cheerful and optimistic. This is a book of fun.

Rob Hardy