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The Fetish in/as Text: Retif de la Bretonne and the Development of Modern Sexual Science and French Literary Studies, 1887-1934

Amy S. Wyngaard

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THE MARQUIS DE SADE'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELDS OF sexology and psychology are commonly known, even if the details of the advent of the concept of sadism have long been forgotten by nonspecialists. The term *sadism* was coined by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his famous compilation of case studies of sexual perversion, *Psychopathia sexualis*, first published in 1886. In the early twentieth century, Sade's *120 journées de Sodome* (1785), a catalog of deviant sexual behaviors ranging from sodomy to incest and pedophilia, became known as "the first *Psychopathia sexualis*" among literary critics and medical doctors alike (Flake 136; Heine, *Marquis de Sade* 70–71, 296–97). The contributions of another eighteenth-century French libertine author, Nicolas-Edme Rétif de la Bretonne, have not fared as well—the term *retifism* never successfully entered medical language, not to mention the vernacular. Nonetheless, Rétif's life and works played a key role in the formulation of theories of fetishism, the perversion that Michel Foucault argues served during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a model in the scientific analysis of sexual deviation and as a basis for elaborating a general theory of sexuality (203–04). Rétif was one of the first cases of foot fetishism to be diagnosed after Alfred Binet distinguished amorous from religious fetishism in his 1887 essay "Le fétichisme dans l'amour." Perhaps most important, in his works Rétif anticipated the modern psychosexual use of the term. Between 1887 and 1934, Rétif rivaled, and even surpassed, Sade as the poster boy for sexual perversion: during this period, there appeared no fewer than fifteen medical treatises and articles that drew on Rétif's works to diagnose foot and shoe fetishisms as well as a variety of other sexual dysfunctions and manias, including impotence, senile salacity, and pulsions toward incest.

AMY S. WYNGAARD, associate professor of French in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics at Syracuse University, is the author of *From Savage to Citizen: The Invention of the Peasant in the French Enlightenment* (U of Delaware P, 2004). She is completing a book on Rétif de la Bretonne and the development of modern conceptions of sexuality, pornography, and obscenity.

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Whereas Sade's graphic depictions of sexual violence are certainly hard to forget and Rétif's playful portrayals of women's feet and shoes may easily be lost in a corpus totaling more than 157,000 pages, less obvious reasons perhaps explain the effacement of Rétif's status as foot fetishist par excellence. While Sade and Rétif studies owe much to the pre-Freudian sex doctors for stimulating interest in the two authors, who were largely ignored and condemned by the nineteenth-century literary establishment, since the early 1930s Rétif scholars have worked to distance the writer from that critical tradition, which they found troubling. In what is often cited as a turning point in Rétif studies, in the September 1934 issue of the medical journal *Hippocrate* Henri Bachelin published an essay defending the literary merit of the author's works alongside articles by Louis Charpentier ("Restif") and Maurice Heine ("Vieillesse") providing the psychosexual readings of Rétif's oeuvre typical of the time. As late as 1988, Jean-Marie Goulemot referred to the "culte fétichiste" 'fetishistic cult' of Rétif—a term that can be seen as evoking the sexologists as well as literary scholars focused on biographical approaches—as part of a past that critics must leave behind to draw attention to the literary qualities of his corpus. Rétif's defenders have seen the medical use of his works not only as counterproductive for his literary reputation but also as insulting. This scholarly commitment to the elevation of Rétif's works has more than likely contributed to the relative silence surrounding questions of the author's fetishism in the second half of the twentieth century.[1]

Similarly, surprisingly little has been written about the use of eighteenth-century French literature, and that of Rétif in particular, by the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sexologists in their formulation of notions of fetishism and other perversions. Studies of the cultural history of fetishism by Emily Apter and by Robert Nye, while recognizing the importance of eighteenth-century French writers such as Rétif and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to the development of the concept, have instead emphasized the connections between late-nineteenth-century French literature and the medical science of perversion—unquestionably a rich topic. While Foucault in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* acknowledges Sade's importance to transformations in sexual thought, he does not explore further the connections between literature and the development of modern sexual science (195–98). To be sure, the medical writings that were inspired by and make use of Rétif's works are not terribly interesting in themselves. Despite the curiosity they can pique in their opening pages, which note limited press runs and restricted sales, they often seem repetitive, superficial, moralistic, and even humorous to our modern sensibilities. Quickly rendered obsolete by the more sophisticated analyses of Freud, the writings of the sexologists seem to have been forgotten by all but the most intrepid researchers of the history of sexuality.

Naive as they can appear, the writings of these early sexual scientists are universally acknowledged to be important. In their elaboration of case studies that probe the psychological bases of deviant sexual behavior, they prepared the way for the theories of Freud and the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, which were similarly set forth in a new kind of writing known as pathography, a term that suggests the narrative qualities of these texts while recognizing their reliance on famous biographies and literary works for their case histories.[2] As I will suggest in this essay, there are compelling reasons for taking another look at these writings and those that focus on Rétif in particular. An examination of the sexologists' use of Rétif and the debates that it engendered reveals that the appropriation of eighteenth-century French libertine literature by medical doctors had wide-reaching and long-lasting cultural effects. The textual interactions between sexual scientists and

literary critics at the turn of the twentieth century profoundly influenced the definition of literature, the status of eighteenth-century literature in particular, and the contents of the literary canon in modern France. It also helped entrench stereotypical attitudes about the French nation—the perception that its citizens have an unbridled and deviant sexuality, its reputation for dirty books and perverted authors—that are held even today. I will explore these issues by focusing my discussion on three areas: the strikingly modern portrayal of fetishism in Rétif's works, the sexologists' use of Rétif in developing concepts of fetishism, and the response of literary critics to the sexologists' writings and its significance. In so doing, I hope to shed light on a critical moment in the history of Rétif scholarship, literary studies, and French cultural history that pitted medical doctor against literary scholar, French against German, and Rétif against his old nemesis, Sade.

This essay tells the cumulative story of how Rétif's works became kinds of fetish objects in the French literary corpus through their medical use, which marked them as bad writing in both senses of the term. In tracing this history, I am interested in illuminating another aspect of the politics involved in the creation of sexual knowledge explored by critics such as Foucault, Roy Porter, and G. S. Rousseau: the tensions that arose between the medical and literary establishments in the years when the studies of sex and literature were forming as disciplines. As Rétif's example demonstrates, these tensions were less methodological than symptomatic of contrasting views of normalcy and its relation to national character, historical period, and literary creation. The analysis of the sexological appropriation of Rétif's writings and its effects extends the issues of power and knowledge surrounding sexual study to include concepts of national supremacy and literary value.[3] The alternative uses of Rétif's work provide another example of how emergent sexual discourses were directed to hierarchical and proscriptive ends as German doctors drew on his writings to prove the moral superiority of their nation and French critics condemned the author to purify the literary canon. This essay aims to tie together the strands of a diffuse history that has been inadequately documented and examined: that of Rétif's singular role in the invention of fetishism as a psychosexual concept and its repercussions for his posterity as well as for that of French culture.

Fetishes, Idols, and Relics: The Exalted Status of Women's Feet and Shoes in Rétif's Works

When Rétif published *Le pied de Fanchette* in 1768, his first and best-known work featuring women's feet and shoes, the idea of religious fetishism was in vogue intellectually and culturally. Charles de Brosses is credited with coining the term *fetishism* in 1756 and developing the concept of religious fetishism in his 1760 *Du culte des dieux fétiches*, where he discusses the worship of material objects such as amulets and talismans among ancient and contemporary African populations. De Brosses calls this cult *fétichisme* after *fétiche*, derived from the Portuguese trading term *feitiço*, which designated the small objects and charms on which European merchants would take oaths in sealing commercial agreements with Africans (de Brosses 11; Apter 5). Before 1760 the French public had become familiar with the role of the fetish in "primitive" religions through the works of authors such as Pierre Bayle and Joseph-François Lafitau, which most likely influenced de Brosses's theories.[4] The concept of fetishism quickly took hold among Enlightenment thinkers such as the baron d'Holbach, Claude Helvétius, and Immanuel Kant, who sought to develop new theories of religion based on reason and materialist philosophy. References to the fetishes of African religions appear in d'Holbach's *Encyclopédie* articles "Serpent-Fétiche,"

"Maramba," "Mumbo Jumbo," and "Ovissa" (1751–72 [Pietz 136–39]). By the early 1760s the figure of the African fetish worshipper had become a fixture in eighteenth-century French cultural discourse, featured in Rousseau's *Émile* (1762 [552–53]) and in a chapter of *Candide* containing an ironic comparison of Dutch and Guinean fetishes that Voltaire was inspired to add to the 1761 edition (222).

When Rétif was composing his novel, all the elements an author would need to make the conceptual leap from religious to amorous fetishism were in place. The romantic figuration of woman as venerated object was nothing new, having been developed in literary discourse since medieval times. However, eighteenth-century French libertine authors gave this quasi-religious image of the female beloved a new twist by cultivating the vocabulary of worship, idolatry, and devotion in the context of erotic, rather than platonic, love. In *Les exercises de dévotion de M. Henri Roch avec Mme la duchesse de Condor* (c. 1780), for example, the abbé de Voisenon explicitly played on the relation between sex and religious ritual: the novel stages spiritual exercises of supposedly devout lovers that are accompanied by a series of sensual acts performed in the name of divine love, service, and charity. Authors of pornographic novels such as Sade and the marquis d'Argens often employed religious terms and practices in a sexual sense, thereby achieving the acerbic critique of the church and its agents that is one of the hallmarks of early modern pornography.[5] Whether a source of metaphor or of irony, the link between the sexual and the spiritual realm was a popular thematic in libertine and erotic writings during the second half of the eighteenth century. These writings ultimately propagated a new image of the female body as an object that was at once sacred and sexual, a tool for achieving physical pleasure comparable to spiritual ecstasy.

Concurrently, the works of painters such as François Boucher and Jean-Honoré Fragonard attest to the voyeuristic fragmentation of the female body fostered by contemporary clothing fashion: the attention drawn to various parts of the body by trends in dress styles and accessories. Throughout the eighteenth century, women's fashions sought to accentuate what were considered the most attractive features of the female form. Décolletages trimmed with lace flattered bosoms framed by ribbons tied at the neck; tight bodices showed off waists that appeared even smaller thanks to hooped petticoats, or *paniers*; elbow-length sleeves festooned with cuffs and ruffles beautified forearms and wrists. Works such as Boucher's *La toilette* (1742) suggest the conscious sensuality of female dress as well as the specific objects—ribbons, lace, and mules—designed to attract an admiring eye. Fragonard's *L'escarpolette* (1767), featuring a delicately articulated female foot kicking off a mule suspended in mid-air above a delightedly expectant gentleman, testifies to the particular fascination with the female foot and shoe in eighteenth-century French culture. Indeed, the feet were often the only part of the lower half of the female body that could be glimpsed under the long hooped and gathered skirts of the *robe à la française*, the *robe à l'anglaise*, and the *robe à la polonaise*, popular from the 1740s to the 1780s.[6] Boucher's and François-Hubert Drouais's portraits of Mme de Pompadour, completed in 1756 and 1764, respectively, attest to the consciousness of this allure (fig. 1). Both artists offer suggestive views of shapely feet encased in elegant slippers peeking out from voluminous puffs of fabric.

Rétif's works culminate these contemporary literary and cultural trends by introducing the religious vocabulary of fetishism—specifically, the terms *fetish*, *relic*, *idol*, and *talisman*—into the depiction of male adoration for the female foot and shoe. Further, unlike eighteenth-century French authors, such as Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux, who included brief scenes of foot eroticism ostensibly to add spice to their

works, Rétif examines at length men's obsession with the female foot and the psychology behind this behavior.[7] In many ways, it is Rétif, and not the sexologists, who deserves credit for "inventing" foot fetishism more than a century before the phenomenon was medically recognized. For Rétif, however, the passion for the female foot was far from a shameful sexual deviation; rather, it was a source of pleasure and inspiration shared by many of his compatriots. His cataloging of acts of fetishism and the psychological pulsions and gratifications that drive them is presented less as a pathology than as a cultural document—an accounting of a common eighteenth-century French preoccupation, as early-twentieth-century defenders of the author were quick to emphasize. It is important to note that while the sexologists considered foot fetishism and shoe fetishism to be distinct pathologies, the two cannot easily be distinguished in Rétif's works: hence the varying categorizations among turn-of-the-century medical scientists who diagnosed Rétif as a foot, shoe, or foot and shoe fetishist.[8] In Rétif's work, the admired female foot is almost always encased in a shoe; they are in many ways seen as equivalent. In a society dependent on vestimentary codes and visible signs, the shoe was an extension or a metonymy of the foot; a delicate shoe suggested a pretty, well-shaped foot, which in turn stood as a symbol for the rest of the body.[9]

In his depictions of fetishism, Rétif drew inspiration from his personal experiences and fantasies; he was also most likely influenced by the explosion of discourse on human sexuality in Enlightenment France. As critics have shown, these erotic guides and treatises sent mixed messages by alternately celebrating sexual expression and condemning "abnormal" sexual behaviors such as masturbation and homosexuality (Rousseau and Porter 1–24; Wagner 21–41). Rétif's writings reflect the various facets of this literature in their attempts to understand the roots and characteristics of foot fetishism and to justify it as a natural, pleasurable impulse. In a frequently cited passage from his autobiography, *Monsieur Nicolas* (1794–97), the author explains the continuity he perceives between women's feet and shoes while musing about the mental and physical causes of his particular "taste":

> [C]e goût pour la beauté des pieds, si puissant en moi qu'il excitait immanquablement les désirs et qu'il m'aurait fait passer sur la laideur, a-t-il sa cause dans le physique ou dans le moral? Il est excessif dans tous ceux qui l'ont; quelle est sa base? . . . Le goût factice pour la chaussure n'est que le reflet de celui pour les jolis pieds, qui donnent de l'élégance aux animaux même; on s'accoutume à considérer l'enveloppe comme la chose. Ainsi la passion que j'eus dès l'enfance pour les chaussures délicates était un goût factice basé sur un goût naturel. (46)
>
> [T]his taste for the beauty of feet, so powerful in me that it inevitably aroused desires and that it would have made me overlook homeliness, is its cause physical or mental? It is excessive in all who have it; what is its basis? . . . The artificial taste for shoes is only the reflection of that for pretty feet, which lend elegance even to animals; one becomes accustomed to considering the envelope as the thing. Thus, the passion that I had since childhood for delicate shoes was an artificial taste based on a natural taste.

The work documents the various stages of Rétif's obsession: his desire to touch and kiss female feet and shoes, which manifested itself by the age of four; his kiss with a female cousin, during which he finds himself secretly attracted to her sister's foot; his orgasm brought on by the sight of a servant's foot in a pretty mule; his ensuing obsession with her shoes, which pushes him to do unmentionable things to them ("Il est des écarts qui ne peuvent se raconter" 'There are indiscretions that cannot be recounted' [223]) just after she has taken them off; the *jouissance* inspired by the rose-colored shoes of Mme Parangon, the wife of the printing master to whom he

FIG. 1
François Boucher, *Portrait of Mme de Pompadour* (1756). Oil on canvas, 79⅛ × 61¾ in. (201 × 157 cm). On loan to the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen of the Collection HVB-Group Munich.

is apprenticed at eighteen. Any number of parallels can be drawn between the author's account of his sexual proclivities and those of his characters, including Edmond R**, who proves to be equally attracted to the fictional Mme Parangon's foot in *Le paysan perverti* (1775; fig. 2). Rétif's fiction fulfills an important psychological purpose by allowing the author to generalize his obsession and present it in a positive light. His attempts to convert the reading public to his cause often take on a humorous aspect, such as when his characters expound on the importance of women's wearing high heels at home or argue for the exemplarity of the fetishist as husband (e.g., "Le joli pied" 262–64, 272).

In his fiction, Rétif develops a concept of foot fetishism that anticipates the late-nineteenth-century formulation in its detail and terminology. The author's portrayals evolve over four decades, during which he elaborates a psychology of the perversion that culminates in his use of the term *fétiche* to describe eroticized objects such as women's feet and shoes. Ranging from the playful to the pornographic, over time Rétif's portraits become more explicit in their description of the motivations behind fetishistic behavior and in their use of religious imagery to evoke the power and ceremony surrounding the fetish object. Shaped by his desire to come to terms with the pulsion as well as by his need to make money, his portraits are often repetitive and rapidly drawn and so of uneven literary quality and interest. *Le pied de Fanchette* reflects the tentativeness of the author's preliminary exploration of the subject, evident in his compilation of an extensive genealogy of literary and historical authorities to lend credibility to his work.[10] Emboldened by his success, Rétif went on to compose works such as *L'anti-Justine* (1798), which evokes the practices of foot fetishism and shoe fetishism in graphic detail. The novel, which can be seen as a counterpart to *Le pied de Fanchette* in its redundant expression of the male obsession with the female foot, stages the sexual excitement and release procured by kissing, tickling, and caressing female feet, by seeing and hearing high heels, and by putting delicate shoes to a variety of erotic uses.[11] While scenes of foot fetishism appear throughout the author's corpus, I will concentrate my discussion on the texts that mark the pivotal moments in his articulation of a conception that is strikingly similar to sexological theories of fetishism: the worship of female body parts or portions of female attire that provoke sexual desire and stimulation.

Although the lighthearted depictions of fetishism in *Le pied de Fanchette* lack the depth of some of Rétif's later portrayals, the novel is notable for its sustained focus on the irrational acts driven by fetishistic desire and for its introduction of a religious lexicon to describe characters' passion for the female foot. It also clearly demonstrates the author's delight in the subject, providing him the opportunity to turn the feminine footwear of his dreams into a fictional reality. The text recounts a series of picaresque adventures occasioned by the protagonist's shapely feet and shoes. Fanchette has several pairs of high-heeled slippers and mules in extraordinary colors and fabrics, all lavishly described by the author: reddish-brown slippers embroidered with green and rose silk, rose mules with green heels covered in silver netting, and green silk moiré mules with rose-colored heels, to name just a few. Fanchette's shoes take on a life of their own as they are lost, stolen, found, given away, coveted, and caressed by her male admirers.

Although Rétif does not go into it in detail, his characters display an erotic fixation on the female foot and shoe that can aptly be described as fetishistic. The sight of the sleeping Fanchette's foot inspires her deceased father's lecherous friend, Apatéon, to approach her "en tressaillant de plaisir; il s'agenouilla; il baisa mille fois ce pied charmant" 'trembling with desire; he kneeled down; he kissed this charming foot a thousand times' (29). The sight of her "joli pied" 'pretty foot' causes a young man in

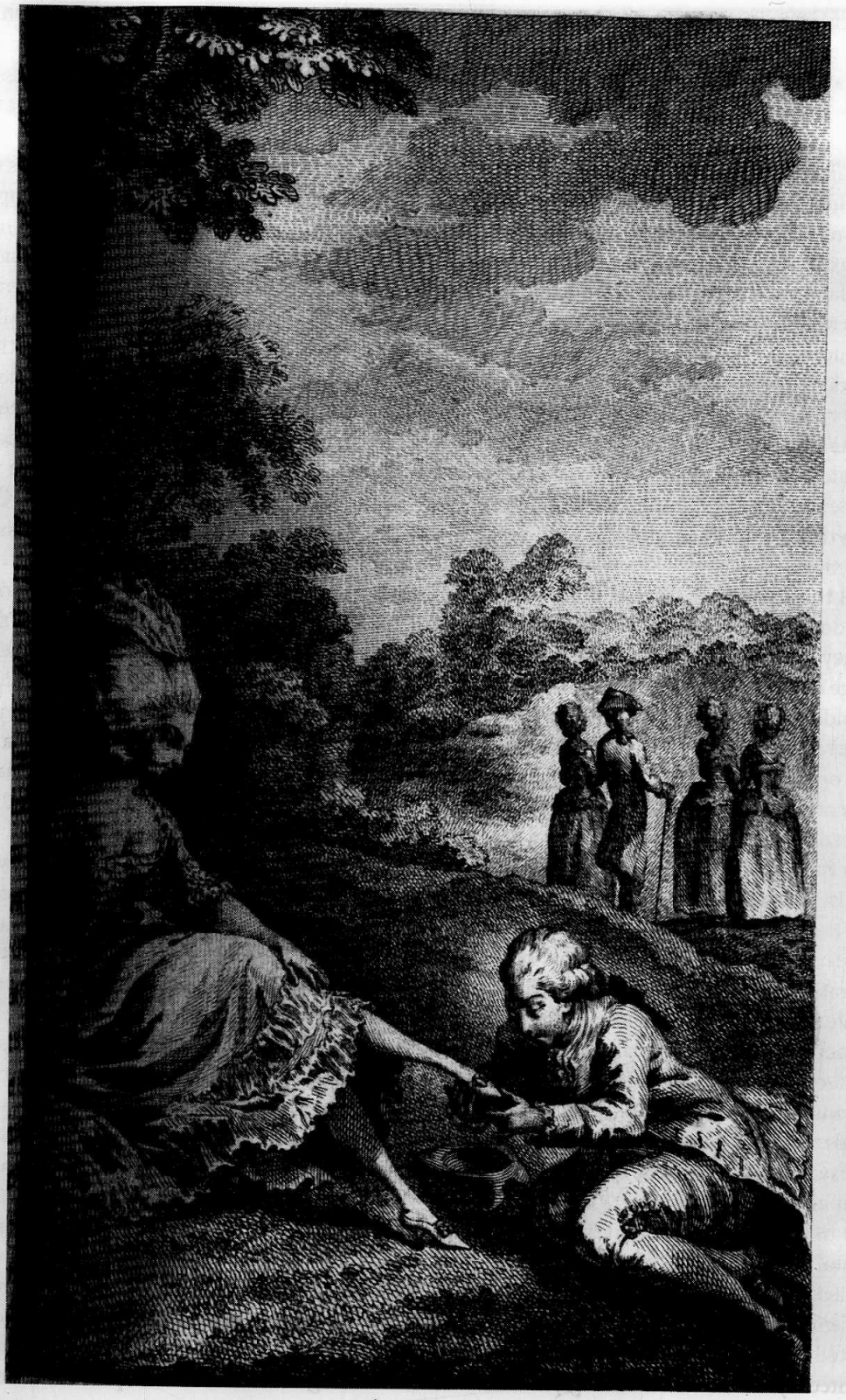

FIG. 2

Louis Binet, illustration to Rétif de la Bretonne, *Le paysan perverti* (pt. 2, letter 64). Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

mourning to stop and stare, old men to try to seduce her, and young men to touch her. One look at her "pied séduisant" 'seductive foot' causes one of her suitors to lose his senses and cry out that he must cede to his passion (62). Significantly, in the novel's preface the author attempts to explain the nature of the penchant, musing about the reasons why a pretty foot alone can arouse sexual desire: "Serait-ce parce que dans les femmes, ces êtres charmants destinés à plaire, la nature a voulu que tout fût enchanteur? . . . [C]es magiciennes aimables font de toutes les choses à leur usage un talisman vainqueur; il n'est rien qui ne devienne flèche de l'amour, dès qu'elles l'ont touché" 'Would it be because in women, these charming beings destined to please, nature wanted everything to be enchanting? . . . [T]hese lovable magicians make a vanquishing talisman of all things at their service; there is nothing that does not become a Cupid's arrow as soon as they have touched it' (18). The conventional image of the woman as enchanting seductress provides Rétif with the seminal analogy that he develops in subsequent works: the woman's foot or shoe is a talisman, a charm endowed with magical powers of seduction, that exerts supernatural control over men and inspires their quasi-religious reverence.

In the corpus of Rétif's works on fetishism, the trope of the magical or religious object serves an important dual function: operating figuratively to justify the fetishist's behavior as involuntary, it also works literally to crystallize the acts of veneration performed around the fetish object. In "Le joli pied," a short story appearing in *Les contemporaines* (1780–85), Rétif builds on the trope to present his most detailed and sympathetic view of fetishists and their compulsions. An irrational, instinctual attraction to the female foot causes an immediate mental and physical reaction in a Parisian man named de Saintepaille: he freezes with surprise and emotion, shivers and shakes, and becomes fixated on the foot in question until it is supplanted by another in his imagination. Rétif provides a highly analytic view of fetishistic desire in his descriptions of Saintepaille's behavior. The protagonist's obsession drives him to follow women to their homes, lie in wait for them, and plot to obtain their shoes—a feat that can require elaborate planning, since his taste runs to shoes that have just been worn. Further, the author elaborates on the disjunction in the fetishist's mind between the body part and the person, pointing out that Saintepaille's passion, uniquely centered on the foot, allows him to overlook a less-than-pretty face and constitutes enchantment rather than love. Saintepaille's serial fetishism comes to an end after he sees the adolescent Victoire de la Grange's foot encased in a small, elegant, puce-colored shoe with silver cording and high, narrow heels. Overcome with his desire and the need to satisfy it, he secretly pays Victoire's shoemaker to make exquisite shoes for her, which a chambermaid returns to him after Victoire has worn them. When Victoire's stepmother learns of the ruse and deprives Saintepaille of a pair of richly embroidered, rose-colored shoes with green heels, he is compelled to steal one of the shoes from Victoire's foot while she sits on the side of a boulevard (fig. 3).

Saintepaille could be considered a typical fetishist according to modern psychosexual taxonomies in his obsessive collecting and subsequent admiring of shoes worn by his beloved. Rétif describes at length his character's object worship, which he terms a cult. Left alone in Victoire's room before their marriage, where her clothing and accessories lie in disarray on a sofa, Saintepaille strokes and kisses her dress before turning his attention to her shoes, telling them of his desire to take their place and "[d']être foulé par ce pied mignon, l'abregé de toutes les grâces" 'to be trampled by this dainty foot, the summation of all graces' (269). On their wedding night, he kneels down to remove the diamond-encrusted, mother-of-pearl shoes he had made for her and replaces them with equally extravagant mules; he then puts the shoes in a

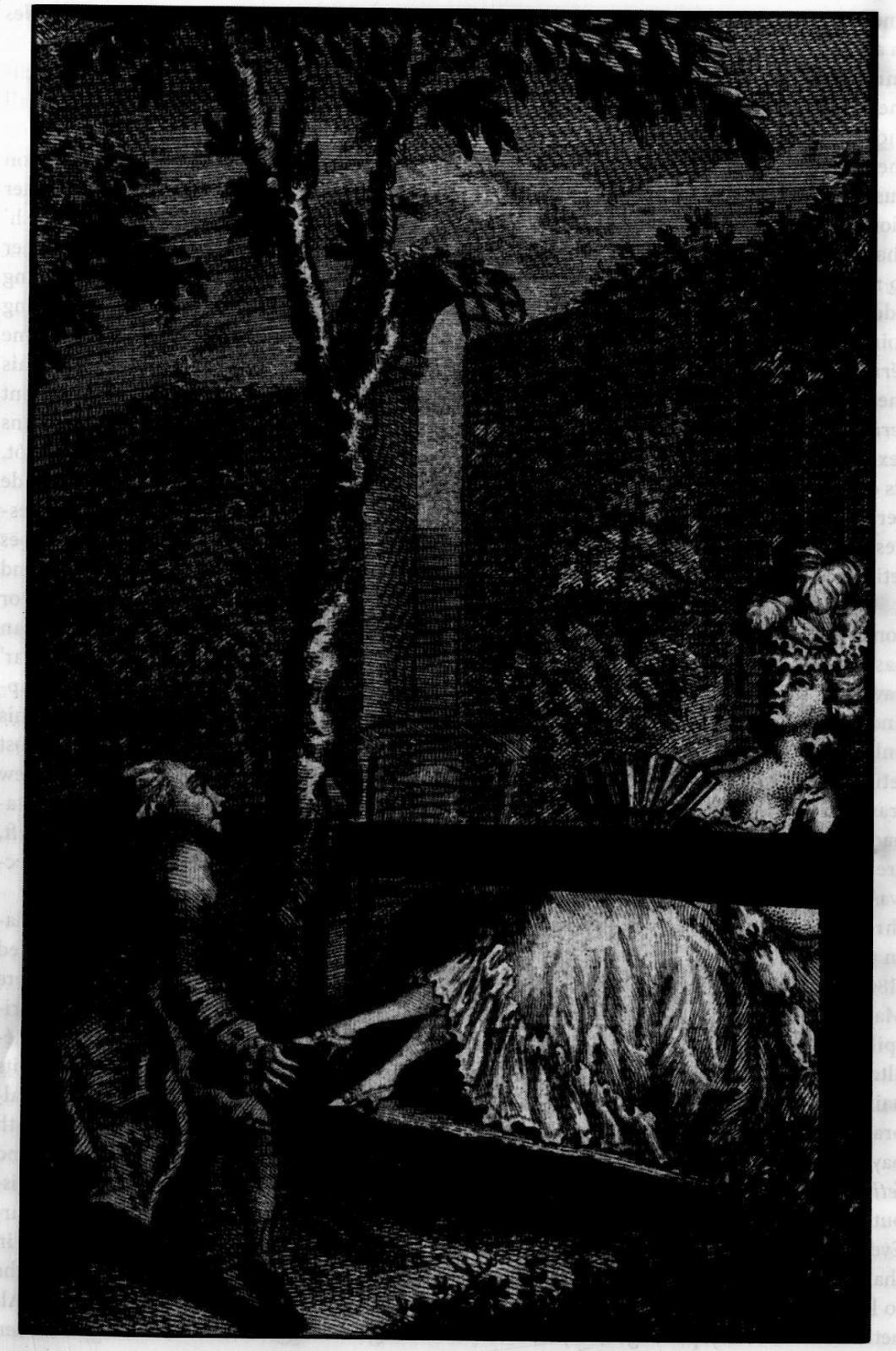

FIG. 3

Louis Binet, illustration to Rétif de la Bretonne, "Le joli pied" (235). Courtesy of the Bryn Mawr College Library.

small, transparent temple, where they are kept in anticipation of Victoire's wearing them on anniversaries. In addition, Saintepaille has the shoemaker make Victoire a new pair of shoes every day to his specifications, which she wears once and then relinquishes to her husband. Rétif repeatedly plays up the religious overtones of Saintepaille's behavior. The character's outward gestures are comparable to ritualistic acts that demonstrate a deeper fidelity: "[E]lle était son idole, sa déesse, et les soins qu'il prenait pour elle, était le culte *extérieur*" '[S]he was his idol, his goddess, and the attentions that he showed her were the *exterior* cult' (273). In its conflation of psychosexual pulsions and spiritual practices and in its exploration of signature facets of the perversion, including the drive to steal and the desire to be trodden on, Rétif's profile of the fetishist prefigures that of the sexologists.[12]

Around 1800 Rétif adds *fetish* to the lexicon of religious terms he employs to evoke the passionate hold that the female foot and shoe have over his male characters. Although it is unclear why the author came to use this term only at the end of his career, the notion of the fetish gave Rétif a culturally current means of transmitting images of foot worship, which had become less metaphoric and more concrete as his portraits evolved (fig. 4).[13] Rétif was clearly taken with the term, using *fétiche* three times in two works from this period. In the fourth edition of *Le pied de Fanchette* (1800), he adds an epilogue that tells of one of Marie-Antoinette's guards, who steals a green, spike-heeled shoe of hers and places it on an altar in his quarters, along with a few of her hairs and her headdress, collar, silk stockings, bracelets, and ribbon necklace. Each day he pays homage to these "*fétiches* sacrés" 'sacred *fetishes*,' not because they are from a queen but because they are from a beautiful woman. Eventually he works himself up to such a state that he throws himself at her feet and attempts to kiss them when she passes (123). In "Annette Galtieri, ou la jupe longue," a short story included in the posthumous *Histoires des compagnes de Maria* (1811), Rétif recounts the adventures of an adolescent girl with a well-shaped foot that caught the attention of all who saw it—so much so that on one occasion "un vieillard le lui demanda pour en faire son idole, ou son fétiche" 'an old man asked her for it in order to make it his idol, or his fetish' (229). After her friends' grandfather steals her shoes and skirt, kneeling before and kissing these consecrated (worn) "relics" and vowing to keep them forever, she is told that the same thing happened to two other women: "Jamais les accapareurs de jupes et de souliers n'ont voulu les rendre: on les a trouvés chez eux dans de jolies niches, comme des idoles, ou plutôt, nous a dit un savant, comme des fétiches de Guinée, ayant une sorte de culte et une espèce d'autel" 'The grabbers of skirts and shoes didn't want to return them: they were found in their homes in pretty niches, like idols, or rather, as a scholar has told us, like Guinean fetishes, having a kind of cult and sort of altar' (232–33). Although both examples may disappoint in their lack of psychological detail, this absence effectively draws attention to the most salient aspect of the texts: Rétif's use of new terminology that coincides with his presentation of two extreme cases of fetishistic theft, the first resulting in imprisonment, the second in a May-December marriage.

While the images of Saintepaille's idolatrous cult and temple may have transmitted the fetishist's ritualistic reverence, they were ostensibly less effective in capturing the primal and instinctive need at the center of Rétif's portrayals. The African fetish, with its savage and exotic power and mysterious allure, seems to have provided the author with an ideal encapsulation of the inexplicable and uncontrollable urge to touch, acquire, and display women's shoes evinced by his male characters. Rétif's illness, followed by his death, in 1806, cut short any further exploration of the female foot and shoe as fetish in his works. Although he suggests that the analogy between

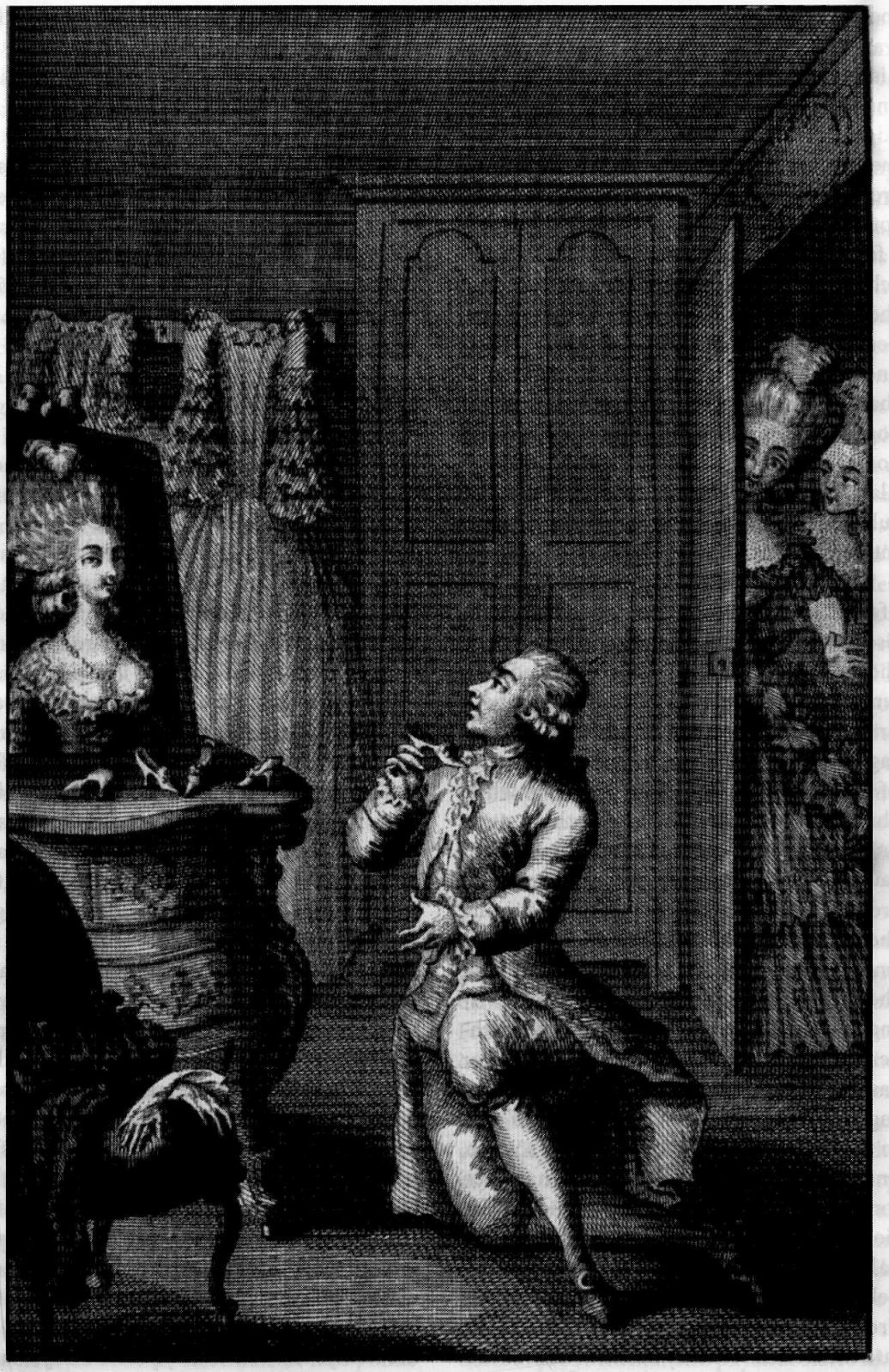

FIG. 4
Louis Binet, illustration to Rétif de la Bretonne, "Le bourru vaincu par l'amour" (274). Courtesy of the Bryn Mawr College Library.

foot and shoe worship and the African fetish was inspired by "un savant," he never reveals his source or tells whether he obtained the analogy directly or indirectly.[14] To my knowledge, Rétif's works contain the only documented use of *fetish* or its derivatives in an erotic context before Binet's writings on amorous fetishism in the late nineteenth century, a fact that has gone virtually unmentioned in scholarly studies.[15] However, in developing the conception, Rétif was indebted to a number of his contemporaries—authors, artists, and philosophers alike. There is no question that he had a talent for picking up on cultural vogues and immortalizing them in his work. Somewhat paradoxically, the trendy and popular aspect of his fiction contributed to the subsequent obscurity that kept its cultural interest hidden for so many years.

Like many of Rétif's works—not the least of which is his 1769 *Le pornographe*, a treatise on the reform of prostitution from which the modern term *pornography* is derived—his writings on the female foot and shoe are both prescient and precious documents, providing insight into the psychology and practice of foot fetishism and shoe fetishism while charting the modern course of their study and diagnosis. A century before Binet, Rétif saw the similarities between the religious and erotic fetish and elaborated on them, coining the modern psychosexual term and making important contributions to the invention of the theoretical concept. It is hardly surprising that late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sexologists mined Rétif's works for case-study material. What is perhaps surprising is the extent to which his writings' role in the development of modern sexual science, and ultimately of psychoanalysis, has been forgotten. Their dubious methods and conclusions aside, the writings of the sexologists are valuable in illuminating the cultural stakes behind the medical use of eighteenth-century French libertine and erotic literature. While late-nineteenth-century French cultural elitists and moralists may have hoped that the medical establishment's appropriation of Rétif's texts would guarantee his literary oblivion, in fact the opposite occurred. Although some scholars might hesitate to admit it, Rétif studies today was in part born of the attention his works received as a result of their clinical study at the turn of the last century. I turn now to a consideration of the controversial medical use of Rétif's texts, with all its surprising and unintended cultural effects.

Rétif as Fetishist: The Sexological and Literary Debates

In *The Sexual Life of Our Time*, first published in 1907, Iwan Bloch summarizes Rétif's contributions to the development of theories of sexual fetishism: "foot and shoe fetishism may be denoted by the term 'retifism,' for it is this sexual perversion which manifests itself most markedly in Rétif's life . . . and in him, also, this perversion found its first literary interpreter and apostle. . . . Rétif first described typical foot fetishism and shoe fetishism, and also wrote the first history of this subject" (628). In calling for the perversion to be known as "retifism," Bloch echoed the assessment of the sex researchers who would draw on and recognize the significance of Rétif's works for more than four decades. Although traces of this history have been retained in studies of fetishism and in literary scholarship on the author, many of its details have been lost, partly because of the number and obscurity of these texts, partly because of the sexologists' questionable methods of research and documentation. In using Rétif to elaborate concepts of foot fetishism and shoe fetishism, the sex doctors relied more on the works of a few of their predecessors than on Rétif's writing; in the process, they quoted the same scientific and literary passages, losing track of medical studies and the content of Rétif's corpus—including his revolutionary use of the term *fetish*. While they provide important

insight into the privileged place and function accorded to Rétif in pathologies of fetishism, these texts are perhaps less compelling in their diagnostic content than in the broader issues they raise concerning questions of territory, national and disciplinary, surrounding the study of his work. The medical examination of Rétif and his work provoked a series of polemics centered on notions of morality, intellectual validity, and artistic creativity that had a formative impact on sexual science as well as literary studies. These debates can be traced back to the advent of the modern nosological classification of fetishistic perversion in Binet's 1887 "Le fétichisme dans l'amour."

In developing the concept of amorous fetishism, Binet was ostensibly influenced by nineteenth-century theoretical discourses, such as those of Auguste Comte and Karl Marx, that transposed de Brosses's concept of religious fetishism to different realms of study.[16] Binet was also following on Jean-Martin Charcot and Valentin Magnan's work on genital inversion (1882), which, without naming them as such, related fetishistic behaviors to latent homosexual impulses. Fetishism's preeminence in the late nineteenth century was in many ways linked to its perceived association with homosexuality, one of the dominant preoccupations of the period. His essay was seminal not only in its advancement of the terminology and etiology of erotic fetishism but also in its use of eighteenth-century French literature in discussing and diagnosing the perversion.

Binet begins by positing a similarity between religious fetishism, or the adoration of a material object to which the fetishist attributes mysterious power, and amorous fetishism, which Binet defines as the intense genital stimulation "dégénérés" 'degenerates' experience in contemplating certain inanimate objects that leave normal people indifferent: "L'adoration de ces malades pour des objets inertes comme des bonnets de nuit ou des clous de bottines ressemble de tous points à l'adoration du sauvage ou du nègre pour des arêtes de poissons ou pour des cailloux brillants" 'These sick people's adoration for inert objects such as nightcaps or ankle-boot nails resembles in all respects the savage's or Negro's adoration for fish bones or shiny pebbles' (2–3). He argues that while fetishism is a typical aspect of love, the adoration for women's eyes, hair, odor, clothing, or accessories is excessive in the pathological fetishist. Although Binet draws on his own clinical observations as well as those of colleagues, his primary source is literary: the *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For Binet, Rousseau exemplifies fetishism of a psychic quality, in which a person focuses not only on a body part or object but also on the emotional state it reflects—in Rousseau's case, the gestures and expressions that reveal a woman's anger or disdain (57). Rousseau also provides an example of "la volupté de la douleur," or the fetishistic penchant for physical suffering (his desire to be hit stemming from Mlle Lambercier's spanking him as a child), and of the propensity for erotic rumination, or the ability to draw pleasure from remembered or imagined moments of fetishistic encounter (his capacity to replay this episode in his mind and substitute other women in Mlle Lambercier's role [61–62, 78]).

Although the methodological problems inherent in using literature to provide clinical descriptions of deviant sexuality appear evident to the modern reader, Binet's reliance on French writing is hardly surprising when one considers its context. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the boundary between literature and science became more fluid as practitioners in each domain borrowed methods and materials from the other. The literary styles and movements of the period, such as realism, naturalism, decadence, and the fantastic, exemplified by Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, drew on quasi-scientific observations to probe mental and physical states like

hysteria, hallucination, degeneration, and morbidity. The rich documentation surrounding the human body and psychology found in contemporary literary texts appeared particularly enticing to medical doctors searching for case histories on which to base developing theories of perversion. As Binet's essay attests and Sade's posterity makes clear, the libertine and erotic writings of the French Enlightenment, their exploration of sexuality grounded in a larger interrogation of human nature, social constructs, and individual constraints, provided some of the most constitutive material for the sexologists' theories—a usefulness implied by the term *literary sexology*, which has been used to describe these texts.[17] The focus of late-nineteenth-century medical researchers working to compile case studies of fetishism soon turned from Rousseau to Rétif, a shift that was prompted by a phenomenon known as "Restifomanie."[18] The publication of several critical studies and editions of Rétif's works in the 1870s and 1880s contributed to an increased interest in the author as well as to a growing awareness of his erotic fixation on women's feet and shoes.[19]

The initial medical diagnoses of Rétif's fetishism appear as brief but highly visible references in two classic late-nineteenth-century studies of sexual perversion. Albert Moll's *Untersuchungen über die Libido sexualis* (1897) contains the first mention of Rétif's foot and shoe (boot) fetishisms, in a footnote that uses citations from *Monsieur Nicolas* and *Les nuits de Paris* (1788) to outline the origins of the author's obsession and the reasons behind his preference for high heels, which include the fact that they make a woman's foot and gait more attractive and gather less dirt (498–99). Krafft-Ebing's subsequent incorporation of a footnote referring to Rétif's foot fetishism as described by Moll in revised editions of *Psychopathia sexualis* sealed the author's status as one of the first and best-known cases to be diagnosed at the turn of the century (159). Shortly thereafter, a 1901 article in the *Revue de psychiatrie* presented principal passages of "Le joli pied" as a psychopathological observation of foot obsession, stating in a short introduction that the story provided a complete picture of the characteristic symptoms of the syndrome: the irresistibility of an obsessive idea, the manifestation of conscience before and after a crisis, the concomitant anxiety and subsequent feelings of satisfaction ("Joli pied" 16).

For the next decade, the medical community viewed Rétif's fetishism as an established fact, and his works were seen as quasi-scientific texts containing clinical descriptions of the perversion that required little or no comment. With their narrative format, psychological richness, and confessional characteristics, Rétif's portraits seemed to slip effortlessly into the contemporary sexological corpus, until the challenges posed by literary scholarship forced doctors to justify and reconsider their diagnoses. This exchange reveals the extent to which sexual scientists and literary scholars worked off each other to define their methods and objects of inquiry. In the process, the study of Rétif became invested with symbolic significance for both groups: for doctors he was proof of the truth and value of sexological theory; for literary critics, evidence of their superior aesthetic judgment and discernment.

The sexologists were not unaware of the problems involved with making literary texts the object of medical study. In Rétif's case, however, questions about the validity of using literature to access psychological and sexual truths were quickly dismissed by the assertion of the autobiographical nature of his fiction. In his 1904 article "Un romancier fétichiste: Restif de la Bretonne," which became a seminal reference for doctors interested in literary pathologies of fetishism and of Rétif in particular, Dr. Louis addresses these objections by stating that the depth of the author's portrayals attests to their autobiographical basis: "On le voit, rien ne manque au type de fétichiste tracé par Restif, et qu'on retrouve dans nombre de ses œuvres: c'est son propre portrait,

qu'indubitablement l'auteur nous a inconsciemment livré" 'As one sees, nothing is lacking in the typical fetishist sketched by Rétif, and which one finds in a number of his works: it is undoubtedly his own portrait, which the author has unconsciously given to us' (356). Louis emphasizes the scientific value of Rétif's texts by juxtaposing clinical descriptions of fetishism drawn from the works of Paul Garnier and Léon Thoinot with citations from "Le joli pied," using italics to highlight the parallels between the medical passages and the literary quotations that follow. Thus, not only does literature become a tool to understand sexological phenomena but also sexual science becomes a means to interpret literature. At the same time as Rétif's protagonist is shown to exemplify various characteristics of fetishistic perversion—the sexual stimulation and release procured by fetishistic activity, the inherent and congenital nature of fetishism, the fetishist's obsessive and impulsive stealing and collecting of desired objects—these characteristics are used in turn to predict Saintepaille's behavior, including his inability, once he starts, to stop himself from taking women's shoes. The essay concludes with a footnote calling for further pathological study of the author, which is envisioned as contributing to both medical and literary scholarship (357n).[20]

Louis's text is significant in inscribing the parameters of the cultural and literary debates surrounding the medical study of Rétif. The article provides a model for the literary pathography of Rétif in a French context; before its publication, the author's works had been examined in this vein primarily by German doctors.[21] The nationalistic implications of the use of eighteenth-century French literature by German sexologists influenced French approaches to the same material. The stereotypes and resentments held by both sides propagated by the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), which led to France's loss of Alsace and Lorraine as well as to the internecine conflict known as the Commune, were still close to the surface at the turn of the century. German sexological texts on Rétif betray the tactics of sexual racism that had been in use for centuries, whereby a foreign country (often the closest or the current national enemy) was blamed for unnatural sexual behavior and vices (Porter and Hall 276). In his study of the marquis de Sade, first published in 1900, Bloch (writing under the name Eugen Dühren) attributes the perversity of the texts of authors such as Sade and Rétif to the "erotic frivolity" and "voluptuous ferocity" inherent in the French national character; he goes on to provide assurances that the same sexual degeneration that plagued France and contributed to its depopulation did not menace Germany, because of the striking differences in the nations' moral values (*Marquis de Sade* 460–62). Similarly, in his 1906 study of Rétif, where he first proposes the term "retifism" for foot and shoe fetishism, Bloch signals the French predilection for this taste (*Rétif* 371–72). While researchers such as Magnus Hirschfeld pointed out the dangers inherent in such statements, vestiges of these prejudicial tendencies lingered in German writings on French sexuality into the 1930s.[22]

Sexological writings on Rétif thus posed two threats to French national pride and standing: the associations made between the author and illicit sexual practices could be seen as challenging France's moral reputation as well as the status of its literature.[23] Louis's text underscores the dilemma of French doctors faced with the proliferation of German studies on Rétif: while professionally and even patriotically motivated to respond with their own assessments and reclaim Rétif for French medical territory, their examination only drew further attention to the "immoral" aspects of French literary texts. At the same time as he lauds the acuity of Rétif's pathological observations, Louis is careful to celebrate the literary charms of his text and the healthy lessons it contains about conjugal love, as if to redeem the author and his writings. The literary community quickly caught hold of the disciplinary

stakes involved in the medical appropriation of Rétif's works as well. In his introduction to a 1907 edition of *Monsieur Nicolas*, John Grand-Carteret launched a lengthy defense of Rétif that questioned doctors' abilities to pass judgment on authors and their writings; he signaled the importance of literary context and imagination. Systematically countering Louis's statements about the pathological nature of the author's fetishism, Grand-Carteret argues for the normalcy of Rétif's attraction to the aesthetic beauty of the female form ("nous sommes tous voués au *fétichisme*" 'we are all dedicated to *fetishism*' [vii]) and points out the particular fascination with the female foot in eighteenth-century France: "Si donc Restif fut un fétichiste pour avoir aimé tout ce que son époque aima, le XVIII[e] siècle, en entier, doit l'être avec lui" 'If therefore Restif was a fetishist for having loved everything that his era loved, the eighteenth century, in its entirety, must be one along with him' (xvii). Furthermore, he lambastes the doctor for conflating author and character, emphasizing the fictional aspects of Rétif's writing (xiv). He similarly denounces the contemporary tendency to equate literary genius with illness, a tendency that led to Rétif's inclusion in Joseph Grasset's 1907 *Demifous et demiresponsables* and Dr. Augustin Cabanès's 1912 "Les névrosés de la littérature et de l'histoire."[24]

Grand-Carteret's apology shifted the immediate focus of the debate surrounding Rétif to French intellectual territory. His rejection of the complementarity of scientific and literary inquiry, specifically his designation of literature as a discrete field that calls for distinct modes of analysis, marks a pivotal moment in the author's study. Grand-Carteret's arguments forced doctors to hone their theories by grappling with two assumptions: the autobiographical status of Rétif's fiction and the pathological nature of his fetishism. In his 1912 article "Restif de la Bretonne fétichiste," Dr. Jean Avalon addresses Grand-Carteret's charges by suggesting that the doctor's critical capacities are superior to the literary scholar's, pointing out the scholar's reluctance to see a reflection of the author's mentality—particularly his perverse sexuality—in his works. Following Louis, Avalon quotes passages of "Le joli pied" to illustrate Saintepaille's status as "un fétichiste parfait" 'a perfect fetishist' and argues that, in the absence of medical literature on the topic, Rétif looked to himself for inspiration. He goes on to cite passages from *Monsieur Nicolas* that reveal the author's morbid obsession with the female foot (89–90). In his medical thesis of the same year, Charpentier responds to the literary claim on Rétif by positing that the author "appartient" 'belongs' to psychiatry, "parce que son cerveau et ses œuvres contiennent des monstruosités, d'anomalies pathologiques et de folie" 'because his brain and his works contain monstrosities, pathological anomalies and madness'; he backs up his assertion by diagnosing any number of perversions evident in Rétif's writing, including mythomania, paranoia, and erotomania as well as pathological fetishism combining the shoe and foot (*Restif . . . fétichisme* 34, 187–90). Louis Barras's 1913 riposte shows just how imbricated the scientific and literary study of Rétif had become: the medical thesis is introduced by Grand-Carteret, who inspires Barras's assessment of the normalcy of Rétif's penchant and Barras's declaration that Rétif's fetishism is that of his century. Emphasizing the artistic imagination and invention that distinguished literary works from clinical narratives, Barras attacks at length the practice of medicalizing literature: "L'œuvre disparaît devant la tare, ou plutôt on en arrive à ne plus s'intéresser, dans l'œuvre, qu'à ce qui peut prouver la tare. . . . Les médecins, esclaves de leur mentalité professionnelle, sont, dans les œuvres, à la recherche de l'anormal. . . . Et l'ennuyeux, c'est que cela gagne le grand public" 'The work disappears before the [psychological] defect, or, rather, one comes to be interested only in that which, in the work, proves the defect. . . .

Doctors, slaves to their professional mentality, are in search of the abnormal in literary works . . . and what is tiresome is that this wins over the general public' (88).

The publication of Barras's thesis coincides with the beginning of a twenty-year period that saw a dearth of studies of Rétif's fetishism due to the decline of sexology signaled by these literary critiques and challenges. After the 1927 publication of Freud's essay on fetishism, the medical interest in Rétif was briefly revived. Freud's validation of the preeminence of foot and shoe fetishisms, which Freud attributes to the boy's looking up the woman's legs toward the genitals, focused attention once again on Rétif.[25] The medical and literary assessments published in the 1930s are remarkable for their assertions of Rétif's foundational importance in both fields.[26] The September 1934 issue of *Hippocrate* featured essays by Charpentier and Heine that summarized Rétif's contributions to pathologies of foot fetishism and shoe fetishism; Charpentier reiterates the main points of his 1912 thesis ("Restif . . . Étude"), while Heine repeats earlier calls to name the combination of the perversions "retifism," pointing out that Rétif distinguished between amorous and religious fetishism well before Binet ("Vieillesse 612–13).[27] Bachelin's "Restif de la Bretonne, écrivain et moraliste," also appearing in the issue, provides a literary counterpoint by arguing against the moral condemnation of Rétif's works; further, the essay establishes the author as worthy of serious study by positing his importance to the origins of realism and naturalism in France (645–46). Bachelin's essay is significant in signaling the beginning of the sustained literary consideration of the author, which can be attributed in part to the polemics surrounding the sexological study of him. During this period, the effects of these dynamics in shaping scientific and literary scholarship were recognized by researchers such as Havelock Ellis, who acknowledged the impact of literary views on Rétif's medical assessment as well as the sexologists' role in drawing critics' attention to his texts.[28]

As Ellis suggests, at the same time as the medical examination of Rétif was in decline, literary scholars began considering his work more seriously. In addition to Bachelin's essay, Frantz Funck-Brentano's 1928 book-length analysis provided a basis for the reassessment of Rétif's literary status. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the publication of a number of critical studies put Rétif on the literary map. While necessarily addressing his sexuality, these biobibliographic works tended to downplay or dismiss issues of his perversion to draw attention to his literary merit.[29] In the 1970s and 1980s, the role of the sexologists was further eclipsed by literary critics' focus on reclaiming Rétif from social historians.[30] Although now largely forgotten, the medical appropriation of Rétif had important implications for the field of literary studies. The sexologists' use of his writings and the ensuing literary response posed fundamental questions about the relation between an author's life and his fiction, probed issues of artistic creativity and its sources, and considered the cultural and disciplinary status of literature and the tools used in its analysis. Further, and perhaps most important, it raised the possibility of separating authors' morality and the critical appreciation of their works. In arguing against the condemnation of Rétif's books on moral and sexual grounds, critics posited the legitimacy of studying them as well as erotic literature in general. In this way, they engaged the contemporary debates surrounding literary history and its study that precipitated the shift away from traditional, philological modes of literary evaluation, or "l'homme et l'œuvre" approaches focused on sources and influences, to modern forms of literary criticism that privilege the text and its plurality of meanings independent of issues of historical context, biographical detail, and authorial intent.[31] However, as Rétif's example demonstrates, the formal analysis of eighteenth-century French libertine and erotic

texts underwent a lengthy evolution as critics grappled for decades with the aftermath of the sexologists' categorizations.

Culture Wars: French Literature and Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

While literary pathologies of Rétif mobilized a core of defenders who laid the foundation for his modern critical study, they also solidified the view of the author as an erotically obsessed sexual deviant whose writing detailed his salacious penchants. Well into the 1950s, literary analyses of Rétif's corpus were colored by the sexologists' diagnoses of his psychological problems and perversions. The issue of his sexual deviance could not be avoided, and in addressing the topic critics drew polemical lines similar to those traced in earlier debates. A number of studies of the author from this period were marked by uneasiness and contradiction as scholars endeavored to acknowledge Rétif's literary interest while condemning his amorous practices. George Saintsbury justifies including Rétif in *A History of the French Novel* (1917) by noting that while he would have been a better writer if he had reined in his sexuality and morbid obsession, he was remarkable for his realism (452–56). In his 1928–31 *French Novelists, Manners, and Ideas*, F. C. Green laments the psychiatric studies of Rétif that limited the appreciation of his originality; at the same time, Green calls him a sex-ridden maniac who shared shameless and revolting erotic reminiscences ([1928] 228; [1931] 5, 7). Other critics appeared to highlight Rétif's deviant sexuality for sensationalist purposes. Henry Marchand's 1933 *Sex Life in France*, void of "anything and everything which would appeal to pornographic-minded readers" and filled with moralizing condemnations of Rétif's writings, nonetheless cites Albert Eulenberg's assessment of his wild sensuality, idolatrous self-worship, and exhibitionism and discusses his penchants for women's feet and shoes and predilections for incest and cunnilingus (24, 192–97).[32] In *The French Pornographer: Restif de la Bretonne* (1946), presented as the first serious critical study of Rétif in English, C. R. Dawes illustrates his analysis with more than a dozen eighteenth-century French erotic engravings and, while avowing it difficult "in an English book intended for general circulation," concludes with a synopsis of Rétif's abnormal sexuality drawn from Charpentier and Heine (205–10). With their teasing omissions and paradoxical morality, such studies recall Foucault's theories on the pleasure-power dyad inherent in the development of modern scientific discourses of sexuality—on the pleasure derived by a powerful few who access, produce, and police talk about sex.

While critics such as Foucault, Jeffrey Weeks, and Lawrence Birken have suggested various reasons for the rise of sexological discourse in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century,[33] only a handful of scholars have addressed the cultural meaning and significance of the French preoccupation with fetishism. Nye associates the development of the concept of fetishistic perversion with a moment of French cultural crisis based on anxiety about health and depopulation, about degeneration, and about declines in marital fertility and in the nation's geopolitical status (15). Apter adds that fetishism's kinship to eighteenth-century libertinage may have provided "a return ticket" to a decadent past in an age of bourgeois moralism (16).

Rétif's example complements these theories by illuminating another aspect of the French fixation on perversion during this period. If the appropriation of Rétif by the sexologists provided them with ample material for case studies when there was a dearth of clinical examples, it also seems to have solved, at least temporarily, a problem weighing on France's moral and cultural psyche—how to categorize and explain eighteenth-century libertine writings and solidify their exclusion

from the French literary corpus. Given the ties between medicine and narrative, to deal with the problem of national sexuality was to deal with the problem of national literature at a time when France was particularly sensitive about its cultural supremacy and patrimony in the light of the increasing power and influence of nations such as Britain, Germany, and Italy and the challenges posed by Third Republic initiatives to modernize the nation and educate its populace. The racially motivated commentaries of German sexologists like Bloch only underscored the necessity of addressing issues of morality in relation to the French national character and literary tradition. Indeed, the tone of condemnation or concern seen in many of the pathographies surrounding Rétif indicates that there is more at stake than simple diagnoses: defining his perversions and relegating him to the category of the abnormal seem to have been important not only for the moral and physical health of the nation but also for its literary status.

Significantly, as Rétif's works were being mined by the European medical establishment, they were being excluded from the anthologies serving to delineate the French literary canon—a textual monument meant to shape the minds of young French citizens and instill pride in the nation's cultural heritage.[34] Omitted from the literary manuals of the mid-nineteenth-century critics Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Désiré Nisard, and Jacques Claude Demogeot, Rétif earned dismissive mentions in turn-of-the-century literary histories such as Ferdinand Brunetière's *Études critiques sur l'histoire de la littérature française* ("ce pourceau" 'that swine'), L. Petit de Julleville's *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française des origines à 1900* ("cet être malpropre et laid . . . dont la vie était un scandale public" 'this unsavory and unsightly being . . . whose life was a public scandal'), Eugène Gilbert's *Le roman en France pendant le XIX^e siècle* ("odieux" 'odious'; "le réalisme par ses pires côtés" 'realism in its worst aspects'), and Gustave Lanson's *Histoire de la littérature française* ("des œuvres aussi vulgaires que nombreuses; il n'appartient presque plus à la littérature" 'works as vulgar as they are numerous; he hardly belongs to literature anymore'); these damning assessments, focusing primarily on the author's character, eclipse any reluctant admissions about his contributions to realist and naturalist aesthetics (qtd. in Bachelin 638–39). The sexologists' uncovering of eighteenth-century French libertine texts facilitated and precipitated their public reburial, an official dissociation from the seamy side of French literature that sought to reject the nation's erotic tradition in order to confirm its literary supremacy. Sade's critical reception similarly reflects this phenomenon.[35] While this institutional housekeeping may have assuaged national cultural concerns and anxieties, the French reputation for debauchery and licentiousness solidified outside the nation's borders. As Marchand's and Dawes's texts suggest, the links among France, sex, and pornography were only more clearly drawn for foreign audiences in the wake of sexological inquiry.

The complex and contradictory history of Rétif's critical evaluation revolves around issues of exemplarity and uniqueness, two qualities traditionally used in judgments of literary and canonical value (Hulbert 122). In making a case for Rétif's exemplarity (i.e., his normalcy and the representativeness of his works), early defenders of the author downplayed the characteristics that made his works distinct; literary critics would later point to this uniqueness to exclude him from the canon. Although the past three decades have seen a resurgence of interest in Rétif as a literary subject, in some ways Rétif studies has never fully recovered from this checkered past. The feelings of sympathy and affinity demonstrated by Rétif's early defenders continued to influence analyses of the author into the 1970s, limiting the scope of inquiry into his works. The Société Rétif de la Bretonne and the serial *Études*

rétiviennes, established in 1985 to validate the author's study, run the risk of perpetuating his fetishistic cult. Somewhat ironically, Rétif remains less known and studied than Sade, whom Rétif himself condemned on moral grounds. Recuperated by the avant-garde and treated by critics such as Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Roland Barthes, Sade has entered the mainstream precisely because of the outrage provoked by his works, which are now perceived as integral to a broad and diverse canon (Ferguson 1–2).

The analysis of the pathographies surrounding Rétif is important not only for completely understanding his reception but also for illuminating the influence that eighteenth-century French libertine and erotic literature had on the development of modern psychiatric thought and psychoanalytic theory. As an examination of his writings and of their medical use demonstrates, Rétif stands at the origins of modern conceptions of the sexual subject by playing a prominent role in the clinical delineation between normal and abnormal sexual behavior at the turn of the twentieth century. Needless to say, much work on Rétif remains to be done in the context of the history of sexuality. Given the current cultural interest in foot and shoe fetishisms evinced by an episode of *Sex and the City* featuring a fetishistic shoe salesman ("Douleur"), the 2004 publication of Caroline Cox's cultural history of the stiletto heel (P. Green), and the cultish popularity of shoe designers such as Manolo Blahnik, who avows celibacy to channel all his sexual energy into his creations (P. Green), it appears to be a particularly retivian moment to undertake this research.

Notes

I am grateful for the input of Susan Edmunds, Lynn Festa, Gerlinde Sanford, and James Steintrager in the writing of this essay.

1. Testud's study is significant in this regard. Conceding that the subject cannot be avoided, he dismisses the issue of Rétif's fetishism in a footnote summarizing the history of scholarship on the question and providing brief citations that illustrate Rétif's deviant sexual comportment, for which Testud resists the term "fetishism" (7–8n). Few literary scholars have written about Rétif's fetishistic portrayals of women's feet and shoes in recent decades; examples include Coward; Masseau.

2. For a discussion of pathography, see Apter 34–38.

3. In the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault discusses the power and pleasure that an elite derived from the creation and study of sexual discourses put to regulatory uses (see esp. 18–22, 60–67, 94–98, 107–51). Critics have subsequently explored this argument in relation to issues of class, gender, and sexual orientation. For an overview of these politics, see Porter and Hall 3–13; Porter and Teich 1–26.

4. It is important to note as well the influence on de Brosses of Hume's 1757 *Natural History of Religion*, which was translated into French in 1759. Good discussions of the historical development of the concept of fetishism include Assoun; Iacono.

5. *Thérèse philosophe* (1748), attributed to the marquis d'Argens, provides one of the best-known examples of the (mis)use of religious discourse and practice in pornographic works. In one scene, as Thérèse watches from a closet, Father Dirrag flagellates her friend Mlle Eradice while reciting scripture and penetrates her while leading her to believe he is purging her of impurities with the cord of Saint Francis; at the height of her pleasure, Eradice cries out that she feels celestial happiness and sees paradise. Sade's *La nouvelle Justine* (1797) provides another example in a passage where Justine prostrates herself before an altar while a priest turns her posture to other uses (595–98). For a discussion of the antireligious content of eighteenth-century French pornographic writings, see Darnton 89–95; Hunt 317–21; M. Jacob 194–202; Wagner 72–86. Darnton includes a translation of key passages of *Thérèse philosophe* at the end of his book (255–62).

6. For a discussion of eighteenth-century fashion, see Delpierre, particularly 14–21; Hart and North, particularly 34–69; Ribeiro 53–66.

7. In Marivaux's *La vie de Marianne* (1731–42), the protagonist shows her injured foot to Valville, much to the delight of both parties (67–68). A more developed example can be found in Mme Benoît's *Agathe et Isidore* (1768), in which Isidore is carried away by his passion while caressing the foot of his mistress. Rétif cites the passage in the notes to *Le pied de Fanchette* (170).

8. Although Krafft-Ebing initially saw all fetishism as pathological, he and other sexologists later distinguished between physiological and pathological fetishism. Considered normal, physiological fetishism was the attraction to a body part or object associated with the beloved, whereas pathological or abnormal fetishism was charac-

terized by the obsession for the part or object independent of the person. Foot fetishism and shoe fetishism were considered pathological in this system of categorization. While distinct, the two types of fetishism were seen as related; Iwan Bloch notes that isolated foot fetishism was rare and that it was generally associated with shoe fetishism. See Hauser 221–23; Bloch 611–29.

9. Examples of this mentality abound, found in the text of *Agathe et Isidore*, in which the marquise's foot is referred to as "le charmant extrait de toutes ses autres beautés" 'the charming extract of all her other beauties' (Rétif de la Bretonne, *Pied* 170). Diderot also comments on the phenomenon in his *Traité du beau*: "quoique nous ne connaissions que la chaussure, nous jugeons aussi de la jambe" 'although we only know the shoe, we also judge the leg' (38). For a discussion of the importance of vestimentary codes and appearances in eighteenth-century France, see Roche 29–48, 177–210, 485–89. I have modernized the French in all quotations; all translations are mine except where otherwise noted.

10. In the notes to the novel, Rétif provides dozens of ancient and contemporary examples of the seduction of the female foot culled from a variety of sources, including biblical, Chinese, Greek, and Persian history and the works of Anacreon, Horace, Ovid, Perrault, Rousseau, and Voltaire. In note 14, he explains that this scholarly apparatus is intended to win the confidence of his readers (166).

11. Rétif also employs religious terms such as *idole* 'idol' and *hommage* 'homage' in his depictions of foot and shoe eroticism in *L'anti-Justine*. See in particular 348, 350, 365–67, 421, 426, 438, 536.

12. Krafft-Ebing argued that the majority of, if not all, cases of shoe fetishism were based on a masochistic desire for self-humiliation and that in most of them being trodden on played a part; he also noted that acts of theft were related to all cases of fetishism (158–60). Ellis and Heine would later use Rétif's case to argue against the association between foot and shoe fetishisms and masochism, as discussed below.

13. A brief scene of shoe fetishism in "Le bourru vaincu par l'amour," appearing in *Les contemporaines*, inspires the engraving that illustrates the story. The protagonist loves his wife but treats her with cruelty and indifference, since he is determined not to give her the upper hand in their marriage. Unaware that he is being observed by his wife and her sister, he expresses his true sentiments while touching and kissing his wife's clothing and accessories. Her shoe, which brings to mind her pretty foot, inspires "un culte d'adoration" 'a cult of adoration' and his quasi-religious respect (316–17).

14. It is possible that Rétif is making a coy reference to Rousseau or Voltaire, whose works contained well-known mentions of the fetishes of African religions, cited above. As early as the 1770s, Rétif had been unfavorably compared to the two authors, dubbed "le Rousseau du ruisseau" 'the gutter Rousseau' and "le Voltaire des femmes de chambre" 'the chambermaids' Voltaire.'

15. Fédi (218–19) and Heine ("Vieillesse" 612–13) may be the only scholars who have noted the singular role Rétif's works play in this history.

16. In his 1844 *Discours sur l'esprit positif*, Comte used the notion of religious fetishism to elaborate a positivist theory of the evolution of human thought; Marx presented his theories of commodity fetishism, or the socially constructed value of material objects based on an economy of desire, in his 1867 *Das Kapital*. Pietz discusses these theories (133–43).

17. For a discussion of literary sexology in eighteenth-century France, see Vartanian, in particular 347–49, 352–53.

18. The increased literary interest in Rétif can be traced to the publication of the first critical study of his work, by Charles Monselet, in 1854. In 1875 Firmin Boissin commented on the phenomenon, noting that the rarity and increasing value of Rétif's works, combined with the passionate collecting of elite bibliophiles, had signaled to the general public that his writings were worthy of consideration (8–13).

19. Publications from this period include Paul Lacroix Jacob's 1875 *Bibliographie et iconographie de tous les ouvrages de Restif de la Bretonne* and editions of *Les contemporaines* (1875) and *Mes inscriptions* (1889). The Goncourt brothers' mention of *Le pied de Fanchette* in their 1862 *La femme au dix-huitième siècle* (347) and Octave Uzanne's 1881 edition of the novel (*Contes*) drew particular attention to the author's fetishism.

20. In his 1905 *Fétichistes et érotomanes*, Émile Laurent takes up this charge by discussing the author in a section on foot fetishism. Following Louis, he recounts the story of "Le joli pied" almost in its entirety and concludes by affirming the quality of Rétif's medical analyses.

21. German medical studies containing references to Rétif from this time period also include Dessoir (318–19) and Eulenberg (39–40).

22. In his work on racism, written while he was in exile from Nazi Germany in 1933–34, Hirschfeld attacks the "racist fanatics" who emphasized the racial basis of "sexual peculiarities" such as homosexuality and sodomy; he particularly takes issue with Bloch's assertions about the sexual anomalies of various races in *The Sexual Life of Our Time* (Hirschfeld 149–74). In his study of Sade and Rétif, Otto Flake's attempts to counter generalizations about French sexuality and character ultimately advance others about French cruelty and debauchery (see esp. 11, 196–97).

23. In his preface to the 1901 French translation of Bloch's work on Sade, Octave Uzanne demonstrates his sensitivity to these issues in his adamant defense of French mores, arguing that descriptions of eighteenth-century Parisian vice were exaggerated by writers and foreigners (see esp. ix–xiia).

24. "Les névrosés de la littérature et de l'histoire" was reprinted in *Grand névropathes* (1930). For a discussion of this trend, see Gilman 217–38.

25. Freud built on the works of the sexologists to elaborate a theory of fetishism as a male response to female lack, positing that the fetish substitutes for the woman's (mother's) penis, which the boy does not want to admit is absent (20).

26. In *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, for example, Havelock Ellis testifies to the centrality of Rétif in the development of sexual theory, calling him "[p]robably the first case of shoe-fetishism ever recorded in any detail" and using the case of Rétif to argue against the association between foot and shoe fetishisms and masochism advanced by Moll and Krafft-Ebing (*Erotic Symbolism* 18, 32).

27. Heine also includes a mention of Rétif's fetishism in his 1936 *Recueil de confessions et observations psychosexuelles*, where he introduces one of Krafft-Ebing's cases, in which shoe fetishism is associated with masochism, by mentioning the contrasting example of Rétif (171).

28. In his 1930 introduction to an English translation of *Monsieur Nicolas*, Ellis recognizes the influence of Grand-Carteret's and Barras's assertions of Rétif's normalcy. The introduction is reprinted in *From Rousseau to Proust*; see in particular 149–50.

29. See, for example, Trahard; Tabarant; Bégué; Childs; and Chadourne.

30. In the 1970s, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's reading of Rétif's *La vie de mon père* (1778) gave rise to a debate with the literary scholar Georges Benrekassa on the use of literary texts as historical documents. See also Goulemot.

31. For discussions of literary history and its detractors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Compagnon 163–212; Moisan 43–59.

32. Marchand's reference to Eulenberg is incorrect; the diagnosis comes from Dessoir's *Geschichte der neueren deutschen Psychologie* (318–19).

33. Foucault links the advent of modern sexual science with bourgeois morality and the attendant normative ideal of the heterosexual couple (158–68); Weeks signals the importance of the publication of Darwin's works, which led to a revival of interest in the dynamics of sexual selection, the sexual impulse, and sexual difference (67); Birken asserts that sexology emerged during the transition from a proto-industrial culture of production to a mass industrial culture of consumption, which brought about a breakdown in sexual difference and a revitalization of sexual taste (vii).

34. Barbara Herrnstein Smith's arguments about the politics of canon formation, specifically her assertion that canonical works reflect and reinforce establishment ideologies, are helpful in illuminating the processes behind Rétif's exclusion from the canon (esp. 33–34). For discussions of the relations among canon formation, nationalism, and education during the Third Republic, see Compagnon 83–89, 141–47; Moisan 4–6, 79–86.

35. In his use by the sexologists and his exclusion from the literary canon, Sade provides an example that in many ways complements Rétif's. For a discussion of Sade's critical reception in France, see Hulbert; also Delon's introduction to Sade's *Œuvres* xliv–xlix.

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