

VISIONS OF DISORDER: SEX AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN A SUITE OF
EROTIC DRAWINGS BY CLAUDE-LOUIS DESRAIS

by

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VISIONS OF DISORDER: SEX AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN A SUITE OF
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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2006, I had the opportunity to undertake research at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, where I encountered a suite of erotic drawings by Claude-Louis Desrais (1746 - 1816) on loan from a private collection. I was immediately drawn to these images, not just for their provocative content, but for their unique aesthetic qualities and political meanings. I wanted to know more about Desrais as an artist, his creative environment, and the clientele that sought this sort of illicit and shocking imagery. My need to answer these questions has taken me through the subculture of libertinism as expressed in the literature and visual arts of eighteenth-century France. Through the course of my research at Harvard, The Frick Art Reference Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and utilizing texts and research database capabilities at Texas Christian University, I was unable to obtain any significant primary source material on Desrais. Consequently, I decided to view this suite as a part of a wider historical discourse on the representation of sexuality. Using secondary sources, in particular the work of Michel Foucault, Lynn Hunt, and Joan Landes, I will examine the larger social historical issues, which informed Desrais's artistic production, including the politics surrounding the French Revolution, fashion, and sexuality.

There exists only a small amount of information on Claude-Louis Desrais and his suite of erotic drawings, but he has received some recognition for his drawings of history, fashion, and sex. These images enable speculation about his association to Revolutionary politics and his involvement in the libertine sphere. A native Parisian, Desrais studied with Francesco Casanova (1727 - 1803) and was a protégé of Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715 - 1790). In "Durameau, de La Rue or Desrais: a Riddle Solved," Ann Leclair

provides the most thorough account of Desrais and his work. Desrais was never accepted into the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. Instead, he exhibited in the *Exposition de la Jeunesse* from 1768-1772. Desrais took part in four of these exhibitions and received favorable notices in the *Avant Coureur*; however, his shortcomings were also discussed.¹ The critics predominantly recognized him as a draftsman and he was noted for his work as an illustrator.² E. Bénézit describes his charming and amorous drawings, but also claims that Desrais was a history painter, who deserved recognition for his historical and military compositions from the Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire.³ More recently, Peter Wagner's *Lust and Love in the Rococo Period*, provides only a brief account stating that pornographic prints and drawings dominated Desrais's *oeuvre*.⁴

The only information available about this particular suite of drawings is found in the *Old Masters Drawings Auction* catalogue, for Tuesday, July 1, 1997, at Christie's, London. For this suite, acknowledged provenance information dates back to the collection of the late Lore and Rudolf Heinemann, before it was obtained by the current private collector. The suite presently consists of sixty-three drawings, with each drawing executed in black chalk, and brown and gray ink. About one-third are monochromatic,

¹ Anne Leclair, "Durameau, de La Rue or Desrais: a Riddle Solved," *The Burlington Magazine* 126, no. 972 (March, 1984): 155.

² Leclair, "Durameau, de La Rue or Desrais," 156. See also H. Cohen, *Guide de l'amateur de Livres à graveurs du XVIIIème siècle*, 6th ed., (Paris, 1912), 1208; and R. Portalis, *Les dessinateurs d'illustrations au XVIIIe siècle I*, (Paris, 1877), 174-78.

³ Although no painting by Desrais is known, he is mentioned in three dictionaries as a history painter. See E. Bellier de la Chavignerie and L. Auvray, *Dictionnaire Général des Artistes de l'école française depuis l'origine des arts du dessin jusqu'à nos jours I* (Paris), 424; Ulrich Thieme, *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Verlag von E.A. Seemann, 1962), 149; and E. Bénézit, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des Peintures, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs, et Graveurs de tous les temps et de tous les pays par un groupe d'écrivains spécialistes français et étrangers* (Paris: Librairie Gründ, 1976), 3, 534.

⁴ Peter Wagner, *Lust and Love in the Rococo Period* (Nördlingen: Delphi, 1986), 225-6.

while the rest are colorful watercolors with washes of yellow ochre, sienna, burnt umber, blue, pink, brown, and gray wash, heightened with white. Each image varies slightly in size, but most have dimensions of 81 x 54 mm. Some images contain the inscription “LL” with a number in the upper left-hand corner covered by a mat. The significance of these letters and numbers is unknown, but are similar to the insignia format utilized in *Thérèse philosophe* (1748), a pornographic book, with two letters and a number placed in the upper left corner of the image (fig. 1). In this particular image, the inscription “PLH,” could stand for “planche H” or “illustration/plate H,” signifying both a series and a printmaking system. For Desrais’s suite, the numbers and letters may relate to a page progression in which all the images had this form of inscription, but were later cut off when removed from their original source.

The authorship of the drawings can be contested, because the letters and numbers appearing on a few drawings are not signatures and no other autographs are visible. However, when compared to other drawings and works in Desrais’s *oeuvre*, crucial stylistic similarities are evident. Formal qualities, such as a curly S-curve, quick handling in penmanship, and loose handling of colored washes, are consistent with his works and can be seen in two other drawings attributed to him: *The Four Sons of Aymon*⁵ (fig. 2) and *Putti Placing Garlands on a Herm of Bacchus*⁶ (fig.3). Desrais signed some of his finished drawings containing religious or historical subject matter, such as the drawing of *St. Peter in Prison* also found in the same private collection.⁷ Regardless of signature,

⁵ Shickman Gallery, New York, pen and wash with white highlights, 165 x 254 mm. See “Durameau, de La Rue or Desrais,” 155; “Signed and dated *LDR 1769*. On the verso, signed *Louis Claude Des Rais, fecit 1769*.”

⁶ Louvre, Paris, Inv. 27597, pen and wash, 246 x 188 mm.

⁷ Leclair notes several different signatures attributed to Desrais: *LDR, Louis Claude Des Rais, C.L. Desrais, L. Desrais*, which have been confused with other artists from that era sharing the same initials, such as Louis-Jacques Durameau and Louis-Félix de La Rue. See “Durameau, de La Rue or Desrais,” 155.

many of Desrais's works have been misattributed. For example, Leclair notes that the Louvre's *Adoration of the Shepherds*⁸ that Anthony Blunt attributed to Desrais that was in fact a direct copy from his master, Casanova. The drawing is autographed *LDR 1767*, but is sometimes ascribed to François Boucher (1703-1790) or even Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806). Currently, the Louvre attributes the drawing to Fragonard.⁹ With the scandalous content of Desrais's suite of erotic drawings, one can see why the artist would want to remain anonymous.

Desrais's suite of erotic drawings was likely kept in a private space, making it difficult to determine the patron and exact date. As a draftsman and printmaker, Desrais would have been familiar with publishers, including those perhaps sympathetic to the libertine cause. It is certain that this suite of drawings was not sold on the open market or by a peddler in the underground book trade. They would have been too expensive and time consuming to create without a definite patron. Furthermore, from the finished quality and size of the drawings, it is doubtful that this suite would have been made into prints. The unknown identity of the patron leaves historical gaps and the uncertainty of the function of the drawings raises questions. The book cover has the inscription "70 Dessins Originaux XVIIIe siècle" on the binding, suggesting it was bound later in the nineteenth century. But, did these drawings originally accompany erotic texts, which were cut out later? Were these drawings made individually and sold as a portfolio or were they supposed to be a set? Such questions cannot now be answered. Desrais's drawings provide modern viewers a glimpse into popular practices, individuals, and tastes in eighteenth-century visual culture. It was common for prints and drawings to be

⁸ Louvre, Paris, Inv. 27603, brown wash over black chalk drawing, 356 x 463 mm.

⁹ Leclair, "Durameau, de La Rue or Desrais," 155.

framed and hung on the wall, in one of Desrais's drawings from the erotic suite (fig. 4), or stored in drawers in print and drawing rooms or in curiosity cabinets.¹⁰ I believe that this suite of drawings functioned as a form of entertainment and political propaganda relegated to the private sphere, either as a collection of images, or as the accompaniment to a literary text.

The assumed function of this suite of drawings and circumstantial evidence, such as fashion, interior space, and sexual acts depicted, provide insight into the work. Independent scholar, Dr. Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, studied some of these images and concluded that Desrais's suite was executed circa 1791-1793.¹¹ Her expertise in eighteenth-century French fashion brought attention to the influence of neoclassical fashions in the skirts and hairstyles of women, which are not as elaborate in comparison to typical 1780s trends. Furthermore, Dr. Chrisman-Campbell concludes that the repetition of the bicorne hat in Desrais's suite is indicative of the date. The bicorne hat descended from the previously fashionable tricorne hat and was popular amongst the military faction; in particular, revolutionaries accessorized the bicorne with a cockade. However, many images present generic 1780s fashions, including the tricorne hat and hairstyles. Additionally, it is not known if all the drawings were made at the same time. With Dr. Chrisman-Campbell's insight and the known functions of politicized pornography in mind, I speculate that the patron would have likely been a male libertine involved in Revolutionary politics, sometime during the early 1790s, between the loosening of censorship laws and the death of the Queen Marie-Antoinette in 1793.

¹⁰ Wagner, *Lust and Love in the Rococo Period*, 31.

¹¹ I am grateful to Dr. Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell for studying some images from this suite and providing me with much useful information.

During the Revolution, politicized pornography flourished in Paris and the influence of libertine philosophies moved out of the private sphere into mainstream politics, namely through literature and the visual arts. Libertines were freethinkers open to sexual and literary experimentation, with behavior and philosophies considered primitive and destructive towards society.¹² They were both the propagators of and the assumed audiences for erotica or politicized pornography, in which politicized sexual acts were often portrayed and took place within the boudoir. The libertine world was popularized and radicalized by the infamous libertine and writer, Donatien Alphonse François Sade, the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814). His tales of extreme sex acts were politically charged with anti-religious sentiments and paralleled Desrais's representations of unusual sex acts taking place within the boudoir, often featuring members of the clergy. The sexual taboos indicated in the controversial sexual positions include anti-clerical sentiments and sado-masochistic acts played out on the body. These figures metaphorically attack social orders implemented by the Church, monarchy, and revolutionaries. The nihilistic attitude Desrais's drawings embody displays the flux in power and the societal disorder in France during the early 1790s.

The representation of the libertine sphere originated in France during the seventeenth century and peaked during the late eighteenth century. In literature, works such as *Thérèse philosophe* (1748) and the writings of the Marquis de Sade (1790s) spread libertine ideologies and often held controversial political significance. The rise in the prevalence of anti-establishment libertine works coincided with the political disorder caused by the Revolution and the First French Republic. Desrais and Sade expressed similarly indifferent attitudes towards sexual mores in their nihilistic approach towards

¹² Wagner, *Lust and Love in the Rococo Period*, 37.

traditional gender roles and the representation of sex acts. Sexual domination and subordination in the visual arts often replicated the division of the private and public spheres, where a clear distinction existed between private/female isolation and public/male activity.¹³ In Desrais's suite, however, the male and female roles are inverted. In his boudoir, most of the women dominate and perform violent sex acts on men. Similar to Sade's works, Desrais rendered male and female bodies acting out transgressions, societal reversals, and exhibitionism that reflected the disorderly body politic of France surrounding the tumultuous period of the Revolution.

Anti-clerical propaganda, the popularity of Sade's writings, and the newly constructed female body were at their pinnacle in late eighteenth-century France. Women were not merely passive sex objects, but active participants in the narrative of political commentary. In Desrais's images women play active roles in violence, but men are sexualized more in their nakedness and subjugation. However, the men appear to be willing participants, creating an unsettling dynamic of hedonism and equal opportunity within Desrais's boudoir, where conventions and inhibitions do not exist. These lustful scenes feature sadism, lesbianism, and orgies, often with transvestites or members of the clergy. Women copulate with each other or work together to torture men. In what follows, I will consider how the visual culture of sex and anti-clerical sentiments, the Marquis de Sade, and the role of the libertine boudoir might have played a role in the shaping of the body politic. These issues will lead to broader conclusions about the nature of sexuality, gender, and libertine actions against the traditional orders that were destroyed during the French Revolution and appear evident in Desrais's suite of erotic drawings.

¹³Joan B. Landes, ed., *Feminism, the Public, and the Private* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.

SEXUALITY AND ANTI-CLERICAL SENTIMENTS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

The pornography of early modern Europe functioned as a type of mockery against Christian dogmas, which deemed sex as sinful and uncivilized. The Italian Renaissance changed the social connotations of sex. Consequently, erotic texts and images were considered intellectually stimulating. These texts were typically reserved for upper-class males, because women generally did not receive the same level of an education or an education at all. Pornographers incorporated pagan, mythological figures, such as Venus and satyrs, from classical antiquity that insinuated philosophical content.¹⁴ Additionally, their “highbrow” nature typically protected pornographic works from destruction, whether the image was on public display or relegated to the private sphere. However, mythologicalized pornography was safer in the private sphere and flourished in the print culture of the sixteenth century. The most famous pornographic print series in sixteenth-century Italy was *The Loves of the Gods* (fig. 5), which incorporated the trope of mythological guises to depict sex acts. Another pornographic print series, *I Modi* (*The Positions*), was executed right before *The Loves of the Gods* in 1524 (fig. 6) by Giulio Romano (c.1499 - 1546), Marcantonio Raimondi (c.1480 - c.1534). Pietro Aretino (1492 - 1556) later added his politically charged sexualized sonnets after the first publication.

I Modi was deemed controversial because the creators did not utilize mythological guises; instead figures were raw, unidealized, and modern. Thus, the Church highly disapproved of the content in *I Modi*. In fact, Pope Clement VII ordered the destruction of the images and the imprisonment of the printmaker, Marcantonio, for the mass

¹⁴ Lynn Hunt, “Pornography and the French Revolution,” in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity 1500-1800* (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 301.

distribution of the illicit series. Even without texts, in its first installment, *I Modi* attacked Church order by representing the body in different sexual positions to attain pleasure, not necessarily to procreate. However, Hunt and other scholars agree that political pornography dates back to Aretino, whose erotically charged social satire in his sonnets further politicized *I Modi* as he named individuals performing unconventional sex acts.¹⁵ These scenes of copulation were not meant to inspire dutiful wives or promote ideas of sex merely for procreation, but instead depicted active, lustful men and women. The images defy Christian conventions of morality and sexuality, and Aretino's texts add a declarative voice that attacks the Reformation and criticizes specific Italian authority figures.

This scandal left *I Modi* in infamy to influence future creations of politicized pornography for seventeenth-century England and eighteenth-century France. Romano's interpretations from ancient pornographic images and the recasting of figures into a modern context became the model for early modern erotica.¹⁶ Like Aretino, Sade antagonized the traditional orders of religion and government through his accounts of sexual debauchery and defiance of moral conventions. Additionally, England's libertine period coincided with the rule of Charles II and the Restoration period, when societal upheaval was expressed through the controversial literary works of John Milton (1608 - 1674) and John Wilmot, the Second Earl of Rochester (1647 - 1680). Indeed, Foucault references a cyclical discourse on sexual repression and power in the early modern

¹⁵ Hunt, "Pornography and the French Revolution," 305.

¹⁶ Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 65.

period, beginning with the Reformation, and ending in the eighteenth century with the French Revolution.¹⁷

In the late eighteenth century, a close relationship existed between the visual arts, literature, and politics. Hunt asserts that an understanding of pornography, from eighteenth-century France, demonstrates central issues that structure the Revolutionary political imagination.¹⁸ In the visual arts, painters, such as Boucher, typically painted their “obscenities” in a light-hearted, publicly acceptable manner, similar to the tradition set forth by previous generations of artists, as can be seen in his painting *Venus and Mars Surprised by Vulcan*, 1754 (fig. 7). In this painting, figures are idealized and mythologized, thus the sexual subject matter is acceptable for public audiences. Other artists, like Nicolas Lancret (1690 - 1743), Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684 - 1721), Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725 - 1805), and Fragonard, exemplify the rococo style and *ancien régime* tastes for depicting high fashion and leisure, while simultaneously objectifying and glorifying the role of women. Prints and drawings allowed for more “hardcore pornography” than paintings, as government and ecclesiastical figures were satirized and images were received in a more private manner. Paintings in the eighteenth century possessed a socially acceptable sexual iconography. More privately consumed media, such as prints and drawings, became propagandistic tools to defy social order and Christian conventions.

In the *Encyclopédie* (1751 - 1772), Denis Diderot (1713 - 1784) stated that prints had the ability to render the true nature of the physical world and proclaimed the graphic

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 116.

¹⁸ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 126.

arts as the new mode of practical communication that reached beyond the private aristocratic sphere.¹⁹ Often *libelles* (political pamphlets that often contained anti-monarchical and anti-clerical texts and images) were distributed on the streets of Paris and outside of Salon openings. A bookseller of illicit “philosophical” books, Jean-Félix Charmet, recorded in the 1780s that his clientele mainly consisted of royal officials, army officers, country gentlemen, and men of the law.²⁰ One such “philosophical” book was *Thérèse philosophe*, previously attributed to Diderot or Sade, but now to Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, the Marquis d’Argens (1703 - 1771). Similar to Desrais’s suite, this book includes scenes of copulation, flogging, masturbation, lesbianism, and attacks on the clergy (figs. 8 - 10). Although Desrais’s suite does not consist of prints like *Thérèse philosophe*, the erotic print culture of the early modern period influenced his drawings.

Prints and drawings were ideal media for politicized pornography. As intimate visuals, they could be held in the hand, analyzed, and inconspicuously given to others. For example, Queen Marie-Antoinette, was a constant target because her body became the symbol for national degeneration through female corruption, vice, social hierarchy, and regressive *ancien régime* ideologies. This is illustrated in the engravings from *Vie privée, libertine, et scandaleuse de Marie-Antoinette d’Autriche*, that were printed anonymously in 1793. One print (fig. 11) shows the queen fondling the genitalia of princesse de Guémenée, one of her ladies-in-waiting, whereas the other print (fig. 12) depicts the queen in a plumed hat, engaged with both a man and a woman.

Representations of lesbianism was a popular trope used to morally attack and politically disenfranchise women during the Revolutionary era, especially images that attacked

¹⁹ Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, cited in Wagner, *Lust and Love in the Rococo Period*, 9.

public women of the old order, such as the queen and other female members of the aristocracy were widely distributed.

In pornography, the assumed subject is male and the object is female, but Desrais's drawings do not present consistent domination, for he often inverts traditional gender roles. While acts of lesbianism are present, women also control the actions of men and actions of groups in the majority of the images. Indeed, female roles as sadistic manipulators are evident in three drawings of males in bondage. Moreover, all the men have erect penises and are actively participating in their sexual torture. They are flogged and tied up like marionettes. One man is seated wearing a bicorne hat and ejaculating (fig. 13), and the other image portrays a man being pulled around a room by a woman, while they dance (fig. 14). One drawing is of a cleric, who is actually being hanged (fig. 15). Murder is the ultimate sadistic act, and the control the women exercised could have been sexually arousing for men and perhaps acted as a political commentary about gender relations within Revolutionary politics. For the eighteenth-century male libertine, such pornographic images, were not just a means to fulfill kinky sex fantasies. Moreover, pornography also worked as a form of political metaphor and inspiration in the deconstruction of civilization. Indeed, Desrais appears to mock laws instituted by the State and the Church that inhibit sexual desire and agency by depicting an assumed Revolutionary and a cleric. In these interior boudoir scenes, both genders possess equal rights in this democratic space in which bodies are equally capable of sexual and political defiance.

²⁰ Jean-Félix Charmant, cited in Robert Darton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 32.

In Desrais's suite of erotic drawings, the most consistent theme is the depiction of members of the clergy in sexual acts. The drawings depict clerics copulating with women in outdoor gardens (fig. 16), bedrooms (fig. 17), and in the same room as others (fig. 18). A divisive screen in the room separates the two couples in the latter composition. In essence, the division simulates a type of corrupt confessional, now in a female-dominated interior space, where bodies can sexually express themselves free of sin. The confessional as another tactic of Christian repression, is discussed by Foucault as a mechanism creating a power structure - where one is silent and holds the power to judge and punish the other.²¹ The notion that "silence is power" inverts typical power structures and conventional gender roles. Additionally, silence as a political tool reinforces the presence of the private sphere, without censorship, and silent forms of expression, such as texts and images, flourish. Another image shows a monk tied up by three women (fig. 19). The libertine monk smiles and appears complacent in his role as subject and object, thus signifying his status as a manipulated tool in the corrupt hierarchy of the clergy and his own natural sexual appetite.

Revolutionaries attempted to dethrone the Church because of its corruption and oppressive nature. Foucault argues that Christianity is the ultimate oppressor in Western civilization, as it implements a patriarchal structure constructing gender barriers and enforcing concepts of sin and shamefulness.²² Politicized pornography defied Christian constructions of proper civilization, and this form of subversive propaganda instigated and reflected political discourse and action during the Revolution. In the early 1790s, anti-clerical sentiments peaked. In April 1792, the Legislative Assembly aimed to

²¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 68.

²² *Ibid.*, 23.

disenfranchise the clergy, decreeing that members of the suppressed religious orders could no longer wear their customary costumes.²³ Sumptuary laws were one of the many mechanisms used by revolutionaries to visibly remove the clergy and aristocracy from the public domain and influence.

Although I cannot assert a direct correlation, contextual information acquired about Desrais, libertinism, and fashion lead me to speculate that his suite of erotic drawings were created around the destruction of the clergy and sometime around the early 1790s when Revolutionary fashion became heavily integrated into politics. For example, many images depict the clergy in traditional garb with hats or skullcaps to distinguish their religious station. However, some cover their skullcaps with hats of both high and lower levels of society, which generate multi-layered political significance and satire. Two drawings, in particular, show clerics with erect penises visiting women in their private boudoirs. Both clerics shed their disguises to reveal their skullcaps, stations, and political affiliations. One cleric has his disguise of a tricorne hat sitting in a chair as a woman fondles his penis (fig. 20). The other image shows a cleric masturbating in front of a woman as his disguise of a country, or riding, hat lies on the floor (fig. 21). These images mock the corruption, hypocrisy, and oppression within the Catholic Church, while also demonstrate that celibate authority figures cannot deny natural human urges and abuse their powers. Moreover, these clerics ignored dogmas to pursue blasphemous pleasures of the flesh. Disguising their religious affiliations demonstrates clerical corruption, the cleric's shame, and fear of public ridicule in a hostile

²³ Lynn Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," in *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*, Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 230.

Revolutionary environment. Politicized pornography, like Desrais's suite, was the most dangerous form of propaganda because it not only attacked the clergy, but also had figures actively and willingly participating in sex acts that were an open defiance against God.

Anti-Christian sentiments prevailed during the Revolution. The Jacobin clubs that dominated most of the Revolution and the early Republic (1789 - 1794) instituted a new type of patriarchal order - the monarchy and the Church were no longer divine and no longer in control of society. Revolutionaries implemented the republican calendar (1792-1795) in an attempt to deny Christian holidays and the traditional dating system from Christ's birth. Jacobins replaced Christian symbols and rituals with republican propaganda. They replaced religious prayers and hymns with patriotic ones. Trees of liberty were substituted for crosses, and processions no longer contained religious figures, and instead martyrs of the Revolution were glorified.²⁴ Patriotism became the new religion, enforced by influential Enlightenment philosophies, such as the writings of Voltaire (1694 - 1778), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 - 1778), and Diderot. Although they died before the onslaught of the Revolution, their subversive attitudes and probing writings against the institutions of religion and the monarchy initiated and sustained the movement against *ancien régime* philosophies.

Although many libertines supported and were influenced by Enlightenment thought, they remained a part of a subculture due to their extreme sexual and societal transgressions. Artists and writers who portrayed libertine ideologies of sexuality and politics were considered degenerate and threatening to both the royalists and republican

²⁴ James A. Leith, *The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France, 1750-1799: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 98.

parties, because of their often ambiguous political affiliations and fundamental obscenities. In the late eighteenth century, politicized pornography often incorporated sado-masochistic acts that were acted out on the bodies of both men and women in both the private and public spheres, creating an ambiguity between pleasure and pain and sex and violence. The history of libertinism and their philosophies regarding sex and politics suggest a type of visual lineage and possible social-historical relevance for the figures in Desrais's suite of erotic drawings.

LIBERTINE NIHILISM: THE RELATIONSHIP OF DESRAIS AND SADE TO THE REVOLUTION

The parallels between the Marquis de Sade and Claude-Louis Desrais are unique within the pornographic tradition and for the purpose of this thesis, assist in speculations about Desrais as an artist, his clientele, and the political nature of his erotic drawings. Not only does Desrais's suite, like Sade's writings, incorporate anti-clerical and sadistic acts, but the suite also incorporates sentiments of political nihilism that illustrate the disorder and despair of the Revolution. Like Desrais, Sade utilizes the medium of sex for political criticism and expression of extreme societal upheaval. In *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, Walter Kendrick states that Sade's contemporaries, as well as twentieth-century French writers, revered him as "the Prophet of our Disorder," in that his transgressions of conventions were accomplished through the satirical fusion of religion, politics, and sex.²⁵ Sade's most famous texts, *Justine* (1791), *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1795), and *Juliette* (1797), coincided with the societal upheaval of the Revolution, the Republic, the Terror and the pinnacle of anti-clerical pornography.²⁶ The illustrations and sex acts described in his works show the influence of earlier erotic texts and images, such as *I Modi* and *Thérèse philosophe*, but are described and portrayed as more hardcore and disturbing. Two images from Sade's 1795 text, *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, display bodies piled on top of each other and women using strap-on dildos, displaying the confusion of gender roles and the defiance of traditional sexual mores (figs. 22, 23). It is possible that Desrais's suite of erotic drawings was a precursor to

²⁵ Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 103.

²⁶ Hunt, "Pornography and the French Revolution," 313.

Sade's writings. They worked in the same time period, were similar in age, and possibly were part of the same social formation.

The Marquis de Sade, was a self-proclaimed libertine, who enjoyed total freedom by denying traditional social conventions. In particular, Sade performed and wrote about sexual taboos and promoted counter-hegemonic ideologies.²⁷ His unconventional lifestyle and ambiguous political agendas were issues in his involvement in the Revolution and his political positions, for it made him a threat and an outsider. Sade was a distant relative of the Bourbons, who had ruled France for centuries, and he took advantage of his station to become the quintessential libertine. He became notorious during his lifetime for his sexual escapades, where he would lure prostitutes and women of the lower classes back to his château under the pretense of payment for household duties. Once the women were in his domain, he would often sedate them or keep them against their will for as long as he pleased. In the confines of his boudoir, Sade would often flog men and women, have them flog him, and have everyone participate in group sex. Many libertines participated in orgies and extreme sexual acts as an open act of defiance against God and Christian dogmas. Artists and writers, such as Desrais and Sade, captured these events.

What sets Sade apart, however, is his politicization of libertinism. Sade's writings, like Desrais's drawings, transformed the confined, feminine space of the boudoir into a location for transgressive, sado-masochistic acts. In Sade's stories, acts of libertine sexuality become metaphors for the societal upheaval of the Revolution and Sade's own dissatisfaction with current affairs. His ultimate attacks centered on the

²⁷ Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 5.

Church. He enjoyed deflowering nuns and described crucifixes serving as dildos and as implements for flagellation. Sade was influenced by the work of known atheist Baron d'Holbach's *Système de la nature*, and other philosophical works that argued human nature must be orientated towards earthly rewards.²⁸ Sade's defiance of social orders led to several stints in prison, including the infamous Bastille, where he spent the majority of his adulthood and as a result began to write. Most of his works of pornographic fantasy were written in prison, where Sade experienced boredom, alienation, and frustration. His unconventional ideologies were perpetuated in isolation, as he felt wronged and misunderstood by the patriarchal orders that dictated eighteenth-century French society.

Sade's involvement in Revolutionary politics was influenced and inevitably hindered by his libertinism. He was transferred from the Bastille ten days before the siege, on July 14, 1789, to the insane asylum at Charenton, because he created a megaphone-like device to rally people on the streets below his cell by describing the atrocities prisoners faced.²⁹ Sade was released later that year by the Assembly's new ordinances that freed all prisoners who were imprisoned under laws set by the *ancien régime*. Sade's release resulted in his sympathies for the Revolution, but most importantly, his hatred for *ancien régime* leaders and doctrines that confined him for over a decade.³⁰ His political beliefs also reflected his libertine philosophies. He supported views that suited his lifestyle best and allowed him the most freedom, not necessarily the most logical or best result for society-at-large. He supported the king and hated the Jacobins, but detested the abuses of the monarchy and the Church.³¹ He wanted total

²⁸ Ronald Hayman, *Marquis de Sade: The Genius of Passion* (New York: Tauris Parke, 2003), 89.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 175-7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

freedom from authority, while wanting to retain his noble position. After the execution of King Louis XVI, Sade held power within the Republic as secretary to his territory section, Section des Picques. His past military experience and inspirational public speaking assisted his political status, giving him the platform to broadcast his anti-monarchial and anti-religious sentiments.³² Ironically, Sade did not support the sadistic attacks on the social body during the Reign of Terror (1793 - 1794). Because of his station and the resurgence of a new patriarchal order under Maximilien Robespierre (1758 - 1794), Sade's freedom and life were at risk. On July 24, 1793, Sade was scheduled for the guillotine for being an enemy to the Republic, and for making false allegiances to the current government. These charges were both true and false because Sade, in true libertine fashion, opposed any form of authority, including the government of the Republic. Therefore, he made false allegiances to ensure a title, which would have made him an enemy, but he did not play an active enough role in government to be considered a counterrevolutionary. Sade managed to escape death, because of the turmoil and the lack of organization within the Jacobin-controlled Republic. Officials did not arrest him until 1801, when France was under the leadership of Napoleon. After his house was ransacked and copies of *Juliette* and tapestries illustrating scenes from *Justine* were confiscated,³³ he was forced to spend the rest of his life in prison. Sade became the scapegoat for "morbid pornography" that jeopardized patriotism and the moral cleanliness of the new Republican social body.³⁴ He did not fully support either the monarchy or the Republic; his political views were shaped by his libertine beliefs of total

³² Hayman, *Marquis de Sade*, 187.

³³ *Ibid.*, 213.

³⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 54-6.

freedom. His celebrity and choice of politicized pornography made him more of a threat to the newly formed social order than any other pornographer of his era.

Scenes of libertine sex where figures seek both pleasure and pain paralleled in Desrais and Sade's works. Acts of sadism by groups of women whipping each other or a single male with cat-o-nine tails or brooms are the predominant form of sexual relations in Desrais's suite of drawings (figs. 24, 25). The use of cat-o-nine tails, fringed whips with bent nails or other flesh-tearing mechanisms attached at the tips, are synonymous with Sade's form of sadism and differ from more common depictions of broom-like whips, which are less painful. In 1745, whipping and banishment were decreed as punishment for the distribution of satirical *libelles*, including pornography, but to little avail.³⁵ During the formation of the Republic, women of Jacobin clubs were satirized in print and ridiculed for public beatings of each other and other female factions, which resulted in their exploitation and eventually contributed to the deterioration of female political influence in the Republic (figs. 26, 27). The women in *La Discipline Patriotique*, from *Révolutions de France et de Brabant* and *Patriotic Discipline or Fanaticism Corrected...* flog each other in the streets in a chaotic manner, expressing feelings of horror, despair, anger, and even amusement as nuns and male onlookers attempt to intervene. Images such as these demonstrate the attempt to discredit women in the public sphere and demonstrate the increasing role of violence in popular culture during the Revolution.

The common use of sadism was not only present in pornography and the private sphere, but in the streets, particularly between public women. On May 15, 1793, the

³⁵ Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 93.

“Amazon of Liberty,” Théroigne de Méricourt, was stripped naked and violently flogged by a band of Jacobin women who opposed her Girondists associations.³⁶ Whether women were attempting to actually hurt opposing forces, prove their loyalty to their factions, or seek the approval of male revolutionaries, a close relationship between sexualized violence, pornography, and the political upheaval during the Revolution is certain. The social significance of flogging was incorporated into the libertine sphere, not as punishment, but as a source of sexual gratification that transcended conventional gender roles and civilized behavior. Foucault asserts that the role of sadism in eighteenth-century culture helped convert the Western sexual imagination from a state of repression, which paralleled the violent political disorder of French society transitioning from the *ancien régime*, to a modern state.³⁷

Desrais combines the popular libertine themes of anti-clerical sentiments with sadism in his suite of erotic drawings. For example, a drawing (fig. 28) portrays a member of the clergy strapped to a table where a group of women flog him with cat-o-nine tails and irons, while another woman is under the table performing oral sex. Unlike Sade’s stories where the clergy rape and abuse women, the women perform sadistic acts on men. On the other hand, like Sade, the object is both active and passive in the sexual act. In this case, the man has an erection and receives oral sex that signifies not only his active arousal, but also the clergy’s hypocritical and oppressive nature on the body politic. Furthermore, the Church’s dismissal of the body is attacked in libertinism and portrayed specifically in this suite. The leaking of bodies through ejaculation, defecation,

³⁶ Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 290.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965), 210.

urination, or bleeding were emphasized actions in Sade's writings. In three images, and possibly others that are not as legible, Desrais depicts a woman defecating on a plate (fig. 29), and a man bleeding from lacerations on his back, while sitting on a toilet as two women insert hot pokers in his ears (fig. 30). Another image shows a man with bruised and bloody buttocks as he ejaculates in a woman's face (fig. 31). Images of active bodies either through sexual prowess or the release of fluids demonstrated libertine philosophies of embracing the natural, biological body, instead of complying with gender constructions and privatized oppression of natural instincts by the Church. After the Terror and Sade's production of *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1795), the Republic experienced a brief separation between the Church and the State.³⁸ The attempt to redefine hierarchies of God and man further blurred distinctions between genders and what was considered socially responsible and acceptable in a modern state.

The canonical need to exclude Sade has been an ongoing quest in history, similar to the marginalization of Desrais and early modern politicized pornography. Sade's political significance has seen renewed interest only within the past sixty years. Many scholars claim that Sade hated women, which was corroborated by his acts of violence against women. However, he did act out his political views like a performance artist and a protestor of conventional sexual behavior and Christian morals. He not only wrote libertine novels of sexual hedonism, but also lived in that manner to openly demonstrate his counter-hegemonic ideals, in particular those in opposition to Christian sexual mores and man-made laws that shaped Western culture. Often scholars justify Sade's behavior through psychoanalysis, claiming, for example, that inattention from his mother and

³⁸ Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: from Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 374.

resentment from his mother-in-law resulted in his need to punish women. However, they forget that he wanted to be whipped, too. Feminist writer, Simone de Beauvoir, claimed that Sade was not Revolutionary, but a product of his environment.³⁹ His attitude towards women was just like any other upper class, eighteenth-century male, but his subversive attitude on sex and societal structures, however, is what set him apart. By punishing himself and others, Sade becomes God. He decides the fate of others by ignoring codes of gender, sex, and civilized society, thus everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in his boudoir.

Besides showing members of the clergy in the female dominated boudoir space, Desrais, like Sade, defiled Christian imagery. In one drawing in particular, (fig. 32) a man performs oral sex on a woman near a *prie-dieu*, a type of Christian prayer desk or altar, while a maid looks out the window for intruders. The woman has her arms raised in an oracle-like gesture, as if she is giving a sermon in orgasmic screams, while she receives sexual pleasure from a man, possibly a priest. These demonstrations openly defy the sacred symbols of the Church and normative behavior within the God-fearing social order. Indeed, one of Sade's libertine pamphlets attacked established religion, claiming "that atheism is the only system possible for people who know how to reason."⁴⁰ This statement suggests the correlation of libertinage, Enlightenment philosophy, and the Revolution expressed by pornographers, either through the written word or image.

The Christian notion that knowledge corrupts women is attacked in libertine literature and artwork. The literary form of character dialogue, specifically in love

³⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Marquis de Sade* (New York: Grove Press, 1953), 13-8.

⁴⁰ Marquis de Sade, as quoted in Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 135.

letters, was a popular writing style in the eighteenth-century, such as in Chaderlos de Laclos's literary work *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782). The popular literary style of love letters and female dialogue is generally sexually charged. In pornographic texts, female courtesans and prostitutes instruct their protégés on the art of seduction that Desrais appears to reference in two particular drawings. In one drawing (fig. 33), an older woman sits in a chair highly amused, while instructing a young woman on how to fondle another young woman's genitalia. In the second image (fig. 34), a woman stands over a group of women and instructs them on how to flog a man kneeling down on the floor. The role of female instructions as a form of corrupt Foucauldian confessional can be seen in many of Sade's texts and other pornographic texts from mid to late eighteenth-century France.⁴¹ In "The Libertine Whore: Prostitution in French Pornography from Margot to Juliette," Kathryn Norberg states that the prostitute appears so frequently in libertine literature that she acts as a social barometer, indicating changing attitudes toward old patriarchal hierarchies.⁴² The notion of a libertine whore who controlled the boudoir was both sexually arousing, yet incredibly threatening to conventional male audiences that were witnessing the societal upheaval in gender, class, and politics during the French Revolution.⁴³

The boudoir becomes a type of corrupt Foucauldian confessional within a female dominated space. In *Thérèse philosophe*, religious authority is further negated through the voice of Thérèse, with her accounts of priests exploiting women, the orgasmic ecstasy

⁴¹ Peter Cryle, *Geometry in the Boudoir: Configurations of French Erotic Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 41.

⁴² Kathryn Norberg, "The Libertine Whore: Prostitution in French Pornography from Margot to Juliette," in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity 1500-1800*, Lynn Hunt, ed. (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 225.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 226-7.

of holy trances, and confessing to interactions with male members of the clergy.⁴⁴

Desrais not only perpetuated anti-clerical sentiments, but also seems to portray the literary trope of a corrupt confessional. In a drawing (fig. 35), he portrays a learned woman, signified by the book (a sex manual or a libertine novel) she holds, while masturbating as two maidservants watch through a peephole at the foot of the bed. She instructs the viewers on how to please oneself and demonstrates how text and/or image perform didactic roles and instigate erotic desires, like the erotic novels of the day. By literally putting herself on display, the woman in the drawing defies convention, much like eighteenth-century women who put themselves in the public sphere through politics, the arts, literature, and in hosting boudoir salons. They are subjects and objects – whores and heroes in the libertine sphere.

The instructors or caretakers in Sade's novels, whether they are members of the clergy, abbesses in convents, or elders to children, instruct masturbation, incest, and sexual experimentation. One of Sade's most famous scenes depicts Justine in a monastery. The monks abduct, rape, and commit sadistic acts on women and prostitutes dress as nuns.⁴⁵ Rather than being corrupted by society, Sade's figure Juliette was corrupted from birth. She advanced her libertinism through experience and social interactions. Juliette defies Christian standards of female agency by engaging in sex outside of marriage and with members of the clergy. She also commits acts of sodomy and practices contraception. Sade's heroine is in a constant search for knowledge and rejects moral standards imposed by the Church. For Sade and his heroines, conscious awareness of human relations and gender roles are not prioritized. Instead, freedom of

⁴⁴ Cryle, *Geometry in the Boudoir*, 45.

⁴⁵ Griffin, *Pornography and Silence*, 15.

passion and the expression of one's sexual appetite are imperative.⁴⁶ Another female libertine in the making is the fifteen-year old pupil, Eugénie de Mistival in *Philosophy in the Boudoir*. Eugénie ends up in the care of Madame de Sainte-Ange and her brother Dolmancé, who sexually enlighten her. Various sexual acts of sodomy, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal sex, orgies, and sadism are finalized with Eugénie witnessing and approving of the rape and torture of her own mother. In *Geometry in the Boudoir: Configurations of French Erotic Narrative*, Peter Cryle notes, "Indeed, libertine instruction for Sade, by contrast with Aretino and Pallavicino, is not seed planting, but seed suffocating: Saint-Ange plans to 'stifle within this young heart every seed of virtue and religion planted by her tutors.'"⁴⁷ The venom injected is civilization, which taints primitive, human instinct, which is violent, sexual, and curious.

Pornographers were not just a few perverts marginalized from society, but were well integrated socially and were generally educated individuals, who often corresponded and possessed possible influence with both royalists and revolutionaries. The parallel between Sade and Desrais is unavoidable and provides fascinating insight into the possible political nature of Desrais's suite of erotic drawings. Both Sade and Desrais promoted libertine ideologies through creative media. Their works acted like counter-hegemonic propaganda within the private sphere and illustrated the disorderly state of gender, sex, and politics in late eighteenth-century French society.

⁴⁶ Griffin, *Pornography and Silence*, 9.

⁴⁷ Cryle, *Geometry in the Boudoir*, 80-1.

MALE AND FEMALE BODIES IN THE INTERIOR SPACE OF THE BOUDOIR

The boudoir was a popular setting for the depictions of libertinism and political satire that Desrais seems to reference in his suite of erotic drawings. The boudoir in eighteenth-century France was considered to be a feminine domain. The interior space was the locus of the private sphere, where women socialized and prepared for public display. As opposed to traditional masculine roles, libertines were generally aristocrats, who preferred the private/feminine sphere and the company of both men and women. The boudoir space depicted in Desrais's suite is female-dominated, which is typical of politicized pornography. In contrast to the norm he presents neither gender as attacked or promoted, similar to Sade. Men clearly abuse women in only two drawings that appear to be rape scenes, but the political agenda remains ambiguous. I would not claim that Desrais is a feminist because he is a libertine. He does subvert the traditional roles of women further than most other political pornographers, demonstrating his or his patron's, extreme political attitudes against the Church and the State.

The "woman question" was a consistent topic in various forms for revolutionaries concerned with implementing a new social order. Women in the public held precarious positions, whether they were prostitutes, members of Revolutionary clubs, or hosts of boudoir salons. Although, radically different positions, these public women threatened the traditional masculine order and visibly confused the image of a healthy social body for the new Republic. In particular, boudoir salons and academic salons were considered centralized areas of intellectual discourse and gender ambiguity, where women were often allowed to participate and even control the events uncensored.⁴⁸ The main

⁴⁸ Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, eds., "Introduction: Art, Cultural Politics and the Woman Question," in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 8.

difference between these two places was that boudoir salons were held in the private sphere and predominately hosted by women, *salonnières*, such as Germaine de Staël (1766 - 1817) and Madame Roland (1754 - 1793). Artists who occupied these types of salons were considered less talented and more effeminate than their academic counterparts. Indeed, an anonymous art critic in 1781, critiques a boudoir artist noting that, “M. La Grenée will never show himself to advantage in the great churches nor in the grand galleries, but well in the boudoirs, the little chapels consecrated to voluptuousness.”⁴⁹ However, academic salons had a limited female presence and the artists represented there demonstrated their traditional civic pride and duty.

Boudoir salons date back to the sixteenth century and attained celebrity for the uncensored, creatively driven environment for both men and women.⁵⁰ The women of boudoir salons dedicated themselves to culture and politics, rather than marriage and stereotypical roles for women. The proto-feminist atmosphere of the boudoir salons was perpetuated by *salonnières*, women in Revolutionary clubs, and female writers, such as Christine de Pizan (1363 - c.1434), Veronica Franco (1546 - 1591), Anne-Marie-Louise d’Orleans, Duchesse de Montpensier (1627 - 1693), and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 - 1797).⁵¹ These women created another outlet for subversive thought and behavior in the early modern era, similar to male Enlightenment thinkers and male libertines. During the Revolution, the deconstruction of Christianity and government authority would have resulted in positive dominant roles for women in and outside the boudoir, that likely

⁴⁹ Jill H. Casid, “Commerce in the Boudoir,” in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 104.

⁵⁰ Anonymous Critic, quoted in, James F. McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914: Gender, Society, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 8.

⁵¹ Many of these fascinating women discuss issues of marriage, education, religion, and gender constructions in early modern Europe that have been recovered and published by *The Other Voice Series*, University of Chicago Press.

created mixed feelings amongst libertines and followers of Enlightenment ideals. Male libertines supported this form of a defiant woman, because the destruction of traditional gender roles meant Christian and *ancien régime* societal structures had less dominance. However, popular opinion still condemned the female presence as unhealthy for the political body of the new Republic.

In particular, Louis XV's mistress Madame de Pompadour defined the eighteenth-century woman and was the quintessential embodiment of the rococo style. Together, she and her favorite painter, Boucher, created a type of idiosyncratic representation of feminine power and beauty that became synonymous with the mid-eighteenth century. She constructed a self-image and political position through her artistic patronage. *Jean-Antoinette Poisson, The Marquise de Pompadour (Portrait of Madame de Pompadour)*, 1758, at the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, glorifies feminine roles by showing a prominent woman who commands the space and directly addresses the viewer, while applying her rouge at her toilette (fig. 36). She possesses the role of subject and object, while embodying stereotypes of feminine virtue and vice.

The boudoir, and in particular the toilette or vanity, is associated with female artifice and deception. The application of make-up and the construction of a public appearance often led to the ambiguity of gender and of class, and is evident in two drawings in Desrais's suite. The first drawing (fig. 37), shows one woman at her toilette curling her hair, while a man is on his knees. He appears to be begging the woman at her toilette for something as another woman flogs him from behind, demonstrating female manipulation and political flux in power. The other drawing (fig. 38) shows a woman seated between her bed and her toilette masturbating. Her room is in disarray, the

wallpaper is decorated with penises, and her lapdog sits at her feet watching the autoeroticism. The allusion to bestiality within an extravagant and debauched feminine space satirizes women of the *ancien régime* and illustrates the assumed corruption of a female dominated arena. Desrais's images of the boudoir exhibit the power of women in the private sphere and the possibility of seduction that could result in the transcendence of gender hierarchies that male revolutionaries feared. Issues of interiority, fashion, and sex all retain political significance from the *ancien régime* to the new Republic as gender roles are being redefined.

Desrais's close association with fashion is evident in his suite of erotic drawings, where the artist does not focus on individual identities, but instead on clothing and hairstyles to connote possible political significance. In eighteenth-century France, trends constantly changed with political ideologies and gender identities. Hunt states, "No other issue demonstrates the tension between translation and didacticism more dramatically than the question of Revolutionary dress."⁵² Women and men used fashion during the Revolution not to show wealth, but to show political alliances that influenced the visual culture and created a new body politic.⁵³ In *Fashion in the French Revolution*, Aileen Ribiero, asserts that fashion raised the status of women in the *ancien régime* by placing women in the public sphere as decoration or personal adornment.⁵⁴ However, fashion was seen as morally dangerous to women because an emphasis was placed on exterior, public appearances, which represented personal vices that women were more susceptible to embody. Women of the Revolutionary clubs attempted to transcend the superficial

⁵² Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 75.

⁵³ Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," 224.

role associated with women and fashion in the public sphere by integrating military symbols reserved for men with their costumes, such as the cockade, breeches, weapons, and the liberty bonnet. The relationship between fashion, sex, and politics is a recurring theme in politicized pornography and Revolutionary visual culture, especially in Desrais's suite of erotic drawings, where Desrais's involvement in costume publishing and late eighteenth-century print culture becomes evident.⁵⁵

The role of fashion in Desrais's work suggests insight into his role as an artist, as well as a glimpse into the role of clothing in the construction of gender identities. Similar to other politicized pornography, attributes are expressed through regalia, in particular hats, for this suite of drawings. Unlike other pornography expressing libertine ideologies, the focus is not just on the sex act, but also on fashion. As Hunt makes clear, the distinctive costumes of men recorded at the Estates General in 1789 demonstrates the important role of fashion in Revolutionary politics. She states, "The clergy wore clerical costumes reflective of rank; the nobility wore hats with white feathers and clothing adorned by lace and gold; and the deputies of the Third Estate wore the sober black and three-corner hats of the magistrate" (fig. 39).⁵⁶ All levels are evident in Desrais's drawings, where six different styles of male hats are depicted, including skullcaps that

⁵⁴ Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publications, Inc., 1988), 13.

⁵⁵ Desrais's *oeuvre* heavily consists of fashion designs created for the aristocracy and theatre productions. One drawing in particular, *Costume Design for a Fury*, 1779, (Galerie R.G. Michel, Paris, pen and black ink, brown wash, heightened with white gouache, over black chalk, incised with stylus, on cream paper, 246 x 175 mm) was executed for the costume designer P.N. Sarrazin who worked for an opera house, inscribed in black ink, lower left corner: *C.L.desrais.de.1779*, was plate 130 for Louis XVI's fashion edition *Galerie des modes et costumes français, 1778-1787*. The drawing appeared in the catalogue prepared to accompany exhibition the *French Drawings from a Private Collection: Louis XIII to Louis XVI* at Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; the J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California; and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Quebec. See Konrad Oberhuber and Beverly Schreiber Jacoby, *French Drawings from a Private Collection: Louis XIII to Louis XVI* (Cambridge: Fogg Art Museum, 1980), 158-9.

⁵⁶ Hunt, *The Family Romance in the French Revolution*, 46.

signify the clergy. There were two different styles of *Jacquets* or riding hats utilized by the bourgeoisie and fashionable in the country. All other styles were worn by both the nobility and revolutionaries, such as the top hat, tricorne hat, and large bicorne hat.

The most popular styles exhibited are the tricorne hat and hats with feathers. The feathers either represented the nobility or feathers appear to be paired with ribbon cockades that would signify a Revolutionary. Both hats signify a prominent status within society, but in Desrais's loosely rendered images, other accessories can distort political affiliations and symbolic meanings, providing insight into the complex visual culture of the late eighteenth century. In particular, the cockade displayed republican loyalties and was often accompanied by a sword, which visibly referenced both noble status and military status. All men in the following drawings (figs. 40 - 43) have taken off their hats, set aside their swords, removed their clothes, and have bent over facing the floor (some with restraints), in order to participate in their punishment, given by numerous women with cat-o-nine tails, brooms, and irons. Here again, acts of sado-masochism demonstrate both female dominance and active male arousal through pain. In only one drawing do the men keep hats on that relate to Revolutionary or military status (fig. 44). This exception portrays many taboos in both *ancien régime* and republican ideologies, by demonstrating the conventional fear of the female dominated boudoir. A female figure of the aristocracy, detectable by her hairstyle, is sitting next to two male figures with her skirts raised and handling both of their penises simultaneously. They are two soldiers or actors appearing as soldiers, distinguishable by their hats, one with a possible cockade on his bicorne hat, and the other wears a helmet unlike any other seen in the suite. The style

seems similar to a Roman helmet and could possibly reference an actor in a theatrical costume, a plausible scenario because of Desrais's association with the theatre. The homosexual act depicted of two men kissing and flogging each other is the ultimate sexual taboo and is hardly represented in any politicized pornography or libertine work during the early modern period, except in the writings of Sade.

Politicized pornography often presented stereotypical roles for women, such as nuns, wives, and whores that trick men into devilish deeds. In one drawing from the erotic suite (fig. 45), a woman seduces a man with a drink in her bedroom. In two other drawings, women seduce men with oral sex (figs. 46, 47). One drawing, that I have previously mentioned (fig. 48), is comical because a woman is fondling a man's genitalia in an act of consoling him, as he cries because he cannot get an erection. The man is literally and symbolically emasculated. He cannot possess an active role in sex and rejects his symbol of political status by taking off his hat. The woman manipulates him with her sexual knowledge, direct gaze, and assumed seductive words.

In *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Hunt states that a woman's dominant, active role in pornography, such as being a sodomite, is not liberating, but in fact undermines the role of women in the new patriarchal structure and is an exercise in misogyny.⁵⁷ Desrais's female figures are dominant and can be threatening, but it remains unclear if his presumable libertine affiliations would have considered the representation of women in this suite of drawings positive or negative. One drawing (fig. 49), in particular, shows a woman who appears to inject an enema into the anus of a man, while he fondles another woman. This image depicts a dominant, active woman penetrating the

⁵⁷ Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 131.

man, while he is giving pleasure to another woman. He simultaneously embodies a passive and active role in sex. Based on the contextual information discussed and the indifferent attitudes libertines possessed in regards to societal constructed gender roles, I believe that Desrais's images were viewed not for their gender portrayals, but recognized for their deconstruction of Christian doctrines on gender, sex, and political influence. In addition, Desrais's suite includes three drawings that clearly depict cross-dressing, in particular men who dress as women in sexual liaisons. In one drawing (fig. 50), a man dressed as a woman lays on a bed with an erection and is being approached by three women, two of which have brooms hidden behind their backs. They appear to be coercing him to move out of bed in order to flog him and possibly each other in a sex act. In two other drawings, men are dressed as women and appear to have more agency than the previously mentioned male. One drawing (fig. 51) portrays a man dressed as a woman having anal sex with a woman seated on a sofa masturbating. In the other drawing (fig. 52), both genders transgress traditional roles with a man dressed as a woman, who enters a chandelier-lit room and gropes a woman dressed as a man, while that person and another woman fondle his genitals. It appears that Desrais is rejecting the notion of gender roles completely in order to demonstrate the Revolution's flux in power and possibly to portray the unconventional ideologies of the libertines in regards to sex and political roles.

In Desrais's suite of erotic drawings, fashionably dressed men and women act out popular themes in libertine works and political propaganda that focus on anti-clerical sentiments and a collapse in traditional gender roles. This confusion in agency related to the fluidity of female-male relations and the ambiguity of political hierarchies

surrounding the early 1790s. Sex toys and devices created further tension in power and redefined traditional gender roles within a libertine space. The use of sex swings, whips, and chairs place the victim in prime position for intercourse and also rape, which are prominent in many libertine works, including Sade.⁵⁸ Only two scenes in Desrais's suite of drawings can be labeled as possible rape scenes, because the women appear distressed. In one drawing (fig. 53), a woman covers her eyes as she sits in a chair and a man seems to force himself upon her. The other image (fig. 54) is not as clear, but appears to portray two different couples in a boudoir. The men seem to force themselves on the women, while one man appears to choke one woman, while the other woman on the ground has an angry expression on her face. The couples could be involved in an act of aggressive foreplay; however, in which the sexualized violence of the images could have been arousing and could embody political significance. These images are unlike the rest of Desrais's suite, because the women do not dominate the interior space and are not sexually aggressive. These plausible rape scenes perpetuate the notion that libertines were not feminists, but seemingly freer roles for women was a coincidental aftermath of the deconstruction of patriarchal orders of the Church and the State. Furthermore, the violence against a body, whether male or female, is sexually gratifying in the libertine sphere and reflects the disorder and violence of Revolutionary society.

The most outlandish sex act in Desrais's suite, and possibly the most politically ambiguous, is the drawing depicting a couple in a sex swing, which is assisted by five women, all with exposed breasts and one with a cat-o-nine tails whip in hand (fig. 55). This image does not appear as a critique of gender, but of class. All the women on the floor are uniform in appearance, in the guises of nymphs or as symbols of Liberty, with

⁵⁸ Cryle, *Geometry in the Boudoir*, 211.

one breast exposed (many women portrayed in this suite have either one or both breasts exposed, while the rest of the body remains covered), with simple hairstyles and dresses reminiscent of neo-classical fashions. All the women stand beneath the couple in the swing and pull ropes to make the swing move. The only emblems that the couple possesses are the hairstyles that place them in the aristocracy. The woman in the swing has an elaborate hairstyle with ostrich feathers, connoting her aristocratic status. Another element to the image is an easel with a canvas, next to a table with a palette and brushes. Is Desrais referencing himself? Desrais was in fact considered a boudoir artist, instead of a traditionally trained, academic artist. As a plausible libertine artist, issues of sex and class would have influenced his status in society and the works he created. The juxtaposition, I would speculate, embodies an important change in the body politic and aesthetic styles of representation for both men and women during the Revolutionary era.

The swing in rococo art, such as in Fragonard's famous image, depicts a woman's sexual availability and also changeability in love (fig. 56). Desrais's depiction of a swing, however, displays a couple physically confined, where they lack control of their bodies as they are suspended in the middle of the boudoir. In accordance with sexual acts depicted in a libertine type of boudoir, the couple willingly puts themselves in this masochistic position. The five women on the floor flog and swing the couple around with ropes connected to the swing. Thus the couple's fate is determined by the five women (possibly allegorical women of the new Republic because of their dress) creating feelings of ambiguity in regards to gender roles and social hierarchies. These neo-classical women punish figures from the *ancien régime* and control the movement of their bodies. Like eighteenth-century *salonnières*, the female figures influence bodies in

their boudoirs, which were once considered private, but are now a part of the public sphere. Additionally, the insertion of the palette, brushes, easel, and oval-shaped canvas, cropped in the foreground, alludes to the visual culture of Desrais's period that constructed how figures of the past and present were portrayed in politicized pornographic art.

In essence, Desrais appears to illustrate the transition from the *ancien régime* into the Republic by utilizing aspects of late eighteenth-century visual culture, clothing, art, and showing how tastes in methods of displaying bodies coincided with the evolving political environment of the era. One drawing in the suite (fig. 57) portrays many elements from antiquity, the rococo, and late eighteenth-century pornography. This image is the only mythological scene in the suite, and one of few to take place outdoors, seemingly defying both acceptable forms of pornography and libertine representations. Desrais places the sexual encounter between the figures outside the boudoir within nature, but inserts elements of the boudoir in the public sphere, such as furniture and sex toys. Three nymph-like figures, possibly a joke on the Three Graces, flog a naked man with cat-o-nine tails and brooms. The women are surrounded by sexual instruments and are assisted by a putto. In the swirling clouds and flowing fabric above, a goddess figure seated in a chariot aided by a putto as she masturbates with a flower. This complex image seems to mock the artistic style of the rococo and possibly punishes a man from the *ancien régime*. Additionally, the mode of mythological guises is corrupted in this space where figures act out sex acts preferred by libertines, which denies the popular, acceptable visual representation of sexuality. Tension is evident in Desrais's boudoir,

where the place appears to embody notions of chaos and of equal rights, where participants choose to be active or passive in their counter-hegemonic role-playing.

Joan Landes states in her book, *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, that sexual subordination became linked to the division of private isolation and public activism.⁵⁹ In Desrais's images, roles are fluid and sexual subordination is not forced upon victims, but individuals choose to take passive roles within a libertine sphere to obtain pleasure, not power. Indeed, unlike republicans and conservative revolutionaries, libertines associated privacy with freedom and preferred the uncensored realm of the private sphere.⁶⁰ More often than not, the women appear to adopt dominant roles in Desrais's suite rather than the men. This is a consistent theme in libertine literature and a popular form of gender representation for politicized pornography. To the general public, such aggressive women represented a monstrosity, a body full of vice, and a threat to the social order. However, Desrais appears to suggest, in the libertine sphere, that a defiant woman instigated male desire and represented positive political rebellion.

⁵⁹ Landes, *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

CONCLUSION

In the early modern period, sex became politicized. During times of societal upheaval, such as the Reformation and French Revolution, sexualized bodies became political tools that critiqued traditional orders and reflected societal disorder. The French Revolution is a unique period in history, when people broke down old orders in an attempt to have a democratic society, only to create a new system that was ultimately more conservative, at least in terms of gender politics and sexual oppression.

Nonetheless, liberated women and gender equality, or gender ambiguity, saturate the pornographic world of the Enlightenment and Revolution.⁶¹ Politicized pornography, in particular literary and visual works created by libertines, such as Sade and presumably Desrais, mirror the flux in politics, gender, and societal representations occurring in the early 1790s. The influence of Enlightenment philosophies and the libertines helped shape Revolutionary thought in regard to human sexual nature and the societal construction of gender roles and authority.

Power structures were in a state of transition during this period, which created a political atmosphere of ambiguity, capitalized on and satirized by politicized pornography. As the infamous Marquis de Sade was a product of his time, so, too, was Claude-Louis Desrais. Illicit material ran rampant in the underground of Paris in the forms of drawings, prints, *libelles*, and “philosophical” books, all of which positively and negatively influenced the construction of the new body politic. Like Sade, Desrais appears to have been a part of the social formation that challenged conventions about sex, gender, religion, and politics from a libertine position. It is unclear if he created this suite of drawings to mock elite members of the *ancien régime* or to mock the fears of

revolutionaries. I propose that he walked a fine line between being a Revolutionary and an aristocrat in the manner of a true libertine. Libertines considered acts of sadism, orgies, and anti-clerical sentiments, “normal” actions as forms for protesting against the oppressive civilizing forces of the Church and the State. In portraying the boudoir, inverted gender roles in extreme sex acts, and politically charged fashions, Desrais may have indeed captured the essence of the libertine sphere and the transition the French Revolution commanded from the oppressive *ancien régime* to the ambiguous modern state.

⁶¹ Norberg, “The Libertine Whore,” 251.

APPENDIX: CHECKLIST OF DRAWINGS

Private Collection

Claude-Louis Desrais (1746-1816, Paris)

1. Inv. No. D-F-514-1

Woman Sitting on Chair with Hands over Her Eyes while Copulating with Standing Man

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black graphite with touches of gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on off-white laid paper

80 x 55 mm

2. Inv. No. D-F-514-2

Lady Supporting Another Lady on Sofa while Standing Gentleman Pleasures Her with His Left Hand

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of graphite with touches of white gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on off-white laid paper

82 x 56 mm

3. Inv. No. D-F-514-3

Standing Lady Giving Seated Gentleman a Drink

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper with damage to upper and lower left corners

89 x 58 mm

4. Inv. No. D-F-514-4

Man Dressed as Woman Entering a Woman Bent Over a Sofa from Behind

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of graphite with touches of white gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on off-white laid paper, inscribed in black ink, upper left corner: L.L. 87

89 x 57 mm

5. Inv. No. D-F-514-5

Intercourse Interrupted by Lady Peering Through a Curtain

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and brown wash and watercolor, framing lines in black ink on blue laid paper, laid down on off-white laid paper

89 x 58 mm

6. Inv. No. D-F-514-6

Priest Penetrating Standing Lady from Behind While She Pleasures Seated Lady with Her Hands and Another Lady Watches Over Fence

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash with traces of white gouache on faded blue antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper
81 x 55 mm

7. Inv. No. D-F-514-7

Two Women Flogging Partially Nude Man Strapped Over a Step Ladder

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and brown and grayish brown wash over traces of black chalk, framing lines in black ink on cream laid paper, laid down on off-white laid paper
80 x 52 mm

8. Inv. No. D-F-514-8

Seated Man Performing Oral Sex on Standing Woman Leaning Against a Bed

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush with brown and gray wash and touches of white gouache on off-white antique paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper
82 x 52 mm

9. Inv. No. D-F-514-9

At the Prie-Dieu: Nude Man is Holding Woman Upon His Shoulders Facing Him with Her Legs Wrapped Around His Neck While Maid Keeping Guard at Window

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash with traces of white gouache on faded blue antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper
84 x 56 mm

10. Inv. No. D-F-514-10

Two Women Having Oral Sex on Canopied Bed

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of graphite on faded blue antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper, inscribed in black ink, upper right corner: LL.32
89 x 56 mm

11. Inv. No. D-F-514-11

Two Women Torturing a Man Seated on a Toilet (Sticking Pokers in His Ears)

Pen and black ink with brush and gray wash on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper
79 x 51 mm

12. Inv. No. D-F-514-12

Nude Woman Leaving Man in Bed

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash with touches of white gouache on faded blue antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper

82 x 56 mm

13. Inv. No. D-F-514-13

Gentleman Interrupting Two Gentlemen and a Lady Having Sex on a Chaise Lounge

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of graphite with touches of white gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper

81 x 55 mm

14. Inv. No. D-F-514-14

Gentleman Masturbating with the Train of a Lady's Dress While She Peaks at Him from Behind Her Fan

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash with touches of white gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique paper

80 x 54 mm

15. Inv. No. D-F-514-15

Three Women Tying Up a Monk

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash, heightened with white gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper

82 x 51 mm

16. Inv. No. D-F-514-16

Two Women Flogging a Seated Friar While He Has Sex with a Standing Woman and Two Women Wait Their Turn

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash with white gouache on cream antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper

81 x 52 mm

17. Inv. No. D-F-514-17

Woman Performing Oral Sex on Seated Gentleman While He fondles Her

Pen and black ink with brush and brown wash, framing lines in black ink on off-white laid paper laid down on off-white laid paper, signed and inscribed in black ink, upper left:

L.L.16I

89 x 57 mm

18. Inv. No. D-F-514-18

Two Standing Young Women, One Fondling the Other, Gleefully Watched by a Seated Older Woman

Pen and black ink with brush and brown and gray wash, framing lines in black ink on off-white laid paper, laid down on off-white laid paper

79 x 51 mm

19. Inv. No. D-F-514-19

Lady Performing Oral Sex on Gentleman Seated on Sofa as He Fondles Her

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash, heightened with white gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper

83 x 56 mm

20. Inv. No. D-F-514-20

Three Ladies Teasing a Maid

Pen and black ink with brush and gray wash, framing lines in black ink on grayish blue laid paper, laid down on off-white laid paper

80 x 51 mm (irregular, some corners missing)

21. Inv. No. D-F-514-21

Man Playing with a Woman on a Bed While a Couple is Engaged in Intercourse on the Floor

Pen and black ink with brush and brown wash, over traces of black chalk, framing lines in black ink on blue laid paper, laid down on blue laid paper; inscribed in black ink, upper left; L.L. 243

88 x 58 mm

22. Inv. No. D-F-514-22

Gentleman Having Sex with One Woman While Kissing Another

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and brown wash, heightened with white gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper

81 x 56 mm

23. Inv. No. D-F-514-23

Woman Bent Over a Chair Defecating onto a Plate Held by a Kneeling Gentleman

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash with white gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper

79 x 51 mm

24. Inv. No. D-F-514-24

Mythological Scene: putti, Masturbating Woman in a Chariot, and Three Women Flogging a Man Bent Over a Sofa

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash, heightened with white gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper

80 x 51 mm

25. Inv. No. D-F-514-25

Gentleman in Bed with Two Women Kissing

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash heightened with white gouache on off-white antique laid paper, mounted on cream antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink
82 x 54 mm

26. Inv. No. D-F-514-26

Four Women Flogging a Nude Man on All Fours While a Fifth Woman Watches

Pen and black ink with brush and brown wash with traces of gouache on cream antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream laid paper
84 x 52 mm

27. Inv. No. D-F-514-27

Four Women Flogging a Priest Stretched Across a Table While Another Woman Performs Oral Sex

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash with traces of gouache on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper
89 x 58 mm

28. Inv. No. D-F-514-28

Rejected with a Kick in the Presence of Three Others

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash and watercolor over traces of black chalk on off-white laid paper, laid down on blue laid paper
83 x 57 mm

29. Inv. No. D-F-514-29

Two Women Flogging a Man Having Sex with Another Woman

Pen and black ink with brush and brown wash over traces of white gouache on cream antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper
89 x 58 mm

30. Inv. No. D-F-514-30

Man on Bended Knee Before Standing Woman Dipping a Ladle in a Pot

Pen and black ink with brush and gray wash over traces of black chalk on cream antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on cream antique laid paper
89 x 58 mm

31. Inv. No. D-F-514-31

Bearded Man with Erection Licking a Painting of a Woman While Standing on a Stool as One Woman Pinches Her Breasts While Standing on a Stool as One Woman Pinches Her Breasts While Observing Herself and Another Lady Sits at a Dressing Table Observing

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

32. Inv. No. D-F-514-32

Erect Gentleman Lays on a Bed Attended by Three Women

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper

89 x 58 mm

33. Inv. No. D-F-514-33

Woman Fondling a Man While Another Watches

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper

89 x 58 mm

34. Inv. No. D-F-514-34

Gentleman on Sofa Fondles a Woman While Five Women Assist

Pen and black ink with gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper

89 x 58 mm

35. Inv. No. D-F-514-35

Actor with Riding Hat Penetrates and Actress in a Hairnet while a Third Watches

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper

89 x 58 mm

36. Inv. No. D-F-514-36

Couple Having Sex on a Swing, Observed and Assisted by Five Women

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper

89 x 58 mm

37. Inv. No. D-F-514-37

Gentleman Stretched Across Bed While Woman Irons his Bottom

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper

89 x 58 mm

38. Inv. No. D-F-514-38

Gentleman Kneels Beside a Woman Being Flogged by a Maid

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper

89 x 58 mm

39. Inv. No. D-F-514-39

Two Soldiers Kiss and Flog One Another while a Nude Woman Handles Their Penises

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

40. Inv. No. D-F-514-40

Woman Flogs a Man Who Kneels with His Head in Her Lap

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on blue antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

41. Inv. No. D-F-514-41

Couple Having Sex on a Bed While a Nun with a Lantern and a Man with a Candle Observe

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on blue antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

42. Inv. No. D-F-514-42

Woman Sitting in a Chair Manipulating a Kneeling Cleric's Exposed Penis

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

43. Inv. No. D-F-514-43

Woman Trying to Help a Man get an Erection

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

44. Inv. No. D-F-514-44

Standing Man Dressed as a Woman Fondles a Standing Woman Dressed as a Man While a Lady Assists

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

45. Inv. No. D-F-514-45

Man Dressed as a Woman Having Anal Sex with a Woman Seated on a Sofa

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on blue antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

46. Inv. No. D-F-514-46

Man (or Woman) Masturbating While Holding a Book and Two Women Observe from Behind a Screen

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

47. Inv. No. D-F-514-47

Gentleman with One Knee on Stool Ejaculating While a Woman Shields Her Face

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

48. Inv. No. D-F-514-48

Lady Giving an Enema to a Gentleman While He Fondles Another Woman's Genitals

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

49. Inv. No. D-F-514-49

Nude Cavalier Performing Oral Sex on a Seated Lady While Six Women Take Turns Flogging Him

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

50. Inv. No. D-F-514-50

Woman Sits on a Man's Lap While a Cleric and a Woman Have Sex

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

51. Inv. No. D-F-514-51

Kneeling Man with an Erection Puts One Hand up a Woman's Skirt and the Other Hand on Her Breast

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

52. Inv. No. D-F-514-52

Gentleman and Two Women Seated on a Sofa, Kissing and Fondling

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

53. Inv. No. D-F-514-53

Seated Lady Holding the Erect Penis of a Man in Costume who is Kneeling on a Cushion While Two Women Observe

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

54. Inv. No. D-F-514-54

Two Woman Playing with a Marionette-Costumed Man who is Ejaculating

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

55. Inv. No. D-F-514-55

Seated Women Holding the Head of a Nude Kneeling Man While Three Women Flog Him and Two Women Observe

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

56. Inv. No. D-F-514-56

Two Gentleman in Red Coats Sitting at a Table with a lady as a Couple Stand Behind Them Having Sex While Another Couple Watch from the Window

Watercolor and pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

57. Inv. No. D-F-514-57

Woman Riding a Nude Military Man While Flogging Him Like a Horse

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

58. Inv. No. D-F-514-58

Young Cleric with Scull-Cap Having Sex with a Lady on Her Bed

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

59. Inv. No. D-F-514-59

Standing Woman Lifts Skirt of Woman on a Bed and Inserts an Objet into Her Behind

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

60. Inv. No. D-F-514-60

Lady with Her Skirt Up Draping Ribbons Over a Standing Nude Man with an Erection While a Lady Holds a Flog and a Satyr Beats a Drum

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

61. Inv. No. D-F-514-61

Woman Seated on a Chair Between Two Beds Masturbating

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

62. Inv. No. D-F-514-62

Nude Cleric with Erection Suspended in Air with Rope and Pully Being Flogged by a Standing Lady

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

63. Inv. No. D-F-514-63

Crouching Man and Woman Being Spanked by a Group of Women

Pen and black ink with brush and gray and brown wash over traces of black chalk on off-white antique laid paper, framing lines in black ink, laid down on tan laid paper
89 x 58 mm

ILLUSTRATIONS

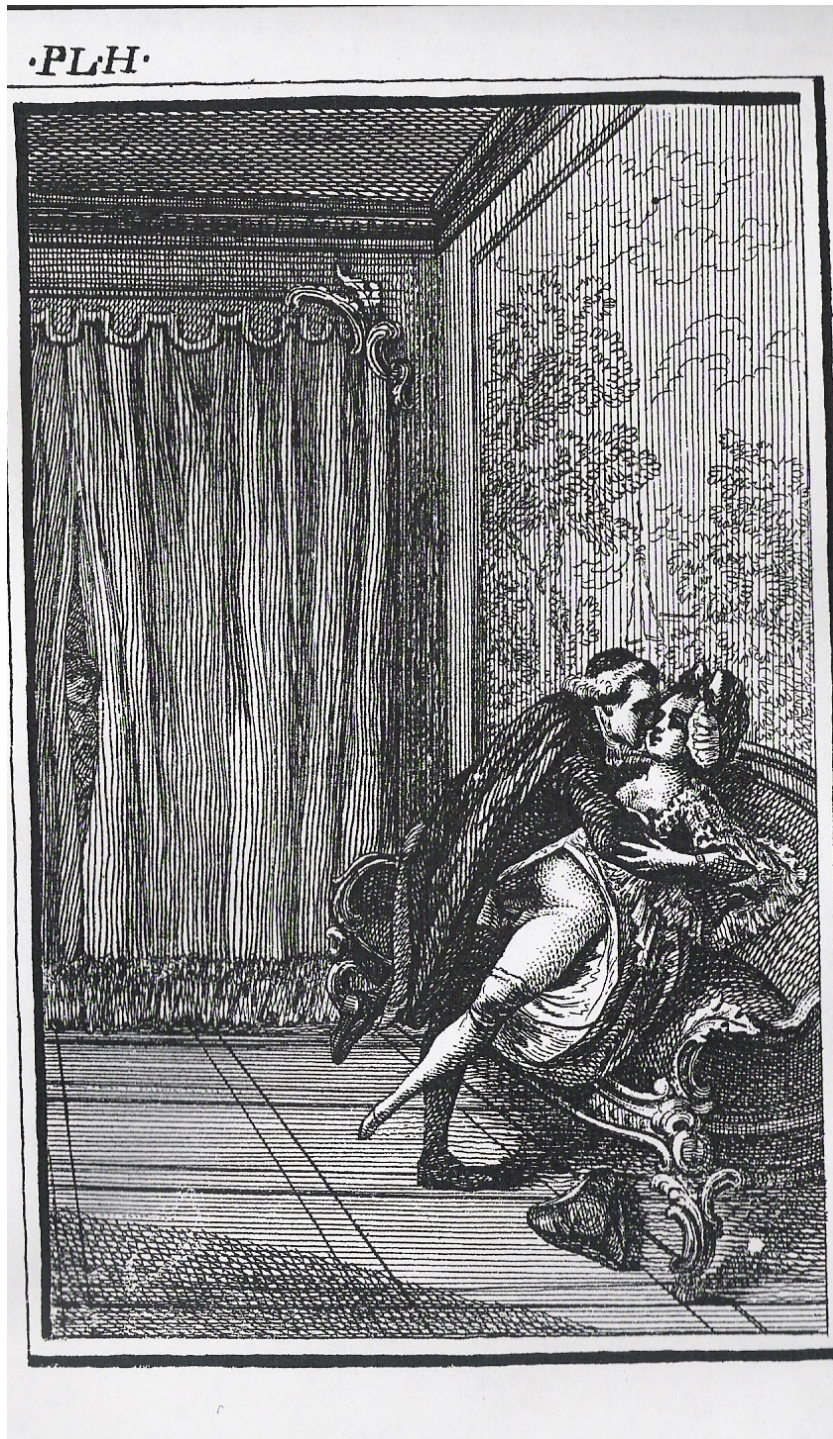


Figure 1:
Anonymous, engraving from *Thérèse philosophe* ("PLH"), c.
1748, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

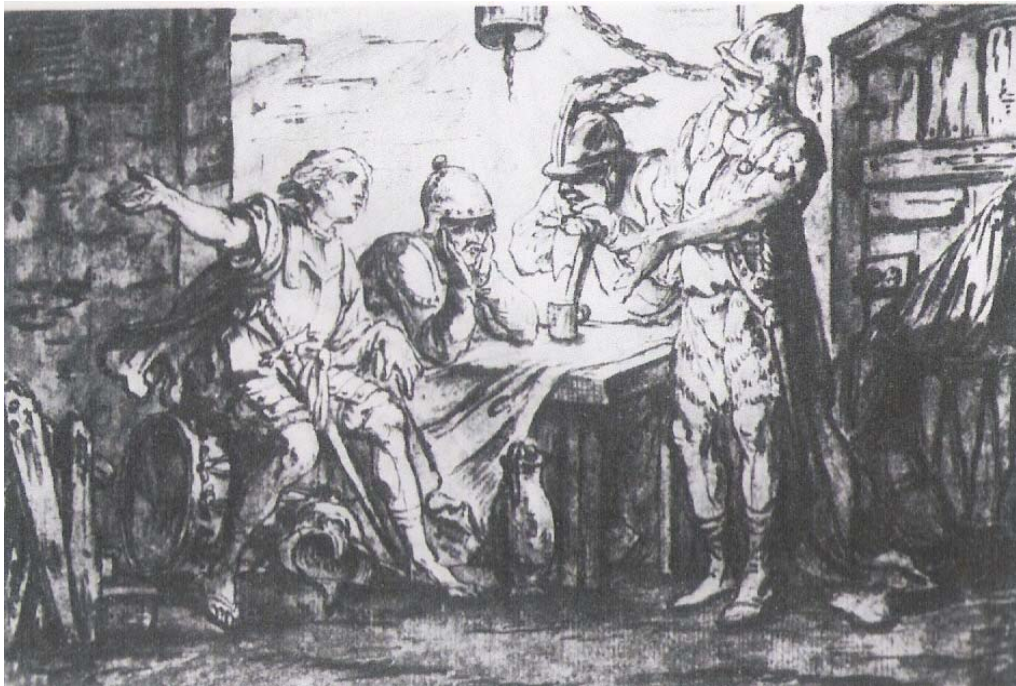


Figure 2:
Claude-Louis Desrais, *The Four Sons of Aymon*, 1769, Shickman Gallery,
New York.



Figure 3:
Desrais, *Putti Placing Garlands on a Herm of Bacchus*, 18th c., Musée Fabre,
Montpellier.

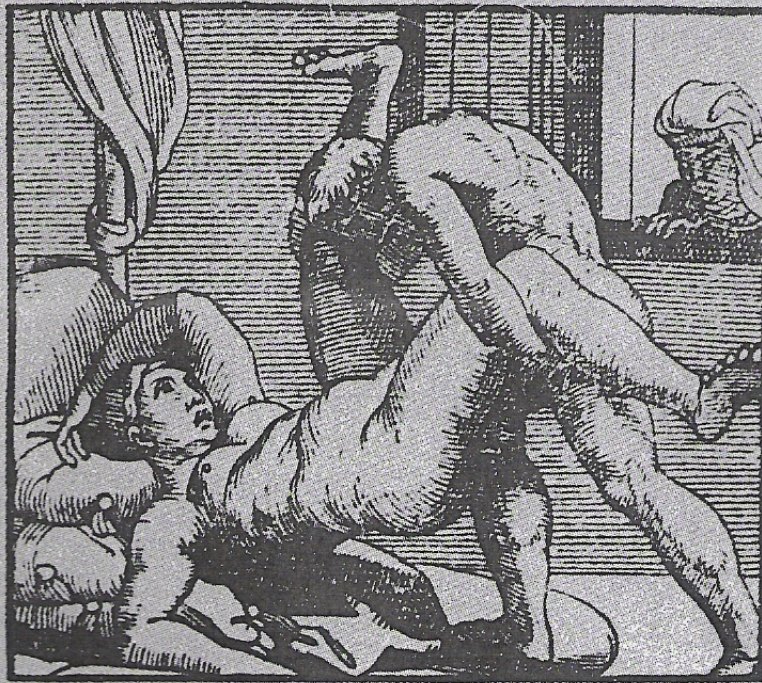


Private Collection

Figure 4:
Desrais, *Woman Trying to Help a Man Get an Erection*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-43,
Private Collection.



Figure 5:
Drawn by Rosso Fiorentino and engraved by Jacopo Caraglio, Scene from *Loves of the Gods*, 1524, The British Museum, London.



A Pri le coscie, accio ch'io ueggia bene
 Il tuo bel culo, e ia tua potta in uiso,
 Culo da compire un pare un paradiso,
 Potta, ch'i cori stilla per le rene;
 Mentre, ch'io uagheggio, egli mi uiene
 Capriccio di basciarui a l'improuiso,
 E mi par esser piu bel, che Narciso
 Nel specchio, che'l mio cazzo allegro tiene;
 Ahi ribalda, ahi ribaldo, in terra, & in letto
 Io ti ueggio puttana, e t'apparecchia
 Ch'io ti rompa due costole del petto;
 Io te n'incaco franciosata uecchia,
 Che per questo piacer plusquamperfetto
 Entrarci in un pozzo senza secchia,
 E non si troua pecchia
 Giottad'i fior com'io, d'un nobil cazzo,
 E no'i prouo ancho, e per mirarlo sguazzo;

Figure 6:

Drawn by Giulio Romano, engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi, text by Pietro Aretino,
 Scene and Sonnet from *I Modi*, c. 1524-27, British Museum, London.



Figure 7:
François Boucher, *Venus Surprised by Vulcan*, c. 1754, oil on canvas, 161 x 71 cm (63.4 x 28 in.), The Wallace Collection, London.



Figure 8:
Anonymous, engraving from *Thérèse philosophe* ("PL.R"), c. 1748, The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York.

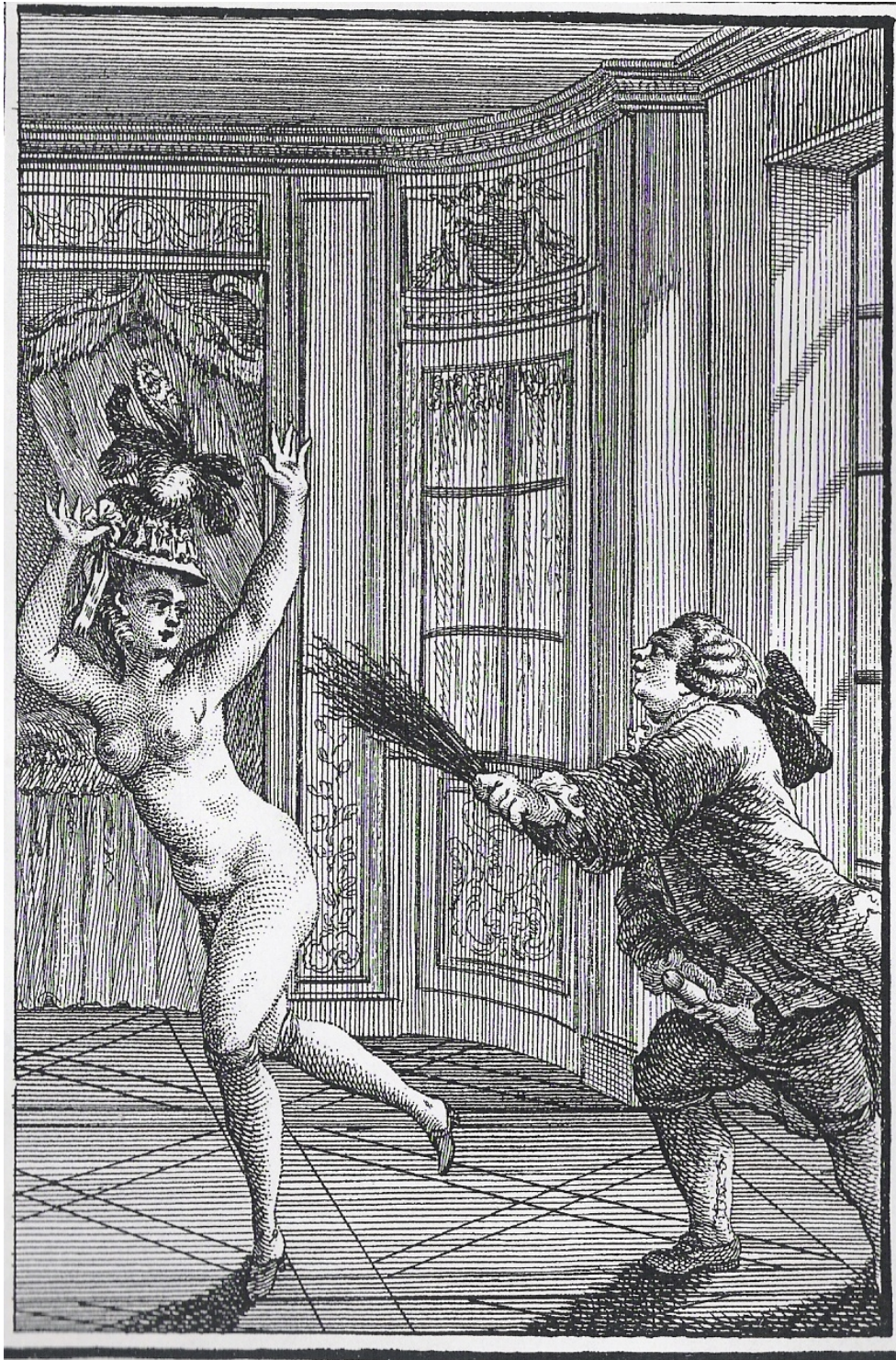


Figure 9:
Anonymous, engraving from *Thérèse philosophe* ("PL.K"), c. 1748, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

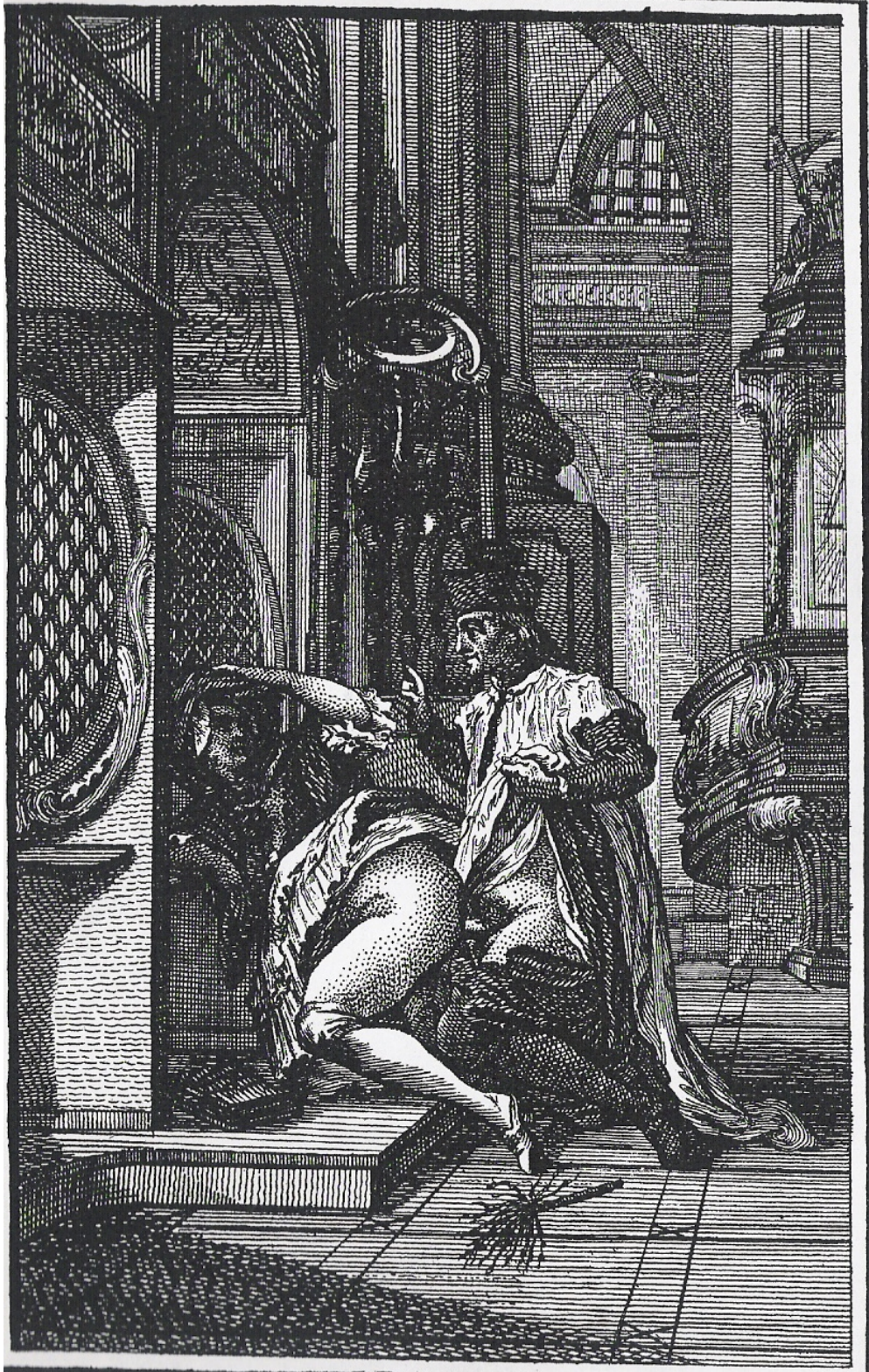


Figure 10:
Anonymous, engraving from *Thérèse philosophe* ("PL.C"), c. 1748, The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 11:

Anonymous, engraving of Marie-Antoinette with princesse de Guéménée, one of her ladies-in-waiting, from *Vie privée, libertine, et scandaleuse de Marie Antoinette d'Autriche*, 1793, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



Figure 12:

Anonymous, engraving of Marie-Antoinette in embrace with a man and a woman from *Vie privée, libertine, et scandaleuse de Marie Antoinette d'Autriche*, 1793, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



Private Collection

Figure 13:

Desrais, *Two Women Playing with a Marionette-Costumed Man who is Ejaculating*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-54, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 14:

Desrais, *Lady with Her Skirt Up Draping Ribbons Over a Standing Nude Man with an Erection While a Lady Holds a Flog and a Satyr Beats a Drum*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-60, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 15:

Desrais, *Nude Cleric With Erection Suspended in Air with Rope and Pully Being Flogged by a Standing Lady*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-62, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 16:

Desrais, *Priest Penetrating Standing Lady from Behind While She Pleasures Seated Lady with Her Hands and Another Lady Watches Over Fence*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-6, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 17:
Desrais, *Young Cleric with Scull-Cap Having Sex with a Lady on Her Bed*, early 1790s,
Inv. D-F-514-58, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 18:
Desrais, *Woman Sits on a Man's Lap While a Cleric and a Woman Have Sex*, early
1790s, Inv. D-F-514-50, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 19:
Desrais, *Three Women Tying Up a Monk*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-15, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 20:

Desrais, *Woman Sitting in a Chair Manipulating a Kneeling Cleric's Exposed Penis*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-42, Private Collection.

Private Collection

Figure 21:

Desrais, *Man on Bended Knee Before Standing Woman Dipping a Ladle in a Pot*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-30, Private Collection.

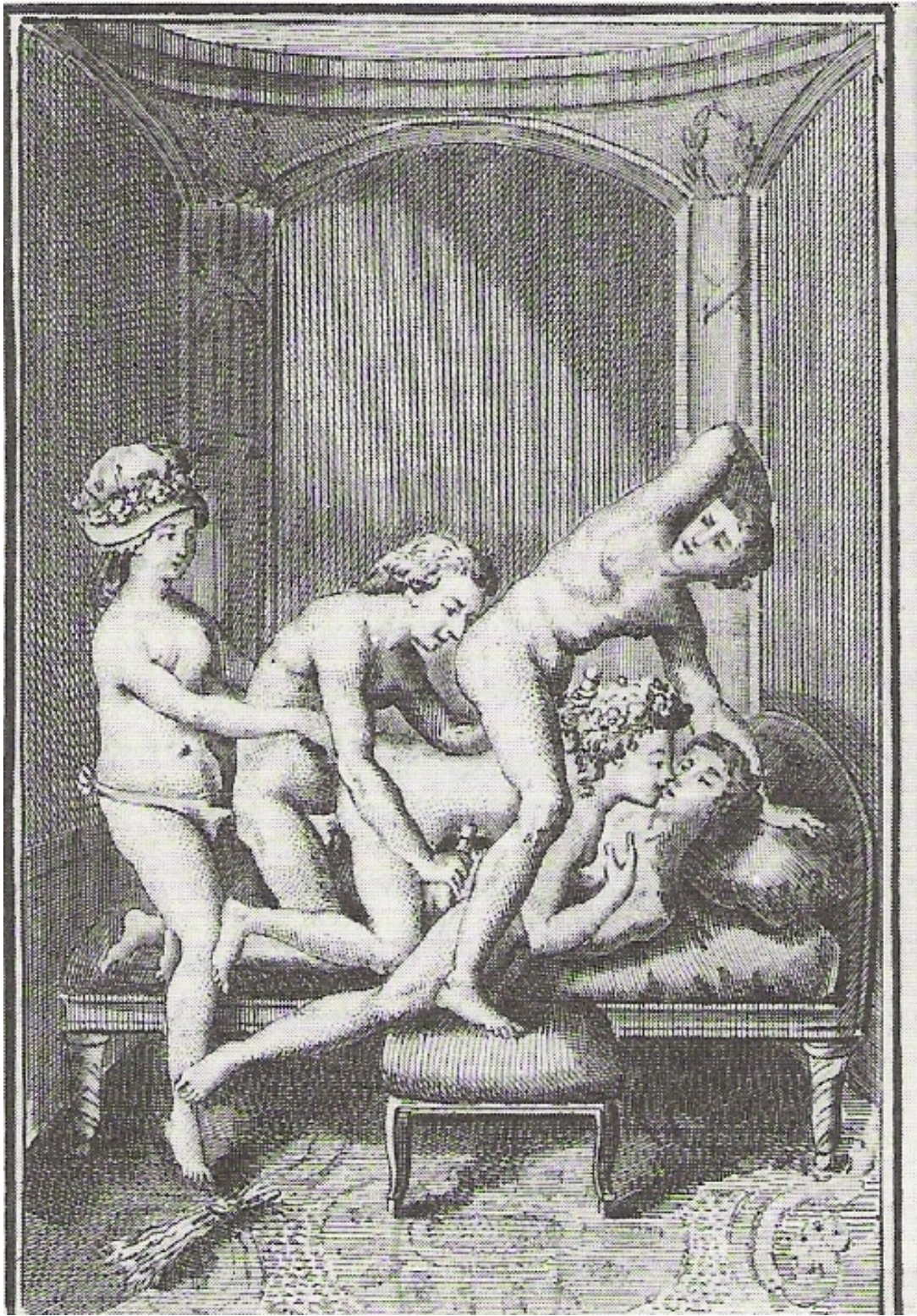


Figure 22:
Anonymous, engraving from the 1795 edition of the Marquis de Sade's *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

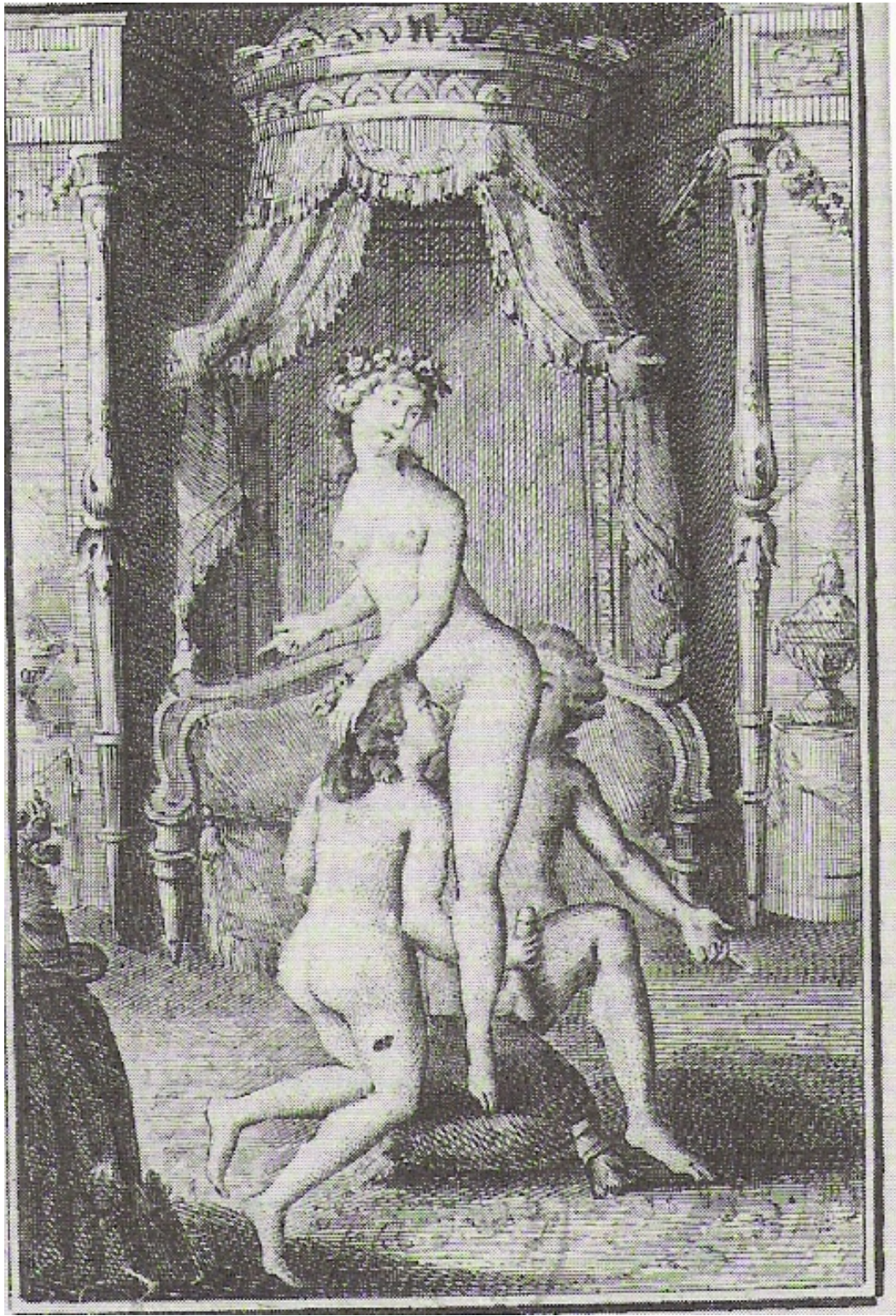


Figure 23:
Anonymous, engraving from the 1795 edition of the Marquis de Sade's *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



Private Collection

Figure 24:

Desrais, *Two Women Flogging a Seated Friar While He Has Sex with a Standing Woman and Two Women Wait Their Turn*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-16, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 25:

Desrais, *Crouching Man and Woman Being Spanked by a Group of Women*, early 1790s,
Inv. D-F-514-63, Private Collection.

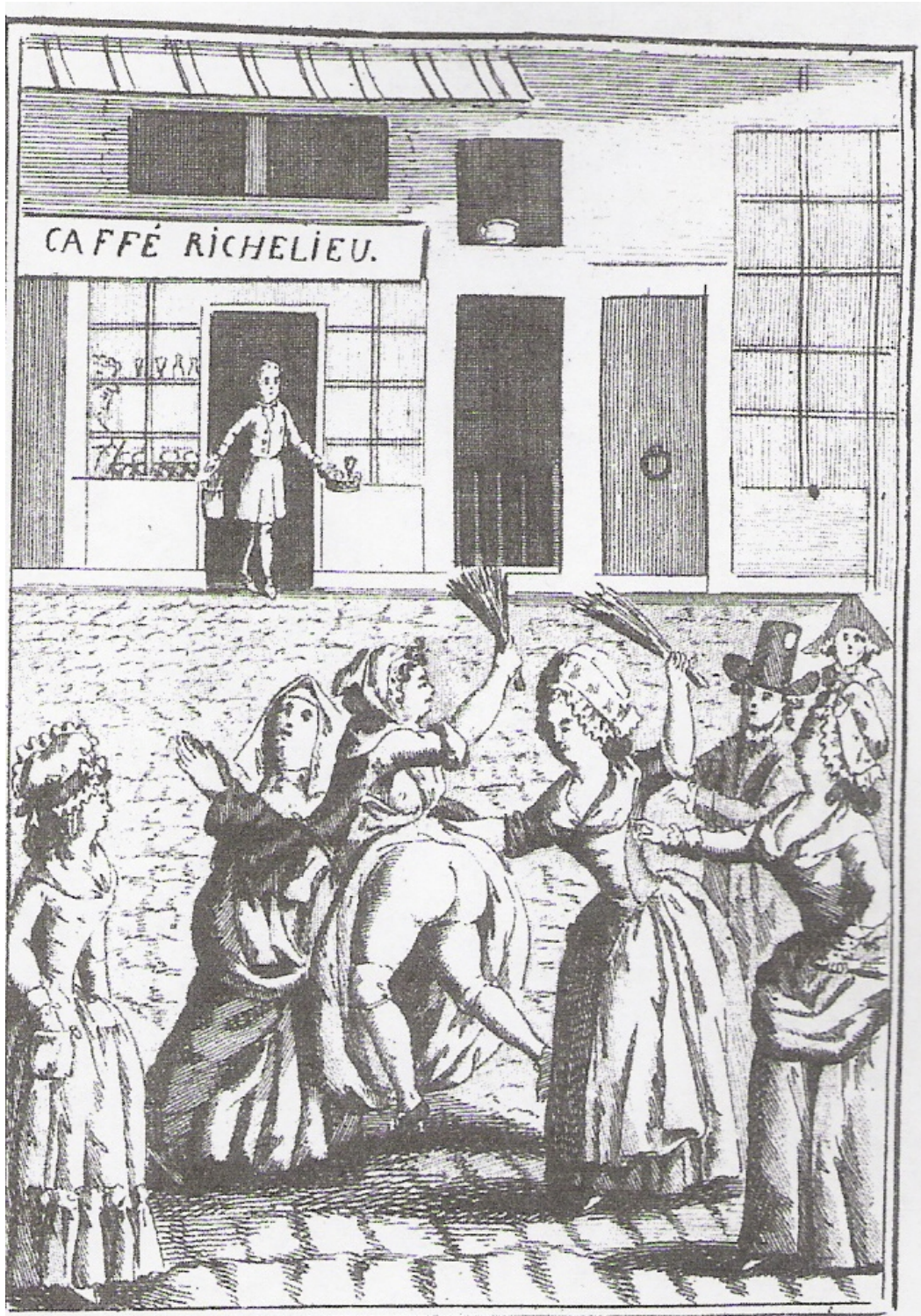


Figure 26:
Anonymous, *La Discipline Patriotique*, from *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, 1791,
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



Figure 27:

Anonymous, *Patriotic Discipline or Fanaticism Corrected: The Period begun during the Week of the Passion, 1791, by the Women of the Market. According to an Exact Count, there were 621 Buttocks Whipped: 310 and one-Half Butts, since the Treasurer of the Miramion(s) has Only One (Cheek), 1791*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

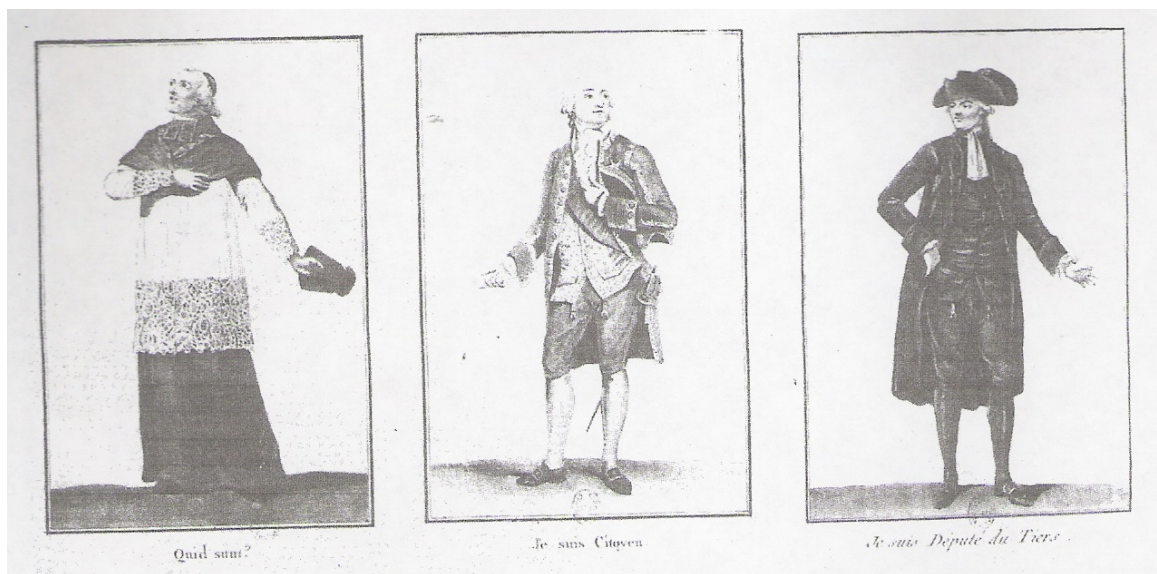


Figure 39:

Anonymous, *The Three Estates*, 1789, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Private Collection

Figure 28:

Desrais, *Four Women Flogging a Priest Stretched Across a Table while Another Woman Performs Oral Sex*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-27, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 29:

Desrais, *Woman Bent Over a Chair Defecating onto a Plate Held by a Kneeling Gentleman*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-23, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 30:

Desrais, *Two Women Torturing a Man Seated on a Toilet (Sticking Pokers in His Ears)*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-11, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 31

Desrais, *Gentlemen with One Knee on Stool Ejaculating While a Woman Shields Her Face*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-47, Private Collection



Private Collection

Figure 32:

Desrais, *At the Prie-Dieu: Nude Man is Holding Woman Upon His Shoulders Facing Him With Her Legs Wrapped Around His Neck While Maid Keeps Guard at Window*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-9, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 33:

Desrais, *Two Standing Young Women, One Fondling the Other, Gleeefully Watched by a Seated Older Woman*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-18, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 34:
Desrais, *Four Women Flogging a Nude Man on All Fours While a Fifth Woman Watches*,
early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-26, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 35:

Desrais, *Man (or Woman) Masturbating While Holding a Book and Two Women Observe from Behind a Screen*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-46, Private Collection.



Figure 36:
Boucher, *Jean-Antoinette Poisson, The Marquise de Pompadour (Portrait of Madame de Pompadour at Her Toilette)*, 1758, oil on canvas, 81.2 x 64.9 cm (31 15/16 x 25 9/16 in.), Harvard University Art Museums, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge.



Private Collection

Figure 37:
Desrais, *Gentleman Kneels Beside a Woman Being Flogged By a Maid*, early 1790s, Inv.
D-F-514-38, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 38:

Desrais, *Woman Seated on a Chair Between Two Beds Masturbating*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-61, Private Collection.

Private Collection

Figure 40:
Desrais, *Gentleman Stretched Across Bed While Woman Irons His Bottom*, early 1790s,
Inv. D-F-514-37, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 41:
Desrais, *Two Women Flogging Partially Nude Man Strapped Over a Step Ladder*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-7, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 42:

Desrais, *Woman Riding a Nude Military Man While Flogging Him Like a Horse*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-57, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 43:
Desrais, *Nude Cavalier Performing Oral Sex on a Seated Lady While Six Women Take Turns Flogging Him*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-49, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 44:

Desrais, *Two Soldiers Kiss and Flog One Another While a Nude Woman Handles Their Penises*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-39, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 45:
Desrais, *Standing Lady Giving Seated Gentleman a Drink*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-3,
Private Collection.

Private Collection

Figure 46:

Desrais, *Lady Performing Oral Sex on Gentleman Seated on Sofa as He Fondles Her*, early 1790s, D-F-514-19, Private Collection.

Private Collection

Figure 47:
Desrais, *Woman Performing Oral Sex on Seated Gentleman while He Fondles Her*, early 1790s, D-F-514-17, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 48:
Desrais, *Woman Trying to Help a Man Get an Erection*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-43,
Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 49:
Desrais, *Lady Giving an Enema to a Gentleman While He Fondles Another Woman's Genitals*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-48, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 50:

Desrais, *Erect Gentleman Lays on Bed Attended by Three Women*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-32, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 51

Desrais, *Man Dressed as a Woman Having Anal Sex with a Woman Seated on a Sofa*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-45, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 52:

Desrais, *Standing Man Dressed as a Woman Fondles a Standing Woman Dressed as a Man While a Lady Assists*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-44, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 53:
Desrais, *Woman Sitting on Chair with Hands Over Her Eyes While Copulating with Standing Man*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-1, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 54:

Desrais, *Man Playing with a Woman on a Bed While a Couple is Engaged in Intercourse on the Floor*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-21, Private Collection.



Private Collection

Figure 55:
Desrais, *Couple Having Sex on a Swing, Observed and Assisted by Five Women*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-51436, Private Collection.



Figure 56:
Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Swing*, 1766, oil on canvas, 81 x 64.2 cm (31.9 x 25.3 in.),
The Wallace Collection, London



Private Collection

Figure 57:
Desrais, *Mythological Scene: Putti, Masturbating Woman in a Chariot, and Three Women Flogging a Man Bent over a Sofa*, early 1790s, Inv. D-F-514-24, Private Collection.

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VITAE

Angela Rene Nacol was born on April 14, 1984, in Houston, Texas to Judy Gay Nacol and Roy Wayne Skrla. She grew up in The Woodlands, Texas with her mother and brother, George Niff Nacol III. She graduated from The Woodlands High School in 2002 and attended the University of North Texas, where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Art History in 2006. She then attended Texas Christian University, where she is anticipating a Master of Arts degree in Art History in May 2008.

During her graduate work at TCU, she received two Mary Jane and Robert Sunkel Travel Endowment Awards. She also worked at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and as a graduate and teaching assistant to the TCU art history faculty and Visual Resources Library. She interned at William Campbell Contemporary Art Gallery, Photographs Do Not Bend Art Gallery, the Kimbell Art Museum, and at the Dallas Museum of Art, where she compiled artists files for the Michael Rosenberg Collection at the museum.

ABSTRACT

Claude-Louis Desrais's suite of erotic drawings now held in a private collection, embody a libertine perspective relating to the politics of the French Revolution.

Although little is known about Desrais and this suite, factors such as sadism, fashion, and the interior space of the boudoir relate the work to the visual culture of early modern erotica and the societal turmoil during the 1780s and 1790s. In particular, Desrais's drawings depict extreme sex acts and express anti-clerical sentiments common in the politicized pornography at this time in Paris in the early 1790s.

Female aristocrats, such as Queen Marie-Antoinette, and members of the clergy were attacked in revolutionary propaganda, especially in the form of *libelles* and "philosophical" books. In the public sphere, sexualized artworks typically represented figures in mythological guises. More hardcore, subversive works were relegated to the private sphere and flourished in the libertine subculture. Libertine ideologies seem to rise with political turmoil, for instance, during the Reformation in sixteenth-century Italy, the Restoration in seventeenth-century England, and the French Revolution, where subversive literature and explicit art thrived. Libertines believed in attacking religion and the monarchy. They rebelled against societal conventions that oppressed human nature by participating in outlandish sex acts, often expressed in creative outlets including art and literature.

The most notorious and extreme libertine was the Marquis de Sade who produced works in the 1790s at the height of Terror and dysfunction during the Revolution. His writings included Enlightenment views and a repertoire of pornographic tropes to express a unique insight into the political atmosphere of the Revolution. The influence of the

libertine subculture is taken to the extreme in the work of Sade and Desrais. In particular, Desrais utilized sadistic sexual acts to invert gender roles. Unlike most pornography, his drawings depict a nihilistic attitude with women dominating the boudoir, but with an unclear political agenda. This served as a mechanism for rebellion against the Church and the State, not necessarily as proto-feminism. In essence, he appears to satirize everything, the Church, social hierarchies, men and women, the *ancien régime* and the Republic. Desrais's suite of erotic drawings exemplifies the active subculture of libertinism in late eighteenth-century France and its subversive attitude towards Revolutionary politics.