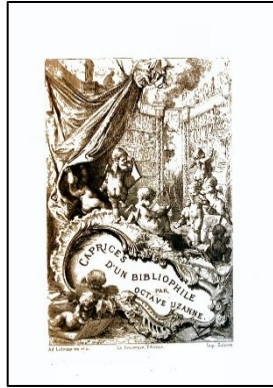


OCTAVE UZANNE

LE CABINET  
D'UN EROTO-BIBLIOMANE



SCISSORS & PASTE BIBLIOGRAPHIES  
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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

That the text below, comprising a chapter drawn from the *Caprices d'un bibliophile* (Paris: Rouveyre, 1878), treats of Frederick Hankey (1823-1882), the notorious English book collector and sadist, is quite certain, but whether its author, Octave Uzanne (1851-1931), was giving an account of an actual visit to Hankey's rooms in Paris is highly improbable.

At the time Uzanne's piece was published, he had indeed not yet met Hankey. In his *Catena Librorum Tacendorum* (1885), Henry Spencer Ashbee, the great British bibliographer of erotica who wrote under pseudonym 'Pisanus Fraxi,' and who knew all his contemporaries in the field, wrote:

In 1878 appeared a sketch, from the facile pen of M. Octave Uzanne of an *Eroto-Bibliomane*, named *le Chevalier Kerhany*, which was generally thought to be intended for Hankey, but this was not the case, as at that date M. Uzanne had not seen the well-known 'riche amateur anglais.' (*Catena*, p. lii.)

In a footnote, Ashbee adds:

It was the writer who had the satisfaction of introducing the editor of *Le Livre* to the collector of the rue Laffitte, March 9th, 1882. We had been dining together—Octave Uzanne, Felicien Rops and myself—when it was proposed to look up Hankey and spend the rest of the evening with him. We reached No 2 Rue Laffitte some time after ten o'clock, and found Hankey in his usual dishabille—short velvet coat, shirt without neck-tie, thin trowsers, thinner socks, and slippers. There was no fire or other artificial heat, in spite of the low temperature of the atmosphere. Knowing that I was in Paris, my visit was not altogether unexpected, but he would certainly have wished to receive my distinguished friends, especially the terrible creator of the Chevalier Kerhany, with more state. We were however appreciative guests, and restraint soon gave way to admiration in presence of Hankey's treasures; and our visit was protracted far into the night, or I should say following morning." (*Catena*, p. lii.)

Ashbee would know what he was talking about. He was on intimate terms with both Uzanne and Hankey, so much so in the case of the latter that when Hankey died many of his books were willed to Ashbee and today may be found in the Private Case of the British Library. But despite Ashbee's claim that it 'was not the case' that Uzanne's essay was about Hankey, the name 'Kerhany' is too much of an obvious anagram of sorts to be a coincidence and it is far more likely that Uzanne's narrative was in fact a flight of fancy, concocted from the many rumors that were doubtless circulating in literary circles about the eccentric English bibliophile. This suggestion is supported by Uzanne's references to 'Kerhany' possessing the original editions of Restif de la Bretonne's *L'Anti-Justine* (Au Palais Royal, chez feue la Veuve Girouard, 1798) and *Tableaux des Mœurs du Temps dans les différents âges de la vie* ('Amsterdam' [1750]). The former exists in just five copies, four in the Bibliotheque Nationale and the fifth, known to be Hankey's, is in

the library of Cambridge University. Uzanne is in error when he states that *Tableaux des Mœurs du Temps* was printed in three copies. It was two, and Hankey was famous for having one in his collection.

Most of what we know of Hankey originates with Ashbee's appreciative memorial piece about him that he included in his *Catena Librorum Tacendorum*:

"If ever there was a bibliomaniac in the fullest sense of the word it was Frederick Hankey. His collection was small, but most choice, and comprised objects and books, exclusively erotic. The former do not fall within the scope of the present work, nor did Hankey attach the same importance to them as he did to his books, which consisted of illustrated MS. the best editions and exceptional copies of the most esteemed erotic works, frequently embellished with original drawings, and clothed by the great French binders. The copies which were not in unsullied bindings of the time, he would have covered by Trautz-Bauzonnet, or other binder of undoubted repute, and he designed himself appropriate toolings wherewith to embellish them. He frequently spoke of making a *catalogue raisonné* of his beloved books, but did not, I believe, put his project into execution. Hankey was in every respect an original; he never rose until after mid-day, and his hours of reception were after 10 o'clock at night, when he was to be found among his books. He had fair hair, blue eyes, and an almost feminine expression, and answered in many respects to the descriptions which have reached us of the Marquis de Sade, his favourite author. He told me he had on one occasion recovered from a serious illness by suddenly obtaining an edition of Justine which he had long sought in vain. He had a curious habit of repeating himself, which at times rendered his conversation tedious... Son of Sir Frederick Hankey, and of his lady of Greek extraction, the subject of this notice was born at Corfu, while his father was governor of the Ionian Islands. He became captain in the Guards, and after retiring from active service, fixed his residence at Paris where he expired June 8th, 1882. A mutual friend announced to me his death in the following words: 'Notre ami Hankey est mort subitement devant moi jeudi dernier, il avait commencé à se soigner. Il ne pensait pas sa mort si prochaine et il ne la craignait pas. Il a été suffoqué, sans avoir éprouvé de douleur apparente. Nous étions très liés ensemble depuis 30 ans, il était un de mes meilleurs amis. Il a été enterré samedi dernier au cimetière du Père Lachaise.' " (*Catena*, p. 1 - lii.)

The panacea of being restored from a serious illness by discovery of a long-cherished book was not confined to Hankey. In an amusing piece by A. N. L. Munby called “Some Caricatures of Book-Collectors” included in his *Essays and Papers* (London: Scolar Press, 1977) is a reference to Isaac Gossett, a Doctor of Divinity and Fellow of the Royal Society, who was “...miraculously restored to health by the mere sight of one volume of the Pinelli copy of the *Complutensian Polyglot* on vellum.”

A far less sympathetic portrait of Hankey, and a much earlier one, is to be famously found in the April 7th 1862 entry in the *Journal* of Edmund & Jules de Goncourt:

Today I visited a madman, a monster, one of those men who skirt the abyss. Through him, as through a torn veil, I glimpsed an abominable depth, a terrifying side of a jaded moneyed aristocracy – of the English aristocracy, which brings ferocity into love, and whose libertinism finds pleasure only through the suffering of women.

At the Opéra Ball, a young Englishman had been introduced to Saint-Victor. He said to him quite simply, by way of opening the conversation, that there was little to amuse oneself with in Paris, that London was infinitely superior; that in London there was a very good establishment, the house of Mistress Jenkins, where there were young girls of about thirteen years old, to whom one first gave lessons, and then whipped them – the little ones, oh! not very hard, but the bigger ones quite hard. One could also stick pins into them, pins not very long, only about this long, and he showed the tip of his finger. ‘Yes, you could see the blood!...’ The young Englishman added calmly and deliberately: ‘I have cruel tastes, but I stop at men and animals...’ At one time, I rented, with a friend, a window, for a large sum, to see a murderess who was to be hanged, and we had women with us to do things to them – he always uses extremely decent language – at the moment when she was to be hanged. We had even asked the executioner to lift the murderess’s skirt a little, as he was hanging her! But it was unpleasant – at the last moment, the Queen granted her a pardon.

So today Saint-Victor introduced me to this terrible original. He is a young man of about thirty, bald, with temples bulging like an orange, eyes of a pale, sharp blue, skin extremely fine, allowing the subcutaneous network of veins to be seen; a head – strangely enough – like that of one of those emaciated, ecstatic young priests surrounding

bishops in old paintings. An elegant young man, with a certain stiffness in the arms and in his bodily movements, at once mechanical and feverish, like someone afflicted with the onset of a disease of the spinal cord; and with all that, excellent manners, exquisite politeness, and a very particular gentleness of demeanor.

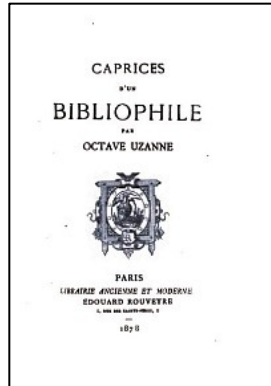
He opened a large cabinet at waist height, in which there was a curious collection of erotic books, admirably bound; and as he handed me a Meibomius, *Utilité de la flagellation dans les plaisirs de l'amour et du mariage*, bound by one of the foremost bookbinders in Paris with interior tools representing phalluses, skulls, and instruments of torture – designs he himself had supplied – he said to us: ‘Ah! those tools... no, at first, he didn’t want to execute them, the binder... so I lent him some of my books... Now he makes his wife very unhappy... he chases little girls... but I got my tools.’ And, showing us, a book completely prepared for binding: ‘Yes, for this volume I’m waiting for a skin, the skin of a young girl... which one of my friends obtained for me... It must be tanned... it takes six months to tan it... If you want to see my skin?... But it’s of no interest... it would have had to be taken from a living young girl... Fortunately, I have my friend Doctor Bartsh... you know, the one who travels in the interior of Africa... well then, during massacres... he’s promised to have a skin like that taken for me... from a living black woman.’

And while contemplating, with a maniac’s stare, the fingernails of his hands held out before him, he goes on speaking, speaking incessantly, and his slightly sing-song voice – stopping and starting again the instant it stops – bores its way into your ears like a gimlet, his cannibalistic words.

Concerning Octave Uzanne, who Gershon Legman jocularly described as “a sort of French Dibdin but even fruitier,” much is known, and the interested reader is referred to his Wikipedia article for further information.

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## LE CABINET D'UN EROTO-BIBLIOMANE



Often, I would meet him at the great booksellers on the Left Bank, speaking sparingly, in a low, weary, almost hoarse voice; with a strange bearing and that air of discomfort and discretion one sees in conspirators. Before a third party he seemed to wish to efface himself, and if he expressed his desires, it was only in an indecisive and anxious way, throwing out vague, brief phrases, full of a timid authority: “Find me the thing in question,” he would say to the bookseller; or else: “Do not forget, please, what you know; I must have it at all costs; don’t skin me too badly, though—I shall come back soon.”

mystery: know what vague whim drove me to make the acquaintance of this strange bibliomaniac, scented, shrouded in mystery; I felt that this singular being was certainly no ordinary person. His very physiognomy intrigued me in a particular way, and beneath the senility vainly disguised in his gait, I sensed a bibliophile of a race apart.

Tall, upright, corseted in a long houppelande<sup>1</sup> falling to his heels; the slender, tapered shoe revealing the silk stocking; the face shaved, made up, rice-powdered; the hair curled and pomaded; the gold monocle in the right socket, lifting the drooping eyelid over a lifeless eye; the hat tilted over the ear, the cigarette between the teeth and the cane in hand – he recalled to me, in the half-light of memory, that admirable type of aging dandy so masterfully sketched by Gavarni, with that witty and realistic caption: “*A bad lot who could be his own grandfather.*”

Hardly had he entered a bookshop when he would cast an anxious glance all around; if a lady happened to be there, seated at the counter, he became agitated, nervous, keenly uneasy. His discomfort showed itself in impatient movements and involuntary tics which cracked and flaked, as they broke through it, the thick layer of makeup spread over his cheeks. One sensed that he wished to be alone, in a man-to-man conversation; accordingly, he said to the bookseller only these few words: “Do you have it?” – “No,” came the reply. – “You’ll think about it, won’t you?” he would resume dejectedly, and then withdraw. A light-coloured coupé, lined inside with rose lampas brocaded with silver, waited for him at the door; our bibliophile, the Marquis de Carabas, would step inside; the carriage door would close, and scarcely had the coachman, powdered like with hoarfrost, flicked his whip at the chestnut horse pawing the ground, than the equipage had already vanished into the distance. It was a vision.

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<sup>1</sup> A houppelande or houpelande is an outer garment, with a long, full body and flaring sleeves, that was worn by both men and women in Europe in the late Middle Ages.

I learned that his name was the Chevalier Kerhany. He lived, I was told, quite cheerfully with ladies, but remained very reserved and of a misanthropic temper with his fellow men. He received few people at his home, and always with a kind of instinctive mistrust; it was said that his interior was of an unheard-of luxury, and that madness there jingled its bells amid orgies worthy of Tiberius; according to common report, he hosted little suppers at his house capable of resurrecting with pleasure all the rakes of the Regency—yet no one, nevertheless, boasted of having attended them. In fact, the Chevalier was demi-mondain: from time to time, he went to the Bois, and on opera nights he would linger for entire hours in the foyer of the ballet. The goddesses of the entrechat surrounded him, drowned him in waves of billowing gauze, flinging at him saucy quips that fanned the libertine fire in his faun's gaze, while he, standing in a Richelieu-like pose, delighted in distributing to those dreadful little rat-snouts the lozenges from his snuffbox or the assorted sweets with which his pockets were always filled.

These details were more likely to inflame than to allay my powerful curiosity about him; I resolved to follow the precept of the Stoics, the famous *Sequere Deum*. I soon realized, indeed, that destiny knows how to guide us, for on this occasion it served me perfectly

## II

One evening I found myself at one of those great Parisian fêtes, brilliant and noisy, at the home of a celebrated artist to whom one of my friends had taken me. Almost abandoned in a small salon of exquisite rococo, steeped in local color and perfume, stretched in perfect repose upon the cushion of a Japanese divan, I let myself be lulled by a languorous waltz, whose strains reached me softened, as if sifted by distance and heavy draperies; while absently gazing at a ceiling delightfully composed in the manner of Baudouin, I had almost lost all sense of where I was, when suddenly, beside me, on

the same divan, nodding his head and marking the rhythm of the dance with the tip of his polished boot, I saw – in the elegance of his evening coat, a gardenia in his buttonhole, his shirtfront entirely encrusted with diamonds – my mysterious bibliomaniac, the Chevalier Kerhany, who appeared, for his part, scarcely troubled by my presence. I did not ask myself how he had come there without my hearing him approach; I immediately thought that the opportunity, brushing past me by a single hair's breadth, must be seized in all haste and clung to. So, coughing lightly to draw his attention and better steady my voice:

“What a voluptuous and adorable thing the German waltz is,” I murmured, by way of opening the conversation.

“Adorable! adorable!” he said simply, without abandoning the lazy sway of head and boot.

“Only Strauss of Vienna,” I went on, “can conceive and write those sweeping, vivid, colorful motifs that lash the blood, seize hold of you, and send a warm shiver from the heart down into the legs.”

“There is only Strauss, indeed,” he sighed, as though speaking to himself; “... and yet Gungl's.”

“Ah! Gungl's,” I said, “a charming composer.”

“*Le Rêve sur l'Océan* is a work made entirely of harmony.”

“Entirely of harmony—yes, entirely of harmony,” he replied to me curtly, as if annoyed at having to speak to me.

There was a silence; my neighbor on the sofa, leaning back with a pout of boredom, was whistling a sort of minuet. I did not lose heart and made a fresh attempt.

“However beautiful the waltz of modern perfection may be,” I ventured, “it cannot help but make the more sensitive keenly regret those melodies of the eighteenth century—melancholy, naïve, and simple—so seductive in character, so penetrating in thought, and so graceful in style.”

He was smiling, seeming to listen to me with pleasure and even to approve; I continued:

“Is there anything comparable to the Quintettes of Mozart, the Gavottes of Rameau, the Menuets of Boccherini and of Reicha, the Symphonies of Haydn and of Beethoven, the Préludes, the Rondos, Duos, Quatuors, the Concertos, the *Thèmes variés* composed around 1725 and later by so many charming musicians who today are for the most part forgotten?”

“And the airs for fife! and the gentle romances! and the motifs for harpsichord!” exclaimed the Chevalier, suddenly sitting upright; “the motifs for harpsichord, Monsieur—what amorous verve! what ingenious charms! what lightness and at the same time what nonchalance! Alas! the piano renders all these pretty things poorly, and I would a thousand times rather hear them performed on the keyboard of a spinet than on the finest Pleyel in the world.”

“Not to mention,” I said, abruptly diverting the conversation, “not to mention that harpsichords were ravishing pieces of furniture, decorated with incomparable artistry by such artists as Boucher, Watteau...”

“Add Fragonard,” my interlocutor resumed passionately, “Fragonard—the divine painter of mad lubricities, of roguish and spirited voluptuousness; Fragonard, who so profoundly understood the science of the nude and of piquant décolletage; Fragonard, that Grécourt of painting. Add Fragonard: I own a harpsichord, a jewel, upon which he has drawn adorable scenes, charming cameos signed with his name.”

“I possess only a very small canvas by this master,” I ventured to say modestly, “but it is a work so fair in tone, so dainty in its undress, so astonishing in execution, so perfect as a whole, and finally so risqué in composition, that I hold it to be a true marvel.”

“The subject—what is the subject?” asked the Chevalier beside himself, possessed by a furious curiosity at the idea of the painting’s ribaldry. “What is the subject, pray?”

“The subject, my God, that is very delicate,” I replied slowly; “you have read *Les Dames Galantes*, have you not?”

“*Les Dames Galantes* are for me a breviary.”

“Then,” I resumed, after this cynical profession of impiety, “you saw there the subject of my Fragonard described in the *Discours premier*, you read it in the one hundred and nineteenth epigram of Martial, Book I, which ends with this line:”

*Hic ubi vir non est, ut sit adulterium.* [Where the husband is away, adultery may play.]

You have read it in Lucian, in Juvenal; in short, my painting depicts *fricatrices*; *Donna con Donna.*”

The face of Chevalier Kerhany was convulsed; his lifeless eyes had recovered a startling brilliance; his lips quivered with astonishment and sweat furrowed his face.

“You own such a painting by Fragonard!” he exclaimed in admiration. “A subject so well treated by such a master—why, it must be magnificent!”

He drew closer, asking me for details; he pressed me on the smallest points, and in the intoxication of knowing—and perhaps the desire to possess it one day—he overwhelmed me with attentions.

Having sought to seize this unbridled erotomaniac by way of curiosity, I had struck home: he had leapt at the description of an erotic subject, and already he was preparing to demand further information from me about the origin of this work of art, when the crowd flooded into the small salon into which we had withdrawn; the waltz had just ended, and the Chevalier was engulfed in petticoats as a few pretty women came to take their places at his side. The intimacy was broken.

Toward the end of the evening, I encountered him again, and after a mutual exchange of courtesies, he handed me his card, assuring me of the pleasure he would take in doing the honors of his library for me.

### III

A few days later, I rang at the door of the Chevalier de Kerhany, whose town house was situated on the boulevard Haussmann; a great devil of a footman, dressed in scarlet livery, came to open the door for me. I first crossed a vast room, a kind of atrium decorated in the Pompeian style, where Roman furniture of every kind was arranged; I caught sight of the *accubitum*, the *biclinium*, the *triclinium* adorned with its *plagula*, the *lectulus*, and even the *subselium*, the *seliqastrum*, the *scabellum*, and other seats faithfully copied from antiquity. The Chevalier was receiving visitors; he was standing in a small smoking room hung with Havana-colored silk, padded with blue satin. He received me with the greatest cordiality, congratulating me on not having feared to disturb him. We spoke of art and literature—or rather, of women—for the whole aesthetic of my erotomaniac seemed to converge and be summed up in the eternal feminine. He saw music, poetry, and painting only through a voluptuous correlation that he delighted, despite himself, in establishing between all masterpieces and the love of the daughters of Eve. Taking each genius in turn, he showed me, with passionate verve, that in the great manifestations of art one could repeat the saying of a famous policeman: *Cherchez la femme*. He spoke of the fair sex as a skillful general might speak of a fortress whose every nook and cranny he knows, gracefully expressing the different ways of attacking the citadel, advancing theories so audacious that I could not, even by veiling my phrases like Turkish women, relate them here. I was completely captivated by this old Anacreon; I believed I had before me the famous Duc de Lauzun giving advice to his great-nephew, the Chevalier de Riom—so much did he display deep knowledge and passionate bravado in the delicate subjects he had to treat.

However, as charming as the conversation was, I soon asked Chevalier Kerhany for the favour of visiting his museum. He granted my request with the utmost courtesy: — “That’s only fair, that’s only fair,” he said to me with a smile, “I’ve been keeping

you here with my trifles. Let us go, if you please, to the gallery of the masters.”

I was shown into a superb gallery lit by a vast bay window facing north; for a moment, stunned by the splendor of the frames and the masterly orgy of color, I soon recovered myself and was able to contemplate at my leisure the most remarkable private collection it has ever been given me to see. There were Velázquez and Murillo, Titian and Andrea del Sarto; resplendent landscapes by Ruysdael, Hobbema, and Poussin; adorable small canvases by Terburg, Metsu, Van Ostade, Wouwermans, Jan Steen, and Vermeer; then, in a broader style, Rembrandts, Rubenses, Jordaenses, Frans Halses, Riberas, Gerard Dous, as well as Antonello da Messina, Guerchinos, Leonardos da Vinci, and Paul Veroneses. I would have needed whole days to sate my admiration; I would need volumes to express the sensations I experienced. I nevertheless tore myself away from this sublime enchantment to remark to the fortunate owner of so many marvels that the more diluted art of the masters of the eighteenth century held no place at all in his gallery.

“One moment, one moment,” he replied, “this would kill that—follow me; you will lose nothing by waiting; follow me, I am going to satisfy you.”

The Chevalier lifted a curtain; we then found ourselves in an octagonal chamber whose white paneling was carved with festoons, garlands, and crowns picked out in matte gold. An immense mirror replaced the ceiling, and all around the room, up to the cornice, were hung paintings from the eighteenth century. There were, first of all, portraits by Reynolds and Gainsborough, and pastels by Latour; then came Van Loo, Pater, Boucher, Lancret, Fragonard, Largillière, Nattier, Dietrich, Le Barbier, L’Épicié, and Boilly. What gave this gathering of masterpieces its particular character was the very nature of the subjects chosen: one saw nothing but a dazzling display of rosy flesh, a rutting of tawny skins and graceful dimples; nothing but a debauch of languid, intoxicating poses, a cloud of roguish, laughing Cupids whose lips met in kisses.

The depravity of an entire century was spread out in the lubricity of these paintings, smiling with lust and amiably vicious; arched torsos—lascivious, possessed, almost demonic—seemed to emerge from their frames, reflected in the great mirror of the ceiling, while the hairy legs of fauns and sylvans, nervously swollen with intense priapism, appeared to shake into the air a sharp, goatish odor that rose to the brain.

I had been there for nearly an hour, intoxicated by so many glimpsed beauties, shattered, annihilated, in a state of prostration impossible to describe. The Chevalier de Kerhany took pleasure in my surprise and in my passive admiration, heightened to excess. “Well then, young man,” he said to me, “well then—what do you say to my eighteenth century? Do you not think that your Lesbian Fragonard would be in very fine company in my modest little museum? That is not all,” he added; “we are now going to visit my Library, which contains certain curiosities that will be to your taste. But... what is the matter with you?—one would think you were feeling unwell?”

I replied furtively, apologizing for being unable to visit my host’s books that day; I invoked a pressing engagement, and thanking the Chevalier, I departed after arranging to return the following day at the same hour.

The fact is that I was suffering from a violent headache and a general malaise; what I had seen had transported me into an ideal world, far from modern Paris and its civilization, far from the banal and the odiously conventional. My imagination had grown weary in a mad flight through the Eden of my dreams, and my brain was still dancing as it lifted my top hat when I found myself on the boulevard.

The Chevalier de Kerhany seemed to me, at that moment, a sinister magician, a sort of Regency Mephistopheles who had taken delight in my youthful enthusiasm. I almost resented him for having led me for a moment into the orchard of forbidden fruit, for

before me I now saw only the little apples of Api—that is, little Parisian girls overdressed according to fashion, trotting cheerfully, followed by the fauns of today: fat bourgeois swollen with purse and belly, hasty hedonists ready to enter the boudoir of the Danaës in the form of a shower of gold.

#### IV

The next day, at the appointed hour, my mind calmer and my senses more composed, I found myself at the Chevalier's house, where he awaited me in his Library. This bookroom was arranged in an oval salon; a window of multicolored stained glass distributed the daylight through a cheerful prism, and the sun, filtered by pink, yellow, and blue lozenges, seemed to splash the oriental rugs with variegated reflections. The walls of the room were entirely lined with rosewood panels, covered in Russian leather, and adorned along the edges with coquettish lambrequins of myrtle-green moiré, scalloped and fringed, whose elegance combined with the practical advantage of protecting the books from dust. High above, near the cornice, on the topmost shelf, in a charming disorder designed for the pleasure of the eye, small statuettes displayed themselves in all the audacity of shamelessness; they were slender Venuses, with nothing of classical stiffness, groups of frantic bathers, Sapphos... before the love of Phaon, pale and wan Narcissi, powerful Herculeuses, and also series of bronze Phalluses possessing the spirit and singular character of those seen in *Le Musée Secret du Roi de Naples*. I felt as though I were in a magistrate's office after the seizure of figurines deemed offensive to public morals, so heated and unrestrained was the composition of this unique statuary. The room contained no furniture except a circular sofa, wide, deep, and rounded, upholstered in a thick Indian fabric of ravishing color, upon which were thrown numerous and varied cushions. Here and there, a few cedar Xs supported boxes of prints, and a reading table, with twisted legs and gilded feet, occupied the center of the

room. From the ceiling, from a rosette with the obscene oddity of certain medieval gargoyles, hung a bronze chandelier of such frightful lubricity that one would have thought it chiselled by some Benvenuto Cellini afflicted with satyriasis.

This Library seemed to contain nearly two thousand volumes, toward which I was already approaching with curiosity in order to scan their titles, when the Chevalier de Kerhany stopped me:

“My young friend,” he said to me gently, “this library is a bibliographical hell of which I am the selfish Pluto; here I have given rendezvous to all the hungry for vice, to all the grotesques of libertinage, to all those condemned by bourgeois indignation, to the morbid and shameful conceptions of brains overworked by pleasures. Few visitors have ever crossed this threshold; only a few pretty sinners have ever dragged the elegance of their slippers here; and if a particular sympathy allows me today to do in your favor what I have done for no other Bibliophile, your wise erudition will, I hope, place you above your senses. Yet I believe I must warn you: reflect as if you were about to take opium for the first time in your life. “My carriage is downstairs—will you come for a turn on the lake?”

“Unhitch the horses,” I said, laughing; “I’m off to pay a visit to your poor wretches.”

“In that case, start on the right,” added the Chevalier, indicating the nearest shelves; “my Library is graduated—those incurables are on the left, at the far end of the place where you are standing. I leave you here alone; in an hour I will return to fetch you.”

The first row of books that I opened formed what one might call the series of the trivial: they were for the most part novels or piquant tales, written in that voluptuous period between the Regency and the Revolution, Turkish, Persian, or Chinese fantasies, good and harmless frolics printed in *Cythère* with Venus’s approval, in *Érotopolis*, in *Cucuxopolis*, or at the Palais Royal with a little Lolo, dealer in gallantry. I saw *Grigri*; *Thémidore*; *Le Noviciat du Marquis de \*\*\** ou *l’apprenti devenu maître*; *Les œuvres galantes de Bordes*;

*Le Grelot; Le Roman du Jour; Le Sofa; Le Tant pis pour lui ou les spectacles nocturnes*; the various Codes: *Code de la Toilette; Code des Boudoirs; Code du Divorce; Code des mœurs ou la prostitution régénérée; Code de Cythère ou lit de justice d'Amour*, then the *Bibliothèque des petits maîtres*, the *Bibliothèque des Bijoux: Les Bijoux indiscrets; Le Bijou des Demoiselles; Les Bijoux des neuf Sœurs; Le Bijou de Société ou L'Amusement des Grâces*; the *Bijoux des petits neveux d'Arétin* and others; *Les Caleçons des Coquettes du jour, Les Calendriers de Cythère, L'Almanach cul à têtet ou étrennes à deux faces pour contenter tous les goûts*, as well as a crowd of scatological works and obscene anas.

The volumes were bound admirably in full morocco, in plain calf or ornamented; each of them was adorned with small special tools, of fine and original design, sometimes brutally coarse through a spirit of local color; they were placed on the spine, between the ribs, in the form of *culs-de-lampe*, or stamped directly in full morocco on the covers of the volumes as a kind of coat of arms. Licentious engravings were added to the most colorful passages of the works to which they were suited; even the endpapers sometimes endured the audacity of a bawdy drawing, and I could not help but think that the book of the most chaste Gallic humor had been mercilessly transformed by the inveterate erotomania of the Chevalier de Kerhany.

As I gradually inclined toward the left, the libertine graduation became more pronounced; I had already passed through the bawdy poetry: *La Muse folâtre; L'élite des poésies héroïques et gaillardes de ce temps* (1670); *Le Parnasse satyrique du sieur Théophile; Le Cabinet satyrique*, the works of *Cornille Blessebois; Dulaurens; Les Muses en belle humeur ou Elite des poésies libres; Le Pucelage nageur; L'Anti-Moine; Le Parnasse du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, and all the works printed in Belgium, in Neuchâtel, in Freetown, with etchings by Rops, to which new engravings were added. I had already gone through the greater part of the Library, and my hands began to tremble as I opened each book that presented itself to me; the small tools assumed cynical and frightening airs; I feared I might not reach the goal, and I

abandoned a few hundred volumes in order to reach the extreme left.

I indeed found myself among the incurables, as the Chevalier had told me; it was on the extreme left, the supreme of the genre, the *nec plus ultra* of depravity and, at the same time, of the artistic luxury of books and engravings. *Les œuvres badines d'Alexis Piron* touched *L'Amour en Vingt Leçons* and *Le Meursius François*; Arétin was represented by the *Recueil de postures érotiques* after etchings by Annibale Carracci; by *Alcibiade Fanciullo à Scola*; by *L'Arétin français*; and by the book called *Bibliothèque d'Arétin*. Near the *Divus Arétinus* I noticed *Félicia ou Mes Fredaines*; *Monrose ou le Libertin par fatalité*; *Les Monuments de la vie privée des Douze Césars* and *Les Monuments du Culte secret des Dames Romaines*. Further on I saw *Justine ou Les Malheurs de la vertu*; *Cléontine ou La Fille malheureuse*; *Juliette ou la suite de Justine*; *Le Portier des Chartreux*; *La France fout...*; *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*; *Les crimes de l'amour ou le délire des Passions*; in a word, all the sadistic works of the Marquis de Sade, in original editions, with bindings stamped with small torture tools. I was about to indulge in the pleasure of examining the manuscripts and original drawings; I laid hands on one of the three known copies of *Recueil de La Popelinière: Tableaux des Mœurs du Temps dans les différents âges de la vie*, one large in-quarto volume, and admired the twenty coquettishly indecent gouaches by Carême, when the owner of this astonishing rarity appeared:

“Ah! ah!” he exclaimed. “You do not go lightly to it, my dear child; not only have you seen the right, the center-right, and the left of my cabinet, but you are also contemplating, as a true connoisseur, as a delicate lover of the subject, the marvel of marvels, the rarest of my rare books after *L'Anti-Justine* by Restif de la Bretonne. Do you know that the possession of my *La Popelinière*, printed under the eyes and by order of the fermier général, cost me ten years of research, ten long years of toil and struggle, and two thousand hard écus?”

“That is about the price of my *Fragonard Lesbien*, without omitting the struggles and fatigues,” I sighed, deliberately.

“You are not, I suppose, going to propose an exchange?”

“Who knows?”

.....

Today the Chevalier de Kerhany is the owner of my *Fragonard*; ... but, in addition to my frequent visits to his cabinet, I am, by virtue of his will, the presumptive heir of *L'Anti-Justine* and the famous *La Popelinière*.

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