

PERIODICALS AS *PROXÉNÈTES*: EROTIC COMPLICITY IN *DON JUAN* (1895–1900)

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French literary culture at the *fin de siècle* was undeniably sex-obsessed. Titillating forms of spectacle, such as the Moulin Rouge and Folies Bergère, sold sex appeal and arousal to an avid public. Bookshops and newspaper stands abounded with sensational novels and saucy magazines. Posters and adverts employed eye-catching sensual imagery to sell their wares. Although this playful eroticism is frequently eclipsed in accounts of the era by more familiar pathologizing discourses of decadence and degeneration, it nonetheless lives on in the popular imagination and in the Parisian tourism industry.¹ These textual and visual forms created an ambiguous erotic realm, hovering somewhere between phantasmatic representation and real-world practices and possibilities. In the analysis below I show how the review *Don Juan* (1895–1900) wielded sex appeal, shared humour, and textual structures of response and involvement to create forms of erotic complicity between text, collaborator, and reader.² By shedding light on an overlooked literary genre, the *revue légère* (highly eroticized, but not necessarily pornographic, artistic and literary reviews), I aim to displace the fetishized literary object by attending to its ephemeral and uncanonized others.

In doing so, I take inspiration from the pioneering work of scholars such as Marie-Ève Thérénty, Alain Vaillant, and Dominique Kalifa, who assert the importance of periodical culture to literary creation and cultural production. Emphasizing the specificity of the press — notably its status as a mediating instrument that is created collectively and published periodically — these critics put forward a holistic approach that rejects traditional hierarchies in order to establish

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¹ Traditional accounts of *fin-de-siècle* eroticism include Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in fin-de-siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), and Vernon Rosario, *The Erotic Imagination: French Histories of Perversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). For a more recent popular history, see Dominique Kalifa, *Paris: une histoire érotique d’Offenbach aux sixties* (Paris: Payot, 2018).

² ‘Complicity’ here refers to bonds formed through the act of sharing ideas and behaviour considered criminal, guilty, or immoral. It encompasses legal definitions as well as illicit forms of sociability, co-operation, and collusion.

‘une histoire de la communication humaine’.³ Beyond the reach of a single work or critic, this project resembles its object of study: it is necessarily polyphonic and collective in nature. More than simply a revisionist gesture promoting critical ‘justice’, the close analysis of under-explored reviews contributes to the wider syncretical project by drawing attention to shaded areas of the cultural map. Like Rachel Mesch’s analysis of women’s magazines in *Having It All in the Belle Époque*, this article considers the textual forms and relations specific to periodical culture, its intersection with book culture, and the role of advertising, while also paying heightened attention to questions of cultural legitimacy, ephemerality, and legal history.⁴ By using this approach, I promote a broader understanding of the *fin-de-siècle* literary field, according to which canonized literary production can be better understood through its embeddedness in wider textual and material networks.

The saucy magazine ‘Don Juan’

The *fin-de-siècle* boom in French periodical production, enabled by improving print technologies and increased press freedom, led to the proliferation of cheaper, more ephemeral, literary and artistic reviews. These were often illustrated and aimed at a wide range of readerships, from the popular to the avant-garde. A notable emerging genre was the *revue légère* or saucy magazine, which was associated with erotic titillation. The best-known example is *La Vie parisienne*, founded during the Second Empire and published well into the twentieth century (1863–1970).⁵ Other notable titles include *Le Courrier français* (1884–1914), *Le [sic] Fin de siècle* (1891–1909), and *Le Frou-Frou* (1900–23). These reviews share key characteristics. First, they are illustrated, containing drawings frequently, if not almost always, centred on eroticized female bodies. Second, they are humorous: satire, irony, word play, and jokes appear throughout their visual and textual content. Third, they publish similar types of column: opinion pieces, gossip columns, literary and artistic reviews, *romans feuilletons*, advice/agonny-aunt columns, readers’ correspondence, alongside less obviously ‘literary’ forms such as the small ad, *réclame*, and other types of advertising. As I explore below, the practice of *réclame* — where an advert’s promotional text is disguised in order to pass as main copy — blurs generic boundaries, offering reviews such as *Don Juan* an opportunity for collaborative and collusive literary creativity.⁶

³ Introduction to *La Civilisation du journal: histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIX^e siècle*, ed. by Dominique Kalifa and others (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2011), pp. 8–21 (p. 19). See also *Presse et plumes: journalisme et littérature au XIX^e siècle*, ed. by Marie-Ève Thérénty and Alain Vaillant (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2004) and Marie-Ève Thérénty, *La Littérature au quotidien: poétiques journalistiques au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

⁴ Rachel Mesch, *Having It All in the Belle Époque: How French Women’s Magazines Invented the Modern Woman* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁵ For a recent in-depth study of *La Vie parisienne*, see Clara Sadoun-Édouard, *Le Roman de ‘La Vie parisienne’ (1863–1914): presse, genre, littérature et mondanité* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2018).

⁶ The term ‘*réclame*’ could also be used to refer to advertising and self-promotional techniques in general. As a specific advertising form, *réclame* was viewed with suspicion, since it blurred the distinction between overtly commercial and ostensibly non-commercial content. See Marc Martin, *Trois siècles de publicité en France* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992), and Marie-Ève Thérénty, ‘La Réclame de librairie dans le journal quotidien au XIX^e siècle: autopsie d’un objet textuel non identifié’, *Romantisme*, 155 (2012), 91–103.

Don Juan is a particularly representative — and as yet unstudied — example of the *revue légère* (see Figure 1). It was founded by Alfred Hippolyte Bonnet and run by René Emery. Although these names are not well known, Emery in particular is worthy of greater critical attention. He not only ran a series of *revues légères* but was also on friendly terms with notable literary figures and journalists, such as Aurélien Scholl and Rachilde. From 1891 to 1892, Emery was the editor-in-chief of *Le Fin de siècle*, where he accumulated several charges for ‘outrages aux bonnes mœurs’.⁷ He was condemned alongside other contributors of *Le Fin de siècle* on 30 December 1891 (one-month prison sentence, 3000-franc fine), 20 January 1892 (one-month prison sentence, 1000-franc fine), 27 January 1892 (three-month prison sentence, 3000-franc fine), and 25 May 1892 (thirteen-month prison sentence, 3000-franc fine).⁸ To avoid serving these sentences, Emery took voluntary exile in Belgium in the latter half of 1892.⁹ According to a letter that Emery wrote to the Decadent writer Rachilde, by mid-1893 he had got back onto the bandwagon, publishing from Belgium the first issue of a ‘revue morte-née’ called... *Don Juan*. This issue was swiftly seized by the authorities and appears to have left little or no other trace.¹⁰ The first issue of the Parisian *Don Juan* appeared on 8 June 1895. Within five months of its initial publication, the review claimed to have reached a circulation figure (‘tirage justifié’) of around 40,000 copies per issue (*Don Juan*, 19 October 1895). This reflects similar figures cited by *Le Fin de siècle* in 1896.¹¹ In response to this sign of popularity, *Don Juan* — which initially appeared weekly on Saturdays — became a bi-weekly from 11 January 1896. However, by mid-1898, the review’s success started to wane, as is suggested by its gradual reduction in size, content, and frequency. In 1900, the publication of *Don Juan* became increasingly erratic, before ceasing entirely.

The review’s content was incredibly eclectic. It printed a wide range of literary contributions, from up-and-coming avant-garde writers to popular authors of titillating fiction. These texts appeared alongside society gossip columns, reader-response competitions, and satirical illustrations. The front page hosted the review’s most notable regular columns: a charismatic comment-section-cum-

⁷ On the link between *Don Juan* and *Le Fin de siècle*, see Jean Watelet, *La Presse illustrée en France, 1814–1914*, 2 vols (Lille: Atelier national de reproduction de thèses, 1998), II, 653–56, and Helen Craske, ‘La Complicité en réseau dans la presse frivole fin-de-siècle’, *Le Magasin du XIX^e siècle*, 10 (2020), 76–81.

⁸ See Paris, Archives de Paris (henceforward AP), série DiU6, Jugements, rôles, répertoires, audiences: DiU6 413, 30 December 1891, CHARDON Hippolyte and others; DiU6 415, 20 January 1892, EMERY René Marie and others; DiU6 416, 27 January 1892, CHARDON Hippolyte and EMERY René Marie; DiU6 428, 25 May 1892, JULIEN Henry Alexandre and EMERY René Marie. See also AP, série D2U6, Tribunal correctionnel de la Seine, Dossiers de procédure (1828–1940): D2U6 95, 25 May 1892, JULIEN, Henry Alexandre and EMERY, René Marie.

⁹ On Emery’s self-imposed exile, see Rodolphe Bringer, *Trente ans d’amour* (Paris: France-Édition, 1924), p. 33. My chronology of Emery’s exile is necessarily approximate due to the lack of specific dates in the sources available.

¹⁰ See ‘Lettre de René Emery à Rachilde’, Paris, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, LF MS 10207, no date.

¹¹ [‘Notre tirage] atteint aujourd’hui 37.500, et les commandes que nous avons déjà reçues pour le mois de mai vont le porter à plus de 40.000, — tous chiffres constatés officiellement par procès-verbaux d’huissier’; *Le Fin de siècle*, 16 April 1896. These figures, which might be exaggerated, are four times the circulation of the more expensive and fashionable *revue légère*, *La Vie Parisienne* (estimated at 8–10,000 copies by Sadoun-Édouard in *Le Roman de ‘La Vie parisienne’*, p. 62) and half that of *Le Figaro* in the same period (see Martin, *Trois siècles de publicité en France*, p. 95).



Figure 1 Paul Balluriau, Advertising poster for *Don Juan*, c. 1895. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

agony-aunt-column ('La Chronique de Sapho'), a gossip column ('La Vie parisienne'), and lampooning satirical pieces — initially in verse, then increasingly in prose — by 'Des Esquintes'. The pseudonym Des Esquintes is but one example of the review's proclivity for word play. It is a pun on the verb 'esquinter' — in this context 'to pan' or 'to slate' — and a playful reformulation of Huysmans's protagonist in *A rebours*. The review here aligns itself with, while playfully ironizing, avant-garde literary culture, by appealing to readers' shared knowledge (however rudimentary) of a landmark Decadent text, and by adopting the critical practice of 'écreintement' typical of avant-garde little magazines.¹² The two internal pages of the review featured a selection of short prose pieces, poems, serialized novels, and more sporadically recurring columns, such as a reader-response column, 'Nos cours d'amour', and a literary review column, 'La Vie littéraire'. Notable contributors included René Ghil, Rémy de Gourmont, Alfred Jarry, Camille Lemonnier, Jean Lorrain, Catulle Mendès, Oscar Méténier, Rachilde, and Léo Trézenik. The final page of each issue was adorned with a humorous and saucy drawing, by artists and caricaturists such as Édouard Couturier and Paul Balluriau, who contributed to many other satirical journals, such as *Le Courrier français*, *Le Fin de siècle*, *Gil Blas illustré* (1891–1903), *Le Rire* (1894–1971), and *L'Assiette au beurre* (1901–36). The frothy eroticism and polemical humour of these

¹² On the practice of 'écreintement', see Yoan Vérilhac, 'Questions de principes: partialité, intolérance, dogmatisme', in *La Jeune Critique des petites revues symbolistes* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2010), pp. 89–97.

drawings regularly pushed the limits of moral acceptability, attracting censorship to the review in July 1896, when Bonnet was condemned for ‘outrages aux bonnes mœurs’.

In this article, I suggest that periodicals like *Don Juan* enact a form of *proxénétisme*, or pimp journalism, due to their tendency to encourage, enable, and profit from erotic relations, both imagined and real. I use the term ‘proxénétisme’, evoking how magazines play the role of sexual go-between, to reframe and nuance a well-known literary trope. As Éléonore Reverzy explores in *Portrait de l’artiste en fille de joie*, the metaphor of literature as prostitution evolved and strengthened throughout the nineteenth century. She suggests that writers during the century’s later decades differed from their predecessors by overtly identifying with and appropriating the metaphor, rather than criticizing and rejecting it.¹³ The analogy took centre stage in fictional depictions of journalism in the era, most famously in Balzac’s *Illusions perdues* (1837–43), the Goncourt brothers’ *Charles Demailly* (1860), and Maupassant’s *Bel-Ami* (1885).¹⁴ Beyond fictional representation, reviews such as *Don Juan* pushed the metaphor closer to reality by intersecting text and imagery with material culture, through the medium of advertising. This tendency is particularly visible in the fourth page of the review, which featured not only humorous and titillating drawings (the most obvious target for censorship), but also half a page of advertisements. A large proportion of the adverts in *Don Juan* promoted sex-related products, including condoms, aphrodisiacs, and sex toys. Supported by these louche sources of income, *revues légères* participated in wider erotic networks that contributed to the lived sexual experiences of *fin-de-siècle* readers. In the analysis below, I consider the role *Don Juan* played in a wider network of criminally inculcated businesses that traded on sex appeal, highlighting a suggestive analogy between the review’s advertising column and the window of a sex shop. I then explore a selection of personal ads in *Don Juan*’s ‘Petites annonces’ column, which offered a creative space for the implication and manipulation of readerly desire. Finally, I analyse the literary implications of *réclame* in the review as a whole, suggesting that the intersection of, and cross-pollination between, advertising and art in *Don Juan* is a fundamentally creative one. By highlighting the promiscuity between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture made possible by the *revue légère* format — where original contributions from members of *avant-garde* elites rubbed shoulders with titillating titbits and sex-toy adverts — I argue for a wider and more nuanced appreciation of an area of literary production that is too frequently dismissed as no more than louche ephemera.

Illicit solidarity: selling sex in ‘Don Juan’ and Maison A. Clavierie

Don Juan profited financially from the sale of sexual products and services. Its advertising columns contain a plethora of adverts that, in half-veiled language, sell condoms, aphrodisiacs, erotica, and sex toys. One example is a recurring advert

¹³ Éléonore Reverzy, *Portrait de l’artiste en fille de joie: la littérature publique* (Paris: CNRS, 1993), p. 180.

¹⁴ See Edmund Birch, *Fictions of the Press in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

for Maison A. Claverie, a shop that sold a range of medical products — hernia belts, feminine-hygiene products, and prosthetic limbs — alongside sexual paraphernalia such as condoms, lubricant (*‘crème de Vénus’*), and sex toys (see [Figure 2](#)). By the start of the twentieth century, the shop had gained renown and approbation for its range of corsets, which were regularly advertised in *Femina* and *La Vie beureuse* — women’s magazines with greater social legitimacy and cultural cachet than *Don Juan*.¹⁵ The business had its own fabric factory at Romilly-sur-Seine, and its financial success enabled Claverie to purchase the Château des Milandes in 1900. Claverie then sold his business in 1905 to the entrepreneur Georges Bos, who would later be awarded the Legion of Honour for his contribution to French commerce.¹⁶ Claverie’s range of products highlighted suggestive analogies between forms of medical, sexual, and sartorial intimacy. However, it was precisely the intimate nature of these products that created practical issues for those selling them, due to *fin-de-siècle* sexual taboos and laws on public decency. The advert in *Don Juan* employs a vocabulary of security and discretion — ‘Prudence/Sureté’, ‘Sécurité absolue’, and ‘Complète discrétion’ — that metonymically signifies the type of products sold (most notably contraceptive devices), while confirming their taboo or illicit nature. In Claverie’s market, there was a tension between the need for publicity and the need for secrecy: to avoid clients’ embarrassment and legal complications, the shop must offer a clandestine service. This leads to the advert’s seeming self-contradiction: the euphemistic language used to refer to condoms (*‘ARTICLES SECRETS [...] garantis incassables’*) and sex toys (*‘APPAREILS SPÉCIAUX pour L’USAGE INTIME de l’Homme et de la Femme’*) is undermined by the way the advert draws attention to these words through capitalization and bold typeface. Through a process of veiling and unveiling, the reader/client makes the imaginative leap to ‘uncover’ the advert’s open secret. However shallow these covering gestures may seem, they were necessary in an era where the lines between licit and illicit sexual behaviours were routinely scrutinized and enforced through judicial mechanisms. These mechanisms could contribute to a business’s financial ruin if it was found guilty of *‘outrages aux bonnes mœurs’*.

Don Juan and Maison A. Claverie offered space in the public domain for the representation, encouragement, and enactment of sexual desires and behaviour considered immoral within traditional Christian frameworks — whether that be through the titillating references to adultery, extramarital sex, and lesbianism in the former, or through the contraceptive devices and sex toys sold and advertised by the latter. By doing so, they participated in what Maxence Rodemacq calls the *‘industrie de l’obscénité’*, producing sexual images, texts, and objects considered

¹⁵ For a presentation and analysis of *Femina* and *La Vie beureuse*, see Mesch, *Having It All in the Belle Époque*, pp. 42–43. Mesch notes how these magazines cultivated ‘identification between readers and subject matter’ by blending advertising and main copy and by promoting special offers on products such as Claverie’s ‘Liane’ corset.

¹⁶ See Agnès Chauvin, ‘Auguste Claverie, le parcours remarquable du propriétaire du château des Milandes en 1900’, *Bulletin de la Société historique et archéologique du Périgord*, 140 (2013), 357–62.



Figure 2 Advertisement for Maison A. Clavierie that appeared regularly in *Don Juan*. *Don Juan*, 18 November 1896, and *passim*. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

obscene by nineteenth-century moral standards.¹⁷ This industry was widespread within and beyond France's national borders, attracting censorship and litigation for the businesses involved.¹⁸ As critics such as Nicholas Harrison and Elisabeth Ladenson note, criminal categories such as obscenity are highly flexible and often seemingly contradictory.¹⁹ Indeed, obscenity is not clearly defined in the French Penal Code, nor in the 2 August 1882 law on 'outrages aux bonnes mœurs'. The latter responded conservatively to the 1881 Press Freedom Law, perceived to have enabled a sudden proliferation of morally corrupting erotic and pornographic material. According to the 1882 law, an individual could face a prison sentence of up to two years, and a fine of up to 3000 francs, for committing the crime of obscenity, 'par la vente, l'offre, l'exposition, l'affichage ou la distribution gratuite sur la voie publique et dans les lieux publics, d'écrits, d'imprimés autres que le livre, d'affiches, dessins, gravures, peintures, emblèmes ou images obscènes'.²⁰ After the law was passed, obscenity trials henceforth took place in the correctional courts as opposed to the *cours d'assises* — that is, without a jury, and usually behind closed doors ('à huis clos'). Furthermore, accomplices could be charged with the same punishment as the principal author of the crime. These changes facilitated condemnation and toughened punishment for those indicted.

Illustrated *revues légères* were frequently targeted by the 1882 obscenity law, and *Don Juan* was no exception. In July 1896, Bonnet faced trial for 'outrages aux bonnes mœurs', for publishing a series of images and an article entitled 'Les Sœurs Barrisson' (*Don Juan*, 25 April 1896) that were considered obscene by Paris's correctional courts. The inculpated works included two drawings by Léon Roze, 'Printemps sérieux!' (18 April 1896) and 'Avant le salon' (25 April 1896), and three

¹⁷ Maxence Rodemacq, 'L'Industrie de l'obscénité: commerce pornographique et culture de masse à Paris (1855–1930)' (unpublished thesis, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2010), pp. 49–53; and 'L'Industrie de l'obscénité à Paris', *Romantisme*, 167 (2015), 13–20.

¹⁸ Pauline Mortas notably cites Maison A. Clavierie products when analysing the internationalization of the sex trade, in 'Hot Stuff: Anatomy of the Sex Market at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century', *French History*, 34 (2020), 213–34 (p. 222).

¹⁹ On the ambiguity and flexibility of 'obscenity', and of the structures of censorship that define and regulate it, see Nicholas Harrison, *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and Its Metaphors in French History, Literature, and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), and Elisabeth Ladenson, *Dirt for Art's Sake: Books on Trial from 'Madame Bovary' to 'Lolita'* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Cited in *La France judiciaire: revue bi-mensuelle de législation, de jurisprudence et d'éloquence judiciaire* (Paris: A. Durand et Pedone-Lauriel, 1881–82), p. 673.

by Couturier: ‘Photographie exécutée place de la Bourse’ (29 April 1896), ‘La Fête de madame’ (6 May 1896), and ‘Le Maillot trop étroit’ (13 May 1896). The trial judgement refers to these images as ‘manifestement obscène[s]’, and refutes Bonnet’s arguments defending their artistic merit:

[II] résulte de l’instruction et des débats [...] que Bonnet [...] a commis le délit d’outrage aux bonnes mœurs, par la vente, l’offre, l’exposition et la distribution sur la voie publique et dans les lieux publics des numéros de ce journal, [...] lesquels contiennent [...] une série de dessins présentant un caractère manifestement obscène en raison non seulement de la nudité partielle, mais aussi des attitudes et des gestes des personnages, caractère accentué par les légendes qui se trouvent au bas de chacun de ces dessins, que Bonnet a vainement au cours des débats, allégué le caractère artistique de ces dessins; que le délit, résultant d’après la loi, de haute publication d’images obscènes, ne saurait être effacé ni atténué par l’habileté de l’exécution.²¹

There is a marked appreciation here for the ways in which text and image functioned subversively in illustrated reviews. Visual obscenity — defined by the presence of nudity alongside provocative (if ambiguously undescribed) ‘attitudes’ and ‘gestes’ — could, according to this judgement, be made even more illicit by the presence of humorous captions. We can see how text and image collude by analysing one of the cited drawings. Roze’s ‘Printemps sérieux!’ depicts a naked woman who slams her door in the face of ‘m’sieu l’ Printemps’, before reading a small ad in *Don Juan* requesting a ‘jeune fille à marier’. In the final vignette, she exclaims: ‘Vlà mon affaire!’ (see Figure 3). The combination of captions and imagery here functions to titillate readers while presenting the review as a medium that enables marriages of convenience. It is implied that the young woman will abandon her youthful love affair(s), identified with and personified by the springtime analogy (‘m’sieu l’ Printemps’), in pursuit of a more stable and financially rewarding marriage. In the drawing, the word ‘affaire’ has a clear business-oriented and pecuniary meaning, which aligns marriage contracts, and the small-ad column advertising them, with prostitution. The correctional court’s insistence on the relationship between images and captions therefore demonstrates a shrewd critical awareness of the subversive potential of textual reception, and in particular the complicit relationships that satirical humour creates between contributors, editors, and readers.

For his role in publishing obscene content in the public domain, Bonnet was charged with paying a 1000-franc fine alongside court fees.²² Far from discouraging *Don Juan*’s contributors, Bonnet’s trial and condemnation offered an opportunity to set forward their polemical standpoint. The review’s *rédaction* penned a series of articles defending both their aesthetic stance and Bonnet’s moral probity. In an article entitled ‘Pour l’art’, the review declares its pure intentions, attacks its critics’ hypocrisy, and compares obscenity debates to France’s Wars of Religion:

[Nous] tenons à déclarer hautement — et les lecteurs qui depuis un an sont fidèles à *Don Juan* le savent — que ce journal est purement artistique et littéraire, qu’il n’a jamais cherché à exciter ni à flatter les passions malsaines.

²¹ AP DiU6 577, 16 July 1896, BONNET, Auguste Hippolyte.

²² AP, DiU6 577, 16 July 1896, BONNET, Auguste Hippolyte.



Figure 3 Léon Roze, 'Printemps sérieux!', *Don Juan*, 18 April 1896. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[...] *Don Juan* chante l'amour, la beauté, l'art, la joie de vivre...

Cette œuvre [...] ne vaut-elle pas mieux que [...] le cri de guerre poussé par des Français contre d'autres Français, sous prétexte qu'ils ne sont pas de la même religion? — La Direction. (*Don Juan*, 20 May 1896)

The hyperbolic tone of the final question alerts the reader to its rhetorical and tongue-in-cheek nature. This can also be seen by the parenthetical appeal to readers' knowledge of the review's content. The editors' claims to moral probity, when considered against the backdrop of the review's predominant 'légèreté', are clearly meant to be taken with a pinch of salt. Following this statement, after the trial's verdict was announced, *Don Juan* published a second 'Pour l'art' article that criticizes the hypocrisy of people belonging to 'ligues pudibondes'. Members of such groups are accused of enacting their zeal by making negative attacks on others' actions, rather than by setting a good example themselves (*Don Juan*, 25 July 1896). The reference to 'ligues pudibondes' evokes organizations such as La Ligue pour le relèvement de la moralité publique and the Société centrale de

protestation contre la licence des rues.²³ The latter was presided by René Bérenger, popularly nicknamed ‘Père la Pudeur’, who was a recurring *bête noire* in the review’s pages. While attacking moralizing zealots with satire, the editors’ response to the July 1896 trial also contains a celebratory element that aligns artistic merit with controversy. Immediately following the second ‘Pour l’art’ article is a short biographical portrait of Bonnet, penned by Emery, affirming the former’s moral virtue. Despite seemingly pandering to the moralizing framework of their detractors, Emery’s opening lines suggest a more subversive appropriation:

A la liste glorieuse des *Condammés de la Neuvième*, après J.-L. Forain, Raoul Ponchon, Jean Lorrain, Oscar Méténier, Jules Roques, Zo d’Axa, Léon Maillard, Vignola, etc., il faut ajouter désormais le nom de notre excellent et cher ami: A. H. Bonnet. (R. E., ‘A.-H. Bonnet’, *Don Juan*, 25 July 1896)

By attributing glory to criminally inculpated artists, writers, journalists, and review directors, Emery’s article creates a community whose artistic and literary value increases when they attract moral condemnation and censorship. The list he cites creates ties of illicit solidarity between individuals whose published works were perceived to encourage ‘immoral’ sexual desires and behaviour.

I suggest that the illicit solidarity evoked in *Don Juan*’s defence of Bonnet extends to cover the relationship between the review and the businesses advertised within its pages. Like *Don Juan*, Maison A. Claverie was not immune to the censoring forces of the correctional courts, despite employing the prudent strategy of veiled language in its adverts. On 15 February 1897, only a few months after Bonnet’s trial, the shop-owner and businessman Charles Delbret, known as Charles Auguste Claverie, was accused of ‘outrages aux bonnes mœurs’. He was condemned, on 24 March 1897, to a one-month prison sentence and a fine covering the trial’s court fees. However, because it was his first condemnation, the court gave Claverie a suspended sentence, with five years’ probation.²⁴ In the trial’s official ‘réquisitoire définitif’, Claverie is reprimanded not only for the obscene nature of the products he sells, but also for the way he displays and advertises them. The document exemplifies how judicial mechanisms regulated sexual morality and gender roles at the *fin de siècle*. First, there is clear sexist gender ideology at work in the court’s appraisal of Claverie’s ‘obscene’ products:

Il y a d’abord des ‘préservatifs pour hommes’, qui pouvant avoir pour objet de protéger les parties sexuelles de l’homme contre la contagion des maladies ou syphilitiques ou vénériennes, sont d’un certain usage au point de vue médical. Mais on n’en peut pas dire des ‘préservatifs pour dames’, des éponges de sûreté et de l’appareil d’un médecin allemand, nommé Hartmann [. . .]; tous ces instruments ont pour but et pour utilité exclusive d’empêcher le coït d’être fécond; ils ne répondent à aucun but avouable ni ne peuvent être conseillés par aucun médecin.²⁵

The logic distinguishing between male and female contraception here seems somewhat dubious, since surely male condoms were also created with the aim of

²³ See Francis Ronsin, ‘Action des ligues morales et repopulatrices’, in *La Grève des ventres: propagande néo-malthusienne et baisse de la natalité française 19^e–20^e siècles* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1980), pp. 121–29.

²⁴ AP, D2U6 110, 24 March 1897, DELBRET Charles (dit A. CLAVERIE Charles-Auguste).

²⁵ AP, D2U6 110, 24 March 1897, DELBRET Charles (dit A. CLAVERIE Charles-Auguste).

preventing pregnancies.²⁶ However, the double-standard sexist ideology is clear: men can have non-procreative sex for fun, and can feel justified in wanting to avoid any unpleasant consequences, but women can *only* (want to) have sex for procreative purposes. This restrictive vision of female sexuality is affirmed by the court's condemnation of sex toys created for female pleasure. A series of items, including a form of ribbed condom ('le parisien dentelé'), a cock ring designed for clitoral stimulation ('l'anneau dentelé'), and fingering toys ('doigtiers') are cited as obscene due to the immorality of their usage: '[ils] n'ont pour but que de procurer à la femme par leur introduction dans le vagin, des sensations voluptueuses, et de concourir ainsi à des pratiques contre-nature'.²⁷ The phrase 'pratiques contre-nature' is particularly loaded, due to its association with other non-procreative sexual practices considered 'perverse' at the *fin de siècle* — most notably, homosexuality. Female sexual freedom and female pleasure are not only morally condemned, but indirectly criminalized, by the French correctional courts' punishing the act of selling products that enable and encourage either of them.

By offering space for female agency and pleasure in their respective businesses, Claverie and Bonnet combined moral subversion with financial gain, in an enterprising and canny gesture: they saw a market and exploited it. These similarities hint at a deeper relationship between textual and sexual production. Further analysis of the 'réquisitoire définitif' of Claverie's trial reveals a productive analogy between the textual space of *Don Juan's* advertising pages and the physical space of Claverie's shop.²⁸ In the 'réquisitoire définitif', Claverie's display cabinets, shop window, and catalogues become the site for judicial scrutiny:

Non seulement Claverie tenait ces objets dans son magasin à la disposition des acheteurs, mais il en exposait quelques uns [*sic*] dans sa vitrine, de façon à tirer l'attention des passants [...]. Il faisait mieux: ces appareils étaient décrits avec figures à l'appui et avec des indications tant sur leur objet que sur la manière de s'en servir, dans un catalogue-prospectus qui était remis sur simple demande à tout client dans le magasin.²⁹

It is above all the sex objects' accessibility and visibility to the public that the courts condemn, in accordance with the emphasis on publicity found in legal definitions of 'outrage aux bonnes mœurs'. The question of ease of access — with the objects 'à la disposition des acheteurs' and catalogues 'remis sur simple demande à tout client' — evokes concerns surrounding the diverse 'public' of clients present in the shop. This in turn reflects contemporary discussions regarding the appropriateness of literary material for readerships defined by overdetermined social, moral, and political anxieties: women, children, and the working classes.³⁰

²⁶ The 'Loi du 31 juillet 1920 réprimant la provocation à l'avortement et à la propagande anticonceptionnelle' made a similar distinction between male and female contraception. See Ronsin, *La Grève des ventres*, pp. 146–47.

²⁷ AP, D2U6 110, 24 March 1897, DELBRET Charles.

²⁸ Richard Terdiman explores a similar analogy, between the rise of newspapers and department stores, in *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 135–42.

²⁹ AP, D2U6 110, 24 March 1897, DELBRET Charles (dit A. CLAVERIE Charles-Auguste).

³⁰ On the question of 'suitable' reading and its relation to periodical culture, see Kate Flint, 'Reading in the Periodical Press', in *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 136–83.

Much like Claverie's shop window, *Don Juan's* pages — especially, but not limited to, the advertising section — sell 'obscene' erotic and textual objects to an anonymous readership, whose potential diversity is threatening to the moral status quo. This threat is fundamentally based on 'separate spheres' gender ideology and the sexual double standard. It might seem logical to assume a predominantly male readership from the presence of such adverts, which are deemed irreconcilable with traditional femininity and the sexual double standard.³¹ However, this assumption ends up re-enacting the blinkered vision of gender and class roles implicit in *fin-de-siècle* moral censure. After all, there is evidence — however implicit or indirect — of mixed readerships in reviews, such as *Don Juan*, that contained morally dubious adverts. Although it is difficult to define the review's actual readership with historical accuracy, due to the scarcity of archival sources, we can reconstruct the implied reader from material within *Don Juan's* pages. Female readers are repeatedly depicted as a central part of the review's intended audience, who actively responded to its content by sending letters to members of the editorial team, such as the agony aunt 'Sapho'. Even if one were to concede that the feminization of the readership of *Don Juan* (frequently addressed as 'nos lectrices') constitutes more of a performance than a direct reflection of reality, and that the letters cited by the editors might be fictional, the presence of adverts aimed specifically at women — from breast-enhancing products ('Farine Egyptienne') to children's toys ('Bébé jumeau') — attests to a perceived female readership. After all, it seems unlikely that businesses selling such products would pay to place adverts in a paper whose readership did not include their target audience (see Figure 4). In a similar way, the concerns raised in Claverie's 'réquisitoire définitif' surrounding accessibility and publicity constitute an indirect affirmation of the mixed nature of his clientele: 'mixed' in multiple senses, whether that be according to gender, age, or class. By metonymical extension, Bonnet's readership in *Don Juan* (who are posited as potentially becoming, if not already, a part of Claverie's clientele) would be similarly diverse, and therefore equally problematic for moral and legal regulatory mechanisms. The sex shop and the *revue légère* offered spaces, both physical and imagined, in which sex, desire, money, and textual production were implicated in one another, creating forms of erotic complicity that were financially, artistically, and libidinally productive for a wide range of readers.

Sexual/textual exchange: personal ads in 'Don Juan'

While offering readers the ability to purchase condoms and sex toys, *Don Juan* also provided space for creative forms of erotic textual exchange. In the 'Petites annonces' column, the review listed personal ads featuring messages between supposed lovers, requests for saucy correspondence, and other avowals of desire.³²

³¹ This assumption is made briefly in passing by Martin, in *Trois siècles de publicité en France*, p. 65, and Reverzy, in *Portrait de l'artiste en fille de joie*, p. 156.

³² For a recent study of the personal ad in Third Republic French journalism, see Hannah Frydman and Claire-Lise Gaillard, "'Les dessous des petites annonces': quand les intimités se marchandent à la quatrième page des journaux (III^e République)", in *Les Petites Annonces personnelles dans la presse française (XVIII^e–XX^e siècles)*, ed. by Hannah



Figure 4 Advertising columns in *Don Juan*, 18 November 1896. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Examples of messages between lovers published in this column include: rendez-vous planning: ‘*Lovely*. Tout est prêt. . . L’échelle est posée. . . T’attend. ch. soir à 10 h. à partir jeudi prochain. — J. V.’ (*Don Juan*, 24 June 1896); post-coital reminders: ‘L. X. 42, J’ai trouvé ton corset sous mon divan. Viens le chercher. Z. 17.’ (14 November 1896); and separations: ‘*Pierrot*. Le Carnaval est fini. L’amour aussi. Inutile me revoir. Tu perds ton temps. L. D.’ (29 February 1896).

By charting various stages in erotic relationships, these messages tap into the imaginative appeal of love stories and adultery novels, while taking a short format more akin to *faits divers*.³³ They encourage readers to fill in the gaps, creating potentially endless romantic and erotic narratives from very few details. Where the message format encourages *Don Juan*’s readers to posit themselves as outsiders looking in on the relationships of others, thereby gaining a vicarious, voyeuristic form of pleasure, the offer-and-request format places the reader in the role of a potential recipient of amorous attention. The titillating appeal of the small ad here becomes intertwined with actual (and not just implicit) appeals to reader response. In the review, there are numerous and recurrent requests for marriage, love affairs, and the exchange of saucy correspondence. In each instance, the relationship

Frydman and Claire-Lise Gaillard (= special issue, *Histoire, économie et société*, 39.3 (2020)), pp. 45–66. This special issue is timely and offers interpretations that parallel my own analysis.

³³ See Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu, ‘Les Faits divers’, in *La Civilisation du journal*, ed. by Kalifa and others, pp. 979–97.

being advertised is often overtly sexual, and ‘illicit’ due to its extramarital, pleasure-centred, and implicitly non-procreative nature. The messages function as a form of sexual solicitation. Consider the following examples:

Jeune dame qui s’ennuie, désir corresp. gaie pour distraire. Mme L., 3, b. rest. Nantes. (*Don Juan*, 18 January 1896)

Dame libre après-midi et 2 jours par semaine, serait recon. à M. très bien, qui voudr. procurer distract. Z. A. Z., X. V., gare Nord. (*Don Juan*, 29 February 1896)

‘Distraction’ and ‘distraire’ here have clear sexual connotations. Readers are solicited both as potential lovers and as potential voyeurs, through their imaginative implication in the future relations between the person making erotic requests, and those fulfilling them. By implicating the reader’s desires and vicarious pleasure, at the same time as offering space for extratextual erotic connections and relationships to blossom, *Don Juan* takes on the role of a *proxénète* or sexual go-between, blurring the boundary between imagined and actual sexual activity.

The correlation between small ads, prostitution, and *proxénétisme* is exploited elsewhere in *Don Juan*, through mises en abyme that emphasize readers’ erotic investment in advertising formats. In a series of fictional correspondence, ‘Lettres à Maud’, published in alternation with ‘La Chronique de Sapho’ between 30 May and 25 July 1896, René Emery charts a passionate but doomed romance that begins with an epistolary exchange via *petites annonces*. The first two instalments, entitled ‘Petites annonces’ and ‘Poste restante’, describe the protagonist’s decision to use small-ad columns as a means of finding his ideal beloved (who turns out to be Maud, the recipient of the letters we are reading). At the start of the series, Emery’s protagonist offers an ambivalent analysis of small ads, considered as a simultaneously debased and idealized medium for erotic exchange:

En ces listes, souvent grotesques, de demandes et d’offres galantes [. . .], je n’ai vu [. . .] qu’une sorte de Bourse de l’amour, et de quel amour? celui qui rôde sur les boulevards, vagabonde par les rues, affamé, glouton, se repaissant des plus médiocres régals et buvant l’ivresse à n’importe quels flacons. [. . .]

Cependant, parmi les habitudes banalités et la plate similitude de ces annonces, peu à peu je découvris, dans le tas, des appels à l’amour, des cris d’espoir, des sanglots de passion qui se trahissent par je ne sais quelles paroles plus sincères, [. . .] qui éveillaient brusquement mon étrange et malade perspicacité d’impulsif. [. . .] Je reconnais encore l’inquiétude et la révolte des âmes altières, captives des bagnes et des galères contemporaines, condamnés à la vie bête, rêvant malgré tout l’affranchissement sentimental par la grâce de romanesques et poignantes aventures. . . (*Don Juan*, 30 May 1896)

The opening lines of this quotation combine vocabularies of sex, money, and prostitution, evoking both visceral desire and disgust. However, this sense of abjection is mitigated by glimpses of an emphatically valorized, aestheticized type of passion attributed to ‘des âmes altières’ fighting against the restrictive bonds of social acceptability. The story’s protagonist successfully finds his ideal lover, by employing this otherwise questionable and debased medium. Emery’s presentation of small ads in ‘Lettres à Maud’ not only works as a thematic discussion of

the genre, but it also enacts indirect *réclame* for *Don Juan's* small-ad column. It does so by encouraging readers to consider small ads as a potential source, however fictionalized, of passionate love affairs. The review's proclivity for *mise en abyme*, in this instance depicting readers using small ads to find lovers and spouses, also existed in visual form through the humorous and saucy drawings published in its pages. One such example is the supposedly 'obscene' drawing 'Printemps sérieux!' by Roze. In this drawing, reproduced and discussed in more detail above, a young woman reads *Don Juan's* small-ad column, exclaiming 'V'là mon affaire!' when she sees an advert requesting a 'jeune fille à marier' (see Figure 3, above). The potentially anecdotal (but probably fictional) nature of Emery's 'Lettres à Maud', and the overtly self-referential *clin d'œil* implicit in Roze's drawing, further hint at the ambiguous status of *petites annonces* as a genre, which — like their artistic and literary depictions — combine unverifiable referentiality with creative re-appropriation and *réclame*. 'Lettres à Maud' and 'Printemps sérieux!' help to frame our understanding of small ads as an enabling textual space which encourages complicit forms of identification and implication on the part of the review's readership.

As these examples suggest, the small-ad format offered readers not only a space for sexual exchange, but also a means of playful textual appropriation that can be understood in literary and artistic terms. Readers (or members of the editorial team) creatively manipulated the genre through *clins d'œil*, word play, and ironic humour:

Il commence à faire froid. Qui me veut réchauffer. Abdalah. b. d. *Don Juan*. (*Don Juan*, 5 December 1896)

Je suis myope; les laides me paraissent jolies. Avis aux laides. L. Y. N. X., bureau *Don Juan*. (*Don Juan*, 24 June 1896)

Un fou, qui a été traité durant 3 ans dans une maison d'aliénés et qui se croit guéri, désire union avec j. femme, jolie, élég. un peu toquée. Toc-toc. 69, bur. *Don Juan*. (*Don Juan*, 4 July 1896)

The tongue-in-cheek humour apparent in these examples reflects the tone of the review, while demonstrating the creativity with which an otherwise seemingly banal or purely lucrative literary form can be appropriated. Furthermore, it was not only anonymous readers or members of the editorial team who injected creativity into the genre. Businesses also frequently manipulated the message format's creative potential in order to advertise their products through indirect (if not particularly subtle) forms of *réclame*. This suggests that the *petites annonces* column was widely perceived as something that people bothered to read. A noteworthy example of this creative re-appropriation can be found in a series of adverts selling 'Farine Egyptienne', which supposedly encouraged breast growth. The small ads promoting this product replicate the lovers' messages analysed above, and yet swiftly reveal their status as *réclame*.

Adèle. T'es belle, mais j'aime les gros nichons! Ecris donc à M. Laurent, 17, rue Saint-Joseph, Paris et dem.-lui une boîte de sa merveille. farine égyptienne à 3 fr. 50 la boîte franco. En un mois tu auras une gorge divine. Anatole. (*Don Juan*, 10 June 1896)

Paulette. Je ne te reverrai que le jour où tu auras développé ta poitrine, ce que tu obtiendras en un mois par l'usage de la farine Égyptienne de Laurent, 17, rue St-Joseph. Paris. 3 fr. 50 la boîte franco. (*Don Juan*, 20 June 1896)

The businesses paying for small ads of this type could, with the implicit if not overt collusion of the review's *rédaction*, sell their wares with enhanced appeal to readers. This enhanced appeal was created by the adverts' similarity with, and physical proximity to, the titillating content of 'real' personal ads. Of course, the supposedly disguised nature of this advertising strategy is far from convincing. In fact, a large part of the pleasure offered by *réclame* is created by the reader's ability to spot, however easily, the attempted advertising ploy. In a strangely productive yet cyclical logic, readers are encouraged to congratulate themselves on not having been duped, whilst effectively being 'meta-duped' into this self-congratulatory mode. These levels of self-aware, playful, and titillating reformulation hint at the perceived financial benefits of wielding the small ads' influence, while demonstrating their creative potential as a genre.

Revealing adverts: eroticism and 'réclame'

The creative potential of advertising is emphatically eroticized in *Don Juan*. Sexual vigour and literary creation are repeatedly aligned, further blurring the boundaries between adverts and art. Indeed, selling sex and selling art become interdependent and reciprocal gestures. This can be seen in the review's in-house book catalogue, the 'Bibliothèque du *Don Juan*', which offered a range of products, from quasi-scientific treatises on sexual topics, to contemporary fiction with predominantly erotic themes. Works by Lemonnier, Mendès, Pierre Louÿs, Rachilde, Zola, and René Maizeroy regularly featured in the catalogue. These appeared alongside supposedly 'scientific' treatises, such as Dr Michel Villemont's *L'Amour conjugal* (1882), the recently published French translation (1895) of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886), and a selection of works by Dr Pierre Garnier discussing a wide range of sexual topics including: marital hygiene, impotence, sterility, and masturbation. The practice of in-house catalogues was employed by other *revues légères*, selling near-identical products. This is not surprising, since *revues légères* were frequently set up and run by an interdependent network of editors and contributors. For example, the short-lived review *Folichonneries* (1896–97) regularly advertised the 'Bibliothèque du *Don Juan*' and for a time listed its offices at the same address as *Don Juan* (18 rue Feydeau). Emery wrote the opening article in the first issue of *Folichonneries*, and the two reviews occasionally republished each other's content. Furthermore, *Le Fin de siècle*, the review Emery led as editor-in-chief between 1891 and 1892, also had an in-house 'Bibliothèque', offering a selection of books similar to the *Don Juan* catalogue. I suggest that the books these reviews sold, with their thinly veiled erotic content, were explicitly promoted for their titillating and arousing impact on readers' imaginations, thereby acting as glorified aphrodisiacs. This comparison is supported visually through the review's page layout: the catalogue frequently appeared above or alongside adverts for

aphrodisiac sweets called ‘Bonbons Vert-Galant’ (see [Figure 4](#), above). The vicarious erotic stimulation offered by the books sold in the ‘Bibliothèque’ exists side by side with its chemical counterparts, in a visual agglomeration of literature, desire, and sex.

The literature-as-aphrodisiac analogy becomes the site of creative appropriation in a series of indirect adverts found in the main body of the review. This gesture blurs the textual boundaries between the dedicated advertising space and the review’s main content. In the 30 May 1896 issue, an article called ‘Pour plaire aux femmes’ appears in the review’s gossip column, ‘La Vie parisienne’:

Chacun connaît le refrain qu’a illustré un chanteur à la mode; cependant il paraît que plaire aux femmes est chose fort difficile. [. . .]

Notre génération est anémiée et débilitée par les excès et fatigues de toutes sortes: pour la régénérer, un savant a trouvé un produit qui augmente la vigueur morale, intellectuelle et physique, et régularise le jeu des principales fonctions de l’organisme.

C’est surtout sur l’acte de la génération que ce produit agit: il réveille les organes engourdis ou surmenés. (*Don Juan*, 30 May 1896)

The critical authority of ‘Masque Rose’ (the recurring anonymous signatory for the column) is co-opted into unsubtle *réclame*. I suggest that this lack of subtlety attracts the reader’s attention in a deliberate way, as part of the review’s wider constellation of intertextual meanings surrounding the aphrodisiac sweets. In order to appreciate this intertextuality more fully, we need to consider *Don Juan* not simply as a collection of individual texts, but also as a complex visual object published serially over time. Articles in newspapers, journals, and magazines do not appear in isolation, but are linked visually with one another through layout choices. With this in mind, it is noteworthy that ‘Pour plaire aux femmes’ is placed just after the ‘Le Boulevard’ subsection of ‘La Vie parisienne’. In ‘Le Boulevard’, an anonymous contributor (probably Emery) offers polemical comment on topical issues. In this number, the topic under discussion is depopulation. The ‘Boulevard’ article puts forward an anti-natalist stance, typical of the review’s wider sexual politics. This stance can also be seen in Emery’s comment-section-cum-agony-aunt-column ‘La Chronique de Sapho’, where the editor-in-chief regularly conveyed anti-natalist sentiment while defending women’s rights to abortion, in articles such as ‘Couveuses’ (*Don Juan*, 24 August 1895) and ‘Ventres honteux’ (12 December 1896). Other indicative titles from the Sapho column include: ‘Amour nature’ (15 June 1895), ‘Péchons, mes sœurs!’ (25 March 1896), ‘Sensuelles’ (9 September 1896), and ‘La Liberté de l’Amour’ (28 October 1896). In the ‘Boulevard’ article discussed above, the anonymous signatory ‘X. . .’ mocks the dominant class’s depopulation fears, justifying abortion as a way of alleviating lower-class suffering: ‘N’y a-t-il pas assez de victimes de l’égoïsme, de l’avarice, de la lâcheté? . . . D’autres? Pourquoi. Foutez d’abord du pain à ceux qui existent. . .’ (30 May 1896). When read alongside, or just after, a polemical and political affirmation of anti-natalist sentiment, the vocabulary of decline (‘anémiée’, ‘débilitée’) and vigour (‘régénérer’, ‘vigueur’) in ‘Pour plaire aux femmes’ can be read more ironically

than if the *réclame* were analysed without any reference to its textual situation. The blatant juxtaposition between the two subsections of 'La Vie parisienne' draws attention to itself, encouraging the reader to align degeneration discourses and depopulation fears not only with the perceived moral hypocrisy of the ruling classes, but also with the manipulative and unsubtle marketing techniques of *réclame*.

Furthermore, the intertextual meanings attributed to the 'Bonbons Vert-Galant' in *Don Juan* accrue over time, showing an editorial stance and advertising strategy that employ a creative form of irony. In No. 98 of the review (29 August 1896), an article appears in 'La Vie parisienne', entitled 'Témoignage probant'. It is framed as a letter from an ageing aristocratic client testifying to the sweets' efficacy. This text appears after a 'Le Boulevard' article attacking the Roman Catholic Church for putting Zola's *Rome* on the Index. It precedes a satirical 'Chronique rimée' by Des Esquintes, entitled 'Histoire d'un crime', which depicts the fateful demise of a man in his eighties who continues to frequent prostitutes despite his old age. The man vaunts his wealth and is subsequently killed by the prostitutes' pimps. The 'moral' of the story is less a condemnation of the murder than a critique of the old man's ridicule:

Voilà comment un vieux planteur
 Qui ne veut pas quitter sa bêche,
 Peut dans une nuit de malheur
 Malgré lui faire tête-bêche.

When read after the 'Témoignage probant', which vaunts the *bonbons* for their ability to make older men sexually vigorous ('Je suis redevenu aussi ardent et vigoureux qu'à vingt ans'), Des Esquintes's dark humour in 'Histoire d'un crime' adds further irony and contradiction to *Don Juan's* use of *réclame*. The desire to maintain an active sex life in old age — with or without the assistance of aphrodisiacs — is posited not only as ridiculous, but also as potentially fatal. As these examples of *réclame* show, *fin-de-siècle* advertising strategies were often ironically self-aware. Editorial choices, particularly regarding page layout, created complex and contradictory intertextual meanings that accrued over time. With an eye for detail and a degree of patience, we can better appreciate the creative potential of advertising in *revues légères*, and its contribution to the wider textual and erotic networks of *fin-de-siècle* literary culture. *Don Juan's* readership — whether imagined or real, contemporaneous or modern — clearly have an important role to play in the construction of these networks, by appreciating the irony, satire, and *clins d'œil* peppered throughout the review's pages, as well as by investing financially and libidinally in its creative endeavours.

Don Juan's advertising pages offer a window onto, and actively contribute towards, creative networks of erotic and literary complicity at the *fin de siècle*. By offering space for businesses and individuals to sell and purchase sexual products and services, the review acts as a go-between and pimp. It enables, encourages, and profits from erotic relations, both real and imagined. Much like the sex shop Maison A. Claverie, the *revue légère* crossed moral and legal boundaries by offering

sexual pleasure to a diverse clientele. The promiscuity of *Don Juan's* readership ('promiscuity' here understood both in the sense of being indiscriminate or wide-ranging and being sexually transient) reflects the promiscuity of generic forms within and across its pages. By playfully manipulating advertising formats — such as the 'Petites annonces', the 'Bibliothèque', and *réclame* — readers, journalists, and advertisers benefited from, and contributed to, the review's creative and enabling textual space. As my analysis demonstrates, the *revue légère* is more than simply louche ephemera. It is a rich and fascinating textual source for literary scholars and cultural historians. Despite its status as a relatively under-examined genre, it encapsulates many of the complexities and contradictions in the *fin-de-siècle* reading experience, constructed according to a type of shared eroticism that was criticized for its supposed immorality, its 'obscenity', and — perhaps its most unforgivable attribute — its frivolity. By becoming willing accomplices in the textual, intertextual, and extratextual relations *Don Juan* creates, we can see how ephemeral literature, the flotsam of the canon, offers flashes of light — many-hued, sometimes garish — onto *fin-de-siècle* literary culture.