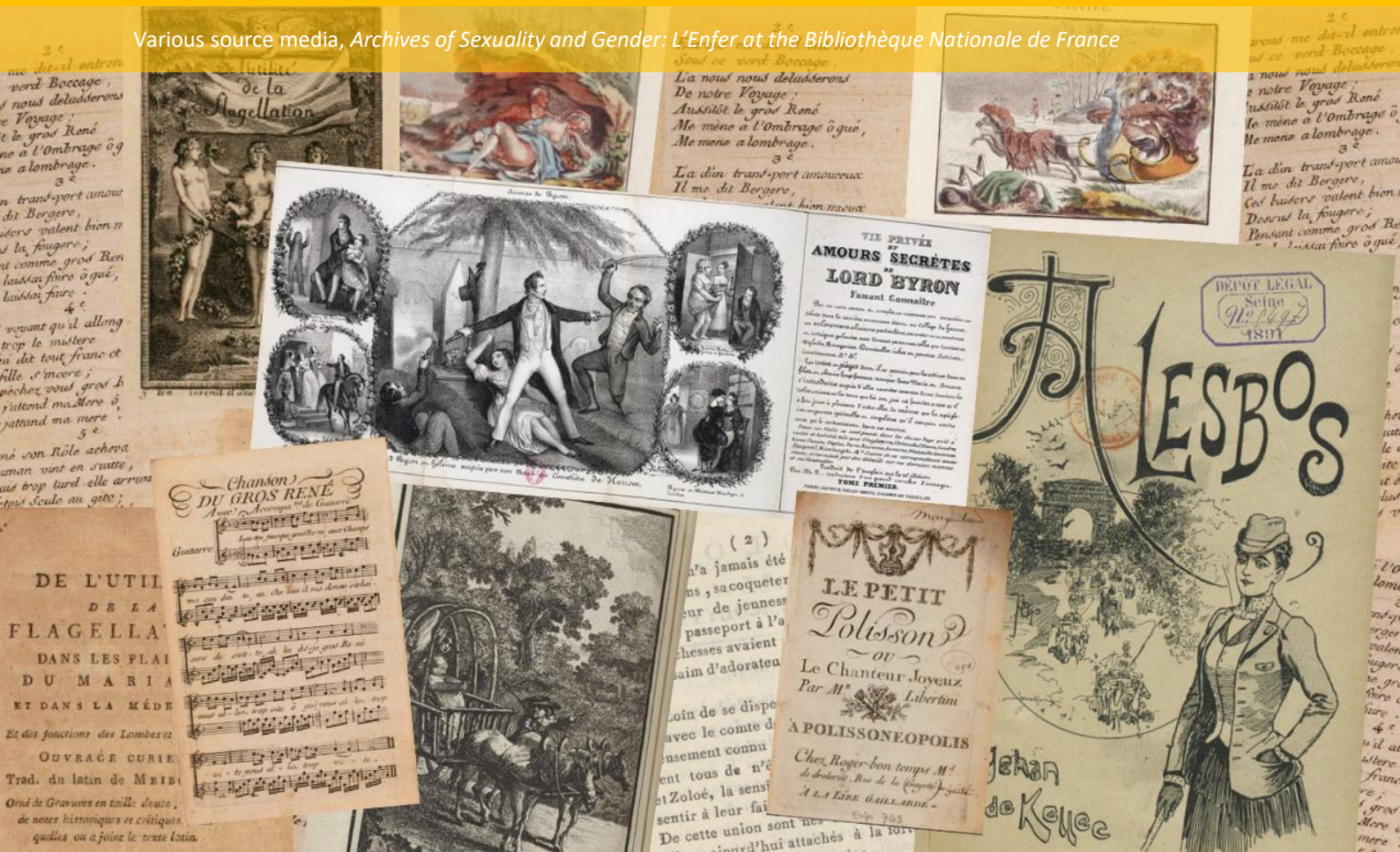


# L'Enfer at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France

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Various source media, Archives of Sexuality and Gender: L'Enfer at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France



## L'Enfer at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France

*This essay has been translated from the original French.*

| By Marie-Françoise Quignard, Honorary Curator at the Réserve des livres rares, Bibliothèque Nationale de France |

The choice of the term *Enfer* ('Hell') to refer to a part of a library's collection is not insignificant. To begin with, it was used in 1652 at the Feuillants Convent in Paris, to set aside heterodox books, i.e. those not following Roman Catholicism.

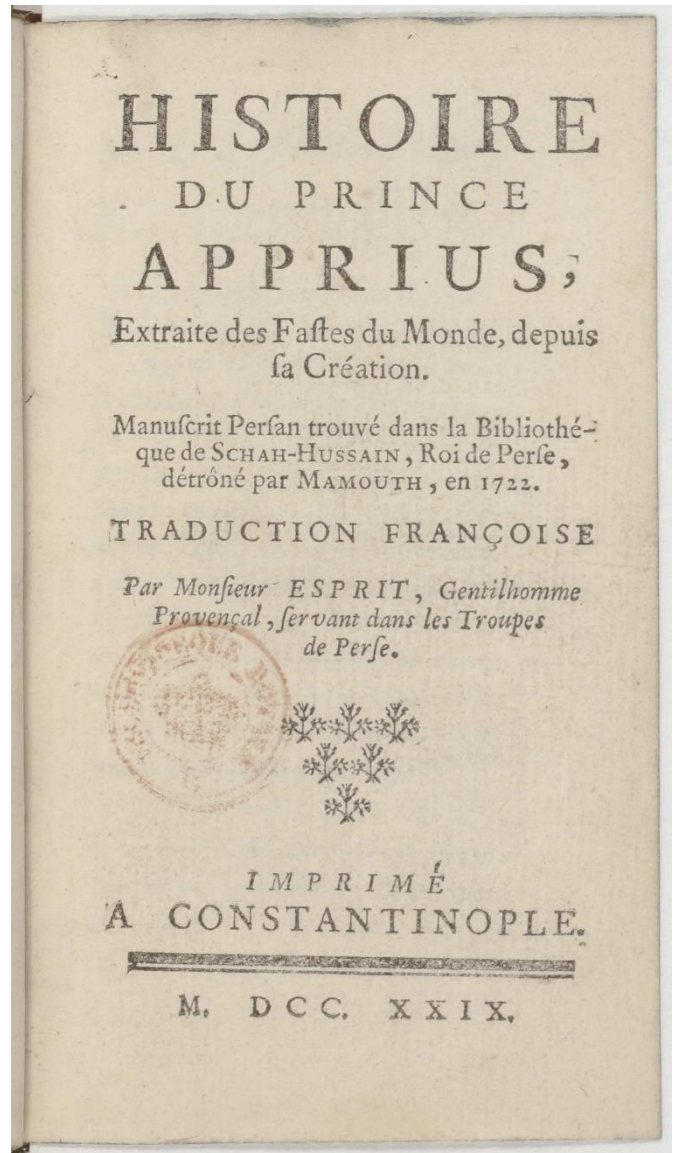
At the French royal library, the *Enfer* classification was accorded in the late 1830s to books considered "contrary to public morality". Their relegation to this classification, which is everything it sounds like, was not a decision made by the political movers and shakers of the time, i.e. the July Monarchy, but was down to the institution, at a time when the library was opening to a wider audience.

Unlike the Private Case at the British Library, *Enfer* is not a closed collection. It continues to grow, even if only now with the addition of a limited selection of erotic and pornographic publications, other classifications having taken over. In 2020, there were around 2000 volumes in the *Enfer* collection.

### Before *Enfer*

In 1750, in the second volume of the *Catalogue of books printed by the Bibliothèque du Roy* (King's Library), consisting solely of literary works, a small area was given over to licentious tomes at the end of the novels section. There were 34 of them. One-third were taken from the library of the bibliophile and collector Jean-Pierre Imbert Châtre de Cangé (1680-1746), acquired in full by the royal library in 1733. The volumes included a copy of the *Histoire du prince Apprius...* (Enfer 233), a satire against the Regent that could be read either as a perfectly innocuous novel about love affairs and war or as an extremely immoral text, from the point where

the obscene equivalents of the characters' names are revealed. Published in 1728, it symbolised the archetype of the licentious novel that, to thwart the censors, did not include the names of the author or printer and gave a fictitious place of publication.



Beauchamps, Pierre-François Godard de. *Histoire du prince Apprius ...*, extraite des fastes du monde depuis la création, manuscrit persan trouvé dans la bibliothèque de Schah-Hussain ... traduction française, par Monsieur Esprit [P.-F. Godard de Beauchamps], ... N.p., 1729.

Later, the French Revolution provided an opportunity for the Bibliothèque to significantly increase its collections as a result of confiscations from the libraries of the clergy, émigrés and those who fell victim to the guillotine, brought

together in book depositories from 1790, access to which was given to the Bibliothèque Nationale.

The confiscated books included a copy of Boccaccio's *Decameron* (Enfer 249), there because of its 12 licentious drawings, along with 116 others. The copies without these 12 engravings were not stigmatised the same way, as the text was not deemed sufficiently incendiary.

In 1836, the rare and precious books put aside from 1795 by Joseph Van Praet, curator of the Department of Prints, were all put together in the same place, joined by more licentious works. From 1844, the reference "Enfer" appeared in the margin of this section, added to the original classification. One hundred and fifty books were included.

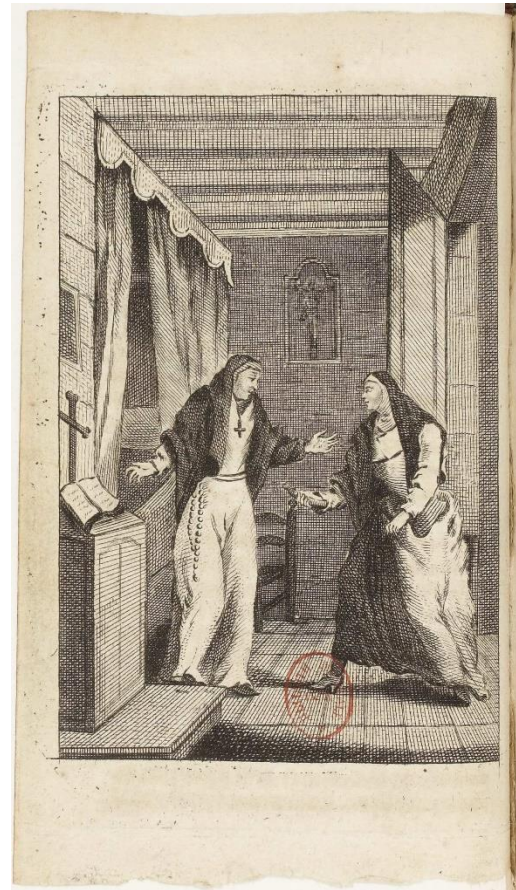
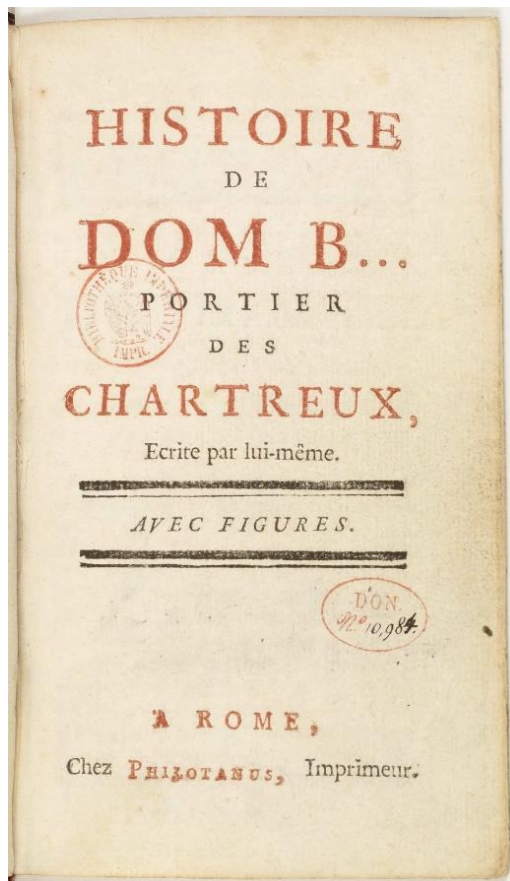
### **What *Enfer* was like**

At that point, *Enfer* at the Réserve of the Prints department became the Prints collection classification where obscene works were kept, those reproached by morality. Unlike in other libraries, none of the Bibliothèque Nationale's works were considered reprehensible for solely political or religious reasons. These were mostly imaginative books, more specifically novels where sex plays a major role, which were therefore forbidden, prosecuted and proscribed.

*Enfer* is a relatively heterogeneous collection. Ancient and rare publications considered classics of erotic literature throughout the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries can be found alongside reprints and pamphlets of lesser interest. The Bibliothèque's earliest books, acquired before *Enfer* was established, date back to the 16th and 17th centuries: copies of *Ragionamenti de l'Arétin*, made up of famous conversations between a former courtesan and her female friend, one of which displays the coat of arms of king Louis XIV (Enfer 221); *La Cazzaria de lo Arsiccio Intronato*, published around 1530 by Antonio Vignali, under the *nom de plume*

Arsiccio Intronato, a priapic dialogue in a comic fashion, between the author and a young law student, urging him to examine everything in the name of philosophy, even the most filthy subjects (Enfer 566); *Alcibiade fanciullo a Scuola* (1652), attributed either to the satirist Ferrante Pallavicino or to the theologian and philosopher Antonio Rocco: a dialogue between Alcibiades and his teacher, where the latter argues any way he can to justify pederasty and convince his pupil of his reasoning (Enfer 469). The characteristics of these works are the form of the dialogue and a lack of illustrations, as the language used is explicit enough.

In France, as of the first three decades of the 18th century, erotic literature became a genre of its own and *Enfer* filled up with these libertine novels, which also came to be known as "philosophical books". Among the classics that were continuously reprinted until the 20th century were the *Histoire de Dom Bougre, portier des Chartreux* (1741), *La Tourière des carmélites* (between 1741 and 1750) and *Thérèse philosophe* (1748). These works, passed on by the materialist philosophy of the time, were only intended for one purpose: to celebrate desire and enjoyment by presenting circles officially devoted to public morality, such as convents, boarding schools, and palaces, to bring them closer to places of debauchery like brothels. What they have in common with their predecessors is their small size so they could easily be concealed, slipped "under the coat" ("sous le manteau") and published anonymously. In terms of the place of publication, it was either fake: London instead of Paris (*Félicia ou mes fredaines*, Enfer 446-449); far-fetched: Everywhere and nowhere (*La Nuit merveilleuse*, Enfer 722), or obscene, like the contents of the book: "À j'enconne, rue des Déchargeurs, aux dépens de la Gourdan" (*Mémoires de Suzon*, Enfer 705). In the 18th century, illustrations made an appearance and joined forces with the text. Inspired by the iconographic tradition of the Italian Renaissance, such as the continuation of *Amours des dieux*, they moved further and



Gervaise de Latouche, Jean-Charles. *History of Dom B ... doorman of the Carthusians, written by himself. With figures.* Chez Philotanus, [circa 1740-1741].

further away to comment on the events in the story. For example, the engravings accompanying *Dom B..., portier des Chartreux* (Enfer 326) and those in *Thérèse philosophe* (Enfer 402).

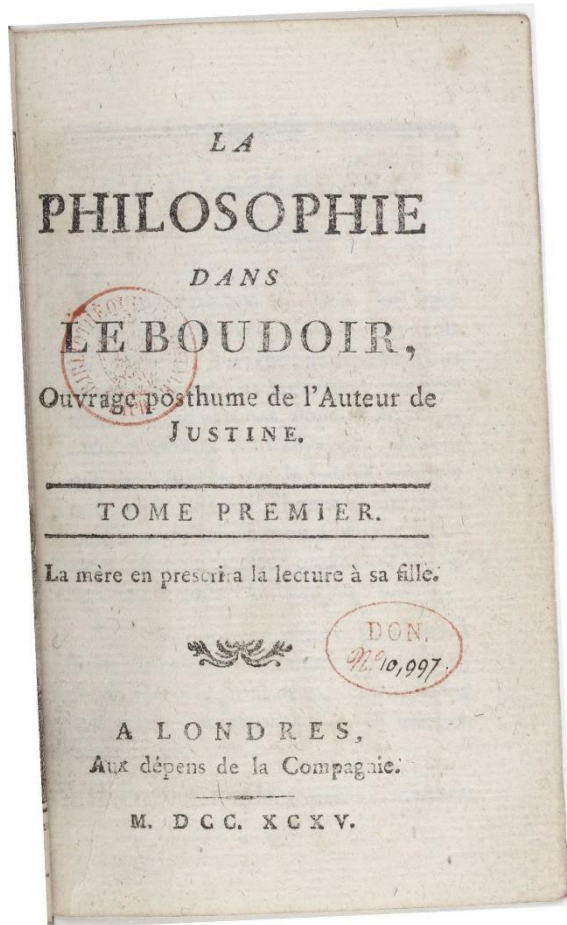
In the 19th century, illegal booksellers, who most commonly settled in Belgium, specialised in the reprinting of erotic texts from the 17th and 18th centuries while also publishing more modern texts. Auguste Poulet-Malassis, convicted for publishing Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* in Paris in 1857, six of the poems in which were deemed "pornographic" and given his interest in reprinting libertine texts, went into exile in Brussels in 1862. Among the texts he published clandestinely were *Serrefesse: tragédie-parodie* by Louis Pine-à-l'envers... with a filthy frontispiece, drawn and engraved by S.P.Q.R. (Enfer 486). The text was written by Louis Protat, a member of the Bar at the Court of Appeal of

Paris, accompanied by engravings by Félicien Rops, a prodigious producer of erotic works.

In the 20th century, authors as disparate in their worlds and in the individuality of their style as Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Louÿs, Georges Bataille, Jean Genet and others added their secret works to *Enfer*.

#### How *Enfer* developed

During the Second Empire, Prince Louis-Napoléon restored the regime of press censorship as under Napoleon I and *Enfer* grew considerably. Jules Taschereau, the Director of the Bibliothèque from 1858 to 1870, scrupulously ensured that the prints and engravings seized by Customs, as well as the books and brochures discarded by the Post Office management, were regularly sent to his institution, not

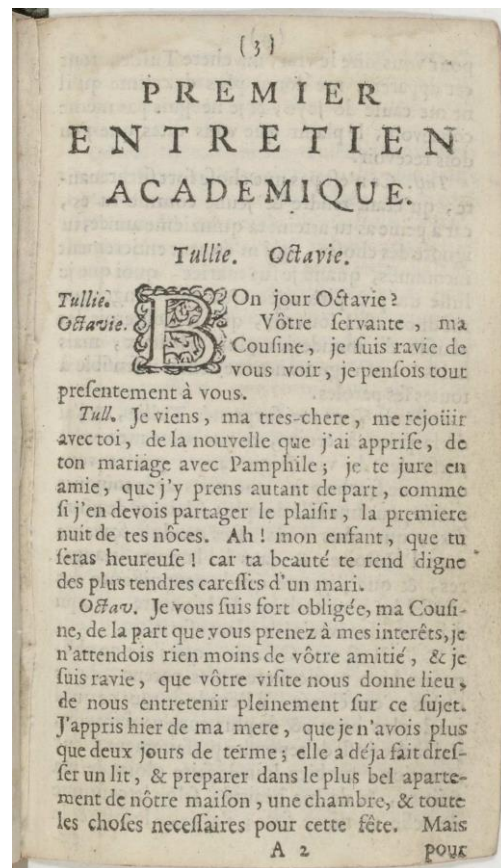
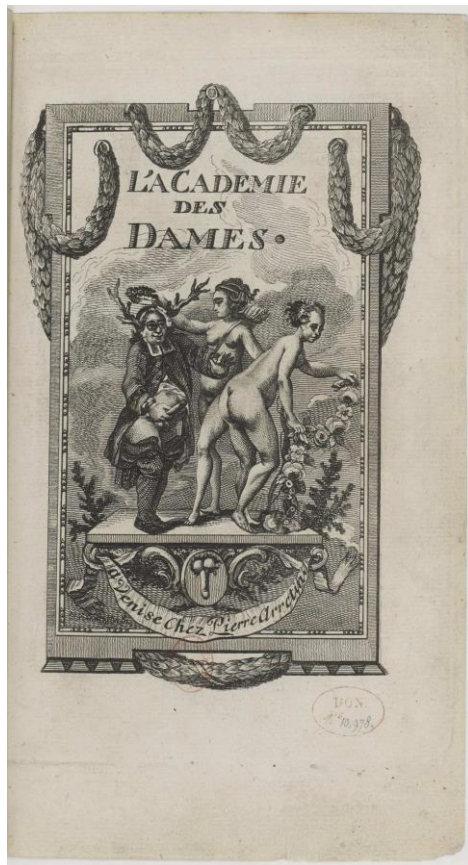
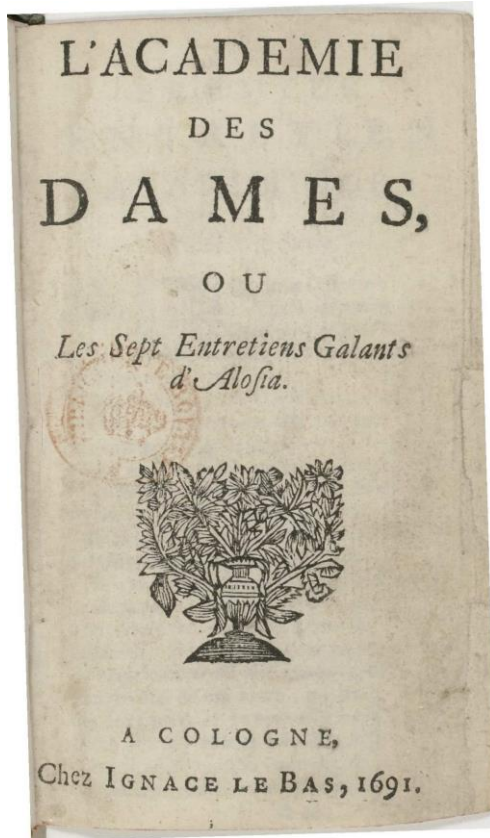


Sade, Donatien Alphonse François de. *La philosophie dans le boudoir / ouvrage posthume de l'Auteur de Justine [le Mis de Sade]*. Vol. 1, aux dépens de la Compagnie, 1795.

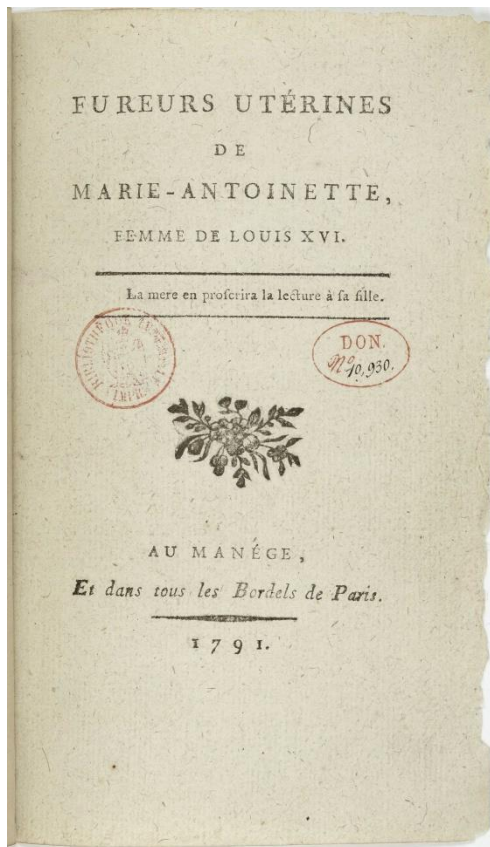
destroyed as may have been usual. 330 seized volumes were added to *Enfer* in 1865 and 1866. One of these became the talk of the town, having been taken in 1866 from the home of Alfred Bégis, trustee of bankruptcies from 1861 to 1882, but also a lawyer, historian and collector of manuscripts by the Marquis de Sade. He considered this seizure a veritable robbery and undertook a lengthy but failed lawsuit against the Bibliothèque for his property to be returned. Over 160 books and 23 engravings became part of the Bibliothèque's collections this way. To name but a few: several editions of *L'Académie des dames* and *La Fille de joie*, 18th century editions of *Dom Bougre*, *Thérèse philosophe*, *Félicia ou Mes fredaines* (Enfer 446-449); the 1864 edition of *Gamiani*, a classic of erotic literature attributed to Alfred de Musset and published by Poulet-Malassis. This seizure was also responsible for the addition of the Marquis de Sade's works

to the Bibliothèque Nationale, including the 1795 edition of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (Enfer 535-536). Since then, Sade has become the author with the most works on these shelves.

It has also been added to by the acquisition of entire libraries, some of the works of which were added to *Enfer*: the library of the bibliographer Adrien-Jean-Quentin Beuchot in 1851, who specialised in books by and inspired by Voltaire; Count Henri de La Bédoyère's in 1864, made up almost exclusively of plays on the French Revolution, the Empire and the Restoration. For example, the lampoon *Fureurs utérines de Marie-Antoinette, femme de Louis XVI, Au Manège et dans tous les bordels de Paris*, 1791 (Enfer 653).



Chorier, Nicolas. *L'Academie des dames, ou les Sept entretiens galants d'Alosia*. Translated by Jean Nicolas, Chez Ignace Le Bas, 1691.



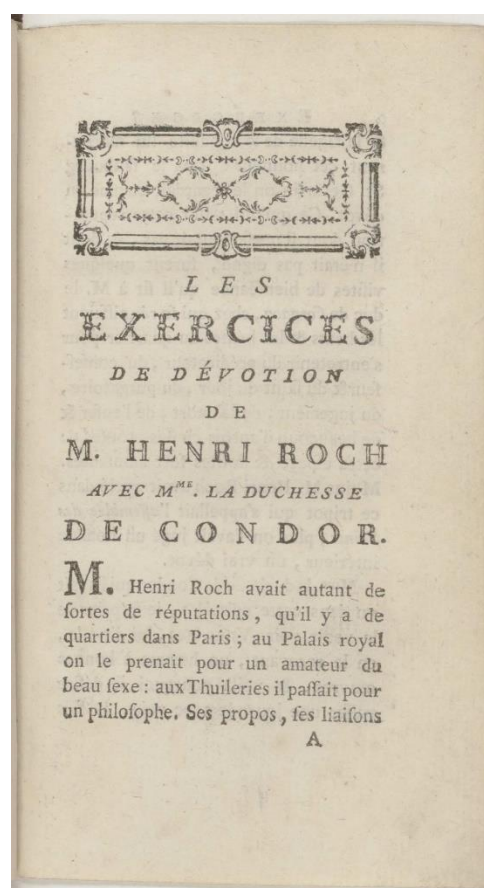
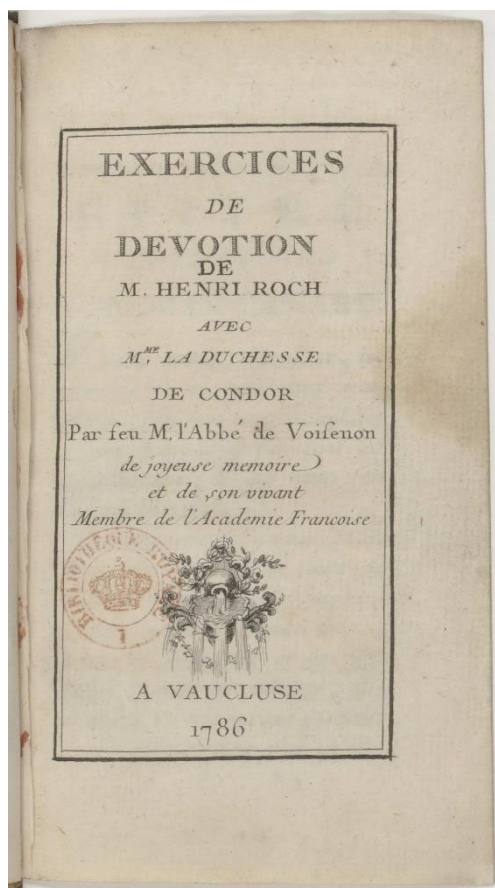
*Fureurs utérines de Marie-Antoinette, femme de Louis XVI, la mère en proscrira la lecture à sa fille; [Suivi de] Le Triomphe de la fouterie, ou les apparences sauvées, comédie en deux actes et en vers. 1791.*

In the late 19th century, the Bibliothèque began to acquire erotic books from booksellers. Until then, in most cases, *Enfer* was added to gradually by seizures and donations. In a request to booksellers, the Bibliothèque noted its interest in this collection that had been relatively poorly received compared to other works held in the Réserve des livres rares. Adolphe Labitte, a specialist in publications from French-speaking countries and a bookseller approved by the Bibliothèque provided them around 50 titles from Belgian publishers such as Jules Gay, Henry Kistemaekers and Auguste Poulet-Malassis. Notable examples include an 1882 edition of the *Exercices de dévotion de M. Henri Roch avec Mme la duchesse de Condor, par feu l'abbé de Voisenon...*, published by Gay and Doucet (Enfer 74), to complement the 1864 edition published by Poulet-Malassis, already included in *Enfer*. Apart from purchases here and there, other major additions include around 100 volumes in 1944 from the Giraud-Badin bookshop, one of which was *Le théâtre érotique*

*de la rue de la Santé...*, illustrated by Félicien Rops (Enfer 1312).

Prior to 1960, the Bibliothèque rarely acquired erotica at auction. Perhaps some kind of decency prevented them from doing so. Even so, in 1949 it took a first edition of *Pybrac* by Pierre Louÿs, published in 1927 by René Bonnel. It was not until the 1980s that this practice became commonplace.

Donations or bequests were rare in the 19th century. Worth a mention are the actions of Louis Hubaud, a Marseille collector, who bequeathed in 1866 his works that were considered obscene, in his words to save them from destruction in case they fell into the hands of the prudish. These included the *Recueil de pieces choisies rassemblées par les soins du cosmopolite, À Anconne, chez Uriel Bandant, à l'enseigne de la liberté, 1735* (Enfer 924). It should be noted however that most donors preferred to remain anonymous.



Voisenon, Claude-Henri de Fusée de. *Exercices de devotion de M. Henri Roch avec M(Me), la duchesse de Condor. Par feu M. l'Abbé de Voisenon de joyeuse memoire et de son vivant membre de l'Academie françoise.* N.p., 1786.

Maurice Audéoud (1864-1907), a great art lover, bequeathed his library to the Bibliothèque nationale in 1909. 650 of his rare books were added to the Réserve collection and kept as the Z. Audéoud reserve. However, given their subject matter, 18 tomes were removed from this classification to be placed in *Enfer*. In the 1910s, authors such as Fernand Fleuret, Pascal Pia and Maurice Heine were regular donors, not only of their own works. A special mention must go to Auguste Lesouëf, a scholar and bibliophile (1829-1906). His considerable library, consisting of almost 30,000 books and over 18,000 drawings, was bequeathed by his nieces in 1913. It included a small *Enfer* of 34 volumes, kept on the sidelines of its 'historical' counterpart. One example is *La Messaline française*, 1789 (Smith-Lesouëf E. 33).

Between 1877 and 1909, legal deposit became a significant source of additions, increasingly serving as a replacement for

seizures. Purporting them to be scholarly, the publisher Isidore Liseux did not hesitate to openly publish, if in limited numbers, most of the major classic erotic texts, such as *Les Kama Sutra de Vatsyayana*, 1885 (Enfer 101).

In 1947, the young publisher Jean-Jacques Pauvert started publishing all the works of the Marquis de Sade, not confidentially as before but to the general public, despite prosecutions against him and the proceedings that followed. These publicly published books joined the legal deposit collections on release and remained in *Enfer* until 1955. Examples: *Histoire de Juliette* in 1948; *La Nouvelle Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu* in 1953, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* and *Les Infortunes de la vertu* in 1954. *Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu* received a preface by Georges Bataille in 1955. As an exception, in 1953 *Les 120 Journées de Sodome ou l'École du libertinage* was limited to 475 copies for



subscribers only. The same went for texts by Georges Bataille and in 1954 for *Histoire d'O* by Pauline Réage. This novel, which became famous all over the world, was a response to men's sadistic fantasies. Anne Desclos (pseudonyms Dominique Aury and Pauline Réage), the Secretary-General of the literary magazine *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, edited by Jean Paulhan, only publicly admitted she was its author in 1994, at the age of 86.

### **The handling of Enfer**

In 1876, thanks to Léopold Delisle, alphabetical classification of all printed books replaced classification by topic. The *Enfer* holdings were then reclassified by author in alphabetical order, followed by anonymous works, taking format into account.

Before this reclassification had been completed, books that came in after 1876 were entered first as they arrived and were given the lowest numbers, 1 to 199 for smaller formats, higher for larger books. Entry in order of arrival resumed after the inclusion of books that came in before 1876. There were 620 of these (597 in octavo, 6 in folio and 17 in quarto), almost half of which came from seizures. This rather complex classification confused many, including Pascal Pia, the author of 1978's *Les Livres de l'Enfer*, stating that the first book in the collection and the one that marked its establishment was *Les Ruses, supercheries, artifices et machinations des filles publiques pour tromper leurs amants* (1871).

The first open mentions of this collection were made by Guillaume Apollinaire, Fernand Fleuret and Louis Perceau, who published *L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Editions du Mercure de France in 1913, undoubtedly with help from some of the institution's staff. This publication could not be controlled by the Bibliothèque in any way. When it was released, they attempted to play it down, merely stating they had nothing to do with its publication. A handwritten

catalogue of *Enfer* was compiled by William Viennot in the late 1880s. The first printed catalogue of the collection was published by Apollinaire, Fleuret and Perceau. It consisted of 825 numbers, the last of which was an excellent pastiche of a 17th century text by Fernand Fleuret. On top of these 825 numbers were another 6 reserved for large formats (901 to 906) and the 31 for medium formats (910 to 930), a total of 862. Between the release of the catalogue and the closure of *Enfer* in 1969, another 957 numbers were added.

When looking through the list of the books in *Enfer*, it is impossible not to note a somewhat arbitrary nature in the classification of multi-volume editions. Either each volume or book in an edition is classified separately, which applies to almost all books that came in before 1876 (*Enfer* 200 to 797), or the entire edition is held together, followed by sub-classifications. Of course, there is therefore a discrepancy between the numbering, the number of volumes and the number of editions (complete and sometimes incomplete), especially as several copies of some books are included.

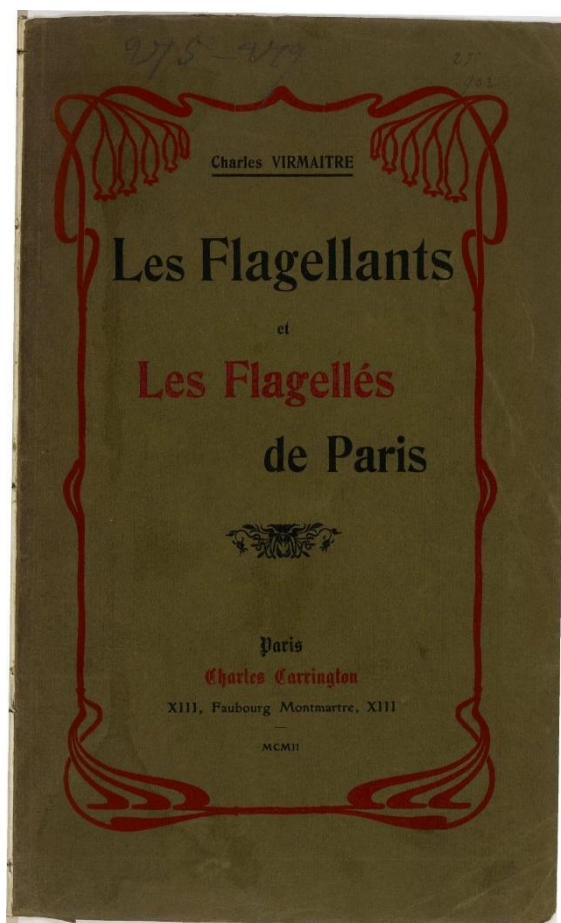
### **Its communications**

Essentially, very few notifications were to be made about these books. Until 1977, it was necessary to apply with a very good reason to the Director-General, who would submit these applications to an advisory committee of curators. Permission was in fact granted more and more often, as long as a scientific interest was shown. Since then, a written application to the Head Curator at the Department of Prints has no longer been required and notifications on these works have been made according to the same rules as the other books in the Rare books collections (*Réserve des livres rares*).

### **Books about flagellation: an appendix to Enfer**

These volumes were somewhat in fashion between 1880 and 1930. Certain publishers specialised in this branch of erotica,

where the instrument of pleasure was a whip. One example is Charles Carrington's *Les Flagellants et les flagellés de Paris*, 1902 (Reserve p. Y<sup>2</sup>. 1000 [211]). Put on public sale with most coming in by legal deposit, these books were not strictly differentiated from other novels kept in the Réserve des livres rares. However, from the 1900s, they were given certain special classifications, including Reserve p. Y<sup>2</sup>. 1000 followed by sub-classifications (1 to 368) in 1934. This classification was closed in 1960 and replaced in the Department of Prints (now the Department of Literature and Art) by classification 8° Y<sup>2</sup>. 90000, which consisted of 2302 numbers when it was closed in 1996. From 1971, classification 4° Y<sup>2</sup>. 10000 was established, which held 133 numbers until its closure in 1991.



Virmaître, Charles. *Les Flagellants et les flagellés de Paris* / Charles Virmaître. Charles Carrington, 1902.

## The closure of *Enfer*

In September 1969, a note from the Directorate of the Bibliothèque stated that *Enfer* was due to close. The explanation was that public morality had changed and the anger that could have been aroused by this classification as a result of the “Apollinaire” exhibition held by the Bibliothèque Nationale in late 1969. The Réserve des livres rares then used this to remove from *Enfer* around 15 books authored, prefaced, or published as erotica by Guillaume Apollinaire, giving them a more respectable classification. The same happened to Verlaine and his erotic works, acquired at the time by the collection, which were classified elsewhere. However, licentious or pornographic works, considered as “low pornography” were classified under 8° Y<sup>2</sup>. 90000 and 4° Y<sup>2</sup>. 10000. Around 40 books initially classified in *Enfer* in the 1960s joined these two classifications.

At that time, the biggest donor of erotic books was Paul Caron, who gave around 1000 books between 1968 and his death in 1985. The 340 books listed in the 1969 register of donations would wait several years to be processed. Lacking male staff, this task was assigned for the first time to a young woman, a librarian in the Office of Donations, simply because she was married and a mother. Most of these books were classified under 8° Y<sup>2</sup>. 90000, including *Passions de jeunes miss* by Tap Tap, 1907 (8° Y<sup>2</sup>. 90000 [1156]) or under 4° Y<sup>2</sup>. 10000, such as *Les Confessions de Miss Coote* by Jean de Villiot, 1906 (4° Y<sup>2</sup>. 10000 [43]). Some very rare volumes were kept in the Réserve des livres rares under the bookshelves used for novels and plays, or as a replacement for copies that had disappeared from *Enfer*.

## The reopening

In 1983, a decision was made to reopen *Enfer*, at the request of researchers and librarians, not for the sake of morality but for practical reasons. Since then, only old editions received by

donation or acquisition that had been proscribed or prosecuted in their time have been classified in *Enfer*. One example is an edition of *Aline et Valcour, ou le Roman philosophique...* by the Marquis de Sade, Paris, Veuve Girouard, 1795 (Enfer 2578 [1-4]), acquired at auction in 2008.

From its reopening in 1983 until 2020, *Enfer* grew by 182 works, 100 of which have been acquired. More so than older texts, various editions of 20th- and 21st-century artists' books from France and abroad have been classified there. For example, *Le Grand ordinaire* by André Thirion, surrealist compositions by Oscar Dominguez, 1934 [1943] (Enfer 2540), bought from a bookshop in 2000.

In 2011, 18 books published between 1972 and 1982, previously classified under 8° Y<sup>2</sup>. 90000, came into *Enfer*, not for their intrinsic qualities but due to the addition of a dust cover illustrated by the US artist Richard Prince. He produced these illustrations for his exhibition at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in 2011. At that time, the Réserve des livres rares decided to add to *Enfer* various publications from the New York counterculture of the 1960s.

Since then, *Enfer* has become purposefully selective. It has lost its "hellish" aspect, shifting instead to the building of a rare book collection. The singular fact that a book is considered immoral, licentious, or obscene is no longer enough of a criterion for it to be sent to *Enfer*. It must be distinguished by its individuality and rarity, the same way as all volumes kept in the Réserve des livres rares.

## About the Author

Marie-Françoise Quignard is Honorary Curator at the Réserve des livres rares, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

In 2001, she edited *Revue de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France* no. 7, (*Érotisme et pornographie*); in 2007/2008, she was co-curator with Raymond Josué Seckel of the *L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque, Éros au secret* exhibition; in 2007 she co-authored the catalogue with Raymond Josué Seckel and its new revised and supplemented edition in 2019.

She has curated exhibitions on Antoni Tàpies (2001) and Pierre Alechinsky (2005).

She was Co-curator of the 18th-century section of the *1000 m2 de deseo, arquitectura y sexualidad* exhibition, CCCB, Barcelona, 2016-2017.

## Further information

For more information about *L'Enfer at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, go to:

[gale.com/enferessays](http://gale.com/enferessays)

# CITATION

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