

CHAPTER ONE



ORIGINS

WHAT DOES “pornography” mean? The *American Heritage Dictionary* (1975) gives a single, apparently decisive definition: “Written, graphic, or other forms of communication intended to excite lascivious feelings.” Etymology suggests that the word is as old as Western culture: “From Greek *pornographos*, writing about prostitutes.” There is something strange about this, though it need not be troublesome. Most modern writing about prostitutes seems intended to excite feelings of indignation or compassion, not lasciviousness. Prostitutes still endeavor to excite their clients’ lust, but—nowadays, at least—writing about prostitutes seldom tries for that effect. Yet it is not hard to imagine a past time, a more primitive one, when whore writing sought to do exactly what whores did. As an ancient word, “pornography” would naturally show traces of its oldest meaning, an identity that time has split apart.

If we go back a few decades, however, we find that the opposite is true. The fifty-year project of the *Oxford English Dictionary* reached “P” in 1909; its definition of “pornography” is, oddly, more complex than any later one. The first meaning, surprising to a modern reader, comes from an 1857 medical dictionary: “a description of prostitutes or of prostitution, as a matter of public hygiene.” Modern readers are familiar with this kind of whore-writing, but the last thing we would call it today is “pornography.” The OED’s second definition is somewhat more up to date: “Description of the life, manners, etc., of prostitutes and their patrons: hence, the

expression or suggestion of obscene or unchaste subjects in literature or art.” It seems strange that this, a close approximation of what we now mean by “pornography,” ranked second in 1909 behind a definition that now is completely outmoded. The vocabulary is outmoded, too: we seldom use the word “obscene” nowadays, and “unchaste” never. And though we may still have some recollection of a time when literature and art were called “pornographic,” that time is far behind us. Instead of starting out simple and turning complex with the passage of time, “pornography” seems to have moved in reverse, growing perversely from multiplicity to oneness.

If we go back further, an even stranger thing happens: “pornography” disappears. Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* of 1755 jumps from “porkling” to “porosity” with nothing in between, an unaccountable leap if the Greeks already had a word for it: *pornographos*. In 1857, “pornography” meant something very different from what it now means; in 1755, “pornography” meant nothing at all. The inescapable conclusion is that, sometime in the century between 1755 and 1857, “pornography” was born. But it must have been already ancient at birth, rising from the grave instead of coming new into the world. Vampires are said to do this; so did “pornography.”

Around 1710 an Italian peasant was digging a well in Resina, a small town south of Naples. He unearthed a mass of marble and alabaster, including fragments of *gallo antico*, the yellow marble prized by ancient Roman architects. Antiquarianism was not yet the rage it would later become, but Giovanni Battista Nocerino was well aware that this was no ordinary mud. Rich foreigners often paid high prices for *gallo antico* and alabaster; Nocerino sold his fragments to a local dealer who specialized in this taste. It was an especially profitable line around 1710, because southern Italy was at that time in the hands of the Austrians, represented by figures like Supreme Officer of the Guard Maurice de Lorraine, Prince d’Elboeuf. D’Elboeuf was building a villa at nearby Portici and was on the lookout for relics from the history of the country he had appropriated. Happening to visit the same dealer to whom Nocerino had sold his discoveries, the prince bought them. His

first purpose was to decorate his newly built walls, but soon he became interested in the archaeological value of Nocerino's find. He pensioned the peasant and bought his land, ordering the well dug down to a depth of sixty feet, where horizontal shafts were sent out in random directions. A few Roman artifacts were discovered, including a marble Hercules; they were restored in Rome and shipped back to Vienna, for the delectation of Prince Eugene of Savoy. But the depth of the excavation, and the solid rock that had to be cut through, made progress laboriously slow. When, after a couple of years, the trove seemed to peter out, d'Elboeuf's project was abandoned.

Not until 1738, when the Spanish had retaken Naples, was work resumed, at the direction of King Charles of the Two Sicilies. Other impressive objects were unearthed, and it was determined that Nocerino's well had plunged directly into the amphitheatre of Herculaneum, one of the three ancient cities buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. For a while, discoveries came so thick and fast that a museum was set up to house them—the Museo Borbonico ("Bourbon Museum"), named for the current ruling family of that unstable area. Again, however, the well ran dry. By 1745, Herculaneum having apparently failed, the excavators turned their attention a few miles to the southeast, where under a hill provocatively named *Civita* ("City"), Pompeii had to lie waiting. Digging at the new site proved much easier, since Pompeii had been engulfed in ashes and small stones—not, like Herculaneum, in a sea of mud that later petrified. Pompeii soon eclipsed Herculaneum as a source of excitement and treasure. In April 1748, the first intact fresco was discovered, in what proved to be an ancient dining room; later the same month a skeleton emerged, still clutching coins stamped with images of Nero and Vespasian.

For its first century and more, the excavation of Pompeii more nearly resembled a circus than a modern archaeological dig. On many occasions, when a notable find was made, it was buried again in order to be refound before the eyes of some visiting noble personage. In the earliest days, thievery was common; even when objects were carefully transported to the Museum, so little was

known about how to preserve them—delicate frescoes in particular—that very often they were damaged beyond repair. Systematic excavation did not begin until the appointment of Giuseppe Fiorelli as head of the project in 1860. It was Fiorelli who first rationally mapped the city—so that the original location of an artifact would not be forgotten as soon as it had been removed—and who established the practice, still in use today, of preserving most finds in place, “instead of ripping out the more spectacular and leaving the rest to disintegrate.”¹ Despite haphazardness and rapacity, however, the gradual unveiling of the Vesuvian cities made a profound impression on the imagination of Western culture. It was de rigueur, of course, for tourists to visit the Museum and take a day trip to the excavations. Meanwhile, those unfortunates who had to stay at home could find in a thickening swarm of guidebooks and catalogues, often with lavish illustrations, a convenient substitute for firsthand experience.

Among the stay-at-homes was eighteen-year-old Thomas Babington Macaulay, who nevertheless, in 1819, won the chancellor’s gold medal at Trinity College, Cambridge, with his poem “Pompeii.” After a strained description of the ancient catastrophe, Macaulay exhorted a modern visitor:

Advance, and wander on through crumbling halls,
Through prostrate gates and ivied pedestals,
Arches, whose echoes now no chariots rouse,
Tombs, on whose summits goats undaunted browse,
See where yon ruined wall on earth reclines,
Through weeds and moss the half-seen painting shines,
Still vivid midst the dewy cowslip grows,
Or blends its colours with the blushing rose.²

This prizewinner offers no glimpse of the future historian’s genius (the goats are especially embarrassing), but it does sum up current clichés about Pompeii, jumbling together observable facts and fanciful Gothic views of Roman ruins. Most typical is the young Macaulay’s labored juxtaposition of the ancient and the new, the

dilapidated and the fresh: amid scenes of neglect, the “half-seen painting,” eighteen centuries old, is as vivid as this season’s rose. For Pompeii’s early enthusiasts, the fascination of the place came from its eerie immediacy, the sense that ancient and modern worlds had met face to face.

An 1830 guidebook put it this way:

But the most astonishing thing is that this city, which was surprised by an unprecedented eruption and disappeared from the face of the Campania, as if by magic, in a few hours, still preserves all the identifying marks of recent human activity and existence. Palmyra, Babylon, Rome, Athens, Canopus—all have nothing to show us but ruins that bear witness to the slow progress of years and the traces of pillage by barbarians who, like violent storms, have left on them the signs of their passage. Pompeii, on the other hand, looks like a city deserted a few moments ago. It is as if the citizens had all flocked to one of those religious festivals that used to draw whole nations, and that were so characteristic of paganism.³

To an age deeply versed in classical literature, Pompeii offered the compelling spectacle of an unmediated vision. Here was no cold collection of white marble, no venerable hoard of texts encrusted with centuries of commentary. At Pompeii, tradition had been short-circuited; the actual color and texture of ancient life were on display, complete with all the trivial accoutrements that literature disdained to mention.

Of course there were lessons to be drawn. In his immensely popular novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), Edward Bulwer-Lytton made an obvious point:

Pompeii was the miniature of the civilisation of that age. Within the narrow compass of its walls was contained, as it were, a specimen of every gift which luxury offered to power. In its minute but glittering shops, its tiny palaces, its baths, its forum, its theatre, its circus,—in the energy yet corruption, in the re-

finement yet the vice, of its people, you beheld a model of the whole empire. It was a toy, a plaything, a showbox, in which the gods seemed pleased to keep the representation of the great monarchy of earth, and which they afterwards hid from time to time the wonder of posterity,—the moral of the maxim, that under the sun there is nothing new.⁴

Despite its frivolous tone, Bulwer's conclusion had ominous implications. It was widely believed (the belief is with us still) that the Roman Empire had fallen on account of internal depravity; monitory analogies with modern corruption had been commonplace since Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88). Pompeii was buried three centuries before Rome “fell,” at a time when the Empire had in fact been at the peak of its vigor; but among its relics was an embarrassingly large number that seemed to document a moral laxity far more extreme than even the bitterest satires of Juvenal had suggested. If modern civilization resembled its Pompeiian predecessor in any way, it was in a perilous state indeed.

From very early in the excavations, objects were being unearthed that presented a special problem to the authorities. Already in 1758, for example, rumors circulated that “lascivious” frescoes had been found; not long thereafter, a particularly outrageous artifact turned up—a small marble statue, highly naturalistic in style, representing a satyr in sexual congress with an apparently undaunted goat. This distressing artwork, under special orders from King Charles, was entrusted to the royal sculptor, Joseph Canart, with the “strict injunction that no one should be allowed access to it.”⁵ Evidently, the order was not strictly obeyed, because in 1786, in his *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*, Richard Payne Knight referred to the statue, “kept concealed in the Royal Museum of Portici,” as “well known.”⁶ No doubt the procedure was already in operation, as it remained two centuries later, that a gentleman with appropriate demeanor (and ready cash for the custodian) would be admitted to the locked chamber where controversial items lurked; women, children, and the poor of both sexes and all ages were excluded. Make-

shift in origin, this method of segregation worked well enough to be extended to the *lupanaria* (brothels) that were uncovered from time to time as the digging went on.

The plan was less practicable, however, for the authors of guidebooks and catalogues. They were faced with the awkward choice of omitting such objects and places from their accounts—thereby rendering them incomplete—or of somehow mentioning the unmentionable. The former course was taken by Sir William Gell, whose *Pompeiana* (1824), a supposedly comprehensive guide to the city, claimed to be the first work of its kind in English.⁷ Gell managed to get through two thick, heavily illustrated volumes without once letting on that anything untoward was to be found either among the excavations or in the Museo Borbonico. His foremost English successor, Thomas H. Dyer, performed the same feat in his anonymous contribution to the *Library of Entertaining Knowledge* in 1836.⁸ Forty years later, however, perhaps because *lupanaria* had gone on being discovered with some regularity, Dyer felt obliged to cast a brief glance at one of them. “We cannot venture,” he snippily remarked, “upon a description of this resort of Pagan immorality. It is kept locked up, but the guide will procure the key for those who may wish to see it.”⁹ As one might expect, Continental guides were less reticent, though only slightly so. Writing in 1830, three years after the first Pompeiian *lupanar* had been unearthed, Charles Bonucci laconically summed up its aura: “The neighboring chamber was devoted to licentious scenes; its paintings indicate this only too clearly.”¹⁰ In 1870, commenting on the same unwholesome room, Ernest Breton made a similar observation: “The coarse paintings which decorate this place evidently indicate that it was intended for the most shameful debaucheries.”¹¹

Popular guidebooks could afford their reticence; suitable tourists (gentlemen) would be able to fill in the gaps without much trouble. This was less true, however, for catalogues of Pompeiian artifacts, since comprehensiveness is among the main reasons for issuing a catalogue in the first place. Following the lead of the Museo Borbonico, which began publishing official catalogues in 1755, a number of similar compilations appeared, in all European languages,

during the subsequent century. These ranged from grandiose picture books in elephant folio, full of color plates and short on text, to multivolumed works packed with allusions to the classics.¹² The official catalogues came out in limited editions intended for an erudite, specialized readership. All other versions were based on them and often merely translated their commentaries. Unofficial catalogues, however, were intended for an audience which, though far from general by twentieth-century standards, nevertheless comprised readers who were able neither to visit Naples nor to read Italian. Such books therefore encountered a problem that could not be solved by the easy expedient of locking a gate.

Pierre Sylvain Maréchal's nine-volume catalogue of 1780, though it is not absolutely complete (the well-known satyr and goat are missing), contains enough eyebrow-raising plates to call for special comment by the author. The questionable objects were mostly representations of Priapus, god of generation and protector of gardens, whose worship was widespread in the ancient world and continued, under a thin Christian veneer, well into the eighteenth century in regions of Sicily and the Campania. Priapus can be identified by his gigantic erect phallus, often out of all human scale, which he brandishes because it is his essence. Maréchal did not segregate his Priapean engravings; he scattered them here and there throughout the work. But each time he came to one, he apologized for it: "Antiquated religious notions, just as much as libertinism, multiplied these images, symbols of generation and also of the universal cause of life. So extremes meet—or rather, in their customs, men change and differ! The simplicity and innocence of our ancestors found nothing indecent in objects which today make modesty blush."¹³

Most of the time, like a faithful disciple of Rousseau, Maréchal was inclined to criticize his own age for having fallen away from an imaginary state of primal innocence to which the Romans were much closer:

Ancient relics . . . are full of objects so indecent, if we compare them to modern compositions, that the brush or needle of our

Artists hardly dares to reproduce them for us. Nevertheless, we should not take this as an opportunity to slander the customs of the people who left us such relics. One blushes, perhaps, only to the degree that one has strayed from nature; and a virgin's eye can linger with impunity on objects which arouse vicious ideas in a woman who has lost her innocence.¹⁴

Now and then, however, this rose-tinted view of the ancient past failed to account for the evidence. So Maréchal shifted his stance:

I know of no way to justify the Ancients in this cynical habit. Their imagination, inflamed by the lure of pleasure, desired that all objects, even the most indifferent and alien to this purpose, should remind them of what seems to have been the sole focus of their existence. Vases, lamps, everyday utensils, and the most necessary articles of furniture became, as it were, accomplices of their libertinism, by showing them its crude simulacrum. We must believe that articles shaped like this were intended only for bawdyhouses.¹⁵

Despite all appearances to the contrary, and despite his own predilection for the more "natural" ancient world, Maréchal could not bring himself to believe that the Romans spent their days amid a forest of phalluses. Such things were too highly charged to be dispersed throughout the environment. They had to be set apart, and the best place for them was a brothel.

This was the largest problem for early cataloguers of Pompeii. As the city gradually came into the light, it grew more and more obvious that images which a modern sensibility would secure behind locked doors had been indiscriminately on display there. Paintings of nude bodies, even in the act of sex, had been placed side by side with landscapes and still lifes, forming a jumble that mystified modern observers. Maréchal's first way out—that the Romans were childlike enough to gaze upon anything safely—hardly sufficed; it also failed to tally with the scarifying accounts of Roman debauchery supplied by Juvenal, Petronius, Suetonius, and others.

Maréchal's second escape route was taken fifty years after him by Bonucci, and by Breton forty years later still: any room where obscene paintings were displayed must have been devoted to obscene activities. This explanation worked well in some cases—*lupanaria*, for example, and nuptial chambers—but it would have become rather frightening if it had been extended to account for the erect phalluses found at many Pompeian streetcorners, or the statues and paintings of Priapus that adorned the foyers of private homes. Confronting these unappealing alternatives, some commentators threw up their hands: "the inhabitants of Pompeii," sighed a cataloguer of 1842, "placed these subjects, repulsed by modesty, in the most conspicuous places, so widely did their ideas of morals differ from ours."¹⁶ In the twentieth century, it has been generally accepted that, for the most part, such images had a mystical function, free from incitement to lust. At the entrance to a home, for instance, Priapus served "to bring good luck and to ward off evil spirits."¹⁷ This solution was available to early cataloguers and sometimes invoked by them. Yet it, too, was inadequate to the real problem that underlay these confused haggles about Roman morality. The problem was purely modern: however the Romans might have responded to such representations, what was one to do with them *now*?

Of course, they could not be destroyed. Had they been of recent manufacture, this would have been the obvious expedient; but any relic of the ancient world possessed, merely thanks to its survival, a value that overrode the nature of the relic itself. Besides, it was essential to the charm of Pompeii that many of the objects found there had equivalents nowhere else. Perversely, this added value accrued principally to two classes of relics, the trivial and the obscene. Though both kinds had presumably been distributed throughout the Roman Empire, trivial things had mostly vanished in centuries of neglect, while obscene ones had succumbed to the zealous progress of Christianity. When it came to obscene objects, an unsettling inverse ratio applied: the more obscene an object was, the more liable it had been to destruction anywhere but at Pompeii, and the more necessary its Pompeian preservation therefore became.

The matter was further complicated by the fact that mere preservation was not enough. Pompeiian artifacts were valuable because they formed a source of knowledge, and knowledge requires dissemination; somebody besides diggers and custodians had to view these things if their value was to be realized. While Pompeii was alive, anyone and everyone had had access to them, but from the moment the first obscene artifact was unearthed, it was apparent that the ancient and modern worlds differed drastically in this regard. Depending on their inclinations, early commentators condemned the one as debauched or the other as prudish, sometimes both by turns; but all agreed that the ancient system of organizing images—which amounted, it seemed, to no system at all—would never do in a later age. What was required was a new taxonomy: if Pompeii's priceless obscenities were to be properly managed, they would have to be systematically named and placed. The name chosen for them was "pornography," and they were housed in the Secret Museum.

It was in this context that a form of the word "pornography" first appeared in English print, in a translation of German art historian C. O. Müller's *Handbuch der Archäologie der Kunst* (1850). Late in the volume, Müller briefly alluded to "the great number of obscene representations . . . to which also mythology gave frequent occasion"; he dubbed the producers of such representations "pornographers" (*Pornographen*).¹⁸ The source of Müller's coinage was a unique instance in classical Greek of the word *pornographoi* ("whore-painters"), tucked away deep in the *Deipnosophistai* ("Learned Banquet") by the second-century compiler Athenaeus. Like the Pompeiian artifacts themselves, Athenaeus' influence had had to wait a millennium and a half to exert its full effect, though in a very different way from any he could have intended or foreseen. At about the same time Müller was digging him up to name a new category of art, others were drawing on him for an apparently remote purpose—the history of prostitution.

Among the many, mostly dry topics covered in the *Deipnosophistai* were the prostitutes of Athenaeus' day, on many of whom he is the unique surviving authority. He therefore earned special gratitude from the new scholars of prostitution, like the bibliophile Paul

Lacroix (1806–84), whose six-volume *History of Prostitution among All the Peoples of the World from the Remotest Antiquity to Our Own Time* (1851–53), published under the pen name “Pierre Dufour,” is certainly the longest, if not the most reliable, early work of its kind. For his discussion of Greek prostitution, Lacroix relied heavily on Athenaeus:

Athenaeus, who draws by handfuls from a heap of books we no longer possess, identifies by their surnames a great number of courtesans whose entire history is confined to these sometimes amphibolous sobriquets. He enumerates, with all the stolidity of a scholar unafraid to squeeze his subject dry, the names provided by his authorities Timocles, Menander, Polemon, and all the other Greek pornographers. . . .¹⁹

In this context, Lacroix employed “pornographers” (*pornographes*) in a more or less neutral sense: they were writers who had described prostitutes. A few pages later, however, freely paraphrasing his source, he explained the word’s ancient meaning:

We therefore believe that the artists who were called painters of courtesans (πορνογράφου), like the Pausanias Aristides and Niophanes mentioned by Athenaeus, did not restrict themselves to making portraits of *betairai* and to representing their erotic academies. When the occasion arose, they did not disdain to paint a courtesan’s face, just as they painted the statues of gods and goddesses in the temples.²⁰

By retaining Athenaeus’ Greek, Lacroix sought to obscure any link between his own *History of Prostitution* and that other, disreputable form of “pornography.” His book was intended to join the *Deipnosophistai* among the “pornographic compilations,”²¹ but it did not at all resemble, said Lacroix, the works of those obliging artists who painted the whore herself as willingly as her portrait.

Instead of merely representing prostitutes, ancient pornographers had decorated them, thereby abetting the trade and allying them-

selves with it. The term “pornography”—“whore-painter” or “whore-writer”—is an ambiguous one, since it fails to specify on which end of the brush or pen the whore is to be found. Modern pornographers in the fields of artistic and social history struggled to tame a wanton word by insisting with wearisome frequency that they had remained untainted, and that readers who imitated them could do the same. In the long run, as we know, they failed: the whore in twentieth-century pornography is the maker or witness of the representation, not the person or scene represented. Perhaps there is something whorish about the very act of representing, since its product—a book or picture—is promiscuously available to all eyes, unless some outside authority restricts access to it. Any book or picture will give itself equally to all comers, and the author or painter, no matter how loudly he protests his good intentions, has no control over his work once he has made it public.

The 1864 edition of Webster’s Dictionary defined pornography as “licentious painting employed to decorate the walls of rooms sacred to bacchanalian orgies, examples of which exist in Pompeii.” Here, as is often the case with attempts to pin down this unruly word, Webster’s made its definition both too precise and too general. By no means all of the “pornographic” representations unearthed at Pompeii were intended to spur imitation in the flesh; not every ancient “pornographer” moved with the ease of Niophanes from painting images of licentious scenes to daubing the actors in them. Early commentators expended a great deal of effort—without much success—distinguishing what we may call “innocent” pornography, with its primarily religious or mystical import, from a less common, “guilty” variety, which may indeed have had the aim of inciting lewd behavior by representing it.

This rather profound difference, however, did not prevent the two kinds from being lumped together as “pornographic.” The old locked room at the Museo Borbonico (by then transformed into the National Museum of Naples) obtained its first systematic catalogue in 1866, under the title “Pornographic Collection,”²² but this gross designation, which sufficed for the museum’s custodians, only aggravated the difficulties of other commentators. M. L. Barré’s French

compilation of 1875–77, for example, reserved the “pornographic collection” for the eighth and last volume as the *Musée Secret*;²³ his introduction cited so many sources of value for these prohibited objects that an uninformed reader might have wondered why they were not the showpieces of the whole establishment. First of all, according to Barré, they gave unique evidence of the “regular or irregular, legitimate or illegitimate relations between the sexes.” Interesting in themselves, these relations held “the meaning and as it were the key of the most important and poorly understood events; they are, so to speak, the secret articles of a treaty, in which alone we often find its whole spirit.”²⁴

In addition, relics of this kind—“which one might call ‘pornographic Relics’”—helped to validate the claims made by ancient satirists. They established the impartiality of historians like Tacitus, whose accounts of imperial debauchery had often seemed purely malicious; they provided priceless information on “licentious poems or treatises” which had been handed down only in fragments or in secondhand summaries by the likes of Athenaeus. Even those relics for which no such excuse could be made would be rendered innocent if everyone involved, writer and readers alike, underwent a bizarre transformation:

Besides, the majority of the relics we are concerned with are truly chaste even in their obscenity, thanks to the artist’s strict intention and style, along with the sanctity of the ideas they are supposed to arouse. . . . Let us see these coarse representations through the eyes of those who dwelt upon the plains of Latium—ignorant and rustic people who consequently remained pure and virtuous even during the most elegant and depraved days of the Empire. . . .²⁵

Barré’s romanticized vision of ancient history was identical to Maréchal’s a century before him, but he pushed the myth to the breaking point. It is inconceivable that sophisticated French readers of 1877 could make themselves over into illiterate Roman peasants; it is equally inconceivable that Barré seriously expected them to do

so. Yet the fiction of such a conjuring trick was necessary, if these precious, poisonous objects were to be rendered safe.

Evidently mistrustful of his readers' mental agility, and perhaps uncertain of his own, Barré concluded his introduction to the Secret Museum with the assurance that a battery of safeguards had been installed:

Even so, we have taken all the prudential measures applicable to such a collection of engravings and text. We have endeavored to make its reading inaccessible, so to speak, to poorly educated persons, as well as to those whose sex and age forbid any exception to the laws of decency and modesty. With this end in mind, we have done our best to regard each of the objects we have had to describe from an exclusively archaeological and scientific point of view. It has been our intention to remain calm and serious throughout. In the exercise of his holy office, the man of science must neither blush nor smile. We have looked upon our statues as an anatomist contemplates his cadavers.

Just as at the real Secret Museum, Barré's printed version excluded women, children, and men lacking the price of admission. Without further aid, the high-priced sumptuousness of his eight volumes would have discouraged the last of these classes; but, books being sluttish as they are, Barré could not duplicate the case-by-case surveillance exercised by Neapolitan gatekeepers. Instead of money, therefore, he stretched out his palm for erudition—a less tangible currency, but one that had the virtue of scarcity among all three of the groups who ought not to see what the Secret Museum put on display.

Barré never let his own text stand alone; the pornographic cadavers were always "surrounded by a venerable retinue of ancient authors who explicate for us the profane debris of antiquity." Their words had not been translated, for an obvious reason:

If we were treating another subject, we might be criticized for this extravagance of erudition; here, however, we will no doubt

be commended, just as sculptors are forgiven the overgrowth of foliage that sometimes screens the nudity of their human figures.²⁶

Of course the poor would be ignorant of Latin and Greek, as would all but the most exceptional women and children. Barré's volume, however, also contained engravings plain to even the least lettered mind. Disdaining fig leaves—which earlier illustrators had applied²⁷—his engravers had chosen a much stranger device:

Our draftsmen have obeyed an analogous rule; but instead of tacking on draperies or other accessories to their designs—which might have spoiled the spirit of the composition or distorted the thought of the ancient artist—they have restricted themselves to miniaturizing a few things. The truly erotic nudity of these rare subjects has thereby been stripped of the excessively crude and impertinent features that marked the originals. They have lost their importance; sometimes, without detriment, they have utterly vanished.²⁸

The result of this odd policy is that phalluses, naturalistic in the originals, taper off like uptilted icicles in Barré's engravings; while the actors in sex scenes have a plaintive look, since instead of genitals they are endowed only with patches of fog.

Barré's rather comical anxiety arose from a pair of dilemmas that haunted all those who wished to set up secret museums, especially in print. It is impossible to display things—as museums do—and keep them hidden at the same time; internal safeguards, no matter how ingenious, can hardly take the place of living gatekeepers. A second problem was even more troublesome. Any museum (or catalogue) gives publicity to its exhibits; if those exhibits promote lewdness, no amount of self-justification by the curator can dispel the impression that he is playing the role of pander. This is what Athenaeus' *pornographoi* did, earning centuries of scorn; later, scholarly pornographers could not rid themselves of the fear that to display pictures of whores was to encourage whorish behavior. The