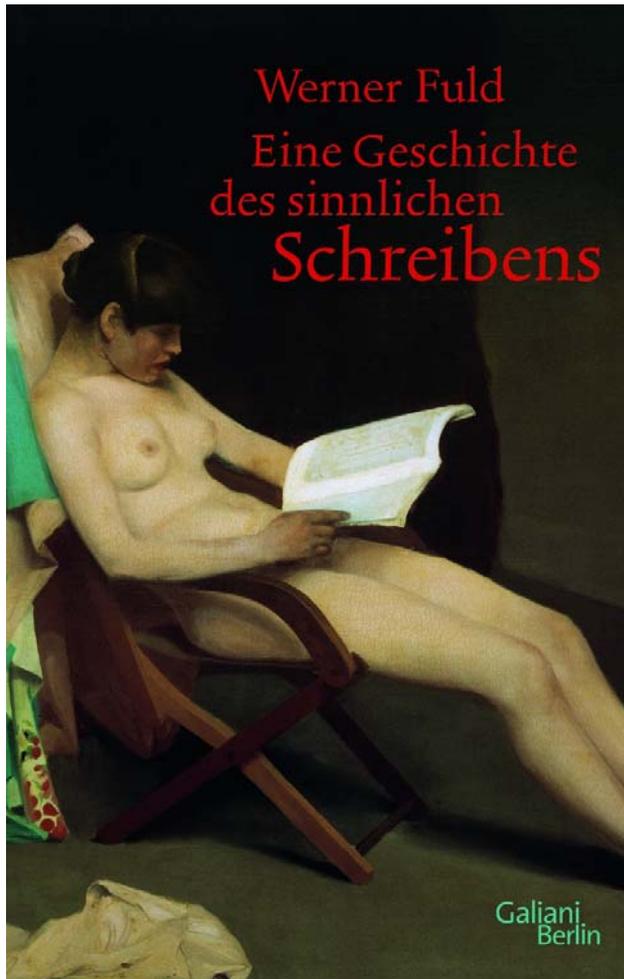


Sample Translation (Table of Content and Introduction)

A HISTORY OF SENSUAL WRITING by Werner Fuld

Translated by Sue Pickett

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Introduction

Erotic literature is women's domain. From the very beginning, ever since knowledge fell into the lap of the apple picker, women have wanted to know what love is all about and share this knowledge with others. The famous courtesan Angela Greca, a confidante of Aretino and the model for Titian's *Danae*, taught a banker's wife her skills and believed it unlikely the lady would not show others what she had learnt. The illustrated sonnets by her friend Aretino, regarded in centuries to come as the epitome of the worst possible pornography, probably served as visual aids during these lessons.

To avoid any misunderstandings, I do not intend drawing a distinction between erotic, obscene or pornographic content. Such derogations by earlier scholars, if they ventured into such morally treacherous terrain, were usually attributable to concerns about their own reputation and fears of prosecution well into the 20th century.

Incidentally, the foreign word "pornography" did not exist at the time of Aretino and Greca. It was a term coined by Restif de la Bretonne (1734–1806), consisting of the Greek word *pornä* (prostitute) and *graphein* (to write), and used to describe the lives of famous hetaera in ancient Greek literature. At that time, it did not have the meaning it has today either. Bretonne's book *Le pornographe* (1769) belongs to his series of political reform documents and his intention is stated in the subheading: "The ideas of a man of honour about regulations for prostitutes". In the entertaining form of an epistolary novel, Bretonne proposed the establishment of state-supervised brothels, suggesting the best ways to equip such establishments and classify the girls, whose prices he said should range between six sous and one louisdor. The aim of this unrealised plan was to alleviate the conditions of the prostitutes who were exposed to all kinds of dangers and abuse in the pursuit of their profession. The term then fell back on Bretonne himself: he was referred to as a pornographer because he described in his extensive literary work the lax morals of the peasants and lower classes – without glorifying them in the way that Rousseau portrayed the rural idyll. He also described in the greatest detail his own excessive love-life – but more about that later.

In 1830, when the German historian Karl Otfried Müller sought a term to express his disgust at the "obscene" frescoes that were uncovered in Pompeii and Herculaneum, he fell back on Bretonne and, in his *Handbuch der Archäologie der Kunst*, described the pictures as pornography. The book was translated into English twenty years later, and the term hitherto non-existent in this sense, in other words referring to pictures, was included in *Webster's Dictionary* in 1864.

From 1821, these erotic images were kept under lock and key in the Secret Cabinet of the Naples National Archaeological Museum to which only distinguished scholars and a small number of privileged individuals had access. The cabinet was closed again in 1853, the exhibits moved to two storerooms and the doors bricked up. Seven years later, the offensive objects were brought out of storage again. This time, they were scientifically documented and described by leading archaeologist Giuseppe Fiorelli in his *Catalogo del Museo Nazionale di Napoli* (1866) as special *Raccolta pornografica* (pornographic collection). Thus, the term "pornography" finally established itself in international vocabulary and henceforth was applied to all kinds of pictorial or written representations that were deemed obscene. However, what was considered obscene differed not only from one culture to the other, it was also subject to historical evolution, as the fate of Lorenzo Da Ponte's opera libretto *Così fan tutte* demonstrates (more about this later). In other words, "pornographic" only became evaluative in the second half of the 19th century. In contrast to its original meaning, this connotation is therefore relatively new. Erotic themes and motifs were such a matter of course in the art and literature of earlier epochs that the term "erotic" did not actually appear in the dictionaries of that time. Only in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* is "erotic" mentioned as a term used to describe an ancient poem on the subjects of love and gallantry "which now refers to everything that has to do with love between the sexes". "Obscene" was also a word that already existed. Its origin is still unknown today and according to the *Encyclopédie* "describes everything that is contrary to the sense of shame" – although the encyclopaedists stressed in opposition to the church how strongly the sense of shame was influenced by cultural and historical change.

For an historical assessment, we only need to look at the relevant essays of the morally meticulous Sigmund Freud (GW XI), who already considered a kiss ("the union of two erogenous mouth zones in place of the respective genitals") to be bordering on the obscene: "But precisely kissing can easily turn into a complete perversion – if, that is to say, it becomes so intense that a genital discharge and orgasm follow upon it directly, an event that is far from rare."

I do not intend to appraise earlier authors or bore readers with long theoretical discussions about the nature of pornography. I am writing not as a scientist but as a lover of the fine arts, so at best I will make aesthetic judgements, aware of the fact that they too can only have limited historical validity.

This book is about erotic literature, which we read today with different eyes to the audience for which it was intended. When we use this modern term, we must bear in mind that it was only this attribute that created the genre – and with it its circle of consumers, who were believed to be exclusively male.

My research produced an entirely different picture. I claim that between Ovid's *Ars amatoria* up until the beginning of the 19th century, a large part of literature with erotic or explicitly sexual subjects was written for a female audience, and was intended and indeed served as a contribution towards their sexual education or as a manual on prudent female behaviour in potentially compromising situations. For centuries, men and women entertained each other at social soirees by reading aloud stories with erotic themes. Boccaccio's successor Pietro Fortini (?–1562) wrote his novellas explicitly as a kind of collection of examples and in his introduction encouraged the timid to read the stories, "because women, just like men, want nothing more than to engage in such pleasurable conversations". He believed women, in particular, could learn a lot for their own behaviour towards their lovers. It was only the history of literature in the bourgeois era, which was dominated by men well into the 20th century, that suppressed the large number of female writers of erotic literature and caused them to sink into oblivion. Towards the end of the 20th century, the anti-porno verdict of naive American puritans then prevented the rediscovery and rehabilitation of these female writers – with the exception of established authors such as Olympe de Gouges and Aphra Behn. Even Ina Schabert's commendable *Englische Literaturgeschichte aus der Sicht der Geschlechterforschung* (1997) lacked successors, so that the isolated preoccupation with individual female authors such as Luise Mühlbach was limited to narrow academic circles and thus remained ineffective.

It is not the aim of this book to write a global history of erotic literature or even attempt an overview for a single continent. My interest lies in tracing certain lines of development that have been overlooked in the past and to bring together the familiar with the forgotten to produce a social history. This is a balancing act, and every reader will inevitably miss one author or the other. It might seem neglectful to ignore Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, but since I have already written at length about this particular case in my *Buch der verbotenen Bücher*, I did not want to bore readers with repetitions. Medievalists will regret the absence of Oswald von Wolkenstein, and lovers of German Rococo the droll Wieland. The omission of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch can simply be explained by the fact that I have not pursued any special sexual interests: it was not my intention to explore obscenity in its most extreme forms.

However, I hope to make up for this by offering readers surprising insights and new perspectives. Erotic literature also has a history and reflects the history of its time. The lover and collector usually sees only the individual work and as a result of inadequate editions learns little about the reasons for its creation or the nature of its impact. My intention was to bring to light again obscured relationships and connections in order to reveal the original, emancipatory impulses of erotic literature. Even when written by men, such literature was not intended only for a male audience until the end of the 18th century. It can even be said that there were times when women benefited far more from the knowledge they gained from erotic publications than male readers. And not infrequently, they wrote these books themselves and had a great impact on the morals of their time.

Since the high middle ages, literature has been called upon to fulfil the requirements of "prodesse et delectare" as defined in Horace's *Ars Poetica*: literature was supposed to be useful and entertaining. Poets educated by entertaining. This was why the audience grew to include not only scholars but interested individuals who quite often could not even read. Thus, the communication of information, which was usually the preserve of the pamphlet, was extended to include entertainment in all available forms of oral presentation – according to the respective target audience, from simple farce and fables in verse form to fictitious letters and finally to the novel, which was able to integrate all forms. Numerous works, especially from the erotic culture, came about and were passed down because of the fact that they were read aloud and consequently became popular with a wider audience. This lost culture of reading and reciting, however, also had an economic reason: printed books were expensive and unaffordable for the general public. Authors at that time were not writers by profession, they did not have to make a living from the sale of their books. The publicity of their name therefore offered them all the fame and fortune they needed. This does not mean that literature was not supposed to be educational on principle; however, we can assume that today we no longer consider some content to be useful in the way that it was originally intended. If, for example in the *Illustres Françaises* by Robert Challe (1713), a lady refuses to become a godparent to a child together with a male acquaintance, the reader at that time saw this as an unambiguously erotic message: if both had become godparents, this would have legally precluded a subsequent marriage. It is also difficult today to believe that Samuel Richardson's novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), which are about seduction and rape, were considered to be educational reading for young girls and women.

The modern censorship of *The Decameron* proves how unusual the notion is that seven young ladies and three young men from high society spend time telling each other indecent stories.

Boccaccio's great world theatre, however, also shows what erotic literature in essence is: fairytales for adults. They release us from reality, create a separate world in our minds, stimulate our fantasies, and with every step we take into the dark forest, we become a little bolder, a little smarter. Because the sin – this is what the story of the apple picker teaches us – is an indispensable element of progress, on the wayside the prudish sit and lament.

Boccaccio's lewd impersonator Jean de La Fontaine also suspected that "Mothers and wives will sometimes pull you by the ear when they read my stories". But this encouraged him even more: "Let's tell a story! But let's tell it well! That's what's most important! That's what it's all about!"