

**The Divine Sade**, the first compilation of essays on the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) published in Great Britain, is a ground breaking and innovative volume. With contributors ranging from Kathy Acker to Philippe Sollers, **The Divine Sade** presents an expansive philosophical exploration of this compelling figure. Furthermore, **The Divine Sade** examines the historical, literary, religious and theatrical framework of Sade's work, and includes translations of Annie Le Brun and Philippe Sollers' essays produced specifically for this issue.

**Kathy Acker**

Reading the Lack of the Body:  
The Writing of the Marquis de Sade

**David Allison**

Sade's Itinerary of Transgression

**Margaret Crosland**

Madame de Sade and Other Problems

**Catherine Cusset**

Sade: Critique of Pure Fiction

**Lucienne Frappier-Mazur**

A Turning Point in the Sadean Novel: The Terror

**Annie Le Brun**

Sade and the Theatre

**Stephen Pfohl**

Seven Mirrors of Sade: Sex, Death, CAPITAL  
and the Language of Monsters

**Philippe Sollers**

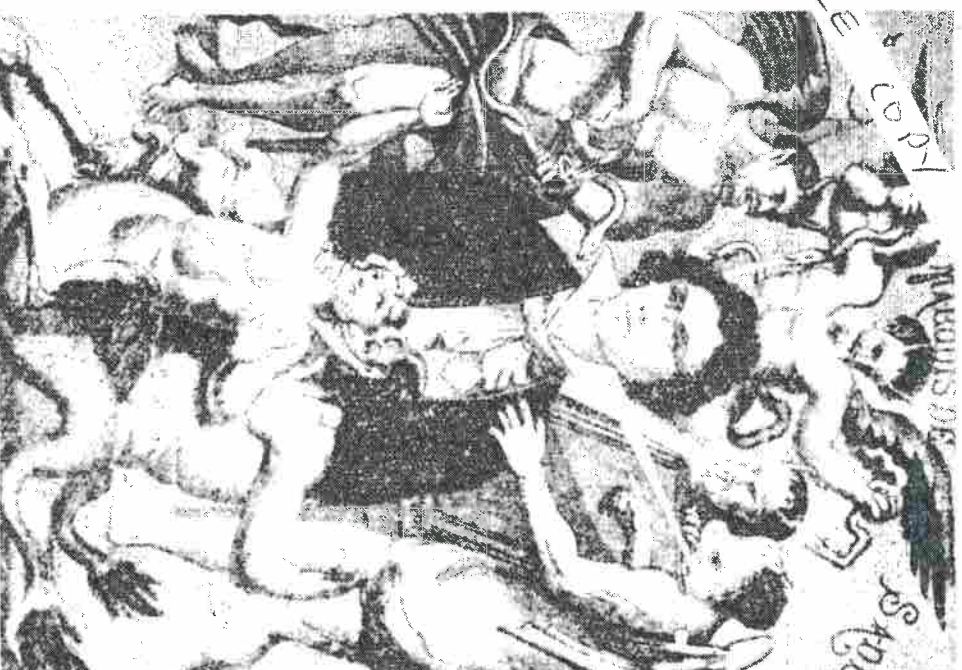
Sade Contra the Supreme Being

*The Divine Sade*

*edited by Deepak Narang Sawhney*

PLI

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*Warwick Journal of Philosophy*



# *The Divine Sade*

*edited by:  
Deepak Narang Sawhney*

*assistant editor:  
Amy Hanson*

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## A Manner of Thinking

Deepak Narang Sawhney

*My manner of thinking, so you say, cannot be approved. Do you suppose I care? A poor fool indeed is he who adapts a manner of thinking for others! (...) If then, as you tell me, they are willing to restore my liberty if I am willing to pay for it by the sacrifice of my principles or my tastes, we may bid one another an eternal adieu, for rather than part with those, I would sacrifice a thousand lives and a thousand liberties, if I had them. These principles and these tastes, I am their fanatic adherent; and fanaticism in me is the product of the persecution I have endured from my tyrants (...).*

- Sade, in a letter to his wife

Writing the introduction to this compilation of essays on the Marquis de Sade is a precarious endeavour. There are various planes on which he may be explored, whether biographical, historical, political, social, literary, philosophical - the list goes on. To penetrate even one such facet of this major figure is to branch out into new terrains of exploration. *The Divine Sade* is a volume which does just that. Eight renowned writers and academics from North America and Europe break new ground, challenge old opinions and set the standard for the future.

*(...) I only cooperate with Nature: I carry things to a certain stage, there I stop, her puissant arm does the rest!*

In introducing this journal, I would like to put forward the pertinent ideas and perhaps unanswerable problems that Sade raises. First and foremost is the question: "Can we go beyond Sade?". Kant's *noumena*, Nietzsche's *will to power*, Bataille's *sacred impossible*, and even Deleuze and Guattari's *body without organs* are perhaps nothing more than branches of Sade's nature. Sade murdered - and probably sodomised - God a century before Nietzsche's declaration. *Dialogue entre un Prêtre et un Moribond* presents a testament to Sade's exorcism of God:

(...) Nature alone has made all that you attribute to your God, why look for a master for her? The cause of that which you cannot understand is perhaps the most simple thing in

the world. Improve your physics and you will understand Nature better, purify your reasoning, banish your prejudices, and you will no longer need your God.<sup>2</sup>

Bataille's taboo transgressions are mere shadows from the Divine Marquis' castle. Compare:

Marie kept on pissing. On the table amidst the bottles and glasses she sopped herself with urine she caught in her hands. She had it running down her legs, her ass and her face. 'Look', she said, 'I'm a lovely sight'. Crouched her cunt level with the monster's head, she spread its lips horribly. A venomous smile came over Marie's face. A sinister, a nasty sight. One of her feet slipped: they collided, her cunt against the Count's face (...).<sup>3</sup>

MADAME DE SAINT-ANGE: I believe it is now of the highest importance to provide against the escape of the poison circulating in Madame's veins: consequently, Eugénie must very carefully sew your cunt and ass so that the virulent humour, more concentrated, less subject to evaporation and not at all to leakage, will more promptly cinder your bones.

EUGENIE: Excellent idea! Quickly, quickly, fetch me needle and thread! Spread your thighs, Mamma, so I can stitch you together - so that you'll give me no little brothers and sisters. (...) Chevalier, frig me while I work (...) No invectives, Chevalier, or I'll prick you! Confine yourself to tickling me in the correct manner. A little asshole, if you please, my friend; have you only one hand? I can see no longer, my stitches go everywhere (...) to her thighs, her tits (...) Oh fuck! What pleasure!<sup>4</sup>

Sade's reputation has rested to a large extent on his sexually explicit or 'pornographic' writings. However, the philosophical dimension of his work, which centres around a notion of nature, has not received the attention it merits. The inability of Sade to escape from his confinement produced a factory of fantasy where characters are denied any possibility of communication, leaving them in a pivoting fulcrum of calculating evil, leading into the play of intoxication. First in fits and starts and then in the bellicose symptoms of a holocaust. The trial of man takes its acute prosecuting strategy, leaving

only the condition of sickness behind in its cincture. In a letter dated January 26th, 1782, he exclaims, 'Oh man! is it for you to say what is good or what is evil? (...) You want to analyze the laws of nature and your heart (...) your heart whereas they are engraved, is itself an enigma which you cannot solve (...)'.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the volumes composed by Sade, a recurring theme is found in the havoc of nature. Nature is not only the encompassing totality of all material force in our universe; it also presents a voyage out of contaminated discourse generated by man in his hope to sustain an ontological identity, whereby his salvation is guaranteed in a sanctuary governed by a supreme being.

You want the whole universe to be virtuous and you do not feel that everything would perish in an instant if there were nothing but virtues on earth. (...) You do not want to understand that, since vice must exist, it is as unjust of you to punish it as it would be to poke fun at a blind man. (...) Enjoy yourself, my friend, enjoy yourself and do not pass judgement (...) enjoy yourself, I say, leave to nature the care of moving you as she pleases and to eternity of punishing you.<sup>6</sup>

Or as Sade jubilantly professes for the means into nature: *your body is the church where nature asks to be revered.*<sup>7</sup> Amplifying the inherent destructive tendency in nature, Sade presents his theory of causality where

all men's actions are only the result of Nature's laws; this should be of comfort to man, this should dissuade him from trembling before any deed - this should engage him calmly to perpetuate every deed, whatever its kind or magnitude. Nothing occurs accidentally; everything in this world is of necessity (...).<sup>8</sup>

The surrender to nature abrogates any notion of transcendental harmony or warranty associated with God and salvation. With this capitulation, the limitations of humanity are opened, allowing Sade to transgress limits or boundaries that are instituted through Christianity into the realm of evil and crime. Sade allowed us a glimpse of force penetrating its primordial desire on petty beings; for 'God dwells in the paricide's murdering arm, in the incendiary's torch, in the whore's cunt'.<sup>9</sup>

Returning again to the question 'can we go beyond Sade?', I would like to further explore his literary and philosophical contribution by examining the recent resurgence of interest in his life and work. Bataille, de Beauvoir, Klossowski, Foucault and Deleuze revived Sade for their generation and now he has come to life again. But why? Because Sade is never complete, never-ending. He is the immanent force of all discourse, of all behaviour. Sade is the Kant that Kant could never be. The havoc of Sade's pen inverts Kant's categorical imperative<sup>10</sup> to produce a farcical effect of law as the governing principle of morality. Lacan's 'Kant avec Sade' argues the futility of Kant's project as it encounters the writings of Sade in so far as the *form* of the law takes a reversal of '... the moral law, this obscene enjoyment that pertains to the very form of Law, in so far as (Kant) conceals the split of the subject into the subject of the enunciated and the subject of the enunciation, implicated in moral law (...)'.<sup>11</sup> Sade has no dependence on transcendental categories which is precisely demonstrated by his opinion of the law:

I have infinitely less reason to fear my neighbour's passion than the law's injustice, for my neighbour's passions are contained by mine, whereas nothing stops or contains the injustices of the law.<sup>12</sup>

The law as presented via institutions suffocates all notions of movement and fluidity which are so prominent in nature. Sade adulterates and rapes discourse, as that found in Kant, at every turn, thus warping the project of transcendence, turning it stolid, with the feitor of evil encompassing every manoeuvre it attempts to articulate. His pamphlet entitled 'Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans' in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* is his attempt to articulate a foundation whereby a true republic of freedom may reign. His adamant loathing of capital punishment exemplifies the inhumane absurdity of having governmental institutions whereby laws validate and control particular behaviours. The residue of Christianity is found in the advent of judicial laws while Sade expresses the other side of the continuum:

(...) To get rid forever of the atrocity of capital punishment, because the law which attempts a man's life is impractical, unjust, inadmissible (...) men have freely taken one

another's lives (...) but it is impossible for the law to obtain the same privileges, since the law, cold and impersonal, is a total stranger to the passions which are able to justify in man the cruel act of murder. Man receives his impressions from Nature, who is able to forgive him this act; the law, on the contrary, always opposed as it is to Nature and receiving nothing from her, cannot be authorized to permit itself the same extravagances: not having the same motives, the law cannot have the same rights.<sup>13</sup>

Nietzsche's volumes are an extension of Sade's vehemence against the whole Christian project relating to a paradigm of justice. The former's position is delineated in philosophical concepts that are already visible in Sade's fiction. *Ecce Homo* is one such text where Nietzsche's anathema to the Christian system is present: 'Have I been understood? What defines me, what sets me apart from the whole rest of humanity is that I uncovered Christian morality (...) the concept of 'God' invented as a counterpart of life- everything harmful, poisonous, slanderous (...)'.<sup>14</sup> Sade's voice reverberates in the works of Nietzsche and echoes in every cavern of modern thought.

Perhaps the reason Sade is never complete lies in the fact that his philosophy is an all-encompassing precursor to those who followed. For the branches to grow, the roots must first be watered; and Sade is indeed the first. Not only does he negate the majority of traditional Western philosophy, but his existence gave birth to the greatest thought of the last two centuries. His resurgence is not merely fashion; but necessary - Sade needs to be confronted again and again, not simply to remember where we've come from, but to learn where we're going. Sade is not merely the historical, but the here and now. And the hereafter.

*Try to turn into pleasure all things that alarm your heart.*<sup>15</sup>



## NOTES

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2. Marquis de Sade, *Dialogue entre un Prêtre et un Moribond*, in *The Passionate Philosopher: A Marquis de Sade Reader*, ed. and trans. by Margaret Crosland (London: Minerva, 1993), pp.21-22.
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5. Marquis de Sade, letter of January 26, 1782 in Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans. by Alastair Hamilton (New York: Marion Boyars, 1990), p.110.
6. *Ibid*, letter of January 29, 1782, p.111.
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8. *Ibid*.
9. *Ibid*, p.41.
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11. Slavoj Žizek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), p.232.
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13. *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, p.310.
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## Seven Mirrors of Sade: Sex, Death, CAPITAL, and the Language of Monsters

Stephen Frohl

### 1. Dancing with Monsters; Dancing with Sade

Monsters haunt the space between what is real and what's symbolic. The real: this is what is unnameably elemental-moving bodies, restless bodies, energetic bodies, relational bodies forever feeding off and into one another. The symbolic: this is what humans abstract from the real through rites of normative language. As a ritual performance, the symbolic involves restrictive economic sacrifice and the moralization of perception. The symbolic bears all the traces of the real but with values added- values that inscribe or tattoo real bodies with desires for things that appear always already partially missing. Missing what? Maybe it's the monsters. Monsters haunt the imaginary.

Subreal ethnography conjures up in (w)riting a spiralling dance with monsters. These strange and uncanny creatures weave their way between what's real and what is culturally (or symbolically) abstracted from the real. This involves a play of passion and mirrors. This involves things other than those conditioned by the rites of normative language; maybe some things less solid. The dance of monsters involves the imaginary: a fluid field of transference, ruled by a perpetual play between forces that attract and those that repulse. To dance with monsters is often dangerous; but for the subreal ethnographer there is no choice. He or she may feel cursed or called out to do this: to dramatize or give written form to powerful forces that, while real, remain categorically conditioned by the cultural imperatives of an existing social order or moral economy. Subreal ethnography mirrors back upon the imaginary of a normative or practically unconscious social order, an order which makes certain fictions appear factual, while making the factuality of others appear fictive.

The Marquis de Sade was a subreal ethnographer, if perversely. He conjured up in (w)riting a spiralling dance of monsters. Some say he became one. The story attempts a dance with Sade.

## 2. Howlings in Favour of Sade

I'm by myself with you. You say: 'Look, it's very logical. Just imagine that I'm the Queen of Sheba and that you're one or more of my aspects. Now get undressed!'

I'm naked, except for earrings, several bracelets and the weight of history. You lead me through the chapel to a computer generated tombstone that's been lifted from another story. A way is open. You descend. The other ethnographers follow. In silence I betray an unease with this lurid empiricism.

Now everything is dark. Or, rather, everything is enlightened, so that no-thing is dark, except the monsters. Sade was a monster, or so the story goes. What a story! Word-perfect descriptions of crime, engendered and justified from within the prison of the modern male ego: screened incantations and howlings. *Howlings in favour of Sade*. CAPITAL criminal howlings and blood flowing most everywhere. Not everywhere but most everywhere. The corporate/military board room. Somalia. Iraq. Guatemala. South central Los Angeles. Bosnia. My bedroom. My philosophy. My animal machine body.

But after reading Sade more than a few questions remain: Whose CAPITAL criminal howlings? Whose blood flowing? Whose bedroom? Whose philosophy? Whose animal machine body?

Modern social theory is born (again and again) in the Historical separation between reflexive knowledge of the ritual situations in which we find ourselves intimately confused and the desire for a precise, indifferent, and picture-perfect description of the world from the top down. In this sense, modern social theory, like other forms of (north)western male metaphysics, dances obsessively around the distinction between things as they exist materially- that is, contingently and in relations of dynamic change- and things as they appear to the idealized mind of the disciplined observer. Which comes first: the headless chicken or the golden egg?

I follow the ethnographers, maybe fifteen or sixteen steps beneath what's most visible. Fifteen or sixteen steps- whose counting? We are now in subterranean vaults that serve as sepulchers for all who have died in the name of clear scientific

procedures. And whom do you think I find here... clad and decked like the vestals they used to immolate in olden days, or at Tailhook, or during fraternity parties- boys will be boys? Or when torturing or advising the torture of political prisoners in El Salvador, or while jerking off before taking off from U.S. aircraft carriers to terrorize and annihilate civilian targets during the 1991 Gulf War? Rodney King rolling between baton blows. British soldiers in Northern Ireland. Little kids squirming beneath daddy's hand. Daddy on the dole. Mommy expecting the worst.

And whom do you think I find here... my sister, my sacrificial double, myself fantasized from the inside out. Her once lively nature is charbroiled to measure; sizzling pink on the inside; two for the price of one. Her flesh has been transformed into meat; her body cut up for the marker. 'She is afraid', whispers one of the ethnographers, endowing me with kisses and a graduate degree. 'When one is as vicious, I mean as objective, as we are, one likes to penetrate the bowels of the earth so as the better to avoid the interference of human animals and their ridiculous laws'. The hands of the female prisoners move no faster than race horses or black basketball players filmed in slow motion. Obsessively. Forever repeating the score.

As advanced as I am in my career as an ethnographer, these opening remarks, I confess, disturbed me not a little. A screech owl flies into the night.

## 3. Sade: Criminal or Modern Criminologist?

Later, while I'm feeling dizzy with terror, the Black Madonna Durkheim appears, saying: 'Seek first for signs of food and clothing, then the Symbolic Order shall be added onto you, if subtracted from your body'. The Black Madonna explains that the class struggle, which is always partially present to a subreal ethnographer influenced by Marx, is a fight for the material and imaginary spaces of memory. 'Nevertheless, it is not in the form of the spoils which fall to the victor that the latter make their presence felt in the class struggle. They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humour, cunning and fortitude. They have a retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers'.<sup>2</sup> A subreal ethnographer must be aware of the most inconspicuous

of transformations- the contradictory accessing of spaces in excess of a given order of things in time.

At eight o'clock on June 23, 1787 in the year of revolutionary CAPITALIST expansion (of the 'Rights of Man' over 'Nature'), the Marquis de Sade began composing a new novel. A preliminary note reads:

Two (orphaned) sisters, one, extremely dissipated (Juliette), has a happy, rich and successful life; the other (Justine), extremely strait-laced, falls into a thousand traps, which end by causing her ruin.<sup>3</sup>

Justine's story was completed first. It appeared in 1791, the year in which a new French Penal Code announced mathematically precise punishment for each and every infraction of the law. This was also the year of the Voodoo-inspired revolt of Africans enslaved by the French in Haiti. It is attempting to read Sade's pornographic enclosure of Justine's orphaned body as a monstrous allegory of a New World Order of economic restrictions. The libertines who assault Justine inscribe their truths upon her skin, penetrating her with rational logic and the promise of control. Justine resists being incorporated into this narrative of western (male) desire, but her resistance brings nothing but tragedy. She is tortured and raped, and although she tries to escape, there is no escape. Unlike her Haitian counterparts, Justine is on her own. She is denied what African slaves kept secretly alive- ritual access to spaces less vulnerable to the narcissistic terrors and death-defying promises of CAPITALIZED selfhood. Her hopes for better futures LIE (nostalgically) in what's past. She is slain by the electricity of this novel moment of HISTORY.

Justine's death is tragic. This is not the case with her sister. Juliette is an orphan who mutates in accordance with the structural possibilities of an unprecedented space of modern subjectivity. Hers is a story of the farcical pleasures offered (even, if in contradictory ways, to women) by giving oneself over to the cynical demands of life within the disciplinary thickness of one's own skin. Juliette's story appears in 1797. Unlike Justine, she prostitutes herself, becoming a 'grand thief', property owner and philosopher of stoic indifference to all but the analytic pleasures of the dispassionate ego. This is HISTORY.

Juliette is well paid for her sacrifices. At the end of her novel existence she dies at peace, well defended from those she parasites.

Between the (w)ritings of one orphan sister and another the world has changed. Justine could not be rationally persuaded, but her sister is seduced into a new form of sadistic training. She is converted to the ways of modern 'men' by her fairy godmother, Delbène. A corrupt abbess and rigorous Spinozian, Delbène is in charge of the orphans' education. Juliette joins in the educative process, becoming a cold and calculating 'man-woman', or so it appears in the (w)ritings of sadism.<sup>4</sup> As Foucault remarks, between Justine's text and Juliette's, a new form of power has entered the world; a new form of parasitism. It feeds ruinously upon all that remains outside the narcissistic confines of the normalized (male) ego.

Foucault reads sadism as a mirror image of modern social power- the disciplinary hollowing out of an interior psychic space that places Man at a distance from the 'unreasonable' world of nature in which he finds himself alone and afraid. 'Sadism is not a name given to a practice as old as Eros; it is a massive culture that appeared precisely at the end of the eighteenth century and which constitutes one of the greatest conversions of the Western imagination. Sadism appears the very moment that unreason, confined for over a century and reduced to silence, reappears, no longer as an image of the world (...) but as language and desire. And it is no accident that sadism, as an individual phenomenon bearing the name of a man, was born of confinement (...) and that Sade's entire oeuvre is dominated by images of the Fortress, the Cell (...) the inaccessible Island which thus form, as it were, the natural habitat of unreason.'<sup>5</sup> In this, the 'violence' of modern power, as it exercises disciplinary control over 'life and death, desire and sexuality will extend, below the level of representation' to an immense 'expanse of shade (...) a bottomless sea', which, like 'the prosperities of Juliette' appear 'solitary- and endless'.<sup>6</sup>

Foucault makes HISTORICAL distinctions between the narrative enclosures that surround Justine and those rationally embraced by Juliette. This repeats- at a different register- a distinction Foucault makes elsewhere between the social control mechanisms of classical reason (which peak during the



eighteenth century) and the positivist technologies of self-discipline that emerge a century later (in both prison and the society of industrial CAPITAL). Indeed, for Foucault, 'the birth of the prison' serves as a cruel metaphor for the sadism which lies at the heart of CAPITAList modernity- the ritual production of an internal technology of calculative self-interest and rationalized self-control. This technology permits modern CAPITAL to acquire a commodified market of labour in much the same way as individual CAPITALists acquire raw materials or natural resources. 'In fact, the two processes- the accumulation of men (and women) and the accumulation of capital- cannot be separated; (...) the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men (and woman) useful accelerated the accumulation of capital'.<sup>7</sup>

Foucault is concerned with the manner in which industrial CAPITAL imprisons individuals within a cruel and fictive social world. Within this world, we experience ourselves as if naturally separate from one other and at each other's throats, competing for survival with a scarce marketplace of positivistically defined human resources. How is it that this cruel fiction passes as if a fact? In addressing this question, Foucault refers to the analysis of Marx in *Capital, Volume I*. Marx argues that CAPITAL economically distorts and, thereby, mystically fetishizes the materiality of actual social relations. As such, 'social relations (...) assume (...) the fantastic form of a relation between things'.<sup>8</sup> Marx describes this process of distortion at work in both the factory and market. Foucault extends Marx's analysis 'below the level of representation' to an immense 'expanse of shade (...) a bottomless sea'. Here, the instrumental logic of CAPITAL penetrates the social imaginary in the most monstrous of ways. This is sadism.

Sade, from whom this form of modern social power borrows its name, was a contemporary of Jeremy Bentham and Cesare Beccaria, the 'founding fathers' of the classical criminological theory. Like his criminological counterparts, Sade was a theorist of the rationality of crime and punishment. But Sade was also a criminal and subreal ethnographer. He was imprisoned for writing *Justine*, a text published in the same year that France enacted an excessively rational criminal code, modelled on the (w)ritings of Bentham and Beccaria. Classical criminology, like sadism, strips individuals of all but the most instrumental

forms of calculative judgment. In what ways is sadism then a shadowy double of classical criminology's abstract commitment to rational hedonism? Both reduce acts of nonconformity to nothing but matters of individual choice. Both also draw upon the philosophy of the enlightenment to justify the calculative pleasures of swift and certain punishment. As a theorist of crime, Sade reasoned that, in contrast to the uncertain and disappointing effects of pleasure, 'pain must be preferred, for pain's telling effects cannot deceive'.<sup>9</sup>

Like Sade's pornography, the eighteenth-century criminology of Bentham and Beccaria pins punishment onto individuals isolated from the social and economic complexities of history.<sup>10</sup> A century later, positivistic approaches to criminology- which, as Foucault points out, were nurtured by the disciplinary institutions imagined by men such as Bentham and Beccaria- took this isolation a step further. I am here using the term *positivism* to depict the dominant methodological rituals by which modern social science- including criminological science- have, since the nineteenth century, laboured to observe, describe and provide interpretive accounts of the cultural practices of others as if these others exist independent of the observing, describing and interpreting eye/' of the positivist. Like the sadist, the positivist positions himself as if on top of nature looking down. While the sadist may employ pornographic methods to cut into his victim's fantastically bound body, the positivist gazes upon the objectified minds and bodies of those 'he' lays bare and sees, rather than the effects of 'his' own perspectival imposition, what he (mis)recognizes as the laws of Nature 'herself', yielding before his probes.<sup>11</sup>

During the heyday of classical criminology, which was also the heyday of early modern CAPITAL, Beccaria and Bentham envisioned a world where the rational power of sign would deter potential wrongdoers from violating the law. But confined within the supposedly rational penal system imagined by Beccaria and Bentham, Sade's pornographic vision exceeded the classical imagination. Sade imagined a world where isolated humans would be forced into submission, not by rational signs but by disciplinary machines. These machines would bind and break the minds and bodies of those they exploit. This signals a new phase of objectification at

the crossroads between pornography and positivism. Here, what was once an abstract male fantasy becomes a concrete form of control, as the objectifying machines, so prominent in both Sade's writings and the positivist imagination, go beyond the mere representational threat of pain. The technological offspring of restrictive economic rituals wherein 'social relations... assume the fantastic form of a relation between things', the epistemological machinery of both sadism and positivism presses itself upon the captured relationality of those it probes, until the objects of its investigation are either forced into submission or killed off in the process.

Still, for all its violence, Sade's vision of objectification remains a literary one—a virtual realm of control, fueled by the poetic power of words. By contrast, the discipline criminology puts into practice what Sade's terroristic (w)ritings only ironically promise. Through surgery, pharmaceutical treatments, behavioural and genetic manipulations, and other forms of therapeutic discipline, modern criminology produces both the theoretical and technical means for making-over the bodies and/or minds of persons who would stray from its restrictive economic laws. As such, modern criminology resembles pornography that is put into practice. It forces nonconformers to submit to the masterful objectifications of those who observe them.

All this suggests disturbing connections between modern criminology (in both its classical and positivist phases) and sadism. Are the logics of these two discourses at root the same? The abstract rationality of criminology, like the libertarian individualism of sadism, pales when confronted with the complex and contradictory actualities of modern patriarchal CAPITAL. Like sadism, modern criminological theory favours but a specialized form of rationality: the rationality of the advantaged, the rich and the powerful. The rationality of the disadvantaged, the poor and the powerless are either denied or made subject to disciplinary punishment. As such, the question must be posed—*is there not something sadistic about the isolated individual application of such theoretical logic?*

In Sade, this question is staged more dramatically. For, in Sade's subreal ethnography of the society in which he was confined, the discourse of modern reason is bodily linked

to the ruthless economic forces of egoistic self-interest and indifference to anything but the pleasures of profit. The rich dine upon the poor and the strong feed off the weak; all the while, ceaselessly repeating, in the most violent of registers, the ascendent philosophical doctrines of the early modern era. At the edge of Sade's prose a twisted poetic logic claws at the fortress of reason. It wraps itself around the prisonhouse of modern language like a vine cut from the tree of a screech owl, a winged monster snaking in from once upon another time— or several— now repressed. Sade's writing dizzily mirrors its readers' own relations to modern history's virulent parade of capitalist military and economic metaphors. Theft is interchangeable with the lawful appropriation of property; life with a control over other's deaths; the male imaginary with the sensibilities of women it subordinates; the economy of the northwest with that which it imperially colonizes; and virtue with vice.

Sade's is an inverted world, a white male-governed world turned upside-down, like the fetishistic world of CAPITAList modernity. But while CAPITALism labours to disguise its sacrificial excretion of other possible ways of living in relation to one another, Sade's subreal depiction of modernity brings all the shit to the surface. Shit: this is what those who economically parasite off the bodies of others feast upon in scene after scene of Sade's relentless drama of exploitation. Nothing remains outside the moral production of the use-value in either CAPITAL or Sade. But here Sade makes criminologically visible what CAPITAL renders practically unconscious. And this, perhaps, is the greatest of his crimes.

#### 4. Haunted Orphans in History.

The true picture of subreal barred from what is structurally possible fits by. Such spaces are recognizable only as images which flash in an instant; fleeting gaps that defy words, leftovers from some unacknowledged sacrificial meal. These uncanny spaces involve the haunting reappearance of what's been made to disappear; seeing what's been rendered as unseeable; hearing what's been silenced; tasting what's forbidden; being touched by the smell of rotting fruit.

As I spin to my left I catch a glimpse of another orphan. It



is Genevieve. She too is a follower of the Black Madonna's and an early Parisian cousin of Justine and Juliette's. Born in the year 420 in Nanterre, this young shepherdess appears a saintly monster; her life and its legends situated at the ritual borders between a spiralling pagan immersion in the perpetual motion of nature's ever-changing forms and the timelessness of monotheistic Christian transcendence. At age seven Genevieve crosses paths with St. Germain of Auxerre. He's *en route* to Britain to combat Pelagian beliefs in a world where flesh is untainted by 'original sin'. She's *en route* to History. At age seven? Why seven? What's the significance of this number? The saint looks into Genevieve's eyes and foretells her future monstrosity, I mean stupidity. She pledges her life.

At age 15 Genevieve loses both her parents. The same thing happens to Juliette at age 15 many centuries later. When the young orphan, Genevieve, goes to live with her (fairy) godmother wonderful things begin to happen. She journeys on missions of love to the regions of Meaux, Laon, Tours, Orleans. There she encounters the cult of Black Madonna, a barely disguised ritual remembrance of those 'times between times' when humans reflexively recognised that-like all other animals, minerals, vegetables, and machines- we are born from, parasitically feed upon, and festively return to the chaotic (m)otherness of earth itself.

Genevieve is seduced, I mean graced. She becomes intimate with the Black Madonna and a champion of one of the dark virgin's favorite sons- Dionysus or St. Denis. Like his pagan namesake, Denis loses his head while defending his (m)other's sacred prerogatives against an alien father's militaristic claims to her body/her land. Genevieve's story is contradictory. Remember: like Sade and his orphans, she's a monster and, thereby, an ally to subreal ethnography. She predicts the invasion of the Huns and, when Attila's armies arrive in 451, prevents a tide of panic from sweeping away Paris when she prophesies that they'll never attack. And they don't.

When Childeric and the Franks lay siege to the city, Genevieve organises an armada of ships to deliver corn to the starving. Because of her brave deeds and cunning she wins the respect of Childeric and, following the Franks eventual victory, she becomes the King's close advisor and life-long friend of

Clovis, his son, and Clovis's wife Clothida (the first king and queen of France). At Genevieve's behest, France's new rulers build a church over the tomb of St. Denis. A few years later, Clovis's son, King Childebert I constructs a sanctuary and abbey associated with the cult of St. Denis on the swampy left bank of the Seine, once the site of a temple to Isis, the greatest of all ancient pagan goddesses. There, for over ten centuries, until dismantled by order of Abbot Bricconnet in 1514, a black statuette of the goddess, 'slender, tall and upright, naked save some wisps of garments around her limbs' is venerated in the Church of St. Germain-des-Prés.<sup>12</sup>

Today, if one looks hard enough, it is still possible to find traces of Genevieve's monstrous labors to keep alive what the blinding white light of Christianity, and subsequently the Enlightenment, made dark with denial- a wise, if self-wounding, epistemological reverence for multiple 'feminine' figurations of the sacred and for the nameless immanence of human animal embodiment within nature. On the dusty floor of the Church of St. Germain-des-Prés, leaning against the wall, one finds a portrait of the Black Madonna, an iconic reminder of what was 'once upon a time' celebrated as a more base and material modality of knowledge, a portrait of the other which reminds us of that part of (western man's) mind he would deny and which he has made dark to himself.<sup>13</sup>

At the time of Justine and Juliette this denial was even more dramatic. Following their death in 511 and 512, Genevieve and Clovis were buried close together in the Parisian Church of the Holy Apostles, popularly known as the Church of St. Genevieve. There, Genevieve's pagan underside was manifest by her striking ruinic emblem- a pentacle raised above a cross. A site of numerous medieval pilgrimages, in 1757 this shrine to Genevieve was made more magnificent by the construction of a huge domed basilica designed by the architect Jacques-Germain Soufflot. Thereafter, the cult surrounding the figure of Genevieve and, by implication, the pagan goddess with whom she was popularly associated, grew in both size and intensity.

All this came to an abrupt end when, in 1793, during the heat of the French Revolution, a frenzied mob, asserting the 'rights of Man' against a corrupt Church hierarchy, entered the

church and desecrated its 'feminine' icons. The body of Genevieve was dug up and burned in the Place de Greve in a ceremony of rage resembling the fantastic sacrileges depicted by Sade. The monster/saint's ashes were gathered up and thrown into the Seine, erasing both the most visible signs of Catholic monotheism and what those signs had themselves long disguised- the haunting 'feminine' presence of pagan epistemological rituals and the bodily approaches to polyvalent cultural knowledge such rituals disclosed.

The Church of Genevieve was then itself transformed into a secular burial place for some of France's most modern and prestigious of men. It was renamed the Pantheon. Sade, who, at the time, lived but a few streets away, on the Rue de Pot de Fer, filled the air with revolutionary phrases, declaring that at long last France had but a single goddess- 'holy and divine freedom'.<sup>14</sup> Too bad for Sade's orphans! Justine and Juliette are left with nothing but mirrored images of the reductive (theological) violence of virtue and its binary counter-part, the destructive force of reasoned vice. Caught between two fiercely patriarchal hierarchies- the rock of authoritarian Church dogma and the hard-place of the modern ego, economically steeled against all but its own masculine self-interest- these two male-fantasized sisters, like Sade himself, are imprisoned either way they turn. Except if they turn or spin so vertiginously that the mirrors which might otherwise have contained them crack, splintering into a thousand-and-one dizzy shards of subreal counter-memories; jamming, mocking, sordidly laughing at the normative interpretive circuits of a culture that would either celebrate or condemn them. But this would be truly monstrous- a perverse ethnographic dance at the borders between what culturally separates virtue from vice; a disturbed and disturbing dance that is both attractive and repulsive at the same time. But how is this possible? You say: 'Look, it's very logical. Just imagine that I'm the Queen of Sheba and that you're one or more of my aspects. Now get undressed!'. A screech owl flies into the night.

### 5. Black Holes in Sade's Story

Near the beginning of Juliette's tale of sexualized terror, at precisely that point in her education where the young 'man-woman' orphan first draws blood- in this case, the blood

of Laurette, a ten year old, sentenced to be sacrificed upon a subterranean altar beneath the tombstones of a convent chapel, by libertines, whose passions are steeled by 'the lantern of (enlightenment) philosophy'- a screech owl disrupts the narrative and escapes from Sade's text. Maybe, it's Lillith or Minerva or some other figure of the Black Madonna. Maybe it's that saintly monster, Genevieve. A totemic image of 'feminine' epistemological forces, banished by the restrictive economic light of a modern male reason, the wood owl issues 'a dreadful shrill screech'. With monstrous wings flapping it blows out the candles that illuminate the libertine's cruel deeds.

'My God, what is this!', cries out Delbène, the cold-hearted atheistic Abbess, whose lectures on the philosophy of Holbach and de Matrie have prepared the theoretical grounds for this orgy. Enveloped by unforeseen darkness, the libertines- whose actions are ordinarily accompanied by endless streams of rational discourse- are 'struck dumb, no one gives her an answer'. Juliette, who has just mechanically bloodied Laurette's vagina, then ass, with an engine-like dildo, 'eight inches in its circumference', the 'massiest' sex-machine 'weapon' in the libertine's 'arsenal', falls frightfully out of consciousness. When later she recovers her wits, Juliette finds herself in her own bed. Maybe she'd been dreaming. Maybe the sleep of reason engenders monsters.

Soon, thereafter, Juliette is visited by Delbène. The Abbess clear up all the mystery, explaining everything in purely rational terms. 'In supernatural occurrences I have no belief at all', Delbène asserts. 'Never is there an effect without its cause and my first concern, whenever surprised by some effect, is to trace out its cause without delay (...) A wood owl hidden in those underground places was the cause of it all; startled by the light to which its eyes were unaccustomed, it had taken flight and its beating wings created a draft that has blown the candles out'. There you have it: nothing to worry a mind steeled by the passions of enlightenment! But why does this strange owl make such an uncanny appearance in Sade's story? In what ways does the owl's intervention, then its flight into darkness, betray the material presence of real- if generally unseen- imaginary forces, haunting the historical construction of the Sadean imaginary; haunting the hegemonic imaginary of modernity, the imaginary of white patriarchal CAPITAL?



## 6. Shadows Across the Field of Enlightenment

Donatien Alphonse François Sade, the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) was and remains a monstrous ethnographic figure in the HlStory of modern thought, a liminal figure at the border between enlightened reason and its binary opposite- unreason and the darkness of the isolated ego economically abstracted from others. Born into the aristocratic privileges of a prominent Provençal family, Sade was to become a champion of the end of nobility and the beginning of the republican state. A defender of the universal 'rights of Man', Sade was also the perpetrator of a series of violent sexual offences against women. A tireless advocate of rational freedom, Sade spent twenty-seven years of his life in lunatic asylums and prisons. Within the walls of his solitary cell, Sade constructed a genre of literature which combines an extreme- almost purely scientific- rationality with fantastic images of monstrous and irrational violence. As such, it is possible to read Sade as something like the dark side of the dazzling CAPITAList enlightenment in which he found himself a part. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue, what enlightenment philosophy asserted 'transcendentally (...) Sade realized empirically'.<sup>15</sup>

In both enlightenment philosophy and the criminological pornography of Sade, there appears a convergence of themes involving egoistic self-preservation (without the guidance of others), a calculative conversion of sensuous human activity into the 'production line method' of instrumental rationality, and the absorption of HlStorical particularities into the 'transcendence' of a generalized form of reason. It is for this reason that critical theorists of modernity- from Horkheimer and Adorno to Jacques Lacan and Luce Irigaray- draw parallels between the thought of enlightenment philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant, and the horrific writings of Sade. Both Kant and Sade celebrate a disciplined subordination of heterogeneous emotions, particularly compassion, and the elevation of an indifferent commitment to scientific 'ratio'. The writings of each man are also marked by a rational fixation of sexual hierarchy. This privileges a seemingly autonomous male viewpoint over 'feminized' images of material interdependence in nature. As such, 'the architectonic structure of the Kantian system' parallels 'the gymnastic pyramids of Sade's orgies and the schematized principles of (...) early bourgeois freemasonry', with each operating as a 'cynical mirror-image' of the other.<sup>16</sup>

Horkheimer and Adorno picture the enlightened (male) subject of Kant, Sade and CAPITAL as excluded from rituals of festive self-loss and generous expenditure.<sup>17</sup> The ecstasy of 'uncivilized' contact with the real are denied those circumscribed by CAPITAList instrumentality. Under CAPITAL, all but the self-enhancing pleasures of instrumental calculation are deemed 'dissolute and insane'. Accordingly:

The enlightenment committed itself to (...) survival (...) Self-preservation, in fact, was given full reign in the free market economy (...) Only with the firm growth of (...) enlightenment is the self strong enough and domination secure enough to turn festival into farce. The masters introduce the notion of enjoyment as something rational, as a tribute to a not yet wholly contained nature, at the same time they try to contaminate it for their own use, to retain it in their higher form of culture; and administer it sparingly to their subjects where they cannot be wholly deprived of it. Enjoyment becomes the object of manipulation, until ultimately, it is entirely extinguished in fixed entertainments. The process has developed from the primitive festival to the modern vacation.<sup>18</sup>

This is to read Sade as symptomatic of contradictions between the positivistic promises of modern reason and the institutional reproduction of economic, sexual and racial hierarchies. In 'Kant with Sade', Lacan argues a related thesis concerning the HlStorical structuring of modern (phallic) desire.<sup>19</sup> In Sade, Lacan reads evidence of the violence imposed upon subjects by a 'cultural split' or 'cleavage' produced within (and between) people by the lawful (or generalized) demands of what passes as universal. This is the violence of an imperative cultural order. This violence is also present in Kant, if in more fetishized form. Here, the Sadean maxim, 'I have the right of enjoyment over your body', by announcing an 'exclusion of reciprocity' with others, is more honest than Kant's appeal to the inner voice of rational conscience. This inner voice demands a 'deposit' of other's flesh; a drilling into and hollowing out of the bodies of others, in order to 'erect the cross' of modern Man's desire. But this is a tormented desire- a desire for what is forever alien and lacking; a desire for what is Other, a desire that splits the very subject it constructs.<sup>20</sup>

In both Kant and Sade, Lacan notes an exclusion of fluid material reciprocity and the seemingly endless reduction of what is real to the binding phantasms of market-governed desire. Thus, the subject of modernity remains forever haunted by what 'he' represses- the indeterminate pleasures of 'the eternal feminine'.<sup>21</sup> For, 'his' pleasures are but instrumental pleasures- the pleasures of the well-guarded (male) ego, *jouissance* overshadowed a forest of restrictive economic phantasms. And this is exactly what Sade's (w)ritings show. Lacan locates Sade's masterful desires within a Historical milieu in which a massive transformation of cultural 'tastes' is taking place, clearing the 'ethical' grounds for what Freud, a hundred years later, would call *the pleasure principle*: the phallic desire system effected by CAPITAL. Rejecting psychoanalysis's 'widespread equivocation' about the transHISTORICAL 'relation of reversion which would unite sadism to the idea of masochism', Lacan argues that, in sadism, one finds the lessons 'of a little story on the exploitation of man by man: the definition of CAPITALISM, as one knows'.<sup>22</sup>

Lacan's reading of Kant with Sade underscores the psychic violence of CAPITAL, 'a revolution in the ideological goal of happiness'.<sup>23</sup> This is a revolution in egoistic self-preservation. It is occasioned by a masculinist system of a restrictive economic exchange: a new form of Historical subjectivity, purchased by the repression of the 'natural' pleasures of being carried away by transterritorial contact with one's (m)others.<sup>24</sup> In Kant, Sade and CAPITAL such 'archaic' pleasures are abolished. Modern morality is restructured the Other side of a 'gap' between what's real and what's imaginary, a radical Historical exile from the ecstatic pleasures of *jouissance*.

In the excessive pleasures of 'archaic' *jouissance* one's self is given over to a generous multiplicity of flows that defy proper names, words or lawful closures. Such ecstatic pleasures are subverted by modern, Kantian or patriarchal CAPITAL. Here *jouissance* is sadistically transformed into a new order of self-contained pleasures. These are the pleasure of pure white idealizations; pleasures governed by a desire for what is fundamentally Other and, thereby, always lacking: positive or positivistic pleasures organised theologically.<sup>25</sup> Fatherly pleasures, but not pleasures of the father's body, only those of the father's name! The pleasures of a perpetual form of crime:

CAPITAL pleasures: solitary and forever on guard against the 'natural' encroachment of others.

Lacan uses the term *phallus* to describe this modern economy of desire. Luce Irigaray is more explicit about the gendered sacrifices this economy demands. Despite a 'lingering fascination with loss', in both Kant and Sade, Irigaray finds no 'real' gift of oneself or epistemological generosity in the compulsions that constitute the boring 'closed circuitry' of Kant's 'categorical imperative' and Sade's pornographic 'mechanization of pleasure'.<sup>26</sup> What is sacrificed by such modern (male) viewpoints is not simply a 'general economy' of the archaic, but the bodies of women in particular. 'In this mechanization of pleasure sexualized bodies come to be immolated in a sacrifice that best succeeds when it achieves black-out (in) death'.<sup>27</sup> Irigaray (w)rites of the 'gap' between what's (nominally) real and (phenomenally) given in both Kant's philosophy and Sade's pornography as an Historical extension of men's classificatory power over women. This 'gap' represents an extension of male economic power as well. On this issue, Irigaray's social psychoanalysis is more Historically specific than Lacan's.

Irigaray also underscores the sadistic implications of the material gap between the fleshy excess of *jouissance* and the abstractly condensed access to the calculative pleasures of total control promised by CAPITAList exchange. Within the patriarchal matrix of CAPITAL the heterogeneous character of women's lived are (like commodities) reduced to the homogeneous category of Woman. Woman vs. Man. As if Woman or Man ever really exist as such. As if natural existence is ideologically containable within a classificatory reduction of 'real' beings to artifactual binary oppositions. Woman vs. Man. This is a true logical opposition. But it has no real existence. Its existence is socio-logical. It is founded upon a classificatory reduction of the real. This is to sacrifice the fluidity of (human animal) beings (in relations to others) to a set of categorically mirrored opposites.



## 7. The Abuse Value of D. A. F. de Sade: Philosophy in the Bathroom.

I wake up with my oneiric lover, Guy Debord. Actually, I wake Guy up by frigging him from sleep to hardness. He pretends to howl. Guy sucks, then bites, my left nipple. I feel pleasure and say so. Vaseline. Then I'm fingering Guy's asshole, kissing his dreams into consciousness. I love my oneiric lover, Guy Debord. He tells things, such as, 'Paris was very nice thanks to the transport strike'.<sup>28</sup>

Condom. More Vaseline. I turn my ass. Guy's slow fucking me, smelling a lot like alcohol. He's biting my shoulder. He's pinching my right nipple. He's whispering philosophy in my ear. 'Once a Hegelian, always a...'. I'm stroking my own cock. I love my lover, Guy Debord. We come together into this story. Then Guy offers me half his cup of breakfast chocolate. I thank him graciously. We chat of politics and of the relation between Sade, the culture of CAPITAL and subreal ethnography.<sup>29</sup>

Guy tells me that Sade's (w)riting makes an ethnographic spectacle of CAPITAL and, thereby, mirror back upon the monstrous ways in which CAPITAL itself spectacularizes, fetishizes or dehistoricizes the materiality of its own violence. This doubling back upon the culture of CAPITAL- which Guy links to the howlings of Sade- operates, not to transcend CAPITAL's violence, but to disturb and critically displace certain of the most possessive aspects of its social imaginary. Guy contrasts this epistemological operation with the philosophical dance of positivism. Humanist intentions aside, the positivist sadistically transforms this subject 'he' studies into 'an object to be worked upon, unreasonable and in need of a calculative make-over'.<sup>30</sup> This removes the subject from the contaminated social marketplace in which the positivist encounters 'her', secreting 'her' away to a well-guarded fortress of detached description. There 'she' is cut up, then analytically reassembled. Afterwards, even when appearing to be speaking in 'her' own voice, the tongue this subject employs is parasitically that of 'her' director- an instrumental puppeteer, banking on this subject's every word, revealing the facts.

Guy explains that, by ritually dislocating 'his' own desire from the contradictory HISTORICAL field in which he labours, the

positivist acts in much the same way as a sadist. The positivist cloaks 'himself' in dense and demonstrative quantities of description, negating 'his' own complicity in the inscription of the facts he fathers. Here, things appear perfectly clear: stripped of the sacrificial aesthetics that constitutes their putative objectivity. This distances the positivist from the impure and contagious sea of dark (m)otherly confusions from which 'he' flees.

I am moved by Guy's word. I tell Guy that his theories sounds like a parasitic mix of Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze and Luce Irigaray.<sup>31</sup> Guy says, 'Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It embraces an author's phrase, makes use of (...) expressions (...) Diversion (or detournement) is the opposite of quotations, the theoretical authority which is always falsified... torn from its context, from its movement and ultimately from the global framework of its epoch (...) Diversion is the fluid language of anti-ideology. It appears in communication which knows it cannot pretend to guarantee anything definitively (...) Diversion has grounded its cause on nothing external to its own truth as present critique'.<sup>32</sup>

Together, Guy and I try to imagine a critical theoretical practice that would diverge from the CAPITAL promises of positivist mastery. Promises. Promises. 'The privileges conferred upon me by my nationality and sex, those I had just now acquired through my performance, my native frankness, everything conspired to put me at ease, and according to my best recollection here as follows is the speech I made that morning',<sup>33</sup> all the while pacing naked, except for several bracelets and earrings, before seven large, body-length bathroom mirrors. I say:

The global HISTORICAL emergence of the culture of white patriarchal CAPITAL- or modernity- involves excreting or shifting away a host of other possible ways of being in relation to one another. But so, too, does CAPITAL cover its excretory traces. Like an alchemical system of white-lightened magic, CAPITAL theologically disguises the violence it begets; transforming the materiality of what it sacrifices- the reciprocity of human animal machine interdependence- into the fetishized appearance of egoistic self-interest. In this way CAPITAL's calculative economy of profit is made to appear a property of Nature 'herself'.



All this is suggested by Marx. But Sade's ethnographic subrealism exceeds Marx's Historical analysis, supplementing Marx's theoretical enterprise with a monstrous form of critical literary engagement. This is not to substitute Sade for Marx but to suggest that, in conjunction with Marx, reading Sade engenders a recognition of some of the most repulsive aspects of modern CAPITAL. Sade's (w)ritings put on display the shit which CAPITAL produces but ordinarily hides. With Sade we enter the imaginary bathroom of CAPITAL, disclosing the excremental privileges of its most powerful occupants, as well as their fetishized diets. In this sense, Sade's writings function to: (1) display the violence of instrumental rationality at work within the sexual-economy of CAPITAL; (2) undermine the theological underpinnings of CAPITAL's logic of self-interest; (3) link a critique of the economic order to the habituation of embodied desire; and (4) mobilize a play of uncanny erotic transferences, enabling a reader to better identify his or her own complicities with CAPITAL, as well as be moved by a desire for desires of a more reciprocal sort.

Concerning Sade's depiction of the instrumental character of the dominant sexual-economy of CAPITAL, it is important to remember that the Marquis's twenty-seven years of incarceration were not the result of his infamous sexual violence against women. This is not to exonerate Sade's cruelty toward Rose Keller, his drugging of prostitutes with cantharidic bonbons, or any of his other acts of violence. But the fact is: Sade's crimes never exceeded the institutionally condoned violence of aristocratic and early bourgeois men against both women and the poor. The reason for Sade's lengthy incarceration was far more political. Sade's ethnographic (w)ritings make disturbingly visible the violent social imaginary underlying the hierarchical sexual-economics of his day. This, as Angela Carter asserts, makes Sade a kind of 'moral pornographer' - 'an artist who uses pornographic material' in order to 'demythify' the reduction of relations of the flesh to instrumental relations of power.<sup>34</sup> This separates Sade's monstrous ethnographic (w)ritings from other pornographers, whom modern patriarchy finds more acceptable. Sade manifestly blurs the distinction between sexual pleasure and calculative economic control, picturing the cultural landscape of early modern capital as a 'gigantic brothel'. In so doing, he finds himself adrift in deep and troubling political water.<sup>35</sup>

Sade's epoch, like all epochs of CAPITAL, was incredibly violent. During Sade's time, Africans were being enslaved and sold as commodities, while the Indian peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean were vanquished by French military economics. In France itself the lower classes were policed against as if they were the dangerous classes. This is a History of the present. In Los Angeles, in 1987, several years before the video-taped police beating of Rodney King, elected City Attorney, James Kahn, sought legal authorization to institute a South African-styled 'pass law' system, cording off 26 square blocks of the city's poorest neighbourhoods, while making it illegal for citizens in those areas to congregate publicly 'in groups of two or more'. A year later, under the code name Operation HAMMER, one-thousand extra-duty police, supported by elite tactical assault squads and a special anti-gang taskforce invaded ten square miles of Southcentral Los Angeles. This is state administered sadism. 'Like a Vietnam-era search-and-destroy mission' the police jack up 'thousands of local (African-American) teenagers at random like so many surprised peasants. Kids are humiliatingly forced to 'kiss the sidewalk' or spreadeagle against police cruisers while officers check their names against computerized files of gang members. There are 1,453 arrests; the kids are processed in mobile booking centers, mostly for trivial offences like delinquent parking tickets or curfew violations. Hundreds more, uncharged, have their names and addresses entered into the electronic gang roster for future surveillance'.<sup>36</sup>

Flash back to Sade's time. Although described by some as an era of new freedoms for women - largely as a result of greater tolerance for sexual license and 'the resultant 'immodesty' of influence granted women of nobility and the upper bourgeoisie - in actuality, the economic plight of most women had worsened over several centuries.<sup>37</sup> Unprecedented numbers of lower-class women were burdened with contradictory demands for sexual purity and harsh economic conditions favouring few occupations but prostitution. At the time of the 1789 Revolution, Paris, with a population of approximately 600,000, employed over 30,000 prostitutes. In the years preceding the Revolution, the mercantile banked royalty and its clerical and bourgeois allies regularly purchased the sexual services of poor women. Many of the women were sold to be 'actresses'. In *Philosophy in the Bedroom* Madame de Saint-Ange was probably more accurate in describing 'whores'

as both 'the public victims of the debauchery of men' and the era's 'only authentic philosophers'.<sup>38</sup> Saint-Ange, like Sade's other prostitutes, cynically acts upon the recognition of the economic status of women as commodities. Unlike wives who 'of necessity fuck by contract', Saint-Ange is 'paid on the nail' and holds few 'illusions about a hiring status that has no veneer of social acceptability'.<sup>39</sup>

In 1750, King Louis XV constructed Deer Park, a massive bordello at Versailles. There, the king and his guests made use of the bodies and sexualized theatrical performances of hundreds of young women. At Deer Park, the Palais Royal, and the lavish bordellos and secret pornologic clubs of Paris and elsewhere, poor women were paid to act out the most lavish, and often violent, of male fantasies. This was a cruel and cynical form of social exchange. As a ritual activity, it also enflamed the restrictive economic imaginations of a class of white European men able to afford such commodified pleasures; abstracting the experiences of these men's own bodily relations with others by transforming fleshy relations into relations governed by money. All this is ethnographically evident in Sade. Indeed, the CAPITALIZED debauchery which occurred at Deer Park and throughout France served as but a thinly disguised model for Sade's subreal depiction of the violent and instrumental sexual-moral-economy of his age. In reading Sade, 'one encounters (everywhere) the same violence: a violence perpetuated against the individual body to transform it into anonymous human material for nourishing the ideological machine' of a society in which 'the moralization of interest goes hand in hand with that of money'.<sup>40</sup>

Sade's writings also reveal the 'invisible hand' of 'theological niceties' behind CAPITAL's cultural claims to secular legitimacy. They do so, not simply by relentlessly criticizing the cruelty of a divine maker, who abandons his creations to the anguish of forever blaming themselves for lacking the strength to conform to illusory standards of virtue. Prosaically, Sade makes this critique. But poetically his words betray something more excessive. To rail against the monstrous cruelty of god from the seemingly sovereign position of Man may be but to substitute a new god of enlightenment for the old god of the Judaic-Christian tradition. As with capital, from Marx's critical perspective, all the 'theological niceties' remain. In terms of prosaic content, this is exactly what happens as, one

after another, Sade's atheistic protagonists proclaim the limitless natural freedom of the individual ego. Sade's 'characters represent moral absolutes in a world where no moral absolutes exist'. And this, as Angela Carter notes, is a 'major contradiction inherent in his fiction, which he never resolves'.<sup>41</sup> But this contradiction is purely prosaic; it exists in the logical structure of Sade's narratives.

Alongside this structure, something more subreal is occurring; something more poetic and more monstrous. As such, those who dare to read Sade may be stricken by a repulsive force that defies description. As Sade's libertines escalate their frenzied game of demonstrative logic- describing everything, counting everything, leaving nothing unclassified, unspoken or uncontrolled- the theological violence of the cold-hearted gods they have become is almost palpable. Here, the reader senses that Sadean masters are themselves mastered by the desires that drive them. Each of their rational thoughts is anchored in bodily pulsations that 'fire the brain', pushing their insatiable appetites toward new crimes and a seemingly limitless stream of victims. They are physically driven, in other words, by desires that exceed, escape the indifferent atheistic creed they espouse. Traditional theology may turn their stomach but a new and more fetishized form of theology turns them on.

'Sadean excess is not an excessiveness of reason'- that is the libertine's tragic economic condition- 'but a metaphorical excess. Far from being a dialectical figure, it asserts itself as a mode of being in that, for Sade, excess is itself, a metaphor for the momentum of desire'.<sup>42</sup> In Sade, all things that are solid vaporize into the agony of perpetual lack and a limitless desire for acquisition. Sade's (w)riting assumes the excessive form of a gruesome ethnography of desires that possess those they penetrate. Maybe this is how modern power really works. Although never failing to speak in the most enlightened of terms, it is quickly apparent that Sade's libertines are more driven than persuaded, tattooed by the restrictive economic violence of a theology that cuts into and feeds off the flesh.

This is how the paranoiac ideology of capital works (in Sade's texts): possessing the body with militaristic ideas that graft on the brain; driving a fearful and disembodied logic into the flesh itself; into the chest, into the throat, into the penis, into the posture. To obtain his precious orgasm, the libertine



must now hunt it down single-mindedly through seas of blood and excrement. But, the more he earnestly strives, the further the goal recedes from him. He is forced to invest more and more energy in the pursuit of orgasm; all the same, it grows harder and harder for him to come. His rituals become more elaborate, his needs more abstract. The structure of his own invented reality hardens around him and imprisons him. The passions he thought would free him from the cage of being become the very bars of the cage that traps him; he himself cannot escape the theatrical decor he has created around himself in order to give himself the confidence to immolate his victims. During the hell-game, the libertine is himself as much in hell as his victims are and they can at least escape from it by dying. He cannot'.<sup>43</sup>

At this point in my story Guy once again intervenes. Guy tells me that he understands that reading Sade as a subreal ethnographer helps display the repulsive instrumentality of CAPITAL, as well as the parasitic theological violence embodied within CAPITAL's phallic desire structure itself. 'But what', Guy asks, 'do you mean by stating that Sade's texts mobilize uncanny erotic transferences that enable both an identification of complicities with CAPITAL and a material imagination of other less violent forms of desire? And why all these mirrors?'

As I ponder Guy's questions, I find myself gazing into the seven bathroom mirrors. They scatter my image: naked, except for several bracelets and earrings. I respond: 'By repeating our attitudes and postures in a thousand and one different ways, is it not possible to reflexively multiply and thereby partially deconstruct the pleasures that imprison us in both privilege and fear?' I am here speaking man to gendered man with my onerific lover, Guy Debord. 'While not everything can become visible', I continue, 'no part of our bodily relations to others can remain economically hidden forever. These mirrored images in which I find myself refracted are nothing but subreal doublings. They play back upon the ritual structurings of desires that simultaneously enslave us and sacrifice others. They are but so many ethnographic tableaus wherein our lewdness waxes monstrous and soon tumbles into laughter'.<sup>44</sup>

'What a marvelous invention', replies Guy. 'We live like lost children, our adventures incomplete'. A screech owl flies into the night.

## NOTES

1. Certain aspects and the atmosphere of the preceding passages are borrowed from The Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*. Translated by Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968), p. 55.
2. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 254-55.
3. Marquis de Sade, as cited in James Cleugh, *The Marquis and the Chevalier: A Study in the Psychology of Sex as Illustrated by the Lives and Personalities of The Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) and the Chevalier von Sacher-Masoch (1836-1905)*, (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1951), p. 107.
4. For a discussion of the term 'man-woman' with reference to Sade's female libertines, see Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis (London: Quartet Books, 1992).
5. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 210.
6. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things, translated by Alan Sheridan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 210-11.
7. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1979), p. 221.
8. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, translated by Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 165.
9. Marquis de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, Eugenie de Franval and Other Writings*, translated by Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 252.
10. For an extended examination of the relations between classical criminological theory and sadism, see Stephen Pfohl and Avery Gordon, 'Criminal Displacements: A Sociological Deconstruction', in Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, Eds., *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 225-254. See also Stephen Pfohl, *Images of Deviance and Social Control: a Sociological History*, 2nd Ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994).
11. Positivism's abstract embrace of an emotionally detached perspective resembles Susan Griffin's description of

23. Juliette Flower MacConnell, *Figuring Lacan: Criticism and the Cultural Unconscious*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 140.
24. For a discussion of the erasure of mothers in Sade's texts, see Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 43-54.
25. For an epistemological contrast to the 'white' abstractions and disembodied logic of positivism, see texts such as Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990) and Gloria Anzaldúa, Ed. *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation, 1990)
26. Luce Irigaray, "Frenchwomen, 'Stop Trying,' in *This Sex Which is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 198-204.
27. *Ibid.* pp. 202 & 200.
28. Guy Debord, 'Howlings in Favor of Sade', in *Society of the Spectacle and Other Films*, translated by Richard Perry (London: Rebel Press, 1992), p. 17.
29. Aspects of this section are appropriated from Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*, p. 567.
30. Stephen Pfohl and Avery Gordon, 'Criminological Displacements: a Sociological Deconstruction', p. 231.
31. See, for instance, Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, translated by Richard Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, translated by Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1989); Luce Irigaray, "Frenchwomen", *Stop Trying*, Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red Press, 1983), sections 207-08.
32. Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*, p. 567.
33. Angela Carter, *The Sadean Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) p. 19.
34. *Ibid.* p. 21.
35. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) pp. 267-68.

- pornography. For Griffin, pornography represents something more than a set of obscene writings and sexualized images. It is a male-dominated culture's revenge against a nature it both denies and fears. See, for instance, Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).
12. Ean Begg, *The Cult of the Black Virgin* (London: Arkana, 1985), p. 66.
13. Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence*, p. 161.
14. Sade's declaration was part of an oration delivered at the funeral of the revolutionary, Marat, following his assassination by Charlotte Corday. See Iwan Bloch, *Marquis de Sade: His Life and Works*. Translated by James Bruce (New York: Britany Press, 1931).
15. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), p. 98.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
17. Horkheimer and Adorno ground their argument in the writings of Roger Caillois. Accordingly, they quote and interpret Caillois in the following fashion:  
 In pleasure men disavow thought and escape situation. In the ancient societies festivals offered a communal celebration of this reversion. The primitive orgies are the collective origin of enjoyment. 'This interval of universal confusion represented by the festival', says Caillois, 'masquerades as the moment in which the world order is abrogated. Therefore all excesses are allowed during it. Your behavior must be contrary to the rules. Everything should be back to front. In the mythic age the course of time was reversed: one was born an old man, died a child... in this way all those laws which protect the good natural and social order are systematically reversed' (p. 105).
18. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 90 & pp. 105-06.
19. Jacques Lacan, 'Kant with Sade'. Translated by James B. Swenson, Jr., *October* 51 (Winter 1989), pp. 55-75.
20. *Ibid.* pp. 56 & 60.
21. *Ibid.* p. 56.
22. *Ibid.* pp. 55 & 65.

37. The contention that the eighteenth century was a 'Woman's Century' is found in Nobert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Urizen Books, 1978). This claim is critically questioned by, among other, Klaus Theweleit. Theweleit demonstrates that the supposed sexual freedoms of upper-class women were accompanied by a cultural reconstruction of woman's 'beauty', in accordance with new technologies of bodily commodification aimed at better pleasing 'the taste and mood of the male sex'. Theweleit points to the popularity of various published manuals and disciplinary procedures used by early bourgeois women to measure and make-over their bodies as market-worthy objects of male desire. See Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume I: Women Floods Bodies History*. Translated by Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) pp. 332-346.
38. The Marquis de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*. Translated by Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Weidentfeld Press, 1965) p. 208.
39. Angela Carter, *The Sadean Woman*, p. 9.
40. Annie Le Brun, *Sade: A Sudden Abyss*, translated by Camille Nalish (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990) pp. 144-45.
41. Angela Carter, *The Sadean Woman*, p. 82.
42. Annie Le Brun, *Sade: A Sudden Abyss*, p. 181.
43. Angela Carter, *The Sadean Woman*, p. 149.
44. Aspects of this passage are appropriated from Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, p. 203.

## Sade and the Theatre

Annie Le Brun  
(translated by Justin Barton)

Sade is not known for his theatre, and the copious theatre he wrote, however capable of being performed, is looked down on by his admirers: for why approach such a complex individual through such an apparently minor aspect of his activity?

A question to which one can respond straightaway by observing that Sade, for his whole life, was fascinated by the theatre, seeking there the real and unreal space in which to represent the excess of his thought. And by pointing out that this is far removed from the false images produced by two centuries of well-meaning and malicious legend as well as by two centuries of moralistic commentaries, whether scholarly or obscurantist.

No, Sade is not the invalid, the demon or the fascist that people have wanted to make of him, in order to discredit him completely. But no more is he the prophet, the philosopher or the literary hack that people have recently seen fit to see him as, even if it means this time that he is completely neutralized.

Sade, to start with, is a man whose extreme awareness of his solitude leads him to invent less a way of thinking than his way of thinking. Because contrary to what has been advanced by the scholarly readings of the last twenty years, Sade is not an obsessive writer. On the contrary, he begins to think because he cannot do otherwise. And I ponder what perhaps is surprising about this affirmation that is a recognition by Sade of an irrepressible need to think, even though he is known for the affirmation of sexual desires that were just as irrepressible, given that:

- on the 29th of October, 1763 (he is 23), he is condemned to 15 days in prison for 'extravagant debauchery';

- on the 3rd of April, 1768, he is accused of flagellation and blasphemy on the person of a young beggar girl - Rose Keller - and what is more, on Easter Day;

- on the 27th of June, 1772, he is accused with his valet of



having whipped, drugged and sodomised four young Marseilles prostitutes;

given that, finally, going from scandal to scandal, he is arrested on the 13th of February, 1777, to be imprisoned initially at Vincennes, then at the Bastille until 1790, only to be arrested again in 1801, then shut up in the Charenton asylum for the insane until his death in 1814.

However, these are offenses which on their own, committed by a young aristocrat in the French society of the second part of the eighteenth century, could not justify the total of twenty-seven years that Sade will end up spending in eleven prisons, under three different regimes - the Monarchy, the Republic and the Empire.

The scandal of Sade lies elsewhere: in the fact of having wanted to think what differentiated him from other people, or rather from the norm that these people pretended to respect.

The scandal of Sade is his having had the prodigious honesty to think from the starting point of his sexual singularity, and at the same time to proclaim that this singularity determined *absolutely* his conception of the world, when everyone, and in vain, forces themselves on the contrary to *relativize* their particularity so as to submit themselves to the order of common sense.

And where does the theatre come into all this? And if what is at stake is a solitude of this kind, which even determines a conception of the world - Sade invented the word 'isolisme' - how can it give an account of the essentially social and socialized form that is the theatre?

The fact is that it is not the least important paradox that Sade, in his life, was mad about the theatre and used, in his work, all the resources of the theatre.

And, to clarify matters, this paradox has been added to the misunderstanding of which I spoke at the start, namely that Sade's theatre, though it is true that it is rather conventional, has been deliberately occulted by studies of Sade, even though for Sade himself his theatre seems to have mattered

more than everything. In fact it can be asked if this paradox and this misunderstanding, apparently contradicting each other, do not assist each other in rejecting a particular violence in Sade's thinking, which would have to be seen as profoundly linked to the theatre - for fear that it would start to exist, that is to say, to become embodied thought. One can wonder whether the whole Sadean adventure is curiously available here to be witnessed, as if what is at stake in his thought goes by way of the theatre, and by a process of theatricalization, which works to put in doubt not just the idea we have of the theatre, but also the idea we have of the world.

In effect, if, courtesy of the play *Marat-Sade*, by Peter Weiss, everything is now known about the episode where Sade, at the end of his life, puts on performances with the deranged patients of the Charenton mental home, the other details are much less well known. This is why I am initially going to try to depict Sade's passion for the theatre, and to what extent it is a question of it being a constant, and without doubt the only constant of his turbulent life. In the first place, the theatre exists for him as for every young aristocrat of the eighteenth century, during the course of which a theatricalization of social life is witnessed which would intensify with the approach of, and during, the revolution, to the point where the frontiers between the stage of the world and the stage of the theatre become more and more blurred. In terms of what concerns Sade, this fact is far from negligible, because he favours a tendency to confound the real and the imaginary which will only grow and become more impressive.

Thus Sade is taught between the ages of ten and fourteen at the Louis-le-Grand college, run by the Jesuits who see in the theatre a pedagogical instrument of the first order, given that even around 1750, when Sade is a pupil there, the chronicles of the times indicate that the scenery of the theatre at the Louis-le-Grand college, was much more extensive than that of the Théâtre Français.

Several years later, having become famous like other young men of his class in the 'theatre of war' of the seven-years war in Germany, Sade chooses his mistresses almost exclusively from among the comedy actresses and dancers of the Comédie Italienne, the Opera, and the Théâtre Italien.

Married young, he spares no expense at Evry, in 1764, in rejuvenating a small society theatre among his wife's family - in line with the fashion - mounting performances there himself, acting in them, and even composing musical couplets for them.

Finally there are the twenty plays - highly conventional - that he wrote in prison, for the most part in the 1780s, which are a new proof of his adherence to the theatrical practice of his time. The titles on their own announce the conformity to the norm of the moment: for instance, *The Misanthropist Through Love*, *The Corrupt Official*, *The Capricious Man*, *The Bouoif*, *Tançède*, *The Madness of Misfortune*, *The Marriage of the Century*.

Moreover, he accords considerable importance to his plays. This is known through his letters to his wife and to his old private tutor, the Abbé Amblet, who he asks to give opinions and advice, and to whom he writes from prison in April 1784, persuaded of his vocation as a playwright:

It is absolutely impossible for me to resist my genius: it pulls me toward this career despite myself, and whatever anyone might do, it will not be possible to divert me from it. I have in my portfolio more plays than a great number of the lauded writers of our time have written and I have frameworks prepared for more than double the number of those I have finished. If I had been left in peace, I would have had fifteen comedies ready on leaving prison. It has been found more enjoyable to pester me: it's the future which will prove to my torturers if they have been wrong or right.

And it is certainly in the hope that his plays would be produced that Sade, as soon as he leaves prison in 1790, at the height of the Revolution, goes to make friends with the most celebrated comedy actors of the French theatre. And up to the end of his life - after having even acted in one of his own plays, *Oxitera*, at the theatre of Versailles, where he would also have been the prompter - he never ceases to multiply actions aimed at finally seeing his theatre on the stage. Without much success. Finally it is known that, two months before his death, his friend Constance Quesnet, who was a retired comedy actress, would deposit at the Odéon several plays from this body of work in which Sade would have believed so much.

And it is here that it is worth taking the trouble to underline to what extent this inordinate taste of Sade's for his own theatre profoundly disrupts the claims of most of Sade's unconditional admirers. In effect, these admirers have the tendency to eclipse the whole of his theatre, under the pretext that it clashes with the rest of his writings. From the point of view of ideas, certainly. But it is also here that they are badly mistaken, in believing they are assisting Sade, for whom words and thought, for the most part in the opposite order, are primarily a vital function and can never be considered solely from the literary or the intellectual point of view.

If his theatre has such importance for him, this is independent of its literary value, but is because the fact of writing plays interweaves in him a system of behaviours that all lead back to the stage, as the meeting point between the real and the imaginary, the unique and the numerous, the world of the spectacular and the world of the secret.

One can even say that Sade is a playwright in the same way as he is an actor, in the same way as he loves comedy actresses, in the same way that he makes himself a theatrical producer. And to get an idea of the only slightly cultural relation that he had with the theatre, one can bear in mind this confided statement that he made when he was nearly forty, when he was already in prison: 'As regards the opera, I loved only the scenery and the women.'

Starting from this, one can anticipate the most important thing, that is to say, the aspect of Sade's relationship with the theatre which separates him from his time. In effect, at the moment where bourgeois theatre is striving to banish artifice from the stage, and even theorising the return to the natural, Sade, on the contrary, has a passion for the theatre as an infinite source of artifice and illusion. To the point of renovating his own theatre at his château of La Coste, of employing two comedy actors there on a permanent basis, and of spending sums, the enormity of which is proportional to the theatrical fever which has seized hold of him.

Thus, in the course of the summer of 1772, in his château or in its environs in the south of France, Sade stages no less than fifteen plays from the repertoire of the Comédie Française from



the same year. Which does not fail to panic his family; for a start, it has this effect on his uncle, the Abbé de Sade, who writes to his mother-in-law, Madame de Montreuil:

I agree with you about the passion of my nephew for comedy plays which, as you are aware, has driven itself to the extreme, and would quickly ruin him if it were to last.

For her part, the same Madame de Montreuil, his mother-in-law, already has ideas on the subject:

Given this has always been his dominant passion, not to say his madness, it is the master of his personality and of his actions up to a certain point.

This is what is clear: what shocks Sade's family so much is precisely what was for him the physical and intellectual appeal of the theatre, such that he practices this art 'literally and in every sense' at the same time as a place of melding where the frontiers between illusion and reality are effaced, and as one of reversal where illusion becomes reality; to the extent that he discovers it as a place of excess where in the end illusion materializes itself and where the games of the real open infinitely onto the imaginary; that is to say, as a sort of outline of the great theatre of sexuality that he is already in the process of creating without yet being aware of it.

For there is an extraordinary fact: it is at the height of this theatrical frenzy in the summer of 1772 that the affair of the Marseilles women occurs, as a result of which, as one knows, Sade is accused with his valet of the crimes of sodomy and poisoning. In other words, it is just at the peak of this madness of theatre spectacles that the scandal explodes, which is definitely to cost him his liberty, as if the theatre proved to be insufficient, as if, for Sade, something in the theatrical game called imperatively for 'another stage'.

And I am not seeking here to appeal to a coincidence of dates. Sade himself, at the end of his life, appears to have grasped this strange relationship between theatre and life: 'I realised that at all times comedies for me had been disastrous', he wrote in 1807 in his *Journal de Charenton*, in the process of going over the list of these strange coincidences, in the course of which

he insists - before recalling the Marseille affair - on the fact that the comedies 'planned in the family of the Maréchal de Ségur were interrupted by the Arcueil affair', that is to say, by the famous session of cruelty and flagellation on Easter Day 1768 which got Sade seriously into trouble for the first time, and left him spending seven months in the fortress at Pierre-Encise, near Lyon.

One is forced to see that everything happens as if, for Sade, the theatre had the double function of retarding and, at the same time, of making more intense, the necessity of a 'movement of action', and that it did this by creating foresight concerning the illusions of theatricality, beyond which there is always 'another stage'. I would even say that across this catastrophic theatrical involvement is objectified, in an astonishing fashion, the continual outbidding in Sade of the head and the body which determined both his life and his thought. Starting from this point, one understands better why it is that most commentators refuse to accept this theatrical passion: through it one sees too well that Sade's thought escapes toward literature, and at that point it is indissociable from his physical life.

On the other hand, for me, there is something very moving about the tragic way in which this theatrical practice prefigures and figures the very essence of his genius, which will be to show, on the stage of desire, how the mind makes itself the beyond of the body, and how the body makes itself the beyond of the mind, in order to set up a totally other theatre, the emergence of which is at the origin of his writings, as will now be demonstrated.

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And here a new paradox appears, namely that to realise this enterprise of dramatising his own relationship with the world, Sade chose not the theatre but the novel, even though if he had wanted to use the theatrical form he had all the means to do it. His plays are clever and demonstrate a good technique. As for his real experience of the theatre, it is large enough to have made him capable of innovation.

It is all the more surprising given that once inside his prison, as Jean-Jacques Pauvert has shown very well in the biography

that he has just finished, Sade de-realises the external world by making it into a vast puppet theatre in which his persecutors are the marionettes. But as to that which goes on inside him, this is totally different; as soon as he seeks to represent the excess which haunts him he abandons theatre for the novel, even if he continues to use and abuse all the theatrical techniques, integrating dialogues, costumes, scenery and machineries into his writing.

The fact is that this turn toward the novel has very much preoccupied me, because it is a question above all of knowing: What is it the novel brings to Sadean theatricality that the theatre does not bring? In the first place I would say philosophy. But not the philosophy of essays, of treatises. Still less the philosophy which begins, as will Diderot, to congeal the stage of bourgeois drama, instituting the worst form of theatre, the theatre of the thesis.

Inversely, in Sade's novels philosophy is put onto the stage, is put into the body, in the course of a veritable theatricalization of thought which starts by asserting itself as being as much a critique of theatre by philosophy as a critique of philosophy by the theatre.

One remembers of course that it is in the course of the 1780s that Sade writes the major part of his theatre. But it is in 1782 that he writes *Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man* which, through its radically atheist character, constitutes an implicit critique of the conventional morality of his plays. However this text, which exposes the theatre of free thought with brio and gaiety, would find its place very easily in the tradition of insolence of the philosophical dialogue if Sade, at the last moment had not turned to the theatre precisely to put in question the limits of atheist philosophy, from which process he nevertheless draws some fundamental conclusions. It is in effect at the last minute, when one is already persuaded that the dying atheist means to have 'six women beautiful as the day' brought to him in order to die voluptuously in their arms, that, without explaining anything, Sade overturns everything by a coup de théâtre, by turning to a postscript, as if he were just giving instructions for interpretation, in order to inform us that it is the priest and not the dying man who, against all expectations, succumbs to the charms of the women. I quote:

The dying man rang, the women entered, and the preacher became in their arms a man corrupted by nature, as a result of not having known how to explain what it was that nature corrupts.

One can say that in this postscript the specificity of Sade's atheism is expressed for the first time, with its demand that one draw the physical consequences of his ideas, and with the use of an example in support: the single fact that the priest should here be contradicted by his own body constitutes the definitive argument against the Christian morality that he is defending. A veritable final coup de théâtre where for the first time this double critical relation of thought and body is implemented, in that here the theatre materialises Sade's atheism. Since in direct contrast with the atheist philosophers contemporary with him, Sade cannot stop himself from seeing the sovereignty of his spirit with respect to the illusory divinity. This sovereignty, which he is, only recognises itself in the proof of the reality of the body. And this is why the theatre, so long as it is the site of an embodiment, is going to constitute for him the best device for passing to the other side of ideas, in order to see where thought is rooted.

And it is precisely this coup de théâtre of the body appearing as the stage of ideas, so as to turn upside down the normal deceitful order of priority, that will never cease to provoke Sade's atheism.

For if some people have not failed to notice the theatricality of the Sadean universe, it remains interesting to recognise that no one has seen how this theatricality is linked to his atheism: that is to say that Sadean theatricality is aimed less at putting on stage this or that fantasy, than at representing - with respect to each fantasy - this impassioned rootedness of thought of which Sade is the great discoverer. 'One inveighs against the passions without ever dreaming that it is in the fires of their torch that philosophy lights its own', he writes in *The Story of Juliette*.

And in fact, one never thinks coldly in response to Sade, there is always someone or something ensuring that the head is heeded up, and, given that the head is heating up, that the body is heeded up in turn, and so on. So that the movement,

the rhythm, the deployment of thought manifests itself as something very physical. One sees the agitation mounting in the reasoning involved, one sees this reasoning put to flight, or, on the contrary, stimulated, exalted.

One can even say that the dramatic tension of Sadean theatricality is indissociable from the conditions in which this impassioned rootedness of thought is produced, or not produced: for example, the slowness of the mechanical succession of the adventures of Justine shows the successive failures of all true thought to incarnate itself in her, barricaded as she is behind virtue, religion and conformism. Whereas, on the other hand, it is remarkable how swiftly one grand scene succeeds another right through the adventures of Juliette, in whom thought acquires a body in a dazzling way, like saltpetre, as she says herself, and for whom the pleasure is to feel all different thoughts in her own body.

From this confusion of thought and body, generated by agitation (*le trouble*), Sade creates his technique of the exacerbation of ideas, which conducts ideas eventually toward a physical testing. A technique which is indissociable in my eyes from a unique use of dialogue. And in this sense, it is far from being insignificant that the two summits of his thought that are *The 120 Days of Sodom* in 1785 and *The Story of Juliette* a dozen years later, should be heralded, if not initiated, precisely by two dialogues: in the first case, *Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man* in 1782, and in the second, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, which appeared in 1795.

As if, in order to acquire its power, Sade's thought had this need of incarnation, which could be achieved through the elemental form of the dialogue - the form which constitutes the matter itself, or more exactly the living tissue of all his novels.

Of course one could retort that Sade does not diverge in any way from the tradition of philosophical dialogue. Only I do not know many philosophical dialogues where the exchange of ideas ends up with the physical transformations that Sade enjoys describing. One remembers the end of *Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man*, about which I have already written. So far as *Philosophy in the Bedroom* is concerned the situation is even more clear: it is through the most extreme

violence that Sade puts on stage the double testing of ideas by the body and of the body by ideas, which reveals itself to be as much the object of his theatricality as it is the generating structure of his atheism. As if it were only at this price that philosophy could say everything that Sade demanded of it.

For him there is nothing else at stake: 'Philosophy must say everything'. One remembers this formula which comes from *The Story of Juliette*, and which has become too famous for one to be able to evaluate all the subversion it implies. I will give as an example only the casualness with which some people read, study and comment on *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, without being aware of the tremendous reversal that Sade announces there, proposing as the title indicates to put, truly for the first time, philosophy in the bedroom, whereas everyone else, right up to today, is occupied with putting and keeping the bedroom in the *philosophy*.

And it is a question of a changing of scenery without precedent which, prior to imposing itself as a totally other relationship to the world, is initially a revolution in terms of theatricality. For the single fact that Sade didn't stop perverting the philosophical dialogue with the theatre and likewise the theatrical dialogue with philosophy, in the form of a recourse to all the theatrical resources on the interior of the novel, constitutes in itself a radical critique of the incapacity of the theatre to 'say everything'; as if Sade had established there that to 'say everything', it is not enough to show everything, and that in wanting to show everything he is far from showing all.

For it is indisputable that Sade, within his novelistic writings, systematically deploys theatrical technique for erotic ends (in fact, there is an interesting study that could be done on this): it is also necessary to recognize, as I have already said, that his aim is not only to put on stage this or that fantasy, but rather his aim is constantly to wrest away the theatrical instrument in order to see and make seen what it is that creates the agitation in the depths of our solitude. And it is also necessary to see that, in doing this, he subverts completely the ideas we have of theatre and also of philosophy, in drawing one after another all the physical consequences of his atheism, to the point of it being unbearable.



That is to say, it is as if, a century before the famous 'all is permitted' that Dostoyevsky deduces from the death of God, Sade made us witness his intolerable physical extrapolation in putting all the riches of theatrical illusion into the power of the most improper, the most unavowable of our desires, from the most deeply buried place of our solitude.

And with one blow, he turns the theatrical machine (*despotif*) into a fantastic instrument of knowledge capable of objectifying for the first time the body of the imaginary through the imaginary of the body. In this respect, the stage of *The 120 Days of Sodom* is striking.

For greater clarity, I will recall the plan of this astonishing text: at the end of the century of Louis XIV, four great libertines decide to withdraw for 120 days (from the 1st of November to the 28th of February) to an utterly isolated chateau, to which they have accompany them the four most famous madames in Paris, along with 42 people who will be the objects of their lust, in order to evolve and experiment with 600 perversities, at the rate of 180 per month: from the most simple to the most criminal.

And to this end, Sade organises all the architecture of this chateau around a vast amphitheatre which is *absolutely* theatrical, in that it is a question of the velvet of the scenery of the stage, the costumes, the figures, the narrators. I employ the word *absolutely* in its proper sense, since buried in the final depths of the Black Forest, rendered inaccessible to other people, this amphitheatre is closed on all sides, materialising the extreme outcome of a tremendous process of the erotic de-realizations of the world. The only spectators of this are the actors, to the extent that nothing exists any more other than the desire that they all work at bringing to light. As to the drama that unfolds itself, it achieves the insupportable levels it does less because of the absolute liberty which is enacted, and more because of the possibility given to each person to draw the whole spectacle toward the secret of their desires. In his prologue, Sade in fact warns his readers of the closely focusing theatricality that he is inventing in order to confront his desires. He writes:

Beyond doubt, many of these misdemeanors you are going

to see depicted will displease you, one knows this, but there will be found among them some which will excite you to the point of orgasm and that is all that is necessary for us. If we had not said everything, analysed everything, how could you expect us to be able to depict that which is agreeable to you?

It is in this simple and terrible fashion that Sade incites us to think, at the risk of pulling ourselves into the depths of horror, through making ourselves overbalance into the abyss of the most frightening loss of erotic identity. Because in risking being suddenly agitated by what repels us the most, we also put ourselves in danger of no longer knowing who we are.

Besides it will not be easy to know to what point Sade's atheism ascends if one does not see at what point its trajectory confounds itself with this spectacular determination to unbalance us toward the depths of ourselves, by not ceasing from putting into the light the essential interweaving of thought and body.

So that, taken into this frightening chamber of echoes, and musing at the same time on the theatrical man's rigour and precision with which Sade constructed his scenic machine, one comes to demand of oneself. But all to show what? I would say: to show what cannot be, to show it concretely, to make unreality physically capable of being felt - the invading unreality of desire, occupying each time the space in which it will collapse itself when it is realised and in which it will establish implicitly the powerlessness of all theatrical representation to delineate the innumerable planes of unreality on which rises up this vast theatre of desire.

Not that I want to say that Sade plays with the unrepresentable or the inexpressible, as our modern rhetoricians have sought to make us believe. It is exactly the opposite that Sade wants, in proclaiming that 'philosophy must say everything'. And it is because he wants to say everything that he makes himself the indefatigable stager (*mettre en scène*) of desire, in order to unearth endlessly sights which are as arbitrary as they are ephemeral, making us see at the same time the nothingness in which they appear and disappear. So that in revealing how this theatre of desire is rooted in the heart

of man, Sade never stops staging the spectacular process of collapse. This is a major element of Sadean theatricality, on the inside of which order is made only to be un-made, a position is settled only to be disrupted, and form only shines out in order to annihilate itself.

And Sade in this has 'delivered the amorous imagination from its own objects', as Éluard said so well, such that he has thrown a light, hitherto unknown, on what one could today call the real functioning of thought.

The remarkable coincidence is that Sade will have staked his liberty for this grand spectacle of desire, having in the end the body as the sole stage, and the imaginary as the sole perspective, at the moment when, under the pressure of history, the theatre closes itself into ideological representation, in other words at the moment when the body congeals into a false witness in a *mise en spectacle*, both pedagogical and world-edifying, which will continue until nearly all forms of theatre have been poisoned.

From the same point of view of the history of theatre, but also of sensibilities, this is I believe of considerable importance to the extent that the movement of moralization which seizes hold of the stage at the end of the eighteenth century does this at the cost of a systematic dematerialization of the body - look at David's paintings - which goes hand in hand with the affirmation of abstract principles in the name of which the State begins to reduce individual liberty, though this is exactly in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity.

And, in connection with this, *Philosophy in the Bedroom* - where Sade tries to see, in full Revolution, what are liberty, equality and fraternity, concretely - is a text which constitutes a stupefying overturning of the politico-social form of representation in the process of installing itself. For in diverting the theatricality of dialogue toward that of the body, Sade inaugurates the most impying critique of the ideological monstrosity, at the very moment where this is born in its modern forms, in other words at the moment when people start to kill in the name of liberty. One could also point out that at this moment when the revolutionary ideology takes over from religious discourse to start producing new chimeras - which

have in common with the old ones that they estrange beings in the same way from their physical materiality - at this moment Sade invents another stage which is the equivalent of a new place in the mind; from these vantages man and world take on totally other dimensions, beginning with that which restores to each body its space for imagination (*espace imaginaire*), in other words, the very source of the infinite liberty which the revolutionary ideology secretly suppresses.

Is it the case that Sade is here, as elsewhere, turning his back on his epoch? It is not so simple. I would underline above all the impressive certainty with which he finds the sensitive point of his time in the problematic space of the theatre, in taking up again the question and the forms which agitated the eighteenth century, though in a way which, although it does not displace them completely, sheds a different light on them. From this point of view, for example, the Sadean stage can very easily be considered as a disquieting physical version of the theatre of Marivaux, with Sade lifting the curtain of mental cruelty in order for us to confront the erotic cruelty which determines the games of love and sexuality. In the same way, the misfortunes of Justine, following each other in a series of forceful scenes, are not far from looking like a bloody parody of Diderot's propositions about the theatre of virtue. As if Sade, from the depths of his solitude, was the person who sensed and depicted the palpable danger that no one else saw coming.

And I am clearly thinking about the transformation of private life into ideological spectacle on the social stage, in which nearly all the forms of theatre of the end of the eighteenth century took part. Which is possibly in part a prefiguring of the fact that this revolution in the history of representation (that is indissociable from the other revolution) is going to take place at the expense of all sensual life, and will therefore systematically deceive concerning its manifestations and concerning what is at stake. This however, is the price that all revolutionaries consent unwittingly to pay, without of course knowing that it is the start of a long tragedy of sensuality which will terminate with socialist realism, where there is no longer any part of life which is not taken hostage for the uses of the ideological stage. And this is the price that, alone, Sade, in peril of his liberty, deliberately refuses to pay; given that rebelling against everything inside him, as well as everything

outside him, could assist such a dictatorship of representation, he interiorises bit by bit the splendours of theatricality in order to reveal to everyone the subversive force of the theatre of the passions.

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A theatre without end, bottomless theatre, but also the first theatre of atheism: it is from this last aspect that Sade's coherence emanates, making us uncover the organic link that unites the material with the imaginary, and making us see at the same time how abstraction violates the singularity of beings and things as much as it violates their liberty. This is a coherence which is indissociable from a theatricality in position to represent for the first time both mankind and the world in the perspective of their infinity and their nothingness. For if Sade never stopped affirming that 'all the happiness of man lies in his imagination', it was also him who remarked several years before his death 'the intervals in my life have been too long'.

As if from in front of this theatre erected on our abyss, he incites us to a courage like his own, a courage to evaluate our life in the absolute light of our desires.

## A Turning Point in the Sadean Novel: The Terror

Lucienne Frappier-Mazur

Sade's revolutionary experience informs not only his political thinking, but also certain episodes of his two saga novels, *The New Justine* and *The Story of Juliette*, along with their modes and themes of symbolic representation. This effect is obvious with respect to his political discourse: one only needs to think of 'Frenchmen, Make Another Effort If You Want To Be Republican', the long 'pamphlet' which Dolmançé reads to his libertine audience in the fifth dialogue of *Philosophy in the Boudoir*.<sup>1</sup> Sade, who had been educated by Jesuits just like the orators of the Revolution, easily assumes the latter's classic rhetoric, which he had already practiced in the course of his civic activity at the Section of the Pikes. It is child's play for him to extract, from the 'politico-philosophical revolutionary discourse', consequences which 'undermine its principles'.<sup>2</sup> Without recapitulating the content of this virulent parody, one should underscore the formal mutation that accompanies it and is developed, after *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, in *The New Justine* and *The Story of Juliette*: the well-known alternation between the orgy scene and the harangue. The harangue was practically absent from *The One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* (written before the Revolution), it remains unobtrusive in *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, and the long discursive passages of Aline and Valcour did not yet present all of its characteristic features.

As for the Sadean imaginary, I certainly do not claim that it underwent a transformation during that period - *The One Hundred and Twenty Days* already enumerated the whole catalogue of tortures, if not always their 'details' (Sade's term) - but, especially under the Terror, it was renewed after Sade encountered the revolutionary event and imaginary. And this encounter also influences the relation to generic models. Some typical episodes, without being total innovations, take shape. The erotic practice does not change, but it acquires a new paraphernalia of torture. New forms of staging and new meanings appear. It is on those aspects that I shall concentrate.

The betrayals and false denunciations that have been related as a whole, and for very good reasons, to the tradition



of the gothic novel, notably increase with *The New Justine*, and even more so in *The Story of Juliette*. Most likely, this has to do with historical and autobiographical events. During the revolutionary years, the republican obsession with aristocratic plots became a fixed idea that gradually invaded all aspects of political life. 'The practice of denunciation (...) came to be considered as an infallible sign of active vigilance'.<sup>3</sup> After thirteen years of continuous imprisonment, and faced with the threat that those daily denunciations held against the citizens' lives, Sade himself was particularly vulnerable. His two sons had emigrated, which compromised him dangerously. He accumulated republican professions of faith and, as Secretary of his Section, demonstrated real civic activity. The massacres of September 1792 fill him with horror. Soon after, his Provence châteaueu is pillaged and devastated by the villagers. Then comes the King's execution. The Terror sets in. Having become president of his Section, then vice-president after resigning in the face of political violence, Sade is arrested in December 1793, most likely upon his colleagues' denunciation. Seven months later, on the ninth of Thermidor, the officer of the Revolutionary Tribunal presented himself at the prison to take Sade to a hearing, the antechamber of the guillotine - strange fate, the officer came to the wrong prison, and Sade was saved. Such incredible vicissitudes go far beyond the regulated denunciations which punctuate the intestinal life of *The One Hundred and Twenty Days*. Conversely, the perverse and arbitrary betrayals that serially structure the plot of *The Story of Juliette* may owe something of their magnitude to those two years lived by Sade in perpetual anxiety.

The convergence is even more certain between the symbolic modes, and often even the themes, of Sadean representation and those of revolutionary festivals, especially the performances of sketches (*saynettes*) or *tableaux vivants*. During those years, this traditional, popular oral genre, with its violent and crude symbolism, enacted the hatred for the institutions of the past. As early as 1791, for example, the revolutionary sketches were burning the pope in effigy at the Palais-Egalité, the former Palais-Royal. Later, it was the turn of Louis XVI. Thus, at the Grenoble celebration of January 21, 1794, the first anniversary of Louis XVI's execution, 'a sitting dummy representing Louis Capet (with a crown and a cuckold's horns) (is placed) on a platform. The "alleged pope" is seated to his

right, and to his left a dummy representing the nobility. When the spectators gathered on the square begin to cry for revenge, two "French Hercules" appear from behind the dummies and finish them off with their clubs', under the imprecations of the crowd that tramples them under foot and drags them in the mud.<sup>4</sup> Although *The One Hundred and Twenty Days* does include scenes of physical punishment, the theatrical staging in this first novel does not owe anything to the genre of sketches. Only at the end of *The New Justine* does one find an echo of the sketch and its dummies, associated with the performance of a summary judgement followed by an execution. *The Story of Juliette* develops such judiciary episodes and intensifies their parodic character.

Especially when accompanied by the ritual of insults, this type of tableau contributes to the oral pluralism of the novel. The insult ritual frequently appears in oral cultures and is characterised by 'direct and ostentatious hostility'.<sup>5</sup> One is reminded of the insults that the Sadean agents hurl at the helpless victims. Marie-Hélène Huet has commented on the priority of the word in revolutionary justice, whose professed mission was to serve the people; only after the questioning and public proclamation of the verdict did the transcription of the procedure take place. This was an open practice of justice, she writes, meant as an '*anti-lettre de cachet*', as opposed to the written order of the latter, which was executed in the 'muffled silence of absolutism'.<sup>6</sup> Sade had had a taste of these two forms of justice and seems to condemn them both.

The passage of *The New Justine* alluded to earlier is the one that best reveals reminiscences of the revolutionary model, for it takes up again and transforms a previously little exploited figure of the Sadean fantasy, the figure of beheading. Beheadings are extremely rare in *The One Hundred and Twenty Days*, perhaps because they allow for only one kind of torture, no matter how slow, or perhaps because beheading during the Old Regime was a punishment reserved for the nobility. It plays a more prominent role in a premonitory dream of *Aline and Valcour*, which foreshadows the violent death of the heroine, in the best gothic tradition. The text describes the ghost of Aline's horrible father raising his daughter's head above Valcour's open wounds. The blood streaming from this head mingles with that of Valcour - it is the only union the two



lovers will ever know. Sexuality in Sade always refers to what Foucault has called *la symbolique du sang* (blood symbolism),<sup>7</sup> which is exactly that of the Old Regime and is quite apparent in this vision from *Aline and Valcour*, whose erotic charge is inseparable from the violence of paternal sovereignty. At this stage, then, beheading still belongs to a double tradition: that of feudal ideology and that of the gothic novel.

Returning to the episode of *The New Justine*, we can discover traces of the revolutionary period. In a 'voluptuous' setting, reminiscent of the Old Regime and of *The One Hundred and Twenty Days*, 'a vast round basin' occupies the centre of a pentagonal hall with niches, mirrors and sofa.

(In the middle of the basin) rose a small scaffold, on which there stood a machine singular enough to merit description. An armchair, placed on the scaffold behind the machine, was intended for the personage who wanted to work the spring of that infernal machine, whose details follow.<sup>8</sup>

The term 'machine', here, does not so much introduce the description of an erotic machine as it connotes the guillotine and the technical progress it represented in the minds of its advocates. In general, the machine does resemble a guillotine, but one embellished by 'noble' details. The victim is still tied on a plank, but the plank is of ebony. The knife is replaced by a big sabre, held by the dummy of a 'terrible man', 'a spectre' not unlike the dummies of the popular sketches. Only the libertine 'agent' (Sade's term for the masters in the orgy scene) may sit down in the executioner's armchair and pull the silk cord which will allow the sabre to descend upon the victim's head. In contemporary engravings representing the guillotine, it is indeed possible to distinguish a rather thin rope. As for the technical efficacy, it negates the humanitarian speed claimed for the guillotine. In the remainder of the scene, it has the opposite effect of prolonging the torture as long as possible.

In June 1794, the guillotine had been transferred to the *Barrière du Trône*, a few hundred yards from the Picpus prison, a former convent where Sade was confined, and in the garden of which an open pit had been dug out. In order to collect the victims' blood, 'a lead-lined coffer (had been placed) under the scaffold, on top of a two-wheeled cart', which was then

taken and emptied into the pit.<sup>9</sup> This coffer is recalled in 'the round basin surrounding the scaffold', also destined to receive the victims' blood. The blood of feudal violence, or of revolutionary violence? It is difficult to decide.

These various connections demonstrate how the Sadean imaginary appropriates and adapts the revolutionary invention. After the Terror, as before, Sadean eroticism has the need to shed blood, but it sheds it somewhat differently. As Regina James points out, the human head bears the mark of identity (and therein lies the limit of the usual equivalence between castration and beheading).<sup>10</sup> Conversely, a headless body is an anonymous body, intended to signify scorn, a significance of which Regina James gives a number of examples from and outside of the French Revolution. In the scene from *Justine*, the trunk of the unfortunate victim becomes the anonymous erotic object par excellence - the most appropriate one to satisfy the Sadean libertine.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, this form of beheading, so similar to that of the guillotine, acquires a new signified, a social connotation that did not appear in the example of *Aline and Valcour*. When it is Justine's turn to mount the scaffold, one of the participants remarks to the libertine bishop, the agent in that scene, that the punishment is too gentle. 'I am sure', the Dubois woman says, 'that if you were at the head of a government, you would find this death too weak for the scoundrels who deserved it. And such is the case with Justine'. This amalgam of erotic practice with governmental punishment indicates a satirical intent, for it is quite contrary to Sade's usage, which tends to distinguish carefully between private and public despotism. The remark can hardly be aimed at anything other than the revolutionary government, considering the type of punishment. Furthermore, it triggers a harangue in which the bishop thunders against the 'vile, despicable class' and the 'ferocious animal that goes by the name of people', which he opposes to what he calls the 'caste' of the third estate. Addressing this caste, he offers to associate with them in a struggle to the death against the lower classes, and draws an alluring picture of the many pleasures of both established political power and private despotism.<sup>12</sup> This juxtaposition completes the transformation of the Revolution's 'egalitarian' guillotine into an instrument reserved for the annihilation of the popular classes. It represents a kind of flattery of bourgeois revolutionaries, unless it is a way

of denouncing their ambition. Does it constitute a serious offer, or could it be the epitome of raillery?

From the sovereign, fallen head, one easily passes on to parricide. Parricide is perhaps the most complex motif in *The Story of Juliette*. It appears in Sade's work only after the experience of the Terror, and apparently not by chance. In a brief dialogue of this novel, Sade places it at the top of the hierarchy of crimes: "--There is nothing I will not permit myself every time my passions speak. --What! I said, even including murder? --Even including parricide, the most frightful crime, if there could be any for mankind".<sup>13</sup> The eighteenth century obsession with the father is contemporaneous with a certain questioning of paternal power and, probably as a result, with its juridical strengthening. In Sade, the theme appears only after the Revolution and assumes the radical form of parricide. Apart from a few sacrilegious episodes, the 'fathers' reign unchallenged in *The One Hundred and Twenty Days*: two of the libertines have killed their mothers and sisters, but none of the four has killed his father, and none of them has a son; in other words, this first novel does not raise the problem either of paternal power or of father-son relationships, since it does not portray them. It seems that a rather long period of incubation was necessary before the parricidal motif could be deployed, since it is still absent from *The New Justine*. *Philosophy in the Boudoir* is mostly concerned with matricide and does not yet contest paternal power, which will be readily overturned only in *The Story of Juliette*.

Like the introduction of the sketch, this second innovation seems to be linked to a number of historical and autobiographical factors: the 1793 regicide, the risks incurred by Sade during the Terror and, long before the Terror, the calling into question or spurning of his paternal authority by the mere fact of his imprisonment - he was at times unable to control decisions concerning his two sons' education. In the delayed appearance of the parricidal motif can be detected the way in which Sade may have lived, indeed assessed and, retrospectively, mythified the Terror. Not only had the Terror killed the father and mother in the person of the monarchs, but Sade escaped execution only by accident. It is as though the fictional enacting of the revolutionary parricide was meant to strengthen the sons' power at the expense of the fathers', too shaken by the Revolution.

Under the monarchy, Sade had been imprisoned as an unruly son. Conversely, under the Terror as an aristocrat, he must have partly identified with the fathers and meditated upon their fate. In other words, Sadean aggression hesitates between the fathers' power - compromised by the Revolution - and that of the sons - crushed under the monarchy - a sort of dialectic that is resolved by the suppression of any filiation. This rather peculiar triumph of the libertine ego - the ultimate form of Sadean isolationism - is inscribed in the relation between sodomy and parricide.

No wonder, then, that the parricidal attack in Sade is enacted on the socio-political and textual levels, as well as on the level of instinctual drives. *The Story of Juliette* narrowly intertwines the instinctual and the political, which together determine certain textual elaborations wherein are linked and merged the historical and intrasubjective dimensions of the Father's murder - the social and the individual. Furthermore, the ambivalence of the point of view manifests itself up to the end of the novel. In fact, Noirceuil's last act, which consists in immolating his sons, renews ad absurdum the full strength of the father's tyranny, which many other details explicitly assert. Power speaks 'through blood', *la symbolique du sang* that Foucault connects with the feudal values of the Old Regime. And, more than once, the violence of the Sadean parricidal transgression proves to be the corollary of the claim for absolute paternal power, even though this does not constitute Sade's final word on the question. Hence the triple process - suppression, identification, appropriation - which characterizes the parricidal gesture.

The clearest signified is suppression. Precisely, the murder of Saint-Fond's father is first presented as a political crime, 'a ministerial crime' that Saint-Fond, the minister, orders Juliette to execute.<sup>14</sup> The libertine Saint-Fond and Noirceuil are two great lords who both enjoy official political power. Saint-Fond's father, 'a sixty-six year old man, respectable in every way', is aware of his son's crimes and exactions and tries to discredit him at court, so as to force him to resign his ministry before being discovered. Seeing Juliette somewhat startled by the role she is to play, Noirceuil undertakes to convince her by means of a long apology of parricide, whose first two arguments may be read as an inversion of the Oedipal model. Oedipus's crime transcends objective knowledge and the notion of individual

freedom, since Oedipus is guilty despite his ignorance. On the other hand, Noirceuil argues at length the negation of filiation and blood kinship, for which he substitutes a parody of the criterion of rational knowledge. First argument: my father did not think of me when he conceived me, therefore I do not owe him any gratitude and, if he reared me, it was only out of vanity. The second argument offers a fine example of perverse logic: if I killed him without knowing him, I would not be committing a parricide. Since I may kill my father without any remorse if I do not know him, it is all the same if I know him. It would suffice to persuade me that the individual I have just killed is my father for me to experience remorse. *If my remorse exists even though the thing does not, it should not legitimately exist when the thing does.*<sup>15</sup>

Afterwards, the reasoning becomes somewhat more complex. The end of the tirade suggests that by assuming parricide, and more precisely a political parricide such as regicide, Sade occupies both the place of the tyrant-father and that of the revolutionary parricide. He first seems to salvage the paternal principle, symbolised by the despotism of a single individual:

(Saint-Fond) is a very great minister: he loves blood, (...) he believes that murder is useful to the preservation of any government. Is he wrong? Have Sylla, Marius, Richelleu, Mazarin, and all the great men, ever thought differently? Has Machiavelli enounced any other principles?<sup>16</sup>

The decisive moment of the harangue is when Noirceuil seizes revolutionary rhetoric and inverts its anti-monarchic attack into a positive prescription in favour of monarchy:

Do not doubt it: there must be blood, especially in order to support monarchic governments; the throne of tyrants must be cemented with it, and Saint-Fond is far from pouring out as much of it as should be shed!<sup>17</sup>

This phrase, 'the throne of tyrants', ties up the Sadean oscillation between identification to the father and identification to the son. The cliché, so characteristic of revolutionary discourse, inevitably connotes the shedding of blood, not so much by the monarchy as by the Revolutionary

Tribunal, and stamps the affirmation with profound irony. The Revolution having killed the symbolic father, it is Saint-Fond-Sade, the Old Regime aristocrat, who claims responsibility for the crime and turns it into a necessity for the 'preservation of any government'. How then can one escape the regicidal guillotine without being oneself a parricide? Crowning the apology of parricide, this Janus-faced reasoning places the son at the end of the series of substitutive formations God-king-father and definitively confers on him absolute power.

Let us consider a little more closely how the parricidal motif informs the relation to literary models. No matter how much Juliette denies the authority of texts, a disrespect of which her scripitor gives abundant evidence, it is as impossible for Sade to abandon completely the conventions of discursive or novelistic genres, or to soften his discordant voice, as to yield to the paternal principle or, on the contrary, to reject it once and for all. As early as the exergue of his harangue in favour of parricide - 'Is parricide a crime or not?' - Noirceuil draws on the parody of classic rhetoric, of moral debate or of matter of conscience (*cas de conscience*): so many models that he knocks off their pedestals on the same grounds as the paternal figure. More subtly, he both imitates and subverts Pascal's *Vilth Provinciale* on the direction of intention, in which the Jesuit gives the son permission to wish for his father's death in the hope of inheriting, and to 'rejoice when this death occurs, provided he does so only for the fortune that will befall him, and not out of personal hatred'. Noirceuil declares:

It would be quite simple to hate (one's father), but even more natural to make an attempt upon his life (...). If self-interest is the general standard of all human actions, there is infinitely less harm in killing one's father than any other person. (...).

for our reasons for doing away with him are far more powerful than with respect to any other man.<sup>18</sup> Sade adds hatred to the justification of self-interest advanced in the *Vilth Provinciale*, and the contrast is blatant between the placid speech of the Pascalian Jesuit and Noirceuil's hammering away at his vehement affirmations:

It is not true that one loves one's father, it is not even true



that one might love him; one fears him, but one does not love him; his existence annoys, but does not please; self-interest, the holiest of natural laws, invincibly induces us to wish for the death of a man that should ensure our fortune.<sup>19</sup>

I have studied elsewhere the forms and implications of the feminine status of Juliette,<sup>20</sup> but without really considering the reasons for her rather belated appearance at this precise moment in Sadean creation. Is there not in her case also a causal relation between the revolutionary event, which overturns all social and political landmarks, and the unprecedented roles that are assigned to this new heroine? Granting a female character at the same time libertine, philosophy, riches and a high social rank, triumph and impunity, without forgetting beauty, is an unheard of phenomenon - it is easy to see all that distinguishes Juliette from the Marquise de Merteuil in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. All the more so since Juliette is not intimidated by parricide any more than by any other crime. Analysing her character as a product of the Revolution, I now intend to read it as a metaphor of the social.

However astonishing she may appear, Juliette is not devoid of literary antecedents. Her libertinage recalls the licentious or pornographic novel, in which the female character's centrality contributes to the erotic effect. This type of novel, whenever it moves away from the pornographic stereotype, also gives the heroine a freedom of movement never granted to virtuous heroines: such is the case of Andrea de Nerciat's Félicia (in *Félicia ou mes fredaines*), or of the marquise in Louvet's Faublas, whose wanderings anticipate those of Juliette in France and Italy. In fact, the same trait already characterized Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, but in the more realistic and hardly aristocratic social context which is that of the picaresque genre.

In any case, it is Juliette's relation to power which owes the most to the revolutionary years. This relation raises many questions, some of which could be stated as follows: how can power be transmitted to a female character in the Sadean universe? What sort of power is it, and what are its manifestations, consequences and limitations? What is the significance of parricide when it is a daughter who commits it?

Throughout the Parisian part - about half of the one-thousand page novel - Juliette's power consists in her erotic function, raised, of course, to the maximum degree. She intervenes in other people's lives under the aegis first of her female, then of her male initiators, and even after amassing a real fortune, she remains dependent on her masters, Noirceuil and Saint-Ford. The latter wield pre-eminent public, institutional power: in this domain, they use Juliette as an instrument or executor and, when she appeals to them for aid, they reward her cupidity or her personal vindictiveness in a most arbitrary manner. In the private area, she organizes their debauchery and, even during the orgies, their desires have priority over hers. Only when they are away can she dominate the orgy. Her power is confined to the private sphere, but even there it is limited. Up to this point in the novel, she differs from her women predecessors only through her viciousness, a viciousness still a little inferior to that of her masters. In the Paris setting, then, Juliette transgresses sexual hierarchy solely in the absence of her masters, Noirceuil and Saint-Ford. The situation begins to evolve from the time of her flight to the provinces, when, at last independent and left to her own devices, she entirely governs her life and her orgies, but still without leaving the private sphere.

It is not until she reaches Italy that a real reversal of forces from one sex to the other takes place, turning Juliette's behaviour into a faithful replica of her Parisian masters' behaviour. For the first and only time, Juliette fully accedes to the Sadean harangue<sup>21</sup> - moreover the *political* harangue - and conducts the libertine game. She exerts a direct influence upon the sovereigns she frequents. If they chance to evolve in the public sphere in Juliette's company, however, it is only in order to engage in massacre for erotic ends. Back in France, Juliette will again leave mastery of the word and the initiative of orgiastic cruelty to Noirceuil, even though the latter's desires can only gratify her own.

Clearly, Italy affords Juliette a space of freedom where she can enjoy the privileges her author cannot yet permit her in France.<sup>22</sup> Italy represents the world upside down. The inversion of the dominant classes, the bourgeoisie in the place of the nobility, is transposed in this new incarnation of Juliette. As a result, the point of view again seems quite ambiguous, and

the reader may hesitate over the meaning to be ascribed to Juliette's republican harangues, her egalitarian discourse addressed to various sovereigns of the Italian states, in which she extols the French woman's loyalty, advocates regicide and liberty for all, without in the least modifying her despotic and orgiastic behaviour - is society not plunged into total chaos anyway? The contradiction between her discourse and her actions does not appear to be fortuitous, if one remembers that, on the contrary, in the Parisian part, the harangues were always exclusively aimed at justifying orgiastic behaviour. Transformed in her Italian speeches into a patriotic Marianne and Enlightenment philosopher, Juliette reverts in her oracles to the aristocratic and criminal libertinage, the figure that most contradicts the ideology of bourgeois revolutionaries who, in the name of Nature, would send woman back to the home and fireside. This might well read as a provocation. Whatever lies at the heart of Sade's thinking, he seems to couple republican discourse with the superior force allotted Juliette, whose cruelty now surpasses that of the Italian sovereigns, with the exception of the pope. Only with the introduction of the revolutionary discourse and of the Italian setting, even less realistic than the Parisian one, does Juliette enjoy unprecedented power and autonomy. Are we to consider this a total derision of the egalitarian ideal, or an exaltation of the social changes it promises? I lean toward the first hypothesis. Sade places the revolutionaries in contradiction with themselves, since at the time he created Juliette the Revolution had crushed women's attempts at participation in political discourse. In fact, what Juliette's role foregrounds is not sexual equality, but the upsetting of hierarchy. Sade no more believes in equality in the Italian part than in the Parisian part.

As to Juliette's patricide, it is at once exemplary - and problematic in as much as it deviates from the model by substituting the daughter to the son. The reproaches and imprecations of her father, who understands her designs, seem to echo the topos of paternal malediction,<sup>23</sup> in which Juliette plays the role usually assigned to the bad son. The preamble to the patricidal act brings Juliette's defiance to its paroxysm. Rendered desperate by his newly-found daughter's cruelty, Bernole 'throws himself on the ground, breaking his skull, and rivers of blood inundate the room'.<sup>24</sup> This renders concrete an intimate urge to deride blood kinship,

as Juliette underscores in a sentence that associates eroticism with the notion of lineage: 'This blood is mine, and it is with delight that I see it flow (...)'<sup>25</sup> - homo-erotic jouissance, masochistic reversal? Juliette, moreover, enjoys the 'delightful thought of burying the next day the man who wrongs her not only by being (her) father', that is, by possessing symbolic power over her, 'but even more by intoxicating (her) with delights', that is, by possessing sexual power over her, for it goes without saying that, at Juliette's instigation, incest has been committed between father and daughter. Here Juliette's status as a woman assumes its full significance. It throws light on the sexual *non-dit* of both family links and political power, and makes the father's defeat all the more shocking as it is achieved by the daughter. Now this father, poor and without connections, possesses only his symbolic rights. As a woman enjoying only mediated access to the established power structure, it is Juliette who most clearly embodies the symbolic dimension of patricide, the outright rejection of the law.

Considered as a whole, those various crimes are not only characterized by the eviction of the fathers for the benefit of the sons/daughters. They take on their full meaning only in the perspective of the absence of sons in the next generation or, if sons exist, of their elimination. We recall that none of the four libertines in *The One Hundred and Twenty Days* has a son and that they sacrifice their wives and daughters without the least hesitation. Since this first novel, Sade had experienced an authority conflict with his own sons. After they emigrated, he may even have viewed them as a threat to his own life and he wrote to them ordering them to come back, reproaching them for 'a situation which holds a sword raised over the breast of those from whom they received their lives'.<sup>26</sup> At any rate, none of the patricidal agents of *The Story of Juliette* can tolerate having his supremacy threatened by a son's existence.<sup>27</sup> Only Noircœuril, the great apologist of patricide, has sons, but they appear only at the moment of being executed by their father. Paternal tyranny culminates with this murder, thereby losing its object - the ultimate parry, it appears, against the sons' revolt.

The many associations between patricide and sodomy corroborate this ultimate meaning of patricide: the suppression of any filiation. In Sade, sodomy symbolizes, among other

things, a unitary economy of non-productive jouissance. It is the fear of pregnancy that Juliette invokes in order to persuade her father to accept sodomic incest with her, an argument which immediately points to the symbolic value of the act, since Juliette has already been impregnated. Similar signifieds characterize sodomic communion, whose meaning acquires complexity only in *Juliette* - it was mentioned, without any 'details', in half-a-line of the plans of *The One Hundred and Twenty Days*. It appears in two episodes of *Juliette*, in which the Host is designated as the 'little God', a phrase that emphasizes its identification with the divine Son.<sup>28</sup> In the first episode, the Host is very roughly treated before actual insertion. In terms of the Freudian interpretation of the Crucifixion, however, it is the sodomic communion administered to Juliette by the pope in Saint-Peter's of Rome during the sacrifice of mass that is most clearly linked to the motif of filiation. Requested by Juliette who outlines the scenario, it takes on an ambivalent meaning - a grotesque parody of the parricidal son's triumph and a sacrilegious attack against Christ - while ensuring the symbolic father's survival.<sup>29</sup> Jesus dies on the cross in order to redeem mankind, guilty of an original crime and, in the Freudian interpretation of the Crucifixion, 'the crime to be expiated can only be the murder of the father' committed by men, since the son's sacrifice is meant to bring about 'atonement with God the Father'. By taking communion, 'the company of brothers consumed the flesh and blood of the son - no longer the father - , obtained sanctity thereby and identified themselves with him'. Through this identification of the faithful with the Son, 'the Christian communion (...) is essentially a fresh elimination of the father...'<sup>30</sup> In this view, the Eucharist dogma signifies the eviction of the father and the appropriation of his qualities by the sons. Juliette and the pope share respectively the traits of the parricidal son and the filicidal father, and although their sacrilegious act only partially corresponds to the Freudian model, it is singularly illuminated by it. Sodomic communion replays in the burlesque mode, both defying the father, and the identification of Juliette receiving the host with the parricidal son, along with the derision of this son under his divine hypostasis, a derision in which the pope actively participates. Simultaneously, the pope, the father of Christendom, but vowed to non-reproduction, in sacrificing his congregation to his pleasures, represents the father as murderer of his sons. The ceremony continues with the

immolation of several young victims, with certain Sadean 'details' that suggest the same symbolism.

In as much as Juliette is a woman, and depending on readers and times, this sacrilege may appear as more outrageous, or more innocuous, or more grotesque. At any rate, it goes far beyond the traditional incompatibility between eroticism and procreation, an incompatibility that, nonetheless, numerous figures of the Sadean orgy never fail to affirm as well. It is customary to insist that the suppression of any genealogical link eliminates the outside world and frees the Sadean agent from any origin and posterity. This remains true, but what is new, in *The Story of Juliette* - and this seems to be the outcome of Sade's experience of the Terror - is the radicalization of this point of view, once it is grafted on to the murder of fathers and sons. The libertine ego and Sadean isolism no longer solely assert themselves in relation to an ontological destiny, but in relation to history. With varying intensity, this new historical consciousness informs the different mutations I have analysed (with perhaps also an increased attention to narrative temporality). With Sade, this could only lead to a catastrophic vision of history, which transforms certain executions of the orgy scene into allegories of the Terror.

## NOTES

1. 'Bedroom' is not an accurate translation of 'boudoir'.
2. Claude Lefort, 'Le boudoir et la cité', in *Petits et Grands Théâtres de Sade*, ed. by Annie Le Brun (Paris: 1989), p.215 a.
3. Lynn Hunt, 'Révolution française et vie privée', in *Histoire de la vie privée*, ed. by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, ed., (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p. 46.
4. Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 105.
5. Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 288-89.
6. Marie-Hélène Huet, *Rehearsing the Revolution: The Staging of Marat's Death, (1793-1797)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 7.
7. Michel Foucault, *La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 196.



8. *La Nouvelle Justine*, in *Oeuvres Complètes du Marquis de Sade* (Paris: Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1963), VII, p. 360.
9. Gilbert Lély, *Vie du Marquis de Sade*, in *Oeuvres Complètes du Marquis de Sade*, II, p. 418.
10. Ragina Janes, "Behndings", *Representations*.
11. *La Nouvelle Justine*, VII, p. 369.
12. *La Nouvelle Justine*, VII, p. 361-62.
13. *L'Histoire de Juliette*, IX, p. 486.
14. *L'Histoire de Juliette*, VIII, p. 241.
15. *L'Histoire de Juliette*, VIII, pp. 242-43.
16. *L'Histoire de Juliette*, VIII, p. 244.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *L'Histoire de Juliette*, VIII, pp. 243-44.
19. *L'Histoire de Juliette*, VIII, p. 242.
20. In *Sade et l'écriture de l'orgie. Pouvoir et Parodie dans "L'Histoire de Juliette"* (Paris: Nathan, 1991), passim and pp. 162-66. (English translation forthcoming, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).
21. In the Paris section, her only harangue, intended to convert Saint-Fond to atheism, is only a little over a page long (VIII, pp. 357-59).
22. Fond memories may well have prompted the choice of Italy, where Sade seems to have enjoyed (almost) unrestrained sexual freedom, but, within the novel, that same freedom in Italy acquires a political significance.
23. See Jean-Claude Bonnet, "La Malédiction paternelle", *Dix-huitième Siècle* 12, 1980, pp. 196, 198.
24. *L'Histoire de Juliette*, VIII, 559.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Letter dated August 17th, 1792, quoted by J. J. Pauvert, *Sade vivant* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1986), II, p. 628.
27. Neither Saint-Fond nor Borchamps have any sons. The former sends his daughter to death and the latter kills his wife and daughter in the midst of atrocious tortures. Although Juliette plays only a subordinate part in the exercise of institutional power, she also has only a daughter, whom she kills at the end.
28. VIII, 468-69 and IX, 161.
29. *L'Histoire de Juliette*, IX, p. 206.
30. Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950), pp. 154-5.

## Sade Contra The Supreme Being

Phillippe Sollers

(translated by Justin Barton and Amy Hanson)

Editor's Foreword

This previously unpublished and extremely curious letter written by the Divine Marquis was entrusted by Apollinaire to Maurice Heine, then, in turn, by the latter to Gilbert Lély. It was handed on to us by Lély shortly before his death, with the instruction that it should not be published until 1989, the bicentenary of the French Revolution. This wish of his, put into effect today, naturally makes of him the person to whom this bringing to light is dedicated.

We have simplified the critical apparatus to the maximum, and all the more so since a certain number of archives (notably those of the Vatican) are still in part inaccessible to us. The person to whom it was sent can only be Cardinal Bernis, who was an exile in Rome, and who died in 1794. The date of the letter is, we believe, the evening of the 7th of December, 1793. In fact the Marquis refers to the torturing of Mme du Barry, which had taken place on the same day. For it is known that he was arrested the day after, the 8th of December, (18th Frimaire, year 2, at ten o'clock in the morning). For that matter, this arrest is indirectly linked to Mme du Barry, since she was involved with the 'Brissac Correspondence'. Sade, in 1791, had requested a place for himself and his dependents in the king's *garde constitutionnelle*, whose commander general was the Duc de Cossé Brissac, lover of the Comtesse du Barry (cf. Cl. Saint-André *Madame du Barry*, Paris, 1909). The Duke had been slaughtered, during a transfer of prisoners, by the populace of Versailles. It is known that, armed only with a knife and a stick, he defended himself heroically. As for the Marquis, he therefore commenced the series of his successive interments under the Terror: Madelonnettes, Carnes, Saint-Lazare, Picpus (where he found himself again in the company of Lacroix). He should have left Picpus only to be executed: an indictment was signed by Fouquier-Tinville before the extraordinary and revolutionary criminal tribunal, on the 26th of July, 1794 (8th Thermidor, year 2). The fact that he escaped when his name was called, when he was about to be conducted to his death, remains a mystery. In the list of the condemned he bears the number 11. He is

accused notably 'of secret relations and correspondences with the enemies of the republic' and of 'showing himself to be the partisan of federalism and the supporter of the traitor Roland' (in other words, of having been a member of the Girondin party). On this evening, the last of his relative liberty, does the Marquis know that he is threatened? One can believe it. Hence the particular importance of this document, the topicality of which will strike more than just one reader.

*'My national detention, the guillotine beneath my eyes, has done me a hundred times more harm than could ever have been done to me by all the imaginable Bastilles'.*

SADÉ  
a letter to his attorney  
Gaufridy  
21st January, 1795

A great tragedy threaten us, my dear Cardinal, I am still dazed by it. It appears that the tyrant and his men of darkness are preparing to reestablish the deistic chimera. Is this not an unbelievable drollery? You know that I am not very sensitive to the rumours and bits of news of all kinds that for several months have agitated our beautiful country. In truth, we have never known such agitation, such fickleness of opinion; so many falsehoods spread in so little time through all minds; so much confusion of thoughts, of desires, of adorations, and of forms of envy; a state so marked by its deterioration into orchestrated malevolence. Will you believe me if I tell you that the secret gospel of this new religion, which I still hope to be impossible (but we are going in this direction very fast), can be summed up in this way: 'You must hate your neighbour as you hate yourself'? Does this not seem very comical to you, and very alarming? Was it necessary to break the altars of superstition and fanaticism, only to end up reconstructing this whole crude cult in reverse? We thought we had uprooted hypocrisy, and look, imagine it, another spectacle is being prepared for us. After the rivers of blood, you know what is coming? I will tell you a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand times: *the Supreme Being!* Do not laugh, it is the rejuvenated name of the Chimera, the marionette has been given a change of clothes.

You will shrug your shoulders in your retreat that, despite your ruin, I imagine adorned by the glory you once inhabited. The monuments of Rome are before your eyes, and Rome will always be Rome. You will see how I myself am coming to terms with the situation if one day my writings reach you. Right now, you would no longer recognise Paris. One might say that a sticky veil, both acrid and insipid, is floating in the streets of this city, which was formerly the liveliest and the cleanest in the world. The inhabitants at one moment seem overexcited and anxious, at the next, convulsive and gloomy. Sometimes they rush at each other to pass on unverifiable gossip; sometimes they avoid and run away from each other as if they had just sworn themselves to an eternal enmity. But no, there they are again the next day, in the process of speaking mysteriously into each others' ears: the gestures are knowing, the grimaces must have a meaning, the plot is everywhere and nowhere. You will imagine that I am many things, but certainly not a cold-blooded animal. And now one can see the appearance of the epoch of abstract blood, rigidified and frigid. The

Christian fable was absurd, very well, but it sometimes permitted moments of voluptuous fervour. What does one see developing now? Stiff bodies, disaffected, disinfected, hygienic, cut with regularity into sections without the slightest sign of lewdness apparent. Take these poor Girondins. You have heard that they died *singing*? Strange picture this, of the guillotine reaping these joyful voices one after the other. These, at least, will have ended as they lived, with the same insolence, as with the pantomime of Sillery coming to the four corners of the scaffold to salute the crowd and the women knitting. Do you think that moved them to help? That it disturbed the rabble? Of course not. We are there in the drawings taken from the life by the sinister David, who has been charged with capturing the attitudes of the condemned: one sees him sitting in the embrasures of windows, impassive, crayon in hand, chewing his way through sketches (en train de croquer) of the unfortunates heaped up in their carts. It is him, it appears, who ought to organise the festivals that are being prepared to celebrate the new god for whom these human sacrifices are ordered. Look what has happened to the fine arts! I saw Fragonard yesterday evening, yes the great and famous Fragonard. He said nothing, he doesn't paint anymore, he has hidden himself away. He has entrusted one of his drawings to me: I have it, at this very moment, under my bed. I would be gone from here if the functionalities of the Supreme Being discovered it! My finances would be good, and I am attached to the idea of keeping my corrupted head on these bent shoulders. The Eye of Allah watches us day and night, let us not awaken his fury. Will I be obliged to go and hide myself in the vaults of the Vatican, in the midst of the obscene collections of the popes? That, you must admit, would be a fine absurdity.

You will remember without doubt this piece of writing by Voltaire, signed Joussoif-Cheribi, about which we laughed together a long time ago. It concerns the dangers of reading. I had noted down some phrases from it: they are only too true: 'For the edification of the faithful and for the good of their souls, we forbid them from ever reading any book, under pain of eternal damnation. And for fear that diabolic temptation might take them under instruction we forbid fathers and mothers from teaching their children to read. And, to prevent all transgression of our edict, we expressly forbid them from thinking, under threat of the same punishment: we enjoin



all true believers to denounce to our officials anyone who pronounces four phrases linked together, from which one could infer a clear and distinct sense. We command that in all conversations one should make use of terms which signify nothing, in accordance with the ancient practice of the Sublime Door.<sup>1</sup> One could imagine, for that matter, my dear Cardinal, a time when, by way of the Supreme Being, and contrary to the commercial optimism of the amiable Arouet, it would be ordered at the same time that one must become rich and that one must no longer read. The 'incorruptible' would have achieved its aim. Paradox? It is hard to know whether to believe that men are moving toward the goal they profess. They speak white and they think black. Say yes, and mean no. Talk of purity, and it turns out as vice. Of virtue, and corruption increases.

As usual, the back of the stage is occupied by women. It is they, I don't need to explain why, who supply the great battalions for the return to God. I had noticed twenty years ago (my problems with *la Présidente* were starting) a renewed propensity of this kind. Do you remember Mmes de... and de...?<sup>2</sup> Well these two mannish prudes used to hold a salon; they prided themselves on having an influence on certain booksellers, who had always been known for equivocation and cowardice. One of them liked to think she knew a lot about poetry, the other, about metaphysics. Both of them opposed to the principles of reason, they reigned at this time over a population of tedious newspaper writers: they used to play at denouncing me in the paper on the least occasion. The Supreme Being, if I dare say it, has closeted itself at their house. I even believe that they were hand in glove with the madwoman Theot.<sup>3</sup> Be that as it may, these whores are today very much in favour. Their aristocratic links have been forgotten, they proclaim themselves to be republicans, they are protected by the Jacobin obscurities, they are even going to have correspondents in Rome, yes, at the Curia. Abbot<sup>4</sup>... this Tartuffe and pseudo-archangel of Sodom, serves them as an all-round factotum. It is said that the stupid Theroinne has been hired by them to pester street-women on a continuous basis. They dream, these vestals of obscurantism, these failed brothel-keepers from Gomorrha, of transforming France into a convent dedicated to the new imposture. The costume has been changed, the murky soul beneath remains the same. The

absence of charm of these brothel rejects will be covered over by a black uniform borrowed from the widowed mystics of Islam. As you see, everything is moving along in step with the falling of the heads into the baskets. It is not just one of these arrogant fools who on certain days will have thought about a violent circumcison of the male to whom they are attracted. Why hold back, they must have said to themselves, just at the organ which is the unique object of our resentment? Why not cut a little further back? Without dirtying the hands, without any contact? In homage to the Supreme Being in its spitefulness, behind which is hidden, with one degree of success or another, the figure of their mother. Mme de Montreuil<sup>5</sup> has taught me enough about this by means of her daughter, who is possessed by the same demon. The Supreme Being! See how it is more agreeable than the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost! It is more female! It remains for them to choose the male sacrifice who could diplomatically put their plan into action - and they will have succeeded.

I repeat: if something is not done soon, we are heading for catastrophe. I could never recover from it: would I have therefore lived and suffered for nothing; cried for nothing the tears of blood over the loss of the manuscripts at the Bastille?<sup>6</sup> Suffered for nothing that villain Rougemont<sup>7</sup> with his daily coarseness, aggravated by my persecutor in petticoats? A philosopher friend speaks of a 'ruse of History'. The ruse of the Chimera is formidable in a different way, and sometimes one could believe that the illusion of History has only been invented to serve it. Once in a place, supported, adored, served by its new priests, it without doubt decides the aim of History, and it is this that we are witnessing today. Already the traffickers in this drug are getting ready in the wings. The Supreme Being is preparing a beautiful Golden Calif for us. What purpose will then have been served by the frightful torture of the little La Barre, when thousands and, perhaps, tomorrow, millions of subjects will have been placed under its yoke? Are we not going to have replaced a tyrant with something worse? Why not, soon, a dictator who would take the title of mufi, or funnier still, of emperor? I can easily imagine David going over immediately to the new regime, and, after the festival of the Supreme Being, I can see him organising this imperial coronation, with the pope himself as an onlooker! Forewarn His Holiness nonetheless that such a comedy is not impossible. Ah, Light, Light, were you

therefore only the preparation for shadows? Rousseau, eternal jackass, has your reign therefore arrived? We had clear-eyed spirits, proven and confident. Now we will have whimperers, people like Héloïse, like Arsinôé. I have a premonition of a flood of sickly melancholy, a cult dedicated to the vapours of the least migraine-ridden, long-awaited prophetess. The *extreme Under-Being (Le Sous-Être extrême)* will sanctify their tears. All that, you will say to me, will be good for the people, only the aristocracy was atheist. But, great gods, where are they going to seek out these stupidities? But even if it were true, who will ever figure better than the aristocracy in the history of taste, of pleasures? What will this new idol serve to do if not increase the ugliness, the traces of which will from now on be present everywhere. You know my motto: disorder, beauty, wealth, frenzy, voluptuousness. And even so: if atheism has need of martyrs, my blood is ready. We hide ourselves away, nevertheless. The brave Thomas B...<sup>8</sup> has just committed suicide. He had become a misanthropist as a result of the weakening of his desires. I have no intention of doing the same thing. My desires are always strong, varied and insatiable. The thinking that emerges from them is still the same. I will not have my throat cut on the altar of the final puppet.

You think that I exaggerate? That such a frozen bestiality could not have embedded itself in just a few months in the most civilised country in the world? And yet, it is true. The consequences for the future are immense, because, don't doubt it, the model will be followed. People are speaking about celebrating the Infamous. It is a tree - the tree of 'liberty'. Here is a sacred transplantation! Something to which the dreams of genealogy could never reach! Abolish servitude: it returns, voluntarily, more than ever. I know that later people will accuse me of having forced the dose in my writings. This is because no one will have seen what I have seen with my eyes, heard with my ears, touched, felt, verified with my hands. Liberty? No one has ever been less free: it is like a river of sleepwalkers. Equality? There is only equality of severed heads. Fraternity? Informing has never been so common. One could never have found it easier had one decided to bring to light the nest of human passions pressing toward the annihilation of all by all. Yes, each wants the death of each, it's true. But this should be done with inventiveness, with piquancy, through the infinite resource of forms, and not through this sentimental coldness of

mechanical tribundis. The sorrowfulness of death revolts me, death should always be linked to pleasure. It might soon be forbidden to mock at death? Think about that! Death serious! Industrial! Technical! And, what is more, accompanied by the moanings of Saint-Preux, and the timorousness of L'Épinette, you know, Grimm's little prostitute? In brief, an infernal bad taste ought to be spilling back above all onto letters and the arts, above all thanks to this madman d'Hébert and to his père Duchesne. It is not only bodies that are being killed, it is also the language, music, painting, architecture, theatre, science. Vandalism has become general, and, beyond doubt, illiteracy will follow this regression. Twelve of thirteen centuries have been needed to repair the ravages of Christianity, how many will be needed to put right those of the new religion? Everyone who can read too easily has become suspect, to have on you a book in Latin or Greek can cost you your life, forthwith. Posturing or aggressive noises are preferred to knowledge: knowledge immediately indicates a state of privilege which classes you as a royalist, a conspirator, a foreign agent or a counter-revolutionary. Virtue, foul Virtue is being rejuvenated in the putrid breath of ignorance and prejudice. I have been told that the Tyrant has dared to declare with his customary falsity that 'The centuries and the earth are the domain of crime and of tyranny; liberty and virtue have scarcely managed to maintain themselves for an instant when they have appeared at certain points on the globe. Sparta shines out like lightning in the immense shadows'. You laugh? You are roaring with laughter? You are wrong: these ineptitudes are now common. Our obscurantists are listened to, read, applauded. *Sparta shines out like lightning in the immense shadows!* This is the language of these young Turks who happily used to be dressed at Lepanto by the adorable Venetian republic, where you were lucky enough to stay recently. They do not know Italy, my dear cardinal, they hold forth on the basis of a merely abstract knowledge of Greece and Rome; they play at Horace and at Curiace without ever having seen the remains of Titus or of Vespasien. Even old Montaigne knew more than them about the resources that ancient Rome represents, he who did not hesitate to go and kiss the mule of Gregory XIII after the Saint Bartholomew massacre. That was how much he feared the 'Calvinist innovations' and the banning, again, of Lucretius and Democritus! A pleasant sight, is it not, to see a spirit so disillusioned as to put up a commemorative plaque in



Notre-Dame-de-Lorette! Which goes to show that *the returns to barbarism* must be traced back beyond the present time. At this moment are we living through anything other than the pure insanity of Geneva? Or perhaps it is a deluge of Prussian influence? One hears talk all the time of the role of foreign countries: in general this talk is about England. But who are they, our iconoclastic Turks, if they are not Swiss, or German, or Russian, only disguised as pompous patricians, thirsting as they are for an easily comprehensible vengeance against the French nobility and its Gallican Church, now returned and on oath to the state? England? But the Regent was a thousand times right in his reversal of alliances. One day he will be recognised as a genius, despite his roués and his open incest with his daughter, or rather *because of them*. The Gallican Church? Now this was the fatal error, protestantism which dared not speak its name, a tawdry version of Rome, a substitute from the gap between the two. My father often used to say this, my father who, as you will remember, was made a freemason at the same time as Montesquieu, and in the presence of Richmond.<sup>9</sup> Of our tonsured heads, our monks, those who were too closely linked to the Ancien Regime - in short, our old servants - have now been eliminated; but the majority have already rallied to the cause of the Supreme Being. Tomorrow they will furnish the troops of the new, even *less pagan* cult, or rather of a cult that represents a bloodless paganism. Christianity is bearable only if it preserves paganism. Without this, it is once again the chimerical and hollow being which comes into existence only to torture the human race. Say for my part to the Holy Father that, *chimera for chimera*, his own, though perfectly hypocritical and laughable, has at least the advantage of having peopled the sanctuaries of the most pleasant Bacchanalia in history. A sensual person is not confused about this; I often think back sadly to the delicious hours that I passed in Florence or in Naples, among all those convulsive, yearning nudes. I admired Michaelangelo and Bernini; I had no passion for the Phrygian busts and bonnets or the truncated columns of false temples. Ah, Cardinal, do whatever you can, I beg you, tomorrow it will be too late! We should see to it that our last years here are employed in holding back the reign of the *Supreme Virago!* (*la Suprême Mégère*). Imagine it. If this calamity were to happen we would even end up missing my old Jesuit masters that you helped to chase from the country; the Jesuits, these jackals of darkness, but who at

least, thanks to rhetoric and casuistry, were in no way unaware that the non-existence of God would be the artistry of the Devil!

Do you know what the guillotine is called here? 'Capet's rope'; 'the abbey of Regret-Mountain'; 'the scales'; 'the sword of justice'; 'the skylight'; 'the fanlight'; 'the national razor'; 'the banknote press' (*'la planche à assignats'*); 'Charlot's razor'; 'the patriotic cutback'; 'the little cat-flap'; 'the widow'. Don't you think these last two names merit a long commentary? I will wager however that 'the widow' has a long future in front of her, and that the Supreme Being will be her eternal husband. As well as this there have been discussions about the divine appellation. One person wanted it to be 'the Great Other'. For a divinity thirsting for blood, this was not bad. Others hesitated: the Great Supreme? The Supreme Other? Some Germans who found themselves there sometimes favoured 'the Spirit', and sometimes 'the Transcendental Subject'. One of them, who was particularly obstinate, wanted everyone to agree to 'the Thing-in-Itself' or 'the In-Itself'. Another held that we should content ourselves with 'the Being', without an adjective. He had a very religious face. Another proposed, more daringly: 'the Nothing'. The Supreme Nothing? You will have to admit that this God, a hundred times more cruel than the other one which has been surpassed, will not be thought to have states of soul. What else? Someone from Vienna who was passing through Paris maintained that henceforth we must prostrate ourselves before 'the Unconscious'. He also started talking vaguely about the 'Lack-in-Being', but this was enough; it had to be brought to an end. The Supreme Being carried the day; the preparations for its enthronement ought to be showing themselves soon. The partisans of the goddess Reason are still muttering a little. But it's all amiable rubbish. And why not call our divinity 'the Lung', as Molière would have said? No, in the end, it will be Being, I tell you, Being. Matter, nature, the republic one and indivisible, the universal future republic, and the totality of bodies; they must all sing its anthem. All astuteness and knowledge will be used to pull the strings of the Punchinello. Finance, of course, *come sempre*. Such will be, under the baton of the incorruptible, the marriage of vice and virtue. Already one of my sons, on the strength of my slight literary notoriety, is intending, when *business recovers*, to commercialise my name in the form, wait for it, of a brand of



champagne. He feels that goes well with my style, given that what is to be sold is bubbly, effervescent and refreshing, and given that our name, as you will know, being the good Latinist that you are, signifies agreeable, delicious, delicate, *sapid*. The young generation has no doubts: if he cannot do me harm directly, this charming Oedipus wants to throw down our blazon into the public domain. Tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, the cafés, the restaurants, the nights and the festivities, are his. 'Drink some Sadel', 'a goblet of Sadel', 'to the health of the Supreme Being!'. La Montreuil, beneath her grand airs, is venerated, and my wife as well. Above all, women care about money: this is a truth which has not yet come into its own. When will this marvelous banquet happen? Will it be at the Globe?<sup>10</sup> In summer? For thermidor?

Apart from that of the king, the executions which have had the greatest success have been those of the queen, of the Girondins, and of Mme du Barry.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Mme du Barry, who did not want to die, one believed for a moment that she was going to make the crowd relent. Sanson says that he no longer acknowledges the people who are brought to his machine. But even he felt himself weaken, and felt that he was about to cry, when confronted by the total dejection of the poor woman, her face shifting ceaselessly from purple to white, her passivity as she fell from side to side in the tumbrel like a sack, her moans, her supplications. He counselled her to pray, but it appears that she could only repeat 'Mon Dieu, Mon Dieu!'. Everyone repeats the words she spoke on seeing the guillotine: 'A moment more, I beg you!' She struggled (executioners), a moment more, I beg you! She struggled, she attempted to bite. It took more than three minutes to get her up. The people were silent, and many fled. 'Once up there', says Sanson, 'she was screaming again: it must have been possible to hear her by the river. She was truly terrifying to look at. Finally, they managed to strap her down, and it was done. Afterwards, the others were executed'. This manner of speaking does not lack grandeur, don't you think, my dear Cardinal? One could imagine that we are back at the time of Tacitus, rather than at the end of the eighteenth century. Who knows whether the men of future centuries will often have the impression of having returned far into the past. These will be the sombre jokes of the Supreme Being. In any case, you will notice the general mechanism. We are far from the

frenzied excitement at the windows overlooking the quartering of Damiers. You once told me, I believe, that Casanova, your vivacious friend from Venice, had observed that a kind of masturbation takes place when watching someone being tortured. Here, nothing of the kind. The spectacle, no mistake about it, is as cold as death. To the extent that one can ask whether the hidden intention behind this whole patriotic abattoir is to rise up with the aid of death against the pleasures of an entire country; to reduce this century to nullity through a form of punishment that is equal in strength to its overflowings and its excesses. La Montreuil doesn't doubt this for a minute. I had forgotten to point out this consolation, by the way: we are promised an immortality of soul. It does not seem clear to me that Mme du Barry believed in this. The immortality of the soul Poor La Mettrie, he also will have laboured for nothing, he who thought that the soul and the body were made together, as if by a single stroke of a brush. You recently asked me to copy a passage for you from the *Treatise on the Soul*. Here it is therefore, coming to you before this book is burned or buried with the others. It's from chapter XXVIII:

In the same way that, as a result of certain physical laws, it was not possible that the sea should not have its flux and reflux, the existence of certain laws of movement has led to the forming of eyes which have seen, ears which have heard, nerves which have felt, a tongue sometimes capable and sometimes incapable of speaking, according to its organisation; finally they have fabricated the viscera of thought. Within, its human machine nature has made another machine, which found itself to be apt for retaining ideas, and for making new ones from them, as with woman, this womb or matrix, who from a drop of liquid makes a child. Having made eyes which see, without thinking; when one sees a bit of mucus produce a living creature, full of spirit and beauty, of morals, and of sensual delight, can one be surprised that a scrap of brain tissue, more or less, manages to generate genius or imbecility?

Is it not piquant, my dear friend, to think of seeing the absurd dogma of the immortality of the soul reimposed, before long, by means of the tetanus-like augmentation of the mortality of the body? Is this not a sort of terrible vengeance by

what does not exist against that which exists? The immortal and illusory soul feeding on the body! What monstrous *psychological* vanity! What ignorant narcissism, worshipping nothing but air! The Eternal carried by its corpses to the basket, bodies to one side, heads to the other! Yes, yes: on one side the man, on the other side the citizen! And lime-filled communal graves for all: equality and fraternity, which no longer have a name in any language! A comedy actor said to me the other evening: 'We would like to resume work tomorrow on Voltaire's *Mahomet*: everyone would apply it to the present situation. The play would be banned, we will have to reject it'. Voltaire proscribed in Paris; the triumph of 1778 will have had a short-lived fame in this capricious country. But I can see what will follow: feeble plays imposed by force, rose-water romances, brain-killing commodities, massive cretinism and conformism, authors castrated from birth, advancement organised by ostriches. What shame, what sadness, what hatred of thought, what a brake on change! You wrote to me that in Rome you had come to be exposed to the hostility and to the persecution of emigrés just as much as revolutionaries (and is it not above all from their wives?). That doesn't surprise me. They are worthy of each other. Fanaticism reunites them in the eternal trinity of stupidity, ignorance and prejudice. What does your Casanova say about it? Have you seen him again? Write, write: the witness of reason must make himself heard by the future centuries. 'What future centuries? There is no more future!' they mutter. 'We will not be judged!' Oh but yes, you will be, scoundrels, even if you should spread barbarism to such an extent that no one, one day, would know any more how to read and write! There will remain some who are untouched. They will traverse, by the power of music alone, the sombre night of death. 'We don't need music any more!' Oh, Italy, do you hear this blasphemy? By the way, have you news of this Mozart who you met at Grimm's house? Is it true that he has composed a *Don Juan*? Is it beautiful? One more opera which now would give rise only to sarcasm. One would think it was a question of paintings of infamies and orgies on the part of a degenerated aristocracy. And, what is more, it is *atheistic*, the single and definitive great crime!

To sum it up, the Supreme Being wants to *select its bodies* and take them, so to speak, back to the basic. It is an experience of sorting. Perhaps one day it will come to fabricate

them from all the pieces, producing them without memory, without a past, uncultivated, immediately obeying its iron voice. As for me, I can see my destiny very clearly: after having dishonoured me, shut me away, ruined me, transformed me into an irresponsible buffoon, they will try to claim that I am mad. I will go from the prison to the asylum, unless I am bled to death before this. Of course, I have taken the precaution of playing a patriotic role. You would laugh at me if you heard me at the Pikes section (what a name!) holding forth with discourses as inflamed as those of the other citizens.<sup>12</sup> I loudly renounce my origins; one cannot find anyone more republican than me. But I exaggerate, I feel that all this is useless. The fatal letters of my rank are written on my forehead. People *tolerate* me. For how long? Already my château at La Coste has been pillaged. This old affair of the Marseilles whores follows me in the shadows, and it is clear that, in our times, a whore is a thousand times more listened to and respected than a man of quality. I am even informed that a series of 'national readings' is now taking place down there, at my château. At these readings it appears that poets are declaiming verses that are as dull as they are incomprehensible. Obscurantist fanatics have convinced themselves that they have supplanted me. That is a part of the *hébertiste* programme which consists, as I have already told you, of degrading the language, of muddling it up, of brutalising it and deadening it. One speaks with borborygms, gibberish has become king. The incessant and democratic usage of the word *foutre*, for example presages the suppression of the thing through the abuse of the word. People will ceaselessly use obscenities in order to render the actual thing impossible. You know that I am appalled by bawdiness. Voltaire would have said that it is a mediaeval malady going back to the Gauls, and I bear in mind his prophecy: 'There are times when one can do the most daring things with impunity; there are others when the most simple and innocent things become dangerous and criminal'. We have arrived at this second part of the play. Legions of little commissaires will soon start suspecting everywhere what is most simple, most innocent. A nation where the women come to knit placidly, and to talk about their love lives, at the foot of the scaffold while the heads are falling - as peasant women carry on washing their laundry while a pig is being killed - this nation cannot go much deeper into the worship of servitude. Everywhere and at all times such debilitation generates dogma; savagery without



emotion will be the new cement for this process. This is what the deism of the shrewd philosopher of Ferney, even though it was ironic, was not able to foresee.

A particularly dull-witted Jacobin exclaimed the other day: 'Tolerance, there are prisons for that!' ('prisons' translates 'maisons', as in 'maison d'arrêt', and this word - see what follows - can also mean 'brothels', as in 'maisons de tolerance'...). I was imprudent enough to respond 'Ah, precisely, citizen, that is why we love it!'. He looked at me spitefully: 'So you're in favour of the philosophical whorehouse?' 'Why not, I responded, and besides five sturdy women arrived yesterday from Avignon; they are at the Marais, shall I take you there?' I was trying to relax the atmosphere: I could see that he was tempted, but he returned to his sermons. In reality, the five women in question were all hideous and stupid, though very skilful. What do you expect, one is obliged to make do with what is available.

Another curious thing is the current vogue for horoscopes and predictions. The poorest charlatan makes himself a reputation in a matter of weeks. Cagliostro are everywhere: the counts of Saint-Germain are of no interest - village soothsayers proliferate. An Italian was arrested recently, and with him half a dozen mystical madwomen. He employed them as oracles, demanding that they recount their dreams in public. As if by accident, he claimed to have entered into communication, through the women, with the Supreme Being - which unveiled in these poor women, in their trances, its vision of the future, its wishes, its objects of wrath, its projects for new laws. There has been much whispering about this case. But as influential members of the Committee for Public Health had got themselves mixed up in it, the scandal was suppressed. The Italian, a new Moses in the Sinai, disappeared at the moment when he was about to reveal the list of the true Elect of the divinity. People are saying that the incorruptible forbade this miracle. Another visionary, a small sly man with a face devoured by vice, has declared himself to be Orpheus returned. In our world of heads loose on people's shoulders this caused no surprise. He comes and goes, chattering, rambling, busying himself with denunciations; he pours forth in the gazettes, makes his poems available to the highest bidder, writes notes denouncing his colleagues, trades in illicit goods,

speculates on the market, chatters and drives yet again, says he is the reincarnation of Homer, of Virgil, of Dante, of Petrarch, recites his spiteful, lunatic's verses with an imperturbable composure - briefly, as he lives in Clamart, he has been nicknamed 'the Orpheus of Clamart'. In these times of disappearing bodies and of the immortality of the soul, his trick of being reincarnated is very clever. Many reincarnated individuals are now declaring themselves. One used to be the confidant of Isis, another, of Aton. Note that no reincarnated person has experienced an inferior state. The women - this goes without saying - were all priestesses or sacral prostitutes. In that way they show they are candidates for the temple of the Supreme Being. As for the Orpheus of Clamart, his love of mankind has no limits. And as he hates all prose which does not resemble that of *Héloïse*, just like a savoyard curate, I must expect regular denunciations from this quarter as well.

Philosophy itself, predictably enough, has become suspect. People are beginning to declare it to be superfluous; to be too linked to the Ancien Régime; a luxury of the nobility; a pastime of the idle. Everything must become a festivity, a gathering together, a collective hymn, a collective distraction. One will sing, one will march, one will cry out. Enthusiasm is a daily obligation. The theatres are closed because reality is now no more than theatre. One has the impression of living on a gigantic screen of lies. Any actors or actresses who were too sophisticated have long since been arrested, or forced to flee. In their place one has the swaggering of automation males and females, capable only of effects which are as simple as they are exaggerated. The most celebrated at the moment is a notorious convulsioneer. She appears, weighty, dishevelled, intense; she pours forth her lines like someone in a visionary frenzy; one imagines sometimes that she is about to collapse and vomit up a complete tubful of serpents; she is a Gorgon, she is the Medusa, she suffers, she groans, she beseeches, she triumphs. The audience is in ecstasies. Ill to whomsoever criticises her! This would be to insult the entire nation. Simply to be reserved about her would appear as sacrilege. If she suddenly appears there is delirium. If she starts singing 'shepherds, bring home your white sheep', the public cries. Her repertoire is invariably that of good against evil. You must understand that she, she also, is visited at night by the Supreme Being. She bears the stigmata when she wakes. Her habitual partner, a puny but



## Philippe Sollers

vivacious Corsican, is a part of some clan which apparently has as a member a military man who is expected to have a great future. He declaims with emphasis. He is also the author of a very bad novel which appeared ten years ago, *The Devil in the Salon*. He tries to make people forget this bland, mildly licentious novel, and he succeeds in this. This is the celebrated couple. But where, I ask you, have our melodious singers gone, our sprightly dancers, our attractive, sensual girls, our refined perverts? Dissolved! Evaporated! Flown away! There have been none to be seen since the assassination of Marat, so much has virtue been redoubled since this accident in the bath. David has painted it, according to his habit, as an antique tableau, with the evident intention of transforming him into a martyr of the faith. On top of this, hundreds of citizens are now saying their prayers, in the evening, in front of a portrait of Robespierre set up in the place of a crucifix. It appears that Danton himself, informed that he was henceforth in danger, responded: 'They wouldn't dare, I am the Arch-Saint'. About which Sanson commented dryly: 'I think he is mistaken. There is only one Arch-Saint: the guillotine'. Pious portraits! Prayers! Arch-Saints! At what point will this descent end? How much longer will this *juridical Saint Bartholomew* endure?

Of course, my dear Cardinal, horrors and crimes are committed during every epoch, and you know that I have filled my novels with them, in order to reveal, for the first time in history, the special vein. Without me, I am not afraid of saying it, men would continue to struggle in their quagmire of passions and would continue to enjoy them without realising it. Reckoning up what happens, assessing it, that is everything. The Supreme Being only intervenes when one is tired of reckoning: one passes to an addition without verification, an easy calculation, a false algebra. I have penetrated the secret: I don't expect either the comprehension of individuals or general recognition - on the contrary. It could well be that I am arrested tomorrow, and that my manuscripts are seized and reduced to cinders. I will at least have saved some of them: this is the only consolation when faced with such destruction. People say at present that the blood running across the beams beneath the guillotine is being consumed in broad daylight by dogs.<sup>13</sup> It coagulates too quickly to be absorbed by the earth and in decaying it produces an infection which is spreading itself everywhere. After witnessing the spectacle, the people dance the carmagnole around the tree of liberty and the murdering machine, without caring for one

moment about the corpses that are being carried away. Never have people been so disdainful of life, and the lack of concern is sometimes carried to such a point that one sees extraordinary scenes. Thus Joseph Chopin, a hussar, twenty-three years old, continued to smoke on the 'weighing machine', as it is called: the head and the pipe fell together into the basket. The prisoners don't demand anything more than that it be over. Sanson confirms this: 'I was able to habituate myself to the horror that we incite, but to grow used to leading people to the guillotine who are ready to say 'thank you' to you - that is difficult in another way'. And again, 'In truth, to see them all, judges, jurors, defendants, one would think they were all sick of an illness one would have to call the *delirium of death*'.<sup>14</sup> All that of course is accompanied by an atrocious vulgarity which is only the signature of cruelty and fanaticism. Yet along with these there is something else again, which is never seen. Villate, a juror at the revolutionary tribunal, was in a hurry to go to a restaurant; the accusation session was dragging on; he got up and cried out 'the accused must be doubly convinced of their guilt, because this is the time I eat, and they are conspiring against my stomach'. Outside, in the streets, you will not be surprised to learn that it is the women who are often the most wild, above all when the condemned women are attractive. Then, they cannot be restrained. These pavement harpies throw stones, mud and excrement at the tumbrels which carry women who are often very young and beautiful. They scream out insults to the point where the men often appear embarrassed. The resoluteness that the prisoners show during their journey doesn't soften the hearts of the citizens at all: it angers them, as a red rag angers a bull. Sometimes this resoluteness becomes astounding: as with Montjournain and de Courtonnet who never stopped laughing and joking as they went to their deaths.<sup>15</sup> This Montjournain was the commander of the battalion of Saint-Lazare. He spent his last moments composing a song, from which I will copy you the last verse.

Quand au milieu de tout Paris  
Par un ordre de la patrie,  
On me roule à travers les ris  
D'une multitude étourdie,  
Qui croit que, de sa liberté,  
Ma mort assure la conquête,  
Qu'est-ce autre chose, en vérité,  
Qu'une foule qui perd la tête.<sup>16</sup>

Those among the condemned who are like this, who sing like the Girondins, and, it must be said, *sing their heads off*; these put fear into the executioner, into the soldiers, into the tribunal itself, and into those who are closely involved in supporting it. They disorientate the people, they constitute, by their constant attitude of derision, an insult which is more threatening to the progress of the cult than anything else. Yet this is an attitude which is thoroughly worthy of our soldiery, our language and our taste. In it I hear our lost music: do you remember that concert, long ago, at the Tuileries, with those two marvelous violinists who played pieces by M. de Sainte-Colombe - *Ja Bourrasque, Je Rapporté*. I am thoroughly afraid at present for my editor, who is mad about these divertissements. I have had no news of him - I hope he has safely hidden his copies of the infamous *Justine*, which nothing, obviously, would make me admit to having written.<sup>17</sup>

This therefore is Paris, this is the cave of massacres. Since the famous *Septembre*, everything is organised in line with the ritual of the slaughter. These are not bodies anymore that are haphazardly hacked at, that are battered to death with blows from a club, that are stabbed with pikes and carved up. They are an uninterrupted procession of holy sacraments being led towards the altar of the Idea, of the Knife - towards the tabernacle of destructive nothingness. The showing of heads to the public strangely resembles the showing of the monstrosity. Being and nothingness are the permanent echo of each other, such are the terrorising Commandments, of Law, of Edification. For you will see that this founding butchery will soon be forgotten: it will become depression, melancholy, intermittent nightmare, inhibition, agitation, sickness, anguish, visions, guilt, resentment, darkness. *It will have put in place a principle of desolation*. It will sometimes be used as a stick, or a source of horror ('keep yourself under control!'), sometimes as a carrot ('keep going forward!'). Christians have bled themselves white for centuries - we will get on better with a controlled haemorrhage... Poems which will be yet more inspired than those of the Orpheus of Clamart will obscure these different developments. They will say, for example: the heart of Being is enclosed by a dark cloud. Beyond doubt! And for good reason! After the waltz of the false gods with their voracious hunger we will have a skeletal god who merely marks time. The condemned cry out: 'Long live the king!' or: 'Long live the

Republic!' - the crowd responds 'Long live the people', and the heavy sound of the knife punctuates these cries: 'Long live the Supreme Being!'. But me, I want neither the king nor the republic; I don't want the nation; nor do I want the supremacy of Being! I have no intention of applauding this carnival, this Jehovah made of cardboard, of brain, (or rather of steel!), this song of praise from rat-like souls! Equality? So be it. But I will recall to you what Voltaire wrote about it in his *Philosophical Dictionary*: 'Every man, at the bottom of his heart, has the right to think himself entirely equal to other men; it does not follow from this that the cook of a cardinal ought to order his master to make him his dinner'. I don't want people to say 'long live' instead of: 'death to'. And no more do I want them to say 'the people' instead of: 'long live death!'. The Orpheus of Clamart is going around everywhere at present reciting his latest poem, which starts with the line: 'Those who piously died for their country'. But I don't want a country either! Literature has no country - and I have nothing to lose but my chains. As for 'piously', I will leave you to laugh as you read your breviary. The programme of 'liberty or death?': we are left only with death. Fraternity, my dear brother (may Allah protect you) - we know to what extent this is practised: you must distrust your brother as you distrust yourself, not speak even to yourself for fear your brother is listening, and realise that the walls are full of fraternal ears ready to send you to spend a season in hell. It appears that a certain Carrier, a very fraternal person, is organising some very fine spectacles on the Loire: these take the form of drowning of all kinds - they are referred to by the phrase 'the room in the water'. Do you know what a 'republican marriage' is? Through this a man and a woman are given the opportunity to get to know each other through a cold and endless asphyxiation. Another man, Jourdan, is in the habit of crying out to the victims at the final moment: 'Go and sleep with your mistress!' You must acknowledge that sensuality has here taken an enormous step: one does not get excited any more by imagining death; one is forced to make love directly with it. The old God demanded procreation, and sacrifices. The new has decreed the abolition of sex, and its replacement by an incessant *decreation*. It is truly a god of the dead. The old one was the same, but at least it gave an appearance of being a god of the living. You will tell me that this clarifies things. Perhaps...



One more word. I am sending you this letter by a reliable courier (you will be astonished by the identity of this person). Whatever you should learn of me later, do not doubt that it expresses what I really think. I have had to hide behind a mask lately, but I fear this will have served no purpose: the examination of suspects has become systematic. It is obvious however that I am not occupying myself with the running of societies. I leave these concerns to those for whom corruption which call itself virtue has become the most constant, the most overwhelming, and the most harsh of vices. Mme de Sade reproached me in the past, under pressure from her mother, for being too interested in *those things*. I was in the habit of responding to her that the memory of *those things*, as she put it, and as her mother, *la présidente*, must have put it, was my sole consolation in prison, and in life, life being in every way only a prison. I will never renounce *those things*, my dear cardinal, under any pretext: it is to be hoped that one day they will be the measure of all writings. I know that you understand me, that I have your absolution, and that you can imagine what I am going off to do straightaway, after having sealed this letter. If I am arrested, may God forbid it, I beg you to do everything to safeguard my papers. Mme Quesnet is reliable. My body is nothing, it will fall where chance decides: moreover my ambition is to disappear forever from people's memories.<sup>19</sup>

The night is now far advanced, my eyes are getting tired. From outside my window in the rue Helvétius, I can hear the drunken songs of the head-hunters. They have had their daily ration: tomorrow they will have the same. Can you feel it coming, this communion, this fusion, this deranged uniting of all the cults? The 'rights of man' - laid down, you will remember, 'in the presence, and under the auspices of the Supreme Being' - will without doubt be a poor defence against this rising tide. All the same I take a certain pleasure in reminding you of Article 11: 'The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man; therefore every citizen may freely speak, write and publish... I stop the phrase there, because then the law as limit returns, which I do not want to think about. 'In the presence', 'under the auspices...'. There was even the phrase 'the eyes of the immortal legislator'. It's enough to make you sick with disgust. Look after my manuscripts, dear friend, get them published. Without doubt they will be a consolation to some people in future times. I say

some advisedly: it will always be the same, there will always be some who will not resign themselves to any limitation of the rights of the imagination. My nights, pen in hand, are and will remain the best memories of my life; ah, how it still flies, this pen, with which I defy, even at this moment, the narrow horizon which locks me in! How powerful letters are when the spirit is on fire! The flame of philosophy will always rekindle itself at the fire of sexuality: it will not be extinguished in the temples, even if a thousand supreme beings should attempt to smother the spark. I believe only in what I read, and then I want to verify each phrase. And I value only the books that people want to burn. People will censure this, whether openly or covertly, but it will always be necessary to keep on lighting the pyre which will consume all the gods. I have only one reproach to make against myself, that of not having written enough. Shall I tell you my one certainty? Only the *printing house is divine*. Stories, experiences, variations, calculations, results, concerning *those things*, this is what is necessary, endlessly. Such is my Torah, my Gospel, my Koran, my Declaration of Rights. Or more precisely, and more modestly, if you prefer it is my sextant, my compass. I have learned to listen to each person by means of the functioning of this magnetic north. They are obliged to indicate it despite themselves: *it makes itself heard* - their smallest lies are magnetised by it, and truths indefinitely breathe, sweat and conspire as a result of its influence. Your glorious predecessor, the Cardinal of Retz, used to say: 'There are matters about which the world constantly wants to be mistaken'. The matters involved are *those things*. They are infinite, in the same way as the proof that one can give of this will be infinite. Is it an accident that French is the language where this amazing demonstration is taking place? Is it an accident that it is the French that people want, and will want to stifle concerning this crucial point? That the French themselves have decided to forget this criminal prosecution? The poor French! Suppress yourselves therefore! One more effort! Embrace the theories of Moses, of Calvin, of Luther, of Mahomet. Turn to the Hebrews, to the Swiss, to the Germans, to the Arabs! Bury yourselves in the gurglings of d'Hébert! I said that I have no country, but finally *quod scripsi, scripsi*. I think of La Fayette in writing these lines: of another novel which is in contrast to Héloïse, and which is therefore to the taste of the new Scylla<sup>20</sup>, and to that of the Supreme Being, and is therefore censored nowadays: 'Magnificence and gallantry have never appeared in France





with so much brilliance as they did in the reign of Henry the second. As he was good at all the disciplines of the body, he made these one of his greatest occupations. Every day there was a hunting party, or tennis, or ballets, or tilting at the ring, or similar entertainments; the colours and the initials of Mme de Valentinois appeared everywhere, and she appeared herself with all the finery that could be shown by Mlle de Marck, her grand-daughter'.<sup>21</sup>

'Grandeur, magnificence, pleasures...'. These words suddenly appear to me to come from another planet; from Mars, from Jupiter, from Venus. You have often asked me if I resemble my ancestor, Laure de Nove, who was the subject of Petrarach's poems. I dreamed of her in the Bastille. 'Why are you groaning on the earth?', she said to me. 'Come and rejoin me'. She held out a hand that I covered with my tears; she also was crying. This dream returned many times: it is too easy to explain why. A resemblance? Judge by this medallion that I enclose with my letter. To this one I add another. You have had the kindness to ask for a picture of me: here it is.<sup>22</sup> It is necessary to finish, my dear Cardinal: my messenger is knocking on the door in the agreed way. Don't forget me in your prayers, and above all in the recollection of those things. Walk out in the world, read, write, live as the subtle Aretin believed one should live in this very lowly world which has nothing supreme about it. And believe me to be always your non-humble, and non-obedient non-servant, that is to say, your friend.<sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

1. Voltaire, 'On the horrible danger of reading' (1765), in *Mélanges, Pléiade*, p. 713. This text, one will remember, ends with the famous phrase: 'Given in our palace of stupidity, the 7th of the moon of Muharem, year 1143 of the hegira'. (Note of the editor.)
2. Here two names have been crossed out (by the recipient?).
3. Catherine Theot claimed to be the mother of God and had founded a sect the priestesses of which called themselves the Guide, the Singer and the Dove. She ended up managing to compromise even Robespierre.
4. Name crossed out.
5. La présidente de Montreuil, Sade's mother in law.
6. The 120 Days.
7. Governor of the Bastille before 1789.
8. Name crossed out. Perhaps Bernart or Bernard, an unknown person.
9. 'The Duke of Richmond was one of the personalities of the English Grand Lodge, of which he would become grand-master. In 1730, Montesquieu being in London, Richmond made friends with him as he had made friends with Voltaire. He received him ... at the same time as two other Frenchmen, François-Louis de Gouffier and le Comte de Sade, the father of the famous Marquis. (...) Sade's family was one of the most ancient of the papal states, and his ancestors included Laure de Nove (Laura 'de Navarre?'), Petrarach's lover'. René Pomeau, in *D'Arouet à Voltaire*, Oxford, 1985.
10. One of the literary cafes at the time, near the Palais-Royal, where the comedy actors gathered after a play. Later this was the meeting place of the fops and the gilded youth generally of Paris. The theatre would have been one of Sade's obsessions. For example, he wrote to Gauffridy, on October 22nd, 1791, 'I have finally appeared in public, my dear advocate. Last Saturday one of my plays was performed, and courtesy of the political cabals, and of the new decrees, and of the women, about whose sex I said unpleasant things, its success was extremely mixed. It will be put on again next Saturday, but with changes; pray for me; we will see. Adieu'. This would have been *Le Comte Oxtiern*

- ou les Effets du Libertinage, on the stage of the Molière theatre, rue Saint-Martin, in the ancient 'des Nourrices' passageway.
11. Mme du Barry had returned to Paris after having fled to London. Denounced, she was condemned and executed. See: Henri-Clement Sanson, *Seven Generations of Executioners*, 1688-1847, Paris, 1862 and 1863, where one can find the diary kept on a daily basis, during the revolution, by his grandfather, Charles-Henri Sanson. This was brought out in a new edition in 1988 entitled *La Révolution Française vue par son Bourreau*, Editions de l'Instant. Writing about the execution of Mme du Barry, Sanson wrote this astonishing phrase: 'If everyone cried out and struggled as she did the guillotine would not last long'. On the 15th of November 1793 (25th Brumaire, Year 2), citizen Sade, at the head of seven other delegates (Vincent, Artaud, Sanet, Bisoir, Gerard and Guillemard) came to the National Convention to read at the witness stand his apology for virtue, entitled Petition from the *Plkes Section to the Representatives of the French People*. In September, in a homage to Marat, he wrote in significant fashion that Charlotte Corday was 'a mixed being to whom one cannot assign any sex', and was 'a Tartar fury'.
  13. *The French Revolution as seen by its Executioner*.
  14. *Ibid.*
  15. *Ibid.*
  16. When in the heart of Paris,  
By order of the country  
I am rolled through the laughter  
Of a mindless multitude  
Who believe that my death  
Assures the conquest of liberty,  
What else, in truth, is happening  
Than a crowd losing its head?
  17. On the 8th of January, 1794, the printer and publisher of *Justine*, Jacques Girouard, born at Chartres, aged thirty-six years, was guillotined at Paris, without doubt for his royalist opinions (a fleur de lys is visible on the title final of his publications).
  18. Marie-Constance Reinelle, wife of one Balthasar Guesnet, was the companion of the Marquis from 1790 to his death in 1814. In his will Sade is anxious to indicate his 'extreme gratitude' for her attentions and her sincere friendship. 'Feelings shown by her not only with delicacy and disinterestedness, but what is more with the most courageous energy, given that under the regime of Terror she removed from me the false revolutionary charges that were all too certainly suspended over my head, as everyone knows'.
  19. The same formula as in the will, where Sade asks to be buried in a thick copse on his land at La Malmaison: 'The first you come to on the right in the wood, when entering from the side of the ancient château by the great avenue which divides the land. Once the grave is filled it will be planted over with acorns in order ... that the traces of my tomb will disappear from the surface of the earth the way I flatter myself that the memory of me will efface itself from the minds of men, though with the exception of the small number who have retained their affection for me to the end, of whom I carry pleasant memories to the tomb'. (See Gilbert Lely, *Vie du Marquis de Sade*, Paris, Cercle de l'livre précieux, 1966 et Mercure de France, 1989).
- In defiance of the wishes expressed in his will, the Marquis was given a religious interment in the cemetery at the house at Charenton. It was here that the affair occurred of the disappearance of his skull after an exhumation. Radon, the doctor at the Charenton Home, entrusted it to Spurzheim, a phrenologist, and a disciple of Gall. Spurzheim would eventually lose it in America (1). Radon wrote: Sade's skull was nevertheless not going to be in my possession for several days without my studying it from the point of view of phrenology, a subject on which I spent much time during this period, along with magnetism. What was the result of this examination?
- A high degree of development of the vault of the skull (theosophy, benevolence); point of exaggerated protuberance in the temporal regions (point of ferocity); point of exaggerated protuberance behind and above the ears (the point of aggressiveness that was so highly developed in the skull of Guesclin); cerebellum of moderate dimensions; point of distance exaggerated from



one mastoid apophysis to the other (point of excess in physical love).

In a word, along with the fact that nothing in the sight of Sade strolling along solemnly (and I would almost say patriarchally), would have made me divine in him the author of *Justine* and *Juliette*, in the same way the inspection of his head would have caused me to absolve him from responsibility for such works; his skull was in every point alike to that of a Church Father. (Ibid.)

It is difficult, confronted with this extraordinary text, to avoid thinking that this study was put together before the death of the Marquis, as a last joke, on the part of Sade and his doctor....).

20. Robespierre.
21. The beginning of *The Princess of Cleves*.
22. The Marquis was arrested on the morning of the next day, the 8th of December, 1793, at ten o'clock. This is an extract from the register of the clerk's office at the prison of Madelonnettes, Paris, rue des Fontaines:  
 'François Desade, aged fifty-three years, native of Paris, man of letters. Height five feet two inches, eyes bright blue, nose average, mouth small, chin round, face full and oval.  
 Previously published as *Sade Contra L'Être Suprême*, Quai Voltaire, Edima, Paris, 1992. Translated by the kind permission of the author.
- 23.

## Madame de Sade and Other Problems

Margaret Crosland

The complex equation of the Marquis de Sade, his persona and his message, may never be solved, for even as the bicentenary of his death -2014- approaches, some of its terms are not yet available to us. However, we have continued evidence of the other, his passion for the theatre which caused him to dramatize all the situations in his life, his obsessional preoccupation with sexuality (at least in his books), his relationships with women, real or fictional, and his devotion to *la philosophie*, i.e. a deep, as it were, intuitive distrust of accepted ideas, linked with an exclusive reliance on the authority of reason.

These three obsessions are hard to separate, for they overlook Sade early in life. The man who led *la philosophie* into the boudoir in 1795 was not one of the *philosophes*, but he had been hearing or reading about them with enthusiasm ever since he had been a young man. His father, Le Comte de Sade, had in the past known Voltaire and even exchanged verses with him; this was virtually the only sign of cultural life in a devious man who became lazy and depressed as he grew older, a man who made no attempt to understand his son and was preoccupied with marrying him off as soon as he could, his only hope of solving his own desperate but unexplained financial problems. When the young Marquis was supervised by a better educated man, the Comte's brother, the Abbé spent several years writing a long book about Petrarch, inspired no doubt by the family's best known ancestor, Laure de Sade, who had made such an impression on the poet in the fourteenth century. The Abbé, who lived at one of the family châteaux in Provence, set his young nephew an example of a worldly life with much female companionship, but also a life of reading and studying.

As far as women were concerned, at least three were important to Sade during his early years, but not his mother, who, as lady in waiting to the Princess de Condé, was usually absent. Sade himself became devoted to his paternal grandmother, and later said of her (speaking through the hero of his *Aline et Valcour, ou Le Roman Philosophique*) that she spoilt him, but he loved her deeply. He also acknowledged the

help of another woman about whom comparatively little is known. Madame de Saint-Germain, his governess when he was a boy; she does not appear to have been an intellectual, but she had obviously read widely and later in life he still respected her literary judgement. He also knew from childhood Marie-Dorothee de Rousset, with whom he later exchanged letters, mainly literary in nature.

His father at least sent him to the well organized Jesuit Collège Louis-le-Grand, where Voltaire had been before him. It was here that he first heard discussion on the history of thought and saw teachers and students taking part in various theatrical performances. No doubt he took part himself. In *Aline et Valcour* again, writing surely about his own youth, he regretted that he had had to leave the Collège in order to go to military school: he was fourteen at the time and he indicated, still speaking through his hero, that he would surely have made a better army officer if he could have continued his general education longer.

Little is known about his life in the army, which lasted until the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, but from his surviving letters we learn that he slept a lot and read a lot. We learn too that through his first experiences with women, he had some notion that in addition to sex there could possibly be something more in such relationships: 'Alas', he wrote to his previous tutor, the Abbé Amblet, 'does one ever really enjoy happiness that is bought, and can love without delicacy ever be really affectionate?' He had begun to think about the whole problem: 'My *amour propre* is hurt now at the thought that I was loved only because I probably paid better than the next man'. At the same time, army life could not have been too demanding, for the young Sade somehow managed to put on a play at Hesdin in the Pas de Calais. Did he write the play? Did he produce it or act in it? We do not know, but we do know that the performances were interrupted because his much loved grandmother had died. He did not complain that his favourite pastime was curtailed by family duty, and in fact he never seems to have complained about any event or behaviour within his own family. He accepted everything they did. Perhaps it was the awareness that the family of de Sade, with its long history and its many branches, especially in Provence, conditioned his entire life and provided a permanent

decor. He did not have to search for his place in society. He knew that he was the only male heir to the Comte and that he would one day inherit the title, the châteaux and estates. He was not aware that he would inherit little beyond problems and debts, for his father had barely tried to cope with them.

Although Sade was not born until twenty five years after the death of Louis XIV in 1715, he grew up against the confused political moves that followed the Regency and the succeeding reign of the Sun King's great-grandson Louis XV, which lasted from 1723 until 1774, controlled for the most part by Madame de Pompadour. In French intellectual life there were two important developments: the growth of salons, organized of course by women, and the compilation of the *Encyclopédie*. If the salons did not interest all intelligent people - Diderot, for instance, did not enjoy these fashionable, elitist gatherings - those who attended them were all potential subscribers to the *Encyclopédie*, if not actual contributors. By the late 1740's there had been several incidents proving that writers showing any tendency to criticism of political or social conditions were dangerous: in 1734 Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophiques*, or *Lettres Anglaises*, were burnt by the public executioner, Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois* caused no such trouble, but Diderot, in 1749, was not so lucky, for his controversial *Lettres sur les Aveugles* sent him to the prison at Vincennes, where he was kept for over three months. He might have been sent to the Bastille, but that famous jail was already full. The young Marquis de Sade was still a schoolboy, but he was soon to hear these stories and to hear too of other books which challenged accepted beliefs in other fields, such as Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* which appeared from 1749 onwards.

There had been other works too, equally calculated to upset the world which conventional people thought would never change. Some time before Diderot found himself in Vincennes there had been other persecutions. Julien Offray La Mettrie, born in 1709 and educated by the Jansenists, abandoned the priesthood for medicine and worked as an army surgeon. He embodied much of his physiological knowledge and observation in the materialistic *Histoire Naturelle de l'âme* (1746), causing such outrage that he left France for Leyden. Three years later came his best known work, *L'Homme machine*, convincing readers that he was an atheist and forcing him to leave France for good. Fortunately



he was given shelter by his admirer, Frederick the Great. Other works followed, all equally admired by the King who prefaced La Mettrie's complete works (1774) long after the author, aged only 42, died following a copious meal.

La Mettrie's materialistic thought developed within the long and honourable tradition of Lucretius, Locke, Descartes and the Italian Vanini (1585-1619), whose lives and fates were some of the most melodramatic, tragic even, of the previous century. Sade knew and quoted all these thinkers and those who followed La Mettrie, such as the encyclopédiste Helvétius, whose best known work *De l'esprit* (1758) aimed to show that sensation is at the origin of all intellectual activity. It was immediately successful with those intellectuals who were able to read it before it too was publicly burnt by order of the *Parlement de Paris*. Another far-sighted *philosophe* was of course the Baron d'Holbach, whose *Système de la Nature* appeared in 1770.

Perhaps it was the Abbé de Sade's influence, combined with that of his tutor at the Collège Louis-le-Grand, the Abbé Amblet, which had led the young Sade to seek the 'consolation of philosophy'. It was the intellectual fashion and the young man enjoyed it as much as he enjoyed the company of young actresses, especially after his marriage. Before the 'affair of the poisoned sweets' (Marseille, 1772), Sade had had time and money to build up a library at the Château de La Coste; it included all these authors writing in the modern version of the materialistic tradition, classified as *philosophie nouvelle* and specially bound, for Sade entitled this collection as *Recueil nécessaire*.

A letter he wrote in 1783, when he had been imprisoned for the fifth time, after two escapes, illustrated how much the *philosophes* meant to him, how far he was regarded as a danger to the public, and possibly even to the state. His reading was censored. At the same time, it becomes clear that if he was in prison because of his behaviour towards women, and because of his mother-in-law's intervention in his affairs, he was now entirely dependent for contact with the world outside, on one woman: his wife. In November of that year he wanted her to borrow from a *cabinet de lecture* a copy of D'Holbach's *Système de la Nature*, four works by Helvétius, and another by

the *philosophe* Fréret. But his wife had no luck: 'I've been told', she wrote, 'that they are all forbidden books and they would not get through'. The censors seemed to be in a state of confusion, for Sade had been allowed to receive *La Réfutation du Système de la Nature*, and enjoyed it. He wrote that he knew these books by heart but needed D'Holbach's original work in order to appreciate the later one more fully.

His wife, Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil, had become the key to his existence. He had virtually no men friends, apart from a few who were in Provence and unlikely to visit the prisoner, ever if they had been allowed to do so. Maybe some men had been alarmed by the various court proceedings and the details of Sade's behaviour - although probably not very different from their own - and obviously Sade had never been a man for the salons. His 'friends' were the men who wrote the textbooks of the new *philosophie*; he had little chance of ever meeting them and now he could not even read their books. His contacts with the authorities were mostly bad, usually destroyed by bureaucratic regulations about letter-writing, visits - which were denied - and prison conditions generally.

The prisoner Sade was not allowed to see his wife for three years. He had not complained about the marriage which had been arranged for him in 1763, although he had been hoping to marry another girl from Provence; he was still writing emotional letters to her while his anxious father was negotiating the marriage arrangements with the future in-laws, the Montreuil. He had possibly even tried to acquire a fiancée during his theatrical interlude in Hesdin and wrote later that he wanted marriage in order to avoid a lonely old age. The results of his marriage may have surprised everyone. The old Comte had not paid much attention to Renée-Pélagie beforehand, he was only interested in her parents' money, but he eventually noticed that she was not 'ugly': 'Elle est fort bien faite. La gorge fort jolie'. Her arms and hands were very white, 'rien de choquant, rien, caractère charmant (...)'. It was too early for him to realize that his son was marrying the woman who in some ways was perfect for him; for the new ménage was very happy, the young people were even good friends as well as satisfactory sexual partners. Nobody knew, but Sade himself probably foresaw, if unconsciously, that he had married the kind of person who, much later, would be labelled a masochist.



For a time the old Comte kept an eye on them and the bride was lucky enough to avoid a mother in law, for the Comtesse de Sade, who lived separately in a convent - it was cheaper than maintaining a town house à deux - remained aloof, refused to give her diamonds as part of the settlement, and did not attend the signing of the contract. Sade's mother was almost always absent from his life.

But Sade himself, as is well known, acquired a mother-in-law who was to influence, in one way or another, the rest of his life and, indirectly, his writing. Madame de Montreuil was still in her early forties, a woman whose charm no doubt served her social ambitions to some extent. She was delighted by her new 'son', called him 'un drôle d'enfant', took part in the amateur theatricals he arranged and possibly 'fancied' him, as the phrase goes. If much was forgiven to young aristocrats at the time, it was hard to ignore Sade's first quasi-criminal sexual offence in the autumn of 1763, a few months after his marriage, and the Rose Keller affair of 1768. Yet his mother-in-law paid off the women involved and his wife continued to forgive and love him. Women formed an essential part of his life at all levels and if the nature of these relationships was to change, they never came to an end.

How soon did Sade, the happily married womaniser, begin writing? He had written plays for the actresses he pursued during the mid-60s, for he had a theatre built at La Coste and took at least one of the actresses there. The modern school of Sade biography and criticism, notably Jean-Jacques Pauvert, refuses to accept that Sade became a writer because of his long imprisonment. Just as he had read widely when young, he also began to write, and not only plays for his current favourites among the actresses. Before 1777 some of his plays were known in Bordeaux, although they may not have been actually performed. He had found time to travel in the autumn of 1769, spending a month in Belgium and Holland and was able to finance his journey through his writings: what writing? Not the account of his journey, which remained unpublished until the twentieth century, but something he wrote in the style of Aretino, to use his own words. This has been lost, but it seems to have been a successful piece of eroticism, for it paid for 'mes menus plaisirs dans une des premières villes du royaume, et m'ont fait voyager deux mois en Hollande sans y dépenser un

sol de mien'. Did he take his pleasure in Bordeaux, or in Lyon or Marseille? Nobody, not even Pauvert, knows, but apparently Sade had at least found a helpful printer in Holland where a great deal of erotic literature was published.

It is not known either whether Sade's loving wife or his watchful mother-in-law knew about this early and successful erotic writing, but if they did, they would no doubt have preferred it to the beating of a widow (Rose Keller) on Easter Day. There was even some unsolved mystery about a 'book' which might have been lost in his *petite maison* at the time of his very first offence. Perhaps it had been erotic too, or contained erotic drawings. Sade and Renée-Pélagie continued in their marital partnership, their eldest son had been born in 1767, their second during the year of the trip to Holland, and their daughter in 1771. Yet in 1771 another woman began to play an unexpected part in Sade's life, and this was his sister-in-law, Anne-Prospère de Launay. Evidence of their relationship is on the whole circumstantial, and although it may not have been incestuous, it might be said to prefigure some of the endless group sex episodes in the major works. The girl was a *chanoinesse*, apparently destined for a religious life, by not yet ready to take her vows. She was obviously intelligent and at one point conducted a correspondence with the Abbé de Sade, which seemed to indicate emotional fencing of some kind.

If Renée-Pélagie objected to this new family situation, no evidence has survived; but it is obvious that Sade was not satisfied by relationships with a faithful wife and an intelligent sister-in-law. 1772 was the year of the much-publicised 'affair of the poisoned sweets' in Marseille and the start of Sade's eighteen 'black' years. The time between this year and 1790, a melodrama in fact, can be summarized briefly as follows: in autumn 1772, Sade was sentenced to death in his absence, but fled to Italy, allegedly with his sister-in-law. Re-arrest, imprisonment, escape. After two quiet years at La Coste, still preoccupied with the theatre, Sade organised mysterious sexual orgies with young girls and at least one young man at the Château, apparently involving his complaisant wife. Second flight to Italy. In 1777, re-arrest in Paris, allegedly due to the machinations of his mother-in-law. The following year the death sentence was quashed, but Sade was still a prisoner and after

one more escape, he was back in the Vincennes prison until his transfer to the Bastille in 1784. In the crucial year 1789, he was transferred to Charenton but was released a year later. He was to see Charenton again.

These biographical insertions are not as irrelevant as they might seem, for his readers profit from knowing how he had spent the time before his serious writing began. He had read the *philosophes*, notably the materialists; he had written plays and possibly pornography; his life was dominated by women - wife, mother-in-law, sister-in-law; Madame de Saint-Germain, Marie-Dorothee de Rousset, and the young women, always now in groups, always working class, professional or amateur prostitutes. Men? Few, for his father-in-law, the Président de Montreuil, was an eminent *robinocrate* who left family management to his wife. Those he knew included the staff who attempted to manage his affairs in Provence, at least one lawyer soon to be in the pay of Madame de Montreuil, visiting actors, whose company Sade enjoyed, and two valets, often important participants in the violent episodes of the Marquis's extra-marital sex-life.

The male company Sade enjoyed by proxy was that of the *philosophes*, denied to him in prison. Although not in solitary confinement, his early years in Vincennes left him in an obvious state of angry gloom; his letters show a loss of confidence, personal and intellectual isolation, many health problems. It is easy to understand how the uncertainty of his situation affected him: he was detained under a *lettre de cachet*, which meant imprisonment without trial and for an undefined term. 'The cry goes up, how long?' It appears to have been in 1782, soon after he had been eventually allowed to see his wife, that he finished the first surviving piece from his middle age - he was 42 when he wrote *Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribund*. There seemed no point in writing plays now, but the dialogue was a popular literary form which Sade was to use intermittently in much of his later work. All the concepts put forward by the materialist thinkers are there: there is no God, no life after death, and no reason for failing to indulge in one's 'natural' instincts, for if anyone went wrong, in the conventional sense, Nature would punish you. All Sade's role-model thinkers had attacked the church and the priesthood, and Sade did the same, but he took his attack one stage further by making his

priest a near-actor. (This dialogue has in fact been produced on the stage in both France and England.) The conclusion embodies the Sadean message: 'Renounce the idea of another world - there is none. Do not renounce the pleasure of enjoying and causing happiness in this world. That is the only chance that nature offers you of doubling or extending your existence'.

'My friend, sensual pleasure was always the dearest of my possessions. I have worshipped it all my life (...). The priest is told that with the help of six women, he can 'forget (...) all the vain sophistries of superstition, all the ridiculous errors of hypocrisy'. At the very end Sade twists the knife: 'the preacher became a man corrupted by nature because he had not known how to explain what corrupt nature was'. In *Le Système de la nature*, D'Holbach had stated with some irony that if man could not understand God was it not possible that priests also would fail to understand Him?

'With the help of women': this is one of the dimensions that Sade the writer adds to the *philosophes*. The thinkers who made up his *Receuil necessaire* had not said much about women, apart from indicating the obvious need to provide them with education. The women in Sade's life who had not received any education at all had received it in the convents or from private tutors. Anne-Prospère de Launay might have had the makings of an intellectual or even a feminist, but since she died suddenly, possibly of smallpox, at the age of 37, she had little chance to develop. Seventeenth century writers had not neglected the problems of women, and Molière himself, although attacking the *precieuses* and the *femmes savantes*, still protested against enforced and arranged marriages. Bossuet and Boileau were no friends of women, but in 1673 Poulain de la Barre published *De l'égalité des deux sexes*.

In *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir pointed out that the eighteenth century was 'divided' in this matter and 'some writers tried to prove that women had no immortal soul. Rousseau dedicated woman to husband and maternity, thus speaking for the middle class. (...) The democratic and individualist ideal of the eighteenth century, however, was favourable to women; to most philosophers they seemed to be human beings equal to those belonging to the stronger



sex. Voltaire denounced the injustice of woman's lot. Diderot felt that her inferiority had been largely made by society. Montesquieu believed paradoxically that "it is against reason and nature that women be in control of the home (...) not at all that they govern an empire". Louis-Sébastien Mercier, in his *Tableau de Paris* (1761-1790), exposed the horrors of cheap female labour, while Condorcet wanted women to enter political life, considering them equal to man if equally educated. "The more women have been enslaved by the laws," he said, "the more dangerous has been their empire. (...) It would decline if it were less to women's interest to maintain it, if it ceased to be their sole means of defending themselves and escaping from oppression."<sup>1</sup>

There was no escape for women in *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*, which Sade presumably began to write in 1782. The girls he included fulfilled the traditional role of sexual objects, but the remarkably detailed portraits of four older women, the storytellers, seem to show how the author, now in his early forties, was taking his revenge on the society which had committed him to prison largely through the efforts of one rich woman. As for the four ladies in waiting, all old and ugly, no naturalist novelist of one or two centuries later ever provided such revolting creatures. Yet the author's explanations as to why his principal characters wanted these creatures are of more interest to us: Nature's 'disorder', expressed through 'old, disgusting and filthy' objects, is more attractive than beauty. It had not taken Sade very long to develop a total pessimism about Nature, his vision and interpretation of Nature's laws are the very opposite of the calm optimism expressed by La Mettrie and D'Holbach: 'Beauty is a simple thing; ugliness is the exceptional thing. And fiery imaginations, no doubt, always prefer the extraordinary thing to the simple thing'. On the same page Sade took care to point out that 'all these things depend upon our constructions and organs and on the manner in which they affect one another, and we are no more able to change our tastes for these things than to vary the shapes of our bodies'.<sup>2</sup> Beauty and health, he thought, analysing the attitudes of his characters, were simple, while ugliness and degradation create a much stronger 'commotion', causing a more lively 'agitation'.

These much quoted statements, appearing on early pages of *Les Cent Vingt Journées*, show how quickly and totally Sade's

thought had developed. In this vast, if incomplete work, he contents himself with adapting the theories of the materialists and taking them to the furthest extent possible, without actually quoting his sources, as he did in his later fiction. Surely it was that unchangeable 'construction' that led him and all his characters into the darkness: that was the way he saw the world. Would his vision have been different if life had been different? Any such speculation is a waste of time, but why, in this first book, did Sade progress no further than the 'simple' passions and the thirtieth day? Perhaps he had not yet developed the intellectual and moral strength necessary for the 'complex', the 'criminal', and the 'murderous' passions. His notes at the end are proof of his ambitious and mathematical approach to his work: 'Under no circumstances deviate from this plan, everything has been worked out, the entirety several times re-examined with the greatest care and thoroughness'. Perhaps he wanted unconsciously to preserve his own life, for only sixteen people survived out of the original forty-six who spent the winter in the Château de Silling. On a 'materialistic' note, three of the survivors were cooks, otherwise nobody would have survived. Readers of *Les Cent Vingt Journées* have to tolerate passim, coprophilia, coprophagy, individual sexual perversions and group sex acrobatics, but they will be fascinated by Sade's undoubted skill in story telling: he had surely remembered Marguerite de Navarre and Boccaccio, with their stories within stories. However, he set to work on most of the Sadean themes, taking the ideas of the materialist philosophes downhill so to speak, to the edge of some unexplored moral darkness. Crime and destruction produce sexual excitement, for one's own pleasure is the most important thing in life. Nature, far from benign, can unfortunately cause frustration, and Durcet, for example, is aware that he cannot achieve the ultimate in crime: 'I must declare', he said, 'that my imagination has always outdistanced my faculties: I lack the means to do what I would do, I have conceived of a thousand times more and better than I have done and I have ever had complaint against Nature, who, while giving me the desire to outrage her, has always deprived me of the means'. In this work, and indeed in his work as a whole, Sade seems to be reaching out for the infinite. He had read Hobbes on the subject, and D'Holbach had quoted him: 'Whatsoever we imagine, is Finite. Therefore we can have no idea, or conception of any thing we call infinite. No man can have in his



mind an image of infinite magnitude; nor conceive infinite swiftness, infinite time, or infinite force, or infinite power'.<sup>3</sup>

If Sade was unwilling to give up his search for the infinite, he compensated by his lifelong efforts to justify all those acts which man-made laws had decreed to be crimes, and therefore punishable. The Bishop, for instance, explains the rewards of homosexual behaviour, and in this context it should be remembered that sodomy, at the time, was a capital offence. 'Consider the problem from the point of view of evil, evil almost always being pleasure's true and major charm; considered thus, the crime must appear greater when perpetrated upon a being of your identical sort than when inflicted upon one which is not, and this once established, the delight automatically doubles'. Sade enjoyed arguments of this sort, specious but inevitably stimulating in a sinister way because one is presumably too naive to have thought of them before.

There must surely be unconscious links between the fascination of ugliness or depravity and what Sade calls 'dishonour' or 'turpitude'. He dwells on this and, in quoting (through Curval) an example of how masochism, like crime, can cause pleasure, he seems to be quoting an enhanced version of his own story: even punishment produces enthusiasm, and public disgrace has been known to produce sexual excitement. 'Everyone knows the story of the brave Marquis de S\*\*\* who, when informed of the magistrates' decision to have him burnt in effigy' (the precise definition of the court at Aix in 1772) was so thrilled by the 'opprobrium and infamy' that he immediately experienced orgasm.

All that Curval has to say about 'Nature' and 'philosophy' is worth studying because, although a President (i.e. a presiding magistrate), he continually speaks as a defense lawyer prepared to turn every argument on its head on behalf of some unspecified prisoner who is either himself or the whole of humanity. He was much given to what he called philosophy and believed that it should not be affected by passions: it should remain constant. No doubt he represented the attitude of his creator. By the time he reached the 29th day, Sade bravely quoted the proverb *l'appétit vient en mangeant*, adding that the more horrors one commits, the more one wants

to commit. But he only added the deeds and discussions of one more day, because even he may have realized that he had already elaborated his basic 'philosophical' ideas, mostly centred in the unalterable will of Nature; and even he may have realized that the sexual elucubrations he described were beginning to exhaust his possible readers. The participants were never exhausted. Before 1789 he has hidden his manuscript in the prison wall and it was not published until 1904, some twenty years after Krafft-Ebbing had brought out his class *Psychopathia Sexualis*.

Was there any further development in Sade's thought? By the summer of 1787 he had completed the first version of the Justine story- there were to be two or three more- and just two years later, he was transferred to Charenton, the hospice for the insane. At this point Renée-Pélagie de Sade again plays a vital role in the story, for if, on July 14th, 1789, Sade himself was safely out of the Bastille, his possessions, and most important of all to him, his manuscripts, were not. His wife was understandably anxious to leave the city and merely delegated, and although someone fortunately found the hidden manuscript, it was not returned to the author and he assumed it was lost. It has been generally thought that he attempted to re-write it, but in a different mode. He would develop the Justine story as a vehicle for his beliefs and would add the story of her sister, Juliette. Krafft-Ebbing apparently believed the two sisters were modelled on the two Montreuil girls, Renée-Pélagie and Anne-Prospère, but it seems more likely that Sade decided, no doubt unconsciously, to base them on the two sides of his own nature.

1791, the year after Sade's release from Charenton, brought the first publication of the Justine story, but the author remained anonymous. In 1795 the long work *Aline et Valcour, ou Le Roman Philosophique*, was published, this time signed, but the same year saw *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*, unsigned. Much *philosophie*, and in the latter work a mixture of pornography and politics, the former no doubt intended to 'sell' the latter, for Sade' was now short of money. Again Renée-Pélagie was involved, for no sooner was her husband free, no longer dependent solely on her, than she went to live in a convent and demanded a separation. This meant that Sade had to repay the dowry that had been the original reason for

his marriage. So once again he felt rejected, isolated, impoverished. Mercifully he met Marie-Constance Guenet, who seems to have loved him, while the theatre, his first passion, allowed him to earn a miserable living. At least one of his plays was performed and he worked, for pittance, as a kind of stage-hand.

The story of Justine, the girl who constantly trusted everyone and seemed to invite cruelty, bears out the theory that beauty, moral beauty, is simple, for this virtuous creature never learns anything. However, like nearly all Sade's women characters, she is more interesting than the men who constantly ill-treat her, because she sometimes makes her own decisions, always the wrong ones. She is silly enough to fall in love with the homosexual Bressac - one is reminded of Violette Leduc and Maurice Sachs - and she helps a man whose life is in danger, allowing herself to be tortured and nearly killed because she trusted him. Sade uses Bressac as he had used characters in *Les Cent Vingt Journées*; the young man justifies the non-existence of God and the murder of his mother. Why should family ties be respected? We do not ask to be born and each of us is alone.

Juliette bears out Sade's theory that the ugliness of vice is more fascinating than virtue, inevitably reminding us of Swinburne's ecstatic evocation of the same theme. Juliette was no small-time criminal; she organized crime on a massive scale and she experienced sexual ecstasy through poisoning, murder and utter degradation, choosing at one point to let a servant drag her onto a dunghill before sex could be readily enjoyable for her. When very young she made the mistake of showing pity, but soon learnt the error of her ways. Although she would naturally seduce men by feminine methods, her one aim was to acquire wealth and power and she soon behaved like a man herself. No doubt this is why Sade portrayed her as loving, or at least desiring so many women, before she enjoyed herself totally by destroying them. However, she was open to education and she relished discussion of many philosophical problems, usually with men or women occupying religious posts. Although it was agreed there was no God, these people who were so-called in His service were at least educated, even learned. Sade enjoyed introducing real people among his clerics, as though to prove that they were criminals or hypocrites, even if, like Cardinal Bernis, they discuss free

will, which we do not possess. The materialist beliefs are still all-important: 'All our ideas owe their origin to physical and material causes which lead us in spite of ourselves'. Archbishop Fénelon is quoted: 'I modify myself with God. (...) I am the real cause of my own will'. 'But', says Sade, 'Fénelon has not considered in saying this that since God is the stronger he has made Him the real cause of all crimes...'. And in addition to its discussion of abstractions, this extraordinary book completes the 'murderous' and 'criminal' passions that were missing from *Les Cent Vingt Journées*.

*Juliette, ou les Prospérités du Vice*, is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand Sade, although like everything else he wrote, it contains repetition and longeurs. However, once one has read one or two episodes from Justine, the story of the poor virtuous girl tells us no more about Sade's thinking than *Les Cent Vingt Journées* had done. *Aline et Valcour* must be read too, for Sade was immensely proud of it and it reveals a less angry man, a frustrated traveller who tried to examine the customs of other countries as a kind of amateur anthropologist, a potential democrat who looked for Utopia and claimed that he had anticipated the ideals of the Revolution. Although nature is still supreme, she is not necessarily destructive, but if Aline's father can still cast incestuous eyes upon his daughter, he does not win. The same theme of incest is also explored in *Eugénie de Franval*, where the father utters highly specious arguments in favour of it, again supported by Nature. However, he does not win either, and story has a tragic end.

Many of Sade's stories might seem to be typical moral tales of the eighteenth century, and again the girls and women illustrate the author's apparent willingness to repent in a strange way for the destructive eroticism which has caused him so much trouble. The most memorable are named after their heroines: *Eugénie de Franval*, *Emilie de Tourville*, *Henrietta Stradson*, *La Châtelaine de Longeville*, *Ernestine*. In the last two at least, *Le Cocu de vie-même*, Sade reminds men that if women behave badly towards them, is that not the fault of the men themselves?

By the time he reached early middle age, Sade insisted



that he would never change, telling his wife and other correspondents that this was his situation. In a long letter to Marie Dorothée de Rousset (January 26th, 1782), he reiterated *en passant* to God: 'Enjoy life, my friend, enjoy life and judge not, I say; leave it to Nature to move you as she will and to the Eternal One that of punishing you (...)' In his books he had insisted that Nature would punish the criminal. He sounded in some ways as though he had had a change of heart: 'accepted fancies, I grant you, do more for happiness than the dismal truths of philosophy'. He sounded also resigned, but more constructive than in his major works: 'Remember, in short, that it is to make your fellow-man happy, to care for them, help them, love them that Nature puts you in their midst, not to judge and punish them'; and here he remembered his own case, 'and above all not to shut them away in prison'.<sup>4</sup>

If Sade did not actually change as life and imprisonment went on, he revealed himself as a writer with many facets. *Aline et Valcour* was written as far as we know concurrently with that harsh final version of the Justine story; the *Historiettes*, *Contes et Fabliaux*, *Les Crimes de l'Amour* were the main moral tales, condemning incest, arranged marriages and marital dishonesty, while alternating themes contain effective if crude humour. In other stories women outwit their husbands, in some they suffer.

Yukio Mishima, in his moving drama *Madame de Sade*, concentrated on her refusal to see her husband upon his release from prison. He was no longer suffering, so she had no need to suffer on his behalf. She evaded any more suffering by retiring to a convent and demanding a separation. Since that entailed the repayment of her dowry, Sade was forced to add 'spice' to his latest work in order to sell it.

His three late historical novels - all with real-life heroines - are confused and barely readable, but while in Charenton, after 1803, he could truthfully have said 'in my end is my beginning', for the plays he wrote and produced for the patients in this hospice for the insane helped to alleviate their suffering, drew an admiring audience from the fashionable world and gave him some comfort. He saw a priest not long before he died and asked to have an unmarked grave, but was given a religious funeral. His separated wife had not arranged

to pay the Charenton expenses and his son asked the police to burn any surviving manuscripts.

If he himself refused to change, his messages have acquired constantly changing listeners: free-thinkers, revolutionaries, 'libertines', libertarians, surrealists, existentialists, have all taken Sade to their hearts, they have identified with him, they have needed him. The perceptive Apollinaire was right in one way, for he forecast that Sade would dominate the twentieth century. Unfortunately, too many readers, but more especially non-readers, think only of the Sade who committed a few acts of gratuitous violence, mainly directed against women, and accept his books, where these horrifying deeds are magnified into monstrosities, at their face value. The Sade who carries the rewarding message for the end of this century is the man who was ready to back the 'system of nature' and refuse any other, applying his own method of uncompromising logic. He was prepared to face, imagine and describe the entire potential within human behaviour which only latter-day psychiatrists and medical researchers have been able to envisage. Forgive his logorrhea; accept, with Maurice Blanchot, that he achieved something unique, *un véritable absolu*.

But what of his political philosophy? Did it exist? The legend has spread that Sade's experience of the judiciary and the autocratic use of the *lettre de cachet* caused him to emerge from the Bastille in July 1789 as a militant revolutionary. Not so. It is true that he called himself Citizen Sade and in 1792 became secretary of the *Section des Piques*, one of the administrative districts of Paris; yet he never cast off his aristocratic background, he frequented former aristocratic acquaintances with moderate views. These included the Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre, whose wife was one of Sade's cousins. The new Citizen was sometimes regarded as suspect, he escaped trouble more than once through luck or politics, near-devilous behaviour. In December 1791, he had written to his lawyer expressing his own kind of royalism which seems surprisingly liberal: 'I am anti-Jacobin, I hate them; I adore the King, but I detest the old abuses; I like a great many articles in the Constitution, others revolt me'. He wanted the nobility to regain their 'lustre', he wanted the King to lead the nation. However, he wanted no National Assembly, 'but two chambers as in England, which gives the King a modified authority'. The



clergy, who were useless, should not be given any power. 'That is my profession of faith. What am I at the moment? Aristocrat or democrat? Tell me please, lawyer, for I myself have no idea'. He tried to convince himself, perhaps, in *Aline et Valcour*, and in that stage of his thinking, that he was surely a potential democrat.

In other, sometimes related ways, he was a moderate: the man who had rallied against the Montreuil family for decades could have sent them to the guillotine during his period of administrative power. But he said nothing and they were spared. The author who had trampled on God helped in the serving of Mass at Charenton in 1805, and the man whose major books are full of slaughter was opposed to the death penalty. He had probably caught up with the ideas of Beccaria. He believed that punishment could not be discarded, but he sincerely thought that prison was no solution.

But who could fail to be fascinated by that famous pamphlet *Français, encore un effort*, inserted into *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*? Did Sade compose the corrupting sexual education of the innocent Eugénie simply to 'sell' his political idea through cheerful pornography, linking personal immortality to the anarchy of an immoral state? The piece recaptures all the violent energy and topsy-turvy logic of Sade's longer books, although Jean-Jacques Pauvert has seen in it a possible echo of the communism developed by François-Noël ('Gracchus') Babeuf, who was unsurprisingly executed in 1797.

There is not one moderate line in *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*, published anonymously in 1795, allegedly a posthumous work by the author of *Justine*. It has a theatrical quality which reflects Sade's current efforts to have his plays produced. He tried hard, but he did not have much luck: he was thought to be old-fashioned. But there is nothing old-fashioned today about the 'freest spirit who ever lived'. He may not have invented a philosophical system but he created, out of his omnivorous reading and his woman-dominated life, a unique adaption of traditional and current trends in thought, creating a historic, controversial and current oeuvre which has come into its own two hundred years after it was written.

## NOTES

1. *The Second Sex*, Part II, IV.
2. Translation (adapted by Grove Press, 1954) by Annette Michelson, quoted by Simone de Beauvoir, *Faut-il brûler Sade?* See bibliography.
3. *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 3.
4. *Selected Letters, The Marquis de Sade*, (translated by W.J. Strachan), edited by Margaret Crosland, London, 1965.
5. *Madame de Sade* was staged by Ingmar Bergman at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in May, 1993.

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## SADE: CRITIQUE OF PURE FICTION

Catherine Cusset

What is libertinage in its Sadean version? In *L'Histoire de Juliette*, Sade lets a woman define libertinage. This woman is La Durand, a brothel-keeper, magician and poisoner, as well as Juliette's last companion:

Libertinage, La Durand said, is a wandering of senses which presupposes the total rupture of all restraints, the most sovereign contempt for all prejudices, the total reversal of all cults, the most profound horror for any kind of morals.<sup>1</sup>

The repetition of the adjective 'all' and the use of superlatives reveal the radicalism of this libertinage, which grounds itself upon the negation of any limit on the freedom of body or mind.

Limit is the main problem of Sadean libertinage: how is it possible to go endlessly beyond the boundaries of time, space, laws, norms, biological ties? How is it possible to 'enfranchise' oneself, since this is the etymological meaning of libertinage?<sup>2</sup> We know the answers given by Sade's heroes: atheism, pleasure, crime, apathy. These are the principles which rule Sade's novels until *L'Histoire de Juliette*. In the latter, Sade goes beyond Sadean libertinage as it was represented in the former novels: he reveals the aporia of libertine principles and depicts the deadlock to which they lead, a deadlock which I shall call 'the despair of limitlessness'. With Juliette, Sade invents a female character who replaces these principles with the freedom of a volcanic imagination, and thus renews Sadean libertinage at its very grounding.<sup>3</sup> Juliette is the only Sadean character who has a 'story': her story is also that of the conditions of possibility of libertine fiction.

1. *The paradox of the unlimited*

Whether they commit their crimes in the fire of passion or in the cold light of reason, Sadean heroes always justify them with the desire for emancipation: 'I have always understood that the idea of this imaginary link restrained and bound passions infinitely more than one might think; and it is in proportion to the weight it has on human reason that I want to destroy it before your eyes' (VIII, 173). Libertines see any link to the other,

any limit on desire, as purely imaginary ties which do not withstand rational analysis: their purpose is therefore to analyze, that is, to dissolve in the etymological sense of the term (in Greek, *anaílein*), everything which they name 'prejudice', 'chimered', 'ghost', or 'illusion'. Such things include, for instance, love, faithfulness, gratitude, moral instinct, and, above all, any religious belief. In the tradition of 17th-century libertine philosophers, Sadean libertines analyze God's existence as an imaginary projection of human fears and desires: 'this ghost (...) cannot exist outside the mind of those who consider him, and he is therefore nothing but an effect of their minds' infammation' (VIII, 45).

This critique of imaginary beliefs explains the long and numerous philosophical discourses in the Sadean novel: we know that libertines, whatever crime they commit, always start or end with a long speech in which they demonstrate that moral, social or natural obstacles to crime are nothing. Sade quotes, plagiarizes or criticizes all 18th-century materialist philosophers from D'Holbach to La Mettrie, pushing their reasoning to its extreme logical consequence, and strongly attacking the belief which is, for him, the basis of all others, the belief in God and the immortality of the soul.<sup>4</sup>

But this God so rationally eliminated by libertines is far from disappearing from the Sadean text, as Pierre Klossowski first and many critics after him have noted as a way to question Sade's atheism.<sup>5</sup> At the moment of climax, called by Sade the moment of 'crisis', libertines scream a name with hate and rage: that of God. While victims are assassinated in cold blood, the mere name of God provokes the libertines' fury: 'God; my blood boils at his mere name' (VIII, 30). When libertines free themselves from physical tension, they all utter blasphemies: 'God fucked twice!' (VIII, 437). 'Damned fucking God! You bugger, God, whom I don't give a fuck about!' (IX, 393). The name of God is used to designate a state of paroxysm: 'We were all on fire, in an excitement that would have made us plunge the dagger into God's heart, if this idiot had existed' (IX, 273). The libertines' climax resurrects God through his name, to repeatedly stage his murder.

The violence of blasphemy, not the affirmation of God's non-existence, characterizes Sadean fiction: as the subject of such hatred, God is no longer a mere fantasy, but gains

consistency. The question of God's existence - or inexistence - confronts us with the paradox of the Sadean system. While rational discourses within the novel and the coldness of description are meant to prove the libertine's apathy in the crime, the name of God, uttered during climax, suddenly gives rise to pathos. At the moment when Sadean heroes explode with pleasure, they paradoxically explode with anger: 'I had never seen his prick in such anger', Juliette says of Saint-Fond (VIII, 334).

The paradox is the following: as soon as God is named in *L'Histoire de Juliette*, the idea of an insufficiency returns: the only limit that libertines meet in the end is God's non-existence. They resuscitate God as the limit that makes them despair because of its non-existence: 'God, villain idiot!', he screams, 'do not limit thus my power, when I want to imitate you and commit evil! (...) Put, if you dare, for one singly moment, your thunder between my hands' (IX, 579). Noirceuil addresses God during the novel's final orgy, when all limits are transgressed and all kinds of crimes committed. While human and divine law is negated, God is named the 'villain idiot' who limits the libertines' power.

Another scene, well before this final one, has attracted the critics' attention. It is the scene in which Saint-Fond, Juliette's master, reveals his secrets, the only way in which he can remedy the deadlock of limit: 'To prevent victims from taking part in celestial joys, he had to make them sign, with blood taken from near their heart, that they would give their soul to the devil, and then he would thrust this note in their ass hole with his prick' (VIII, 357). Even if Saint-Fond calls this little ritual a 'weakness', and the more rigorous Clairwil a 'folly', readers will remember it as an essential moment in *L'Histoire de Juliette*: it seems to prove that Sade, in spite of his proclaimed atheism, stays in a system dominated by the sacred. Saint-Fond refuses to give up his weakness, because it allows him to escape the despair of limit: 'This idea drives me to despair; (...) when I immolate an object, I would like to lengthen its pain beyond the immensity of centuries' (VIII, 356).

The very name of Saint-Fond symbolizes the solution through which he remedies his despair: by thrusting in his victim's anus an eternal damnation, he does not simply commit the crime of sodomy punishable by death in the eighteenth century, and therefore breaks a law, but he also sanctifies the bottom, he



God, for Sade, is fiction that 'took hold of the minds of men'. What makes God's weakness, the impossibility of rationally proving his existence, is precisely what constitutes his strength as fiction. Negated as authority, eliminated as the figure of the almighty father, God is nonetheless everywhere in the Sadean novel; he exists as the fiction principle. Libertines are never done with God because his name represents the power, not of the law, but of the imagination. In showing their contempt for God, libertines reveal their anger against fiction, which does not have the power to prove its own truth: fiction - and Sade chose to write novels, not philosophical essays - is based on the desire for illusion.

Sadean libertines are never done with God because his very name embodies the power of imagination. The libertines' anger does not aim to annihilate God's existence, but to resurrect his power, as the ultimate guarantee of the power of fiction. Their destruction of all beliefs confronts Sadean heroes with a lack of limits which does not leave them any other choice than the endless repetition of a physical act to which they cannot but give a metaphysical meaning, therefore falling again into the trap that their system should have allowed them to escape: 'Fucking' means challenging God.

The Sadean system seems not to escape this deadlock. It would therefore be easy to conclude that there is an aporia of the Sadean libertinage, by stressing the repetition principle which rules the Sadean novel and does not lead to any 'end', to any resolution of the aporia. Pierre Klossowski writes in *Sade mon prochain*: 'By narrating her (Juliette's) adventures which have no reason to ever end, Sade wants to forget the grief that the loss of Justine, impossible to possess, caused him'.<sup>9</sup> In *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, Roland Barthes expresses a similar idea, in a narratological, not theological, context: Sade's novels are 'ateleological', and it is 'this absence of end (telos) which constitutes their specificity and modernity.'

But *L'Histoire de Juliette* contradicts this idea. It is the only novel which Sade entitled 'histoire' (story), a title which seems to contradict the common idea that the Sadean novel does not tell a story leading to an end, like all traditional stories; it is also the only novel in which Sade gives the narrative voice to a female libertine, whereas women, in his other novels, most often

sacralizes sodomy: this sanctified bottom, this 'saint fond' opens the gate to an infinity of suffering. Why do libertines always associate the question of God's existence and that of sodomy? Because they are both questions of power: no more than God can libertines prove their power. The 'fucked ass', like the 'damned fucking God', proves nothing. The sodomistic act can be endlessly repeated: it hits only its own limits, which are the limits of the penetrated body. What does the endless challenge to God's power prove? That libertines have something to prove: that the simple fact of God's inexistence does not satisfy the libertines, who, beyond their rational atheism, look for an absolute of non-belief, which only could fulfill their need of an infinity of evil.

Because there is no God, no sacred limit, it is possible to conceive of and commit everything. But it is precisely when everything can be done that the absence of limit becomes a limit: 'Only the law made the crime, and (...) the crime falls away as soon as the law no longer exists', La Deibène told Juliette at the beginning of the novel (VIII, 74).<sup>6</sup> Four hundred pages later, this cold statement becomes a cry of fury with Clairwil, the woman who had reproached her young friend Juliette for her lack of sang-froid: 'I am desperate to find only prejudice, instead of the crime that I desire and find nowhere. O fuck, fuck! When will I be able to commit one?' (VIII, 429). The deadlock is the absence of limits defining crime: it is this 'nowhere' to which crime leads Clairwil, Saint-Fond and the other libertines, and which drives them to despair. The unlimited is desire's limit.

God, as a 'chimera', as 'ghost', is said to be only 'the effect of the mind's inflammation' (VIII, 45). However, Sade describes his own work as the product of an inflamed imagination.<sup>7</sup> The arguments which allow him to negate God's existence can also be used against Sade's claim to reveal the truth in a novel, since Sade, in his short essay *Idées sur les Romains*, states that men started to write novels only because they believed in gods:

No sooner did man begin to suspect the existence of immortal beings than he endowed them with both actions and words. Thereafter we find metamorphoses, fables, parables, and novels: in a word, we find works of fiction as soon as fiction took hold of the minds of men.<sup>8</sup>

embodied the weak imagination that libertines seek to destroy. Sade does not simply represent the paradox of the unlimited which leads to the infinite repetition of the same act, he also resolves it in his last anonymous and most important novel. Saint-Fond and Clairwil, the two libertines who used the word 'despair' to describe their impotence in front of the paradox of libertinage, are eliminated in the novel. Juliette survives. Her 'story' represents the solution through which Sade paradoxically resolves the aporia of libertinage.

## 2. *The Italian journey or the volcanic imaginary*

Not only does Juliette survive, but also she leaves the country in which her masters had initiated her to libertinage. 'The Sadean journey teaches nothing', wrote Roland Barthes.<sup>10</sup> This statement became almost a dogma among French critics of Sadean fiction. Yet, although the lesson is neither cultural nor moral nor ethnological, there is one, for Juliette and for Sade's readers.

Juliette's departure for Italy marks a new step in her story. Before her trip to Italy, Juliette had never uttered a long discourse like La Delbène, Saint-Fond, Noircœur or Clairwil. It is in Italy that she speaks as a philosopher for the first time, when she faces Pope Plus VI and King Ferdinand of Naples. However, Juliette's speeches are different from the other libertines' discourses: she seeks not simply to destroy victims' prejudices and imaginary beliefs, but rather to ridicule power, even when a libertine hero, like Pope Plus VI or King Ferdinand, benefits from this power. She shows that she is not impressed by authority of any kind. In some way, her discourses put an end to discourses: to the authority of a masculine and theorized libertinage.

Juliette's first discovery in Italy is the Pietra-Mala volcano. When Juliette arrives in Pietra-Mala, she has just left France, the country of reason, the country of her libertine teachers and masters. She discovers Italy as a volcanic land, as the country of 'Nature's whims'. The crossing of the Italian border means a real and symbolic rupture with her past: she leaves the country of discipline and reason for that of fire and exuberant images.

Two volcanos frame Juliette's descent into the Italian peninsula: Pietra-Mala in the North, Vesuvio in the South. Between the two volcanos, Juliette travelled through all Italy, from the Alps to Calabria, and went through all the steps

of libertinage and corruption. Her discovery of the second volcano marks the acme of her sexual, political and intellectual power.

In no other place in Europe is Nature as beautiful and as imposing as in this city's surroundings. It is not the sad and uniform beauty of Lombardian plains, which leave imagination in a tranquillity that resembles languor: here, it is everywhere inflamed. The disorders, the volcanos of this always criminal nature plunge the soul in a turmoil that makes it capable of great actions and tumultuous passions.

'This is us, I told my friends, and virtuous people resemble these sad Piemontese fields whose uniformity annoyed us' (XI, 354).

What does Juliette proclaim with this image of volcanos, as opposed to Piémont's flat landscapes? She declares that flatness and uniformity are boring, be they geographical, moral or aesthetic. She establishes a dichotomy between virtue's boring flatness and imagination's volcanic inflammation. In this dichotomy, libertines who taught Juliette to commit crime with sang-froid, with 'apathy', and fought against the power of human imagination, libertines who repeat crimes endlessly and get rid of imaginary illusions, seem to be closer to flat lands and virtuous people than to volcanic peaks and Juliette's imagination. In 'Kant avec Sade', Jacques Lacan attempts an analogous comparison when he brings together Kant's imperative of moral law and Sade's imperative of apathy: like moral law, Sadean libertinage intends to be pure of any human motivation; it must be 'non-pathological'.<sup>11</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, in their chapter on *L'Histoire de Juliette* entitled 'Juliette, or Reason and Morals' in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, identify Sadean libertinage with a pure and disincarnate 'ratio'.<sup>12</sup> But they blame Juliette for being still idolatrous: she keeps believing in pleasure, she does not reach the perfection of libertinage like other characters in the novel, her companion Sbrigani for example.

Shouldn't we ask, then, why Sade recounts Juliette's, not Sbrigani or even Saint-Fond's story? During her Italian journey, Juliette swerves from her teachers' lessons to lead the reader on another path, that of a metaphorical language which seems to contradict the meaning of Sadean libertinage. After she and



Clairwil murder her friend Olympe Borghèse by throwing her into the Vesuvio, Juliette superstitiously interprets the shower of stones which falls around them, but Clairwil immediately corrects her:

'Ah! Ah!', I said without even condescending to get up. 'Olympe takes her revenge! These pieces of sulphur and bitumen are her farewell: she warns us that she is already in the bowels of earth'. 'There is a very simple cause to this phenomenon', Clairwil answered me. 'Each time a heavy body falls into the volcano's bowels, it puts in motion the matters which never stop boiling in the bottom of its womb, and provokes a light eruption' (IX, 417).

Clairwil, a serious libertine, corrects Juliette with a scholarly tone to give her a precise and clear explanation of the volcanic phenomenon. She refuses, even just for fun, to be the dupe of nature. But Clairwil does not get the last word. Juliette rejects her explanation and replaces it with a more poetic interpretation:

'You are wrong about the cause of the shower of stones which just overflowed us; it is nothing but Olympe's request for her clothes: we must give them back to her' (IX, 418).

'There is a very simple cause to this phenomenon', Clairwil had said. Precisely, the simplicity of phenomena does not interest Juliette. She is attracted to volcanic nature as a poet, not a volcanologist. She asserts a metonymic continuity between the volcano's flame and that of her desire: 'The flame which evaporated from this soil inflamed my mind' (VIII, 553).

Volcanic fire inflames her mind. Juliette uses this fire as a metaphor for her imagination and for libertine passions: it is the process of metaphorization that inflames her mind and stimulates her desire.

We should not mistake Juliette's choice of an oneiric interpretation for ignorance. Sade, earlier in the novel, carefully demonstrated his heroine's scientific knowledge. He described a scene in which Juliette, an enlightened philosopher, intends to destroy her listeners' belief in the supernatural: 'The lake Asphaltite's surroundings where they (Sodom and Gomorrha) were located were only volcanos which had not really gone

out: why should we persist in seeing something supernatural, when our surroundings can be produced by such simple means?' (VIII, 553). It is therefore by choice, not ignorance, that Juliette dispels a scientific explanation which is as boring and flat as Piemontese plains, because it eliminates legends by rationalizing them. For the sake of play, Juliette chooses metaphor, and does not try to 'unveil truth' entirely.<sup>13</sup>

Juliette distinguishes herself from her teachers and masters through her relation to imagination. At the beginning of the novel, this difference appeared as a youthful error; libertines reprimanded their young pupil: 'You should diminish this sensibility which ruins you', Noirceuil advised Juliette, echoing Clairwil: 'I still find the same fault in her: she commits crimes only with enthusiasm, she needs to get excited' (VIII, 455). Far from correcting her fault, Juliette claims it as a quality: during the different steps of her Italian journey and particularly the discovery of the volcano, she asserts her difference from the other libertines. And Juliette's story proves that she is right: she survives, while two of her main teachers, Saint-Fond and Clairwil, die. The end of the novel confirms Juliette's choice of a playful imagination.

### 3. Juliette's passion

Infidelity and treason are the preeminent principles of libertinage. The more a libertine expresses her love for Juliette, the more sure she is to die. Juliette sacrifices Madame de Donis to her daughter, Honorine de Grillo to Olympe Borghèse, Olympe Borghèse and the Queen Charlotte to Clairwil, and Clairwil to La Durand.

Clairwil's death nonetheless modifies the scenario: she is not sacrificed to the principle of infidelity, but to the passion of another woman who wants to be the only one to possess Juliette's heart; and who, in turn, is never sacrificed. 'Juliette, I adore you. The only price I wanted for all I have done was to adore you without rival: I was jealous of Clairwil (...)' (IX, 430). Jealousy, ridiculed throughout the novel by the libertine philosophers, reappears suddenly toward the end, and serves even to justify, in Juliette's eyes, La Durand's crime: 'The rascal! It is because of jealousy; this motive excuses her in my eyes' (IX, 455). Verbal exchanges between Juliette and La Durand make not only the love vocabulary, but also the generous practices banned by libertines, reappear.



La Durand, for instance, refuses the money that Juliette wants to give her to pay for the poison used to kill Clairwil: 'I don't want to be paid for a favor given by my heart' (IX, 430). While monetary payment serves precisely, in the libertine system, to reverse the traditional system of values, here, for the first time in the novel, sentimental value prevails over monetary value. Juliette also insists on their delicate feelings and acts: 'I received, I must say, her attentions with the same delicacy as she in giving them to me' (IX, 436). This delicacy, never heard of in the relations between libertines who mean by 'delicacy' only the refinement of some sexual fantasies, leads Juliette and La Durand to utter the most tender declarations of love and oaths like in the most traditional of love relationships: 'In the name of the most tender love, stop worrying, my angel', La Durand tells Juliette (IX, 438). 'I repeat that I give myself up to you, that you can count on my heart as I rely on yours; our union makes our strength, and nothing will ever dissolve it', Juliette tells La Durand (IX, 439).

How should we read these declarations of love, so abundant at the end of *L'Histoire de Juliette*? Is it a parody of the 'metaphysical' vocabulary of love, like in all the love declarations which are uttered throughout the novel and which all lead to treason, following the law of libertine desire?<sup>14</sup> Why, then, is La Durand never betrayed?

La Durand has a particular status in the novel. Compared to Clairwil or even to Olympe Borghèse, and mostly to Noirceuil or Saint-Fond, her presence is quantitatively rather unimportant. Her role is composed mostly of eclipses: she appears for the first time at the middle of the novel, to reappear only four hundred pages later and disappear again after fifty pages, before she reappears in the last three pages. However, despite such a rare presence, she is not a secondary character. It is she, indeed, who determines the plot's main peripeteias. During the first encounter between Juliette and La Durand, when Clairwil takes her friend to visit a fortune teller, she predicts Clairwil's and Juliette's future (VIII, 509). Four hundred pages later, her prediction concerning Clairwil's death is carefully realized by her own agency. Before this, if Juliette left France for Italy, it was because of a dream in which she suddenly remembered the fortune teller's prediction, as though her superstitious belief in the prediction and her own dream were stronger than her

philosophical and libertine reason. When La Durand reappears in Italy, we suddenly learn that she secretly accompanied Juliette throughout her journey:

'I never lost sight of you, my dear and tender friend. I followed you to Angers, to Italy, while doing my business; I always had you under my gaze. My hope disappeared when I saw your various liaisons with the Donis, Grillo, Borghèse, and I was even much more desperate when I discovered that you had found Clairwil again... Eventually I followed you here from Rome, and, tired of seeing my plans thwarted for so long, I decided to unravel the adventure: you see how well I succeeded' (IX, 434).

'I decided to unravel the adventure': it is indeed La Durand who gives the novel a reason to end, since she 'unravels' *L'Histoire de Juliette*. To unravel means to untie a knot, to solve (or dissolve) it. It is also La Durand whom Sade entrusted with defining libertine as 'the total rupture of all restraints'. No libertine would disavow such a definition. However, La Durand's acts seem to strangely contradict her principles: it is by tightening the most solid bond - that of her eternal alliance with Juliette - that she unravels the novel. *L'Histoire de Juliette* ends on this bond, that no treachery will ever cut. The narrative of Juliette's adventures thus appears as a quest leading to the indestructible alliance of Juliette and La Durand.

When Juliette ends her narrative, her libertine listeners decide to hand over Justine to nature, which fulfills their expectation by killing Juliette's sister with a thunderbolt: 'A thunderbolt strikes her down, crossing her through and through' (IX, 583). This final thunderbolt eliminates sentimental weakness embodied by Justine (who could not stop crying while listening to her sister's narrative), and strengthens libertine principles: 'Come and look at Heaven's work, come and see how it rewards virtue' (IX, 583). God ('Heaven') is once again ridiculed and his powerlessness (or impotence) is stressed in this final scene, upon which many critics have commented: nature's fire serves to prove the validity of libertinage. Juliette's adventures thus seem to end with the sacrilegious rupture of the familial link, with the symbolic annihilation of sentimental illusions.

But we most often forget that this thunderbolt is not the last event in the novel. It is followed by a second gift of heaven:

They had hardly arrived at the castle when a travelling coach arrived through the other road; (...) A tall woman, very well dressed, gets out, Juliette walks toward her. Good Heavens! It is La Durand, it is this dear friend of Madame de Lorsange, condemned by the inquisitors in Venice, whom Juliette thought she had seen hanged to the ceiling of the room of her terrible judges. (...) 'Dear soul!', she exclaims while rushing into her friend's arms (...) 'by which event!... great God... explain... I don't know what to believe any more (...)' (IX, 584-585).

Sade uses the expressions 'Good heavens' and 'great God' to express Juliette's violent emotion: God (heaven), ridiculed when Justine was struck by the thunderbolt, now reflects Juliette's incapacity to utter an entire sentence, as if she were hit with a metaphoric and sentimental thunderbolt (in French, a *coup de foudre*).

The novel does not end with Juliette's final word, but with La Durand's arrival, narrated by an external narrator. The novel ends because Juliette's and La Durand's relationship leaves nothing to add: 'I therefore run up to you, my angel', La Durand went on, 'I make you happy, and this makes me content' (IX, 585).

How should we understand this unexpected denouement to which critics have not given its deserved attention? How should we understand the return to a rhetoric of passion in a novel which ridicules any link to the other and sanctions this derision with murder?

With regard to her crimes and principles, La Durand is not very different from the other libertine characters in the novel. However, her social status makes her distinctive: she is not an aristocrat, she has no social or political power, and she does business out of necessity. She comes from a low social rank, and she has to work to earn her living. She is introduced in the novel as a maker and seller of poison, and a fortune teller. She is called 'La Durand' or 'Madame Durand', which indicates her plebeian origin; when she narrates their first encounter, Juliette even names her 'the witch' or 'the shrew'.

Juliette, a rich aristocrat (through her marriage to M. de Lorsange) chooses La Durand, who is her social other. Their

social difference is one of the paradoxical causes of her attraction for this woman. When Juliette meets La Durand again in Italy, she has independent means. But she decides to carry on all of La Durand's trades: 'There was no day that this quadruple trade of whore, procurer, witch and poisoner would not bring us a thousand sequins, and often much more' (IX, 544). Juliette forms with La Durand the paradoxical couple of the aristocrat and the procurer, and chooses to let herself be prostituted by her.

The contest between Juliette and La Durand is not only social, but also physical. We learn indeed of some strange characteristics of La Durand: 'Durand had never been able to enjoy sexual pleasure in an ordinary way: she was obstructed, but (...) her clitoris, as long as a finger, inspired in her the most ardent taste for women. She fucked them, she sodomized them' (IX, 431). La Durand is anatomically closer to man than women, since, being obstructed, she can not be penetrated, and uses her clitoris like a penis. If the homosexual relationship between Juliette and La Durand represented a transgression of the norm, the transgression itself is now transgressed: what we find at the end of the double inversion is a homosexual relationship which paradoxically reproduces the scheme of a heterosexual relationship.

The meaning of the two women's alliance is both political and poetic. Politically, libertinage is condemned, at the end of the eighteenth century, by novelists who identify it with the decadent philosophy of an aristocracy locked in its past and cut off from a new political consciousness which takes control over reality away from this high social class. Because La Durand is a plebeian woman, because her obstructed body embodies a limit while transgressing the gender limit, and opposes her paradoxical 'impenetrability' to men's sexual violence, because she is Juliette's physical and social other, her alliance with Juliette indicates a revolutionary rupture with the libertinage of the *ancien régime*.

Poetically, Juliette's choice gives back the pleasure of imagination to libertinage. Libertines who made a boast of destroying all illusions, prejudices and beliefs limiting mind and passions, had to invent an object of hatred, God, in order to stimulate their desire and resurrect the lacking limit. Juliette recreates this limit, first by replacing analysis with metaphor,

then by tying a paradoxical alliance with La Durand: she substitutes the libertines' discourses which theorize pleasure without theory. The ultimate cult reversed by Juliette and La Durand is that of libertinage, Juliette and La Durand do not try to eliminate every belief. They accept to escape from the rationalizing power of words.

Juliette tells her listeners how, during their first encounter, La Durand imposed silence on Clairwill who was repeating the obvious truth of libertinage:

'Simple creatures', La Durand answered, 'it is not a man who enjoys your body, it is God'.

'You are mad, Madam', Clairwill said. 'There is no God (...)'

'Shut up!' La Durand said. 'Give yourself up to the impressions of the flesh, without wondering about those who make you feel them: if you say another word, everything is ruined' (VIII, 508).

La Durand orders the libertine to keep silent, to believe in the 'God' that she invented for them, and to have pleasure. She chooses imagination over reason and mocks the two libertines who pay her to discover her secrets, thus affirming her primordial freedom.

It is the same freedom that Juliette exerts at the end of the novel, during the grand final orgy, when she orders her former master Noircueil to shut up and 'fuck'. Because this last orgy takes place on Noircueil's property and is organised by him, one could think that Juliette's return to France also means her masters' fantasies. However, the way in which she interrupts Noircueil, who is speaking to the horrified victim he is sodomising, reveals how much their power relation has changed.

'Just think, Madam', said the ferocious Noircueil still sodomising, 'that it would be enough to cut the dividing membrane, to completely nullify the action against which you protest; and if you want, Juliette, with a razor (...)'.  
'Fuck, fuck, Noircueil! You are talking nonsense (...)'. (VIII, 560).

Noircueil was on the point of asking Juliette to cut the membrane dividing her victim's vagina from her anus: he wants

to 'nullify' the crime by destroying the physical limit which transforms sodomy into a crime. However, Juliette energetically interrupts him and accuses him of talking nonsense (In the French text, *déraisonner*), of losing his reason. Libertine reason faces its own contradiction: it destroys every limit, and this elimination (of limits, of difference, of 'dividing membranes') gives libertines a limitless power. But this rational elimination of difference confronts reason with madness: with its other, with its own limits.

Juliette establishes the limits of reason: she reveals the impossibility of an entire rationalisation of pleasure: she calls the concrete representation of the disappearance of the crime (through the disappearance of the 'membrane' which delimits it) the beginning of irrationality. She was the pupil, she has become the master, and she gives an order to Noircueil: to 'fuck', and to shut up.

The volcano episode and the final relationship with La Durand represent Sade's choice of limit. With these two episodes, Sade invites us to read his texts as fictive and humorous texts, and not, as suggested the French feminist Elisabeth Badinter who wanted to censor Sade's novel, as rational demonstrations inviting readers to commit murder.<sup>15</sup> Juliette's transformation through the novel allows us to understand why Sade entitled his last long novel *L'Histoire de Juliette*: Juliette chooses fiction, without trying to prove its truth; she chooses pleasure, without trying to annihilate every belief, since imaginary belief is a component of pleasure. What Sade tells us with the invention of Juliette is that freedom is the very choice of limit. 'The total rupture of all restraints' implies the acceptance of one restraint, in order that libertines do not stop on their way, in a challenge they address to God or to themselves. *L'Histoire de Juliette* is Sade's critique of pure fiction. Just as Kant wrote a 'critique of pure reason' to examine the conditions of possibility of reason as well as its limits, so does Sade outline the conditions of possibility of fiction in *L'Histoire de Juliette*, and in so doing he reveals the power of the imaginary.



## NOTES

1. Sade, *Oeuvres Complètes*. (Paris: Cercle du livres précieux, 1962-4), IX, 511. All translations are mine.
2. The word 'libertinage' comes from the latin word 'libertinus' which designates a specific social category in Roman society: that of slaves who have been freed, but are not yet Roman citizens.
3. In *Soudain un Bloc d'Abî Sade* (Paris, J.J. Pauvert, 1986), translated into English in 1990. Annie Le Brun thus defines Juliette's character: 'A being in search of its form beyond all forms, Juliette is the body of the most beautiful idea one can have of freedom' (p. 295).
4. These discourses, which aimed to educate the reader as well as the libertine pupil and characterize Sade's prose- no other Eighteenth century author of libertine novels demonstrate such a need to 'unveil truth' - have been more studied than any other part of Sadean novel, and critics, from Maurice Blanchot to Philippe Roger, have more often analyzed the Sadean 'system', Sadean 'reason' or libertine 'principles' than Sadean fiction's strategy.
5. Pierre Klossowski, *Sade mon prochain* (Paris: Seuil, 1967).  
Sade *My Neighbor*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991).
6. This paradox has been remarkably studied by Geoffrey Bennington in 'Sade: Laying down the Law', *Oxford Literary Review*, 6 (1984), 38-56.
7. 'You have enough intelligence to understand that a vice whose origin is in the blood's effervescence can not be amended by (...) inflaming imagination through seclusion' (Letter to *Madame de Montreuil*, March 13th, 1777, O.C., XII, ed. cit.).
8. *Idées sur les Roman*, O.C., X, ed. cit., 4.
9. Klossowski, p. 149. (Translation and italics are mine).
10. Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1980), p. 21.
11. Jacques Lacan, 'Kant avec Sade', in *Écrits* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1966).
12. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972).

13. Furthermore, Sade chose not just any kind of natural phenomenon, but the volcano, which, in the Eighteenth century, precisely embodies nature's ambiguous character: it is at the same time an object of scientific knowledge and the source of real terrors and mythic legends. Volcanic peaks fill the Eighteenth century imaginary; their eruptions, fires and lava flows serve as metaphors, in politics, for revolutionary explosion, in the psychology, for outbursts of passion.
14. For Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, Juliette and La Durand's relationship is purely parodical. She affirms that La Durand would certainly have also been betrayed by Juliette if her adventures had continued: she does not take into consideration the fact that Sade precisely chose to end his novel without having La Durand betrayed by Juliette. See Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, *Sade et l'écriture de l'orgie* (Paris: Nathan, 1991).
15. I am referring here to an 'Apostrophe' program on Sade organized by Bernard Pivot in the summer of 1989, during which the debate among Elisabeth Badinter, Annie Le Brun and Jean- Jacques Pauvert was rather animated.

## Sade's *Itinerary of Transgression*

David Allison

I would like to address the nature of transgression and its logic or itinerary in Sade's work. If this task is somewhat speculative and incomplete, it perhaps mirrors the foundational incompleteness of the more than sixteen extant volumes of Sade's writings. For a more exhaustive, if not definitive, resolution of the very issue of transgression, the analysis would have to continue the debate between Derrida and Foucault over the validity of Bataille's celebrated account of transgression, which in turn draws upon the earlier work of Roger Caillois.<sup>1</sup>

The first concern, however, is to try to ascertain to what extent 'transgression' is really a concept in the strict sense. While it can assume a variety of grammatical forms (noun, transitive or intransitive verb, adjective or adverbial form), the noun derives ultimately from the Latin verb *transgredi*, which means, to step (*trans*) across (*gredi*). In its transitive verbal form, the *OED* defines 'to transgress' as follows: 'To go beyond the bounds or limits prescribed by a law, command etc'. Or, 'to break, violate, infringe, contravene, trespass against'. To this, it adds: 'To offend against (a person); to disobey. To go or to pass beyond (any limit or bounds)'. In its noun form, the citation continues: 'The action of transgressing or passing beyond the bounds of legality or right; a violation of law, duty or command; disobedience, trespass, sin'. 'The action of passing over or beyond (in the etymological sense)'. Or, 'The refusal to be limited'. More conventionally, perhaps, transgression is held to be synonymous with the following: trespass, violation, infraction, breach, infringement, contravention. Further, it is held to be analogous with such terms as encroachment, invasion, entrenchment, slip, lapse, offense, sin, vice, crime.

It immediately becomes evident that 'transgression' is no ordinary word. It seems to represent what Leibniz would call a *masterrolle* of characterisations or qualities: for example, a veritable roster or calendar of types and specimens. The examples or instances of its use-- simply as enumerated in the *OED* entry-- concern or deal with the following abstract cases: bounds, limits, prescriptions, laws, commands, conventions, duties, statutes, constitutions, doctrines, goals,

paths, boundaries, proportions, sequence or formations. The general subject matter to what these cases or concerns would refer, are the following-- again, from one dictionary citation: property, civil law, constitutional law, ecclesiastical or canon law, human will, Divine will, the human subject, human conduct, geology, music and manners. This abstract and general range alone, would provide a dizzying basis for a classification of transgression. And add to this a discussion of precisely what *nature, conduct* or *humanity* alone might entail, and the most astute numerologist or taxonomist would quickly be left speechless. *Again*, in its most succinct lexical formation: to transgress is to pass beyond any limit, any boundary. And what is defined by a limit? a boundary? Precisely that which has discrete form, discrete identity.

We seem hard pressed, then, to speak about transgression in any precise sense. What, for example, would constitute a strategy for finding examples of transgression? That is, how would we identify transgression, or acts of transgression, in the first place? This task would surely raise the problem of the hermeneutic circle: we would have to presuppose a rather definite concept of transgression in order to discern its particular instances. Quite simply, one would have to know, one would have to presuppose, the nature of what one is looking for, prior to being able to identify something as an example of it. Alternatively, is transgression perhaps something other than a concept in the strict sense-- is it perhaps a vague notion? An idea, disposition, or state, which assumes identity only in name, only nominally? Would this nominal unity therefore be established on the basis of gathering various features of resemblance? Thus, the nominal unity of the term would find its basis in metaphorical usage, or in a certain figurative use of speech (for example, by turning to the analogy or simile). Would there be a family resemblance of features? Perhaps a general metaphorical or morphological sameness to the varied uses of what passes for transgression?

One striking feature of this term, this so-called concept of transgression, is that in each pretended case of its use, it seems to acquire sense from the object of its operation. Thus, I transgress something or someone. If I transgress the law, I am a law-breaker. If I transgress divine command, I am a sinner. If I transgress one's person, I am perhaps an assaulant or a rapist.



Do that to another's property and one is a trespasser; to another's ownership of property, and one is thereby a thief. Those who transgress codes of social conduct are termed barbarians or churls; civil conduct, criminals. Transgress proper etiquette or manners and one is a boor. Do that to statistically conventional behaviour, and one is usually deemed insane. If transgression were to be operated upon conventional speech, discourse itself would become incomprehensible: it would risk grammatical unintelligibility. The transgression of conventional sexual conduct or identity constitutes deviance or perversion, as would the transgression of ethical codes constitute immorality.

Now, surely, these terms carry a negative import, even if, to be most generous, this might only amount to a rhetorical indictment. The question of negativity, however, arises in at least two senses: 1) Negativity arises in the attitude that we assume in the face of such transgressions as rape, insanity, theft, boorishness, etc. In this case, it is a matter of our judging certain transgressive acts negatively. Yet-- following for a moment the nominal sense of transgression-- would there not equally be transgressive acts we might well consider in positive terms, acts which we would most likely lend our approval? Perhaps there are 'good' or estimable types of transgression; indeed, to transgress the limits of the *status quo*, understood as progress? For example, technological, economic or political progress? Perhaps liberation from institutional forms of repression, such as racism, sexism, economic or political bondage? Liberation from institutions of repression-- taxes, fines, penal incarceration, the madhouse or even educational tracking, for instance. *Freedom*, in this case, would signify release from a variety of binds, restrictions, codes, norms, etc. that were not felt by the individual or by the society to be in his or its best interests. And transgression in this positive attitudinal sense thus raises the second question concerning negativity.

Secondly, each case of transgression seems, as we said, to be governed by its object. What the sense or meaning of each transgressive act is seems to come from *without*, from a limiting exteriority.<sup>2</sup> Here, the very operation of transgression seems to encounter, precisely, its limit. In what case, transgression-- it might be argued-- is its own limiting case. That is, transgression would seem to be the negativity which governs the field of

possible operation itself-- whether this field be ethics, morality, sexuality, religion, civil law etc.

It would appear that this sense-- transgression as negativity-- would probably be the principal consideration for our everyday use of the term. At least, that is what would seem to be the case. In other words, transgression seems to stand or fall on its association or identification with one or another kind of negation. But, and this is precisely what is at issue, is this negative or negating function simply coextensive with the already existing field of operation? Does the limit of the operational field dictate the range and extent of negativity, or, does negativity dictate the limit of the operational field?

If what is at stake in the notion/idea/ or concept of transgression is simply the play of negation or advantage in attempting to pursue it-- for it could be understood merely as rejection, denial, violation or negation-- then one would simply be immoral, irrational, unbalanced, unthinking, illogical, unhealthy, noncooperative, insincere, immodest, unconventional and illegal. Or, a sinner, deviant and coward. In such cases, negativity would be inscribed within its field and by its field as surely as the function of denial, invalidity and contradiction would be found only within a system of logic: as subduction and negation are within mathematics, as ellipsis and negation lie within conventional grammar. In short, transgression would operate as a system-bound rule of operation or deviation. And again, it would be the limit case of its own field.

What would the positively construed attitude have to say about the second kind of negation: for example, the limit case? Ideally, both the negative and the affirmative kinds of transgression could occur within the field of operation: progress, reform or development as affirmative modes need not leave the region of play or operational engagement. New acts might be developments or refinements of earlier types: innovative social or political developments would thereby still remain under the domain of societal or civil codes. In such a sphere, emotional or sexual differences, for example, might not only be tolerated, but might well be accommodated to existing structures of social and cultural organisation.



Affirmatively transgressive acts would be little different from reformist gestures in this case. The limits which define positive and negative operations would remain basically unchanged-- or, at most-- somewhat expanded according to an already inscribed pattern or code of systematic organisation. In this sense, the difference between heresy and heterodoxy might amount to little more than such reforms as those proposed by Martin Luther: for example, a protest-ant re-formation.

Following this line of thought, it might appear that transgression-- in either its negative or affirmative modes-- nonetheless remains bound by its limits, since the limits, which in each particular case are addressed, are themselves circumscribed by the very field which defines them. In the simplest terms, negativity is bound by the values *positive and negative*, and by the respective *region or field of application*. Thus, a positive transgression nonetheless invokes the field in which it operates. And, this is precisely why a rapist is a term of *moral reprobation*, or 'atheist' a term of religious reprobation, or 'schizophrenia' a term for the mentally maladjusted or dis-functional. Hard it is to escape the field of negativity, precisely because negativity-- whatever we may think of it-- is one of the structures of the field.

So far, then, we seem to hesitate to assign a positive conceptual value, some value or mark of content, to the seemingly *ampliative* character of transgression. Rather, we have been speaking of it as a notion, perhaps, one that had to be discerned across a variety of cases. The word seems to derive its sense from the object and field of the so-called 'transgressive' operation. Further, we have been discussing, without really settling, the issue as to whether 'transgression' is in fact system-dependent: for example, whether transgression is simply bound by the rules which govern a field of operation-- even if it be simply to negate or to violate these rules themselves, these taboos and prohibitions. Or, should we ask, as 'ampliative', does transgression *reinscribe* these rules of governance and limit within a wider field of play, or, finally, whether it suspends the rules themselves by which the field of play is properly identified and dominated. Which is to say, there seem to be three possible options to our understanding of transgression so far: 1) that it is system and function-bound. 2) That it is system and function-expanding, for example, that it is

'ampliative'. 3) That by its operation, system and function are themselves fundamentally altered, volatilized: disrupted and essentially changed.

Alternatively, and more modestly, perhaps, these three ways of viewing transgression might simply point up that we have but barely sketched out the domain of a discourse, without assigning a very precise sense to the terms of that discourse. To come to the point of decision, we would ultimately have to examine instances or cases of what passes for transgression. We would have to examine various discourses about transgression, and raise the issue as to whether or not it can called a concept, a notion or a sense-unity *of all*, and finally, to try to point out within which context it makes sense even to talk about transgression either about a specific case of transgression, or about transgression in general. If the latter, what is the compass, the arena, the deployment of transgression? What does it include or exclude as its multifarious operation? Might general transgression include, within its own reservoir of possibility and operation, the formal identity of the *language* we use to denominate it? In which case, can it-- to call it 'it'-- be spoken about, written about, enunciated, recorded or even remembered? Recall our itinerary.

More commonly, perhaps, we tend to think of transgression as being *motivated*, as having some purpose for its initial operation-- commonly, I say, if we think of the usual, lexically defined instance of this word. 'Little Francine was raped by someone'-- there must be a reason! 'Young Herbert outraged the entire community by his unspeakable acts'-- why would such a nice boy do that? Motivation, and purpose: these seem to characterize what passes by the name 'transgression' in almost every possible case, whether we initially view transgressive acts as negative or as positive testaments.

Perhaps the most positive sense of transgression could be expressed in the rather sympathetic terms of liberation or freedom. To free oneself from fetters of one kind or another, to overcome an undesirable condition, brought about by external powers, to liberate oneself from, perhaps, an unjust fate. Of course, it will be under the *rhetoric* of just such cases that we are wont to ascribe heroism, courage and tragedy to the human situation. We know that for the mythology of Hesiod and Homer,

constitute this claim: the *Regulae* and the *Discourse on Method* argue that analytical geometry is fully adequate to describe and to explain the whole of physics, mechanics and dynamics-- for example, the entire natural order: fate.

Inhabiting the age of Descartes-- as we well do-- this is barely an issue for us. Quite simply, we believe it. We are the masters and possessors of nature. In somewhat more contemporary terms, it is frequently heard said that, 'we want it all and we want it now'. Even better, perhaps, 'we expect it all and we expect it now'. From the situation we occupy, then, *three teachings of Descartes* have been passed down to us, and precisely, constitute our age as our age- and we with it:

- 1) That we determine the ends and purposes of nature by our own will. That is, we become the source of value for the world-- no longer is it attributed to the dreary fates or to the God of the Levant. Our human will dictates the value importance of anything in the world.
- 2) We accept it as a fact, as a very condition for our modern existence, that our human knowledge interprets the world according to the pattern we have selected-- in our case, mathematics.
- 3) What follows, in consequence, is the fact that nature itself becomes something quite different for our age-- quite different from the conception of nature, prior to the Enlightenment. Nature itself, nature in itself, is no longer held to possess value, meaning or purpose-- except for, apart from, that value, purpose and meaning with which we humans have chosen to invest it. All this follows from Descartes: as the earth replaced the sun for Copernicus, so does the human replace God for our modern age.

When the Marquis de Sade writes, some 150 years later, however, he shows that the new teachings of the Renaissance and Enlightenment still remain incomplete in their extension, for they are, strictly speaking, limited to the precise domain of the natural sciences. If human will replaced the divine order, this was only effective, it seemed, on the level of scientific theory-- this, even despite the benefit of an ever-increasing number of practical inventions and applications (for example, as

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the fates guarded the portals of eternity, weaving out their web of constraint, governance and ultimately, of subjugation-- the subjugation of humanity and even of the Gods as well. Fate or fortune-- the words are identical-- govern our affairs. One knows this familiar lament all too well. It is that in the face of which one is powerless. It is our condemnation. Nonetheless, it occasionally smiles on the hero, on the tragic hero, or, even on the person who presumes to unravel its divine fabric.

By the period of the Italian Renaissance and, following that, the European Enlightenment, however, that fabric had become somewhat threadbare. Galileo, Copernicus, Bacon, Hobbes and Machiavelli were the first to more accurately divine the pattern to this web: it was relatively consistent in warp and weave, it employed the primary colors, and it operated according to the inexorable order of mathematical exactitude. It only remained to fully assess the myriad details, the rules, the complex web of causal affinities in order to understand the very operations of fate: but by the period of the Enlightenment, fate or fortune-- what Machiavelli termed 'sweet mistress fortuna'-- was itself held to be coextensive with the entire natural order.

We are familiar enough with this historical period of thought to recognise it as exemplary of the modern age, having brought us the teaching of the mathematical mastery over nature. But, why, one asks, should one master nature? Machiavelli responds: 'Such that we may make provisions to ensure our own well-being in the face of its cruel and intemperate demands'. Descartes, likewise, responds: 'Such that I may enjoy all the sweetness and felicity this world has to offer-- and not, one might add, to be crushed by it. We should remember that, for Descartes, the highest branch on the celebrated 'tree of knowledge', is morality. And what, for Descartes, is morality? He defines it, quite simply, as 'the art of living well'.

The motivation for mastering nature would thus appear to be transparently obvious. Its means, perhaps less so. Ultimately, it is by something entirely *unnatural*, that one conquers nature, that we can become 'the masters and possessors of nature'. This unnatural means of overcoming nature is art: that is to say, artifice, technique. For Descartes, this will be the art of reasoning well, that is, by following a non-natural method, guided by the rules of mathematics. His two earliest works



catalogued in Diderot's *Encyclopedie*). What Sade saw practiced, however, was the very opposite of a newborn and unfettered human freedom. Rather, Sade shows how the ancient religious and moral teachings, together with their restrictions, their taboos and prohibitions, etc.-- Sade shows how the ancient moral teachings continued to *forbid* the effective practice, the effective reawakening of human freedom. If God was no longer in control of physics and dynamics, he seemed, nonetheless, to continue to control the minds and bodies of humanity in general. 'The light of stars takes years ...'

Sade's task, then, is to dramatically finish the work of Descartes: to complete the work of the Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers, and to bring the doctrine of absolute mastery and freedom down from the level of theoretical physics and dynamics, to the practical level of daily life. Namely, down to the level of the *individual's* freedom: so as to permit the individual to act as she or he chooses. Thus, Sade claims to engage the doctrines of the new sciences so as to bring about their concrete expression on the level of ethics and morality. In short, he is concerned to understand and to explain how it is we act. At the very height of the Enlightenment, Sade draws his conclusions for the forthcoming secular age: a hundred years before Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche. Sade, like Raskolnikov, declares: 'If God is dead, then everything is permitted'. For the individual, or for humanity at large, for that matter, there is no rule, no law, that is absolutely justified or universally justifiable.<sup>3</sup> Nothing from without can legitimately restrict our freedom to act, nothing can properly be said to determine how or why we should act, other than our own will, our passions and inclinations. In fact, for the modern political state, freedom itself is the beginning and end of human action: life, liberty and the *pursuit* of happiness, whatever the latter might consist.

We recall that in the High Middle Ages, the *authority* for the religious and political administration of Europe, was St. Thomas Aquinas. In the *Summa Theologica* he writes:

Now it is evident that the world is ruled by divine providence, that the whole community of the universe is governed by the divine reason. Therefore, the very notion of the government of things in God, the ruler of the universe, has the nature of a law

(...) Law is a rule and the measure of acts, whereby man is induced to act or is restrained from acting: for law (lex) is derived from the term 'to bind' (ligare), because it binds one to act or not to act.<sup>4</sup>

This was a sentiment about which Sade felt quite strongly. Understandably so, since he was bound in prison for some twenty-seven years of his life. Likewise, it is understandable that he wrote in defence of personal freedom, and that he not only attacked the notion of confinement, restriction, and constraint, but that he attacked the *institution of law itself*. For every law claims submission of the individual. The human subject is precisely, thereby, that which is *subjected*.

In view of his heritage, and in consequence of his own subjection, Sade is perhaps the single most uncompromising revolutionary in the tradition of Western thought: he attacks, he lay's siege to, the Divine Law, to the Eternal Law, to the Natural Law, and to the Human Law. It is for this reason that Sade is not the patty libertarian, who only wants to negotiate free passage in and among the necessary rules of order, convention, and social justice. Rather, he is a *libertine*: the only value consists, ultimately, in his personal exercise of freedom-- from any and all constraints, limits, bonds. Thus, his highest act is the total destruction, the total annihilation, of these constraints themselves, these laws, rules and duties that bind, that restrict and constrict his personal freedom.

Sade is no longer content to live comfortably under the dominion of order, for *order itself* constrains and dictates only certain possibilities of personal action. Order itself crushes-- it deforms or reforms its 'other'-- in its ceaseless demand for conformity, assimilation and submission. Sade's writings about transgression or revolution, are thus statements in the strongest sense, they are 'doctrines' *in extremis*: they demand the complete overthrow of any vestige of order. His revolt or transgression takes place, in each case, according to the particular type of restriction that is imposed on his freedom. Thus, Sade variously proposes blasphemy, immorality, crime, incest, murder, violation, lies, slander, theft, rapacity, irrationality, sodomy, hate and every other kind of violence, perversion or aberration conceivable-- each of these a specific and considered tactical operation to serve the strategic movement of the libertine's transgressive itinerary.



Now, all this is not to suggest that we cannot profit from a consideration of Sade. On the contrary, his peculiar style of excess teaches us a great deal about the tenor of modern life and thought. Like many strictly contemporary thinkers, Sade teaches the doctrine of individual freedom: and for him-- that is to say, properly speaking, for the libertine-- this means absolute freedom or liberty: absolved from all constraint. Somewhat differently, perhaps, this is the modern foundational doctrine of mastery itself: the mastery formerly possessed by *fortuna*, God or Nature. But now, with Sade, this drive to mastery assumes a most deliberate progression. One does not, for instance, start off as a master. For Sade, we can point out at least eight stages in this progression to absolute mastery, to absolute freedom, eight stages of transgression, or, eight transgressive operations-- each of which may be conceived as a particular art or teaching.

1). First, and as a preliminary step, the libertine must establish power over *himself*. Mastery begins with the art of self-mastery. The libertine must first free himself from his own weaknesses-- he must overcome his own weak sentiments-- sentiments which would prevent the growth and consolidation of his own power. Thus, the libertine must start off with what is closest to himself, with what is already within himself, namely, with his apparently singular emotions-- his sentimental values, or, what Sade refers to as the 'alleged instincts'. To gain self-control, self-mastery, he has rid himself of the alleged or so-called 'natural instincts', such as the instincts or sentiments of paternity, maternity, family devotion, filial love etc. What seem to be the instinctual emotions of natural life must first be overcome, because they would only serve to restrict the libertine's drive to mastery; they would place limits on the expression of his own passions, his real instincts, urges, wills, energies and freedom.

Not only does Sade denounce the instinct for domestic family life, but he proposes to replace family life itself with incest. Marriage, for the libertine, is termed the 'hymeneal bond', and it is certainly not the product of any real love or affection-- emotions or sentiments which, in any case, would serve to weaken or to deflect the libertines's own drive to mastery. Sade has one of his characters, Dolmancé, in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, make following remark:

What is it we see? Reciprocal hatred; children who, even before reaching the age of reason, have never been able to suffer the sight of their fathers; fathers sending away their children because they could never endure their approach. Those alleged instincts are hence fictions, absurd; self-interest only invents them, usage prescribes, habit sustains, but never did Nature engrave them in our hearts. Tell me: do animals know these feelings? No, surely not; however, 'tis always them one must consult when one wishes to be acquainted with nature. O Fathers! Have no qualms regarding the so-called injustices your passions or your interest leads you to work upon these beings, for you nonexistent, to which a few drops of your sperm has given life. To them you own nothing, you are in the world not for them but for yourselves; great fools you would be to be troubled about, to be occupied with anything but yourself; for yourselves alone you ought to live. And you, dear children, you must be persuaded also that you own nothing to those individuals whose blood hatched you out of the darkness. Pity, gratitude, love-- not one of these sentiments is their due; they who have given you existence have not a single right to require them from you; they labor for themselves only, let them look after themselves.<sup>5</sup>

2). Second. By removing this kind of restrictive instinct and emotion, and by denouncing the closest bonds-- the family-- as specious, the libertine finds himself limited, checked, at another level, one that is far more extensive than the family unit. Thus, he must next assert his mastery over people in general, that is, over conventional society as a whole. This project demands the cultivated exercise of *cruelty* on the part of the libertine. He must guarantee the effective submission of other individuals, precisely to ensure that they remain weak, that they not be a threat or limit to his own mastery.

3). Third. More importantly, perhaps, one's concerns are not exclusively preoccupied with individuals. Rather, it is the province of *customs and manners*, for example, *morality*, which binds people together into a more powerful and dangerous organisation. Consequently, for the libertine, it is these *customs* which must suffer his attack. Custom or convention forms individuals into a *group* and renders them collectively dangerous to the libertine. Also, these customs themselves are

socially restrictive to the libertine. They continually impose taboos and bonds upon the individual, there prohibiting his own free action. Thus, Sade repeatedly attacks the customs and morality of a people, claiming that they are entirely arbitrary, unnatural and unfounded-- in short, they are simply relative codes-- relative, as he says, to a patch of geography, of terrain. One particularly personal, if not recurring, example he cites is to be found at the end of his 'Notes Concerning my Detention': 'So long as any French soil is left on the globe, it will forever be recognisable by the corruption practiced upon it'.<sup>6</sup>

4). Fourth. But with the violation of custom and habit, a new basis of social coherency and social justification is revealed, one that again severely restricts the libertine, namely, law itself. Thus, the libertine is compelled to attack the legitimacy of civil law by showing that it, in turn, is fully arbitrary: that civil law, just as much as manners, customs and habits varies from country to country, place to place, time to time, to me to me.

To counter the restrictive effects of civil law, Sade shows that the law itself is fully unjust and unjustifiable-- that it doesn't merit compliance. In consequence, he counsels *fraud* to overcome the unjust law. The civil law, he says, supposedly exists for the weak; but the civil contract deprives the weak of what little they do have in the first place. Alternatively, and at the same time, it deprives the strong the right of acquiring more. As such, the law is contradictory, and benefits no one. As he would claim in *Justine*,

the truly intelligent person is he who (...) lashes out against the social contract, he violates it as much and as often as he is able, full certain that what he will gain from these ruptures will always be more important than what he will lose if he happens to be a member of the weaker class; for such he was when he respected the treaty; by breaking it he may become one of the stronger.<sup>7</sup>

5) Fifth. Society, nonetheless, claims to justify the civil order: ostensibly, it justifies the state and its laws by calling upon a transcendent foundation-- by invoking a deity, by recourse to theological argumentation, for example, by claiming divinely ordained rights and principles, divinely sanctioned human laws, by claiming equality in the face of God and by the precedent of Holy writ. Thus, civil law would typically justify itself by appeal to the authority of Divine Law.

The libertine, therefore, sets out to deny the existence of God: to disprove the divine, indeed, to ridicule it, to show the pain and suffering that religion in fact causes the individual to endure-- and, certainly, this is the very axis of his novel, *Justine*. To overcome or to correct the limitations imposed by religion, Sade appropriately teaches blasphemy.<sup>8</sup>

But blasphemy is not only a temporary victory, a pyrrhic victory, on the way to complete mastery and freedom, a victory gained largely by flight. Blasphemy is only tactical stage because if theology is itself but the product of a frail human psychology, if God is only a fiction of weak minds, then the claims of religion are easily dispensed with. Religion as the foundation of law, law as the foundation of society's manners and customs-- all this can be easily dissipated. One need not struggle against mankind's pettiest fears, because they simply reflect and reinscribe the weakest elements of society at large. To seriously wage war with religious taboos and beliefs, and to remain at this level of discourse and blasphemy, would be to concede the issue of mastery. It would be to depend upon the religious beliefs of other people-- hardly one's equals-- to depend on *their* child-like delusions for one's own attempt at victory, one's own liberation. Rather, the libertine derives pleasure and strength from his mastery over society and their silly beliefs: the libertine himself accordingly becomes solitary and uniquely sovereign-- divine.<sup>9</sup>

6). Sixth. To remove himself from all sentimental, family, social, civil and religious restrictions, Sade makes the libertine attain equality with nature at large. Up until now, each stage of his progress towards the attainment of mastery, his path to *absolute freedom*, had been justified by appealing to *nature*. But at this stage of his evolution, the libertine now conceives himself to be on the same level as nature itself. He willfully embraces all that exists: he pursues all things, every activity, every thing, and *not just* pleasant diversions or excesses. He welcomes pain, suffering, joy, filth, happiness, wealth, abuse, degradation, every act, every delight, every torture.<sup>10</sup>

Sade here reinterprets *nature* in a way that is somewhat different from the traditional view. For Sade, nature is precisely the sum of forces of creation and destruction. Indeed, to create, one must forcibly destroy. Thus, for Sade, there is no



natural order as such to be maintained, no natural reason, no natural purpose, no natural ends. What is natural, then, is quite simply, everything that could possibly be. As Bishop Butler would so succinctly express this: 'All that is, is and not another thing'. To wit, nature as *partes extra partes*, in a perpetual state of motion, of dynamic transformation. Indeed, this is far from the rationally ordered and purposive view of a traditionally conceived nature.

So, with the libertine, there is nothing more natural than the destructive violation of what was formerly called natural law-- the God-given reason and purpose that purportedly structured the entire universe and the constitution of the human species. By appealing to his newly formulated natural order, Sade will have sodomy replace the sanctified form of procreation. Likewise, bisexuality and homosexuality, because they express natural urges, are more natural than what was formerly called sex by nature; for example, conventional sexuality-- its *practice*, and the identity of its participants. In keeping with this new found view, contraception and onanism displace mere birth-- and abortion and murder serve to transgress what religion had for so long venerated as 'natural' life. In one of his characteristically exculpatory accounts, Sade would equate criminality itself with his account of nature, both of them seen as the extension of mechanics:

The primary and most beautiful of Nature's qualities is motion, which agitate her at all times, but this motion is simply a perpetual consequence of crimes; she conserves it by means of crime only; the person who most nearly resembles her, and therefore the most perfect being, necessarily will be the one whose most active agitation will become the cause of many crimes. Since it is proven that she cannot reproduce without destructions, equilibrium must be preserved; it can only be preserved by crimes; therefore, crimes serve Nature; if they serve her, if she demands them, if she desires them, can they offend her? And who else can be offended if she is not?<sup>11</sup>

7). Seventh. Yet, for Sade, even this seemingly total abandonment of restrictions, this complete overcoming of taboo, law, form, identity, order and natural limitation, etc., even this seems to be inadequate because the libertine would

unwittingly become a slave to nature itself, to nature herself. Indeed, nature permits-- it encourages, it is identical with-- every conceivable violation and excess. Thus, nature seems to exercise her authority even here, even in the deepest and most excessive throes of criminality. And while the natural order so conceived might hardly be thought to be at all repressive or restrictive, nonetheless, for Sade, even this is felt to be an impediment to his concept of a total freedom or sovereignty. He therefore feels compelled to overcome nature itself. But how can one plausibly do this? How can one overcome or transgress nature? Especially, nature as it is conceived by the likes of someone like Sade?-- for example, according to a rather casually conceived Eighteenth century mechanistic view.

Sade seems to present three ways of overcoming nature so conceived: thereby, to gain absolute freedom for the libertine: a). The first way is by teaching, and by adopting, the cultivated practice of apathy. Neither a question of creation nor destruction, neither production nor depletion; rather, the libertine finally attains a state of rest and passivity-- he continually needs whips, chains, implausible devices, greater and greater tortures and spectacles to increase his jaded state of apathy. In short, the libertine denies nature any kind of recognisable or typical activity, by refusing to participate on its terms. And at this state, the initial distinction between 'real' and 'alleged' needs-- or, between natural and conventional-- becomes abandoned.

b). The second approach Sade takes, in his attempt to transgress nature is to replace it with what could only be unnatural-- the life of the imagination. And, for Sade, the imagination is the highest faculty, the highest capacity of mankind. The libertine acts out of the imagination in order to impose what is thoroughly fictive, unnatural, in the place of the real and natural. Nature thus becomes recreated in the image of the debased and perverted libertine's imagination.

c). As a third strategy, Sade seeks to reverse the very conditions of man's natural existence. No longer shall health inspire happiness, but now, continual shock, disruption, and violence. If health is also equilibrium, harmony, proper proportion, reason and balance, then this shall be overturned and made unstable, unbalanced and degenerate by excess of everything, by-- as Bataille would have it-- *plethora*.



8). We reach the eighth stage of the Sadean itinerary. In the end, we could say that Sade's libertine achieves all he has set out to attain-- that he overcomes all opposition and becomes free, unfettered. But the only limitation he cannot overcome is death itself. He comes closest to surpassing that most human mark of finitude, however, in *Juliette*, when he says,

What I should like to find is a crime, the effects of which would be *perpetual*, even when I myself do not act, so that there would not be a single moment of my life, even when I were asleep, when I was not the cause of some chaos, a chaos of such proportions that it would provoke a general disturbance so formal than even after my death its effects would still be felt.<sup>12</sup>

Also, one can find much the same state purpose in *Justine*: for example, the well known passage where Sade compares one of his characters to

... those perverse writers whose corruption is so dangerous, so active, that their single aim is, by causing their appalling doctrines to be printed, to immortalize the sum of their crimes after their own lives are at an end: they themselves can do no more, but their accursed writings will instigate the commission of crimes, and they carry this sweet idea with them to their grave.<sup>13</sup>

A third instance in *Justine*, where the libertine literally experiences the delight of transport in overcoming the limitations of death, is the occasion of the game played by the infamous cad Roland, the old game of 'cut-the-cord'. In this case, the *petit mort* of *jouissance* effectively becomes an out-of-life experience:

Roland is stimulated by a few of his usual caresses: he climbs upon the stool, I put the hatter round his neck; he tells me he wants me to curse him during the process. I am to reproach him with all his life's horrors, I do so: his dart soon rises to menace Heaven, he himself give me the sign to remove the stool, I obey: would you believe it Madame? Nothing more true than what Roland had conjectured: nothing but symptoms of pleasure ornament his countenance and at practically the same instance rapid

jets of semen spring nigh to the vault. When 'tis all shot out without any assistance whatsoever from me, I rush to cut him down, he falls, unconscious, but thanks to my ministrations he quickly recovers his senses.<sup>14</sup>

We recall a striking fact about the Marquis de Sade: he was imprisoned for a period of twenty-seven years. We could say that the cause for his imprisonment was simply the fact that he was certifiably, impossibly mad. These two considerations go a long way to explain why he was obsessed with the notions of constraint, restriction, limitations and his almost Satanic obsession with power. In short, it is perhaps understandable why he was so concerned with his own absolute freedom, liberty or mastery.

Psychopathology and rhetorical hyperbole aside, however-- and granted, they are difficult to minimize in Sade's case-- his itinerary of transgression nonetheless reflected one of the major themes of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought: that of autonomy and self-determination. Certainly, autonomy as the transformation of the subjected individual, but also, by virtue of his participation in the French Revolution, Sade joins the modern historical movement of national self-determination, which so consciously sought to incarnate these very ideals. At once striving for a rigorous personal autonomy, yet finding himself bound by the conflicting demands of the still-emerging nation state, Sade embodied the often times painful contradictions of modernity in his own person: not the least of which was his repeated incarceration by the revolutionary regime itself, much less his fortuitous liberation from its death-sentence by the guillotine (*'arret de mort*).<sup>15</sup>

To get a clearer perspective on this subject who is the agent of transgression, we are again drawn to the nature of the libertine as cast by Sade-- particularly in regard to the defining role played by his 'otherness', that in relation to which transgressive agency is directed. From Fichte through Kojève, it has become relatively commonplace to understand the very inferiority of the modern subject through its relation to the other. Battalieu, for example, develops his understanding of 'inner experience' according to what he terms the 'principle of continuity'.<sup>16</sup> Simply stated, the principle of continuity holds that we can describe what any individual is or is not, in terms of that individual's continuity

with other people (the intersubjective dimension), continuity with oneself (the constituted ego identity), continuity with the prevailing morality, with the prevailing thought of an age, with the environment. With those whom one trusts, with what one believes, continuity with the ensemble of civil and cultural codes, or-- in brief-- continuity with one's place in the world (the domain of general acculturation). In each case, we say that one is continuous or discontinuous with respect to *something else*-- with respect to society, time past, humankind in general, ideology, value, nature and culture.

Now, we don't usually employ the term 'continuity' when we talk like this, but we do use other words for the same kind of relation: we say, for example, that someone is 'well-adjusted', 'at ease', 'integrated', 'normal', 'conventional', that he 'gets along' and is well- or poorly- 'adapted', etc. We may also say, for example, that we 'identify' with something, that we 'associate' with others, or that we 'relate' to them in some fashion. 'Adjust', 'identify', 'integrate', 'associate', 'relate': these terms mean that we unify, that we become one, *with* our surrounding world. Such an analysis tends to make us think in terms of *others*, in terms of what is *outside* us. We are well-adjusted because we are continuous with what is not us. What is peculiar in these cases is that to account for the specificity of the subject, we seem to have totally abstracted from the very uniqueness and individuality of ourselves-- from what we are, deep down inside. Who is this *me* which must undergo the process of adjustment, identification, integration or association in the first place-- and continually thereafter?

Sade asks the question, and his answer is, nothing but energy: sheer, unrestrained, unlimited energy. Energy without form, without order, without reasons, excuses or justification. Now, the terms Sade uses to describe this energy are several: most importantly, they are desire, passion, shock, pleasure, pain, excitation, orgasm, flood etc. Each of these terms is unique in that of *itself* it has no limits, *no specific nature, form or identity*. When one strips everything away from oneself, all conventions, all definitions, codes and restrictions, what results? Unrestrained energy that expresses itself as action, as desire, as passion etc., and in an infinity of ways.<sup>17</sup> Thus, at the very start of *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, the positively divine libertine, Mme. de Saint-Ange (Madame Holy Angel), says:

I have discovered that when it is a question of someone like me, born for libertinage, it is useless to think of imposing limits or restraints upon oneself-- impetuous desires immediately sweep them away. In a word, my dear, I am an amphibious creature; I love everything, everyone, whatever it is, it amuses me. I should like to combine every species.<sup>18</sup>

Here, especially, we see this *drive to unite, to combine, to be continuous*. But there is a significant difference in this case. Mme. de Saint-Ange is not going to combine on the level of them, of the *other*, of society, morality and religion. No shopkeeper mentality there. A real Iron Lady, she-- and certainly one of the major figures in Sade's repertory of libertines.

She wants continuity, but on a quite different level-- her own level. Continuity on the level of what is her own, herself. And, her imperious continuity is centrifugal, not centripetal! What is this level of self for Sade? We have already noted it: energy-- a fully consuming passion, desire, pleasure, ecstasy. All these terms, which are themselves formless and without restriction, all these terms which point to the level of the most personal, intense, core sense of self, all these are really expressions of what we call sexuality, eroticism, life energy as primary process, as libido, as power.

What the libertine wants, then, is the free fulfillment, the unrestrained exercise of all these desires, these primary drives and pulsions. Thus, sexuality is the strongest, the most intense, most personal performance of continuity-- to be associated with, identified with, integrated with-- anything. Unity or continuity, in this case, is dictated from within, from the intensely personal drives and desires, which furrow and invest exteriority with delight. This comes from *within* and not, repeat, not from without. Thus, the only thing truly important to the libertine is himself, or, equally, herself-- which explains why the libertine continually exercises a sovereign and confident self-assertion, a complete and fulfilling egoism, an unremitting subjectivism which seeks no approval, requires no consent, and tolerates no resistance. All value derives from the unique and sovereign libertine: the exterior object stands as nothing. Selfish, vain and totally despotic.



At this point in our reflection, there emerges the great contradiction-- the contradiction of all contradictions-- the great wall of China: it is the contradiction between the individual and the state, the private and public, the self and other, the I and the Thou, the subject and the object. In short, it is the general contradiction between the me and the non-me-- which is to say, the you, the they, the them, the it, the system, the rules, God, the trap, jail, and the madhouse. We know what Sade wants and we know who wins, who will always win. Social continuity stands in the way of personal continuity. Social continuity requires taboos, restrictions, prohibitions, mores and laws. Society, in short, limits the individual's very life, his freedom to act out of himself. The individual's life thus becomes broken, fragmented, made *discontinuous* by the demands of social continuity. Society thereby forces the individual into isolation-- into a situation that frustrates his very attempt to be autonomous.

We have already seen how these restrictions and prohibitions assume a *systematic order* for Sade: internalized instincts led to the family; the family led to society; society led to morals and manners; morals and manners led to law; laws led to theology; theology led to reason; reason to nature. Each move in this series was a *justification* for the previous move, the previously attained stage. Thus, society ultimately justifies itself by appealing to what is 'natural'. Furthermore, we saw how Sade attacked each justification in turn, even to the point of upsetting or volatilizing the very notion of nature. Thus, he effectively eliminates the source, the cause, the origin of these-- to him-- painful taboos. He eliminates the underlying reason or justification for any taboo, any restriction or inhibition.

In short, Sade is perfectly content to get rid of anything that stands between the libertine and his own expression of natural instincts, that is, his own so-called 'inverted' or volatilized nature-- which is neither rational nor theological. Nature here becomes a reflection of the libertine's own energy, his own passions, desires and destructive cruelty. Simply by reading *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, one could easily divine what would become of social continuity-- much less, community-- were Sade to implement his stated project. Now, the traditional way of defining the individual according to social continuity would

be the following (for example, according to an ascending order of justification), and this is contrasted with Sade's position:

TRADITIONAL VIEW	SADE'S VIEW
1) individual	1) individual (libertine)
2) sentiments	2) X (alleged)
3) family	3) X (fictional)
4) society at large	4) society of libertines (jokes)
5) morals (manners)	5) laws (capricious and few, if any)
6) laws	6) morals (manners)
7) theology	7) X (blasphemy)
8) reason	8) X (desire, passion)
9) nature	9) nature (inverted, volatilized)

Nature, then, for Sade-- the base of his whole system, becomes the justification for the individual's action-- for his *personal continuity*, his unrestricted fulfillment of desire, passion etc. *Natural principles* therefore *dictate* morals and manners: on this basis his proposed revolutionary government would institute laws, but laws in accordance with the ways people-- that is, libertines-- would in fact behave, laws based on how libertines do act, not on how people in general should act. Thus, society becomes a society of libertines and the individual is free to be himself or herself. In other words, *everything drops out* except the libertine himself and an inverted nature. But, because nature is itself either *formless* or has an *infinity of forms*-- nature, thus, as unprincipled polymorphous perversity-- it too, drops out of the equation. Ultimately, nature is itself overcome by the imagination, by exhaustion, excess, apathy and art. Thence goes its own agency: likewise, passes any imposition of bind or constraint, for example, of law-- of legitimization or justification.

In the end, the libertine acts out of himself, out of his own delight in the senses: the imagination opens an ever-widening palate for his tastes, for the progressively intense exercise of his drives, eschewing the natural for the infinity of the fictive, rendering it-- in turn-- fact, deed. In one sentence of the *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, Sade effectively sums up his entire system: 'Every principle is a judgement, every judgement is the outcome of experience, and experience is only acquired by the exercise of the senses.'



What kind of unity or continuity, then, does the libertine achieve in the end? Again, the continuity of uninterrupted sexuality, of a totalizing libidinal cathexis-- once all those taboos are removed, ignored, avoided or destroyed. The libertine's art is to increase sexual appetite and desire in a vertiginous spiral, becoming intensely physical, exteriorized and universally imposed-- a kind of physical ex-pression of the formerly private drives. And-- formless, beyond all reason-- eroticism would never again be the same. This would be a divine madness, total transcendence in immanence, akin to the prophetic, blasphemous and poetic elements of the Platonic account in the *Phaedrus*, or to the Dionysian 'witches brew', as Nietzsche recounted it in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The libertine's catheted enjoyment would increase 'a thousandfold' in the 'immense melting pot' of 'transspiciating' nature, as the Comte de Bressac would proclaim. Thereby, the libertine overcomes his isolation: through desire's union. Or, through the delirium of madness or excess-- whether in intense physicality or, in continually writing himself deeper into his own plot of madness. And, in just such a plot, everything that stands between the libertine and nature, that is, between two notions of the inside, everything must collapse: laws, morality, sentiments, family, society, reason and religion. All these now stand as nothing to his logic of transgression. They all have equal value, which is to say, quite arbitrary value-- for the now 'divine Marquis'-- precisely because they have no value of themselves in their otherness. As the nefarious Mme. Dubois would conclude,

One must never appraise values save in terms of our own interests. The cessation of the victim's existences is as nothing as compared to the continuation of ours, not a mite does it matter to us whether any individual is alive or in the grave. (...) For there is no rational commensuration between what affects us and what affects others; the first we sense physically, the other only touches us morally, and moral feelings are made to deceive; none but physical sensations are authentic (...) thus, not only do two hundred *louis* suffice for three murders, but even thirty *centimes* would have sufficed, for those thirty *centimes* would have procured a satisfaction which, although light, must necessarily affect us to a much more lively degree than would three men murdered, who are nothing to us. (...) A little more philosophy in the world would soon restore all to order.<sup>19</sup>

## NOTES

1. The principle text in question is Bataille's *Eroticism*, English translation, M. Dalwood (London: Calder, 1962), but especially central would be his *Inner Experience*, English translation, L. A. Boldt (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), and his *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, English translation, A. Stoekl, C. Lovitt and D. Leslie (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). Derrida's essay 'From a Restricted to a General Economy: a Hegelianism Without Reserve' is to be found in his *Writing and Difference*, English translation, A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), Chapter IX, pp. 251-257 and Foucault's text, 'A Preface to Transgression', is to be found in his *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, English translation, D. Bouchard, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), Pt. I, Ch. 1, pp. 29-52. The discussion would also have to include, among many of his works, the important 'Sade' essay, by Maurice Blanchot, which appears in *The Marquis de Sade: Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, Eugénie de Franval, and Other Writings*, English translation, R. Seaver and A. Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 37-72, as well as Pierre Klossowski's *Sade My Neighbour*, English translation, A. Lingis, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), and his 'Nature as a Destructive Principle', in *The Marquis de Sade: The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, English translation, A. Wainhouse and R. Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1966), pp. 65-86.
2. Recall, that for Bataille, the experienced sense of transgression came largely from within, that is, from the intensified desire provoked and induced by the fearful taboo or prohibition. Nonetheless, the taboo or prohibition was itself initially imposed from without.
3. More strongly, the very terms which constitute universality itself-- totality, the transcendental, the absolute, law, reason and identity-- as an *intelligible* system or as a system of control, these are the terms which Sade is concerned to evade, to deconstruct, to dissimulate.
4. *Summa Theologica I*, Question 91, article 1; Question 90, article 1.

5. Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, op. cit., p. 354
6. Sade, *Justine*, op. cit., p. 154
7. Sade, *Justine*, p. 494
8. Here we see one of Sade's recurrent tactics: to contravene the universal law or premise by invoking the particular fact. The empirical alone is real. The example of blasphemy should bring to mind the occasion for Sade's initial imprisonment: the invagination of a crucifix and confessional waters he performed upon a young provincial girl. The degree of ridicule he draws upon rule governance, however, is perhaps nowhere more evident than the comminatory set of rules devised by the 'society of the friends of crime' in the *One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom*, whereby human actions is 'governed' or 'legislated': merely by the number of agents (storytellers, prostitutes, villains, homosexuals, hags, children) multiplied by their collective number of members and orifices: this factor by the production and multiple exchange of their respective secretions and emissions. The society's laws are but the temporary coincidence of the libertine's caprice, as is membership itself.
9. The model of divinity operative in Sade (for example, when the narrator identifies himself with it) is also *ironic*, and largely patterned on Descartes' 'God of the *Meditations*--for whom the divine truths were dependent on the divine will. What results from such a position and for God, so conceived, is deftly stated by Pierre Bayle, and quoted in Leibniz, in his *Theodicy*, paragraph 180: 'The consequence of this doctrine will be, that before God resolved upon creating the world he saw *nothing better in virtue than in vice*, and that his ideas did not show him that virtue was more worthy of his love than vice. *That leaves no distinction between natural right and positive right*; there will no longer be anything unalterable or inevitable in morals. (...) (Also) it opens the door to the most exaggerated Pyrrhonism: for it leads to the assertion that this proposition, three and three make six, is only true where and during the time when it pleases God; that it is perhaps false in some parts of the universe; and that perhaps it will be so among men in the coming year'. Leibniz continues his remarks in paragraph 186: 'Through this artifice, the eternal verities, which until the time of Descartes had been named an object of the divine understanding, suddenly became an object of God's will. Now the acts of His will are free, therefore God is the free cause of the verities. That is the outcome of the matter. (...) But if the affirmation of necessary truths were actions of the will of the most perfect mind, these actions would be anything but free, for there is nothing to choose. (...) (And) that was preserving only the name of freedom'. In a letter to Malebranche, June 1679, Leibniz states the reason for Descartes' 'ironical characterization of God: 'I am told that Descartes established so well the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, I fear that we are deceived by such beautiful worlds. For the God or perfect being of Descartes is not a God such as one imagines, and as one would wish, that is to say, just and wise, doing all things for the good of the creatures so far as is possible, but rather he is something approaching the God of Spinoza, that is to say, the principle of things, and a certain sovereign power called primitive Nature, which puts all in action, and does all that can be done: which has no will nor understanding, since according to Descartes he does not have the good for the object of his will, nor the true for the object of his understanding. For he did not wish that his God act according to some end, and it is for that reason that he excluded from philosophy the quest for final causes, under this clever pretext that we are not capable of knowing the purpose of God' (my emphases).
10. Nietzsche would later articulate this state of personal dispossession in his doctrine of the 'Dionysian' attitude in his *Birth of Tragedy*, and in his early essay, "The Dionysian Worldview". For an extended discussion of Dionysian 'dispossession', cf. D. Allison, "Nietzsche Knows No Noumenon", in *Why Nietzsche Now*, Ed. D. O'Hara (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp.295-310
11. *Justine*, p. 520.
12. *Juliette*, English translation, A. Wainhouse, (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 525.
13. *Justine*, p. 611.
14. *Ibid.*, pp.687-88.
15. On July 27th, 1794, Sade was scheduled to be executed. The Jacobin bureaucrats, however, had misplaced his prison admission papers, so he could not be located by the bailiff and be brought to the guillotine by the execution detail. Twenty-one of his fellow prisoners were not so fortunate.

16. G. Bataille, *Eroticism*, op. cit. Cf. esp. his Introduction, and Part One, 'Taboo and Transgression'.
17. This reduction of the traditionally conceived 'natural' world to the domain of the formless, a domain without order, parallels the entire Cartesian project, whereby the Aristotelian account of nature-- as informed-- is reduced to that which, of itself, has no form, and is thereby precisely 'elemental': the reduction of all things to the celebrated 'wax' example in the *Meditations*. Since wax is an 'element' and ordinarily thought of as a 'thing', it has no proper 'form' at all, save the abstract property of extension. The Cartesian project, like Sade's, is to begin from the imagination, and to impose an entirely unnatural determination upon nature: for Descartes, this 'art' is precisely mathematics, his *mathesis universalis*. For Sade, it is the reduction to the elementally formless, out of which desire will multiply its incarnations to infinity, in the ecstatic play of transgressive energy.
18. In *Justine*, op. cit., p. 187.
19. *Justine*, pp. 491, 695.

## Reading the Lack of the Body: The Writing of the Marquis de Sade

Kathy Acker

I am using this essay to do two things. To read a short passage from *Philosophy in the Bedroom* by the Marquis de Sade. To read one of his tales.

The more that I write my own novels, the more it seems to me that to write is to read.



**I. TO WRITE IN ORDER TO LEAD THE READER INTO A LABYRINTH FROM WHICH THE READER CANNOT EMERGE WITHOUT DESTROYING THE WORLD.**

On January 12th 1794, the Marquis de Sade was taken from the Madelonnettes prison to his home so that he could be present at the examination of his papers. The next day, he was transferred to the Carmelite convent on the rue de Vaugirard. Here, he spent a week with six other prisoners, all of whom had fever which was malignant, two of whom died during that week. De Sade was then marched to Saint Lazare, a hospital which had once been a lepers' home and was now a prison.

On July 28 of the same year, Maximilien Robespierre was executed.

In October of the same year, de Sade was again liberated from his jail.

In 1795, a work in two slender volumes entitled *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (*La Philosophie Dans le Boudoir*),<sup>1</sup> a 'Posthumous work of the Author of *Justine*'<sup>2</sup> appeared in London.

The publication of these volumes boosted the sale of the novel.

**The Purpose of Fiction**

*Philosophy in the Bedroom* consists of seven dialogues. Two of the four speakers are typical Sadean monsters, a Madame de Saint-Ange who in twelve years of marriage has slept with 12,000 men<sup>3</sup> and Dolmancé, 'the most corrupt and dangerous of men'. The third, the Chevalier de Mirvel, not quite as libertine as his sister, Madame de Saint-Ange, but then he is a man who has heterosexual leanings, nonetheless willingly assists the others in their seduction of the fourth speaker, a fifteen-year-old virgin, Eugénie de Mistival. *Seduction*, as in *corruption*. In the Sadean universe, these two acts are equivalent.

By the end of the seventh dialogue, Eugénie had been seduced. In fact it took no time at all, ten or twelve pages, for

the scoundrelly adults to rob the poor child of her virginity, Sade-style, in the ass. But true virginity, for the Marquis, is not physical. It takes the monsters of corruption more than 150 more pages to teach Eugénie that she can do whatever she pleases: fuck and get fucked in every possible way, blaspheme God, ...disobey, fuck and sew up her mother's cunt to ensure that her mother will no longer interfere in Eugénie's affairs.

The surface purpose, then, of the long and often tedious arguments that occupy most of *Philosophy* is the corruption of Eugénie. De Sade's deeper purpose in penning these dialogues could not have been the seduction of a fictional fifteen-year-old. Of a virgin who despises virginity and, even more, her mother - always a sign in the Sadean universe of a propensity for freedom.

Most probably Eugénie was a fictional representation of de Sade's sister-in-law, Lady Anne Prospère de Launay. Though married to the older sister, de Sade had fallen violently in love with Anne; she returned his passion. De Sade's mother-in-law, Lady Montreuil, angered at least by the sexual delights of these two, did all that she could and succeeded in procuring de Sade's legal confinement.

If the authorial purpose in the writing of *Philosophy* was revenge, if de Sade's purpose was to sew together, fictionally, his mother-in-law's lips, all of her lips, it was poor revenge at best. In 1781, Mademoiselle de Launay died unmarried. De Sade had not seen her since his imprisonment in Vincennes. The Marquis did experience a strange revenge against his mother-in-law. In August 1793, out of jail, he wrote, 'I am broken, done in, spitting blood. I told you I was président of my section: my tenure has been so stormy that I am exhausted. (...) During my presidency I had the Montreuil's put on the liste épuratoire (for pardon). If I said a word they were lost. I kept my peace. I have had my revenge'.<sup>4</sup>

For a man as furious as de Sade, writing must be more than fictional revenge. Writing must break through the representational or fictional mirror and be equal in force to the horror experienced in daily life. Certainly the dialogues of *Philosophy* are seductions. But seductions of whom? Why did de Sade, born into the upper classes and then pent up in prisons not directly of his own making, want to use writing only to seduce?

## Women in the World of Men

Towards the end of the third dialogue in *Philosophy In the Bedroom*, Eugénie, no longer a virgin in a number of ways, admits to her female teacher that the most 'certain impulse' in her heart, note that she does not say 'deepest', is to kill her mother. Eugénie is admitting to nothing: almost as soon as she met Dolmancé and Madame de Saint-Ange, she stated, still virginal, that she loathed her mother. Dolmancé and Saint-Ange had no liking for theirs. Now, the girl and the woman talk about the position of women in society.

Dolmancé interrupts with the man's point-of-view. He informs his pupil that a woman in this society has but two choices: to whore or to wife.

Due to her class background, Eugénie is not destined for prostitution, Dolmancé continues, so she must consider her future position as a wife. If she is to survive, a wife must serve her husband. Husbands know three sexual positions: 'sodomy, sacrilegious fancies, and penchants to cruelty'. The wife's positions with regard to her husband's desires are gentleness, compliancy, and agreeableness.

Dolmancé's opinion is that, in this society, women must serve men in order to survive. No wonder that the women who want more than this, who want their freedom, hate their mothers. In de Sade's texts, mothers are prudes, haters of their own bodies, and religious fanatics, for they are obedient to the tenets of a patriarchal society. The daughter who does not reject her mother interiorizes prison.

The daughter who rejects her mother, such as Madame de Saint-Ange, such as Eugénie, finds herself in an unbearable position. In the patriarchal society, for women freedom is untenable. As regards Eugénie's freedom to kill her mother, Dolmancé argues, she is free to do this, she is free to do any act, as long as she employs guile and deceit.

A woman who lives in a patriarchal society can have power, control, and pleasure only when she is hypocritical and deceitful. With this statement of Dolmancé's, de Sade has erected, or laid down, once more, the foundations of the labyrinth of logic.

Now, the maze begins to be built. Dolmancé continues: Women are free to choose to act like men. Women can 'transform (...) themselves into men by choosing to engage in sodomy'. In sodomy, the most delicious position is the passive one. In other words, a woman can know freedom by choosing to counterfeit a man who selects the bottom power position. Here is one example of deceit.

'(...) 'Tis a good idea', Dolmancé continues to instruct his student in her search for power and pleasure, 'to have the breach open always (...)'. For her to remain an open hole.

Dolmancé may be seducing the seduced; that is not the purpose of this argument. Clearly de Sade is not. In this and other dialogues, de Sade is blindfolding his reader. The reader believes that she or he knows how to think, how to think logically, how to know; the reader believes that she or he can know. The cogito. De Sade is leading this naive reader into the loss of belief in the capability of such knowledge, into the loss of sense. And leaving the reader in her or his last-ness.

It is here in this text that de Sade abandons the male gaze.

## Abortion and Logic

A woman talks to a woman about the position of women in a male-determined society: Madame de Saint-Ange and Eugénie continue the discussion of women, freedom, and sodomy. A woman invariably gives up any hope of freedom, mentions the older woman, as soon as she has a child. A woman who wants to be free, above all, must avoid pregnancy.

The discussion about female identity in society narrows down to the problem of abortion. Women's freedom, Saint-Ange says, depends upon her ability to stop pregnancy.

De Sade argues in order to seduce.

These days, a typical pro-choice liberal will say that women must have the right and, therefore, the opportunity to control their own bodies and make their own moral choices. Eugénie sidesteps all liberalism; she asks whether it is morally permissible to abort a child who is just about to be born.

Madame de Saint-Ange picks up this ball and runs home. Home, for de Sade, is located in hell. She replies that abortion is equivalent to murder and that every woman has the right to murder her own child. 'Were it in the world, we should have the right to destroy it'.

Dolmancé bursts into the female gaze, but does not bust it up, by bringing up the subject of God: That 'right is natural (...) it is incontestable'. Only a belief in God, rather than in Nature, could lead a human to value an embryo more than herself.

Note Dolmancé's mention of or call to Nature. In the patriarchal society, there are no women; there are only victims and male substitutes. And men. Nature is female because, as is the case with women, she does not exist. She does not have existence apart from that gaze which is always male or male-defined. Luce Irigaray on the subject of the possible nature of Nature within the patriarchal structure: 'Of course what matters is not the existence of an object - as such it is indifferent - but the simple effect of a representation upon the subject, its reflection, that is, in the imagination of a man'.<sup>5</sup>

De Sade is not presenting nor has he any interest in presenting a pro-choice argument. He has as little interest in abortion as he has in Nature, in the nature of Nature. In the nature of women. De Sade is talking about abortion in order to seduce us, his readers, into the labyrinth where nothing matters because, there, nothing can matter. Nothing can mean anything, for all is confusion. De Sade is a patriarch who hates patriarchy and has nowhere else to go. And, jail-rat that he is, raging in his cage or maze, he uses text to overthrow our virginites, virginites not born from the body but from the logos; he seduces us through writing into overthrowing our very Cartesian selves. Neither male nor female seem to be left...

## II. READING A TALE BY DE SADE: WRITING OR READING WHOSE ONLY PURPOSE IS TO DESTROY ITSELF.

'(...) The traces of my tomb will disappear from the surface of the earth as I hope my memory will vanish from the memory of men'.<sup>6</sup>  
- The Marquis de Sade

### The Body

In 1778, de Sade projected a collection of stories entitled *Contes et Fabliaux de Dix-huitième Siècle Par un Troubadour Provençal*. The book would consist of thirty stories; tragedy would alternate with comedy.

The collection never appeared. In 1800, eleven of the tragic and dramatic tales were published in four small volumes under the title of *Les Crimes de l'Amour*.

### The Garden of Logos

One of these crimes, named *Florville and Courval*, or *the Works of Fate*, begins as a fairy tale: good exists; evil exists; good is the opposite of evil. A certain Monsieur de Courval is a good man because he is sexually strict or pure. His former wife was a bad woman because she liked to have sex and was libertine.

Within the fairy tale genre lie the assumptions that its readers, if not the characters within the fiction, are capable of making moral distinctions and that morality is dualistic.

This fairy tale world borders on being mechanical: M. de Courval is good; therefore he is seeking out the good; therefore he is searching for a good wife. (A new wife.) Through the help of a friend, he finds a wife-candidate who seems to qualify as good. Now the marriage or the end of the fairy tale should take place, but it doesn't.

The site of the fairy tale turns into that of the law court. The language of the fairy tale turns into that of the law court.



Behind every fairy tale lies the law. Since the wife-candidate is an orphan, her class is unknown. Therefore, her moral status and, so, her identity is unclear.

M. de Courval must decide whether or not the woman is good enough to marry. Since he is rich, male, and nineteen years older than her, he possesses all the attributes of a judge; he ought to be able to judge her moral worth. If she is judged good, the law court will turn into the place of marriage. If not, the characters and the reader will find themselves in the site of tragedy.

### The Woman's Tale/Her Version of the Garden of Logos

The wife-candidate, a certain Mademoiselle Florville, announces that she will tell a tale, her tale, so that the older, rich man will be able to judge her properly. She adds that she is presenting Courval with this autobiography to convince him not to marry her. In this morally-defined society, her desire is irrational; here is a hole, the first in the mechanistic movement of the ex-fairy tale, of the morality-determined cause-and-effect. In de Sade's texts, every lapse of logic or hole announces the site of a labyrinth. Every labyrinth is a machine whose purpose is to unveil chaos.

Remember: in de Sade's texts, stories exist for the purpose of seduction.

De Sade constructs his labyrinths out of mirrors. Mademoiselle de Florville's story, in its beginnings, mirrors the narrative in which it is located. Just as there were two poles, good and evil, or the husband and his ex-wife, in the outside story, here the reader, through Mademoiselle de Florville, meets Madame de Lérince whose soul is beautiful (and, presumably, whose body does not exist) and Madame de Verquin in whom 'frivolity, the taste of pleasure, and independence' reign supreme. Both these women are kin to M. de Saint-Prât, Florville's substitute father. In the larger tale, since Florville was an orphan, she was situated between the poles of good and evil; in this story within a story, the two older women fight for control over the site of Florville's body.

This story within a story begins with Florville, the untouched body. So that no one will suspect him in all his goodness of harbouring secret incestuous intentions, her guardian, M. de Saint-Prât, sends her off to his sister, Madame de Verquin.

His act, whose intention seems good, leads to evil. In its beginnings, the female's garden of logos is morally muddy. Madame de Verquin introduces Florville to her 'handwork', a youth named Senneval. Senneval proceeds to seduce the young girl, impregnate her, refuse to marry her, abandon her. Eugénie, now quite muddled, bears a son whom Senneval removes from her.

Has Eugénie become evil? Not yet, judges her substitute-father, as M. de Courval will judge, when Eugénie returns to him. He tries to show her that she can still return to the good or proper path of the garden: 'Happiness', declares M. de Saint-Prât, 'is to be found solely in the exercise of virtue (...). All the apostles of crime are but miserable, desperate creatures'. He adds that society is vitally interested in seeing good multiply and flourish.

Georges Bataille in his *Literature and Evil*, whose sixth essay is devoted to the work of de Sade, replies that society's only good is its own survival, that 'society is governed by its will to survive'.<sup>7</sup>

The fight between good and evil for the body of Florville is in full sway. In order to ensure that she becomes good, M. de Saint-Prât now sends her off to Madame de Lérince. At the same time, 'a secret feeling' which is drawing her 'involuntably toward the site of so many past pleasures' keeps the young mother in touch with Madame de Verquin.

Once penetrated, the body or garden cannot forget the pleasure that stemmed from its penetration.

That garden whose paths are still clearly labeled good and evil though they touch and cross each other will now become a maze. Knowledge with regard to the ability to make moral distinctions, thus the capability for judgement, disappears. A catastrophe, 'a tale so cruel and bitter it breaks my heart' takes place. Madame de Lérince, this good woman, introduces

Florville who is now 34 years old, no longer innocent, to a boy half her age. The Chevalier de Saint-Ange. A dangerous situation for a woman. His origins, like Florville's, are unknown; unknown, the state of his morality.

The second narrative mirror: When Saint-Ange is in the act of raping Florville, she believes that her sexual past with Senneval is repeating itself. In order to shatter the mirror whose name is abandonment and pain, she kills this lover/rapist with a pair of scissors. As soon as Florville recognises that she has murdered the boy, she cries, 'Oh you! Whose only crime was to love me overmuch (...)'

This second narrative mirror does not reiterate and aid sight or understanding: it only blurs and confuses. Florville's moral status is now not confused, but unfathomable. Was she right or wrong to kill? Was Saint-Ange driven by passion or by unjustifiable aggression and violence? Why did she murder Saint-Ange? Was she motivated by her memory of the past, by her fear of again yielding to sexual desire? Did she murder because she too blindly obeyed the moral dictates of her society, because she too deeply feared that she might not be good? In this case of rape and of murder, who is good and who is evil? In this case, what is the good and of what does evil consist?

What is certain is that with the end of the first half of Florville's autobiography, de Sade fully abandons the languages of the fairy tale and of the cold, precise narrative of the law court. The formal verbal garden of morality whose arrangement is that of the logos has decayed; all that is left is the wilderness, almost the chaos and violence, of passion. Florville began to speak this language, this language whose narrative irrationality guides, when she admitted that something in her, something 'secret', unfathomable or unspeakable, was attracting her to Madame de Verquin, to the home of Madame de Verquin. As soon as she has scissored Saint-Ange, she speaks nothing but this language: '(...) My feelings for you were perhaps far superior to those of the tender love which burned in your heart', Florville confesses to the corpse of her rapist who or which is also the corpse of her moral worth.

The first half of the woman's story ends in this: in confusion crossing over into chaos. In the overthrow of moral distinctions.

Such was Florville's purpose when she began to talk, to tell her tale, to her judge.

### Interlude

Yet Courval has not been overthrown. Not yet overthrown to himself. He does not yet sit in horror: he still believes that he can judge another person. A woman. He informs Florville, with a return to the language of the law court, that because the murder was not premeditated, she is innocent of that murder, therefore he wants to marry her.

### The Destruction, Through the Female Gaze, of the Male World

Florville may have caused the garden of logos to wither away, but since she has not destroyed Courval, her judge or husband-to-be, she continues her tale.

Remember: in de Sade's texts, stories exist for the purpose of seduction.

M. de Courval has just informed Florville that her rape by and murder of Saint-Ange does not matter; now, within this story-within-a-story, M. de Saint-Prôt and Madame de Léince who are also good tell Florville the same thing. They hide her murder from the world.

This third narrative mirror in which the good aid and abet a murderer announces the reality of dream.

The language of passion; now, narrative controlled by dream. Who needs Freud when de Sade's around? The world of logos is in the process of dying; now there is dream; soon death will reign through the garden of identical terror.

Then, there shall be no more judgement, no more the law courts of the world.

Florville dreams a dream in which Senneval shows her two corpses. One is the corpse of the past, male. It or he is Saint-Ange. The second is the corpse of the future, female. She is strange, as yet unnamed.



Kathy Acker

After the dream is over, the world of death begins. Death upon death will litter the remainder of Florville's autobiography, of her seduction of her listener, of her destruction of his male gaze.

The death of Madame de Verquin. Good and evil have reversed themselves. In this world. The evil woman dies beautifully. Since she lived through and for the body, since she accepted materiality and its laws, the swing and sway of change and of chance, Madame de Verquin accepts her imminent death and dies with 'courage and reason'. For she does not attempt to cling to possessing, to use possessions to rigidity identity: she wills all of her possessions to be flung, after her death, to whomever according to the dictates of the lottery.

Second, the death of a strange and older woman. Florville is responsible for sealing this 'woman's doom'. Seemingly by chance, for Florville does not recognise the stranger, for Florville understands none of what she sees nor what is happening. This is the realm, beyond good and evil, of chance.

Before she is executed thanks to the words but not the will of the narrator, the stranger tells Florville that she had dreamed a dream about Florville before she ever met Florville. Dreams are true in the realm beyond good and evil. The stranger dreamed that Florville was with her son and a scaffold. Now, we, the readers, understand none of what we are reading.

The third female death is of Madame de Lérence. Back in the world where evil is good, and good, evil, this most saintly of women dies miserably, stuffed like a potato with remorse and regret. 'Madame de Lérence's fears are virtue's anxiety and concern'. The universe of judgement and of the law is not only the one in which good is evil, evil, good, but is the place where virtue creates fear. Fear, the illusion that gives birth to all other illusions. Fear of the past returning and the fear of not being virtuous once drove Florville to murder Saint-Ange with a sewing tool.

Florville's autobiography ends here, in death.

Interlude

Yet Courval is still alive and still believes that he can judge Florville and thus marry her.

**Destruction, By the Male Gaze, of the World of Men: Oedipus Inverted**

As in *Oedipus Rex*, a stranger now enters and tells his tale:

He identifies himself as one of the two children born to Courval and his first wife, the son who was as debauched as his mother. Estranged from his father, he is now strange to his father.

He next identifies himself as the Senneval who seduced Florville, then spirited away the male fruit of that seduction.

That male fruit, when he grew up, raped and was murdered by his own mother, Florville. Senneval further explains that the older woman whom Florville had not recognised and whom Florville's testimony had condemned to execution was Courval's first wife. Senneval's younger sister did not die as Courval had believed; her name is Florville.

The stranger has not told his tale to seduce Florville, but rather to instruct her who she is. For the first time in her life, she is no longer an orphan. For the first time in her life, she knows that she did not will yet caused her mother's death, slept with her brother, murdered her brother's and her son, and might marry her father. For the first time in her life, Florville has been given an identity card into the world of human and the name on that identity card is unbearable.

The fourth narrative mirror: As the stranger was once strange to his listeners, Florville was strange to herself. No longer strange to herself, her knowledge, which is always self-knowledge, is not bearable. In the same way, de Sade was once strange to us, his readers. De Sade, the monster. Strangers and monsters: outsiders. As the stranger told Florville his tale and strangeness was disappeared into the chaos of self-knowledge, so de Sade was telling his tale and now is no longer strange. For I am de Sade; I am that monster.

Whose name is human.



**The Body, Disappeared**

Oedipus was able to deal with his knowledge of the self whose logos is chaos by casting out his own eyes. *Casting* as in *castrating*. Florville cannot castrate herself: at the end of 'Courval and Florville' when there are no tales left to tell, Florville must commit suicide and does. This is de Sade's tale: the non-tale, the tale that does not exist. De Sade, also masochistic, bound up, pent and spent in prison, had no tale left and nowhere to go.

For Florville and for de Sade, there is only the world in which this tale began, the world dominated by men, the world of male language, prison.

REGARD the Oedipal myth: The Law of the State forbids, above all, the murder of its King. At the same time, since no human can be immortal, the real survival of the state depends upon that very death and the replacement of the King. The Law protects, by repressing, and all repression is also the repression of knowing, the division between the symbol, the immortal Head, and the symbolised, the human who, though king, is himself subject to the laws of materiality, especially of sexuality and of death.

As soon as Oedipus answers the Sphinx's question correctly, he has access to the symbolised or the verboten: to the body and sexuality of his mother. The Law is not patriarchal because it denies the existence, even the power, of women: after all, every King has His Queen. The Law is patriarchal because it denies the bodies, the sexualities of women. In patriarchy, there is no menstrual blood.

De Sade has nowhere to go because, for him, there are no actual women. In his texts, women are either victims or substitute-men. Hating the society based on centralised power (the immortal King), de Sade most often chose to see through the female gaze, but this female gaze is still the gaze, that act of consciousness that must dominate, therefore define, all it sees. The gaze - which, though seemingly female, is always male - is that sight whose visual correspondent is the mirror. In the mirror, one only sees oneself. Since there are no women, women with bodies, for de Sade, he cannot escape the

labyrinth of mirrors and become all that the law has repressed.

When the mirrors break, *to see is to become*.

De Sade did not cast out his eyes (castrate himself). Rather, he shattered mirror after mirror, behind every mirror stood another mirror; behind all mirrors, nothingness sits. De Sade wrote in order to seduce us, by means of his labyrinths of mirrors, into nothingness.

De Sade wanted to show or to teach us who we are; he wanted for us to learn to want to not exist. This is nothingness. He wanted his fictional structures to be mirrors of the world or that horror from which, for him, there was no escape: '(...) The traces of my tomb will disappear from the surface of the earth as I hope my memory will vanish from the memory of men'.<sup>8</sup>

De Sade, born a patriarch, understood patriarchy and raged against the walls of that labyrinth.

## NOTES

1. Since I am reading from the English translation, I shall refer to texts by their standard English titles.
2. Gilbert Lély, *The Marquis de Sade, A Biography*, trans. by Alec Brown (New York: Grove Press, 1962), p.391.
3. Note de Sade's realistic tendencies.
4. Letter from de Sade to Gaufriid, quoted in Geoffrey Gorer, *The Life and Ideas of the Marquis de Sade* (London: Panther Books, 1964), p.52.
5. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.207.
6. De Sade quoted by Apollinaire quoted by Georges Bataille in his *Literature and Evil*, trans. by Alastair Hamilton (New York: Urizen Books, 1973), p.89.
7. Bataille, p.6.
8. Bataille, p.89.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Kathy Acker** is the author of *Blood and Guts in High School, Empire of the Senseless, Great Expectations and My Death, My Life*, by Pier Paolo Passolini. She is currently working on a new novel and teaches at the San Francisco Art Institute.

**David Allison** is a Professor of Philosophy at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. He is the editor of *The New Nietzsche* (Delta, 1977) and is currently co-editing a volume (with Mark Roberts and Allen Weiss) entitled *Sade Beyond Measure: Categories of Reading*, which will be published in the spring of 1994.

**Justin Barton** has been a member of *PLI's* editorial board since 1991 and is a graduate student in the Philosophy department at the University of Warwick. He is currently working on his PhD thesis about the role of the future in Nietzschean and Deleuzian genealogies.

**Margaret Crosland** is the editor of *The Passionate Philosopher: A Marquis de Sade Reader* (Minerva, 1993), *The Mystified Magistrate* (Peter Owen, 1986) and *The Gothic Tales of the Marquis de Sade* (1990). She has written biographies on Colette, Cocteau, Edith Piaf and Simone de Beauvoir.

**Catherine Cusset** is an Assistant Professor of French at Yale University. She has published a novel entitled *La Blouse Romaine* (Gallimard, 1990) and several articles on Sade, earlier libertine novelists, and Rococo painters, in *L'Infini, French Forum*, and *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*.

**Lucienne Frappier-Mazur** is a Professor of French Literature at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of a book on Balzac's *Comédie humaine*, of *Sade et l'écriture de l'orgie, Pouvoir et parodie dans 'L'Histoire de Juliette'* (1991) and of many articles on Balzac, Stendhal, Nodier, Sand and the eighteenth century erotic novel.

**Amy Hanson** has been a member of *PLI*'s editorial board since 1992. She received her Master of Arts in English from the University of Warwick specializing in Faulkner, Modernism, Post-Colonial Literature, and Critical Theory. She is currently writing her first screenplay.

**Annie Le Brun** is one of her generation's foremost authorities on Sade. After a study on the late eighteenth century European black novel entitled *Les Châteaux de la Subversion* (1982), she produced two works on the Marquis de Sade: *Soudain un bloc d'abîme, Sade* (1986) and *Sade, aller et détours* (1989). She is also the co-editor of Sade's *Oeuvres Complètes*.

**Deepak Narang Sawhney** has been a member of *PLI*'s editorial board since 1992. He received his Master of Arts in Continental Philosophy from the University of Warwick specializing in Nietzsche and Bataille. He is currently completing his PhD thesis on fascism and technology in Deleuze.

**Stephen Prohl** is a writer, performing artist, video maker and Professor of Sociology at Boston College, where he teaches courses in social theory, social psychoanalysis, cultural studies and the sociology of deviance and social control. Stephen's recent writings include *Death at the Parasite Cafe: Social Science (Fictions) and the Postmodern* (St. Martin's Press/MacMillan, 1992); *Images of Deviance and Social Control: a Sociological History*, 2nd Ed. (McGraw-Hill, 1993) and the forthcoming *Venus in Video: Male Mas(s)ochism and Ultramodern Power*. Stephen was also the 1991-92 President of the Society for the Study of Social Problems.

**Philippe Sollers** is an author and intellectual who has been writing for forty years. His works include *Sur le matérialisme* (1974), *Femmes* (1983), and *Le Secret* (1993). In 1992, he received the Grand Prix de Littérature from the Académie Française for his life's work.

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Department of Philosophy  
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