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Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800

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Pornography Has a History

Pornography still provokes intense debate, but in Western countries it is now generally available to adult consumers and scholars alike. When you make your way to the Reserve Room of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, for instance, there are only a few reminders of the secrecy formerly shrouding the famous Collection de l'Enfer. As late as 1992 you still had to fill out a form explaining your "precise reason for request." The asterisk on the front of the form referred you to the back where it said, "general or vague terms ('scientific research,' 'documentation,' 'personal research') will not be accepted." When you read those words of warning it is hard not to think of prim, worried librarians trying to keep dirty books out of the hands of the wrong people, most likely aging men in fraying suit jackets who would occupy their seats in search of something other than scholarship. It is a measure of the changing times that no one ever questions your responses any more.

The very existence of the Collection de l'Enfer or its English counterpart, the Private Case of the British Library, gives a sense of definition and clarity to pornography that it has not always had. Pornography did not constitute a wholly separate and dis-

tinct category of written or visual representation before the early nineteenth century. If we take pornography to be the explicit depiction of sexual organs and sexual practices with the aim of arousing sexual feelings, then pornography was almost always an adjunct to something else until the middle or end of the eighteenth century. In early modern Europe, that is, between 1500 and 1800, pornography was most often a vehicle for using the shock of sex to criticize religious and political authorities. Pornography nevertheless slowly emerged as a distinct category in the centuries between the Renaissance and the French Revolution thanks, in part, to the spread of print culture itself. Pornography developed out of the messy, two-way, push and pull between the intention of authors, artists and engravers to test the boundaries of the "decent" and the aim of the ecclesiastical and secular police to regulate it.

Although desire, sensuality, eroticism and even the explicit depiction of sexual organs can be found in many, if not all, times and places, pornography as a legal and artistic category seems to be an especially Western idea with a specific chronology and geography. As a term in the modern sense, pornography came into widespread use only in the nineteenth century. For some commentators, consequently, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were critical in the development of a modern notion of pornography. But the main lines of the modern pornographic tradition and its censorship can be traced back to sixteenth-century Italy and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France and England (albeit with important antecedents in ancient Greece and Rome). Thus, the essays that follow shall focus on this time period and these places.

Pornography came into existence, both as a literary and visual practice and as a category of understanding, at the same time as – and concomitantly with – the long-term emergence of Western

modernity. It has links to most of the major moments in that emergence: the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Writers and engravers of pornography came out of the demimonde of heretics, freethinkers and libertines who made up the underside of those formative Western developments. For this reason, a historical perspective is crucial to understanding the place and function of pornography in modern culture. Pornography was not a given; it was defined over time and by the conflicts between writers, artists and engravers on the one side and spies, policemen, clergymen and state officials on the other. Its political and cultural meanings cannot be separated from its emergence as a category of thinking, representation and regulation.[1]

Early modern pornography reveals some of the most important nascent characteristics of modern culture. It was linked to freethinking and heresy, to science and natural philosophy, and to attacks on absolutist political authority. It was especially revealing about the gender differentiations being developed within the culture of modernity. Although no judgment is offered here on the value of modern pornography, understanding its history is an essential element in understanding the current debates.

The need for a historical perspective was recognized in the 1986 Meese Commission report on pornography, which complained that "the history of pornography still remains to be written."[2] The 1,960-page final report included only sixteen pages on the history of pornography in all times and all places (that is, less than one percent of the total report) and another forty-nine pages on the history of the regulation of pornography. This disproportion between the history of the practice and the history of its regulation is significant, since pornography has always been defined in part by the efforts undertaken to regulate it.

The Commission's brief historical overview was, however, sur-

prisingly good. It argued that the control of written and printed works in Europe from medieval times through the seventeenth century was undertaken primarily in the name of religion and politics, rather than in the name of decency, and it showed that modern obscenity laws only took shape in the early nineteenth century. The first conviction in the United States for the common law crime of obscene libel, for instance, took place in 1815 in Pennsylvania, in the case of *Commonwealth* v. *Sharpless*. As the Meese Commission report shows, while regulation of pornography was not invented in modern times, regulation in the early nineteenth century marked a clear departure from earlier concerns.[3]

In *The Secret Museum*, Walter Kendrick traced the origins of modern attitudes toward pornography with more precision. Kendrick attributed the invention of pornography to the conjunction of two very different events at the end of the eighteenth and during the early decades of the nineteenth century: the creation of "secret museums" for objects classified as pornographic and the growing volume of writing about prostitution. Kendrick situated the secret museum (whether in the form of locked rooms or uncataloged holdings) in the long-term context of the careful regulation of the consumption of the obscene so as to exclude the lower classes and women. With the rise of literacy and the spread of education, expurgation of the classics was required; this practice, insofar as English-language books are concerned, began in the early eighteenth century, flourished throughout the nineteenth, and came to an abrupt though incomplete end at the time of World War I. Thus, the prospect of the promiscuity of representations of the obscene – "when it began to seem possible that anything at all might be shown to anybody"[4] – engendered the desire for barriers, for catalogs, for new classifications and hygienic censoring.

In other words, pornography as a regulatory category was in-

vented in response to the perceived menace of the democratization of culture. As the Meese Commission itself noted, albeit with a somewhat loose sense of chronology and a penchant for understatement, "until the last several hundred years, almost all written, drawn, or printed material was restricted largely to a small segment of the population that undoubtedly constituted the social elite."[5] It was only when print culture opened the possibility of the masses gaining access to writing and pictures that pornography began to emerge as a separate genre of representation.

As Kendrick argued, the concept of pornography was historically shaped, and its development as a category was always one of conflict and change. Pornography was the name for a cultural battle zone: " 'pornography' names an argument, not a thing." Obscenity has existed just as long as the distinction between private and public behavior, yet around the middle of the nineteenth century, according to Kendrick, something changed in the balance between obscenity and decency, private and public, and pornography emerged as a distinct governmental concern.[6]

The middle of the nineteenth century was certainly crucial in linguistic terms. The word *pornography* appeared for the first time in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1857, and most of the English variations on the word (*pornographer* and *pornographic*) date from the middle or the end of the nineteenth century. The words emerged in French a little sooner. According to the *Trésor de la langue française*, *pornographe* surfaced first in Restif de la Bretonne's treatise of 1769 titled *Le Pornographe* to refer to writing about prostitution, and *pornographique*, *pornographe* and *pornographie* in the sense of obscene writing or images dated from the 1830s and 1840s.[7] The Collection de l'Enfer of the Bibliothèque Nationale was apparently set up in 1836, though the idea had been in the air since the Napoleonic regime and perhaps even earlier.[8] Thus, in the decades just before and just after the French

Revolution, the term begins to gain consistency, a fact that is far from accidental.

The earliest modern usage of the term *pornography* that I have been able to find is in Etienne-Gabriel Peignot's *Dictionnaire critique, littéraire et bibliographique des principaux livres condamnés au feu, supprimés ou censurés*, published in Paris in 1806. Peignot was interested in cataloging not only the books but the reasons for censoring them. In his preface, he established three classes of reasons: religious, political and moral. Included in the moral class were those books that disturbed the social order and contravened good morals. This class of suppressed books was further subdivided: books that, though not obscene, were filled with "bizarre and dangerous opinions," such as Rousseau's *Emile* and the works of Helvétius; immoral books written in prose which "one calls *sotadique* or pornographic"; and works of the same kind written in verse. Pornography is here clearly associated with immorality and with the need to protect society.[9]

Peignot was trained as a lawyer and worked as a librarian and school inspector. As a consequence, he was no doubt especially alert to the concerns characteristic of modern discussions of pornography: legal regulation, library classification and consideration of the effect on morals. Peignot began his dictionary in ways reminiscent of all the early catalogers of pornography and of much current commentary, that is, with assurances that he recognized the "delicacy" of his subject: "I did my best to treat it decorously, that is, in a fashion designed not to shock any opinion but to inspire horror for these debaucheries of the spirit which have justly provoked the severity of the laws." Yet, again like his successors, he insisted on the need to pursue such investigations rigorously and evenhandedly. Some books have been unjustly censored, he argued, and many writers and booksellers were punished too severely when all that was required was the simple suppres-

sion of publication. Peignot was grappling with the problem of print in a supposedly modern society; books should not be suppressed just because religious and political authorities do not like them but rather because they offend some basic shared sense of the social order.[10]

Peignot recognized the contradiction implicit in openly discussing pornographic literature: If you write about the loathsome, don't you give it the very publicity that a good moral order would try to suppress? To get around this problem, Peignot announced that he had cited very few pornographic works even though they were "unfortunately all too numerous." He gave two reasons for his reticence: it would be dangerous to make the books known, and few of them had been publicly condemned. The police, he claimed, ordinarily took these books away in secret. He then gave a representative list of the most abhorrent and included several, though not all, of them in his dictionary. Peignot thus placed himself exactly on the crucial battleground identified by Kendrick: on the border between the zones of darkness and light, the secret and the revealed, the hidden and the accessible. Peignot was extending the zone of light by compiling his dictionary even while supposedly condemning certain books to darkness.[11]

From the way Peignot tossed off his list of the most repugnant, immoral books, it is clear that a kind of galaxy of the most explicit pornographic writing was already in place in the minds of connoisseurs at the beginning of the nineteenth century. At the top of Peignot's list of prose works was the *P—des Ch—*; *Th—ph—*, and the *A—des d—*. Since the author of the first was listed as well as the "translator" of the last, it is clear that Peignot expected to fool no one by failing to list the full titles: *Histoire de Dom Bougre, portier des Chartreux* (1741), *Thérèse philosophe* (1748) and *L'Académie des dames* (1660). He included in the same category the libertine works of both Fromaget (author of *Le Cousin*

de Mahomet, 1742) and Crébillon fils; *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, *Jacques le fataliste* and *La Religieuse* of Diderot; *Les Liaisons dangereuses* of Laclos; *Le Poëte* (Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Desforges, 1798); and the *Veillées conjugales* and the *Galerie des six femmes* of Desf— (presumably *Galerie des femmes* by Victor-Joseph-Etienne de Jouy, 1799). He listed several works in verse as examples of that genre, including the *Pucelle d'Orléans* of Voltaire (1755), *Chandelle d'Arras* of Dulaurent (1765), the *Ode à Priape* of Piron (1710) and the *Epigrammes* of Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, in circulation since the early eighteenth century (figure I.1).[12]

Peignot reserved his only extensive commentary in the preface for the one work – seized by the police – that "includes all that the most depraved, cruelest, and most abominable imagination can offer in the way of horror and infamy": *Justine*. His reference to the two editions, to the engravings, and to the initials of the author (M.D.S—) again make clear that Peignot expected many if not most of his readers to be familiar with this work of Sade's. However, Sade does not appear in the dictionary itself, for, as Peignot insists, we should "penetrate no further into the sewers of literature."[13]

Thus, by 1806 at the very latest, a French pornographic tradition had been identified. In the main body of his dictionary, however, Peignot listed suppressed books only in alphabetical order, with no distinction made between pornography, heresy, political subversion and philosophic radicalism. Aretino's sonnets (1527) and *L'Ecole des filles* (1655) are listed along with La Mettrie's materialist tract *L'Homme machine* (1748) without much discussion of their differences. If, as Peter Wagner has argued, pornography "becomes an aim in itself" sometime after the middle of the eighteenth century, rather than merely an adjunct to other forms of criticism of church and state, the distinction was still not widely understood.[14] Robert Darnton has demonstrated that the

FIGURE 1.1. The Pornographic Author. Frontispiece to *Histoire de Dom B—, portier des Chartreux* (Frankfurt edition, 1748).

French government of the ancien régime prohibited all books that threatened religion, the state or good morals, and all these were indiscriminately labeled "philosophical books," whether they were politically motivated scandal sheets, metaphysical treatises, anticlerical satires or pornographic stories.[15] By the time of Napoleon's empire, critics such as Peignot were beginning to think of pornography as a separate category of bad books, but the separation was still far from complete.

The Pornographic Tradition

In September 1800, Paris police commissioner Louis-Nicolas Violette was ordered to search a bookstore on the Pont Neuf for licentious books. He found a large cache, which he duly listed for his superiors. Some of the books were beautifully bound with gold bindings; others were more cheaply stitched. After confiscating the books, he went to the home of the bookseller, where he found three more sets of forbidden books. In the same apartment building he located a woman who worked as a bookbinder and who had in her possession 200 unbound copies of Piron's *Oeuvres badines*, a collection of eighteenth-century erotic poetry that had been republished in 1796 with pornographic engravings.

Commissioner Violette's list is not identical to Peignot's dictionary entries of only six years later, but it overlaps in many important respects: *Thérèse philosophe*, *L'Académie des dames* and the poetry of Piron were included, as well as *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* of Sade. Not surprisingly, works published during the revolutionary decade were especially prominent: *Julie philosophe* (1791), *Le Portefeuille des fouteurs* (1793), *Etrennes aux fouteurs* (1793) and the novels of André-Robert Andréa de Nerciat (*Félicia*, 1775, and its sequel *Monrose*, 1792). The police knew what they were looking for.[16] Like the librarians, the police clearly had their own lists, lists which resembled, indeed shaped, those of the librari-

ans. By the late 1790s, the French police had a special Morals Division which devoted some of its energies to the discovery and confiscation of "licentious works."[17]

As this example from 1800 shows, the policing of pornography seems to have been directed at a mixture of pornographic classics and more ephemeral types of literature. In 1718, nearly a century earlier, the Paris police reported a cache of bad books typical of that earlier time. At the top of the list were copies of *L'Académie des dames* and *L'Ecole des filles*, the leading seventeenth-century classics. The list was filled out with political pornography, anticlerical obscene works and potentially subversive but nonpornographic political pamphlets as well. Listed alongside the well-known classics of the pornographic genre were pamphlets defending the powers of the courts against the crown or detailing the loves of the recently deceased Louis XIV or other high-ranking courtiers.[18]

Pornography was a category constituted by both the regulation of and the market for printed works. On the one hand, the efforts of religious and political authorities to regulate, censor and prohibit works contributed to their definition. On the other, the desire of readers to buy certain books and of authors to produce them also contributed to the construction of a category of the pornographic. The readers' desire was heightened by the prohibition, but the prohibition alone does not explain which books readers sought out, because some prohibited books sold much better than others regardless of the level of censorship. That readers ordered the same books again and again and that authors made constant references to their predecessors show that information about pornographic books and engravings was quite readily available, at least to upper-class, educated men.

Readers knew which products were "hot" and which were not, as Darnton demonstrated in his study of the best-selling

books offered by the Société typographique de Neuchâtel in the last decades of the ancien régime. Prominent on Darnton's lists are many books that are also cited by Peignot in his preface. *Histoire de Dom Bougre, portier des Chartreux*, *Pucelle d'Orléans* and *Chandelle d'Arras* are on Darnton's list of the ten best-selling impious or obscene religious works, and *Thérèse philosophe* and *L'Académie des dames* rate among the top ten best-selling books in Darnton's category of pornography.[19]

Darnton's work has told us much more about French readers of pornography in the eighteenth century than we know about readers of pornography in other places and times. The frequently cited case of Samuel Pepys in England is unfortunately the exception that proves the rule of general silence on these matters. Unlike most diarists, journalists or memoir writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Pepys actually described buying *L'Ecole des filles* in his *Diary* in 1668:

> Thence away to the Strand to my bookseller's, and there stayed an hour and bought that idle, roguish book, *L'escholle des Filles*; which I have bought in plain binding (avoiding the buying of it better bound) because I resolve, as soon as I have read it, to burn it, that it may not stand in the list of books, nor among them, to disgrace them if it should be found.

A few days later, Pepys recounted in a kind of code language his masturbation while reading the book. It was a "mighty lewd book," Pepys insisted, "but it did hazer my prick para stand all the while, and una vez to decharger." Afterwards he burned it as promised, had supper and went to bed.[20] Respectable men (not to mention women) did not collect works known as "mighty lewd" in their libraries, though they often did seek them out for their own private pleasures.

It is not surprising that Pepys bought a French book, because the French pornographic tradition was central to European consumption. The French were not the only source, however. English writers contributed some important elements to the pornographic tradition in the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth century; the French translation of John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (popularly, *Fanny Hill*, 1748–1749) was the best-selling pornographic work in the catalogs of the Société typographique de Neuchâtel.[21] *Fanny Hill* may be the single most read pornographic novel of all time (figure I.2). It was translated into many other languages during the nineteenth century – German translations were published in 1792, 1863, 1876 and 1906, for instance – but it took its place alongside many translations from the French. *L'Ecole des filles*, *Histoire de Dom Bougre*, *Thérèse philosophe*, and, later, the novels of Sade appeared in German, Spanish and other European languages throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Translations from the English and especially the French pornographic classics constituted the core of available pornography in Spain, Germany and the Dutch Republic, as well as other European countries, and these translations were of course supplemented by works in the original French and English.[22]

Some measure, however imperfect, of the predominance of English and French titles can be found in the catalog of the Private Case of the British Library. The overwhelming majority of the 1,920 titles are either English or French. Those two languages are followed by German (127 titles, twenty-eight of which were translations from French or English); Italian (thirty-eight titles); Latin (thirty-two titles); Spanish (nine titles); Dutch (eight titles) and so on to Hungarian (two titles) and Finnish (one title). Moreover, hardly any of the non-English or French titles, and even the translations from those languages, were published before 1800. There are three titles in German, all from the 1790s; one in Dutch

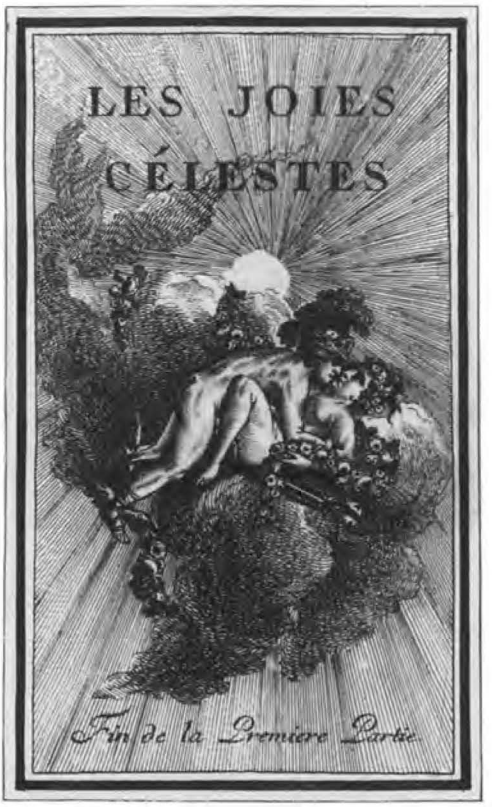


FIGURE 1.2. French translation of *Fanny Hill. La Fille de joie, ou Mémoires de Miss Fanny* (French edition, 1786).

(a collection of prints); and none in Spanish, for example. Until at least the middle of the nineteenth century, French and English publications overwhelmingly dominated European pornography.

Although the catalog of the Private Case is no doubt biased against non-English and French publications, it is the best source for establishing a crude international chronology of pornography. Of the 127 German titles, three were published before 1850 (all in the 1790s); twenty-nine were printed between 1850 and 1899; forty-six between 1900 and 1918; and thirty-two between 1919 and 1933.[23] Although more pornography was published in French, the first half of the nineteenth century seems to mark a similar lull in publication of new works. The standard work on nineteenth-century erotic French prose, Louis Perceau's *Bibliographie du roman érotique au XIX^e siècle* (1930), lists only twenty-six new works for the period of 1800–1850, but lists seven times as many being published in 1850–1900.[24] The pace of publication picked up again almost everywhere in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. Significantly, it was only in the decades of the emergence of mass politics – the 1880s and afterward – that most countries began to produce their own indigenous pornography, a fact again suggestive of the link between pornography and democracy.

The relative weakness of national pornographic traditions outside France and England is clearly evident in the recently studied example of eighteenth-century Russian pornography.[25] The largest private Russian library in Catherine the Great's time included much of the well-known French and English pornography. Not only was little indigenous pornography produced in Russia, but nonpornographic novels were also under fire. Even nonpornographic foreign novels were often only available as handwritten translations commissioned by high-ranking nobles. Production of both novels and pornography seem to be related, and countries that

did not produce novels did not produce much pornography either.

The one Russian writer who, in the eighteenth century, produced something close to pornography was Ivan S. Barkov. His name became a code word for illicit writing: *barkovscina* became the word for pornography in Russian. In his short and tumultuous life, Barkov wrote odes, tragedies, fables, satires, idylls, songs, epitaphs, epigrams, riddles and couplets (but, significantly, no novels), most of which circulated only in *samizdat* manuscripts. Barkov combined the classical forms he had learned from such works as Piron's *Ode à Priape* with elements of Russian folklore. One collection was titled *The Maiden's Plaything*, a reference to the male member that he glorified in all of his pornographic writing. Although Barkov's writing was quite tame compared to Western models, it continued to exercise an influence in the Russian literary underground until well into the nineteenth century. When questioned about the source of his freethinking ideas, one man arrested in the Decembrist conspiracy of the 1820s replied, "various compositions (who does not know them?) of Barkov."[26]

Although French works formed the core of the pornographic tradition in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, the first modern source cited by every expert on pornography – and by many of his would-be successors – is the sixteenth-century Italian writer, Pietro Aretino. Aretino made two contributions to the tradition, one in prose and the other in sonnet form. His *Ragionamenti* (1534–1536) became the prototype of seventeenth-century pornographic prose. In the *Ragionamenti*, Aretino developed the device of realistic and satirical dialogues between an older, experienced woman and a younger, innocent one. This dialogue form had a long life; it completely dominated seventeenth-century pornography in every language, and it still appears, for example, in Sade's *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795), 250 years later. The most influential section of the *Ragionamenti* was the

dialogue in the first part, which deals with the lives of whores. Soon, this section alone was widely circulated in Spanish, Latin, German, Dutch, French and English.[27]

Aretino also composed a series of sonnets, known as the *Sonnetti lussuriosi* (listed in Peignot's *Dictionnaire*), to accompany a series of erotic engravings in which the various positions for lovemaking were graphically depicted. The engravings had been published without text in 1524 and suppressed by order of the pope. Aretino's name was quickly associated with the illustrations as well, even though they did not come from his hand, and "Aretino's postures" became the name commonly given to the entire collection of imitations and variations supposedly drawn from the sixteenth-century original. References to Aretino's postures abound in seventeenth-century English drama, for instance, and especially in works of pornography.[28] When an English translation of *L'Ecole des filles* was advertised in a London newpaper in 1744, the advertisement described the book as adorned with twenty-four curious prints, "after the Manner of Aratine [*sic*]."[29]

In the minds of his successors, Aretino stood for the basic pornographic intention. The name *Aretino* represented what Peter Wagner has defined as pornography: "the written or visual presentation in a realistic form of any genital or sexual behavior with a deliberate violation of existing and widely accepted moral and social taboos."[30] Aretino seemed to take this role on himself. In a letter of dedication he defended his action as countering hypocrisy and celebrating bodily pleasures:

> I renounce the bad judgment and dirty habit which forbid the eyes to see what pleases them most.... It seems to me that the you-know-what given us by nature for the preservation of the species should be worn as a pendant round our necks or as a badge in our caps, since it is the spring that pours out the flood of humanity.[31]

Aretino brought together several crucial elements to form the basis of the pornographic tradition: the explicit representation of sexual activity, the form of the dialogue between women, the discussion of the behavior of prostitutes and the challenge to moral conventions of the day.

In this book's opening essay, Paula Findlen sets Aretino in the context of sixteenth-century Renaissance culture and the creation of a new marketplace for the obscene. Aretino was only one of many authors and engravers who produced forbidden works on the fringes of the new print culture. Images of amorous encounters, which had been previously confined to humanist circles and were often in the form of high art, now circulated in cheap reproductions designed for a more popular audience. Sixteenth-century pornography relied heavily on classical models, including the revival of Roman poems to the god Priapus, which circulated in manuscript form during the fifteenth century. In its reliance on classical themes, pornography in the sixteenth century was not especially innovative. Rather, it was the diffusion through print culture that marked a significant new departure.

Sixteenth-century humanists also wrote a kind of "academy pornography," designed for limited distribution to an educated elite, in which local politics were dissected in sexual terms. Findlen analyzes one of them, Vignali's *La Cazzaria* (1525–1526), which depicts Sienese factional struggles in terms of competition between Pricks, Cunts, Balls and Asses. Such works provided the prototypes for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political pornography. In the sixteenth-century versions of pornography, sodomites and prostitutes were already depicted as privileged observers and critics of the established order, thanks to their membership in the "third sex." Aretino and his peers, when compared to those who wrote in the pre-sixteenth-century literary forms, can be seen to have inaugurated a literary tradition which was new in

two respects: it appealed to a broader audience thanks to the use of printing, and it employed political satire, which would play an increasingly important role in the next two centuries.

Works inspired by Aretino appeared immediately, beginning with the pseudo-Aretine *La Puttana errante* (1531). The next major moment in the establishment of a pornographic tradition came a century later in France, in the late 1650s, with the publication of *L'Ecole des filles* and *L'Académie des dames* (published originally in Latin as *Aloisiae Sigaeae Toletanae Satyra Sotadica de arcanis Amoris et Veneris*... in 1659 or 1660, figure I.3). The last professed to be a translation, by a Dutch philologist, from a work originally composed in Spanish by a woman, Luisa Sigea. It was, in fact, written by a French lawyer, Nicolas Chorier. This convoluted story shows how the pornographic tradition was almost immediately imagined, both by authors and readers, to be European rather than narrowly national.

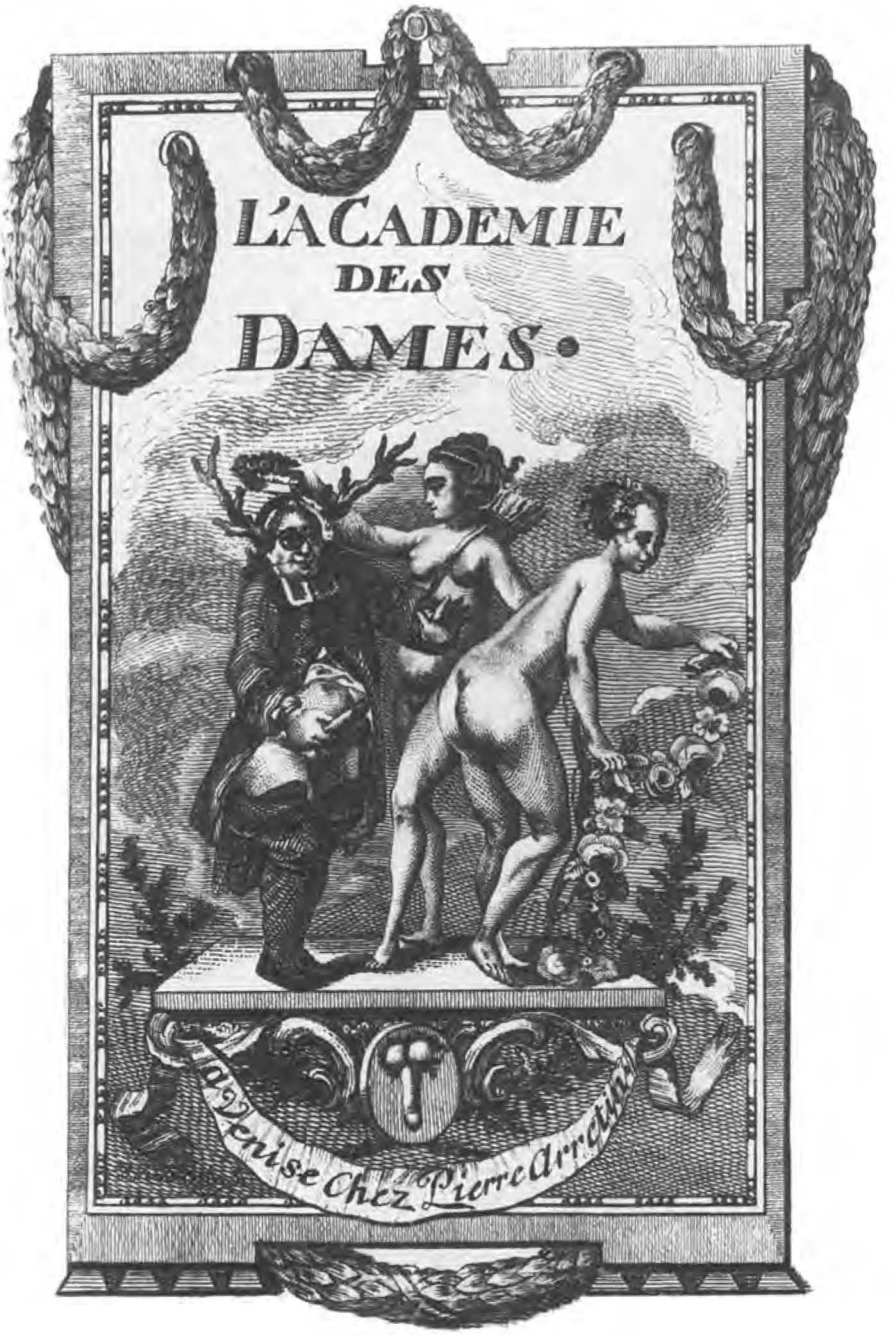
The publication of *L'Académie des dames* in Latin was probably designed to evade prosecution rather than to ensure an international audience, but the internationalization of the tradition can be seen in the diversity of places of publication for such books (figure I.4). Experts disagree, for example, about whether *L'Académie des dames* was first published in Lyon, Grenoble, or the Dutch Republic, the final being a well-established haven for publishers of forbidden books. These books were immediately available in England. Pepys bought his copy of *L'Ecole des filles* in 1668, and another English diarist records knowledge of the Latin edition of *L'Académie des dames* in 1676 (the French edition appeared in 1680). An English translation of *L'Académie des dames* appeared in 1684.[32] Likewise, in the eighteenth century English pornography was quickly translated into French; the French translation of Cleland's book appeared only two years after its English publication.


JOANNIS MEURSII
ELEGANTIÆ
LATINI SERMONIS
SEU
ALOISIA
SIGÆA TOLETANA
De arcanis Amoris & Veneris
Adjunctis Fragmentis quibusdam Eroticis.
PARS PRIMA.

LUGD. BATAVORUM,
EX TYPIS ELZEVIRIANIS,
CIↃ IↃCC LVII.

FIGURE 1.3. (above) Title page to one of the Latin versions of *L'Académie des dames* (1678).

FIGURE 1.4. (right) Title page to a nineteenth-century French reprint edition of *L'Académie des dames* (despite its claims to being published in Venice by Aretino – long since dead – it was published in Grenoble, 1680). This engraving may have been added in the nineteenth century.



David Foxon has claimed that "pornography seems to have been born and grown to maturity in a brief period in the middle of the seventeenth century."[33] At that time sex became intellectualized, particularly in the two books just cited. One sign of this new experience of sex was the use of what are now called *sex aids*, with the reading of pornography being a prime example. In the 1660s, imported Italian dildos, as well as condoms, first became available in London.[34] Almost all the themes of later prose pornography were present by 1660: the self-conscious aim of arousing sexual desire in the reader, the juxtaposition of the material truth of sex against the hypocritical conventions of society and the rulings of the church, and, new in the seventeenth century, the cataloging of "perversions" as so many variations on a self-justified, amoral gratification of the senses (even when some of these perversions were supposedly condemned). These aspects, as well as the emergence of libertinism as a mode of thought and action, were related to the new emphasis on the value of nature and the senses as sources of authority.[35] From the beginning, pornography had close ties to the new science as well as to political criticism.

Because pornography first emerged in the sixteenth century, and developed concomitantly with print culture, it is hardly surprising that its next big step forward in the seventeenth century was closely related to the development of the novel, which was the most important new genre of that culture. The publication of *L'Ecole des filles* and *L'Académie des dames* signaled the displacement of the center of pornographic writing from Italy to France, and this shift occurred just when French novels were increasingly being differentiated from the romance as a genre. Marie-Madeleine Pioche de Lavergne, countess de Lafayette, for example, published her influential novels between 1662 and 1678.

Just how the development of the novel and pornography were related in the seventeenth century is far from clear, however, and

it is a topic that bears further investigation. As Joan DeJean shows in her essay, the pornographic originality of *L'Ecole des filles* was exaggerated by contemporaries and later literary historians because it was included in the repression of texts linked to the Fronde (1648–1653), the internal civil war of nobles and magistrates against the crown and its ministers. *L'Ecole des filles* was linked to the novelist Paul Scarron and his wife, Françoise d'Aubigné, the future Madame de Maintenon and mistress of Louis XIV, and to Louis's disgraced minister of finances, Nicolas Fouquet, who had in his possession one of the few surviving copies. DeJean speculates that the authors of *L'Ecole des filles*, whomever they were, were experimenting with various forms of prose fiction at a moment when the novel as a genre was far from fixed or settled. Both *L'Ecole des filles* and *L'Académie des dames* show traces of the effort to combine Aretino's dialogue between women with many of the elements of the emerging novel.

Between the publication of these two works in the middle of the seventeenth century and the next major recasting of pornographic writing in the 1740s, pornography stagnated as a genre.[36] Pornography, however, continued to be published in this period, and much of it was explicitly related to political issues, as is shown in the essay by Rachel Weil on English Restoration political pornography. During the Fronde in France, pornographic pamphlets had attacked the Regent, Queen Mother Anne of Austria, and her presumed lover and adviser, Cardinal Mazarin. Libertine and libelous pamphlets were also published against Queen Christina of Sweden after her conversion to Catholicism in 1654.[37] Despite the continuing flow of pornographic pamphlets, no new major works emerged to join the classics of the tradition.

Then, in the 1740s, pornographic writing took off with the rapid-fire publication of a series of new and influential works: *Histoire de Dom Bougre, portier des Chartreux* (1741); *Le Sopha* by

Crébillon fils (published 1742, written 1737); *Les Bijoux indiscrets* by Diderot (1748); *Thérèse philosophe* (1748); and Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1748–1749), to name only the best-known works. These classics of the genre appeared in a very short period of time, all of them now utilizing the extended novel form rather than the previous Aretinian model of a dialogue between two women. Did pornographers, as some have suggested, have to await the development of the novel in its eighteenth-century form – Richardson's *Pamela* was published in 1740 – before they could advance their own prose efforts? And if so, how was the new novelistic form of writing so quickly assimilated into the pornographic tradition?

The link between pornography and the novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been commented on by many. Steven Marcus has argued, for example, that "the growth of pornography is inseparable from and dependent upon the growth of the novel." Yet his analysis is very general and, therefore, vague. He attributes both pornography and the novel to the "vast social processes which brought about the modern world": the growth of cities and with them of an audience of literate readers; the development of new kinds of experience, especially privatization; and the splitting off of sexuality from the rest of life in an urban, capitalist, industrial and middle-class world. Pornography, for Marcus, is "a mad parody" of the new, private experience set up by these social changes.[38]

Such a broad analysis, though not without merit, fails to explain the timing of the major bursts in pornography and especially the differences among countries. If pornography reflects (and reflects upon) the growth of cities, literacy and privatization, then why don't the writers of the Dutch Republic – arguably the most urban, middle-class, literate and privatized country – specialize in the genre? Much early modern pornography was published in the Dutch Republic, but little was written originally in

Dutch, as Wijnand W. Mijnhardt's essay on politics and pornography demonstrates. Although Dutch writers produced a few home grown pornographic novels in the last decades of the seventeenth century, sometimes as direct imitations of Aretino, the increased pornographic output the French and English experienced in the 1740s passed by the Dutch almost unnoticed. Instead, as Mijnhardt argues, the Dutch turned away from their previous openness about the public discussion of sexuality, which was so evident in the numerous sexual and erotic manuals published in the late seventeenth century, and removed all sexual references from the public sphere, whether in brothels, paintings or pornographic books.

It hardly seems coincidental that the rise in pornographic publications in the 1740s also marked the beginning of the high period of the Enlightenment as well as a period of general crisis in European society and politics. The year 1748, so rich in pornographic publications, was also the year of publication of Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des lois* and La Mettrie's *L'Homme machine.* Darnton has shown that pornography was often enlisted in the attack on the ancien régime, but he describes such politically motivated pornographic writing as the underside or lowlife of Enlightenment literature.[39]

Others have postulated a closer relationship between pornography and the Enlightenment's stinging criticism of clerical rigidity, police censorship and the narrowness and prejudices of conventional mores. Aram Vartanian argues that eroticism in general played an important, if neglected, role in providing creative energy to the Enlightenment as a movement. His exemplary philosophe, Diderot, wrote pornography (and was imprisoned for it in 1749), and, according to Vartanian, the Enlightenment provided a climate favorable to the progress of "literary sexology," which began with pornography. He attributes the resurgence of

the erotic in literature and painting in the eighteenth century to the Enlightenment's understanding of nature: sexual appetite was natural; repression of sexual appetite was artificial and pointless; and the passions might have a beneficial influence in making humans happy in this world. Sexual enlightenment was consequently a part of the Enlightenment itself.[40]

Margaret C. Jacob's essay on the philosophical and social content of pornography in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries traces this radical side of the Enlightenment. She shows that pornography was first naturalist and then profoundly materialist in inspiration. Eighteenth-century pornography was Lockeian and La Mettrian in philosophy, and a large part of its shock value rested on its materialist underpinnings. Materialist thinkers such as La Mettrie seemed to be drawn inexorably from their writings on the soul's subordination by physical influences toward efforts to theorize pleasure, as with La Mettrie's own *L'Art de jouir*. Diderot, also a materialist, wrote pornographic novels along with his more conventional, philosophical, yet nonetheless threatening, works. As Diderot remarked in one of his letters, "There is a bit of testicle at the bottom of our most sublime feelings and our purest tenderness."[41]

The burst of publication in the 1740s may have been related, in addition, as Jacob suggests, to a more general crisis in the French state caused by the unsuccessful prosecution of the War of Austrian Succession. The war ended in 1748 in a stalemate that carried with it the prospect of continuing decline in influence for the French. Materialist philosophy and pornography were both ways of criticizing the status quo at a time when the status quo was weakening.

By the end of the 1740s, the pornographic tradition was becoming well established and was clearly linked to the novel in form. By then, French publications predominated in the genre, despite

the remarkable international influence of *Fanny Hill*. Between the 1740s and the 1790s French pornography turned increasingly political. As criticism of the monarchy grew more strident, pornographic pamphlets attacked the clergy, the court, and, in the case of Louis XV, the king himself.

In the 1790s, the French Revolution let loose another cascade of pornographic pamphlets directly linked to political conflicts and, at the same time, the early modern pornographic tradition culminated in the writings of the Marquis de Sade. Virtually all of the themes of modern pornography were rehearsed by Sade; indeed, he specialized in the cataloging of pornographic effects. Rape, incest, parricide, sacrilege, sodomy and tribadism, pedophilia and all the most horrible forms of torture and murder were associated with sexual arousal in the writings of Sade. No one has ever been able to top Sade because he had, in effect, explored the ultimate logical possibility of pornography: the annihiliation of the body, the very seat of pleasure, in the name of desire. This ultimate reductio ad absurdum of pornography would not have been possible without the prior establishment of a pornographic tradition. By the early nineteenth century, when efforts at regulation for moral purposes expanded dramatically, the police, the writers, the printers and the readers all knew what the models were.

Pornography as Politics and Social Commentary

From the days of Aretino in the sixteenth century, pornography was closely linked with political and religious subversion. Aretino decided to write sonnets to accompany obscene engravings when he heard of the arrest of the engraver of the original sixteen postures. The identification between pornography and political subversion could also work in reverse: *L'Ecole des filles* was assumed to be wildly pornographic because it was the subject of a determined

political repression. As Rachel Weil argues, however, political pornography was continuous with other forms of political commentary and not always easily separated out as a genre. Charles II's potential tyranny was often represented in sexual terms, but the argument that despotic kings resembled Eastern tyrants could be found in more formal political works as well. The link between debauchery and tyranny or despotism could be found throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It culminates in the flood of pamphlets attacking Marie Antoinette and other leading figures of the French court after 1789, which I discuss in my essay on pornography during the French Revolution.

Pornography's relationship to the novel as a form of narration heightened its reputation as an oppositional genre, because the novel itself was under severe attack through the eighteenth century. Jean Marie Goulemot has shown that pornography engaged the same paradoxes of imagination and reality as the novel, and novels were also regularly condemned for their capacity to incite desire. Some pornography, then, is simply a specialized version of the novel; it plays upon the imagination of the reader to create the effect of real sexual activity, all the while, of course, being purely imaginary. But there seems to be an important gender differentiation that Goulemot misses in his analysis: women were thought especially susceptible to the imaginative effects of the novel, while men were usually assumed – rightly or wrongly – to be the primary audience for pornographic writing, at least until the end of the eighteenth century.[42] If pornography is just a subset of the novel, why is it imagined to be so different in its gender audience and effects?

Pornography, like the novel, was often associated with libertinism.[43] Libertinism followed the same trajectory as pornography; under the influence, in part, of the new science, it took shape in the seventeenth century as an upper-class male revolt

against conventional morality and religious orthodoxy, and then spread more broadly in the eighteenth century into the artisanal and lower middle-class circles of many Western countries, especially England and France. Libertines were imagined to be free-thinkers who were open to sexual, and literary, experimentation. By the definition of their adversaries in church and state, libertines were the propagators of and audience for pornography. As a consequence, the thread of libertinism weaves through many of the following essays.

Pornographic novelists explored realist techniques of writing, which became increasingly important in the eighteenth century. In *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, for example, Sade parodied the interminable scenes of seduction found in novels such as Richardson's *Pamela*. This truth-telling trope of pornography went back to Aretino. "Speak plainly," the prostitute Antonia insists in the *Ragionamenti*, "and say 'fuck,' 'prick,' 'cunt' and 'ass'...." Similarly, in *Histoire de Dom Bougre* a libertine nun explains the true meaning of the expression "to be in love": "When one says, the Gentleman... is in love with the Lady... it is the same thing as saying, the Gentleman... saw the Lady... the sight of her excited his desire, and he is dying to put his Prick into her Cunt. That's truly what it means."[44]

In her essay on the obscene word, Lucienne Frappier-Mazur explores the significance of the language of transgression. The obscene word played on the contrast between different social registers of language – crude and elegant, lower and upper class, masculine and feminine – in order to achieve its effect. To enact social transgression and a kind of hyperrealism, obscene language fetishizes certain words related to sex; the obscene word substitutes for the body part in question but, in the process, acquires the status of a fetish. As a consequence, the original emphasis on realism paradoxically devolves into a form of the grotesque, where

penises are always huge, vaginas multiply in number and sexual coupling takes place in a kind of frenzy that is hardly "realistic." This results in pornography that is imaginary and at times fantastic even though its effects on its readers are very real.

One of the most striking characteristics of early modern pornography is the preponderance of female narrators. Frappier-Mazur emphasizes the structures of voyeurism and eavesdropping that are established by female narrators, which turn the male readers of such works into complicit third parties. Both Margaret C. Jacob and Kathryn Norberg address the issue of the female narrator, but with a different focus. They emphasize the potential for social and philosophical subversion in female narration. Materialist philosophy, for example, required that women be materially or sexually equivalent to men; otherwise, all bodies in nature would not be equally mechanical. Randolph Trumbach argues in his essay on eighteenth-century England that male sexuality was codified before female sexuality to eliminate the legitimacy of male homosexual relationships, with the result that men were less likely than women to be represented as sexually polymorphous. (Sade's male characters are the exception in this respect rather than the rule.) Thus the issue of the female narrator and her transgression of expected female roles goes to the heart of questions of sexual difference.

In her essay on the pornographic whore, Norberg focuses on the privileged figure of early modern pornographic literature, the prostitute. From Aretino's dialogues onward, the female narrator is often a prostitute by occupation. The pornographic whore, such as Margot (the stocking mender who is the main character of *Margot la ravaudeuse*, 1750), is most often portrayed as independent, determined, financially successful and scornful of the new ideals of female virtue and domesticity. Such texts, written by men, consequently elide the very sexual difference that

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