A Monster for Our Times: Reading Sade across the Centuries

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2011
ABSTRACT

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This doctoral dissertation looks at several readings and interpretations of the works of the Marquis de Sade, from the eighteenth century to the present. Ever since he was imprisoned under the Old Regime following highly publicized instances of physical and sexual abuse, Sade has remained a controversial figure who has been both condemned as a dangerous criminal and celebrated as an icon for artistic freedom. The most enduring aspect of his legacy has been a vast collection of obscene publications, characterized by detailed descriptions of sexual torture and murder, along with philosophical diatribes that offer theoretical justifications for the atrocities. Not surprisingly, Sade’s works have been subject to censorship almost from the beginning, leading to the author’s imprisonment under Napoleon and to the eventual trials of his mid-twentieth-century publishers in France and Japan. The following pages examine the reception of Sade’s works in relation to the legal concept of obscenity, which provides a consistent framework for textual interpretation from the 1790s to the present.

I begin with a prelude discussing the 1956 trial of Jean-Jacques Pauvert, in order to situate the remainder of the dissertation within the context of how readers approached a body of work as quintessentially obscene as that of Sade. At Pauvert’s trial there emerged an opposition between readings that concentrate on the prurient nature of the texts and those that instead attempt to justify their place in society by stressing their intellectual merit. This opposition remains in effect throughout the remaining chapters,
each of which focuses on a particular historical moment in the reception of Sade’s works and on a certain reader or group of readers. Chapter One establishes Sade himself as the first reader of his texts, and discusses how he situated them with respect to the genre of obscene books that had developed in France throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Chapter Two focuses primarily on Rétif de la Bretonne as the first reader of Sade, one who publicly condemned the author and his works on moral grounds while simultaneously composing his own erotic novel in the Sadean vein. Chapter Three deals with the onset of a tendency among nineteenth-century French authors to admire him as the “Divine Marquis,” with a particular focus on Flaubert and his discussion of Sade in his correspondence.

The second half of the dissertation focuses on the reception of Sade’s works during the twentieth century. Each subsequent chapter examines the interaction of mainstream intellectual readings—such as those of the surrealists, post-war essayists like Blanchot and Bataille, or Pasolini in Salò—and the underground readings that occur in the realms of erotic fiction and film, paying special attention to how Sade was used in various political and artistic debates. Finally, my conclusion discusses the place of Sade in contemporary society, including in recent films such as Benoît Jacquot’s Sade and Philip Kaufman’s Quills.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my sponsor, Professor Elisabeth Ladenson, who has provided continuous guidance and support over the years. I am also indebted to my advisor, Professor Joanna Stalnaker, for her encouragement and constructive criticism from the earliest stages of my research to the final defense.

I also want to thank Professor Phil Watts for reading early drafts of several chapters, as well as Professor Jenny Davidson and Professor Edward Mendelson for being part of the dissertation committee.

Finally, I owe much thanks to the staff of the Department of French and Romance Philology and the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University, in particular Benita, Isabelle, Meritza, Catherine, and Sarah.
Introduction

This dissertation considers the reception of the works of the Marquis de Sade, from the initial publication of his texts in the 1790s up to the present. After a preliminary discussion of the censorship trials that took place in France and Japan during the mid-twentieth century, it follows a linear historical approach, wherein each subsequent chapter focuses on a particular set of important readers during a given historical period, beginning with Sade himself and ending with twentieth-century filmmakers of various nationalities. At issue is the question of how certain individuals and groups have gone about reading an oeuvre whose obscenity, for the most part, has been taken as an established fact. Sade, for instance, situated novels such as Justine and Juliette within the genre of “livres obscènes,” and that view prevailed through Jean-Jacques Pauvert’s 1956 trial for openly distributing Sade’s complete works, where both the prosecution and defense agreed that his literature was obscene.

While the judgment of what constitutes obscenity in specific instances may vary over time in accordance with changing views regarding publicly acceptable moral behavior, the basic definition of obscenity has, arguably, remained relatively stable since the emergence of the concept in its modern form during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹ By definition, obscenity involves transgressing the boundary between the public and private realms, wherein material or behavior that might be acceptable in private is considered unfit for public circulation and display. For instance, when Louis-Sébastien Mercier criticizes the leniency granted to the press under the Revolution, he does so because such freedoms have allowed Justine and other abominable publications

¹ Joan DeJean discusses the origins of obscenity during the early modern period in The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France.
to be sold publicly in places such as the Palais de l’Égalité (*Le Nouveau Paris* 340, 430). Over a century and a half later, when Jean-Jacques Pauvert stood trial following his publication of Sade’s complete works in 1956, the specific offense of which he was accused involved the transportation, distribution, and sale of materials deemed “contraires aux bonnes mœurs” (Pauvert, *L’Affaire Sade*, 8-13). Similarly, although the United States Supreme Court has ruled (in its 1969 decision *Stanley v. Georgia*) that adults have the right to possess and view obscene material within their own homes, contemporary American pornographers continue to face trial (and serve time) for distributing their DVDs and internet videos because, according to Title 18, Part I, Chapter 71 (Sections 1461, 1462, and 1465) of the U.S. Criminal Code, it is a federal offense to mail, transport, or otherwise distribute (including via internet) “obscene matters” across state boundaries. In other words, the crime of obscenity today necessarily involves the public distribution of inappropriate sexual material, as has been the case for centuries.

Sade’s tales of rape, torture, and coprophagia elicited cries of moral reprobation from the on set, beginning with the publication of *Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu* in 1791 under the relaxed censorship regulations of the Revolution. Early readers such as Rétif de la Bretonne (who was himself an author of licentious works) and Louis-Sebastien Mercier considered Sade’s novels to be a public danger for their potential to corrupt readers and inspire imitators. This image of Sade as a monster prevailed in France throughout the nineteenth century, as editions of *Justine* and other works were summarily banned, confiscated, and either destroyed or collected in the special reserve

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2 For instance, filmmakers Paul Little (better known by his screen name, “Max Hardcore”) and the husband and wife duo Rob Zicari and Lizzy Borden (of Extreme Associates) were recently imprisoned on federal obscenity charges (in 2008 and 2009, respectively). In July 2010, charges were thrown out against Evil Angel owner John Stagliano after federal prosecutors made several procedural errors (failing, for example, to connect Stagliano to the DVDs in question).
section of the Bibliothèque Nationale known as the “Enfer.” Public discourse on Sade was largely confined to moral condemnations, although several rebellious authors subtly praised him in their own fiction or in private correspondence, celebrating the very monstrosity that others sought to eliminate. The notion that Sade’s oeuvre was unfit for public circulation remained intact through much of the twentieth century, as the XVIIe Chambre correctionnelle de Paris initially ordered the seizure and destruction of Pauvert’s editions, while the Japanese Supreme Court reached a similar decision regarding the Japanese translation of *Juliette* in 1969. More recently, scholars such as Roger Shattuck have argued for the suppression of Sade’s works on moral grounds.3

Gradually, however, a current began to emerge among French intellectuals who opposed the presiding moral view, and argued in favor of the Marquis de Sade’s place in French society. While the origins of this movement can be traced back to the Romantics, it was first publicly articulated in the work of Guillaume Apollinaire, who sought to justify Sade on literary, philosophical, and political grounds in the preface to his 1909 collection *L’Œuvre du marquis de Sade*. During the 1920s, the surrealists would build upon Apollinaire’s work by celebrating Sade as a poetic and political revolutionary who stood as a precursor to their own movement. Following the Second World War, several prominent French intellectuals published essays devoted to the Marquis de Sade, all of which essentially argue that his works contain some greater social importance beyond their sexual explicitness. Paulhan, Bataille, and Breton would make similar claims in their testimonies in support of Pauvert during the 1956 trial, as would Japanese authors

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3 See Shattuck’s chapter “The Divine Marquis” in *Forbidden Knowledge*, 229-299.
Kenzaburo Oe, Shusaku Endo, and Ooka Shohei when testifying on behalf of translator Tatsuhiko Shibusawa and publisher Kyoji Ishii before the Tokyo District court in 1962.

The approach of Sade’s admirers finds an echo in a pair of decisions by the United States Supreme Court regarding the boundary between obscene material and constitutionally protected speech. In his majority opinion in the 1957 decision Roth v. United States, Justice William J. Brennan Jr. defined obscenity as being “utterly without redeeming social importance.” By extension, material that contains even a hint of social importance (or “value,” the term used in the 1966 case A Book Named “John Cleland’s Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure” v. Attorney General of Massachusetts) cannot be condemned as obscene. While the Court would subsequently narrow this definition further in its 1973 decision Miller v. California, where Chief Justice Warren Burger specified that obscenity “does not have serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” (so that the redeeming social value needed to be “serious” and not merely present in order to merit protection), the basic premise remained unchanged, and continues to be in effect today. In their published responses to Sade, French intellectuals from Apollinaire to Beauvoir likewise argued that his oeuvre in fact contained sufficient social importance to merit circulation and discussion in the public arena.

In their efforts to justify the redeeming social value of Sade’s works, however, these twentieth century readers tended to overlook the detailed descriptions of extremely violent sexual practices that had prompted the outrage of moralists in the first place. In fact, I argue that Sade could only undergo the transformation from a banished monster to an author worthy of public discussion through the process of downplaying the erotic aspect of his works in order to concentrate on elements of redeeming social importance,
whether they be philosophical, scientific, or political. In other words, twentieth century readings neglect “the prurient interest” of his texts (to borrow another expression from the U.S. Supreme Court), in order to focus entirely upon socially important matters. For Sadean sexuality to enter the public realm, its prurient nature must be downplayed in order to emphasize its overall social value, which could also be labeled political value since what is being stressed is how his works participate in intellectual communication among members of the polis. This broad definition of the political is the one Geoffrey Stone adopts in a recent article on obscenity, where he argues that the First Amendment was intended to protect “political discourse,” whereas “by definition, obscenity is primarily sexual rather than political expression,” and is thus private, apolitical, and unfit for public distribution (1864). Readers have indeed argued that Sade’s texts advance political discourse in various ways, from Blanchot’s discussion of their philosophical density to Frappier-Mazur’s analysis of their relation to gender politics. Richard Ellis has explained this appeal to politics as a “‘politicization’ of the erotic/pornographic,” wherein the erotic text became socially acceptable not as a result of “changing social values” or some other “liberating” tendencies, but through the attribution of social value to sexually explicit material (38-41). As Linda Williams argues in her study on pornographic film, “Even obscenity and pornography proper—defined legally in the mid-1960s as near-worthless forms of explicit sexual representation—had themselves become, as they have continued to be, increasingly respectable objects of study, as long as they were bracketed as social and political problems rather than cultural forms” (Hard Core 90). This same process has dominated public discussion of Sade since the initial efforts to rehabilitate the author and his works in the early twentieth century.
Much of the history of Sade reception can thus be broken down into a general dichotomy between moral condemnations on one hand, and attempts at justification through an appeal to social importance on the other. For the most part, scholarship devoted to the topic has focused on the efforts of the surrealists to rehabilitate Sade in the early twentieth century. Norwegian scholar Svein Eirik Fauskevag’s *Sade dans le surréalisme* (1982) documents how the surrealists completely ignored the materialist philosophical context in which Sade wrote, so that the word “Sade” takes on a meaning of its own and becomes synonymous with notions such as liberty and revolution. In *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject* (1992), Carolyn Dean similarly discusses the surrealist rehabilitation of Sade, noting how “Through the 1920s, the surrealists, like Sade’s biographers, developed an image of Sade as both victim and visionary and made his name synonymous with a persecuted truth […] the movement thus both poeticized and politicized Sade. He emerged as one of the major figures in the surrealist pantheon, at once a prophet, a pioneer, and a martyr to modernity” (162). Nicholas Harrison makes similar observations in *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and its Metaphors in French History, Literature, and Theory* (1995), where he writes that “By 1924 […] Sade had already emerged as some sort of mascot or role model for the Surrealist group” (139), and that, “[F]or the Surrealists, Sade provided a means of tapping the dynamism of the Revolution in a way which allowed them to show themselves in the reflected light of his (still shocking) revolt […]” (161). As Fauskevag, Dean, and Harrison demonstrate, the surrealists were among the first groups to present a politicized and sanitized version of the Marquis, suitable for public discussion.
With respect to other periods of Sade reception, Mario Praz discusses sadistic elements in French Romanticism in the central chapter of his 1930 book *The Romantic Agony*, “In the Shadow of the Divine Marquis.” The definitive work on post-war readings of Sade remains Gallop’s *Intersections*, while Harrison’s *Circles of Censorship* also draws parallels between the surrealists and *Tel Quel* in their respective approaches to Sade. My dissertation, however, focuses instead on what one might call underground responses to Sade, as opposed to the openly published writings discussed by previous scholars. With public discourse on Sade so thoroughly tied to politics, readers had to turn elsewhere in order to engage with his socially unacceptable brand of eroticism. For many writers, the anonymous erotic novel offered a separate space where it was permissible to indulge in the prurient material that others either overlooked, attacked, or infused with hidden meanings. In his *Anti-Justine*, for instance, Rétif seems to take pleasure in the very same sort of sexual violence he was condemning in public. Similarly, Apollinaire clandestinely published *Les Onze Mille Verges*, a sexually explicit novel that manages to surpass even Sade in its violence and scatological detail, at the same time that he was publicly defending Sade’s importance on intellectual grounds. Examples of this phenomenon arise throughout the twentieth century: Aragon, for example, retreated from both Paris and the surrealists in the summer of 1923 in order to write *Le Con d’Irène* after reading *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, while André Pieyre de Mandiargues explored sexual violence from the perspective of the libertine predator in *L’Anglais décrit dans son château fermé*, shortly after Beauvoir published “Faut-il brûler Sade?” Most of these novels have yet to be considered in relation to Sade, despite the fact that such a reading provides essential insight into both the works themselves and their Sadean source text.
Although erotic fiction represents the most common format to respond to Sade without attention to the “social importance” of his oeuvre, it was by no means the only one, as Flaubert lauded the humorous and masturbatory virtues of Sade in his correspondence, while filmmakers Jess Franco and Tatsumi Kumashiro celebrated Sadean eroticism in their erotic films of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The bulk of my dissertation focuses on various readings of Sade that have been carried out since the initial publication of his works in the 1790s, showing how this tension between erotic and politicized readings plays itself out in specific historical contexts. After discussing Pauvert’s trial, where the issue of reading Sadean obscenity was considered in the quintessentially public forum of the courtroom, I then move back in time to a discussion of Sade himself as the reader of his own works. At certain moments in his oeuvre, the author adopts the role of literary critic and reflects upon both his genre in general and his own texts in particular. My first chapter, “Obscene Books Before Sade: A Libertine Library,” traces the difficulty of distinguishing between “pornography” and “philosophy” back to the early modern origins of the genre in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and attempts to show how Sade’s own reading of obscenity combines the two fields in a manner that would prove elusive for later generations. In a sense, Sade himself provides a model for reading that allows for the simultaneous enjoyment of intellectual stimulation and sexual arousal, a concept that seems completely foreign to modern audiences, who tend to characterize his work as belonging exclusively to one realm or the other.

In my second chapter, “Indecent Exposure: Sade’s Written Crimes in Post-Revolutionary France,” I focus on Rétif de la Bretonne as the first external reader of
Sade, and examine how he publicly sought to portray the libertine aristocrat as a dangerous criminal for both his real-life and written transgressions, yet privately wrote his own erotic fiction that in fact copies much of what he deemed atrocious in Sade (with a few notable exceptions that highlight what, in Rétif’s view, truly constituted obscene material). My third chapter, “Private Reflections: Sade in the Nineteenth Century,” takes a look at a period when public declarations on Sade were confined to stern moralist recriminations. It was during the nineteenth century, when Sade’s works were summarily banned from public society, that rebellious authors began to admire the “Divine Marquis” for his subversive disdain for bourgeois values. In looking at nineteenth century reactions to Sade, especially those that appear in Flaubert’s private correspondence, I will attempt to document how the materialist libertine author evolved into a romantic hero celebrated by later generations.

The second half of my dissertation deals exclusively with the twentieth century, and involves several of the figures who participated in Pauvert’s trial. My fourth chapter, “Sade on the Margins of Surrealism: Apollinaire, Aragon, and Bataille,” looks at the way in which the surrealists dominated public discourse on Sade in the 1920s with their strategically sanitized version of the greatly admired Marquis, and how the clandestine erotic fiction of three writers associated with the movement—celebrated surrealist precursor Apollinaire, Breton’s close friend and co-founder Aragon, and fellow-traveler turned rival Bataille—presents a reading of Sade drastically different from that put forth by Breton and other surrealists in mainstream publications. Next, in “Returning to Literature: Sade and the Post-war Erotic Novel,” I build upon Gallop’s analysis in Intersections by resituating the numerous essays published on the Marquis in the late
1940s within the greater context of the debate on littérature engagée, focusing on Paulhan as a key advocate for both the return to literature and for the Marquis de Sade. The erotic novels of the 1950s, I argue, continue the strategic shift away from politics first sketched in the earlier post-war essays of Paulhan and others, albeit with a more precise focus on the details of Sadean eroticism. Finally, my last chapter, “Sodom on the Silver Screen: Sade in the Sixties and Seventies,” discusses the numerous films devoted to Sade in the aftermath of the sexual revolution. While Pasolini’s heavily politicized Salò, o le 120 giornate di Sodoma represents the pinnacle of intellectual involvement with Sade, his work is counterbalanced by a series of comparatively obscure European, Japanese, and American films that take a decidedly less serious approach toward the Marquis.

Throughout this history, a thread of adaptations and imitations focused on reading Sade for pleasure thus runs counter to the predominant strain of politicized interpretations that relate his works to greater social concerns. Significantly, these prurient readings could only take place in relatively secretive domains situated on the margins of mainstream public discourse, whether it be in clandestine fiction, private letters, or low-budget erotic cinema. Although, as I show in my chapters, many of these responses were nonetheless involved in the political concerns of their respective eras, they never make eroticism subservient to political concerns, free as they were from the constraints of acceptable public discourse.
On December 15, 1956, a thirty-year-old publisher named Jean-Jacques Pauvert was brought to trial before the XVIIe Chambre correctionnelle de Paris. He was charged with two separate counts of having “fabriqué et détenu en vue de faire commerce ou distribution, transporté, vendu, mis en vente, distribué ou remis en vue de la distribution” books suspected of being “contraires aux bonnes mœurs.” Grouped together under the first count were three books that had been considered by the “Commission consultative de la famille et de la nationalité française” (also known as the “Commission du Livre”) in 1954, while the second count made exactly the same claim against an edition considered on December 16, 1955: these volumes, according to the Commission, “mêlaient à des propos sur la société du temps, des descriptions de scènes d’orgies, des cruautés les plus répugnantes, et des perversions les plus variées, et contenaient intrinsèquement un ferment détestable et condamnable pour les bonnes mœurs,” and were thus recommended for prosecution (Pauvert, L’Affaire Sade, 8-13). While the moral code that had allegedly been violated was that of France in the 1950s, the “société du temps” in question was not that of the mid-twentieth century, but of the late eighteenth; the books were not contemporary erotic novels like Histoire d’O (another of Pauvert’s publications) or L’Image, but three texts originally published in the 1790s and another lost in manuscript form during the fall of the Bastille, all of which were written by Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade: La Philosophie dans le boudoir, Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome, La Nouvelle Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu, and Histoire de Juliette ou les Prospérités du Vice. As the government prosecutor Maynier would ask in his statement before the court, was it not true that, although it was technically the “malheureux éditeur”
Pauvert who was being forced to take the stand, “c’est en réalité l’illustre et « divin »
Marquis de Sade qui est aujourd’hui traduit en correctionnelle plus de 140 années après
sa mort?” (69). The implications were clear: over one hundred forty years after his death,
and one hundred sixty-five years after the publication of his first novel, the Marquis de
Sade was finally being put on trial for his written rather than physical crimes, to
determine whether or not his unique brand of literature had a place in society.

Legal troubles were of course nothing new for Sade. Back in October 1763,
(Shortly after his financially-motivated marriage to the bourgeois Renée-Pélagie de
Montreuil on May 17, 1763), Sade committed various acts of sacrilege in front of a
pregnant, twenty year-old prostitute named Jeanne Testard, at a secret residence he
maintained on the rue Mouffetard in Paris. Testard complained, prompting a police
investigation that uncovered accounts of similar behavior with other prostitutes, and the
twenty-three year-old aristocrat was forced to spend a few weeks in the dungeon at
Vincennes (from October 29 to November 13, 1763). Then, on Easter morning, April 3,
1768, Sade brought thirty-six year old Rose Keller (an Alsatian beggar he happened to
encounter while strolling near the Place des Victoires in Paris) back to another of his
private houses, this one in the village of Arcueil. After leaving the woman alone for an
hour (which he spent in another room with two prostitutes), Sade stripped Keller naked,
tied her up, and whipped her repeatedly. When Keller somehow managed to escape and
shared her story with concerned villagers, word quickly spread about the Marquis’s cruel
behavior, and a second prison stay resulted (for five months, this time). Another scandal

4 During a nightlong session, Sade sodomized Testard, requested that she exchange whippings with him,
and read to her from obscene books. He also repeatedly attacked God and the Church, masturbated on top
of a crucifix, forced his partner to do the same, and ordered her to undergo an enema upon the sacred
symbol as well. For a more detailed account of Sade’s biography, see Maurice Lever, Donatien Alphonse
François, marquis de Sade.
erupted four years later, when Sade poisoned two prostitutes by giving them Spanish Fly during a pair of orgies in Marseilles on June 27, 1772. Although neither of the poisonings was fatal, Sade and his valet were nonetheless hanged in effigy in the center of Aix-en-Provence on September 3, 1772, for poisoning and sodomy. Sade’s most serious crime, however, occurred during the winter of 1774-75, when the Marquis hosted a series of orgies involving his wife and a veritable harem of young servants and prostitutes at his castle in Lacoste. In response to some mysterious offense committed against her daughter, Madame de Montreuil finally had Sade arrested during a trip to Paris in February 1777. While the Présidente de Montreuil had arranged for the family name to be publicly cleared at a retrial for the Marseilles affair, she nonetheless kept her son-in-law imprisoned until after the Revolution under a lettre de cachet she had obtained from the king.

Aside from the obviously sexual nature of the offenses in question, what stands out in the Sade trials of both the eighteenth and twentieth centuries is how the defendant was guilty of violating the separation between the public and private spheres that, according to Habermas, emerged in Western Europe during the eighteenth century. As a mid-ranking nobleman under the Old Regime, the Marquis de Sade could expect the authorities to look the other way as he indulged in his preferred sexual practices. For the most part, this is precisely what occurred, as most of his trysts with prostitutes failed to

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5 Although each of the five prostitutes involved in the day’s events resolutely denied accepting Sade’s offers to receive anal penetration in exchange for more money, since to admit to being sodomized would be to confess a crime, they did confirm that Sade himself was sodomized by his valet.

6 See Jürgen Habermas, Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, translated into English as The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society. As Keith Michael Baker has argued, although Habermas privileges England as the site for the emergence of a distinctly public sphere, his model can also be applied to eighteenth century France as well. See “Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas,” especially pages 189-198.
raise any eyebrows. Flagellation and even sodomy, which was still technically a capital offense, were acceptable activities with prostitutes, provided that proper discretion was exercised. The problem, however, was that Sade’s carelessness consistently resulted in his private sexual behavior erupting into public scandal, landing him in prison each time. The primary purpose of imprisonment for debauchery, as Foucault argues in *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*, was to protect the interests of the families involved, particularly with respect to patrimony. Thus, it was not the acts themselves that led to punishment, but rather their public exposure. Libertine behavior was nothing unusual in Sade’s family; his father, after all, had seduced several powerful women (including the Princess de Condé) and was once arrested for soliciting sex from a young man in the *Jardin des Tuileries* (where aristocrat men were known to cruise looking for male partners), while his paternal uncle had kept prostitutes at his castle in Saumane. Even Sade’s bourgeois in-laws, who reluctantly financed his extravagance, tolerated his extramarital liaisons; in fact, when Sade began public affairs with actresses and courtesans, Madame de Montreuil admitted privately that she would prefer that Donatien confine himself to married women, who were both less expensive and more discreet. But when the Marquis de Sade repeatedly shamed the family name (which, along with his inherited castle, was his principal contribution to the marriage), the Montreuils were forced to respond. His

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7 In addition to the prostitutes interviewed by the police in 1763, neighbors also noticed, for instance, when Sade took four prostitutes to his house in Arcueil in February 1768 and exchanged whippings with them, but did not bother to report the event until the investigation into the Keller incident a few months later. The weekend in Marseilles in 1772 also featured other orgies that did not result in poisoning (for more on Sade’s sex life, see Lever’s previously cited biography). By the late eighteenth century, execution for sodomy had become rare, and imprisonment took precedence; see Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*, 121, and Lever, *Les Bûchers de sodomie: Histoire des “infâmes,”* 239.

8 *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* 123–124. Foucault refers time and time again to the Marquis de Sade as an archetypical example of “les hommes de déraison” that classical society sought to categorize and remove.
lengthy mid-life imprisonment, which lasted from 1777 to 1790 (first at Vincennes, then at the Bastille, and finally at Charenton), occurred not because he had abused a few prostitutes—a mere trifle, as Madame de Montreuil remarked in her correspondence (Correspondances du marquis de Sade 7.225). Rather, as Sade gradually retreated into the private sphere for his activities, moving from the public space of brothels to private residences and finally to his inherited castle at Lacoste, he foolishly involved his wife in his debauchery, compromising her reputation as well as his. As master of his wife’s body, the Marquis could engage in a wide variety of sexual practices with Renée-Pélagie, who owed him an infinite conjugal debt (“dû conjugal”). However, while he may have been able to practice anal intercourse with her, for example, shaming his wife in front of others, as he did at Lacoste, was unacceptable; as Sade would later admit in a letter to Renée-Pélagie, “au fait sa femme à soi, n’est pas faite pour cela” (Correspondances 18.190).

Following his liberation from Charenton on April 2, 1790, after the Assemblée nationale had abolished lettres de cachet, Sade was imprisoned twice more during his lifetime: once for political reasons during the Revolution between 1793 and 94, and again for improper public conduct when he was arrested and imprisoned in early March 1801 for having authored several obscene texts over the course of the preceding decade.

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9 In her correspondence, Madame de Montreuil states that her daughter had indeed somehow “compromised” herself (Laborde 7.201-202).


11 See also Maurice Lever’s discussion of sodomy among eighteenth century aristocrats in Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade, 33-36, as well as his Bûchers de Sodome. With respect to sodomy in the marriage of Donatien and Renée-Pélagie, see Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade, 124-125, and a suggestive letter Sade wrote to his wife from Vincennes in June 1783 (Correspondances 18.92-93).
including the recently published ten-volume collection *La Nouvelle Justine, suivie de l’Histoire de Juliette, sa sœur*. As a result of releasing his private sexual fantasies into the public sphere, Sade spent the remainder of his days in prison, until he finally died at Charenton on December 2, 1814. He had never been charged with any particular offense, however; rather, the police seized him during a well-coordinated raid on the shop of his publisher Massé, and then the Napoleonic regime kept him locked up secretly in an insane asylum. As products of the political chaos and moral laxity of the Directoire, *La Nouvelle Justine* and *Juliette* had no place under the renewed order of the Empire; nor, for that matter, did their author.\(^\text{12}\)

Pauvert’s mid-twentieth-century trial brought forward the question of whether or not the works of the Marquis de Sade were fit for public consumption and circulation in modern society. Since the 1790s, Sade’s works had circulated in clandestine editions that made no mention of either author or publisher. By distributing them “under the cloak,” Sade’s publishers tacitly acknowledged that such books had no acceptable place within public space. Through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unabridged copies of Sade’s sexually explicit works (as opposed to texts such as *Aline et Valcour* or *Les Crimes de l’amour*, which Sade had published openly in his lifetime) were thus both rare and expensive, and available only to the determined, wealthy, and well connected. But Pauvert sought to change all this, by making the Marquis de Sade more widely available to average readers. Following the war, Sade became an increasingly hot topic of conversation among intellectuals, resulting in a frenzied publication of commentaries and tame or truncated editions that, in Pauvert’s view, prudently sidestepped the main thrust

\(^{12}\) Sade may also have been suspected of writing a pamphlet entitled *Zoloé*, which mocked Napoléon and Joséphine, among others (see Lever, *Donatien Alphonse François, marquis de Sade*, 585-588).
of the texts themselves: “ Toujours des commentaires sur ou des morceaux choisis d’une œuvre introuvable!” he exclaims; “On ne peut pas lire Sade, mais on peut en parler, et le citer partiellement, prudemment!” (La Traversée du Livre 145). In response, Pauvert thus decided to publish Sade’s complete works openly and at an affordable price, so that Sade could at last become the subject of a well informed public discussion.

According to Pauvert himself, he spent long afternoons copying Sade’s texts at the Bibliothèque nationale, before painstakingly correcting “thousands of pages” for the printers (Sade vivant 1.vii). In reality, however, he may have relied upon the previous work of the late Maurice Heine and the man who continued Heine’s work after his death, Gilbert Lély. Pauvert considered Lély a rival, and, judging from his memoirs, seems to have welcomed the publicity of the trial as a way to promote himself as an authority on Sade. In 1952, Lély published the first volume of his extensive Vie du Marquis de Sade, the first serious attempt to reconstruct Sade’s life based upon a careful analysis of archives and available documents (the second volume would not appear until 1957). When Pauvert later published his own biography, Sade Vivant, in the 1980s, he spent much of his time refuting Lély’s arguments (albeit without much supporting evidence, often relying instead upon mere speculation). While Lély may have been the first to publish a biography of the Marquis, Pauvert won the race to become the first non-clandestine editor of Sade’s complete works, as in late December 1947 his printer sent him the first two finished volumes of the complete edition of Histoire de Juliette. As Pauvert proudly proclaims, this was the first time Sade had been published unabridged.

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13 This is at least the version of events related in Quignard and Seckel, 128. Pauvert, for his part, claims to not even have known Lély at the time (La Traversée du Livre, 145, 177, 181). He does admit, however, that for Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome, he and his wife Christiane had recopied the text of Maurice Heine’s earlier edition (available only through subscription), published between 1931 and 1935 “par S. et C., aux dépens des Bibliophiles Souscripteurs” (182).
and openly: “j’avais mis pour la première fois au monde un nom d’éditeur sur la
couverture d’un Sade « interdit » au texte intégral, au-dessus de l’adresse du garage de
mes parents: « Sceaux/ chez Jean-Jacques Pauvert/ 39 rue des Coudrais, 39/ 1947” (La
Traversée du Livre 145-146). The problem, however, was that no booksellers would take
them, fearing both a lack of public interest and government seizures. Despite repeated
visits by the police (whom he had conveniently provided with their own copies), Pauvert
persisted, and the ten volumes of Juliette finished printing in July 1949 (La Traversée du
Livre 163). The remainder of Sade’s most scandalous texts soon followed, with La
Philosophie dans le boudoir appearing in late 1952, the four volumes of La Nouvelle
Justine in May 1953, and finally Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome in December. In
order to emphasize the intellectual seriousness of the endeavor, the illustrations that
constitute such a large part of Sade’s original publications (not including Les Cent Vingt
Journées de Sodome, which did not appear until the twentieth century) were omitted from
Pauvert’s discreet editions, each of which appeared in small in-16° format, with black
covers and gold lettering. As defense attorney Maurice Garçon observed, Pauvert “n’a
pas cherché le scandale, a évité de livrer au commerce des volumes attrayants
accompagnés d’illustrations équivoques. Son édition, brochée, en noir, est sévère comme si elle devait prendre place dans une bibliothèque janséniste [...]” (L’Affaire Sade 113).
Although the authorities would agree that Pauvert had not deliberately courted scandal,
they were far less willing to see the editions as harmless enough to adorn a Jansenist
library.

Looking closely at the charges leveled against Pauvert nearly two centuries after
Sade’s first sexual crime, it becomes apparent that the young publisher was being accused
of committing a similar breach of the sacrosanct separation between the public and private realms. The Commission did not recommend that Pauvert be prosecuted for possessing Sade’s complete works, or even for reprinting them. Rather, it was distributing—or intending to distribute—indecent material that constituted Pauvert’s alleged crime. Specifically, Pauvert was brought to trial for violating article 126, paragraph 2, of the “décret-loi” of July 29, 1939 (on “la famille et la natalité”), which sought to curb the widespread immorality that was supposedly weakening the nation. In a departure from earlier censorship laws, which focused on printed material other than books, the 1939 decree made all publications subject to prosecution, and established a special commission, composed of seven members representing legal institutions as well as organizations such as the Association pour la Défense de la Moralité publique and the Société des Gens de Lettres, whose purpose was to review books in order to judge their suitability for public circulation. When the committee met to discuss Pauvert’s editions of Sade, it determined that their descriptions of orgies featuring the most “repugnant cruelties” and “varied perversions” did in fact pose a danger to the moral health of France, and recommended the case for trial.

The proceedings of December 1956 thus marked a momentous occasion in the history of both French law and literature, in that an indisputably obscene work of literature would be read and judged in a courtroom. The Sade trial differed from other famous literary trials that have since drawn the attention of scholars in that the literary status of the works in question was tenuous at best. Unlike Madame Bovary and Les

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14 On other literary censorship trials, see Elisabeth Ladenson, *Dirt for Art’s Sake: Books on Trial from Madame Bovary to Lolita*, Yvan Leclerc, *Crimes écrits : la littérature en procès au XIXe siècle*, and Dominick LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial*. In her conclusion, Ladenson observes how Sade’s novels, along with John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, differ from the other works she discusses:
*Fleurs du mal*, for instance, Sade’s texts featured explicit descriptions of sexual acts, related using the most vulgar terminology. In contrast to risqué twentieth century novels such as *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *The Tropic of Cancer*, Sade presented an especially violent version of sexuality, with his works characterized by seemingly endless repetitions of rape, torture, dismemberment, and murder. Sex constituted the primary focus of his plotlines, except when his libertines paused to give philosophical lectures justifying their criminal excesses. Even Sade would consider works such as *Justine* and *Juliette* to be outside his main, openly published oeuvre. In short, what the XVIIᵉ Chambre correctionnelle de Paris considered and analyzed was not the elevated style or flawless diction of a reputable author, but obscenity, a variant on the genre of obscene books that had been considered unfit for publication since seventeenth century; books that, as Rousseau famously remarked, were intended to be read with one hand, since they targeted above all the sexual stimulation of their reader; books that would eventually become known during the nineteenth century as pornography.¹⁵ “S’il est une vérité certaine,” Garçon acknowledged, “c’est que l’ouvrage du Marquis de Sade est résolument pornographique, et vous n’attendez pas de moi, je pense, une tentative de justification de ses obscénités” (*L’Affaire Sade* 86).

By placing the Marquis de Sade on trial, the French courts brought into public view the reading of obscene texts, a practice that had, up until recently, been confined to

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private boudoirs and brothels. At issue was not the distinction between art and pornography, but the question of how one should go about reading obscenity. The defense attempted to avoid the issue entirely by proposing that, in Sade’s case, one should look beyond the undeniable and indefensible obscenity of the works in order to focus on their more serious intellectual merit: “Faisant la part des obscénités qui ne sont pas défendables,” affirmed Garçon, “on apercevrait que Sade était un écrivain d’importance et qu’on trouvait, dans ses pages, l’extraordinaire révélation d’une pénétration psychologique peu commune” (92). In practice, casting aside the obscenities would actually leave very little in terms of textual material, and would essentially deprive Sade of his most prominent characteristics. Garçon’s suggestion merely followed the strategy of Sade’s earlier twentieth century admirers, who, beginning with Apollinaire and continuing through the surrealists and intellectuals such as Paulhan, Blanchot, and Bataille, had been doing precisely that in their own public pronouncements on the Marquis. When several of these individuals took the stand to testify on Pauvert’s behalf, they predictably rehearsed the very arguments they had been making throughout the preceding decades. Paulhan, for instance, claimed that to him Sade’s oeuvre seemed “assez importante, et historique, puisque tous les écrivains ou presque tous les écrivains du XIXe siècle, ceux qui sont représentatifs, sont sortis du Marquis de Sade.” According to Paulhan, Sade’s supposed influence on nineteenth century writers proved his importance both as a writer—“c’est un très grand écrivain,” the expert witness assures the court—and as a philosopher (48). In a letter he wrote in support of Pauvert (which was somehow lost on the day of the trial and not read in court), Breton similarly cites a list of authors who read and understood Sade (Lamartine, Pétrus Borel, Baudelaire, Swinburne,
Lautréamont, Apollinaire, Stendhal, Nietzsche, Barbey d’Aurevilly) as proof of his intellectual seriousness (64). Reiterating the same theme, Bataille specified the philosophical merit of Sade’s oeuvre, arguing that it allows the reader “de descendre par Sade dans une espèce d’abîme d’horreur, abîme d’horreur que nous devons connaître” because it is precisely the “devoir en particulier de la philosophie”—here Bataille specifies “c’est ici la philosophie que je représente”—“de mettre en avant, d’éclairer et de faire connaître” this abyss of horror (56). Likewise, Jean Cocteau wrote in a letter addressed to the court that “Sade est un philosophe, et à sa manière un moralisateur,” a statement that elicited disbelief from the presiding judge (“C’est Jean Cocteau qui dit cela?” he asked in amazement [62]).

This emphasis on the intellectual value of Sade’s work is evident of a more widespread process both before and after the Pauvert trial, in which previously excluded obscenity became socially acceptable only when it could claim to possess some higher, redeeming social importance. During the 1920s, Breton and the surrealists would attempt to rehabilitate Sade’s place within society by advocating the political and literary importance of the man and his work. In the aftermath of World War II, Paulhan, Bataille, and others would make similar arguments defending the Marquis as an important writer and philosopher. Across the Atlantic, the U.S. Supreme Court established judicial precedent based upon such reasoning in its landmark 1957 decision in Roth v. the United States, which upheld the conviction of publisher Samuel Roth for sending illegal obscene material (in this case, erotic stories and nude photographs) through the U.S. mail, but significantly narrowed the definition of constitutionally unprotected obscenity as being “utterly without redeeming social importance.” “Obscene material,” wrote Justice
William J. Brennan Jr. in his majority opinion, “is material which deals with sex in a manner appealing to prurient interest.” However, merely portraying sex “in art, literature and scientific works,” Brennan continues, “is not itself sufficient reason to deny material the constitutional protection of freedom of speech and press.” In a formulation that would have significant repercussions regarding subsequent American obscenity trials, Brennan ruled that “All ideas having even the slightest redeeming social importance” benefited from the guarantees of the First Amendment. While the Court’s 1973 ruling in *Miller v. California* replaced the definition of obscenity as being “utterly without redeeming social importance” with material that “does not have serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value,” thereby shifting the burden of proof to the defense (who would now have to prove that the work in question did in fact contain some degree of social value), the opposition nonetheless remained between prurient obscenity on one hand and socially valuable, protected free speech on the other. Arguing just a few months before the *Roth* decision, Pauvert’s defense would attempt to justify the re-publication of Sade’s works on similar grounds of social utility.

In the case of Sade, the author’s notoriously obscene oeuvre could only appear in public if its prurient elements were either overlooked or otherwise discarded: it was only after “Faisant la part des obscénités” that Garçon sought to defend the Marquis. Likewise, Breton relies upon the authority of “des hommes de science” (he mentions in particular “Des médecins, comme Eugen Düehren, comme Maurice Heine,” referring to two of Sade’s twentieth century biographers and publishers) to argue that one should “passer outre” what he calls “le contenu manifeste” of Sade’s works, or the explicit

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16 Sex, Brennan went on, is “a great and mysterious motive force in human life” that “has indisputably been a subject of absorbing interest to mankind through the ages; it is one of the vital problems of human interest and public concern” (354 U.S. 476 [1957]).
descriptions of rape and torture that happen to constitute their most prominent component. Speaking on his own behalf, Pauvert would similarly claim that, “malgré son obscénité” (“Je n’en nie pas l’obscénité,” he told the judge), “l’œuvre de Sade est une œuvre importante” and a part of France’s literary heritage (44-45). No one at the trial would deny that Sade held a unique place within the French literary tradition. The question, however, was exactly which tradition he belonged to. Garçon set Sade’s oeuvre apart from other works that “ne sont que pornographiques,” such as Rétif de la Bretonne’s Anti Justine, the anonymous 1740 novel Portier des Chartreux, the 1833 work Gamiani (“faussement imputé à Musset,” Garçon explains), and John Cleland’s Fanny Hill, all of which he mentions by name. According to Garçon, however, “Toute autre est l’œuvre de Sade, qui fait aujourd’hui l’objet d’une multiplicité de travaux littéraires, philosophiques et scientifiques” (108). Sade had recently attracted the attention of serious intellectuals—Garçon mentions Lély, Klossowski, Breton, Paulhan, and Beauvoir (113), while Maynier directly quotes Blanchot (81)—, and everyone from the illustrious witnesses to the judges would admit that, as a precursor to Krafft-Ebbing, Havelock Ellis, and Freud, Sade’s work was of considerable scientific interest. One must therefore learn to distinguish his oeuvre from decidedly less serious pornographic endeavors; as Garçon argues, “Il faut évidemment voir là qu’il existe une différence entre l’œuvre de Sade et celle de professionnels de l’obscénité dont nul ne s’occupe et que j’abandonne bien volontiers à vos sévérités” (109). Maynier, however, would place Sade in the same tradition as other obscene works of pornography, going so far as to claim that “la plupart des ouvrages, que vous avez vous-même condamnés, n’ont fait que reprendre

17 Garçon (112), Paulhan (50), Bataille (57), Breton (64), and even the court in its final judgment (122, 129) would mention the scientific importance of Sade’s oeuvre.
les thèmes traités par le Marquis de Sade,” and that “le Marquis de Sade a été un chef
d’école et le véritable inspirateur de toute cette littérature” (79). For the defense, Sade
was thus a major author whose obscenity should be cast aside in order to focus on the
serious intellectual merit of his oeuvre; for the prosecution, Sade was nothing other than
the founder of modern French pornography.

What is particularly interesting about these apparently irreconcilable
interpretations of Sade is the manner in which certain writers and intellectuals evoked in
Pauvert’s defense themselves privately read Sade with an almost exclusive focus on the
lascivious aspect of his works. For instance, just a few years before testifying, Paulhan
was involved in the publication of two erotic novels inspired by Sade, Dominique Aury’s
Histoire d’O and André Pieyre de Mandiargues’s L’Anglais décrit dans son château
fermé, both of which eschew philosophy entirely in order to concentrate solely on
sadomasochistic eroticism. Bataille, for his part, must have provoked quite a few
chuckles when he claimed to represent “philosophy,” he who had authored several
clandestine erotic novels beginning with 1928’s Histoire de l’œil, another work that
evokes Sade in its attention to perverse and violent sexuality. And although Breton
would maintain a strict sense of propriety in his own treatment of Sade, he was
nonetheless aware of how others, such as Apollinaire (whom Garçon cites at length) and
Aragon, had responded to reading Sade by composing their own erotic fiction. Even
Garçon’s dismissal of Rétif’s Anti-Justine helps to support the argument of the
prosecution, as it was the first work written as a sexually explicit reaction to Sade’s
oeuvre. In public settings such as the trial, French intellectuals would readily look
beyond Sade’s obscenity in order to concentrate on more serious matters; in secret,
however, many of them concentrated solely on his detailed descriptions of rape and
torture, imitating them through erotic novels inspired by an obviously prurient reading of
the Sadean source text.

It is not by chance that the tension evident during the Pauvert trials—between
public, philosophical or political readings of Sade on the one hand and private or
underground erotic readings on the other—remains constant through each historical
period that appears in my study. After all, at its core obscenity involves transgressing the
boundary between public and private by bringing inappropriate sexual material (that in
itself may or may not be acceptable in private) into public view, which is why obscenity
violations continue to focus on the illegal distribution of obscene material, rather than its
production or possession. Since the concept of obscenity itself depends precisely upon
this separation between the public and private domains, attempts to bring an indisputably
obscene oeuvre such as that of Sade into the public realm inevitably involve some sort of
compromise, wherein the work’s “manifest” sexual content is de-emphasized in order to
focus on more serious intellectual components that would justify the work on scholarly or
artistic grounds. As a result, more often than not public (and openly published) discourse
on Sade has favored politics and philosophy at the expense of sex. But, as Garçon
admitted at the trial, “Certes, dépouillée de son caractère obscène, qui ne peut intéresser
personne, l’œuvre de Sade est souvent décourageant à lire” (94). This dismissal of
obscenity as uninteresting forms part of Garçon’s strategy to downplay such content in
order to focus on the philosophical density and intellectual rigor of Sade’s oeuvre, which
in turn becomes discouraging to prurient-minded readers through its very complexity.
Although Pauvert took pride in presenting the editions in their complete form, the defense
essentially argued that readers should censor the obscenity on their own. Without its obscene character, however, Sade’s works are not only discouraging but plainly impossible to read. Omitting this fundamental characteristic, as Garçon, Breton, and others suggest we do, in fact yields a truncated and thoroughly domesticated version that bears little resemblance to the original oeuvre. Contrary to Garçon’s claim, what actually makes Sade interesting is the very obscenity that his admirers and defenders attempted to deny.

In a sense, the debate on the place of obscenity within the public sphere that took place at Pauvert’s trial has yet to be resolved. This should come as no surprise, given the inconclusive manner in which the trial came to a close. For all intents and purposes, the trial ended with Pauvert’s testimony, as the publisher had admitted to putting into public circulation a collection of obscene books, in clear violation of the law. In their verdict, the court argued that, despite the strategy of the defense, “on ne peut dissocier les principes de [Sade’s] philosophie, des abondantes scènes de débauche et de violences qui en sont les applications” (125). Moreover, even allowing for the defense’s suggestion that Sade’s obscenity be overlooked, what remained was a “pernicious” philosophy that “conduit à la négation systématique des principes fondamentaux de la morale” (122, 130). Predictably, the court therefore condemned Pauvert to a large fine (totaling 200,000 francs), and ordered the confiscation and destruction of the works in question (122-133). But Pauvert and Garçon appealed the verdict, and on March 12, 1958 the court of appeals reached its decision. First of all, since the consultative commission that considered Juliette, as Garçon had pointed out during the trial, was incomplete, with both

18 With regards to Juliette, the court concluded in a similar fashion that “l’on ne peut, dans l’appréciation des influences dangereuses de son œuvre, dissocier les principes de cette philosophie des descriptions qui en sont les applications ou qui servent de prétexte à leur exposé” (132).
the representative of La Société des Gens de Lettres and L’Association pour la Défense de la Moralité publique absent from the December 1955 hearing, the appeals court invalidated the judgment on *Juliette*. More remarkably, however, the court expressed its agreement concerning the verdict on the three other works, but granted Pauvert a reprieve concerning the fine and the destruction of his editions. In other words, upon appeal the court confirmed that *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*, and *La Nouvelle Justine* did in fact pose a danger to public morality, but refused to sentence Pauvert under the 1939 law. Sade’s works were thus declared unsuitable for public circulation, but were allowed to remain in the public domain nonetheless.

Since the revocation of Pauvert’s sentence in 1958, the Marquis de Sade has remained in a sort of legal limbo in France. During the 1960s, both Pauvert and Lély (for Cercles du Livre Précieux) cautiously published updated versions of Sade’s complete works, with an obvious “academic” focus intended to deter censors: neither editor included the obscene illustrations of Sade’s original editions, and Pauvert prefaced each volume with essays by Paulhan, Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot, Pieyre de Mandiargues, and others in order to show the intellectual seriousness of the endeavor. While neither edition faced legal proceedings, the paperback editions published by Union Générale d’Éditions in the 1970s as part of their collection “10/18” did run into some trouble under a July 16, 1949 law pertaining to “les publications destinées à la jeunesse.” In the attempt to avoid such legal hassles, the 10/18 paperbacks followed many of the precautions that Pauvert had taken with his hardcover editions in order to present Sade’s novels as serious intellectual material. For instance, the three-volume 1976 edition of

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19 “Jugement de la Cour d’Appel” (non paginated). In *L’Affaire Sade.*
Juliette featured a preface by Gilbert Lély, and wisely omitted the accompanying illustrations, except, oddly enough, on the covers of the books, each of which featured an orgy scene from the original edition, albeit with the participants’ genitals carefully obscured through shadowing. These provocative cover illustrations, combined with an inexpensive price tag, prompted Interior Minister Raymond Marcellin, following the recommendations of the “Commission de surveillance et de contrôle des publications destinées à l’enfance et à l’adolescence,” to declare both La Nouvelle Justine and Juliette unfit for public display. (To further dissuade potential buyers, both works were subject to a supplemental tax of 33%, compared to 5% for most other books). In 1992, the restriction on Justine was revoked, but not that on Juliette (Joubert 189). Thus, although pricey scholarly editions, such as Pauvert’s third installment of Sade’s complete works, published between 1986 and 1991, or Michel Delon’s 1990-1998 edition for the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade—which was the first openly published edition to include the original illustrations—, were allowed to circulate freely, cheaper paperbacks faced tighter scrutiny. To this day, the only paperback edition of Juliette available in French is a truncated version that omits all coarse language and sexually explicit passages, whereas Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome, La Philosophie dans le boudoir, and La Nouvelle Justine were all republished by 10/18 in 1998.20

Twentieth century editions of Sade’s works met a somewhat more decisive fate outside of France’s borders, with the publication of Japanese and English language translations beginning in the late 1950s. Before Pauvert’s trial, the reception of Sade’s works was primarily a domestic affair, which explains why the bulk of my study will

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concentrate on French readings of the Marquis leading up to the 1950s. In 1959, however, scholar Tatsuhiko Shibusawa began working on a Japanese translation of Sade’s *Histoire de Juliette ou les prospérités du vice* entitled *Akutoku no sakae*. Since, in the translator’s view, Sade’s work was “classical literature” set in an “aristocratic society,” Shibusawa employed metaphorical literary terms from the Edo period (1603-1868) to replace the vulgar terminology (such as “con” and “vit”) found in the original editions. Furthermore, Shibusawa’s editions cautiously omitted the illustrations that originally accompanied *Juliette*, following Pauvert’s precedent. Nonetheless, Shibusawa and publisher Kyoji Ishii were indicted on obscenity charges shortly after the Japanese *Juliette* was published. As was the case with Pauvert, Shibusawa and Ishii were indicted for selling (and possessing with intent to sell) a work deemed to be obscene, in this case the second volume of the translation, “Juriette no Henrei” (*Juliette’s travels*). Under Article 175 of the Japanese Criminal Code, three conditions needed to be met in order to determine that a crime of obscenity had occurred: the wanton appeal to sexual passion, an offense to the average man’s sense of modesty, and an opposition to proper concepts of sexual morality. On October 16, 1962, the Tokyo District court agreed that the latter two elements were present in “Juriette no Henrei,” but found the work to be both so outlandishly violent and fantastically unrealistic as to be unable to appeal to sexual passion. Shibusawa and Ishii were thus acquitted, for the moment.

On November 21, 1963, however, the Tokyo High Court reversed the District Court’s ruling, prompting the defendants to appeal to the Japanese Supreme Court. In the meantime, Shibusawa and Ishii continued to publish further translations of Sade

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21 See *Sado Saiban* 2.30-36, 118-19, and 168-170, as well as Kirsten Cather, “The Great Censorship Trials of Literature and Film in Postwar Japan,” 240.
throughout the decade, including an edition of *Keibo Tetsugakusho* (*La Philosophie dans le boudoir*) and *Sodomu hyakunijunichi josho* (the preface to *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*) in 1962 and *Shin Jusuchinu* (*La Nouvelle Justine*) in 1965. Finally, on October 15, 1969, ten years after Shibusawa had begun his translation, the Supreme Court released its ruling in *Ishii et. al. v Japan*. By an eight to five margin, the Court upheld the High Court’s decision, on the grounds that “Juriette no Henrei” did in fact meet all three requirements for obscenity, and ordered Shibusawa and Ishii to pay a small fine of 70,000 yen. As a result of the guilty verdict, Sade’s works did not become widely available in Japanese translation until the 1990s, at around the same time that Michel Delon was preparing his editions of Sade for the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* in France.

Several of the dissenting judges in *Ishii et. al. v Japan* agreed with the Tokyo District Court, however, and essentially argued that Sade was fit for public circulation in Japan precisely because his texts failed miserably as erotica. For instance, Masatoshi Yokota deemed *Juliette* to be an “intellectual novel” that was more likely to inspire loathing rather than “obscene feelings” (Itoh and Beer, 197-200). Noting how “in the translation the caution was taken of using the secret language of the Edo period, which is now completely dead language, concerning the organs of sex and depraved sexual activities,” Kotaro Irokawa concluded that “What is described […] are numerous unreal acts that are outside the experience of Japanese readers, and even what is lewd is almost entirely lacking in feeling” (216). Sade thus belonged to the “realm of the fantastic”; his works were “grotesque in the extreme, and almost sufficiently filthy to make one vomit.” “The ordinary person,” Irokawa concluded, “cannot but find it basically something of a pain to read through the whole book” (217).
The opinions of Yokota and Irokawa recall those expressed by several participants in the Pauvert trials, where it was generally agreed upon that Sade’s works were boring or otherwise repulsive. Breton, for instance, argues that “le contenu manifeste” of Sade’s oeuvre “serait de nature à provoquer la répulsion, non l’attraction,” and would thus pose no risk of corrupting its readers (64). Paulhan likewise identifies Sade as “un exemple qui se propose comme n’étant pas à suivre” (52), as if the oeuvre itself discouraged imitation. For Bataille, the horror that one experiences when reading Sade distinguishes his work from “le jugement de simple pornographie qu’on serait tenté de lui attribuer,” since “n’importe qui s’essayant à la lecture de Sade se trouve plutôt soulevé d’horreur” (56). Whereas pornography tended to stimulate its audience, Sade was more likely to fill his readers with horror, or, as Cocteau mentions in his letter, bore them sufficiently to quell any libidinal urges, since, according to Cocteau, “Il est ennuyeux, son style est faible.” When the presiding judge remarked after the reading of Cocteau’s letter that “Je suis d’accord sur un point: c’est qu’il est ennuyeux,” Garçon confirmed, “Sur ce point nous sommes tous d’accord” (62). For Garçon, Sade’s tediousness became a positive attribute, as it distinguished his oeuvre from pornography, which contained only “allusions obscènes et évocations libidineuses de débauches,” whereas Sade, on the other hand, “décrit comme un clinicien ennuyeux, ne cherchant point à séduire, ne faisant grâce d’aucun détail, ignoble, impitoyable et froid dissecteur de passions […]” (111).

The American publisher Grove Press would follow Garçon’s strategy of presenting Sade’s works as boring, intellectual texts when they released a volume containing the first unabridged English language translations of Sade’s 1791 novel.
Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu and his 1795 dialogue La Philosophie dans le boudoir in 1965. Translated by Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse, The Complete Justine, The Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings also contained selections from Sade’s correspondence and last will and testament, along with the atheist manifesto Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond and the novella Eugénie de Franval, which originally appeared in Sade’s openly published 1800 collection of tales Les Crimes de l’amour. The following year, Grove Press published The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings, featuring Sade’s notorious, unfinished prison manuscript, his 1791 play Oxtiern, ou les malheurs du libertinage, and several other texts from Les Crimes de l’amour: the critical essay Idée sur les romans and two novellas, Florville et Courval, ou le fatalisme and Ernestine, nouvelle suédoise. Finally, in 1968, Grove Press published its most daring Sadean work yet, a 1,205 page edition of the complete Juliette.

The risky decision to introduce the works of the Marquis Sade to the American public came in the wake of recent legal developments regarding the place of sexually explicit material in American society. In response to the Roth decision, Grove Press published a paperback edition of D.H. Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover in 1959, only to have the U.S. Post Office attempt to prohibit the publisher from transporting the book through the mail (De Grazia 338-340). Lawyer Charles Rembar successfully defended the novel in court, however, and Grove Press would soon score an additional victory regarding its 1961 publication of Henry Miller’s Tropic of Cancer with the 1964

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As Grove Press publisher Barney Rosset later told de Grazia, “Grove’s first important censorship battle was Lady Chatterley’s Lover. The reason I started with it was that it seemed to me impossible that people would say Lawrence wasn’t a great writer. And I had this urge to test the obscenity laws” (De Grazia 369). See also Ladenson 131-156.
Supreme Court ruling in *Grove Press v. Gerstein*. Finally, the Court’s decision in the 1966 case *A Book Named “John Cleland’s Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure” v. Attorney General of Massachusetts* (which reversed a Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling that had condemned as obscene Putnam’s 1963 publication of the eighteenth century English erotic classic) affirmed that “A book cannot be proscribed unless it is found to be *utterly* without redeeming social value.” Since even the lower courts had conceded that *Fanny Hill* might contain limited literary merit and social importance, the Supreme Court declared the novel to be protected by the First Amendment. If a book that caters to the prurient interest as blatantly as does *Fanny Hill* could benefit from constitutional protection, then Grove Press stood on sound legal ground in publishing the philosophically inclined texts of Sade.

The key for Grove Press in avoiding the legal proceedings that had plagued Pauvert was thus to demonstrate that each of its editions contained redeeming social value. To this effect, *The Complete Justine, The Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings* featured prefaces by Jean Paulhan (“The Marquis de Sade and his Accomplice”) and Blanchot (“Sade,” a translation of the 1947 essay “A la rencontre de Sade,” which later appeared as “La Raison de Sade” in Blanchot’s 1949 work *Sade et Lautréamont*), and *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings* began with Beauvoir’s 1951 essay “Must We Burn Sade?” and a chapter from Klossowski’s 1947 collection *Sade mon prochain, “Nature as Destructive Principle.”* That these dense and complicated essays were

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23 *Grove Press v. Gerstein* applied the court’s decision reached earlier that day (June 22, 1964) in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (which overturned an Ohio court’s ruling declaring Louis Malle’s film *Les Amants* to be obscene) to reverse a Florida court’s verdict that *Tropic of Cancer* was obscene. See Ladenson 182-185, and De Grazia 370-383. For more on the obscenity trials surrounding Grove Press’s publications in the early 1960s, see Charles Rembar, *The End of Obscenity: The Trials of Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Tropic of Cancer, and Fanny Hill*. 
themselves originally written in a specific historical context regarding the role of literature in post-war France, and were perhaps more likely to confuse American readers than provide them with an introduction to Sade, was beside the point. Whereas, traditionally, a preface seeks to mediate the experience of reading a particularly challenging text (by providing historical context and literary interpretation, for instance), the essays that prefaced the Grove Press editions were meant to give the publisher legal protection: since so many renowned French intellectuals had bothered to reflect upon Sade, the editions suggest, there could be no question that his works possessed considerable social value. Nonetheless, Grove Press exhibited caution in first publishing the relatively tame 1791 version of *Justine*, rather than the expanded and obscene *La Nouvelle Justine* that appeared at the end of the decade. Instead, the 1965 volume *The Complete Justine, The Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings* tentatively tested the waters of official tolerance by including only one of the works that faced prosecution in France, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, whose lengthy political pamphlet *Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être républicains* would surely protect the dialogue under the guidelines laid out in *Roth* that the work in question must be “taken as a whole.” In fact, the publishing of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* together with *Justine*, the *Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond*, Eugénie de Franval, and the essays by Paulhan and Blanchot practically ensured that the volume as a whole would not “appeal to the prurient interest.” Similarly, the pairing of *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*—which since its initial publication in 1904 by German sexologist Iwan Bloch had usually been received as a scientific catalogue of perversions and a precursor to the work of Krafft-Ebbing rather than an erotic work—alongside innocuous literary and critical texts would make
condemning the volume on the grounds of obscenity almost impossible in the wake of *Roth* and subsequent rulings. It was only with the un-prefaced 1968 edition of *Juliette* that Grove Press risked getting into trouble over its translations of Sade, and the novel may have been an attempt to test the *Memoirs* ruling the way that *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* had tested *Roth*. By the late 1960s, however, those concerned with regulating obscenity in the United States faced much greater challenges than those posed by an eighteenth-century French author, especially since Grove Press—like Pauvert before them—had taken the additional precaution of excluding the sexually explicit illustrations that accompanied Sade’s original editions. When Grove Press daringly published *Sixty Erotic Engravings from Juliette* in 1969, the American courts were more concerned with controlling the expansion of contemporary pornographic magazines and films, whose status under *Roth* was much more tenuous.

For the most part, following the Sade trials of the mid-century, censorship in France, the United States, and Japan has turned its attention from books toward visual media such as films and illustrated magazines. In a sense, the historical periods covered in this study represent an era when words and texts were taken much more seriously than they are today. Perhaps the reason for this shift in focus is that, over the past decades, visual media have replaced texts as the predominant means of cultural exchange. Here in the early twenty-first century, editions of Sade’s most obscene works are widely available in most European languages and in Japanese. Yet filming a faithful adaptation of any of these texts would be practically unthinkable, and would surely be grounds for obscenity charges in a handful of societies that otherwise permit freedom of expression, such as the United States, where pornography containing fecal material and even fictional depictions
of non-consensual sex are forbidden. While Sade’s words may have finally lost their ability to provoke scandal, the themes and images evoked in his works remain dangerous. Despite our supposedly boundless support for artistic freedom, we may yet again see the day when Sade is placed on trial, this time as the source of a violent and sexually explicit cinematic adaptation. Should that day occur, the unfortunate attorneys given the task of defending such atrocities would be well advised to draw upon the readings presented in the following chapters, just as Garçon cited everyone from Rétif to Paulhan in defense of Pauvert.
Chapter One
Obscene Books before Sade: A Libertine Library

In the winter of 2008, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France presented an uncharacteristically racy exhibit entitled “L’Enfer de la Bibliothèque: Eros au Secret.” Grouped together for public display (provided one was at least sixteen years of age) was a collection of naughty drawings, texts, photographs, and films, spanning from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. All of the works had found their way at one point or another into the library’s special reserve section (known as the “Enfer,” or “hell”) where sexually explicit works were collected for isolation and preservation. Among the pieces presented were various original editions from the eighteenth century, including the anonymous erotic classic *Thérèse philosophe*, and several tomes from Donatien Alphonse François de Sade’s vast post-Revolutionary opus, *La Nouvelle Justine, suivie de l’Histoire de Juliette, sa sœur*, carefully propped open to display some of the text’s one hundred graphic illustrations.

To scholars of the Enlightenment, the flagrant exploitation of the coarse sexuality present in such works must have smacked of vulgar opportunism. Thanks to the work of Robert Darnton, we now know that sexually explicit texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not received by their contemporaries as “pornography” (a term whose modern meaning, as Walter Kendrick has demonstrated, did not come into place until the nineteenth century), but as “philosophy,” the code word given to clandestine books that contested the principles of religion, political authority, or morals. For more on the evolution of the term “pornography,” see The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture. For a detailed discussion of the disparate works that made up clandestine eighteenth-century “philosophy” and their circulation under the cloak, see Robert Darnton’s The Literary Underground of the Old Regime.
obvious philosophical bent of such works is evident in their titles and subtitles, such as *L’Ecole des filles, ou la philosophie des dames*, *Thérèse philosophe*, or Sade’s *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*. A closer look at the texts themselves reveals a puzzling mixture of philosophical discussions combined with sexually explicit descriptions (and illustrations), often involving flagrant anti-clericalism, as in the case of *Venus dans le cloître, ou la religieuse en chemise* or *Histoire de Dom Bougre, portier des chartreux*. So are we to assume, then, that enlightened eighteenth-century audiences, to paraphrase the dubious claim of the infamous *Playboy* subscriber, read *Thérèse philosophe* and *Juliette* for the philosophy? And that, by extension, the modern tendency to situate such texts within the category of “pornography” belies our own inability to understand the more complicated forces at work behind and in between all that sex?

In displaying eighteenth-century philosophical texts under the heading “eros,” the BNF exhibit points toward the difficulty of categorizing such historical works now that the boundary between art and pornography has become much more rigid. As James Steintrager observes, one of the main difficulties of interpreting the literature of Sade and others lies precisely in their uncertain generic status. Are we dealing with critical philosophy, stimulating erotica, social satire, some combination of the foregoing, or all of them, or more? While we might now be tempted to categorize a work such as *The New Justine* as pornography pure and simple, in the eighteenth century depictions of graphic sexuality usually commingle with philosophical treatises, especially of the materialist variety, and political polemic. (*Cruel Delight* 131)

While moralists from the nineteenth century onward have largely agreed that Sade’s works are nothing more than pornography intended for sexual arousal, there is certainly no denying the fact that there is more to the texts than just sex. Of late, scholars have
gone even further in their assessment of Sade’s works, to the point where sex becomes intertwined with political and philosophical concerns. For Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, for example, in Sade’s *Juliette* “Politics are set at the heart of the orgy through the politicization of the sexual and the sexualization of the political, and the work successfully weaves parody, power relationships, and the orgy scene into one fabric” (1). The orgy scene, according to Frappier-Mazur, does not exist as mere masturbatory fantasy; rather, “the orgy scene represents not only the subversion but, just as much, the re-creation of social order and hierarchy under a phallic, unifying economy” (ix). On a similar note, Peter Cryle claims that the “classical erotica” analyzed in his study “have remarkably little to do with such standardly modern notions as ‘desire,’ ‘climax,’ or ‘the sex act,’” and seeks to move beyond such concepts in order to obtain “a clearer understanding of politics in the boudoir” (viii). In perhaps the furthest reaching assertion of all, Lynn Hunt argues that

> If we take pornography to be the explicit depiction of sexual organs and sexual practices with the aim to arouse sexual feelings, then pornography was almost always an adjunct to something else until the middle or end of the eighteenth century. In early modern Europe, that is, between 1500 and 1800, pornography was most often a vehicle for using the shock of sex to criticize religious and political authorities. (“Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity” 10)

To the uninitiated observer, the texts on display at the BNF are just earlier versions of *Penthouse* or *Hustler*, a straightforward testament to the continuity of masturbatory fantasy across the ages. To scholars, however, they are above all works of philosophy and political polemic, where sex serves as a vehicle to represent a greater issue.

But how, one might ask, did eighteenth-century readers respond to these texts in their original context? Finding the answer to such a question may provide some clues as
to how we are supposed to read works of such uncertain generic status as *Thérèse philosophe* and *Juliette*. Although both texts are clearly grounded in the philosophical tradition of the Enlightenment—*Thérèse philosophe* lifts metaphysical reflections from the clandestinely published, anti-Catholic *Examen de la religion dont on cherche l’éclaircissement de bonne foi* (1745), while Sade unabashedly borrows from d’Holbach and other Materialist thinkers to the point of plagiarism—, their blatantly explicit depictions of sex certainly set them apart from other clandestine Enlightenment texts such as Diderot’s *Lettre sur les aveugles* or Voltaire’s *Dictionnaire philosophique*, and even places them in a different category than more subtle erotic novels like *Les Bijoux indiscrets* or *Le Sopha*.

In fact, prominent eighteenth-century readers did establish a precedent for future generations by singling out sex as the defining characteristic of such works and declaring them “obscenity” rather than “philosophy.” In his 1757 *Mémoires sur la librairie*, Chrétien Guillaume de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, who as *directeur de la Librairie* was responsible for royal censorship, separates questionable books into four categories—*Les satires personnelles, Le gouvernement, Les mœurs*, and *La Religion*, with works against religion regarded as the most dangerous. Within the category of morals, Malesherbes distinguishes between obscenity and mere licentiousness (“les livres seulement licencieux, comme les contes de La Fontaine, les épigrammes de [Jean-Baptiste] Rousseau, etc.”), arguing that leniency is only appropriate with regard to the latter:

> Ce qu’on appelle communément ouvrages contraires aux bonnes mœurs, sont les ouvrages obscènes ou seulement licencieux.

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25 See Darnton’s analysis of the way *Thérèse philosophe* modifies the tract to fit its own purposes (*The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* 108-110). On Sade’s debt to the materialist tradition, see Caroline Warman, *Sade: From Materialism to Pornography*. 

L’obsénité doit être défendue: toutes les lois y concourent: tout le monde pense de même à cet égard, et les règles qu’on prescrira aux censeurs peuvent être facilement observées. (110-111)

Malesherbes—who would later single-handedly save the Encyclopédie project in 1759—demonstrates a concern for protecting legitimate works of literature from censorship, an attitude that would later be taken up by the U.S. Supreme Court in the mid-twentieth century (with the important distinction that the Supreme Court would find enough social value in works that Malesherbes declared obscene to grant them constitutional protection). According to his doctrine, even books that were contrary to “bonnes mœurs,” a legal term referring primarily to sexual morals that is still used in France today, had a right to circulate freely within the public realm. Everyone apparently agreed, however, that obscenity, which Malesherbes seems to consider an easily identifiable category, should be banned.

Malesherbes’s usage of the term “obscenity” attests to the currency the concept had gained in France by the mid eighteenth century. As Joan DeJean has demonstrated, obscenity emerged as a category during the second half of the seventeenth century, following the 1655 publication of L’École des filles, ou la philosophie des dames, the first obscene prose work to appear in French and the inaugural text of the new genre of erotic “philosophy.” The sexually explicit work was deemed unacceptable, with the

26 Diderot testifies to a similar distinction between acceptable erotic works and obscenity when, in his Salon de 1765, he relates how he once asked a female bookseller (Mademoiselle Babuti, who later became Madame Greuze) for La Fontaine and other tolerated licentious works, which the woman presented to him without hesitation. When he asked for Vénus dans le cloître, however, she vehemently denied his request and informed him that she did not sell such wicked things (152).

27 See DeJean, The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France. “Obscenity” traces its origins back to the Latin obscenus, and began to appear in French during the sixteenth century. For a discussion of the evolution of the concept of obscenity in medieval France, see Merceron’s essay, “Obscenity and Hagiography,” in Jan M. Ziolkowski’s Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages, as well as the other essays included in the collection.
authorities seizing whatever copies they could find and prosecuting its two suspected creators, Jean l’Ange and Michel Millot. Soon thereafter, the term “obscene” appeared in Guillaume Colletet’s *L’Art poétique* (1658), where he warns the epigrammatic poet against using “termes obscènes qui représentent les choses un peu trop librement, et qui laissent de sales images dans l’esprit du Lecteur,” and goes on to compare using obscene language to indecently exposing one’s body, asking his reader, “n’aurons-nous point de honte de découvrir ce que nous devons tenir secret, comme des parties du corps que la bienséance nous oblige de cacher?” (108-109). In 1663, “obscénité” would appear as a neologism in Molière’s *Critique de l’École des femmes*, once again (albeit ironically) denoting material that was not fit for public display. A century later, the *Encyclopédie* would remark under the entry “obscène” that “il se dit de tout ce qui est contraire à la pudeur,” condemning “l’obscénité dans la conversation” as “la ressource des ignorants, des sots et des libertins” (11.309). By that time, however, obscene books and engravings could be found just about everywhere, and the authorities arrested countless individuals involved in their transportation and sale. Malesherbes’s attack on “obscenity” in 1753

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28 For a more complete discussion of the trials surrounding *L’École des Filles*, see chapter two of DeJean’s *The Reinvention of Obscenity*, as well as her earlier article, “The Politics of Pornography: L’École des Filles,” Michel Camus’s preface to *L’École des Filles* in *Œuvres érotiques du XVIIe siècle*, and Roger Thompson’s “Two Early Editions of Restoration Erotica” and *Unfit for Modest Ears: A Study of Pornographic, Obscene, and Bawdy Works Written and Published in England in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century.*

29 Scandalized, the character Climène refers to the play’s infamous “le” as having “une obscénité qui n’est pas supportable.” Climène had prefaced her usage of the neologism with a series of apparent definitions—*L’École des femmes* is “une pièce qui tient sans cesse la pudeur en alarme, et salit à tous moments l’imagination,” it is full of “d’ordures et de saletés,” and “les saletés y crevent les yeux”—, providing a list of synonyms that prefigures later legal definitions of obscenity. Yet her companion Élise nonetheless fails to grasp its meaning, underscoring the freshness of “obscenity” as a concept: “Ah! mon Dieu! obscénité. Je ne sais ce que ce mot veut dire; mais je le trouve le plus joli du monde” (*Œuvres complètes* 1.647-649).

30 See Jean Marie Goulemot, *Ces Livres qu’on ne lit que d’une main : Lecture et lecteurs de livres pornographiques au XVIIIe siècle*, 29-35.
therefore rests on almost a century of linguistic and legal precedent that had condemned “philosophical” works such as *L’École des filles* for their explicit sexuality.

Incidentally, one of the major figures to reject the philosophical pretensions of the genre that grew out of *L’École des filles* was himself a philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Describing the negative effect that “lectures dérobées et mal choisies” had on him as an adolescent, in his *Confessions* Rousseau voices his relief at having nonetheless managed to avoid obscene and licentious books:

> Cependant si mon goût ne me préserva pas des livres plats et fades, mon bonheur me préserva des livres obscènes et licencieux: non que la Tribu, femme à tous égards très accommodante, se fit un scrupule de m’en prêter; mais, pour les faire valoir, elle me les nommait avec un air de mystère qui me forçait précisément à les refuser, tant par dégoût que par honte; et le hasard seconda si bien mon humeur pudique, que j’avais plus de trente ans avant que j’eusse jeté les yeux sur aucun de ces dangereux livres qu’une belle dame de par le monde trouve incommodes, en ce qu’on ne peut les lire que d’une main. (*Œuvres complètes* 1.40)

By condemning books that can only be read with one hand, Rousseau suggests that, even for enlightened eighteenth-century readers, erotic “philosophy” may have been about sex and masturbation after all. His warning against the dangers of obscene books attests to their relative accessibility. The fact that la Tribu tried (unsuccessfully) to push the works on Rousseau underscores an essential component of the concept of obscenity: its prominent (and offensive) presence within the public sphere. Essentially, Rousseau places himself in agreement with Malesherbes, perhaps going even further than the government censor in his rejection of licentious works as well. Perhaps most importantly, however, Rousseau singles out the principal danger that obscene books present: their tendency to incite the reader to masturbation. As Vernon Rosario has demonstrated, Rousseau’s comments figure amidst a wealth of scientific and
philosophical literature produced during the eighteenth century condemning the medical and social consequences of masturbation and the obscene texts that often inspired it.  

Such secular voices of course followed the Church, which continued to oppose masturbation on moral grounds. If Malesherbes could confidently proclaim that “everyone” agreed what obscenity was and that it should be banned, it was perhaps because the socially destructive potential of masturbation was so widely acknowledged, even among philosophers.

Masturbation was not the only potentially negative consequence of obscene books, however. In his own Rousseau-esque autobiography, *Monsieur Nicolas* (which he began in 1783), Rétif de la Bretonne describes how reading erotic literature enflamed him to such an extent that he broke his promise to remain faithful to his mistress Zéphire. Like Rousseau’s, his account provides information regarding the circulation of such texts, which often did not even require a visit to the bookshop. As he would later note when referring to erotic fiction in his 1796 essay *Fausse immoralité de la liberté de la presse*, “on ne garde pas ces sortes de livres dans sa bibliothèque, on les prête,” and this time it is his companion Molet (“un grand libertin,” according to Rétif) who lends him a copy of *Dom Bougre, ou le portier des chartreux* while the twenty-four year-old Rétif is lying in bed one Sunday (*Monsieur Nicolas* 2.1040). More importantly, however, Rétif seeks to warn his readers about “le danger des livres tels que *Le Portier des Chartreux, Thérèse Philosophe, La Religieuse en chemise, et le reste*” by illustrating “l’érotisme subit et terrible qu’ils excitèrent” within him. “Vif, ardent, curieux,” Rétif relates, “je le pris [“le premier de ces livres”] avec transport et me mis à le lire dans mon lit; j’oubliai tout,

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31 In *The Erotic Imagination: French Histories of Perversity*, in particular the chapter “Onanists: The Public Threat of Phantastical Pollutions,” especially pages 16-34. See also Thomas W. Laquer’s *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*. 
jusqu’à Zéphire. Après une vingtaine de pages, j’étais en feu.” In the outrageously exaggerated narrative that follows, Rétif explains how he forced himself upon every young woman who happened to cross his path. First is “Manon Lavergne, petite couturière de la rue Notre-Dame”: “Je me jetai sur elle,” confides Rétif; “La jeune fille ne fit pas une grande résistance….” Unsatisfied, further reading arouses him even more:

Je repris ma lecture, après son départ… Une demi-heure après, parut Cécile Decoussy, compagne de ma sœur Margot […] je mis tant de fureur dans mon attaque qu’elle effrayée autant que surprise, elle me crut fou, enragé… Elle céda, après s’être mise à mes genoux pour me fléchir. Je repris ma funeste lecture… […] Environ trois quarts d’heure après, arriva Thérèse Courbuisson […]. (Monsieur Nicolas 1.1042-1044)

After having sex with Thérèse, Rétif finishes his reading (“J’achevai ma lecture”) and meets Séraphine Jolon: “Je la saisis, la renversai. Elle voulut se défendre. Ce fut de l’huile dans le feu… Je ne pris pas même le temps de fermer ma porte. Je finis, je recommençai… […] j’étais comme un forcené….” Next, Rétif copulates with Séraphine’s sister, Agathe Fagard: “je la soumets aussi vigoureusement à un sixième triomphe qu’au premier, soutenue que j’étais par la fougue de mon imagination… plus efficace que tous les satyrions….” Finally, Rétif has exhausted the “sudden and terrible eroticism” brought on by his “fatal reading,” and, overcome with shame, he blushes over his “frenzy” and apologizes to the two sisters.32 While Rétif’s unrealistic exploits mirror those found in the erotic texts he was reading—where insatiable supermen can ejaculate without limitation, and all women are perpetually available for intercourse—, he nonetheless emphasizes the ability of such books to arouse: “Voilà l’effet des lectures érotiques,” he concludes, as if the reader needed any further reminder that Le Portier des chateaux was the cause of his erotic furor. Although the “danger” Rétif warns against

32 “Agathe Fagard n’était pas encore revenue de sa surprise lorsque, mes feux apaisés par un triple effort presque simultané, je rougis de ma frénésie et fis mes excuses aux deux belles-sœurs…” (Ibid.).
cannot be taken too seriously, he does at least confirm that not all contemporary readers of *Dom Bougre* read the work solely for its philosophy. Later, Rétif would even cite the ability to stimulate lazy husbands to copulate with their no longer beautiful wives as one of the virtuous goals of his *Anti-Justine*, a sexually explicit novel that is noticeably devoid of philosophical content.³³

Are we then to take *Dom Bougre*, *Thérèse philosophe*, and *Juliette* off our bookshelves and hide them under our beds? Or might we find another interpretation of obscene Enlightenment philosophy, one that situates itself somewhere between Malesherbes and Rousseau on the one hand and modern scholars on the other? In fact, it is D.A.F. de Sade himself who provides such a vantage point when he rather discreetly reveals his stance as a reader and critic of obscene books. For a brief moment in the third section of *L’Histoire de Juliette*, the murderous orgies that comprise much of the text’s action subside so that the author can pause to offer reflection on his novel and its place in literature. While waiting for the return of Father Claude (whom they have decided to murder), Juliette and Clairwil take a tour of the libertine monk’s library. On his shelf, Claude possesses an abundance of what Juliette, likes Malesherbes and Rousseau before her, refers to as “livres obscènes,” and Sade’s heroine singles out four for specific mention—*L’Histoire de Dom Bougre, ou le portier des chartreux* (1740), *L’Académie des dames* (1655), *L’Éducation de Laure* (1788), and *Thérèse philosophe* (1748)—, thereby providing a snapshot of the genre as it stood in the late eighteenth century. The choice of works covers three of the most popular erotic texts of the Classical period (*L’Académie des dames, Dom Bougre, and Thérèse philosophe*), as well as the more

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³³ In *L’Anti-Justine* 287, 393-94 (*Œuvres érotiques de Restif de la Bretonne*). I discuss the *L’Anti-Justine* at length in chapter 2.
recent work of one of Sade’s contemporaries. Significantly, all four works were either printed or reprinted during the 1780s and 1790s, suggesting that they represented Sade’s foremost competitors for a share of the market at the time of Juliette’s publication. The mention of previously published obscene books was standard practice within the genre, and served to situate newer works within the tradition. Through the literary convention of the library visit, which appeared most notably with the purging of the knight-errant’s bookshelves in Don Quixote, Sade, like Cervantes before him, defines the contours of his chosen genre, passes judgment on his predecessors, and explains how his own work relates to theirs.

**Literary Criticism in the Boudoir: Juliette Judges the Classics**

The library visit in Juliette stands out within Sade’s oeuvre as the only instance where the author provides commentary on the type of sexually explicit, “obscene” literature he himself composed. True, Sade does assume the role of literary critic in his essay Idée sur les Romans, the preface to his openly published Crimes de l’amour, a collection of conventional, inexplicit libertine tales that appeared in 1800, shortly after the clandestine publication of Juliette. But the literature he considers in Idée sur les Romans prudently steers clear of forbidden fiction, and instead focuses on celebrated

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34 Unbeknownst to Sade, the author of the 1788 text L’Éducation de Laure was none other than Mirabeau, whom he coincidentally attacks in the same passage.

35 L’Académie des dames was reprinted in 1770, 1774 (in Latin), 1775 and 1776 (in two volumes), and again in 1781 and 1782. Dom Bougre was reprinted in 1777, 1786, and 1788 in 1786 and even inspired two sequels, Mémoires de Suzon, sœur de Dom Bougre, portier des Chartreux (1778) and the Histoire de Marguerite, fille de Suzon, nièce de Dom Bougre (1784) (in Œuvres anonymes du XVIIIe siècle I). Later editions of Thérèse philosophe reappeared in 1782, 1785, 1796, 1797, and 1800, while Éducation de Laure was reprinted in 1791.

36 See Goulemot 40.
authors ranging from Rousseau and Voltaire to Richardson and Fielding (36-43). Sade even concludes his essay with a firm denial of having written Justine, indicating how much he sought to keep his clandestine and openly published works separate.\(^{(37)}\) It is only through the character of Juliette that he discusses the merits and shortcomings of the classics of obscene literature, just as he comments on major eighteenth-century novelists in his essay. Despite the passage’s brevity, much is therefore at stake in Juliette’s visit to Claude’s shelves. Through her critique of works such as L’Académie des dames, Histoire de Dom Bougre and Thérèse philosophe, Juliette not only identifies what were the most popular obscene books in France during the late 1790s, but puts forth criteria for evaluating them as a distinct genre.

Significantly, Claude does not house his collection in a stern retreat for scholarly reflection, but rather in a space that more closely resembles a boudoir than a library. Although Juliette states only that the books are found somewhere in Claude’s “manoir,” or home, the sexual aids—“des godmichés, des condoms, des martinets”—that accompany them attest to the primarily erotic function of both the room and the editions it houses (Œuvres 3.591). Although there was a tradition wherein members of the social elite hid obscene books in their personal libraries—for instance, Nicolas Fouquet, Louis XIV’s finance minister, locked away a copy of L’École des filles in the study of a private house where he met his mistress, while Montesquieu’s library contained the anti-Catholic Vénus dans le cloître ou la religieuse en chemise—, Sade deliberately situates Claude’s

\(^{(37)}\) “Qu’on ne m’attribue donc plus, d’après ces systèmes, le roman de J… : jamais je n’ai fait de tels ouvrages, et je n’en ferai sûrement jamais ; il n’y a que des imbéciles ou des méchants qui, malgré l’authenticité de mes dénégations, puissent me soupçonner ou m’accuser encore d’en être l’auteur, et le plus souverain mépris sera désormais la seule arme avec laquelle je combattrai leurs calomnies” (Ibid. 51).
texts in a more sensual, and, above all, accessible, location. While texts that remain hidden in the private libraries of aristocrats such as Fouquet and Montesquieu would obviously not circulate through society at large, Claude, like Rétif’s libertine companion Mollet, openly shares the contents of his library with others. In fact, Claude leaves his library open to his female guests, allowing a supposedly vulnerable readership to access the books that both Rousseau and Rétif found so dangerous. As Juliette begins her perusal in astonishment at the scope of Claude’s collection—“On n’a pas d’idée de ce que nous y trouvâmes d’estampes et de livres obscènes”—, one is left to wonder how she and Clairwil will respond.

Contrary to expectations, however, Juliette does not begin masturbating following her perusal of obscene books, nor do she and Clairwil immediately gather the participants for another orgy. Despite the inviting nature of the boudoir-like setting and widely held fears of female vulnerability to both sensual fiction and masturbation, the obscene books on Claude’s shelves leave both women cold, and Juliette instead follows the lead of countless other Sadean libertines by applying rational critique to eroticism. Ironically, the one time Juliette fails to become aroused is when she encounters the works of Sade’s predecessors. One by one, Juliette dismisses the contents of Claude’s collection, revealing herself to be as harsh and cruel a literary critic as she is a libertine. The first “obscene book” that she and Clairwil notice is the 1740 novel Histoire de Dom

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38 On Foquet’s copy of L’École des filles, see DeJean, The Reinvention of Obscenity, 78. Jeanette Geffriaud Rosso mentions Montesquieu’s possession of Vénus dans le cloître in Montesquieu et la féminité, 198-199.

39 For a discussion of female readers of erotic literature, see Rosario, The Erotic Imagination, 27.
Bougre, portier des chartreux that so enflamed Rétif. Juliette, however, calls Dom Bougre a “production plus polissonne que libertine, et qui, néanmoins, malgré la candeur et la bonne foi qui y règne, donna, dit-on, au lit de la mort, des repentirs à son auteur.” Juliette’s attack on the author for his dying regrets, probably a reference to the general theme of repentance that frames the novel (Saturnin, “Dom Bougre,” begins his narrative by thanking God for saving him from libertinage, and ends up taking refuge as a castrated syphilitic among the Carthusians), ties into her conclusion that the work is more licentious than libertine (Histoire de Dom Bougre 31-32, 234-36). A truly libertine work, the sort that would correspond to her tastes, would apparently not back away from its more daring pronouncements.

At times, Portier des chartreux does indeed touch upon themes that would prove dear to Sade, making Juliette’s rejection of the work seem surprising. The entire second half of the novel describes the sexual promiscuity that reigns within a monastery, situating the work within a long lineage of anti-clerical obscenity that Sade would later build upon in his own works. (The monks even maintain a secret harem, which they refer to as the “piscine,” that perhaps provides the model for the Sainte-Marie-des-Bois episode in Sade’s Justine saga.) As befits its title, Dom Bougre dedicates a significant amount of space to sodomy, particularly between men (167-170). There are even several lengthy philosophical defenses of male buggery, first when Father Casimir “en prit la

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40 In his introduction the Fayard compilation Œuvres anonymes du XVIIIe siècle I, Michel Camus calls the Histoire de Dom Bougre both the first French erotic novel and the first French philosophical novel (Œuvres anonymes du XVIIIe siècle, I, 12).

41 Œuvres 3.590. Robert Darnton (The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France 87) and Michel Delon (in his notes at the end of Juliette, Œuvres 3.1466) both believe Jean-Charles Gervaise de Latouche was the author of Dom Bougre, although Michel Camus expresses his doubts (Œuvres anonymes du XVIIIe siècle I 13).
défense comme un tendre père prend celle d’un enfant chéri,” which succeeds in convincing Saturnin to sodomize the young men of his monastery, and also when Saturnin himself defends the practice on the grounds of individual taste and preference (161-162, 170-171). Moreover, Sade’s libertine monk Claude quotes from *Dom Bougre* when he clarifies for Juliette the apparent contradiction between being both a clergyman and a libertine, thereby suggesting that Sade had a copy of *Dom Bougre* on hand while composing *Juliette*. 42 Indeed, Sade’s imitation of *Dom Bougre* extends even further, as *La Nouvelle Justine* copies a passage (and illustration) in which the young Saturnin, trying desperately to break a young girl’s hymen, ends up breaking the bed, causing it to crash to the floor with a loud bang.43 Sade himself had even requested the work by name (along with *Thérèse philosophe*) in a 1783 letter to his wife, in which he asks her to send him “Quelques romans un peu libres et un peu…, vous m’entendez bien. Ça, pour me faire venir de jolies pensées dans ma solitude, dans le goû du Portier des Chartreux ou de Thérèse Philosophe” (*Correspondances du marquis de Sade* 18.94). Sade’s reference to “pretty thoughts” in his solitude underscores the double-sided pleasures that obscene books have to offer: while on the one hand Sade obviously refers to masturbation, his usage of “pensées” suggests there is an intellectual component to his stimulation as well.

42 Claude’s citation reads as follows: “les passions, dit un homme d’esprit, prennent une nouvelle force sous le froc, on les porte dans le cœur, l’exemple les fait éclore, l’oisiveté les renouvelle, l’occasion les augmente : le moyen d’y résister!” (*Histoire de Juliette* 588; italics in original). The lines are identical in *Histoire du Dom Bougre*, with the exception of the exclamation point at the end, which appears as a question mark in the Fayard *Œuvres anonymes du XVIIIe siècle* edition (although punctuation normally poses a problem in eighteenth-century clandestine editions). To offer additional support for the notion that Sade wrote this scene with *Dom Bougre* close by, Juliette calls Claude a “pénailon,” a rare term that also appears in *Dom Bougre* shortly after the quoted passage (*Juliette, Œuvres* 3.588, *Dom Bougre* 158).

43 *Dom Bougre* 98; *La Nouvelle Justine, Œuvres* 2.996-1001. In Sade’s version, it is a wall that collapses, seriously injuring a young woman in the next room, whose wounded body is then sexually abused until she dies.
Despite his apparent taste for *Dom Bougre* as a reader, however, Sade has Juliette take a notably harsher approach when she assumes the role of literary critic.

This harshness seems to stem at least in part from the fact that it is the character Juliette—“putain par principe et par tempérament,” as la Durand notes with admiration (*Œuvres* 3.1119)—who is judging the works in question, and not the author himself. One of the central themes of *Juliette* is that women are capable of surpassing even the most depraved male libertines in terms of cruelty. For instance, when Cordelli asks Juliette if he should spare one of her favorite female companions, Juliette instead exclaims, “Ah! si j’ordonnais ces tourments, ils seraient plus affreux que ceux que tu prépares!” (3.1138), prompting Cordelli to offer the following praise for Sade’s heroine: “—Délicieuse créature!... voilà comme j’aime les femmes; elles sont plus féroces que les hommes, quand elles se livrent à la cruauté.” The remark leads to a prolonged discussion on female cruelty, which is naturally more advanced than that of males, since, as Juliette observes, “leurs organes sont plus déliés, leur sensibilité plus profonde, leurs nerfs bien plus irascibles: or, voilà le genre de constitution qui mène à la barbarie.” “Avec une imagination bien plus vive que la nôtre,” Cordelli adds, “une femme doit plus avidement embrasser les excès, et voilà pourquoi, dans le crime, elles vont toujours bien plus loin que nous.” Indeed, even Juliette admits her inability to comprehend the female imagination in all its depravity, as she later remarks following an orgy with a woman who “porta l’extravagance au point de désirer d’aller se faire foutre au milieu d’un hôpital de vérolés. Bien venu qui m’expliquera maintenant l’imagination des individus de mon sexe: pour moi, j’y renonce” (3.1220). Since the female imagination is livelier than that of the
male, it follows that a woman such as Juliette would not be so easily aroused by *Dom Bougre* as were male readers like Sade, Rétif, and the hapless Claude.

Juliette’s indifference continues regarding the next work she finds on Claude’s shelves, the seventeenth century *L’Académie des dames*, which she determines to be an “ouvrage dont le plan est bon, mais l’exécution mauvaise; fait par un homme timide, qui avait l’air de sentir la vérité, mais qui n’osait la dire, et d’ailleurs, plein de bavardage.”

A cursory glance at the work in questions shows Juliette’s comments to be remarkably pertinent. According to its “plan” (or outline), *L’Académie des dames* describes the sexual education that the more experienced Tullie bestows upon her younger cousin Octavie as the fifteen year-old girl’s marriage approaches. The plot, organized around a series of seven appropriately titled *entretiens académiques*, is indeed “plein de bavardage,” since all the two Italian women essentially do is talk, and talk about sex. In a format Sade would later use extensively in his own works, Tullie and Octavie move back and forth between tales of their past exploits and sexual encounters narrated in the present tense, with a few philosophical reflections spliced in between. Topics they cover include such Sadean staples as female-female eroticism, multi-partner orgies, flagellation, and sodomy, a structure that probably inspired Juliette’s approval of the “plan” itself. But, according to Juliette’s standards, the project is poorly executed: the orgies usually involve men taking turns with a woman, leaving at least one participant completely unengaged, and sodomy appears only once, in the midst of Tullie’s account of a marathon sexual encounter she had in a Roman brothel. All in all, the work is a far cry from the

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44 *Œuvres* 3.590-591. Originally published in Latin as *Aloisiae Sigaeae Toletanae/Satrya Sotadica...* in 1660, *L’Académie des dames* was updated and translated into French by its original author, Nicolas Chorier, and published under its better-known title in 1680. For a discussion of the differences between the Latin original and the French translation, see Margaret C. Jacob, “The Materialist World of Pornography.”
elaborate scenes that would enable Juliette to achieve orgasm in Sade’s texts, and thus earns her scorn.

According to Juliette, however, the author of *L’Académie des dames* nonetheless sensed some kind of “truth” that he dared not touch upon as a result of his timidity. A closer look at the text itself provides some clues as to what this “truth” that Juliette values so much might be. Describing her initial experience with sodomy in the Roman brothel, Tullie admits that she felt pleasure, but that she would never want to do it again, calling for God’s help to resist future temptation, and claiming that she would be angry should her husband Oronte want to sodomize her (558). This same fluctuation between physical pleasure and moral revulsion persists throughout the conversation on sodomy that follows. Tullie almost ends up confessing that she and her husband practice sodomy within their bourgeois marriage after Octavie asks her whether Oronte “a jamais usé sur ton derrière des mêmes droits” as the Florentines in the brothel (558), but the arrival of Tullie’s lover and his friend delays the confession indefinitely. During the ensuing orgy (565-570), the two men take turns teasing Octavie about sodomy, continually playing upon the reader’s expectations that they will penetrate her anally (although they never do). Once they finally leave, Octavie and Tullie return to their discussion, which features a historical account of sodomy, from its classical origins to its supposedly continued predominance in Italy and Spain, where, according to Tullie, anatomical reasons explain its popularity: as she asks her cousin, “Qui est-ce qui niera, Octavie, que nous autres, Italiennes et Espagnoles, ayons le con plus large que toutes les autres Européennes?” which in turn leads men to seek a smaller orifice (584-590). The crux of Tullie’s
analysis, however, comes when she openly links sodomy with *esprit*, before condemning the practice on moral grounds:

> Ceux qui se piquent d’esprit disent qu’il n’y a rien qu’on doive condamner dans ce plaisir; que le cul d’une femme n’est pas d’une autre nature que les autres parties de son corps; qu’il n’y a plus de mal à lui mettre le vit au derrière que de le faire branler entre les mains. Quoi qu’il en soit, la chose me paraît ridicule, si elle n’est pas vilaine en elle-même. (584)

The positive connotation of *esprit* and its suggestion of rationally based intelligence underscore the attractiveness of the pro-sodomy argument. From a rational, philosophical perspective, a woman’s anus is certainly of the same “nature” as any other party of her body, so the notion that sodomy should be somehow forbidden collapses.

The Florentine Fabrice had made a similar argument in the Roman brothel while attempting to convince Tullie to partake in anal intercourse: “À quoi bon tant de façons? dit Fabrice, vous qui avez tant d’esprit et qui l’avez cultivé par l’étude des belles-lettres, pourquoi faites-vous difficulté de nous accorder ce que les plus nobles et les plus galantes dames de Rome ne nous ont pas refusé?” (557). Fabrice wisely offers the behavior of noble and “gallant” Roman women (with a pun on the other meaning of “galante,” “amorous”) as an example, and Tullie’s eventual acquiescence shows that, to the cultivated, well-read mind, there can be no rational objection to sodomy.

Tullie later elaborates upon the philosophical argument that sodomy, like any other form of non-reproductive sex, in fact constitutes a natural practice, since nature does not intend that all semen be used for reproduction in any case, with the principal example being that husbands can still exercise their “droit” over their wife’s body when she is pregnant (586-587). The word “droit” refers back to Octavie’s question earlier regarding whether or not Oronte exercised his “droit” over his wife’s behind,
underscoring the dilemma married women might face should their husbands wish to sodomize them: while sodomy is an officially condemned practice—a capital offense in France, as Tullie observes (590)—married women were nonetheless expected to submit themselves entirely to their husband’s whims. (In fact, Tullie specifically instructs Octavie to obey her husband regardless of his demands, particularly in relation to sexual matters [476].)

The truth hinted at in L’Académie des dames is therefore that the (potentially contradictory) Church doctrine against sodomy should be disobeyed in the pursuit of sexual pleasure. For men and women of esprit, such a conclusion seems obvious. The problem, however, is that the text moves in the direction of such an argument only to back away from it. Tullie’s reference to “Ceux qui se piquent d’esprit” suggests her overall contempt for pompous intellectual sodomites, and although she cannot respond to the pro-sodomy position on an intellectual level, Tullie nonetheless maintains the status quo by dismissing sodomy as either “wicked” or “ridiculous.” Her ambivalence toward sodomy reflects an overall tendency in the text to simultaneously praise and reject officially condemned sexual practices. For example, on the one hand, L’Académie des dames defends adultery on the grounds that a wife will eventually tire of her husband (431-433); on the other, however, it argues that sex is, after all, best between husband and wife (419). Similarly, while non-reproductive sex between females is defended both on the grounds of pleasure and philosophy (418), sodomy, in so much as it receives favorable treatment, is only permitted as a prelude to vaginal intercourse (585). In fact, Tullie time and time again voices her support for the Catholic stance on sodomy, rejecting both philosophy and sexual pleasure in favor of religion. “Je ferais mal de
l’approuver,” she states; “quand la terre ne dirait rien, la voix fulminante du ciel la condamne” (592). In the end, the voice of heaven is enough to convince her that sodomy and its voluntary waste of semen is a crime: “C’est un adultère, c’est un homicide, et il étrangle (pour ainsi dire) par cette sale volupté un enfant qui n’est pas encore né” (592).

With her religious convictions solidified, Tullie then moves on to argue that, despite philosophical arguments to the contrary, sodomy is in fact against nature:

Si le derrière avait été destiné à cet usage, il aurait été plus commodément formé, le membre de l’homme y aurait pu entrer et sortir sans tant de travail et de danger; ce que nous ne voyons pas, puisque des jeunes filles, qui sont facilement dépucelées, ne peuvent supporter les attaques du derrière sans ressentir de cuisantes douleurs, qui sont souvent suivies de maladies que toute l’industrie de l’Europe ne peut guérir. (592-593)

Nature, the text shows, can thus be cited to support either side of the sodomy debate. For empirical evidence to support Tullie’s claims, one need only return to her prior account of her own experience with sodomy, where she describes how one of the men was a particularly “mauvais hôte,” and how the “rudesse” and “violence” of his withdrawal was such “que je ne pus retenir mes cris” (557-558). *L’Académie des dames* thus hints at the truth not only through the suggestion that cultivated *esprits* should reject religion and partake in sodomy, but through the linkage between sodomy and the most heinous of crimes, such as homicide. Even such apparently negative conclusions about sodomy, however, constitute positive attributes for libertines like Juliette, who go against Catholicism to celebrate the destructive, homicidal nature of anal intercourse. In *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, for instance, Dolmancé argues that nature in fact commands that people practice sodomy (“Jamais la nature, […] si tu scrutes avec soin ses lois, n’indiqua d’autres autels à notre hommage que le trou du derrière; elle permet le reste, mais elle ordonne celui-ci”), and cites anatomical configuration to support his claim, in
direct refutation of Tullie’s comments on the discordant shapes of the penis and the anus:

“si son intention n’était pas que nous foutines des culs, aurait-elle aussi justement
proportionné leur orifice à nos membres? Cet orifice n’est-il pas rond comme eux? Quel
être assez ennemi du bon sens peut imaginer qu’un trou ovale puisse avoir été créé par la
nature pour des membres ronds!” (Œuvres 3.80). In examining human anatomy and
sensing the criminal essence of sodomy, Tullie moves toward the sort of philosophical
treatment of sex that Sade sketches out in his oeuvre, but erra by drawing what in the
view of his libertine characters are the wrong conclusions.

The false promise of criminal activity in fact determines Juliette’s judgment of the
next work she discusses, Mirabeau’s 1788 Le Rideau levé ou l’éducation de Laure.
Although Juliette condemns en masse the obscene works of “Mirabeau, qui voulut être
libertin, pour être quelque chose, et qui n’est et ne sera pourtant rien toute sa vie” shortly
after critiquing L’Éducation de Laure, the mutual animosity between Sade and Mirabeau
apparently did not cloud the critical evaluation, as Sade seems not to have known the
identity of the anonymous text’s author.\(^45\) In fact, of all the works on Claude’s shelves,
L’Éducation de Laure bears the closest resemblance to those of Sade (most likely as a
result of their chronological proximity). The orgies it describes approach Sade in their
degree of accumulation, building up from the standard male/female/female threesome
and the two-couple foursome to a typically Sadean “gang-bang” involving five men and

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\(^45\) Such at least is the opinion of Michel Delon; see his notes to Juliette (Œuvres 3.1466). If Sade had
known Mirabeau to be the author of L’Éducation de Laure, he probably would have mentioned it here. In
1780, Sade verbally attacked his distant cousin, apparently without provocation, while they were both
imprisoned at Vincennes. See Maurice Lever, Donatien Alphonse François, marquis de Sade, 341-342 and
720-721. In Juliette, an author’s note at the bottom of the page continues the heroine’s commentary, going
even further its personal attack on the late Mirabeau to show how Sade’s hatred remained fresh almost a
decade after his rival’s death: “Pas même député assurément ; une des meilleures preuves du délire et
de la déraison qui caractérisèrent, en France, l’année 1789, est l’enthousiasme ridicule qu’il inspira ce vil
espion de la monarchie. Quelle idée reste-t-il aujourd’hui de cet homme immoral et de fort peu d’esprit ?
celle d’un fourbe, d’un traiître et d’un ignorant” (Œuvres 3.591).
one woman; also described in the text’s orgies are sodomy, including that of the male-male variety, and double penetration. Moreover, *L’Éducation de Laure* features philosophical discourses on everything from science to religion to history, and even mentions Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* and Voltaire’s *Zadig* by name. Even the names of the characters would appear again in Sade: Laure writes her letter to Eugénie, whose name would reappear as the title character in Sade’s tale *Eugénie de Franval* and the heroine of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, while one of the female characters involved in the orgies is a maid named Justine. Most importantly, however, *L’Éducation de Laure* evokes the beloved Sadean theme of sexual cruelty in its preface, where Laure warns Eugénie of men who take pleasure in harming women:

> Dans les plaisirs qu’ils prennent avec nous, il en est peu qui pensent à nous les faire partager. Il y en a même qui cherchent à s’en procurer en nous tourmentant et en nous faisant éprouver des traitements douloureux. A quelles bizarreries leur extravagance ne les porte-t-elle pas? Leur imagination ardente, fougueuse et remplie d’écarts s’éteint avec la même facilité qu’elle s’allume; leurs désirs licencieux, sans frein, inconstants et perfides errent d’un objet vers l’autre. (Mirabeau, *Œuvres érotiques* 314)

Laure’s words could just as easily have come from Sade’s Justine, describing the torments she experienced at the hands of any number of libertines. With such a beginning, readers such as Juliette (and Sade) would be right to expect that some description of these painful treatments and bizarre extravagancies would follow.

However, *L’Éducation de Laure* never fulfills its initial promise, prompting Juliette to call the work another “production manquée net, par de fausses considérations.”

Outlining the precise reason for her dislike, Juliette goes on to lament that if the author eût prononcé l’uxoricide, qu’il laisse soupçonner, et l’inceste, autour duquel il tourne sans cesse, en ne l’avouant jamais; s’il eût multiplié davantage les scènes luxurieuses…mis en action les goûts cruels dont il ne fait que donner l’idée dans sa préface, l’ouvrage, plein d’imagination,
devenait délicieux: mais les trembleurs me désespèrent, et j’aimerais cent fois mieux qu’ils n’écrivent rien que de nous donner des moitiés d’idées. (591)

As with the “cruel tastes” hinted at in the preface, *L’Éducation de Laure* builds upon the reader’s expectations that incest will play a central role in the narrative, as the young Laure describes the attentions bestowed upon her by her affectionate father, which only increase following her mother’s mysterious death. Later, however, it is revealed that the man is not in fact Laure’s biological father, thereby removing the titillating specter of incest from the text entirely. Juliette’s acknowledgement of the “imagination” inherent in the work attests to its potential to become “delicious”; however, like *Dom Bougre*, which concludes on a pious note, and *L’Académie des dames*, which similarly retreats into Catholic orthodoxy, *L’Éducation de Laure* steers clear of the cruelty that Juliette would have found so appealing, presenting only “half ideas” of incest, uxoricide, and sexual cruelty, without pursuing them further. In essence, Mirabeau’s misleading preface probably aimed to attract would-be buyers who would peruse the first few pages of *L’Éducation de Laure* in a bookshop, making Juliette’s reaction one of understandable disappointment, brought on by the text’s false advertising.

Of the obscene books Juliette mentions, only *Thérèse philosophe* therefore merits qualified praise as “le seul qui ait montré le but, sans néanmoins l’atteindre tout à fait; l’unique qui ait agréablement lié la luxure à l’impiété, et qui, bientôt rendu au public, tel que l’auteur l’avait primitivement conçu, donnera enfin l’idée d’un livre immoral.” For a criminal such as Juliette, it is not enough for obscene books to present explicit descriptions of sexual acts, combined with philosophical discussions on various topics.

46 *Œuvres* 3.591. Following popular custom, Sade attributes *Thérèse philosophe* to the Marquis d’Argens, but the identity of the work’s author in fact remains doubtful. For a summary of the debate surrounding the authorship of *Thérèse philosophe*, see Michel Delon’s notes to the Pléiade edition (3.1467).
Such books must also be immoral, and go against the very moral foundations of eighteenth-century French society. By combining the cardinal sin of lust with outright impiety, Thérèse philosophe thus points toward this ultimate goal of immoral, obscene literature, a goal that is simultaneously erotic and philosophical. Among the books in Claude’s library, Thérèse philosophe is by far the most philosophical, in both a traditional and erotic sense. The text features metaphysical reflections lifted from the clandestinely published, anti-Catholic Examen de la religion dont on cherche l’éclaircissement de bonne foi (1745), which the male protagonist, abbé T., preaches to his mistress Mme C. after making her climax, thereby combining “lust with impiety” in a manner that Sade’s materialist libertines would later repeat incessantly. True, earlier works might have toyed with religious doctrine, as was the case in L’Académie des dames, or relentlessly mocked lustful clergymen, as did Dom Bougre. But Octavie and Tullie wisely refrained from contradicting the Church, while Dom Bougre concludes with a repentant, castrated Saturnin taking refuge with the chaste Carthusians. Thérèse philosophe instead goes beyond the light mockery of most anti-clerical erotic texts to reject both Catholicism and religion. Like the plagiarized passages from d’Holbach that appear in Sade’s novels, the inclusion of Examen de la religion in Thérèse philosophe attests to the manner in which obscene books became involved in the dissemination of radical Enlightenment philosophy, and therefore participates in what Robert Darnton has deemed a more widespread “process of gradual, downward diffusion of knowledge” (“The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature,” 14). It is this combination of arousing “luxure” and subversive “impiété” that makes the text so appealing to Juliette, as immoral books have the potential to corrupt generations of readers. Thus, when Clairwil states
that she would like to find a crime with perpetually continuing effects, “en sorte qu’il n’y eût pas un seul instant de ma vie, ou même en dormant, où je ne fusse cause d’un désordre quelconque, et que ce désordre pût s’étendre au point qu’il entraînât une corruption générale, ou un dérangement si formel, qu’au-delà même de ma vie l’effet s’en prolongeât encore,” Juliette suggests writing as one aspect of a tripartite strategy (“le meurtre moral, auquel on parvient par conseil, par écrit ou par action”) wherein a single libertine could eventually corrupt millions of people over time (3.650-651). The pleasurable (and best-selling) format of erotic fiction provides an ideal venue for spreading immorality through the strategic placement of dangerous philosophical ideas.

Above all, it is the particular brand of eroticism present in Thérèse philosophe that deliberately contradicts Catholic orthodoxy. At its core, the novel makes an argument in favor of non-reproductive sex, and, in particular, the masturbation that theologians had condemned since the Middle Ages.47 Mme C., Thérèse’s female mentor, almost died in childbirth, and makes a vow never to be pregnant again (82). She therefore permanently renounces copulation, and attains her pleasure through mutual masturbation with her lover, the abbé T. The latter, in turn, recommends masturbation to both Thérèse and Mme C., and even provides a philosophical defense of “les plaisirs de la petite oie,” as masturbation is called in the text (96-98). In a conversation with Mme C., the priest also preaches the virtues of dildos and, in his own self-interest, religiously forbidden coitus interruptus (93-95). By the end of the novel, Thérèse herself will reveal how adept a pupil she has been, contenting herself with masturbation, first of the solitary sort and then of the mutual variety with her lover, before eventually discovering complete satisfaction

47 For a brief history of Catholic views on masturbation, see Rosario, The Erotic Imagination, 15-18.
through coitus interruptus. Both masturbation and coitus interruptus, the two possible sins associated with the character of Onan in *Genesis*, are therefore transformed into virtues in *Thérèse philosophe*.

But religion is not all that *Thérèse philosophe* contradicts in preaching masturbation and coitus interruptus. Throughout the eighteenth century, the fear of depopulation led doctors and philosophers to condemn such non-reproductive sexual practices on social, rather than moral, grounds. While Swiss physician Samuel Auguste Tissot published the influential *L’Onanisme, Dissertation sur les maladies produites par la masturbation* in 1760, Rousseau and Robespierre were among the many secular voices who spoke out against unnatural “celibacy in marriage.” In telling Thérèse that masturbation is both natural and harmless (so long as it is practiced in moderation) and recommending coitus interruptus, the philosophical abbé ends up going against the majority philosophical opinion of his time. The distance between *Thérèse philosophe*

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48 Thérèse describes the benefits of her new method of contraception as follows: “Cependant, j’avais saisi le trait, je le serrais légèrement dans ma main qui lui servait d’étui, et dans laquelle il acheva de parcourir l’espace qui le rapprochait de la volupté. Nous recommencâmes, et nos plaisirs se sont renouvelés depuis dix ans dans la même forme, sans trouble, sans enfants, sans inquiétude” (186).

49 Vernon Rosario situates scientific studies against masturbation as “part of a common trend in the Enlightenment: the secularization and medicalization of morality. Improper acts were analyzed as violations of familial and social rules, and physiological and natural ‘laws’ rather than ecclesiastical doctrines” (*The Erotic Imagination* 19).


51 For example, in his entry on “manstupration ou manustupruation” in the *Encyclopédie*, Dr. Ménuret de Chambaud (who acknowledges his debt to Tissot) concedes that moderate masturbation poses no medical harm, but essentially views masturbation “comme cause d’une infinité de maladies très - graves, le plus souvent mortelles,” precisely because “il est rare qu’on ne tombe pas dans l’excès. La passion emporte: plus on s’y livre, & plus on y est porté; & en y succombant, on ne fait que l’irriter” (10.51). L’abbé, on the contrary, tells Thérèse, “ce sont des besoins de tempérament aussi naturels que ceux de la faim et de la soif. Il ne faut ni les rechercher ni les exciter, mais dès que vous vous en sentirez vivement pressée, il n’y a nul
and other popular obscene books such as *L’Académie des dames*, where internal ejaculation is required in order to provoke a female orgasm, is enormous (*L’Académie des dames* 426, 446). What is perhaps more astonishing is that *Thérèse philosophe* ends up making the same connection between obscene books and immoral sexual behavior as Tissot, Rousseau, and Rétif by illustrating the power of obscene books to arouse, particularly when in the hands of female readers. Despite her vow to refrain from intercourse, Mme C. finds herself so enflamed after reading *Dom Bougre* that she begs the abbé to “put it in her,” regardless of the risks:

> Baise-moi comme il faut, mon cher ami, disait Mme C… en se laissant tomber sur son lit de repos. La lecture de ton vilain *Portier des Chartreux* m’a mise toute en feu: ses portraits sont frappés, ils ont un air de vérité qui charme. S’il était moins ordurier, ce serait un livre inimitable dans son genre. Mets-le-moi aujourd’hui, l’abbé, je t’en conjure, ajoute-t-elle, j’en meurs d’envie, et je consens d’en risquer l’événement. (102)

Unlike Juliette, Mme C. objects to the filthy (“ordurier”) components of *Dom Bougre*; she also becomes aroused by her reading, to the point where her previous resolutions are summarily tossed out the door, as was Rétif’s fidelity when he read the text as a youth. Out of concern for the reputation of his friend, however, the abbé refuses her requests (tellingly, he also admits that he does not feel physically up to the task: “monsieur le docteur n’est pas aujourd’hui, comme vous voyez, dans son brillant, je ne suis pas Gascon, et…”), and instead masturbates her, satisfying her through the safe yet widely condemned “plaisirs de la petite oie.” Similarly, it is her lover’s collection of erotic books and paintings that causes Thérèse to masturbate and eventually surrender her
virginity through coitus interruptus. As opposed to mainstream Enlightenment moralists, however, Thérèse philosophe presents the stimulating effects of obscene books and the wasteful expenditure of non-reproductive sex in a positive light, pointing the way toward a goal that Sade would strive to attain in works such as Juliette. Indeed, as Juliette suggests in concluding her brief foray into literary criticism, the novel that eventually unites “luxure” and “impiété,” the “livre immoral” that would be “bientôt rendu au public,” is none other than the Histoire de Juliette itself.

Sade, Reader of Sade: Hand-jobs and Footnotes

Fittingly, Juliette next directs our attention to the obscene books of Sade himself, when, after discussing the works of his predecessors, Juliette goes on to praise the merits of the oeuvre in which she appears. Just as Idée sur les romans concludes with a defense of Aline et Valcour, here Juliette suggests how Sade’s work surpasses all others in the genre. First, however, she hastily dismisses the remaining tomes on Claude’s shelves (whose she does not even bother to mention) as “misérables petites brochures, faites dans des cafés, ou dans des bordels, et qui prouvent à la fois deux vides dans leurs mesquins auteurs, celui de l’esprit et celui de l’estomac.” With an elitist tone, Juliette attacks the many erotic pamphlets that flooded the streets of Paris during the 1790s, because, in her

52 In a section appropriately entitled “Effets de la peinture et de la lecture,” Thérèse lists the works she finds in her lover’s “bibliothèque galante”: “Je dévorai des yeux ou, pour mieux dire, je parcours tour à tour pendant les quatre premiers jours l’histoire du Portier des Chartreux, celle de La Tourière des Carmélites, L’Académie des Dames, Les Lauriers ecclésiastiques, Thémidore, Frétillon, etc., et nombre d’autres de cette espèce, que je ne quittai que pour examiner avec avidité des tableaux où les postures les plus lascives étaient rendues avec un coloris et une expression qui portaient un feu brûlant dans mes veines” (182). Thérèse had made a bet with her lover that she would be able to spend fifteen days amidst the books and paintings without masturbating: if she resists, she would be able to keep the collection in her room for a year; should she succumb, her lover can take her virginity. Not only is Thérèse unable to contain herself after five days, but she openly calls for the count to take her, “placing her finger” not to masturbate but in order to signify his victory (185).
view, they are not really “books,” high-quality editions destined for a privileged clientele, but miserable little brochures, printed in brothels and cafés rather than in real print-shops (obscene books, it seems, may very well end up in brothels, but should not be made in them). According to Juliette, these pamphlets lack both sophistication and intrepidness. Displaying an aristocratic haughtiness that suggests the views of author and character coincide, Juliette ridicules the stingy writers who produce erotic literature for the sole purpose of making money. Lamenting the abandonment of philosophy that took place in French erotic fiction at the end of the eighteenth century, Juliette also bemoans the absence of esprit evident in such texts, while, at the same time, criticizing their authors for lacking the stomach to combine sex, philosophy, and crime as Sade does in his works.

Such emptiness of esprit and of stomach is only to be expected, Juliette suggests, given the lowly origins of the pamphleteers. In turn, Juliette then hints as to why her own story succeeds in arriving at the “goal” laid out in Thérèse philosophe or the “truth” sensed in L’Académie des dames, where others could not. In her tirade against erotic brochures and pamphlets, Juliette reasons that

\[\text{la luxure, fille de l’opulence et de la supériorité, ne peut être traitée que par des gens d’une certaine trempe… que par des individus enfin, qui, caressés d’abord par la nature, le soient assez bien ensuite par la fortune, pour avoir eux-mêmes essayé de ce que nous trace leur pinceau luxurieux [...]. (Œuvres 3.591)}\]

53 Many of the pamphlets published during the Revolution depicted political figures in sexually compromising positions; see Lynn Hunt, “The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution,” and “Pornography and the French Revolution.” Juliette is also attacking the works of contemporary authors such as Mirabeau, Nerciat, and Rétif, as is evident in her subsequent inclusion of Mirabeau among the “polissons qui nous inondent des méprisables brochures dont je parle, parmi lesquelles je n’accepte pas même celles de Mirabeau […].” Sade also used the verb “inonder” to attack Rétif in Idée sur les romans: “R… inonde le public ; il lui faut une presse au chevet de son lit” (Les Crimes de l’amour 41). Regarding the presence of obscene books in brothels, Rétif describes how he perused Dom Bougre while awaiting service at the establishment of La Massé (Monsieur Nicolas 1.930-931).
Lust, that all-important accompaniment to impiety, requires aristocratic opulence and superiority. Only aristocrats are capable of producing good erotic literature, since only they could possess both the natural inclination and the material wealth necessary for the boundless pursuit of sexual pleasure that Sade describes in his works. Whereas Sade himself would steadfastly deny ever having written such works as *Justine* and *L’Histoire de Juliette*, here in the text itself the author makes a rare reference to his libertine past, implicitly arguing that his works excel within the genre as a result of his lived experience.

Although the visit to Claude’s library concludes immediately after Juliette’s introduction of literary criticism into the boudoir, Sade’s critical attention to his own oeuvre continues throughout the remainder of *Juliette*. In the footnotes that accompany the main text, Sade leaves traces of his own reading of *Juliette*, and establishes himself as the work’s first reader. Significantly, Sade’s reading of his fantastic novel often leads him to distance himself from the text in order to reflect upon his lived sexual experiences. For example, when Juliette describes how Claude’s enormous member (“neuf pouces six lignes de tour, sur treize pouces de long, tête franche”) responds to her gifted touch, the author/reader adds a footnote meditating enthusiastically on the joys of masturbating a man (585). On a similar note, the “deux fouteurs et deux fouetteuses” who follow Cornaro while he peruses a room of erotic paintings (and a harem of toddler girls) prompt Sade to reflect on the intertwining pleasures of being penetrated anally and being whipped (1200). In both instances, Sade breaks with traditional attitudes toward sexuality, following *Thérèse Philosophe* in its celebration of wasteful, non-reproductive sex. Sade can of course discuss such unorthodox practices as masturbating another man, receiving a whipping, and being sodomized because, during his wild years as a young
aristocrat, he was able to take advantage of the favors accorded to him by “nature and fortune” (to repeat his own terms) and accumulate firsthand experience in sexual matters (as in the Marseilles affair, for instance, where Sade partook in all three activities).

The footnotes in *Juliette*, as Philippe Roger has argued, tend to focus entirely on such libertine behavior, suggesting an attempt to constitute libertinage as a “discipline” in its own right. Commenting upon the differences between the content of the footnotes to *Aline et Valcour* and those of *Juliette*, Roger observes that in *Juliette* “le plus fort contingent est fourni par celles qui se rapportent explicitement et exclusivement à des « sujets de libertinage »” (*La Philosophie dans le pressoir* 75). In order to explain this phenomenon, Roger hypothesizes that “une tentative est lisible dans *les Prospérités du vice*, qui vise à constituer le libertinage comme « matière », comme « discipline », comme, dirait-on, une science humaine dont le statut bien particulier nous est suggéré par le caractère propre aux notes qui en traitent” (75). In returning to his own experience, Sade strives to construct his own discursive system based upon eroticism and philosophy. Libertinage, according to Sade, is above all an interactive discipline: through the notes, the author often addresses his readers in order to simultaneously inform them and incite them to copy his example (as Roger writes, the notes “qui portent sur le libertinage sont, indissociablement, informatives et incitatives” [75]). Surprising though it may seem, for all its supernaturally endowed males and fantastically resilient victims, the novel does in fact offer advice on real-life sexual practices in the footnotes. For example, one note refers to an orgy in which Clairwil receives two members in her vagina, addressing women in order to inform them of the voluptuousness (“si chatouilleuse, si rempilie de sel”) to be gained from imitating the libertine, a feeling that can be increased if a third
man penetrates them anally at the same time (Œuvres 3.620). Since (as a male) Sade could obviously not have gained firsthand experience of this posture, he provides a somewhat humorous parenthetical reference that attests to the real-world accuracy of such information: “(Note communiquée par une femme de trente ans, qui l’a essayé plus de cent fois dans sa vie)” (3.620). Later in the novel, another footnote follows up Juliette’s expertly administered masturbation of Honorine to instruct readers on the correct manner to masturbate a woman, which involves “making pleasure penetrate through all pores” (Œuvres 3.808). In each instance, a descriptive passage from the text is followed by an explanatory note, which in turn provides a transition between the fantasy of the novel and real-life sexual practices. Although one may be tempted (as was Roger) to dismiss the humorous footnotes as mere parody, Sade’s relentless return to lived experience suggests that something more may perhaps be in play here. After all, it is not as if his footnotes urge the reader to engage in criminal behavior that he himself only imagined. On the contrary, each time Sade incites his reader to action, it is toward a realistically feasible and potentially pleasurable practice that he points. Thus, for instance, after inspiring Sade’s reflections on being whipped and sodomized, Cornaro proceeds to sodomize and slowly decapitate four children while their pregnant mother hangs upside down, without eliciting any commentary from the author.

Sade’s instructive and incitatory messages to his audience in the footnotes of Juliette bring up the question of who he envisioned the reader of his novel to be. Indeed, Sade’s text at times seems to favor a specific type of ideal reader. For instance, at one
point in particular, shortly after the library visit, Juliette and Clairwil participate in an orgy in which they are penetrated in every manner imaginable by a group of 64 monks and 10 novices. In a note at the bottom of the page, Sade provides the exact number of times both women “avaient été foutues jusque-là” (not counting in the mouth, which, Sade claims, “ne produit pas une sensation assez marquée”): Clairwil a total of 185 times and Juliette 192, “cela tant en con qu’en cul.” He then goes on to explain the rationale behind such precise accounting:

Nous avons cru devoir établir cette addition, pour en éviter la peine aux femmes, qui sans cela, n’auraient pas manqué de s’interrompre ici pour la faire. Remerciez-nous donc, mesdames, et imitez nos héroïnes, c’est tout ce que nous vous demandons; car votre instruction, vos sensations et votre bonheur, sont en vérité le seul but de nos fatigants travaux; et si vous nous avez maudits dans Justine, nous espérons que vous nous bénirez dans Juliette. (Œuvres 3.618)

In singling out his female readers for their attention to the number of couplings, Sade plays upon stereotypical notions of insatiable female desire. While the undeniable humor of Sade’s playful apostrophe represents another means through which the author distances himself from his text in the footnotes, thereby establishing a sense of complicity with his audience, one should perhaps not dismiss his reference to the “goal” of Juliette as mere comedy. Instead, he outlines a plan for the reception of his novel, through which his instructions, when properly imitated, will lead to heightened physical sensation and, in the end, happiness. What is especially intriguing about Juliette is that he envisions a specifically female audience for the work, when, by and large, most consumers of eighteenth-century obscene books were male. In fact, however, Sade’s reference to a female readership recalls the portrait of the ideal reader that he had already sketched in describing Juliette amidst the obscene books on Claude’s shelves. The ideal reader of
Juliette should be just as calculating and rigorous as Juliette herself in her determination to understand the exact numerical details of each orgy, and should accept nothing less than the best quality in masturbatory aids, which is perhaps why neither Juliette nor Clairwil become aroused at the obscene books in the library. By instructing his readers to imitate his heroines, Sade is therefore offering not only a model for sexual behavior, but for reading as well.

One way that female libertine readers might respond to Juliette appears at the conclusion of the visit to Claude’s library, where one encounters “la mort tragique de Claude” himself. Fittingly, Claude, whose language and sodomite tendencies have already linked him with Dom Bougre, ends up castrated just like his predecessor. On the one hand, Claude’s castration merely builds upon the suggestion that lustful clergymen be castrated to protect vulnerable women, a convention common to such anti-catholic works as Histoire de Dom Bougre and others. But whereas the repentant Saturnin sought a chaste retirement within a monastery, Claude serves a much more useful function. Claude’s death exemplifies the way in which Sade’s “truly immoral” work successfully combines lust and impiety, at once continuing and breaking with the tradition of earlier obscene books. As Juliette narrates,

nous entourâmes cet infortuné de plaisir, et quand son vit fut dans la plus grande érection, ma scélérate amie, le faisant aussitôt captiver par cinq femmes, lui fit trancher la verge au niveau du ventre, et l’ayant fait préparer par un chirurgien, elle s’en composa le plus singulier et le plus beau godmiché qu’on ait vu de la vie. Claude expira dans d’affreux tourments, dont Clairwil nourrit sa lubrique rage, pendant que trois femmes et moi, la branlions à deux pieds de la victime, et parfaitement en face d’elle. (Œuvres 3.592-594)

The libertine reader, Sade suggests, might follow Clairwil in masturbating before the description (and illustration) of the monk’s death, an episode that finally provides the “cruel tastes” Juliette could not find elsewhere. Similar to the way Thérèse Philosophe shows female readers masturbating over erotic literature, Claude’s severed penis will be used as a dildo, further cementing the frightening bond between obscene literature and (female) masturbation that so plagued philosophers and moralists alike. Once again, the act ties into notions of male exhaustion before the voracious female sexual appetite, as Clairwil will preserve Claude’s penis in a state of permanent erection impossible to achieve while its owner was living. Contemporary issues are also referenced indirectly: at the heart of the philosophical discussion condemning masturbation and coitus interruptus was a persistent attack on clerical celibacy and its decimating effects on the nation’s population, which often compared voluntary religious celibacy to castration (Blum 11-60). Here, Sade plays upon this linkage by arguing that, since monks were essentially castrating themselves anyway, one might as well make use of their virility, as does Clairwil. Clairwil’s dildo provides a humorous response to pre-Revolutionary fears about population decline, indicating yet another instance when Sade presents wasteful sexual practices in a positive light. Libertinism, the philosophical system that Sade develops throughout his obscene oeuvre, revolves around this haughty mockery of both religion and Enlightenment philosophy in the midst of an illustration of the pleasures of destructive hedonism.

56 The illustration depicts a knife-wielding woman triumphantly holding up Claude’s genitalia in the center of the room, before the eyes of Clairwil, who sits in one corner amidst the caressing hands of her female companions while the hapless Claude expires in another.
Time and time again, the question of readership surfaces throughout Sade’s oeuvre, indicating its overall importance to the author. Before Juliette, Sade famously dedicated La Philosophie dans le boudoir “Aux Libertins,” thereby isolating a specific group of readers from among the general public: “Voluptueux de tous les âges et de tous les sexes, c’est à vous seuls que j’offre cet ouvrage” (Œuvres 3.3). He then goes on to differentiate between the various “sexes” that might compose his readership, advising them to imitate the character who most closely corresponds to their situation: “Femmes lubriques, que la voluptueuse Saint-Ange soit votre modèle […] Jeunes filles […] imitez l’ardente Eugénie […] Et vous, aimables débauchés […] que le cynique Dolmancé vous serve d’exemple […]” (3). As he does in Juliette when he informs his female readers that he wrote the novel exclusively for them and instructs them to imitate his heroines, here Sade makes the explicit identification between reader and character. Just as each individual in the boudoir achieves satisfaction according to his or her particular idiosyncrasies, readers can choose between several models. However, in addition to their libertine tastes, the proposed examples of Madame Saint-Ange, Eugénie, and Dolmancé share aristocratic origins and a correspondent level of education. Significantly, Sade does not address servants and tell them to imitate the absolute obedience of Augustin: the lower classes are excluded from the audience of La Philosophie dans le boudoir, much as Augustin is removed from the boudoir prior to the reading of “Français encore un effort si vous voulez être républicains.” Indeed, just as the philosophies that Dolmancé preaches in the boudoir are addressed to a like-minded group of privileged libertines, the fictional audience of the first-person Histoire de Juliette consists of the heroine’s wealthy and depraved companions, while the audience of the earlier Justine ou les malheurs de la
vertu is Juliette herself. In other words, Sade intends for the readers of his obscene works to be united not only by temperament, but by social status as well.

Thus, when Justine, Eulalie, and la Dubois enter the “cabinet des plaisirs” of the bishop of Grenoble in *La Nouvelle Justine*, they find the libertine “presque nu” and “sur un canapé,” where “Il lisait […] *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*” (*Œuvres* 2.1058). With the sort of complete detachment a true libertine is supposed to exhibit, the bishop coldly examines the derrières of his two victims: “Justine et Eulalie, poussées par la Dubois, furent alors obligées d’aller présenter leurs derrières à l’abbé, qui, toujours le livre à la main, les palpe, les examine de sang-froid, en disant avec négligence… « Oui, cela n’est pas trop mal… cela vaut la peine d’être vexé »” (2.1058). Wealthy, powerful, and thoroughly corrupt, the bishop exemplifies the sort of reader addressed in Sade’s dedication to *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*. Like Madame de Saint-Ange, he has a private room dedicated entirely to sexual pleasures; like Dolmancé, he maintains a thoroughly jaded demeanor, and does not hesitate to include murder among his passions, as he eventually decapitates Eulalie while sodomizing her, shortly after putting down Sade’s instruction manual.57 (One might also add that, like Sade himself, the bishop is rather fat). This reference to the bishop’s reading material forms yet another part of a long-running inside joke between the author and his knowledgeable readers, who would likely chuckle even more when glancing at the bottom of the page, where a footnote accompanying the mention of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* provides a shameless advertisement for Sade’s earlier text: “Il nous a paru que cet ouvrage, de la même main que celui-ci, devait à ce titre, et peut-être même à beaucoup d’autres, prétendre à l’estime

57 Dolmancé suggests that he, too, has murdered for pleasure in *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (*Œuvres* 3.54-55).
des curieux” (2.1058). Such comical asides allow Sade to let his ideal readers know that he does not take himself completely seriously.

Fittingly, the self-referential nature of Sade’s oeuvre, hinted at through Juliette’s suggestion of aristocratic superiority and through his footnotes’ references to personal experience, appears most clearly in the Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome manuscript, a private text that remained unpublished during Sade’s lifetime. Although Sodome does not feature the lengthy materialist discourses that would dominate his later works, Sade’s method in presenting such a wide variety of “passions” is nonetheless philosophical: “Si nous n’avions pas tout dit, tout analysé, comment voudrais-tu que nous eussions pu deviner ce qui de convient?” he asks his imagined, ideal reader (Œuvres 1.69). While commentators have seized upon the importance of “tout dire” in Sade’s oeuvre, the act of analyzing everything is just as important. As Sade states in the work’s introduction, one of the reasons for treating such material is to show his “ami lecteur” that even the most shocking and repulsive behavior can be sexually stimulating: “Sans doute, beaucoup de tous les écarts que tu vas voir peints te déplairont, on le sait, mais il s’en trouvera quelques-uns qui t’échaufferont au point de te coûter du foutre, et voilà tout ce qu’il nous faut” (69). The reader of Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome should be an active participant who uses the text as a masturbatory aid, since the author’s comprehensive approach will assure that all tastes are accounted for and no one is left indifferent. Sade pursues this thought further, using a culinary metaphor to outline a system of choice similar to that presented in the dedication to La Philosphie dans le boudoir:

C’est ici l’histoire d’un magnifique repas où six cents plats divers s’offrent à ton appétit. Les manges-tu tous? Non, sans doute, mais ce nombre prodigieux étend les bornes de ton choix, et, ravi de cette augmentation de facultés, tu ne t’avisés pas de gronder l’amphitryon qui te régale. Fais de
mêmes ici: choisis et laisse le reste, sans déclamer contre ce qui reste, uniquement parce qu’il n’a pas le talent de te plaire. Songe qu’il plaira à d’autres, et sois philosophe.\textsuperscript{58}

Above all, Sade tells his readers to be philosophers while reading his text, much as he would later tell them to imitate Dolmancé or Juliette. In the end, the philosophical proof accompanying his analysis can be found in the resultant penile or vaginal secretions of his readers. That wasteful expenditure lies at the heart of \textit{Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome} becomes clear from the beginning, with the author’s desire to “cost” the reader his or her \textit{foutre}. However, although the stated aim behind Sade’s unfinished catalogue of “écarts” is the sexual stimulation and subsequent ejaculation of his friendly reader, the communicative value of the work is undermined by the fact that Sade himself was the only reader of the manuscript during his lifetime. After composing the draft within the Bastille, Sade recopied the text onto a roll of paper that could easily be stashed between the cracks of his cell walls, in order to hide it from his captors. Whether or not he intended to publish it before the Revolution is unknown, but seems unlikely given his abandonment of the project five years before his release from prison.\textsuperscript{59} Perhaps even more so than the dedication of \textit{La Philosophie dans le boudoir} to voluptuous libertines, the footnotes to \textit{Juliette}, or the inclusion of characters who are themselves readers, the familiar address to the reader of \textit{Sodome} points toward the imprisoned and isolated Marquis himself as his own intended audience.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. The passage recalls a similar one from Saturnin’s defense of male-male sexual relations in \textit{Dom Bougre}—“Il en est d’un garçon comme d’un mets pour lequel on avait du dégoût : le hasard en fait tâter, on le trouve délicieux” (\textit{Histoire de Dom Bougre, portier des chartreux}, 161)—, showing yet again how much Sade borrowed from the earlier text.

\textsuperscript{59} Although Sade would not leave the Bastille until July 1789, he ceased work on \textit{Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome} in October 1785. In contrast, works that Sade did intend to publish openly and under his own name—such as \textit{Aline et Valcour}, his plays, and the short stories that make up \textit{Les Crimes de l’amour}—received a much more continual attention from their author. Sade’s plays in particular were a frequent topic of conversation in his letters to his wife.
Sade’s envisioning of an exclusive readership, coupled with his suggestion that only aristocrats are capable of writing effective obscene literature, lends a distinctly elitist and class-conscious dimension to his works. Such a stance was not without precedent: in Thérèse Philosophe, for instance, l’abbé T. argues that enlightenment is only for a select group of individuals, and that religion will do its part to control the masses, much in the same way that the libertines in Sade’s boudoir significantly send the peasant gardener Augustin away during the reading of the politically seditious “Français, Encore un effort.”60 Despite their authors’ intentions, however, obscene books had the capacity to reach just about anyone once they were released in public, and their politically subversive potential has led Robert Darnton to suggest a possible link between Thérèse philosophe and the Revolution.61 Nonetheless, Sade seems to have made every effort possible to ensure that his works refrained from offending the political authorities of the post-Revolutionary era. As opposed to the overly political “pornography” that circulated during the Revolution, Sade noticeably refrained from making any political attacks.62 His caricatures of libertine monks and corrupt clergymen, while significant in light of his own atheism, are mostly a throwback to the conventions of the genre: at a time when the Church had already been disinherited of its land and power, and after priests had been murdered in the streets, such anti-clericalism packed little political force. On a similar note, the mid eighteenth-century materialist philosophy Sade draws upon had long since lost its rebellious quality; La Nouvelle Justine and the Histoire de Juliette were, after all,

60 Thérèse philosophe 112-116; Œuvres 3.110.

61 See The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France, 110-111.

62 See Jean Marie Goulemot, Ces Livres qu’on ne lit que d’une main, 35-37, and Lynn Hunt’s previously mentioned essays, “The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution” and “Pornography and the French Revolution.”
printed on the rue Helvétius. Even coitus interruptus, that unnatural practice that had inspired the scorn of clergymen and philosophers alike, had, by the Revolution, become commonplace among all levels of society.63

The ideal readers that Sade conjures up appear to be a reaction against this very process of democratization and declining aristocratic prestige, one that Sade himself felt dearly both during his midlife imprisonment at the hands of his bourgeois mother-in-law, and later during the years of financial hardship that he suffered during the Revolution. Implicit in Sade’s introduction of literary criticism into the boudoir is that only certain readers are capable of understanding obscene books and their puzzling mixture of lust and impiety. In the end, the cruel and calculating critic, the voluptuous of all sexes and ages, and the masturbating “ami lecteur” are all one in the same. Sade only intends for true libertines to read his works. The fact that his books have, as so many moralists feared, so often fallen into the wrong hands perhaps explains the persistent difficulties subsequent readers have experienced in trying to determine whether all that sex represents something more “serious,” or whether it really is all about wasting “foutre” after all. Sade, at least, presents a model of reading that can appreciate both the erotic and philosophical components of obscene books simultaneously.

63 As Jacqueline Hecht argues in “From ‘Be Fruitful and Multiply’ to Family Planning: The Enlightenment Transition,” 539-540.
Chapter Two
Indecent Exposure: Sade’s Written Crimes in Post-Revolutionary France

In the autumn of 1787, Rétif de la Bretonne began what would become a lengthy smear campaign directed against the Marquis de Sade. His timing was certainly curious, to say the least: Sade, after all, had already been in prison for over a decade, first at Vincennes beginning in February 1777, and then in the Bastille from late February 1784 onward. His last documented crime, aside from a couple of temporarily successful flights from jail, had occurred some fifteen years earlier, in June 1772, when he fed prostitutes pastilles containing Spanish Fly and had his valet sodomize him during a weekend of orgies in Marseilles. Nonetheless, a series of additions Rétif made to his massive opus Les Nuits de Paris between September and December 1787 attack the Marquis vehemently for the sexual misconduct that had landed him in prison in the first place.

The chapters “Les Yeux bandés” and “Aventure de Désirée,” which, according to Rétif’s journal, were written on September 3, 1787, relate the mistaken abduction of a prostitute named Desirée, and vaguely hint that a certain well-known aristocratic libertine was behind the kidnapping. More specifically, the “Nefanda” episode, composed on October 6, 1787, directly identifies “Le Comte de S**, libertin cruell, le même dont on a déjà vu un trait” as the villain responsible for both Désirée’s abduction and the atrocities in “Nefanda,” where the Count kidnaps a saddler’s daughter and her groom on their wedding night and proceeds to tie up the young woman and whip her while forcing her to

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64 See Les Nuits de Paris 108, “Les Yeux bandés” (t. III, vol. V p.1188) and 109, “Aventure de Désirée” (t. III, vol. VI p.1199). The moral of the tale, according to Rétif, is that “Il est des gens qui se croient tout permis, parce qu’ils sont d’un rang élevé” (1202). Rétif’s account of the composition of these passages can be found in Mes inscriptions, 1779-1785 / Journal, 1785-1789. For more information on Rétif’s references to Sade, see Monsieur Nicolas 1.1555.
watch as her new husband is caressed by three brothel madams (Nuit 155, t. IV, vol. VII, 1582). Two months later, Rétif wrote “Les Passe-temps du ** de S**,” which describes the aftermath of a violent orgy, based loosely on the infamous “affaire de Marseille” of 1772: “Et nous trouvâmes des jeunes garçons, des jeunes filles, pêle-mêle; les uns en sang; les autres dans un état terrible, par les drogues mises dans leur vin. Des filles avaient été ou trompées, ou violentées par ceux qu’elles n’aimaient pas, et qu’elles n’avaient pu reconnaître dans l’obscurité” (Nuit 274, t. VI, vol. XI, 2461). Finally, on December 13 and 14, 1787, Rétif built upon the scandal of the “affaire Keller” to accuse Sade of performing vivisections in “Le fat qui fait du vivant disséquée,” “La Femme vivante disséquée,” and “Suite de la femme disséquée.”

So what prompted this belated literary resurrection of the Marquis de Sade over a decade after his crimes had made their initial run through the French language press? By 1787, the imprisoned libertine had largely slipped from public memory while wasting away behind bars, exactly as his mother-in-law Madame de Montreuil had hoped. Within the context of Les Nuits de Paris, ou le Spectateur nocturne, Rétif sought to remind his readers of the atrocities Sade had committed before disappearing under a lettre de cachet. Allegedly the result of decades spent wandering the streets of Paris after dark (twenty years, according to Rétif in Les Nuits de Paris and Mes ouvrages), Les Nuits de Paris presents itself as a factual account of the seedy underworld that emerges once the sun sets

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on the kingdom’s capital. As the work’s subtitle implies, *le Spectateur nocturne* claims to be a journalistic endeavor (similar to Addison’s *Spectator* and Marivaux’s *Spectateur français*) that reveals Paris’s nocturnal secrets to an unknowing public. Rétil appears to have believed that he was providing a public service in denouncing Sade, whose violent abuse of female prostitutes conflicted with Rétil’s advocacy of a gentler treatment toward women. Beginning in 1787, Rétil’s persistent attempts to discredit Sade in the public eye by exposing (and exaggerating) his crimes point toward a genuine belief that Sade constituted a public danger, a powerful monster that must be stopped at all costs.

At the same time, however, there was also another dimension to Rétil’s tenacity, one that was both decidedly personal and linked to a more widespread phenomenon during the twilight of the ancien régime. As Robert Darnton has demonstrated, in the years immediately prior to the Revolution Paris saw an influx of aspiring provincial writers, who came to the capital “in search of glory, money, and the improved estate that seemed promised to any writer with sufficient talent” (“The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature” 18). The closed society of letters proved frustratingly difficult to enter, however, and so these aspiring authors “survived by doing the dirty work of society—spying for the police and peddling pornography; and they filled their writings with imprecations against the monde that had humiliated and corrupted them” (20).

Among the writers Darnton mentions in his article is Rétil, the son of peasants from Yonne whose work as a police spy provided him with much of the material for *Les Nuits de Paris*, which was but one of several works dedicated to exposing the corruption of

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Parisian society. Rétif was himself a libertine and womanizer, and recounts many of his supposed sexual exploits in his autobiographical *Monsieur Nicolas*, which he began working on in November 1783. He was also the author of several naughty libertine texts, such as the fetishistic *Pied de Fanchette* (1768), and seems to have drawn upon his brothel experience for his 1769 *Pornographe*, a pamphlet arguing for official regulation of prostitution. When Rétif, who was labeled the “Rousseau du ruisseau” by his haughty contemporaries, found traditional paths of publication closed to him, he installed a printing press in his own home, producing a staggering quantity of literature over the final decades of the eighteenth century. It was in later novels such as the popular *Paysan perverti* (1775-76) and the voluminous *Les Contemporaines* (1789-85), which themselves contain no shortage of racy passages, that Rétif began to equate Parisian life with decadence and perversion. Vilifying the aristocratic Marquis seems to have provided Rétif with further means to denounce the obscenity of the ancien régime. It also allowed Rétif to make a name for himself by distinguishing his own immoral behavior from that of his predecessor, while simultaneously increasing the attractiveness of his oeuvre through an attention to salubrious detail.

Rétif’s public and published attacks on Sade would continue throughout the 1790s, albeit with a noticeable change in focus after the clandestine publication of Sade’s works turned the erstwhile Marquis into a literary rival as well. One of the earliest readers of Sade’s works, Rétif de la Bretonne consistently denounced their potentially dangerous impact on society. Picking up right where he left off in *Les Nuits de Paris*,

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67 As Darnton argues, to writers such as Rétif “the Old Regime was obscene. In making them its spies and smut-peddlers, it had violated their moral core and desecrated their youthful visions of serving humanity honorably in Voltaire’s church. So they became rank atheists and poured out their souls in blasphemies about the society that had driven them down into an underworld of criminals and deviants” (36).
Rétif attempted to alert the public of the threat Sade now represented as the author of particularly violent obscene books. Following the Revolution, Sade’s literary output thus replaced his earlier sexual misconduct as the subject of his rival’s diatribes, and Rétif eventually played an important role in publicly identifying Sade as the author behind such anonymous obscene books as Justine and La Philosophie dans le Boudoir. This shift from physical to written crimes is significant in that it uncovers a new set of problems regarding the presence of obscenity within a recently reconfigured public sphere following the fall of the ancien régime. The publication of Sade’s sexually explicit oeuvre during the Revolution coincided with a change in the approach toward regulating obscenity. Under the freedom of the press espoused by leaders such as Robespierre and eventually enshrined in the constitution of the Directoire, government censorship on moral grounds was no longer permitted. The result was a proliferation of obscene material, usually in the form of the widely available, politically motivated pamphlets that Lynn Hunt has analyzed in detail.68 It was in this environment of unprecedented freedom of expression that Sade published all of his obscene works, from the 1791 version of Justine to the 1795 La Philosophie dans le boudoir and onward to the ten-volume La Nouvelle Justine, suivie de l’Histoire de Juliette, sa sœur, which appeared at the end of the century. In most instances, printed obscenity was no longer technically a crime, and any attempts at censorship usually concentrated on eliminating politically seditious speech that openly threatened the most influential group of the moment (Hunt, “Pornography and the French Revolution,” 310-312). Whereas the ancien régime had viewed political polemic and obscenity as separate (if often linked) offenses, under the

Revolution only politics could land an author or publisher in trouble with the law. Sade’s obscene publications thus constitute a marked departure from most pre and post-Revolutionary obscene literature in their delicate handling of contemporary politics; although *Justine* and *Juliette* recycle the well-worn philosophical convention of portraying clergymen as debauched libertines, for instance, they are careful to avoid criticizing those in power since 1789. As Lynn Hunt has argued, “Sade’s novels marked an important transition in the 1790s,” in that they helped to transform sexually explicit literature from focused social and political polemic to “a general assault on morality itself, rather than a specific criticism of the irrationalities of the ancien régime moral system.”

It was precisely this moral danger inherent in Sade’s works that so concerned Rétif, who believed that reading Sade’s novels would inspire imitative criminal behavior.

In this respect, the attitudes of Sade and Rétif regarding obscene literature could not be more different. On the one hand, readers such as Rétif viewed Sade’s works as both an indication of post-Revolutionary chaos and a harbinger of further instability to come. “Ô Dsds! ” Rétif exclaimed in 1796, “Tes récits ne sont vrais que dans tes désirs, mais que tu es dangereux! Si le Pinard de la Vendée avait eu lu tes écrits, que d’inouïes cruautés il aurait commises!… Si les monstres destinés par leurs mauvaises inclinations à être des assassins les lisent un jour, que de douleurs ils feront éprouver aux filles et

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69 Hunt claims that Sade “took the politically and socially subversive possibilities of pornography to their fullest possible extreme and, at the same time and perhaps by the same act, he paved the way for the modern, apolitical genre of pornography. His attack on every aspect of conventional morality undermined the use of pornography for political ends in the future” (“Pornography and the French Revolution,” 330). If Sade had truly taken “the politically and socially subversive possibilities of pornography to their fullest possible extreme,” however, his novels would be full of references to post-Revolutionary society, rather than to that of the Old Regime.
femmes leurs victimes!”

With his reference to Jean Pinard, a soldier and member of the Comité révolutionnaire de Nantes who was guillotined in December 1794 for committing various atrocities during the Revolution, Rétif draws the connection between Sade and Revolutionary violence, suggesting that his writings lead directly to criminal activity.

Louis-Sébastien Mercier, a friend of Rétif who is also discussed in Darnton’s article, expresses a similar opinion, and in 1798 criticized the liberty of the press and the obscene publications that it enabled, which he called “poison,” “ordures,” and “les éléments de tous les vices” (Le Nouveau Paris 430). Leaving no doubt regarding which obscene books he was referring to, Mercier goes on to mention Justine by name in a later passage:

On ne lisait pas à Sodome et à Gomorrhe les livres que l’on imprime et que l’on vend publiquement au Palais-Égalité. Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu est étalé sur des planches. Mettez une plume dans la griffe de Satan ou du mauvais génie ennemi de l’homme, il ne pourra faire pis. Vingt autres productions, moins abominables il est vrai, car celle dont je parle a remporté le prix de la turpitude et du vice, sont là pour achever de décomposer ce qui restait de morale par instinct, dans le cœur de quelques jeunes gens.

Although he does not specifically imagine the atrocities Justine might inspire, Mercier nonetheless follows Rétif in denouncing the novel’s ability to corrupt its readers. For Mercier, the public sale and open display of the novel stands as a sign of social decomposition and moral corruption, and represents one of the many unfortunate consequences of the Revolution that he observes in Le Nouveau Paris. His choice of words is significant in that it underlines an evolving tendency to identify obscenity with

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70 Fausse Immoralité de la liberté de la presse, in Monsieur Nicolas 2.1034. Testud explains in his notes that “Dsds” is an “Abréviation coutumière chez Rétif du nom de Sade (qu’il orthographie De Sades)” (2.1710).

71 Ibid. 340. While Mercier may in fact have been referring to La Nouvelle Justine, which was published sometime after 1798, and not Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu, the fact that Le Nouveau Paris was itself published in 1798 probably precludes such an error.
“ordures” or “filth,” thereby equating sexually explicit publications to other undesirable elements whose exclusion, as Norbert Elias has argued, was essential in the establishment of civilization and social order (187-191). For post-Revolutionary readers such as Mercier and Rétif, “dirt, obscenity, and lawlessness,” to borrow a phrasing from Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger*, thus appeared as coinciding threats to civilized society.72

Sade, on the other hand, viewed his own particular brand of obscenity as fundamentally innocuous, and disagreed with the idea that such “ordures,” as Mercier and others frequently called his texts, posed some sort of threat to the social order. While the term “ordures” may have come to characterize Sade’s oeuvre in general, the works themselves feature a very specific kind of filth, in the form of the abundant fecal material that Sade includes in his fictional orgies. Although Rétif and Mercier view such elements as dangerously subversive, the literal presence of filth in Sade’s works instead points toward a reaffirmation, rather than a subversion, of traditional hierarchies. One can in fact trace such an attitude through his published works, which, incidentally, devote an increasing attention to filth over the course of the decade, as the author took advantage of newfound liberties to become even more daring in his publications, amplifying not only their sexual explicitness but also the role of fecal material in his texts, which evolves from a euphemistic presence in *Justine* to a topic of discussion in *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* before becoming fully engrained in the narratives of *La Nouvelle Justine* and *Juliette*.73 If Sade viewed such “ordures” and similar obscenities as a harmless and enjoyable way to earn a living, however, the same cannot be said for his attitude toward

72 “Dirt, obscenity and lawlessness are as relevant symbolically to the rites of seclusion as other ritual expressions of their condition” (*Purity and Danger* 98).

73 Lucienne Frappier-Mazur also observes an increasing disorder relative to excrement in Sade’s works, but takes her analysis in a different direction. See *Writing the Orgy*, 14-15.
engaging in Revolutionary politics. As one can observe within his works, Sade consistently delves into filth while refraining from offending the current political order, which, as he himself had learned from his participation in the Section des piques and subsequent imprisonment under Robespierre, could have deadly consequences.

The dual meanings of the term “filth” thus appear as both a means to denounce the dangers of Sade’s obscene books and a textual sign of their ever-increasing obscenity. Fittingly, it was the presence of fecal material, and not, as he often claimed, sexual violence, that constituted Rétif’s primary objection to Sade’s literature, as can be seen through his various post-Revolutionary publications dedicated to attacking and exposing Sade, such as the final revised edition of Les Nuits de Paris, his autobiographical Monsieur Nicolas, his Fausse Immoralité de la liberté de la presse pamphlet, and, finally, his obscene novel L’Anti-Justine ou les délices de l’amour. In fact, despite Rétif’s continued insistence that it is the mistreatment of women that makes Sade and his works particularly dangerous, he nonetheless seems to take delight in describing the horrors he is supposedly denouncing, a practice that becomes even more pronounced as the decade progresses. In the midst of his proclamations that Sade’s works threaten society by their ability to inspire real-life imitators, Rétif thus reveals his own pleasure at reading tales of rape and mutilation, going so far as to imitate them on a textual level, thereby releasing additional supposedly dangerous texts into the public sphere. As a close reading of L’Anti-Justine demonstrates, what Rétif in fact finds unacceptable in Sade is the latter’s fascination with excrement, which he deliberately leaves out of his Sadean pastiche, despite the importance that uncleanliness takes in Sade’s oeuvre, beginning with the 1791 publication of Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu.
“Que la poule ponde!”: Sade, Rétif, and the Prevalence of Filth in Justine

On June 12, 1791, Sade wrote a letter to his lawyer Reinaud discussing the forthcoming publication of his first two novels:

On imprime actuellement un roman de moi, mais trop immoral pour être envoyé à un homme aussi pieux, aussi décent que vous. J’avais besoin d’argent, mon éditeur me le demandait bien poivré, et je lui ai fait capable d’empêter le diable. On l’appelle Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu. Brûlez-le et ne le lisez point, si par hasard il tombe entre vos mains: je le renie, mais vous aurez bientôt le roman philosophique que je ne manquerai certainement pas de vous envoyer. (Correspondances du marquis de Sade 22.48-50)

From the onset of his literary career, Sade distinguishes between two types of publication: on the one hand, there were legitimate novels like Aline et Valcour ou le roman philosophique, of which he was apparently proud, while, on the other, there were immoral works like Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu, which were unfit for decent readers and whose authorship he would forever deny. Since his release from prison on April 2, 1790, Sade had directed most of his energies toward the first category of literature. Whereas he, like many aristocrats under the ancien régime (including his father and uncle), had initially approached writing as a personal hobby, in the wake of the Revolution he found himself obliged to earn a living as an “homme de lettres” and to go under the unassuming title “Louis Sade.” He first set his sights on the theater, but met with only limited success: after many attempts, Sade found all of his plays rejected, save one, Oxtiern, which he wrote in the spring of 1791 based upon the novella Ernestine that he first set his sights on the theater, but met with only limited success: after many attempts, Sade found all of his plays rejected, save one, Oxtiern, which he wrote in the spring of 1791 based upon the novella Ernestine that

74 Maurice Lever, Donatien Alphonse François, marquis de Sade (Fayard, 1991) 48, 409. In the years preceding his imprisonment, Sade classified many of his early texts under the heading “Ouvrages divers,” and dedicated significant time and effort to an account of his Voyage d’Italie following his return to France in 1776. Once locked up at Vincennes and then in the Bastille, Sade continued his leisurely literary pursuits, drafting numerous plays and short stories (several of which would later be published in the 1800 collection Les Crimes de l’amour) and even beginning work on his lengthy epistolary novel Aline et Valcour. His most famous private work is of course the sexually explicit Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome, which he wrote in the Bastille and carefully copied onto a roll of paper to hide inside his cell, only to lose the manuscript forever when the prison was ransacked in July 1789.
he had composed in prison. *Oxtiern* was performed twice in October and November 1791 at the théâtre Molière, before being put aside for provoking violent reactions among the public (who, during the Revolution, were especially sensitive to representations of aristocratic abuses of power). A similar fate would strike the short, one-act *Le Suborneur* in January 1792, whose first and only performance was interrupted by a group of Jacobins. With theaters either turning away his plays because of their poor quality or halting their performances for political reasons, Sade had no choice but to turn elsewhere in order to support himself financially while he tried to finish the novel *Aline et Valcour*, which he had begun writing at the Bastille in 1786. Thus, he decided to revise and expand another text from the Bastille, the novella *Les Infortunes de la vertu*, turning it into a potentially lucrative obscene book “capable d’empester le diable” in order to satisfy his editor and earn some money.\(^7^5\)

Sade’s choice of vocabulary in describing *Justine* as “capable d’empester le diable,” however, suggests a more nuanced approach toward his obscene oeuvre. If we interpret “empester” as a synonym for “to corrupt,” then Sade apparently felt *Justine* to be so immoral that it could corrupt even Satan. Indeed, the potential of the novel to deprave its readers emerges as a constant theme from the moment *Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu* appeared in two large in-8° volumes bound in calf leather shortly after Sade’s letter to Reinaud. While the large format, which demonstrates a marked break from the “small book” format of earlier obscene books, suggests a certain degree of

\(^{75}\) Gilbert Lély cites the fact that the overall goal of Sade’s letter to Reinaud was to convince the lawyer to send him money as evidence that more “metaphysical” concerns were at work in the composition and publication of *Justine*, arguing that Sade’s claim that he wrote to satisfy his editor was merely a part of his persuasive strategy (see Lely, *Vie du Marquis de Sade*, vol. 2, 478-79). Maurice Lever, on the contrary, ascribes purely financial motives to the struggling aristocrat (see *Donatien Alphonse François, marquis de Sade*, 425).
openness, both Sade and his publisher Girouard remained anonymous; moreover, “Holland” was listed as the place of publication (“chez les Libraires associés”), although it was actually printed in Paris. The clandestine attributes of *Justine* suggest Sade and Girouard were fully conscious of doing something illegal, and that it was best to keep their identities hidden. Moreover, the leather-bound tomes of *Justine* were not to be confused with the inexpensive and easily accessible obscene pamphlets that had flourished under the Revolution: destined for the privileged amateur of erotic literature, *Justine* sold for the pricey sum of seven pounds ten sols, and was not, in 1791, as widely available as it would become by the end of the decade.

As it turned out, however, the 1791 publication of *Justine* did not technically violate any laws. At precisely the moment of *Justine*’s publication, the Assemblée nationale was discussing the offensive and corruptive qualities of obscenity in an attempt to determine whether or not obscene images should be tolerated under the new government. The law pertaining to the “exposition et vente d’images obscènes,” proposed on July 7, 1791, prescribed criminal trial for all those “prévenus d’avoir attenté publiquement aux mœurs, par outrage à la pudeur des femmes, par actions déshonnêtes, d’avoir favorisé la débauche, ou corrompu des jeunes gens de l’un ou de l’autre sexe, par exposition et vente d’images obscènes […]” (*Archives parlementaires* 28.28-29). At first glance, the law demonstrates continuity with most eighteenth-century condemnations of obscenity by attacking the supposedly corruptive influence of the works in question. However, the proposal only mentions obscene images, which circulated en masse after the Revolution, and not the written obscenity that had fixated censors of the ancien régime during the preceding decades. Under the terms of the law, therefore, Sade would
not have committed any crime in publishing *Justine* even if he had employed obscene language, since the original 1791 edition contained only an allegorical frontispiece and no further illustration. Robespierre seized upon this focus on image over text, and remarked that “si le législateur peut se mêler de la vente et de l’exposition des images, s’il peut les punir, il y a la même raison contre les écrits obscènes et licencieux, il faut par conséquent attaquer ici la liberté de la presse” (*Ibid.*). Any law that would attack “les principes de la liberté,” in Robespierre’s view, should not be passed without careful consideration and discussion about its greater implications. His stance, of course, was not that the Assembly should start banning books as well, but that outlawing images was undesirable since it constituted just as great an affront to free speech as censoring language. Despite Robespierre’s conclusion that “dans ce moment l’Assemblée nationale ne doit point porter une loi sur ce que le comité appelle les images obscènes,” however, the law nonetheless passed, with the sole modification, following a remark by Buzot, that selling obscene images would merit a lesser sentence than corrupting others through physical seduction (*Ibid.*).

Early readers of *Justine*, however, believed that the unillustrated novel nonetheless posed a threat to society through its unquestionable ability to corrupt its readers. Soon after the novel’s publication, the *Feuille de correspondance du libraire* published a review in 1791, judging the work to be dangerous and warning educators not to be misled by its title (Lever, *Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade*, 426). (Remarkably, however, the newspaper nonetheless admitted that *Justine* might convince the already debauched to change their lifestyle, proving that at least some readers did in fact take Sade’s stated moral goals about vice and virtue seriously.) In September 1792,
the *Journal général de France* also warned about the misleading title of *Les Malheurs de la vertu* and recommended it be kept away from young people, lamenting that the “rich and brilliant” imagination that created the novel wasted its talents on a book that elicits “disgust and indignation” (qtd. in Laugga-Traut 37-38). But the most vocal and determined response to *Justine* would come from Rétif de la Bretonne, who, according to his *Journal*, first read the novel on August 23, 1793 (Testud, “Le Journal inédit de Rétif,” 1577). As Rétif would later recall in the opening *avertissement* to *L’Anti-Justine ou les délices de l’amour*, reading Sade’s *Justine* left him in a violent and disturbing state of excitement: “Blasé sur les femmes depuis longtemps, la *Justine* de Dsds me tomba sous la main. Elle me mit en feu. Je voulais jouir, et ce fut avec fureur: je mordis les seins de ma monture, je lui tordis la chair des bras…” (*Œuvres érotiques* 285). As Rétif apparently learned from his own experience, there existed a direct correlation between reading *Justine* and imitating its violent sexual behavior, which in turn constituted the greatest social threat posed by Sade’s works. After engaging in violent sex, Rétif felt “Honteux de ces excès, effets de ma lecture,” and set out to prevent *Justine* from corrupting additional readers. Rather than merely condemn the novel on moral grounds, however, Rétif began directing his energies toward unmasking its dangerous and anonymous author.

By the spring of 1794, Rétif had correctly identified Sade as the author of *Justine*, and decided to incorporate his findings into the “Cinquième époque” of his autobiographical *Monsieur Nicolas*. While making final corrections to a passage that details “le danger des livres tels que *Le Portier des Chartreux, Thérèse Philosophe, La Religieuse en chemise*, et le reste,” Rétif adds a sentence that condemns an even more
dangerous work: “Mais je connais un livre encore plus dangereux que ceux que j’ai
nommés: c’est Justine; il porte à la cruauté: Danton le lisait pour s’exciter” (1.1044). By
linking Justine to the recently executed Danton, Rétif draws the connection between
Sade’s novel and the violence of the Revolution, suggesting that the publication of
Justine constitutes a political crime comparable to those of the Terror. In his view, such
violent and obscene literature possesses the ability to inspire an infinite number of crimes
among its readers. The French expatriate Charles de Villers, writing in the German
francophone newspaper Le Spectateur du nord in 1797, would reach a similar verdict
regarding Justine, judging that

Il est, parmi les livres, ce que Robespierre a été parmi les hommes. On dit
que lorsque ce tyran, lorsque Couthon, St. Just, Collot, ses ministres,
étoient fatigués de meurtres et de condamnations, lorsque quelques
remords se faisoient sentir à ces cœurs de bronze, et qu’à la vue des
nombreux arrêts qu’il leur fallait encore signer, la plume échappoit à leurs
doigts, ils alloient lire quelques pages de Justine, et revenoient signer.
(qtd. in Laugga-Traut 74-75)

Danton, Robespierre, and other Terrorists were thus seen as using Sade’s novel as
inspiration to carry out their atrocities. While Villers did not necessarily believe the story
to be true (“Je ne garantis pas l’anecdote,” he admits), he nonetheless follows Rétif in
underscoring the link between Justine and the violence of the Revolution, to which,
according to contemporary accounts, a sexual component was often ascribed. In his
chapter on the “Massacre de Septembre,” for instance, Mercier reluctantly describes the
murder and subsequent mutilation of the Princess de Lamballe: “frappée de plusieurs
coups, elle tombe baignée dans son sang et expire. Aussitôt on lui coupe la tête et les
mamelles, son corps est ouvert, on lui arrache le cœur, sa tête est ensuite portée au bout
d’une pique et promenée dans Paris” (98). The sexual nature of this posthumous
mastectomy becomes even clearer when Mercier adds that “l’un de ces monstres lui coupa la partie virgine et s’en fit des moustaches, en présence des spectateurs saisis d’horreur et d’épouvante” (99). Earlier in his chapter, Mercier had also described how, “A l’hôpital général de la Salpétrière, ces monstres ont égorgé treize femmes, après en avoir violé plusieurs” (97). Sade himself noticed this sexual nature of Revolutionary violence, when, while recalling the events of August 10, 1792, during which the Swiss Guards were massacred at the palais des Tuileries and their corpses subsequently stripped and castrated (Lever, *Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade*, 482), he makes an appropriate historical comparison: “le lendemain de la Saint-Barthélemy, les femmes de la Cour de Catherine de Médicis sortirent du Louvre pour contempler les corps nus des huguenots assassinés et dépouillés sous ses murs. —Au 10 août, les femmes de Paris vinrent de même contempler les corps des Suisses jonchés dans les Tuileries” (*Œuvres complètes*, ed. Gilbert Lély, 15.16). Readers seem to be confused, however, as to whether *Justine* was a cause or a product of such violence. Villers, for example, argues that “il ne pouvait être conçu qu’au milieu des barbaries et des sanglantes convulsions qui ont déchiré la France. C’est un des fruits les plus odieux de la crise révolutionnaire: c’est un des arguments les plus forts contre la liberté de la presse.” While his stance against freedom of the press resembles that of Mercier, his statement seems to contradict his other assertion that reading *Justine* led the Terrorists to further violence.

Rétif, at least, showed no hesitation in proclaiming Sade responsible for both isolated incidents of violence under the ancien régime and the more general violence of the Revolution, as he conveniently identifies the author of *Justine* in a note at the bottom of the page of *Monsieur Nicolas*: “Il est du scélérat de Sades, des *Nuits*.” (Exhibiting
greater discretion, Villers instead alluded to Sade’s illustrious ancestor, Petrarch’s muse Laura: “Je n’ose vous en nommer l’auteur. Je craindrois de faire rougir les mânes de la belle Laure.”) In an attempt to build a case against his adversary, Rétif thus refers back to the villain of Les Nuits de Paris, informing his readers that not only is Sade responsible for publishing Justine and exciting Danton’s cruelty, but also for raping and murdering commoners under the ancien régime. Before publishing the “Cinquième époque” of Moniseur Nicolas, Rétif would even add the crime of authorship to the other violent offenses committed by the fictional Marquis in Les Nuits de Paris, when he mentions “les infamies, depuis décrites par de Sade dans son exécrable roman intitulé: Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu” in the final volume of Les Nuits de Paris, published in November 1794 (qtd. in Laugga-Traut 86). The “Cinquième époque” of Moniseur Nicolas and its identification of Justine’s author would appear during the summer of 1795, at around the same time that Sade was publishing Aline et Valcour and La Philosophie dans le boudoir.

The scandalized observations of its earliest readers, combined with Sade’s warnings to Reinaud and ambiguous attitude toward his anonymously published novel, suggest that Justine must have been a horrendous work indeed. In fact, however, on the surface Justine appears far less shocking than either the “obscene books” that circulated clandestinely under the ancien régime or the political pamphlets that flooded the streets of post-Revolutionary Paris. A cursory glance at the first edition reveals no sexually explicit engravings, and no visual representations at all other than an allegorical frontispiece thematically depicting Virtue between Lust and Irreligion. Even more surprising is the novel’s glaring absence of obscene vocabulary. Told through the chaste
language of its heroine, *Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu* carefully cloaks virtually all references to sexual activity under a veil of decency. “J’adoucis les expressions,” Justine tells her interlocutor, Madame de Lorsange; “vous le comprenez, madame, j’affaiblirai même les tableaux; hélas! l’obscénité de leur teinte est telle, que votre pudeur souffrirait de leur nu pour le moins autant que ma timidité” (*Œuvres* 2.256). While Justine’s seemingly endless array of euphemisms represents a break from the barrages of “con,” “cul,” and “foutre” that characterize not only Sade’s later obscene works but most obscene French literature during the eighteenth century, her softened expressions actually increase the obscenity of the “tableaux” that she describes. For example, when Justine relates her descent into the hidden depths of Sainte-Marie-des-Bois, she tells how,

> de temps en temps, [Dom Sévérino] m’arrêtait du bras gauche enlacé autour de mon corps, tandis que sa main droite, se glissant sous mes jupes par derrière, parcourait avec impudence cette partie malhonnête qui, nous assimilant aux hommes, fait l’unique objet des hommages de ceux qui préfèrent ce sexe en leurs honteux plaisirs. Plusieurs fois même la bouche de ce libertin ose parcourir ces lieux, en leur plus secret réduit: ensuite nous recommencions à marcher. (229)

Justine’s insistence on chaste language actually underscores the shamefulness of the act: rather than explicitly describing sex as does her sister Juliette in the final version of the novel, Justine emphasizes the “impudence” in the monk’s actions, identifying her anus as the “dishonest part” preferred by certain men in their “shameful pleasures.” Contrary to Justine’s modest intentions, in the end the young girl’s anus receives extensive attention, and even contains its own “most secret recess” for the monks to violate. Thus, while the distance between such chaste language and the lewd acts it describes remains faithful to the character of the novel’s first-person narrator, it also provides for one of the *Justine’s* most titillating elements by provoking arousal through the continued violation of female
purity, as Justine shames herself further each time she describes her past dishonor. One need only compare Justine’s reluctant metaphors to the more direct language of her sister, who unabashedly uses the most vulgar terms from the earliest moments of her narrative, such as when she relates how la Delbène performs oral sex upon her and a companion during one of their initial orgies in the convent: “Sa langue s’introduit d’abord dans l’intérieur du con d’Euphrosine, et de chacune de ses mains elle nous chatouille le trou du cul […]” (Œuvres 3.184). While Juliette’s language quickly loses its ability to shock through its repetitiveness, Justine remains just as scandalized regarding her “partie malhonnête” after it has been violated a countless number of times as she was in the beginning. With Justine, Sade demonstrates how neither obscene language nor graphic illustrations are necessary to make the ideal “livre immoral” that Juliette would later hint at in Juliette ou les prospérités du vice (Œuvres 3.591). Instead, the “tableaux” presented in the novel possess such obscenity that even their mere “teinte,” as Justine remarks, suffices to offend and deprave a modest audience.

The novel’s ability to corrupt constitutes just one aspect of the term “empester,” however. As Sade perhaps suggests in his claim that Girouard requested Justine “bien poivré,” “empester” could also mean “to infuse with a fetid odor,” as if the novel’s fetor could outdo even the sulfurous stench of hell. Such a reading of “empester” would not only remain consistent with Mercier’s designation of obscene books as “ordures” and bibliographer Etienne-Gabriel Peignot’s later discernment of “miasmes pestilentiels” in Justine, but would also account for the central presence of foul-smelling filth within the novel itself (Peignot 1.xvii-xiiij, xxiv-xxv). Excrement first appears in the novel during Justine’s initial orgy at the convent, when, after Sévérino first sodomizes her and
Clément whips her, Jérôme carries out his “jouissance favorite.” The monk starts by placing one of his fingers “où Sévérino s’est placé” only moments before. While digitally penetrating the young girl’s anus, Jérôme then proclaims, “je veux que la poule ponde, et je veux dévorer son œuf.” Probing with his finger, he finds the desired “egg” (“Oh! mon enfant, qu’il est douillet!” he exclaims), and then forces Justine to defecate into his mouth (Œuvres 2.233-235). Aside from an instance of comic flatulence in Thérèse Philosophe that ends up disgust ing an eager sodomite, Justine’s egg laying represents the first published exploration of the erotic appeal of defecation. While Jérôme’s metaphor evokes such Sadean themes as physical violation, infertility, and cannibalism, conveyed with typical Sadean humor, his comparison of Justine to a hen highlights the fact that she, and not her captor, degrades herself through the base and animalistic process of defecation. Her vocabulary, which consistently betrays her “dégoût” and “répugnance” at the “ignominieuse passion” and “impuretés” preferred by “l’indigne” Jérôme, emphasizes the filthiness of the act, once again making the text seem even dirtier through the usage of chaste language. As if being forced to defecate into the monk’s mouth were not degrading enough, Justine must also receive Jérôme’s semen in her own mouth in exchange. The cyclical ingestion of both substances effectively makes the novel live up to Sade’s promise that Justine could “empester le diable,” and would make the text particularly filthy to its contemporary readers, particularly Rétif.

Rétif Responds: Cleanliness and Violence in L’Anti-Justine

In 1796, Rétif composed an erotic novel that he envisioned as an antidote to Sade’s Justine, a work that would inspire gentler treatment toward women than the
violence that, as he himself knew firsthand, *Justine* was wont to inspire. “Mon but
moral,” Rétif writes,

qui en vaut bien un autre, est de donner à ceux qui ont le tempérament
paresseux un *Erotikon* épicé qui les fasse servir convenablement une
épouse qui n’est plus belle. C’est ce que j’ai vu faire à plusieurs hommes
qui se servaient pour cela du livre cruel et si dangereux de *Justine, ou les
malheurs de la Vertu.* J’en ai un plus important encore: je veux préserver
les femmes du délire de la cruauté. *L’Anti-Justine,* non moins savoureuse,
non moins emportée que la *Justine,* mais sans barbarie, empêchera
désormais les hommes d’avoir recours à celle-ci. La publication de la
concurrente antidotale est urgente, et je me déshonore volontiers aux yeux
des sots, des puristes et des irréfléchis pour la donner à mes concitoyens.\(^76\)

Rétif thus envisioned *L’Anti-Justine ou les délices de l’amour,* his literary response to
Sade, as performing a public service, both by arousing uninspired husbands to copulate
with their wives, and by supplanting the barbaric novel men supposedly now use for such
a purpose, thereby saving women from the cruelty that inevitably resulted after their
husbands read *Justine.* \(^77\) *L’Anti-Justine* would then feature a non-violent brand of
eroticism voluptuous enough to turn the public away from *Justine* and its harmful effects:

> “Pour remplacer la *Justine* et faire préférer *L’Anti-Justine* il faut que celle-ci surpasse
> l’autre en volupté autant qu’elle lui cède en cruauté” (394). Despite its proclaimed civic
goals, however, *L’Anti-Justine* was never completed, and received only a limited printing
(under a pseudonym) in 1798, intended solely for the author’s friends and

\(^{76}\) *Œuvres érotiques* 393-94. Rétif makes a similar claim in his preface, where he states, “Mon but est de
faire un livre plus savoureux que les siens [the “sales ouvrages de l’infâme Dsds”], et que les épouses
pourront faire lire à leurs maris, pour en être mieux servis ; un livre où les sens parleront au cœur ; où le
libertinage n’ait rien de cruel pour le sexe des grâces, et lui rende plutôt la vie, que de lui causer la mort ;
où l’amour ramené à la nature, exempt de scrupules et de préjugés, ne présente que des images riantes et
voluptueuses” (287).

\(^{77}\) As David Coward argues, “Sade avait rendu le sexe abominable : Rétif cherchait à le transformer en un
moyen utile, civique et louable de renforcer le mariage et par la de protéger la société. *L’Anti-Justine* est
ainsi un ouvrage aussi politique qu’autobiographique” (“Rétif, critique de Sade” 78).
acquaintances. What is most surprising, however, is that the novel, which, in an apparent reference to Rétif’s personal life, focuses primarily on the incestuous relationship between a father and his daughter, also explores the topic of sexual violence with horrific detail and explicitness. Thus, although Rétif would proclaim in his preface, “Personne n’a été plus indigné que moi des sales ouvrages de l’infâme Dsds” because “Ce scélérat ne présente les délices de l’amour, pour les hommes, qu’accompagnées de tourments, de la mort même, pour les femmes” (287), his own Délices de l’amour would depict women being tortured and killed as well, suggesting that sexual violence might not have been his primary point of contention with Sade after all. In fact, as a creative response to reading Sade, L’Anti-Justine seems to highlight the attractiveness of sexual violence, apparently undermining its proposed aims in the process.

While mostly composed of mutually pleasurable sexual encounters, involving such practices as incest, multi-partner orgies, and sodomy, the novel also features a particularly violent scenario in what is by far its most striking chapter, the appropriately titled “Du fouteur à la Justine.” When Conquette-Ingénue, the novel’s heroine, is about to be sold by her abusive husband (Vitnègre) to a murderous and cannibalistic monk (Father Foutamort), whose penis is so large that he inevitably kills any woman he penetrates, the narrator (Conquette’s incestuous father) and her lover (Timori) conspire to replace her with a syphilitic prostitute in order to save her life. While the murderous

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78 Working under a pseudonym, Rétif strangely attributes L’Anti-Justine to Simon-Nicholas Henri Linguet, a journalist executed in 1794. The novel appeared in one illustrated in-12° volume. The only surviving 1798 edition (Enfer 492, now preserved in MICROFILM M-1420 at the BNF) terminates in mid-sentence.

79 According to his journal, he even had vaginal and anal intercourse with his daughter on numerous occasions (Daniel Baruch, Nicolas Edmé Restif de la Bretonne [Fayard, 1996], 212-213, 215-216, 228, 235).
monk and fatal inoculation seem to recall the Sainte-Marie-des-Bois episode of Justine and the conclusion to La Philosophie dans le boudoir, respectively, the passage describing the scene between Foutamort and the doomed prostitute Connillette actually surpasses anything found in either of Sade’s works in both its ferocity and detail. 80 Foutamort begins by biting off Connillette’s nipples as he penetrates her vaginally, injuring her almost to the point of death; in his attention to the pleasures of sexual violence, Rétif is careful to point out how the monk enjoys the act all the more since he is killing a woman both beautiful and “étroite” (342). Noticing that her heart is still beating, Foutamort then sodomizes Connillette and destroys her perineum, gruesomely making “un trou des deux.” 81 This final act kills Connillette, whose corpse is then violated repeatedly by Foutamort before he chops up her body and eats her, an act that Rétif again relates in meticulous detail (343). Even though Rétif follows the chapter with the assurance that “il n’y aura plus dans le reste de l’ouvrage aucune horreur qui ressemble à celle du moine Foutamort” (since, Rétif claims, “Les horreurs à la Sade sont aiséées à présenter; c’est la peinture de la douce volupté qui est le chef-d’œuvre du génie!”), his decision to compose and publish such horrors certainly calls into question the supposedly non-violent aims of his response to Justine (347). After all, Sade’s novel, as Rétif himself admitted in his avertissement to L’Anti-Justine, did manage to arouse him considerably, putting him “en feu” and making him want to “jouir […] avec fureur.” More than anything else, L’Anti-Justine seems to acknowledge this capacity of sexual violence to arouse in spite of the reader’s intentions.

80 And, as Catherine Lafarge points out, in linguistic obscenity as well. See “Les délices de l’amour’ de Restif de la Bretonne: attaque efficace contre Sade?” 1249.

81 “Ma foi, la gueuse n’a plus qu’un cul, ou qu’un con,… je ne sais lequel,” he laughs (343).
While Rétif’s relationship to sexual violence thus comes across as ambivalent at best, the same is not true regarding his stance toward the combination of filth and eroticism that Sade first highlighted in the “que la poule pond” passage of Justine. In fact, if one dominating theme emerges from L’Anti-Justine, it is not, as the author claims, the celebration of non-violent sex, but rather an obsessive focus on female hygiene. Throughout the novel, cleanliness continually resurfaces as the foremost feminine virtue. Thus, after an early incestuous encounter, the narrator proudly describes the cleanliness of his daughter Conquette: “Propre comme elle le fut toujours, elle se débarrasse et court se laver” (316). Later, when the narrator finally takes his daughter’s virginity, he again stresses how she immediately washes after he withdraws (330). Rétif constantly describes Conquette running to the bidet both before and after sex, with the narrator concluding most orgies with statements like “Et en finissant, elle alla se laver le con.”

During one particular orgy, the sight of the young woman washing herself even serves as the main stimulus for the men involved. In another instance, after having vaginal intercourse with her father and his friend Montecon, Conquette must have both her vagina and anus washed before receiving oral sex, and it is only “Après une scrupuleuse ablution” that the men begin to lick her orifices:

Conquette-Ingénue […] sauta du foutoir et courut se laver. Elle trouva de l’eau tiède préparée. Nous fûmes aussitôt à genoux devant notre divinité et nous lui épongeâmes l’un le cul, l’autre le con, les fesses et les cuisses, car elle était pleine de foutre et d’un peu de sang […]. (364-365)

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82 374. In this instance, the cleansing is followed by further intercourse, additional cleansing, and then intercourse again (385).

83 388. The washing itself leads immediately to intercourse, after which, as Conquette’s lover remarks, both men are exhausted and the woman’s vagina is sullied: “Je vois, me dit-il de même, vous ne bandiez plus assez roide, et je suis votre boute-en-train. Mais elle a le con plein de foutre….”
In calling Conquette “notre divinité,” the narrator exemplifies the profound respect for women that Rétif announces as the goal of his novel. Maintaining their divine status, however, requires constant washing, both before sex, as if to suggest that female genitalia is inherently soiled and always in need of purification, and afterward, when both semen and vaginal secretions (both contained in the word “foutre”) must be cleansed to maintain good hygiene. The vagina is not the only sullied area of the female body, however, as Rétif insists that Conquette’s anus be cleansed before Montecon can lick it, thus suggesting that the anus is also fundamentally unclean, without ever specifying why. This obsession with feminine hygiene is so prevalent in L’Anti-Justine that it appears to constitute a deliberate part of Rétif’s response to Sade, wherein the author rejects his rival’s attachment to filth by stressing cleanliness.

The presence of blood on Conquette’s body underscores the fundamentally violent nature of intercourse in L’Anti-Justine, which often involves a noticeably sadistic component. Even outside the outrageous “Du fouteur à la Justine” chapter, violence appears throughout Les Délices de l’amour, but always in connection with good hygiene. For example, it is only when he observes that “sa femme, après avoir pissé, avait fait bidet” that Conquette’s abusive husband Vitnègre decides to forcibly strip her in front of a dinner guest, exclaiming “Voilà un con bien propre! il faut le gamahucher tous les deux, d’adresse ou de force” (322). Likewise, after surrendering her anal virginity to her lover Timori, Conquette again insists upon purifying herself immediately afterward because she is full of “foutre”—“J’en sui pleine, me dit-elle. Le devant, le derrière. Il faut que je me purifie”—, and the narrator relates how he himself took charge of the cleansing, washing “moi-même avec une fine éponge les charmes secrets de ma déité. Il
y avait un peu de sang à la rosette, et même au conin.” Interestingly, blood and semen appear as the only emissions from Conquette’s anus, while fecal material, which one might naturally expect following an incidence of sodomy in a novel responding to Sade, is notably absent. In another passage, when the virgin Rosemauve arrives at the end of an orgy involving sodomy, she is first ceremoniously cleansed (“On lui baigna cul, con, cuisses, pieds”), before one of the men “perça sans pitié, par des efforts redoublés, le cul virginal [...]” (409). The young girl’s participation ends in a particularly violent fashion, first when the narrator deflowers her despite her cries (“J’enfilai la pucelle, qui criota, sanglotina, et ils furent témoins de ma nouvelle victoire. Mais Conquette me gronda sérieusement…”), and then when another man treats her with exceptional brutality (“Brisemotte, enragé, se jeta sur Rosemauve, qui ne s’y attendait pas, et la foutit en levrette avec tant de brutalité qu’il la fit crier autant de douleur que de plaisir”). Despite Rétif’s repeated claims that his novel would serve as both the antidote to and antithesis of Justine, a close reading of the text consistently demonstrates that violence is perfectly acceptable within his erotic system, provided that the women are kept clean. Through its obsessive focus on female hygiene and noticeable absence of feces, Rétif’s Anti-Justine thus identifies bodily filth as the principal source of offensiveness in Sade’s novel—the true “barbarie” in Justine that Rétif found so repulsive he could not bear to mention it.

Through its stress on hygiene and omission of scatological detail, Rétif’s literary response thus singles out fecal material itself as the most dangerous element in Justine.

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84 353. At the sight of blood, the narrator recognizes his daughter’s suffering, which she immediately dismisses since she felt more pleasure than pain: “—Hé ! quoi, ma délicieuse, tu as donc encore souffert ? —Oui, mon cher bourreau. Mais le plaisir l’a toujours emporté, même en cul.”

85 409, 421. Interestingly, in keeping with the novel’s exclusive focus on feminine hygiene, while he deflowers Rosemauve, the narrator himself has his anus licked by a woman without any preliminary washing.
For Sade and Girouard, however, the publication of such obscene literature would prove to be anything but dangerous, as Justine went through several re-printings throughout the decade, each of which tended to test the limits of official tolerance. A second version, for example, appeared soon after the first in smaller and less presumptuous in-12º format, geared toward a larger audience and offered at the lower price of 6 pounds. But it was the third, 1794 edition of Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu (which listed far-off “Philadelphia” as its place of publication) that possessed the greatest potential to reach a wide swathe of the population, as it was the first of Sade’s works to appear with sexually explicit engravings that could arouse both erudite and illiterate alike.\(^{86}\) The illegal and unsigned engravings in the “Philadelphia” version graphically depict various scenes from the novel (such as Justine urinating into an outlaw’s mouth, Justine and another woman nude in the monk Clément’s bedroom, and Justine having her buttocks sewn shut by Saint-Florent), and demonstrate a marked decrease in quality from the 1791 frontispiece, drawn by a known artist, Philippe Chéry, and engraved by Antoine Carrée. Justine eventually underwent another reprinting in 1800, most likely in an attempt to capitalize on the recent publication of La Nouvelle Justine, by which time the size of the original format decreased even further to the easily concealable in-16º format.\(^{87}\) With so many editions in circulation, Sade’s Justine was literally everywhere by the end of the decade, as Louis-Sebastien Mercier had noted with disgust in Le Nouveau Paris (340).

\(^{86}\) It is unknown to what degree Sade was involved in these later editions, although their dates do correspond to his periods of liberty during the 1790s, suggesting that he at least played some role in their publication: after 1791, re-printings occurred in 1792 and 1794, omitting the year 1793, when Sade became wrapped up in politics and was imprisoned again.

\(^{87}\) Enfer 509 in the Bibliothèque Nationale.
Filth and Politics in the Boudoir

For Sade, publishing “ordures” thus proved to be a particularly lucrative activity. Fittingly, and in stark contrast to Rétif’s *Anti-Justine*, the literature that Sade would publish throughout the remainder of the decade would continuously celebrate fecal material as a largely unthreatening component of eroticism. In particular, excrement does not appear in Sade’s works as an undesirable substance that needs to be eradicated in order to maintain order, as is the case in *L’Anti-Justine*, but rather, the incorporation of filth into eroticism ultimately reinforces existing social structures by serving the interests of those in power. Whereas the men of Rétif’s novel exert control over female bodies by washing away offending biological fluids, in much the same way that Rétif himself controls the sex in *L’Anti-Justine* by ensuring it is always clean, Sade’s libertines instead demonstrate their power by forcing subordinates to soil themselves. When Jérôme commands Justine to lay an egg despite her disgust, for example, he reaffirms the hierarchy of the monastery, where victims are obliged succumb to the whims of their captors. The emission of filth is not subversive, but is a forced process necessary to survive under a given social order. By degrading her even more, Justine’s obliged swallowing of Jérôme’s semen further solidifies her subservient position. In his 1795 publication *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, Sade would exhibit even greater clarity with respect to the role of defecation in maintaining power relations within both the boudoir and society at large. Fecal material makes its first appearance in the dialogue when

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88 Although Rétif’s heroines willingly ingest the semen of their lovers on numerous occasions, in one particular instance he too interprets the act as a sign of degradation, as the disgusted narrator refuses further intercourse with Adélaïde Houchepine after Montecon ejaculates into her mouth and forces her to swallow his semen as a sign of hatred for her former aristocratic lover, Foutâne. Another woman, Vitsucette, also participates in the degrading act: “L’ayant embouchée [Adélaïde], et lui ayant fait avaler son foutre, en haine de Foutâne, j’en fus dégoûté ainsi que de la Vitsucette, dite la Baiseuse, à laquelle il en faisait autant. Je n’y étais plus retourné” (360).
Dolmancé hints toward the “goûts antiphysiques” of certain husbands, leading to

Madame de Saint-Ange’s confession of her elderly husband’s particular fantasy:

[…] le goût de mon mari consiste à se faire sucier, et voici le très singulier épisode qu’il y joint; pendant que, courbée sur lui mes fesses à plomb sur son visage, je pompe avec ardeur le foutre de ses couilles, il faut que je lui chie dans la bouche… Il avale. (Œuvres 3.43)

Like the desperate Justine, who defecates into Jérôme’s mouth before swallowing his semen, Madame de Saint-Ange performs the act in accordance with her own best interest, as her husband grants her total liberty in return for satisfying him. As a process of contracted exchange, defecation thus serves as a way to solidify the institution of marriage, wherein a younger wife receives both wealth and personal freedom (along with semen) in return for her feces. Later in the dialogue, it is the peasant gardener Augustin who will be forced to satisfy Dolmancé’s need for feces, as the immoral instructor leads him away into a private cabinet for some unspecified activity that Jean Deprun interprets in his notes as “une fantaisie coprophilique” (3.1354). The fact that this (presumed) defecation takes place away from the gaze of both the reader and the orgy’s other participants does not suggest that it was somehow dangerous, however; in fact, Eugénie, despite her initial disgust upon hearing what Dolmancé proposes to do (she receives the news “avec l’air de la répugnance,” stating, “Vous avez raison, cela est horrible”), nonetheless offers to accompany Dolmancé in order to masturbate him while he amuses himself with Augustin.89

The participation of feces in the reinforcement of social structures proves to be a constant throughout Sade’s œuvre, from the unpublished *Les Cent Ving Journées de*
Sodome manuscript to the final version of *La Nouvelle Justine, suivie de l'Histoire de Juliette, sa sœur*. In the *Sodome* manuscript, where the libertines require their victims to retain their feces until instructed otherwise, and strictly forbid cleansing after defecation, excrement in fact constitutes the very center of the text, as it is above all defecation that Sade initially attempts to hide from his readers until the moment is right. By the time Sade rewrote the initial orgy at Sainte-Marie-des-Bois in *La Nouvelle Justine*, feces would become a much more important component of the narrative than in the 1791 version. For instance, as the monks pass Justine around, “Sévérino entrouvre les fesses de Justine, et la fait pêter dans sa bouche,” while, just before biting Justine’s vagina, “Sylvestre enconne la femme de quarante ans en levrette; elle lui chie, pendant ce temps-là, sur la racine du vit.” As in the earlier edition of the novel, Jérôme again orders Justine to perform fellatio on him, but here has other women provide him with feces: “celle de trente ans lui chie dans le nez; celles de quatorze et de quinze lui en font autant dans les mains” (*Œuvres* 2.610-611). Instead, this time it is Ambroise who orders Justine to defecate while he sodomizes her, before demanding a similar contribution from others: each time he removes his penis from Justine’s anus, the mouth of Ambroise

sollicite un étron, qu’on lui donne à la fin […] Il se replace, on le sodomise: quatre beaux culs, deux mâles et deux femelles, se rangent

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90 Thus, for example, the narrator describes in only the vaguest of terms how Rosette and Zélamir would be punished for not adhering to the libertines’ wishes (1.118), and offers no further clarification until la Duclos introduces filth into her storytelling on day nine. Day ten then begins with Sade’s note to himself, “Souvenez-vous de mieux voiler dans le commencement ce que vous allez éclaircir ici,” followed by the following clarification: “Plus nous avançons, mieux nous pouvons éclaircir notre lecteur sur de certains faits que nous avons été obligé de lui tenir voilés dans le commencement […] : il était expressément défendu aux sujets, de quelque sexe qu’ils fussent, d’aller à la garde-robe sans une permission expresse, afin que ces besoins, ainsi conservés, pussent fournir au besoin de ceux qui les désiraient. […] Ce qu’on appelle la cérémonie du bidet ne plaisait pas exactement à nos quatre amis : Curval, par exemple, ne pouvait souffrir que les sujets qui devaient avoir affaire à lui se lavassent ; Durcet était de même, moyen en quoi l’un et l’autre avertissait la duègne des sujets avec lesquels ils prévoyaient de s’amuser le lendemain, et l’on défendait à ces sujets d’user en aucun cas de toute ablution ou frottement, de quelque nature qu’il put être […]” (1.163-164).
autour de lui; tous pètent, chient, vessent; on lui en fait dans le nez, sur le visage, dans la bouche; on en remplit ses mains; et l’impudique, au comble de ses vœux, perd son foutre, en invectivant celle dont il reçoit pourtant toute sa volupté. (2.614)

While typical of the general expansion of the original tale that occurs throughout *La Nouvelle Justine*, the numerical accumulation of the passage also stresses the monks’ unchallenged hold on power. As Justine is welcomed to the monastery by a cacophony of anal emissions, feces appears as something the monks forcibly extract from their victims, enabling them to reinforce their dominance by controlling the basic biological process of defecation. The apparent disorder of the flatulence and feces-filled orgy in fact forms part of a strictly regulated hierarchical system.

Within the fictional world of Sade’s texts, the contracted exchanges of feces therefore take place in accordance with the dictates of those in power. In a similar manner, the circulation of written “ordures” in the public sphere was tolerated up until the Consulate, provided that such texts refrained from critiquing the current government. On the one hand, Article 355 of the *Constitution du 5 Fructidor An III* (August 22, 1795) explicitly stated that there was no limitation to the freedom of the press, thereby providing Sade with the liberty to amplify his obscene publications over the latter half of the decade. 91 At the same time, as Lynn Hunt has remarked, any attempts to control the press were largely directed against political journals, which in effect allowed obscene publications to flourish without interference. 92 Perhaps aware of the risks involved in

91 “Il n'y a ni privilège, ni maîtrise, ni jurande, ni limitation à la liberté de la presse, du commerce, et à l'exercice de l'industrie et des arts de toute espèce. Toute loi prohibitive en ce genre, quand les circonstances la rendent nécessaire, est essentiellement provisoire, et n'a d'effet que pendant un an au plus, à moins qu'elle ne soit formellement renouvelée.”

92 “From 1794—perhaps even from 1792—until the Consulate, repression was apparently even less effective than it had been in the early years of the Revolution […] Although the leaders of the Directory
political publications, Sade deliberately attempts to avoid offending post-Revolutionary political sentiment, all while increasing both his literary output as a whole and the importance of fecal material within those works.\footnote{Whereas earlier obscene works such as Venus dans le cloître ou le religieuse en chemise, Histoire de Dom Bougre, portier des chartreux and Thérèse Philosophe certainly featured a strong political element in their relentless attack on the clergy under the ancien régime, by the mid-1790s the presence of monks, nuns, and the Pope in works such as Sade’s constituted more of an homage to the conventions of the genre than an attempt to undermine social institutions; as Hunt argues, “Since the aristocracy and the clergy had lost most of their influence, one set of motivations for publishing pornographic pamphlets had been superseded” (“Pornography and the French Revolution” 314).} For example, Sade could not publish Aline et Valcour until August 1795 because altering the text to make it conform to the political climate of the Revolution took him more time than he expected. The author had to be careful to show that the libertine behavior he half-heartedly condemns in the novel was a vice of the ancien régime that had disappeared thanks to the Revolution. Thus, when a curé bemoans the corruption that reins in the “Babylone moderne” of eighteenth-century France, prophesizing that “l’État énervé pour embellir cette nouvelle Sodome, s’engloutira comme elle, sous ses ruines dorées,” Sade is quick to add in a footnote, “C’est ici, comme dans bien d’autres passages, que nous supplions nos lecteurs de ne pas perdre de vue que cet ouvrage s’écrivait un an avant la Révolution” (Œuvres 1.447). In fact, the title page of Aline et Valcour prominently announces that it was “Écrit à la Bastille un an avant la Révolution de France,” and Sade makes certain to provide ample footnotes reminding the reader not only of the date of the novel’s redaction, but that the regime, like Mercier, were troubled by abuses of freedom of the press, they focused almost exclusively on getting control over the political journals. Their preoccupation with political dissent seems to have opened the door to the relatively unfettered publication of nonpolitical pornography” (Hunt, “Pornography and the French Revolution” 312).
author himself was imprisoned in the Bastille, a victim of the previous society’s injustices.\footnote{In addition to the example cited above, see also pages 541, 626, 640, 728, 978, and 980 of \textit{Œuvres} 1.}

Sade had to be particularly cautious because he had learned firsthand the dangers of becoming involved in Revolutionary politics. Although, in the early days following his release from prison, “le citoyen Sade” carried out his duty as a citizen of the young republic, both as a member of the militia and of the National Convention, where he belonged to the Section des Piques, he was nonetheless arrested and imprisoned on December 8, 1793, at the height of Robespierre’s power.\footnote{The Section would later become one of the Convention’s most radical wings, and was the same to which Robespierre belonged. Sade even served as the Section’s President for a few months in 1793, and, given the violence of the times, probably signed a few execution orders, although he did intervene to save the lives of his despised in-laws by removing them from a fatal list, most likely out of self-interest: with his aristocratic background, his scandalous behavior in the past, and the fact that his sons had emigrated (which alone could be grounds for execution), Sade had every reason to divert attention from his family relations, and continually had to defend his patriotism during the Revolution.} After being moved from the Couvent des Madelonnettes to Saint-Lazare, Sade ended up imprisoned in the Maison Blanchard at Picpus, which in June of 1794 became the burial site for decapitated corpses. After narrowly avoiding the guillotine, Sade was eventually freed on October 13, as the Terrorists’ hold on power had begun to wane.\footnote{Most of Sade’s biographers believe that Sade survived due to an administrative error. Maurice Lever, on the other hand, argues that Sade owed his life to his friend and companion Madame Quesnet, who borrowed money under Sade’s name to pay off the administration (Lever, \textit{Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade} 534).} Still, the experience seems to have taught him to avoid political involvement in a world where power changed hands so quickly. Sade therefore had to make sure that \textit{Aline et Valcour}, published with the name of “le citoyen S***” prominently displayed on its title page, refrained from offending Revolutionary political sensibilities, especially since its original publisher, the
determined royalist Girouard, was beheaded in January 1794. But even the clandestine and anonymously published *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* reveals an especially problematic relationship to Revolutionary politics that perhaps reflects Sade’s own political experience. The erotic dialogue takes a surprising political turn when Dolmancé—prompted by Eugénie’s question “si les mœurs sont vraiment nécessaires dans un gouvernement, si leur influence est de quelque poids sur le génie d’une nation?”—reads from a brochure that he happened to purchase at the Palais d’Égalité that morning (*Œuvres* 3.110). While the pamphlet does not directly answer Eugénie’s question, it does discuss the place of morality in a Republic, beginning with a stern rejection of religion, followed by justifications of crimes such as slander, theft, prostitution, rape, adultery, incest, sodomy, and murder. In short, since a Republic will always be in conflict with the despots who surround it, it will rely on the immoral practice of warfare for its very survival, and therefore cannot demand that its citizens behave morally. In order to survive, a Republic thus requires permanent insurrection and perpetual movement, neither of which, in answer to Eugénie’s question, is compatible with morality.

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97 Girouard’s widow took over his business, and was responsible for publishing both *Aline et Valcour* and *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* in the late summer of 1795.

98 Identified as an “ouvrage posthume de l’Auteur de *Justine*” (in an apparent attempt to capitalize on the popularity of his earlier novel while still protecting his true identity) *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* was listed as being published in “Londres, Aux dépens de la Compagnie,” in typical clandestine fashion.

99 “[L’État] ne se conservera que par la guerre, et rien n’est moins moral que la guerre ; maintenant je demande comment on parviendra à démontrer que, dans un état immoral par ses obligations, il soit essentiel que les individus soient moraux […]” (3.129).

100 3.129. In its conclusion, however, the pamphlet suggests that such instability merely represents a step in the growth of the Republic, whose virtues will soon inspire others to follow its example, bringing about the fall of foreign tyrants and the spread of liberty to other nations (3.153). Although Dolmancé does not
This awkward intrusion of dubious political theory into Sade’s otherwise standard erotic dialogue calls into question the function of the pamphlet within the text as a whole. While Philippe Roger persuasively presents “Français, Encore un effort” as a parody of the sort of political literature widely available in Paris at the time (in “A Political Minimalist”), the textual importance granted to the pamphlet seems to suggest a more forceful statement regarding Sade’s relationship to contemporary politics. The pamphlet, for instance, indirectly references the Constitution du 5 Fructidor An III, the document that allowed for the publication of works such as La Philosophie dans le boudoir, when it mentions “le serment des propriétés que vient de prononcer la nation.” On a more personal level, however, Sade uses the pamphlet to portray himself in a favorable political light and to ridicule his enemies. The Republic, the pamphlet argues, should contain various officially sanctioned sites where individuals could act out their sexual inclinations with total impunity, even if that meant bringing physical harm to others (3.131, 134). Sade’s inclusion of this fantasy within “Français, Encore un effort” relates to his own real-life experience, as he had initially suggested a similar indulgence toward libertines in a 1783 letter he wrote to his wife, arguing that the best way to cure him of his own immoral tendencies was not to lock him up in a prison cell, where his imagination only pushed him further into depravity, but within a seraglio, where he would simultaneously satisfy his sexual urges and learn to treat women with greater respect (Correspondances du marquis de Sade 18.116-118). Amidst his description of a

explicitly draw the connection (for obvious reasons), such a state of peace would by extension remove the necessity of widespread immorality.

101 3.127. The Convention adopted the Constitution on August 22, 1795. The pamphlet also mentions “le nouveau code que l’on nous prépare” (3.125), referring to the Code des délits et des peines adopted on October 22, 1795. Jean Deprun points to the relevant passages in establishing the publication date of La Philosophie dans le Boudoir in his notes to the Pléiade edition (3.1265-660).
similar (albeit more violent) system of seragios in “Français, Encore un effort,” a revealing note at the bottom of the page explicitly relates this idealized concept of sexual freedom to Sade’s own experience as the target of official surveillance due to his unorthodox behavior: “On sait que l’infâme et scélérat Sartine composait à Louis XV des moyens de luxe, en lui faisant lire trois fois la semaine, par la Dubaril, le détail privé et enrichi par lui de tout ce qui se passait dans les mauvais lieux de Paris: cette branche de libertinage du Néron français coûtait trois millions à l’État” (Œuvres 3.153). As lieutenant general of the Parisian police from 1759 to 1774, Antoine de Sartine had ordered the inspector Marais to follow the Marquis in order to monitor his trysts with the capital’s prostitutes. Such control of individual sexual behavior, Sade argues, is a sign of tyranny and has no place in a Republic. Denouncing both Sartine and Louis XV in the same breath thus conveniently provides Sade with yet another opportunity to present himself as both a victim of the “French Nero” and a stalwart adherent to the Revolutionary cause.

In addition, “Français, Encore un effort” attempts to justify libertinism on the grounds of political utility. Sade’s footnote attacks the surveillance program of Louis XV not only because it exemplified the lustful king’s hypocrisy, but because it cost the state a considerable sum. If the new Republic truly wants to distinguish itself from the tyranny of the ancien régime, it must, according to the pamphlet, avoid interference in the sexual lives of its citizens. The consequence of imposing moral restrictions on individual behavior is nothing short of political revolution. If individuals are not allowed to reign as despots over their own private sexual kingdoms, the text argues, then they will direct their energy toward overthrowing the government (3.131). Political action occurs only
when individual sexual interests are denied; by itself, immoral sexual behavior poses no threat to state, and does not constitute a political act. By extension, the stance of “Français, Encore un effort” therefore argues that, as a potentially immoral act, the publication of obscene literature such as La Philosophie dans le boudoir is not politically dangerous. Instead, it is only political speech that constitutes a danger to the social and political order, as the situation of the pamphlet within the plot of the dialogue demonstrates. After all, Augustin, the gardener, was dismissed from the boudoir only for the reading of “Français, Encore un effort”; only after the political discussion has concluded does the impressionable peasant return to participate in the rape of Madame de Mistival, where he is eventually joined by the syphilitic valet, Lapierre. Implied in these comings and goings to and from the boudoir is the idea that political discussion must remain the privilege of the educated upper classes. Sexual knowledge, however, can be made available to all since it lacks politics’ potential to disrupt and destabilize society. Sade thus suggests that the only dangerous passage in La Philosophie dans le boudoir pertains to politics, rather than to the violent and unconventional sexual practices that would frighten so many of his readers.

The only true danger in the boudoir is thus the overtly political “Français, Encore un effort,” which, fittingly, contains a warning regarding its readership:

j’atteste ici formellement n’avoir aucune de ces vues perverses; j’expose les idées qui depuis l’âge de raison se sont identifiées avec moi, et au sujet desquelles l’infâme despotisme des tyrans s’était opposé tant de siècles: tant pis pour ceux que ces grandes idées corrompraient, tant pis pour ceux qui ne savent saisir que le mal dans des opinions philosophiques, susceptibles de se corrompre à tout; qui sait s’ils ne se gangrèneraient peut-être pas aux lectures de Sénèque et de Charron, ce n’est point à eux que je parle, je ne m’adresse qu’à des génies capables de m’entendre, et ceux-là me liront sans danger. (3.126)
By dismissing the views presented as perverse and stressing that he is merely exposing ideas, Sade further distances himself from the pamphlet’s arguments, even if “Français, Encore un effort” is itself already an anonymous, fictional treatise within a greater anonymous publication. Since tyrants have always opposed such ideas, seeking to censor them on moral grounds would thus be a sign of despotism unsuitable to the post-Revolutionary era. Sade is not clear, however, as to who these “génies” capable of understanding him might be. When he rejects “ceux qui ne savent saisir que le mal dans des opinions philosophiques,” Sade seems to exclude readers such as Rétif, Mercier, and Villers who condemn his work on moral grounds. At the same time, the dismissal of Augustin suggests that Sade only addresses the educated elites, a notion conveyed through the term “génie,” which Deprun in his notes to the Pléiade edition defines in the more general sense of “esprit” or “caractère” (3.1327), although it had by 1795 gained its additional definition of designating someone of superior intelligence. The intended audience of “Français, Encore un effort” would thus be the same as those “libertins” that Sade singles out in his dedication: “Voluptueux de tous les âges et de tous les sexes, c’est à vous seuls que j’offre cet ouvrage” (3.3).

Perhaps most importantly, Dolmancé’s reading of the pamphlet, unlike the other philosophical interludes in the dialogue, does not lead to sex, demonstrating the degree to which Sade attempts to keep politics and eroticism separate. Instead, the pamphlet inspires a discussion on crime and cruelty, which in turn provides erotic stimulation. Even then, however, Sade makes certain to alert his reader that the discussion has shifted registers, and no longer pertains to the political theory laid out in “Français, Encore un effort.” In the midst of Dolmancé’s lengthy justification for sexual cruelty, wherein he
famously remarks that “il n’est point d’homme qui ne veuille être despote quand il bande,” Sade provides a note explaining that he does not mean for despotism to be taken in political sense:

La pauvreté de la langue française nous contraint à employer des mots que notre heureux gouvernement reprouve aujourd’hui avec tant de raison; nous espérons que nos lecteurs éclairés nous entendront, et ne confondront point l’absurde despotisme politique, avec le très luxurieux despotisme des passions de libertinage. (3.158)

Sade’s mention of “notre heureux gouvernement” and its “raison” places the Revolutionary government in clear contrast to the “absurde despotisme” of the ancien régime. Writing during the Revolution, when political involvement, as he himself had witnessed all too clearly, could easily lead to imprisonment and death, Sade makes every possible effort to ensure that his own work conforms to post-Revolutionary political sensibilities. “Français, Encore un effort” is thus neither a potentially legitimate tract of political theory nor a sign that political concerns inevitably find their way into the boudoir. Rather, the pamphlet reflects the period of instability in which Sade wrote, and presents political neutrality as a necessary component of libertinism. As the author himself suggests, his “lecteurs éclairés” would presumably be able to discern his political stance with relative ease: here, he hopes that they will hear him just as he had earlier specified that he is only addressing “des génies capables de m’entendre.”

**Rétif’s Revenge: The “Monster-Author” Unmasked**

The publication of “Français, Encore un effort” would nonetheless prove dangerous for Sade, however, and would play an important role in landing him in prison for good once Napoleon came to power under the Consulate. In keeping with the
pamphlet’s focus on both parody and personal attacks, Sade’s argument for
governmentally administered seraglions in fact parodies Rétif’s 1769 pamphlet *Le
Pornographe ou la prostitution réformée* and its proposal of systematic governmental
reform and regulation of the Parisian brothel network.\textsuperscript{102} This blatant attempt to humiliate
Rétif through a disdainful parody would provide the spark for a barrage of attacks against
Sade that Rétif wrote in 1796, shortly after the publication of *La Philosophie dans le
boudoir*.\textsuperscript{103} In addition to *L’Anti-Justine*, Rétif responded to Sade in both the “Neuvième
époque” of *Monsieur Nicolas* (composed in September 1796 and published in September
1797) and *Fausse Immoralité de la Liberté de la Presse*, a pamphlet written in response
to the *Constitution du 5 Fructidor An III* that attempts to answer the question, “Est-ce un
bien que la presse soit absolument libre, ou doit-on la restreindre?”—in particular “pour
des ouvrages comme *Justine, Aline, le Boudoir, la Théorie du libertinage*, et autres du
mème homme, dont il est parlé dans *Les Nuits de Paris*, qui allait disséquer une femme
vivante” (*Monsieur Nicolas* 2.1032). While Rétif directs most of his attention toward
*Théorie du Libertinage*, an unpublished manuscript whose existence has never been
verified (but that Rétif insists on having read), his reactions against Sade’s distortion of
his brothel system could just as easily apply to “*Français, Encore un effort*” and its

\textsuperscript{102} While he may have simply been responding to his appearance as a villain in *Les Nuits de Paris*, Sade
had always held Rétif’s literary talents in contempt, as is evident in a 1784 letter he wrote to the Marquise,
imploring his wife not to send him any of Rétif’s works: “Surtout n’achetez rien de M. Rétif, au nom de
Dieu! C’est un auteur de Pont-Neuf et de Bibliothèque bleue, dont il est inouï que vous ayez imaginé de
m’envoyer quelque chose” (*Correspondance du Marquis de Sade* 18.185).

\textsuperscript{103} As David Coward has argued, “[…] il s’agissait non seulement d’un vol d’idées mais de leur
« parodie. » Si Rétif détestait Sade, il est certain qu’une partie de sa haine fut motivée par ce qu’il
percevait comme une expression publique et humiliante de mépris” (“Rétif, critique de Sade,” 77).
implicit acceptance of murder.\textsuperscript{104} Although Rétif may have had strictly personal motives for his outburst, in his response he continually claims that the abusive aristocrat of \textit{Les Nuits de Paris} and “monstre-auteur” must be prevented from publishing further “horreurs” before he causes the death of thousands: “Ô gouvernement, préviens ce scélérat, qui peut faire donner une mort cruelle à vingt mille femmes, s’il est lu par les soldats…” Rétif writes in the “Neuvième époque” (\textit{Monsieur Nicolas} 2.451). In order to facilitate the government’s task, Rétif conveniently reveals the current residence of “Dsds” (twice mentioned by name in \textit{Fausse Immoralité de la Liberté de la Presse}), whom he envisions composing additional horrors “dans son repaire immonde de Clichy, où son âme atroce s’amuse de ces horreurs idéales, en y joignant pourtant l’horrible plaisir de faire saigner, dit-on, toutes les semaines, une infortunée qui lui sert de maîtresse” (2.1033-1035). In a similar manner, \textit{L’Anti-Justine} would claim to be published by “la Veuve Girouard, très connue,” thereby publicly identifying the woman responsible for printing Sade’s \textit{Aline et Valcour} and \textit{La Philosophie dans le boudoir}.

While Rétif stresses that Sade’s literary and sexual crimes continue, he also connects Sade with the abuses of the ancien régime, insisting that “Ce scélérat a rêvé ces horreurs dans la Bastille, où il fut mis pour la femme à disséquer vivante: ce sont les élans de sa rage contre l’espèce humaine…” (2.1032). Indeed, much of \textit{Fausse Immoralité de la Liberté de la Presse} denounces “le citoyen Sade” as a corrupt nobleman, attempting to land him in political trouble following the Revolution: “Quel monstre, qu’un homme à

\textsuperscript{104} In fact, Rétif claims that his primary reason for revealing Sade’s name in the “Cinquième époque” was to stop the publication of \textit{Théorie du Libertinage}: “[…] et si j’ai l’air d’en indiquer l’auteur, dans la septième partie de cet ouvrage, c’est que j’ai voulu prévenir, en lui montrant qu’il est connu, la publication de la \textit{Théorie}, qui ne paraît pas encore et que j’ai lue en manuscrit…” (2.451). To clarify Rétif’s mention of the “septième partie de cet ouvrage,” \textit{Monsieur Nicolas} was divided into “parties” as well as “époques.” He was wrong in his location of the passage, however, as it in fact occurs in the eight part, fifth “époque.”
pareilles idées!” Rétif exclaims; “Et c’est un noble! Un noble de la famille de la célèbre
Laure de Pétrarque! C’est cet homme à longue barbe blanche qu’on porta en triomphe en
le tirant de la Bastille!… Ô peuple aveugle! Il le fallait étouffer!” (2.1033). The political
slant of Rétif’s assault becomes even more apparent toward the end of the essay, when he
condemns “la haine d’un tigre-homme, d’un vil noble, méchant comme tous ses pareils,
contre l’espèce humaine” (2.1039). Rétif thus associates the hatred for humanity present
in Justine and other works with the crimes of the aristocracy, and suggests that everyone
would be better off with the Marquis behind bars.

Although such a stance remains consistent with the overall argument of Fausse
Immoralité de la Liberté de la Presse, which concludes that the absolute freedom of the
press should be maintained, but that writers should be held responsible for crimes they
inspire (since, according to Rétif, Sade’s works may have already caused hundreds of
deaths, there was no choice but to lock him up again for the good of society), Rétif would
not have to wait long for the end of the Directoire and its freedoms. In the meantime,
others soon began to take notice of Sade’s scandalous publishing activities as well. In
April 1798, friends of the writer Jean-Marie Jérôme Fleuriot published a letter in the
Journal de Paris correcting an earlier attribution (in Le Cercle) of Justine to Fleuriot:
“cet ouvrage obscène intitulé Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu n’est pas de lui.
Personne n’ignore qu’il est d’un certain monsieur de Sade à qui la Révolution du 14

105 Rétif thus proposes to establish a registry of booksellers, publishers, and buyers that would permit the
tracking of obscene publications, in order to take appropriate measures should a crime be committed: “On
ne touchera pas à la liberté de la presse, mais quand l’ouvrage aura fait commettre un crime, l’auteur,
l’éditeur, le libraire, les prêteurs de l’exemplaire seront déclarés mauvais citoyens et incapables d’en
exercer les droits,” unless they can somehow prove that individual who committed a crime after reading
obscene literature was already corrupt beforehand (1039). In another of his statements regarding the deaths
caused by Justine, Rétif writes, “J’avoue qu’il est difficile de réparer les ravages des productions de
l’auteur de Justine, etc. Comme je l’ai dit, peut-être déjà plus de cent, plus de deux cent femmes ou filles,
tombées entre les mains de libertins du même genre que l’auteur, ont péri victimes de la brutalité” (2.1039).
juillet ouvrit les cachots de la Bastille” (qtd. in Lever, Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade 570). Rétif’s claim that the liberation of Sade constituted yet another unfortunate consequence of the Revolution had apparently caught on. The following year, a premature obituary for Sade in the August 29, 1799 edition of l’Ami des lois would again attack him for composing Justine:

On assure que de Sades [sic] est mort. Le nom seul de cet infâme écrivain exhale une odeur cadavéreuse qui tue la vertu et inspire l’horreur: il est auteur de Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu. Le cœur le plus dépravé, l’esprit le plus dégradé, l’imagination la plus bizarrement obscène ne peuvent rien inventer qui outrage autant la nature, la pudeur, l’humanité. (qtd. in Lever, Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade 575)

After filling so many of his clandestine novels with anal emissions, Sade had well earned his reputation for emitting foul odors. Sade would vehemently deny all of these charges, but would succeed only in convincing the public that he was not dead.

In hindsight, Sade had done himself no favors in signing his name to Aline et Valcour and identifying La Philosophie dans le boudoir as the “ouvrage posthume de l’Auteur de Justine” in the second half of 1795. In the space of a few months, the Parisian reading public was thus presented with a somewhat racy novel by “le citoyen S***,” an obscene dialogue by the anonymous author of Justine, and Rétif’s written declarations that the two men were one and the same. Aline et Valcour in particular cast doubt on Sade’s character: although the lengthy epistolary novel relating the tragic love of its title characters more closely resembles Les Liaisons Dangereuses than Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu in terms of its sexual content, the text’s subject matter and presentation were still rather risky. Rétif, for instance, would consistently list the novel among the “exécrables ouvrages composés depuis la Révolution, Justine, Aline, le Boudoir, la Théorie du Libertinage” (2.451). On the one hand, its libertine villains outdo
even Oxtiern, the title character in the play whose productions were halted in 1791 after angering the public, in terms of wickedness; as Rétif accurately summarizes in *Fausse immoralité de la liberté de la presse*, the “malheureux” author of *Aline et Valcour* “fait violer deux filles, l’une naturelle, l’autre légitime, par leur père, qui les fait périr ensuite. Ce même homme empoisonne sa femme et jouit de ses souffrances, etc.” (2.1032).

Moreover, the novel’s accompanying engravings push the limits of decency, either by depicting inexplicit scenes that convey an obvious sexual tension, or by revealing breasts and genitalia in otherwise non-erotic situations. The fact that *Aline et Valcour* sold rather well, going through three editions and even inspiring two heavily plagiarized pirate versions, probably did not help Sade’s case much, either.

The last straw came when Sade and publisher Nicolas Massé released the massive ten-volume expansion of the *Justine* saga, the four-volume *La Nouvelle Justine* and its companion, the six-volume *Histoire de Juliette, sa sœur*, sometime between 1798 and 1802. The text of the ten volumes was accompanied by no less than one hundred

106 In all, six of the sixteen engravings that accompany the text display potentially offensive material. Two illustrate the text at its most passionate moments, such as when the libertine Dolbourg raises his cane to strike the covered breasts of his imploring victim (1.441), and when a Spanish judge attempts to rape Léonore from behind (1.811), while another goes out of its way to depict vaginas when they could be easily hidden (when Sainville is ordered to inspect Ben Mâacoro’s European captives, 1.607). The other three engravings show breasts during violent or otherwise disturbing passages—such as when Léonore’s captor removes her from a coffin (1.543), when Don Juan inadvertently stabs his mistress (in one of Léonore’s digressions, 1.885), and when a nude woman is tortured by Inquisitors (1.909)—, thereby adding an erotic element to scenes of death, torture, and murder. Such flirtation with the forbidden was nonetheless common in openly published eighteenth-century engravings; see Philip Stewart, *Engraven Desire. Eros, Image, and Text in the French Eighteenth Century*.

107 First *L’Histoire de Sainville et de Léonore* in 1798 and then *Alzonde et Koradin* in 1799, both by A.P.F. Ménégault.

108 The actual dates of publication for both *La Nouvelle Justine* alone and *La Nouvelle Justine, suivie de l’Histoire de Juliette, sa sœur*, are unknown. Although many commentators follow the indication on the title page and give 1797 as the year all ten volumes were published, Pascale Ract-Madoux believes that the four volumes of *La Nouvelle Justine* appeared in 1799, followed by the six volumes of *Juliette* in February
“gravures obscènes” that certainly added to the work’s commercial appeal. Europe—indeed, the world—had never seen such clandestine erotic publication on this scale. Several pirate editions soon followed the original printing, apparently distributed by individuals who had obtained and then copied earlier editions.¹⁰⁹ With so many editions, both legitimate and counterfeit, of the four-volume Nouvelle Justine, the six-volume Histoire de Juliette, the ten-volume set of the two novels together, and the two-volume reprinting of Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu, it is safe to say that Sade’s erotic saga flooded the market from the final years of the eighteenth century and into the early 1800s, as Mercier had noted in Le Nouveau Paris. Despite taking the customary precautions, Sade would soon find himself in trouble because of Justine and Juliette. The end of the Directory and beginning of the Consulate in November 1799 was accompanied by a crack-down on both obscenity and political speech, which Sade tested somewhat with the open publication of Les Crimes de l’amour, a collection of eleven short stories written while Sade was in the Bastille, in four in-12° volumes, in early 1800.¹¹⁰ The name “D.A.F Sade, auteur d’Aline et Valcour,” appeared on the title page, along with that of “Massé, Editeur propriétaire, rue Helvétius, n° 580.” Like Aline et Valcour, the novellas did nothing to correct assumptions regarding Sade’s character, and feature similar tales

¹⁰⁹ These pirate texts are distinguishable from the originals through their numerous faults, both with respect to the text itself and to the accompanying engravings. See editions Enfer 1186, 2507, 2509 and 2511 in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

¹¹⁰ The novels were published in tiny in-18° format, the names of Sade and Massé did not appear anywhere in the editions, and although Massé’s presses were located on the rue Helvétius in Paris, Amsterdam was given as the place of publication, and 1797 as the year, in order to mislead the authorities. On the first page of the first volume of La Nouvelle Justine, an “editor’s note” proclaims this edition to be the original, composed by the anonymous author in 1788, and that the earlier Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu is no more than a “misérable extrait bien au-dessous de l’original” (2.393).
focused on libertine behavior, such as *Ernestine*, the original basis for Sade’s play *Oxtiern* (but without the play’s happy ending), and *Eugénie de Franval*, the tragic story of a father’s incestuous relationship with his daughter.

*Les Crimes de l’amour* was prefaced by Sade’s critical essay *Idée sur les romans*, which discusses the history of the novel and lays out his views on the genre, lashes out against Rétif (in an apparent attempt to obtain revenge against the author responsible for unmasking Sade’s identity), and concludes with yet another denial of having written *Justine*. The passages on Rétif in particular offer a contrasting interpretation of who was releasing filth into society, as Sade writes that “R… inonde le public,” and that “il lui faut une presse au chevet de son lit; heureusement que celle-là toute seule gémira de ses *terribles productions,*” in reference to his rival’s in-home printing press. In fact, Sade counters his rival’s claims by arguing that it was in fact Rétif who was flooding the public with a literature both disgusting and “*bien poivrè,*” attacking what he deems “un style bas et rampant, des aventures dégoûtantes, toujours puisées dans la plus mauvaise compagnie; nul autre mérite, enfin que celui d’une prolixité… dont les seuls marchands de poivre le remercieront” (41-42). A few paragraphs later, Sade advises aspiring novelists, “si tu n’écris comme R… *que ce que tout le monde sait,* dusses-tu, comme lui, nous donner quatre volumes par mois, ce n’est pas la peine de prendre la plume […]” (45). The real offense, the erstwhile aristocrat implies, lie not in publishing immoral tales such as *Aline et Valcour* and *Les Crimes de l’amour*, but in producing massive quantities of mediocre and unoriginal literature.

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111 “Qu’on ne m’attribue donc plus […] le roman de J… : jamais je n’ai fait de tels ouvrages, et je n’en ferai sûrement jamais ; il n’y a que des imbéciles ou des méchants qui, malgré l’autenticité de mes dénégations, puissent me soupçonner ou m’accuser encore d’en être l’auteur, et le plus souverain mépris sera désormais la seule arme avec laquelle je combattrais leurs calomnies” (*Les Crimes de l’amour* 41-51).
Sade’s persistent denials notwithstanding, he was nonetheless arrested and imprisoned in early March 1801, when the authorities raided Massé’s office and found manuscripts and printed volumes of *La Nouvelle Justine* and *Juliette*. Sade just happened to be present in the office that day, having apparently been set up by Massé, who was willing to sacrifice one of his authors in order to save his own skin. Without trial, Sade was secretly incarcerated in the former convent at Sainte-Pélagie, where he remained until early 1803. After a brief stay at the Bicêtre Asylum, Sade was transferred to Charenton in mid-March (under the pretext that he was “dans un état perpétuel de démence libertine,” since the authorities needed an excuse to house a sane and healthy individual alongside the mentally ill), where he would remain until his death on December 2, 1814 (Lever, *Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade* 595). The publishing career of “D.A.F Sade” was thus brought to an abrupt halt with the erosion of the post-Revolutionary freedoms upon which he depended. After the fall of the ancien régime, Sade felt that he could maintain his liberty so long as he refrained from criticizing Revolutionary politics. In as far that his stance enabled the publication of increasingly obscene works from *Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu* to *La Nouvelle Justine, suivie de l’Histoire de Juliette, sa sœur*, he was right. Sade should have perhaps known, however, that such freedoms were susceptible to disappear during a period of political instability. With the rise of Napoleon bringing an end to the chaos that permitted the presence of obscenity in the public sphere, the known author of works whose extreme violence and scatological detail, according to most readers, threatened the very foundation of social order, could no longer expect to remain free. Sade’s argument

112 According to Lever, one thousand copies of *Juliette* were destroyed, and dozens of both *Juliette* and *La Nouvelle Justine* seized. See Lever, *Donatien, Alphonse, François, Marquis de Sade* 585-586.
that filth—in both its literal sense and as a synonym for obscenity—was politically harmless would prove unacceptable to the Consulate in its attempt to control the population by controlling language.

In the end, Rétif’s reading of Sade’s novels would thus win out, as subsequent readers would either follow Rétif in condemning them on moral grounds or take an opposite position by celebrating their supposedly subversive tendencies. After a brief period during the Revolution when obscenity was tolerated so long as it steered clear of politics, Sade’s oeuvre would be banned for attacking morality alone, until its twentieth-century defenders would desperately attempt to attach some greater political significance to it in order to justify its presence in society. In both instances, Sade’s own politically neutral stance is largely ignored. For him as for his characters, the emission of “ordures” merely provided a means to survive under a given social order, whether it meant defecating into the mouth of one’s captor or publishing a novel that could “empester le diable.” But for readers such as Rétif, Mercier, Villiers, and other moralists who would subsequently demonize Sade over the course of the nineteenth century, Justine and other works constituted a fundamental threat to the social order. Strangely, although Sade himself would reject this interpretation, his later admirers would in fact turn Rétif’s apocalyptic predictions into positive attributes, deifying the Marquis for his devilish revolt against conventional morality.

Chapter Three
Private Reflections: Sade in the Nineteenth Century
In 1806, while D.A.F. de Sade was locked away among the mentally ill at Charenton, the bibliographer Etienne-Gabriel Peignot published a *Dictionnaire critique, littéraire et bibliographique des principaux livres condamnés au feu, supprimés ou censurés* that featured a special passage dedicated to the Marquis. Singling Sade’s oeuvre out from other censured works, Peignot judges that “M.D.S.” merits a “flétrissure” for composing *Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu*, which contains “tout ce que l’imagination la plus dépravée, la plus cruelle, la plus exécrable peut offrir d’horrible et d’infâme” (1. xvii-xiii, xxiv-xxv). Peignot attacks *Justine*—particularly the final edition—in the context of a larger discussion of books that are either “sotadique ou pornographique,” such as *L’Académie des dames, Histoire de Dom Bougre*, and *Thérèse Philosophe*.113 With the use of the term “pornographic,” Peignot confirms a development that had been taking place throughout the eighteenth century, particularly in the 1790s when most obscene literature shed its earlier philosophical and political pretenses.

Unconvinced by the intellectual posturing of *Thérèse Philosophe* or Sade’s libertines, Peignot instead identifies sexual stimulation as the primary aim of such books, and is so disturbed by *Justine* that he places its “monstruosités licencieuses” in “les égouts de la littérature,” claiming that one cannot touch the novel “sans qu’il s’en exhale des miasmes pestilentiels.”

Peignot’s notes on Sade are typical of public discourse on the Marquis in the nineteenth century, when both the infamous libertine and his unorthodox brand of eroticism were summarily excluded from public space. In general, the sexually explicit

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113 Regarding *Justine*, Peignot remarks that “[I]l y en a deux éditions ; la dernière est la plus affreuse” (xxiv). Lynn Hunt discusses Peignot in “Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity,” claiming his reference to be the “earliest modern usage of the term *pornography*” (14-18). As she explains in her notes, “Peignot used the terms *pornographique* and *sotadique* as synonyms. *Sotadique* comes from the Latin *sotadicus*, which is based on the Greek name of an obscene poet, Sotades” (342).
books that had circulated clandestinely over the course of the eighteenth century, particularly during the political chaos of the 1790s, were seized by an increasingly powerful state and either destroyed or sent to the Bibliothèque Nationale, where they were kept in a special reserve section for isolation and preservation. As Peignot’s remarks suggest, the notorious works of Sade were widely considered to be the worst examples of the obscene literary genre that gradually became known as pornography. Much as Napoleon sought to remove Sade from public life by sequestering him at Charenton, the Empire and subsequent regimes took similar measures against the clandestine works of the Marquis and others. By the end of the 1830s, the library’s reserve section contained approximately 150 books, although the number is somewhat misleading since many editions already held by the library prior to 1792 had yet to be definitively classified. Then, in 1844, library employee Paulin Richard began to reorder the library’s catalogues, and gave the licentious works previously classified under the call number “Y2” the special mention “Enfer,” a term somewhat less revolting than Peignot’s suggestion of “égouts.” Over the course of the century, the collection of the Enfer would increase as government seizures yielded ever-greater spoils. In 1876, the Enfer contained roughly 620 titles judged “contraires aux bonnes mœurs”; between 1877 and 1909, another 230 books were added (Quignard 166-167).

This official censorship and condemnation of the Marquis de Sade in nineteenth century France features an interesting corollary, however, wherein writers privately express veneration for their pornographic predecessor. In fact, it was during the time when Sade was essentially banned from public discourse that he first began to evolve into the subversively heroic figure we have come to know today. As Elisabeth Ladenson
notes, over the course of the twentieth century “[h]e was successively lauded by Dadaists, surrealists, existentialists, structuralists, and poststructuralists,” until he “became the emblematic free spirit shackled during his lifetime by the repressive forces of the past, and finally appreciated by a more enlightened posterity,” which, she adds “did not, however, fully occur until the 1960s” (229). But before various avant-garde groups could claim Sade as one of their own, his name would appear in such private sources as the correspondence of Flaubert or the personal notebooks of Baudelaire. Understandably, few dared to display their admiration as openly as Pétrus Borel, who included a defense of Sade in his 1839 novel *Madame Putiphar*, or Alfred de Musset, whose anonymous 1833 novel *Gamiani ou deux nuits d’excès* represents the only attempt by a major nineteenth century author to respond to Sade’s works through an erotic novel. Instead, public mentions of Sade in France during the nineteenth century, outside of the righteous proclamations of scandalized moralists, would most often use his name in reference to a general fascination with evil and eroticism.

The earliest critic to attempt to document Sade’s influence on French Romanticism was Mario Praz, whose influential 1930 study *The Romantic Agony* places much of nineteenth century French literature “in the shadow of the Divine Marquis,” to borrow the title of its central chapter.¹¹⁴ Through close readings of several French Romantic texts, Praz uncovers countless traces of abused heroines and sadistic villains, tracing them all back to the Marquis de Sade. In its treatment of Sade, *The Romantic Agony* was primarily a response to what Praz calls “The recent enthusiasm of the

¹¹⁴ The book’s original title was *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica*. The Italian version was republished by Sansoni in 1976 with a revised preface and notes by the author, while the most updated version of *The Romantic Agony* remains the 1970 Oxford University Press edition, translated by Angus Davidson.
Surrealists for Sade,” and the critic goes to great lengths to distance his study from “the Surrealists, who have now made themselves the champions of Sade’s greatness” (xvii).

Sade was not, as the surrealists and others claimed, a man of genius, or even an original thinker; in fact, Praz writes, “The most elementary qualities of a writer—let us not say, of a writer of genius—are lacking in Sade,” whom Praz identifies as “merely a pornographer.”115 Faced with the surrealists’ vocal admiration for Sade, Praz takes a resolutely moderate view, arguing that “neither the conspiracy of silence which ended only yesterday, nor the apotheosis towards which there is a tendency today, can be accepted” (xvii). Although Claude Duchet would later accuse Praz of overstating his case (Duchet 219), Praz’s conclusion, as stated in his preface, comes across as rather modest:

Was Sade a ‘surromantique’? No, but he was certainly a sinister force in the Romantic Movement, a familiar spirit whispering in the era of the ‘mauvais maîtres’ and the ‘poètes maudits’; actually he did nothing more than give a name to an impulse which exists in every man, an impulse mysterious as the very forces of life and death with which it is inextricably connected. (xviii)

While Duchet goes a bit further in declaring that “L’influence littéraire de Sade est à peu près nulle,” he nonetheless follows Praz’s observation that Sade merely provided a name for a certain impulse: “Tout au plus pourrait-on parler d’un sadisme diffus, d’origine multiple, auquel le nom de Sade, et les polémiques qu’il suscite, font prendre conscience de lui-même” (239). According to Praz and Duchet, sadism, rather than the Marquis de

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115 xvii, 147. At times, Praz leaves no doubt regarding his assessment of Sade and his twentieth century admirers: “The conclusion of the present study will prove, even to those who are least well-informed, that Sade’s work is a monument—not, indeed, as Guillaume Apollinaire was pleased to declare, ‘de la pensée humaine’—but at least of something. But that the light which his work throws upon the less mentionable impulses of the man-animal should suffice immediately to classify the author as an original thinker, or, without further ado, as a man of genius, is a conclusion only to be pardoned if the ignorance and momentary infatuation of its formulator are taken into account” (xvii). As an example of “ignorance and momentary infatuation,” Praz then cites both Maurice Heine and Jean Paulhan.
Sade himself, was present in much of French Romanticism. Since textual encounters were presumably rare, Sade came to epitomize sexual cruelty through his name and reputation alone.

Efforts to determine who actually read the illegal editions often end up reduced to mere speculation. Balzac, for instance, includes an apparent reference to Justine in his erotically charged 1835 novella La Fille aux yeux d’or, which, in the course of its bloody tale of female-female eroticism, judges the widely condemned “immoralité des Liaisons Dangereuses, et de je ne sais quel autre livre qui a un nom de femme de chambre” to be inferior to that of normal ballroom conversation (La Comédie humaine 5.1097). While the book with the “name of a chambermaid” seems to be Justine, Balzac provides no concrete evidence of ever having read the novel (although he did list the openly published Aline et Valcour and Les Crimes de l’amour among his list of works to read between March and April of 1843).116 Perhaps because Sade’s texts were difficult to obtain, the moralists’ object of scorn could develop into a secretly worshipped icon among rebellious authors, paving the way for the surrealists in the 1920s. Regardless of whether or not they were familiar with Sade’s texts, French authors from Musset to Mirbeau (whose Le Jardin des supplices was published in 1899) exhibit a persistent fascination with erotically charged violence, transforming Sade into a subversive antidote to bourgeois morality. This manner in which public condemnation and private adulation interact becomes especially clear in the example of Flaubert, whose public concern for his reputation in the wake of his 1857 trial over Madame Bovary contrasts sharply with his private fascination with Sade as it emerges in both his personal correspondence and in

116 As Duchet notes in “L’image de Sade à l’époque romantique,” 233.
conversations recorded by the Goncourt brothers in their journal. Unique among major nineteenth century authors, Flaubert’s enthusiasm for Sade is well documented, making it possible to determine which works he read, when he read them, how he obtained them, and how he interpreted them. Flaubert’s readings offer the rare opportunity to discover how a close reader reacted to Sade’s editions at a time when their very possession was illegal, and provide clues as to the manner in which they circulated under such circumstances. At the same time, however, his tendency to read Sade as a source of private pleasure while publicly denying any connection with the notorious author exemplifies a pattern that would continue over the course of the twentieth century, when public admiration for Sade became the norm among literary circles, provided that one stress the political or intellectual seriousness of his oeuvre. As becomes clear through his personal correspondence, Flaubert’s reading sets him apart from both the scandalized moral concerns of Peignot and the enthusiastic admiration of twentieth-century surrealist admirers of the “Divine Marquis” in that he consistently refuses to take Sade seriously.

In the Shadow of the Divine Marquis: Echoes of Sade in Romantic Literature

On July 15, 1839, a seventeen year-old lycéen from Rouen named Gustave Flaubert wrote a letter to his childhood friend, Ernest Chevalier, playfully begging him to find some novels written by the Marquis de Sade. “Ô mon cher Ernest,” Flaubert implores, “à propos du marquis de Sade si tu pouvais me trouver quelques-uns des romans de cet honnête écrivain, je te le payerais son pesant d’or” (Correspondance 1.47). Flaubert’s initial mention of the Marquis occurred a few lines earlier, in reference to his
frustration regarding the inadequacy of his own style.\textsuperscript{117} “J’en suis fâché,” the young epistolarian admits, “mais ce n’est pas de ma faute, je n’ai pas l’esprit philosophique comme Cousin ou Pierre Leroux, Brillat-Savarin ou Lacenaire, qui faisait de la philosophie aussi à sa manière, et une drôle, une profonde, une amère de philosophie!” (1.47). The mention of an infamous criminal alongside two more conventional philosophers prompts Flaubert to exclaim enthusiastically, “J’aime bien à voir des hommes comme ça, comme Néron, comme le marquis de Sade. […] Ces monstres-là expliquent pour moi l’histoire, ils en sont le complément, l’apogée, la morale, le dessert; crois-moi, ce sont les grands hommes, des immortels aussi. Néron vivra aussi longtemps que Vespasien, Satan que Jésus-Christ” (1.47). While Sade’s actual crimes may have paled in comparison to those of Nero and Lacenaire, Flaubert’s placement of the Marquis alongside such monstrous criminals is indicative of a romantic fascination with the immoralist and the outlaw, for which the name “Sade” became an apt signifier.

In professing his admiration for the Marquis de Sade, Flaubert rebels against the predominant public discourse of his time, which featured resolute condemnations of the dangerous author similar to those of Peignot in his 1806 \textit{Dictionnaire critique}. For instance, in an 1834 article in the \textit{Revue de Paris}, writer Jules Janin builds upon Peignot’s evocation of pestilential putridity, judging that Sade’s biography belongs “parmi les plus souillées et les plus fangeuses” and claiming that “Partout où paraît cet homme, vous sentez une odeur de soufre, comme s’il avait traversé à la nage les lacs de Sodome.” Sade’s “livres obscènes,” according to Janin, take the “obsénités qui n’étaient

\textsuperscript{117} “Allons, maintenant me voilà lancé dans le parlage, dans les mots ; quand il m’échappera de faire du style, gronde-moi bien fort ; ma dernière phrase qui finit par brumeux me semble assez ténébreuse, et le diable m’emporte si je me comprends moi-même! […] Nom de Dieu que je suis bête ! Je croyais qu’il allait me venir des pensées et il ne m’est rien venu, turlututu!” (1.47).
que cela dans la tête des autres écrivains” and transform them into “un code entier
d’ordures et de vices.” In other words, Sade was especially dangerous because he goes
farther than other writers of the genre by codifying filth and vice under a rigorous system.

Janin then discusses the corruptive potential of Sade’s oeuvre, much as Rétif and Mercier
had done in the 1790s, and shares a pathetic anecdote about an innocent youth named
Julien who found a hidden copy of Justine and, succumbing “sous le souffle empoisonné
du marquis de Sade,” goes insane. The example thus serves as a warning, with the reader
Julien becoming the unfortunate companion to the fictional Justine and Juliette. As
another possible effect of reading Sade’s works, Janin, like Rétif before him, also evokes
their capacity to inspire murder, claiming that “Les livres du marquis de Sade ont tué plus
d’enfants que n’en pourraient tuer vingt maréchaux de Rais, ils en tuent chaque jour, ils
en tueront l’âme aussi bien que le corps.” Lest one suspect that something other than
insanity or homicidal furor might result, Janin’s article closes with the assertion, “Quant à
ceux qui les pourraient lire à plaisir, ils ne les lisent pas: ceux-là sont au bagne ou à
Charenton” (qtd. in Laugga-Traut 124-131).

Despite their dramatic effect, Janin’s closing remarks contradict a point made
earlier in his article regarding Sade’s readership in the 1830s. Janin had initially
proclaimed the Marquis de Sade to be “un nom que tout le monde sait et que personne ne
prononce,” suggesting that the notorious author maintained a secret yet ubiquitous
presence in nineteenth century France by no means limited to its penal colonies and
asylums. Despite the efforts of government censors, according to Janin, the forbidden
books nonetheless found their way onto the secret shelves of private libraries: “Car, ne
vous y trompez pas,” Janin warns, “le marquis de Sade est partout; il est dans toutes les
bibliothèques, sur un certain rayon mystérieux et caché qu’on découvre toujours […]].”

Apparently speaking from experience, Janin claims that an entire generation has read them, from “les vieillards de l’empire” to “les jeunes gens de la restauration.”

In “Quelques vérités sur la situation en littérature,” an article published in the July 1843 installment of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Sainte-Beuve would build upon Janin’s assessment to add that Sade’s influence can be felt throughout the popular literature of the period:

> Il y a un fonds de *De Sade* masqué, mais non point méconnaissable, dans les inspirations de deux ou trois de nos romanciers les plus accrédités […] j’oserai affirmer, sans crainte d’être démenti, que Byron et de Sade (je demande pardon du rapprochement) ont peut-être été les deux plus grands inspirateurs de nos modernes, l’un affiché et visible, l’autre clandestin, — pas trop clandestin. En lisant certains de nos romanciers en vogue, si vous voulez le fond du coffre, l’escalier secret de l’alcôve, ne perdez jamais cette dernière clé. (13-14)

Even though Sade was officially barred from public space, his presence, according to Sainte-Beuve, nonetheless managed to creep into society through contemporary literature.

While Sainte-Beuve does not name the “deux ou trois de nos romanciers les plus accrédités,” Count Horace de Viel Castel, art collector and curator of the Louvre, would prove much more specific in listing the authors who succumbed to Sade’s influence. In the March 29, 1851 entry of his posthumously published private memoirs, Viel Castel blames Sade for both the depraved state of contemporary literature and for a specific instance of immorality regarding what he calls “un très grand scandale qu’on se raconte

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118 “Ainsi,” Janin addresses his readers at one point, “il est convenu que vous avez lu ce livre, vous les oisifs qui savez lire, vous les innocents effrontés de la table d’hôte ou de l’estaminet, vous les séducteurs de la Grande Chaumière ou de Tivoli, vous les Lovelaces du foyer de l’Opéra ou du Café de Paris, vous si simples, si bons, si doux, si timides au fond de l’âme, malgré tous vous efforts pour vous faire méchants et cruels, vous dont la première grisette vient à bout, allons donc, voilà qui est bien convenu : vous êtes sur se triste sujet plus savant que je ne saurais être.”
sous le manteau” involving three Russian aristocratic women who had supposedly teamed up with Dumas fils and Alfred de Musset to organize “une société de débauche” (78-79). “Entre ces trois femelles et leurs conseillers,” Viel Castel writes, “la débauche prit de grandes proportions, ce fut à qui de ces roués rendrait sa pupille plus savante en l’art lupanarique. On interrogea les auteurs, on approfondit leurs différents systèmes et enfin le très ignoble marquis de Sade dut tressaillir d’aise dans sa fange au bruit des turpitudes dont il était l’inspirateur.” According to Viel Castel, Alexandre Dumas fils (whom he subsequently attacks in a vitriolic racist tirade) served as chief instructor, giving lessons on “le charme de la prostitution” with “de Sade à la main.” The Count then steps back from contemporary gossip and laments Sade’s influence on the literature of his day:

On ne sait pas assez tout le mal produit par les œuvres monstrueuses du marquis de Sade (Justine et Juliette). Je ne parle pas seulement des tristes résultats produits par la lecture de ces ignobles romans, mais de l’influence qu’ils ont eue sur toute la littérature du XIXe siècle. Hugo dans Notre-Dame de Paris, Jules Janin dans L’Âne mort, Théophile Gautier dans Mlle de Maupin, Mme Sand, E. Sue, de Musset, etc., etc. Dumas dans son Théâtre, tous sont parents de Sade, touts jettent un morceau de sa débauche dans leurs productions. (78-79)

While more specific than Sainte-Beuve’s “fonds de De Sade masqué,” Viel Castel’s denunciatory list actually has more to do with his personal politics than with some insightful reading of the texts mentioned. Although Praz would later agree that “the responsibility of the subject matter” of Janin’s L’Âne mort “must be credited to […] the Marquis de Sade” (127), Hugo’s name appears primarily because Viel Castel opposed his

119 The women in question are Madame de Nesselrode, wife of the Russian ambassador to Paris, along with Madame Zéba and Princess Kalerdjy.

120 Viel Castel describes the scene as follows: “Alex. Dumas fils, ce nègre mal blanchi par trois générations de descendance adultérine, cet arrière-petit-fils d’un marquis de la Pailleterie et d’une négresse de St-Domingue, trouva dans la Nesselrode l’écolière la plus complètement docile […]” (ibid.).
progressivism, while Dumas is singled out yet again for his interracial origins. The mention of Sand’s name is somewhat more problematic. The critic Capo de Feuillide did attack the “corrosive passages” of her 1833 novel Lélia, which he labeled a “prostitution of body and soul” filled with “vile and shameful thoughts” (qtd. in Harlan 169). Sand had also had several high-profile male lovers, including Musset and Chopin, and was rumored to have had a love affair with the actress Marie Dorval.\textsuperscript{121} Perhaps even more offensive in Viel Castel’s view, however, were Sand’s Republican politics. In any case, although Sand may have been a controversial author in her time, there is no reason to suggest that she was really a “parent de Sade” who read the Marquis and tossed “un morceau de sa débauche” in her novels.

In fact, some fifteen years after Viel Castel’s journal entry, Baudelaire placed the two authors at polar opposites, remarking, in an intended preface to a re-edition of the still-banned Les Liaisons dangereuses, that, “En réalité, le satanisme a gagné. Satan s’est fait ingénu. Le mal se connaissant était moins affreux et plus près de la guérison que le mal s’ignorant. G. Sand inférieure à de Sade” (Œuvres complètes 2.68).\textsuperscript{122} Baudelaire’s distaste for Sand’s literature is well-known, and in his preface he calls her work “Ordure et jérémiades.” With this mention of “filth and jeremiads,” however, Baudelaire is not suggesting that Sand’s novels were filthy in the Sadean sense; instead, the poet is referring primarily to her political engagement, and in Mon cœur mis à nu he cites “Son amour pour les ouvriers” as among her principal faults (Œuvres complètes 1.686-687). There, Baudelaire expands upon his negative view of Sand, summarizing that “Elle est

\textsuperscript{121} Harlan discusses Sand and Dorval in her chapter “The Author and the Actress” (160-172).

\textsuperscript{122} According to Claude Pichois, the preface was written sometime between January 20 and March 20, 1866 [2.1115]).
bête, elle est lourde, elle est bavarde; elle a dans les idées morales la même profondeur de jugement et la même délicatesse de sentiment que les concierges et les filles entretenues.” Her literature was thus “ordure” in Baudelaire’s opinion because its style, thematic content, and lack of sophistication placed it on par with the vulgar classes; as he remarks in conclusion, “Que quelques hommes aient pu s’amouracher de cette latrine, c’est bien la preuve de l’abaissement des hommes de ce siècle” (ibid.).

In addition to providing Baudelaire with another opportunity to attack Sand, the statement “G. Sand inférieure à de Sade” also suggests a certain ubiquity regarding Sade’s presence in nineteenth century French literature, placing Baudelaire alongside the likes of Janin, Sainte-Beuve, and Viel Castel. His remark also conflates Sade with Satanism and a broad notion of “Le mal se connaissant,” showing how the Marquis came to be synonymous with evil in a general sense. Baudelaire himself conveys an enticingly malevolent version of eroticism in many of his poems, which prompted several of his twentieth century readers to see him as a natural disciple of Sade. Breton and Aragon, for instance, cite Sade’s influence on Baudelaire in their attempt to rehabilitate the Marquis as a legitimate author (Breton Œuvres complètes 1.632-633). Baudelaire also features prominently in Praz’s study, where the critic argues that “One sees how much Baudelaire had learned from the Divine Marquis” (148), and claims that Baudelaire’s “inexhaustible need to be occupied with macabre and obscene subjects, his desire to terrify and shock people […] these are traceable to one and the same source. ‘L’escalier secret de l’alcôve’ in this case is only to be opened with that one particular key which Sainte-Beuve recommended should not be forgotten” (153). Just as Praz published The Romantic Agony in response to the surrealists, the renewed interest in the Marquis among post-war
intellectuals yielded Georges Blin’s *Le Sadisme de Baudelaire* in 1948, where he acknowledges the philosophical affinities between their respective oeuvres: “La parenté de Sade et de Baudelaire dépasse d’ailleurs le cadre de l’algolagnie amoureuse et elle se retrouve sur un certain plan moral et métaphysique qui est celui où la cruauté doit trouver sa justification” (47).

A close look at *Les Fleurs du mal* certainly reveals its share of Sadean imagery. “Une Martyre,” for example, which is supposedly based upon a “dessin d’un maître inconnu,” describes the decapitated body of a young dark-haired woman—nude except for “un bas rosâtre,” a “jarretière,” and various “bijoux précieux”—spread out on the bed of a stuffy boudoir, displaying “Dans le plus complet abandon” her “secrète splendeur” and “beauté fatale.” While imaging the “amour ténébreux,” “coupable joie,” and “fêtes étranges / Pleines de baisers infernaux” that led to the woman’s murder, the narrator wonders whether “l’homme vindicatif” who committed the crime satisfied himself sexually before killing her or afterward with her corpse.123 Such scenes of murder and necrophilia abound in *La Nouvelle Justine* and *Juliette*, where Sade expresses a continuous fascination with the pleasures of “discharging” into the anus of a freshly killed corpse or an expiring victim at precisely the moment of his or her death.124 Despite the thematic proximity between such passages and “Une Martyre,” however, Baudelaire himself was quick to deny any suggestion of Sade having a direct influence on his work.

In an October 1, 1865 letter to Auguste Poulet-Malassis, the poet asks his friend for

123 “L’homme vindicatif que tu n’as pu, vivante,
Malgré tant’amoïeur, assouvir,
Combla-t-il sur ta chair inerte et complaisante
L’immensité de son désir ?” (45-48).

124 See, for instance, pages 751-53 and 1063 of *La Nouvelle Justine*, and pages 850-852 and 1201 of *Juliette*, in volumes two and three, respectively, of Sade’s *Œuvres.*
information on how to obtain a copy of *Justine*: “Vous seriez bien gentil si vous m’envoyiez une note me disant quel est le prix d’un exemplaire de la *Justine* et où cela peut se trouver, *tout de suite* […]” (*Correspondance* 2.532-533). Lest one suspect that Baudelaire himself is interested in reading Sade’s novel, he specifies that he is in fact inquiring on behalf of “un grand homme,” Sainte-Beuve: “Que diable le sieur Baudelaire veut-il faire de ce paquet d’ordures?” Baudelaire asks Poulet-Malassis, using the same term he would later apply to Sand, albeit here with a drastically different meaning that ironically references the commonly held opinion regarding the Marquis. The reason behind Baudelaire’s denial of interest in *Justine* was not concern for his reputation; rather, as he proudly proclaims, “Le sieur Baudelaire a assez de génie pour étudier le crime dans son propre cœur.” While Baudelaire may not have needed *Justine* to compose “Une Martyre,” what is especially interesting about his letter is that he transforms the criminal behavior present in both his poetry and Sade’s novels into a virtue. In this respect, Baudelaire resembles several perhaps less ingenious authors who would use Sade’s name to add an element of subversive criminality to their own texts.

For instance, Frédéric Soulié includes an apparently gratuitous reference to the Marquis in his 1837 novel *Les Mémoires du Diable*. Exhibiting a characteristically romantic fascination with Satanism, the plot centers on the baron François-Armand de Luizzi, who is guided by none other than the devil himself through the secret lives of his countrymen, where he witnesses the crimes that lie behind the façade of an apparently moral society. In one particular episode, Luizzi enjoys a brief moment of domestic bliss among the respectable Buré family, only to learn that the Madame Buré is an adulteress and murderer, while Monsieur Buré’s sister Henriette languishes in captivity as
punishment for having conceived a child out of wedlock. As a sign of her captors’ cruelty, Henriette is locked in a room with no other book than “Justine, l’ouvrage immonde du marquis de Sade, ce frénétique et abominable assemblage de tous les crimes et de toutes les saletés.” Repeating many of the condemnations that characterized public references to Sade at the time, the narrator eventually reveals that Henriette’s tormentors gave her Justine hoping that it would drive her insane. Deprived of any other paper, the unfortunate young woman has no choice but to write on the “pages obscènes” of “cet odieux ouvrage,” using her own blood as ink:

Oh! quel effroyable supplice infligé à cet âme obligée de verser de chastes pleurs entre ces lignes de boue et de faire monter sa prière à Dieu entre les blasphèmes débauchés de ces pages dégoûtantes! […] Oh! comment cette blanche hermine a-t-elle traversé, dans son long et étroit dédale, ce bourbier fangeux? comment ce papier, si sale de ce que la main d’un misérable y a imprimé, est-il coupé de lignes pures et douces, où s’est posé timidement l’âme d’une infortunée? (111-114)

Despite Soulié’s apparent moral objections to Henriette’s torment, however, Praz claims that “It is obvious that Soulié is retracing the outlines of Sade’s Justine and Juliette,” arguing that the author not only read the novels, but imitated them in his own work (132). In fact, Les Mémoires du Diable does focus almost exclusively on immoral behavior, which the novel pretends to justify on moral grounds, in a manner similar to Justine. Furthermore, the description of Henriette’s deflowering comes across as surprisingly sadistic, given the habitual tenderness of her previously chaste lover Léon, who had not even dared to touch her hand until a few minutes earlier. Writing over the pages of Justine, Henriette describes how she was “dans les mains de Léon comme un corps inerte et sans force […] Un anéantissement douloureux du corps et de l’esprit me livrait à lui sans défense, il eût pu me tuer sans que j’en éprouvasse de douleur.” No longer the
gentle suitor, Léon behaves more like the libertines who torment Justine, as Henriette emphasizes how “son haleine brûlait mon visage” and “le cri de son bonheur [...] le délire de la joie de Léon” eventually roused her from her somnolence (158). While Soulié never approaches the explicitness of Sade’s works, Praz points out that he seems to revel in the sordid details of his tale, suggesting that his condemnation of “ce bourbier fangeux” might not be so sincere after all (The Romantic Agony 132). Les Mémoires du Diable thus subtly praises the Marquis under the auspices of acceptable morality, representing one of the many ways in which French authors publicly express their admiration for their condemned predecessor.

In a noticeably more overt manner that anticipates the surrealists by nearly a century, Borel daringly includes an homage to “le comte de Sade” in his 1839 novel Madame Putiphar, where he extols the virtues of this “martyre” and “cette gloire de la France” before accusing his contemporaries of hypocrisy, praising “l’illustre auteur d’un livre contre lequel vous criez tous à l’infamie, et que vous avez tous dans votre poche [...]” (5.217-218). Feeling perhaps personally targeted by this last remark, Janin responded to Borel in a June 3, 1839 article in Journal des Débats, expressing his amazement that the novelist could portray Sade—“cet atroce et sanglant blasphémateur, cet obscène historien des plus formidables rêveries qui aient jamais agité la fièvre des démons” and “l’auteur de ces livres sans nom qui ont causé plus de ravages que la peste”—in a favorable light (qtd. in Praz 128). Janin’s objections notwithstanding, Borel’s open praise of Sade was perhaps indicative of the secret admiration many writers felt for the Marquis at the time. Flaubert, for instance, cites Janin’s response to Borel in his July 1839 letter to Chevalier in order to explain his sudden interest in obtaining
Sade’s texts: “J’ai lu sur lui [Sade] un article biographique de J. Janin qui m’a révolté sur le compte de Janin bien entendu, car il déclamait pour la morale, pour la philanthropie, pour les vierges dépucelées” (Correspondance 1.48). In his rebellion against conventional morality, Flaubert reverses Janin’s criticisms by turning them into positive attributes that, contrary to Janin’s intentions, actually draw him to the works of “cet obscene historien,” as Janin so aptly called him.

Although Madame Putiphar provided a rare example of openly published praise for the Marquis de Sade during the nineteenth century, a different sort of response to Sade appeared in the anonymously published, clandestine 1833 erotic text Gamiani ou deux nuits d’excès, now known to have been written by Alfred de Musset when he was only twenty-three years old.125 According to Joris-Karl Huysmans (in an unpublished “Etude sur le Gamiani de Musset” drafted around 1876), Musset supposedly composed Gamiani to win a bet that “en évitant toute expression crue ou érotique, il écrirait à l’encontre des Anciens, le volume le plus « Cela » que l’on pourrait rêver dans ce genre!”126 Rumors also circulated at the time that Musset based Gamiani on George Sand, (although their relationship was only beginning in 1833), who was known for her sexual frigidity and Sapphic tastes.127 Conveyed mostly in dialogue format, Gamiani tells the story of a young, beautiful Italian Countess whose resolute solitude surprises polite society. While some, as the narrator Alcide explains, call her “une Fédora, une femme sans cœur et sans tempérament,” in reference to Balzac’s 1831 novel La Peau de chagrin,

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125 See the introduction to Jean-Jacques Pauvert’s edition of Gamiani (Ramsay/Pauvert, 1992).

126 “Inutile de dire qu’il gagna son pari,” Huysmans adds approvingly (Musset 1992, 30).

and others “lui supposaient une âme profondément blessée et qui veut désormais se soustraire aux déceptions cruelles,” the truth, as an unnamed “vieux libertin” reveals, is that she is a “Tribade” (Musset 1992, 44). Intrigued, Alcide decides to spy on the Countess at night, and watches her as she seduces a young virgin named Fanny until he becomes so aroused that he decides to join in their lovemaking. For the most part, Musset manages to avoid raw or obscene language, using euphemisms such as “partie en feu” (52) or “priape” (70) to designate sexual organs, although the term “clitoris” does begin to appear toward the end of the text (100-101). Following the inaugural threesome, Gamiani begins to share her personal story, which includes a particularly brutal experience with a group of monks reminiscent of those who tormented Justine. After being whipped, deflowered, and then raped by over twenty monks (61), Gamiani finds comfort beside her Mother Superior, with whom she engages in a sexual relationship. As the title suggests, the text features a wide range of excesses (including three separate instances of bestiality involving a dog, a monkey, and a donkey [79, 102-204, and 111-113, respectively]), until Gamiani tells of her final orgy at the convent, in which a lone, intruding man expires from fatigue after copulating with all the nuns (114-115). However, in a sequence that recalls the Roland episode of Justine, the unfortunate man experiences another erection when he is executed by hanging in order to insure his silence, prompting the Mother Superior to mount him again (the pair soon crash to the floor, which somehow ends up bringing the dead man back to life). As the action shifts from the Countess’s narrative back to the present, Gamiani’s insatiable desire soon leads

128 Gamiani notes how “la pendaison produit son effet ordinaire,” leading the Mother Superior to climbs up and “s’accouple dans l’air avec la mort, et s’encheville à un cadavre” (114-115). Roland had Justine hang him in order to confirm that hanging did indeed lead to erection (and ejaculation).
to tragedy, as she fatally poisons both herself and Fanny while penetrating her younger partner with a dildo, a “redoubtable instrument” that Gamiani straps to herself (120-125).

With its sadistic monks and murderous orgies, Gamiani clearly recalls the works of Sade, suggesting that Musset possessed at least a general familiarity with their thematic content. Writing some four decades after the text’s publication, Huysmans would describe the final poisoning as “Gamiani renouvelant les sanglantes folies du Marquis de Sade,” and would list both Justine and Juliette as being among its obvious influences: “[…] ce livre étrange qui s’inspire visiblement, tantôt de Pètrone, tantôt d’Apulée, de La Religieuse de Diderot, de Justine et de Juliette et tantôt des plus belles hymnes saphiques et des priapées antiques” (Musset 1992, 36-37). Like Rétif in his Anti-Justine, Musset decided to compose his own erotic fiction in response to Sade, albeit from a far less critical perspective than his predecessor. Nonetheless, Musset attempts to show that a work can be sexually explicit without being vulgar, eliminating several central components of Sade’s works, such as sodomy, defecation, and coarse language. Gamiani was intended to be a work of art, whereas, as Huysmans argues “les épouvantables ordures du Divin Marquis” belong to a different category altogether (37). Flaubert, on the contrary, would focus precisely upon such “dreadful filth” in his reading, valorizing the very elements that many of Sade’s admirers would seek to suppress.

A Close Textual Encounter: Flaubert and “le Vieux de Sade”

Although Flaubert asked Chevalier to find him “quelques-uns des romans de cet honnête écrivain” in his July 1839 letter, there is no evidence to suggest that Chevalier actually risked sending an edition of Sade from Paris. Sade’s name would nonetheless
continue to appear in Flaubert’s correspondence to Chevalier during the school year of 1839-1840, when Flaubert was expelled from his lycée for bad behavior and completed his baccalauréat alone. In a January 20, 1840 letter, Flaubert jokingly instructs Chevalier to read the Marquis as part of his moral and historical education—“Lis le marquis de Sade et lis-le jusqu’à la dernière page du dernier volume, cela complétera ton cours de morale et te donnera de brillants aperçus sur la philosophie de l’histoire” (1.61)—, presenting Sade as a subversive alternative to a conventional education. Then, curiously, on April 8 Flaubert mentions having sent Chevalier “du marquis de Sade” in an earlier letter: “Tu ne te doutais guère que j’envoyais du marquis de Sade. Lis-la (surtout le paragraphe du portrait) à Alfred […]” (5.933). Was the “portrait” that Flaubert asked Chevalier to read to his friend Alfred some excerpt from Sade’s clandestine editions? Or had Flaubert merely composed another humorous “personnage imaginaire” like the one named “le Garçon,” whom Edmond and Jules de Goncourt mention in their journal entry of April 10, 1860? According to the Goncourt brothers, during his “première jeunesse” Flaubert and his friends had created the fictional character and circulated pages of his continuously evolving story among themselves as a running joke:

Le Garçon avait toute une histoire à laquelle chacun apportait sa page. Il faisait des poésies et il finissait par tenir un Hôtel des Farces, où il y avait la Fête de la Merde, lors de la vidange, et où l’on entendait résonner dans les couloirs les commandes suivantes: « Trois seaux de merde au 14! Douze godemichets au 8! » La création, par là, aboutissait à de Sade. C’est étonnant, ce de Sade, on le trouve à tous les bouts de Flaubert comme un horizon. Il affirme qu’alors, il ne l’avait pas lu. (1.370)

If Flaubert and Chevalier were in fact exchanging portraits of “le Garçon” in 1840, then the “marquis de Sade” that Flaubert mentions sending would perhaps be a similarly raunchy passage, since he claims to not have yet read Sade during his youth. As the
Goncourt brothers observe, however, Flaubert’s longstanding fascination with such lascivious and scatological subject matter is all the more remarkable since it predates his first textual encounter. In fact, feces and dildos, along with their corresponding activities of defecation and masturbation, would come to characterize the version of the Marquis that emerges throughout Flaubert’s correspondence.

Evidence nonetheless exists that Flaubert did actually encounter Sade’s work sometime around 1840. In his *Cahier intime de 1840-1841*, Flaubert makes several references that suggest some degree of textual familiarity, such as when he writes that “Quand on a lu le marquis De Sade et qu’on est revenu de l’éblouissement, on se prend à se demander si tout ne serait pas vrai, si la vérité n’était pas tout ce qu’il enseigne—et cela parce que vous ne pouvez résister à cette hypothèse à laquelle il nous fait rêver d’un pouvoir sans bornes et de puissances magnifiques” (*Œuvres complètes* 1.743). While the informal style of the cahier makes Flaubert’s statement somewhat difficult to interpret, his comments nonetheless describe the experience of reading Sade for the first time as an initial sense of “éblouissement” followed by more serious reflection. For Flaubert, Sade confronts his readers with the lure of unlimited power and the uncomfortable truth that our own behavior might not be all that different from that of his libertines if we were in their position. A few paragraphs later in his cahier, Flaubert highlights supposed shortcomings in Sade’s oeuvre, observing that “Le marquis De Sade a oublié deux choses: l’anthropophagie et les bêtes féroces, ce qui prouve que les hommes les plus grands sont encore petits et par-dessus tout il aurait dû se moquer du vice aussi, ce qu’il n’a pas fait et c’est là sa faute” (1.744). Although cannibalism and wild animals can be found in the latter portions of *La Nouvelle Justine* and *Juliette*, one wonders why Flaubert
would bother to include such observations in his private journal if he had not actually
read at least some of Sade’s oeuvre at the time. In his notes to the Pléiade edition of
Flaubert’s *Cahiers intimes*, Guy Sagnes argues that Flaubert read Sade during the second
half of 1839, citing his letters to Chevalier as evidence.\(^\text{129}\)

If that were the case, however, it is strange that Flaubert does not refer to Sade
more often in his 1840 correspondence with Chevalier, other than in a July 7 letter where
he complains about having been forced to learn Greek and other uninteresting subjects
when he was “plutôt fait pour lire le marquis de Sade que des imbécilités pareilles”
(1.65). Moreover, after 1840, Sade’s name would not appear again in Flaubert’s
correspondence for over a decade, disappearing just as mysteriously as it had first popped
up. The 1845 version of *L’Éducation sentimentale*, however, would include a reference
to *Justine* in Flaubert’s description of Jules’s reading habits following his failed conquest
of Lucinde. After at first rereading “*René et Werther*, ces livres qui dégoûtent de vivre,”
and then the poetry of Byron (the other of “les deux plus grands inspirateurs de nos
modernes,” according to Sainte-Beuve), which instills in him a poetic yearning for death,
Jules eventually turns to more violent fantasies, imagining himself in the place of
Caligula and Nero (*Œuvres complètes* 1.945-946, 957-959). His quest for literary
representations of female beauty leads him to libertine novels, and when Flaubert notes
that Jules “alla jusqu’au bout, jusqu’à la fin,” that can only mean one thing. Instead of
“la sensualité étroite de Faublas” (in reference to Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvray’s
novel *Les Amours du chevalier de Faublas*, published between 1787 and 1790), the
young man prefers “cent fois les monstruosités de Justine, cette œuvre belle à force

\(^{129}\) *Œuvres complètes* 1.1465, 1472. Geoffrey Wall makes a similar assessment: “Flaubert was 18 in
December 1839 and it was around this time that he probably read de Sade for the first time” (“Thinking
With Demons: Flaubert and de Sade,” 122).
d’horreur, où le crime vous regarde en face et vous ricane au visage, écartant ses gencives aiguës et vous tendant les bras” (1.959-960). For Jules, *Justine* offers relief from provincial ennui and a break from his Greek studies, a language that, like Flaubert, “il s’efforçait aussi à lire” (1.955). Reading Sade, Jules “descendit dans ces profondeurs ténébreuses de la nature humaine, prêta l’oreille à tous ces râles, assista à des convulsions et n’eut pas peur” (1.960). The novel’s horrific crimes lead him to the Baudelairean conclusion that poetry is everywhere: “elle s’exhale vers vous du cœur de la vierge et du sommeil de l’enfant, comme de la planche des échafauds et de la lumière des incendies.”

In this first version of *L’Éducation sentimentale*, Sade comes across as a rebellious, romantic poet similar to Byron, just the sort of figure to interest a melancholic and erudite young reader like Jules. Flaubert’s ability to portray both Jules and Henry from a critical distance in the novel, combined with the coincident disappearance of references to Sade from his correspondence, seems to suggest that he himself had finally outgrown his youthful adoration of the notorious outlaw.

Then, suddenly, references to the Marquis begin to reappear in Flaubert’s correspondence while the author was composing *Madame Bovary*, between September 1851 and April 1856. Flaubert first uses Sade’s name again in a letter he wrote to the poet Louise Colet on July 7, 1853, in the midst of their second love affair, where he merely mentions Sade’s name to signify an extreme state of mental illness: “La folie et la luxure sont deux choses que j’ai tellement sondées, où j’ai si bien navigué par ma volonté, que je ne serai jamais (je l’espère) ni un aliéné ni un de Sade” (*Correspondance* 2.377). Like Baudelaire, Flaubert implies that he is perfectly capable of reflecting upon lust and insanity on his own, without the need of textual sources. Whereas the nineteen-
year-old student ironically referred to Sade as “cet honnête écrivain,” the adult Flaubert appears to view the Marquis less favorably. From that moment onward, however, Flaubert would refer to Sade with increasing frequency, and even begins quoting from Sade’s works, suggesting that, regardless of his earlier textual encounters, Flaubert was definitely reading Sade while writing Madame Bovary. For instance, in an erotically charged December 8, 1853 letter to the poet Louis Bouilhet (where Flaubert asks his friend “Enfin as-tu dérouillé ton monstrueux engin?” and recalls a dream about “la mère Lormier et la manière dont elle frottait mes roupettes contre ses tétons”), Flaubert refers to Sade in a warning against getting involved with one particular woman, “la Blanchecotte:” “La B[lanchecotte] sera une teigne. Cette femme est passionnée, prends garde! (cavendum est, comme dirait Jules Janin), « du tempérament, de l’imagination, beaucoup de sensibilité » (style de Sade), et il serait peut-être plus sage d’avoir recours à cette vieille masturbation” (2.474). Once again, Sade stands as a counterpoint to Janin and his warnings, but this time, Flaubert provides textual support that shows he had managed to become familiar with the forbidden editions themselves. While the exact phrase “du tempérament, de l’imagination, beaucoup de sensibilité” does not appear in Sade’s oeuvre, similar descriptions appear throughout, notably in Justine and La Nouvelle Justine to describe the counterfeiter Roland, and at several points in Juliette.\(^\text{130}\) Thus, by 1853, Flaubert had read Sade closely enough to remember and recycle specific phrases characteristic of his style.

Imitating Sade’s style would be but one of the ways Flaubert would accentuate his letters with references to the Marquis over the next few decades. For instance, an August

\(^{130}\) See, for instance, the descriptions of Roland in Justine (Œuvres 2.325-326), Célestine in La Nouvelle Justine (2.521-522), and Saint-Fond, Juliette, and Olympe in Juliette (3.382, 604, and 1104-1105, respectively).
11, 1856 letter to Bouilhet regarding his recent break-up with the actress Marie Durey inaccurately cites the Marquis de Bressac from Justine and La Nouvelle Justine: “Je n’aurais pas été fâché que tu me donnasses quelques détails sur ta rupture avec Durey. « Aucun des écarts de la lubricité ne m’est indifférent », dit Brissac [sic.” (2.624). A month later, Flaubert would again cite Sade in reference to Bouilhet’s promising career as a playwright: “Allons! tout va peut-être partir. « La Bombe éclate », comme dit ce vieux de Sade” (2.632). In both instances, the citation forms part of an inside joke, and allows Flaubert to punctuate his letters with salacious asides, similar to his accentuation of the word “asses” in “donnasses,” which, along with the mention of Bressac, lets Bouilhet know precisely what sort of details Flaubert is asking for. While “Le Vieux” would become Flaubert’s preferred nickname for Sade and a constant reminder of his admiration for the condemned author, “La Bombe éclate” is an expression that Sade uses to describe male ejaculation, first with respect to Rodin in Justine, and then again while describing the same scene (albeit in a more vulgar fashion) in La Nouvelle Justine (Œuvres 2.208, 2.536). “La Bombe éclate” also features in an episode involving another libertine from La Nouvelle Justine, Bandole, whom Justine reluctantly masturbates to ejaculation after he performs a fatal caesarean section that destroys both mother and child (Œuvres 2.586). When Flaubert uses the metaphor in his letter, he is essentially comparing the advancement of Bouilhet’s career to an orgasm. Of course, this would only be apparent to someone who was familiar with Sade’s works, as was Flaubert. His allusions to the Marquis thus perform an exclusive function, establishing Flaubert and his companions as

131 Although Flaubert is referring to the Marquis de Bressac, the matricidal aristocrat with a preference for men, the character never pronounces those precise words. The liaison between Durey and Bouilhet began in March or April 1854, according to Jean Bruneau (Correspondance 2.1264).
a select and enlightened group capable of appreciating the lighter side of the supposedly dangerous author.

Whenever the names of Bandole and other Sadean characters surface in Flaubert’s letters, it is always in the same irreverent tone that playfully uses Sade to mock the supposedly serious world of letters. For instance, in a September 1857 letter to Jules Duplan, Flaubert warmly addresses his friend as “Vieux Bandole,” and then jokes about an unfavorable article published in *Le Spectateur* about *Madame Bovary*. After asking Duplan to send him a copy, Flaubert adds, “Je suis comme Gernande, j’aime à être injurié. Ça m’excite,” in reference to the Countess in both versions of *Justine* who is repeatedly bled by her husband (2.764). In another letter to Duplan a few weeks later, Flaubert again refers to the Gernande episode by comparing George Sand to Dorothée d’Esterval, a bloodthirsty hotel proprietor and “tribade” who later joins the Gernande couple at their castle:

Envoyez-moi l’article de Mme Sand. Voilà déjà quelque temps qu’il est paru. Et n’est-il pas convenable que j’écrive un petit mot de remerciement à cette autre Dorothée. La comparaison est peut-être très irrévérencieuse, mais cependant ne dit-on pas de par le monde qu’« elle décharge comme un homme ». Car, elle aussi, a « de la philosophie ». (2.766)

The article in question, a review of *Madame Bovary* that has since been affixed the title “Le réalisme,” was originally written on July 8, 1857, and published as “Courrier de Village” in the September 2 edition of *Le Courrier de Paris*. In her review, Sand labels Flaubert’s work a “livre remarquable,” adding that “La chose est exécutée de main de maître, et pareil coup d’essai est digne d’admiration” (219-220). She also defends the novel on moral grounds, judging that “la lecture était bonne pour les innombrables Madame Bovary en herbe que des circonstances analogues font germer en province, à
savor les appétits du luxe, de fausse poésie et de fausse passion qui développent les éductions mal assorties à l’existence future” (220). While the two authors would eventually become friends (Sand even dedicated her 1867 novel Le Dernier amour to Flaubert), Flaubert had manifested his admiration for Sand as early as a March 18, 1839 letter to Chevalier, where he writes, “Tu me dis que tu as de l’admiration pour G. Sand, je la partage bien et avec la même réticence. J’ai lu peu de choses aussi belles que Jacques, parles-en à Alfred” (1.39). His comparison of Sand to Dorothée, in contrast to Baudelaire’s 1866 dismissal of Sand’s oeuvre as “Ordure et jérémiades,” thus belongs to the realm of playful banter rather than mean-spirited polemic. Flaubert draws upon Sade’s characters to present an exaggerated caricature of Sand, in an attempt to make his reader chuckle through an appropriately placed allusion that pokes fun at a fellow author regarding her taste for masculine clothing and her rumored affair with Marie Dorval in 1833. In their Journal entry for June 28, 1881, for instance, the Goncourt brothers cite Dorval as stating “de mes deux amants, Sandeau et Mme Sand, c’est Mme Sand qui me fatigue le plus,” and then go on to relate a rather graphic anecdote regarding their sexual relationship: “Mme Dorval passait la nuit avec Mme Sand et venait trouver Sandeau le matin. Sandeau n’aimait pas Mme Dorval et n’aimait que Mme Sand, dont il retrouvait ainsi tous les matins quelque chose dans la vulve de l’artiste dramatique” (3.120). On a similar note, in their December 8, 1893 entry, the brothers make a broader claim


133 Sade’s description of Dorothée appears in La Nouvelle Justine (Œuvres 2. 826). In truth, Flaubert actually appears to confuse Dorothée with la Durand, another female libertine with masculine attributes in Juliette. While her barred vagina and abnormally long clitoris resemble the “le con sec et pourpré” and “clitoris long de trois pouces” of Dorothée, it is in fact Durand, and not Dorothée, who “discharges like a man,” as Juliette notes after being sodomized by her clitoris (3.1116-1117).
regarding the anatomy of women of talent such as Sand: “si on avait fait l’autopsie des femmes ayant un talent original, comme Mme Sand, Mme Viardot, etc., On trouverait chez elles des parties génitales se rapprochant de l’homme, des clitoris un peu parents de nos verges” (4.485). While both the Goncourt brothers and Flaubert jokingly imagine Sand with a large clitoris, however, Flaubert does not seem to have been suggesting any sort of link between masculinity and literary talent.

As an adult, Flaubert would often reduce Sade to a source of bawdy humor. His principal partner in such exchanges was Duplan, whom, in an October 20, 1857 letter, Flaubert praises for sharing his interpretation of the Marquis: “Ah! Duplan, comme je t’aime, mon bon, pour comprendre ainsi le grand Homme. Tu es le seul mortel de la création qui le sente comme moi. Cet « affreux livre, cet abominable ouvrage », etc., a été le plus grand élément de grotesque dans ma vie. J’ai maintes fois cuydé en crever de rire!” (2.770). Instead of the dangerous consequences Janin and others had warned of, reading the grotesque passages of Sade pushes Flaubert to laughter. In a mockery of moralists who make the mistake of taking Sade seriously, Flaubert sees his entire oeuvre as a source of grotesque amusement: “Moi,” he continues to Duplan, “je pense, parfois, que l’existence de ce pauvre vieux a été uniquement faite pour me divertir” (2.771).

Fittingly, his letter begins with a series of allusions to La Nouvelle Justine and Juliette, playfully accusing Duplan of neglecting his friend in order to masturbate and then wondering whether he may have fallen victim to numerous Sadean characters:

Ne pas croire, mon cher Monsieur, que je supposais que vous m’oubliez. Non! Mais je me disais: « Ce bougre-là a tellement lu le Manuel qu’il s’est manucisé à outrance, et il se crève! Alemani l’a fait claquer comme un volcan, il s’est perdu dans le lac de Bandole, ou bien asphyxié dans les lieux de Gernande? Il a été assassiné par Bras-de-fer? On l’a enlevé pour le mettre au couvent, dans la classe des fouteurs de vingt-cinq ans? Il est
entré comme maître d’études dans la pension de Rodin (boarding school for young pédérastes)? Bressac et Jasmin l’on [sic.] lié au pied d’un chêne? Roland lui fait faire de la fausse monnaie? Râlant, beuglant, pâle, épouvanté, la merde au cul, la bave aux lèvres et la gueule cassée, il décharge dans son agonie, sous le clitoris rubicond de Dorothee furieuse. Je voyais le pistolet! (quelle auberge! comme on y trouvait des chambres à prix modérés et ayant vue sur la place!). (2.770)

While readers of La Nouvelle Justine from Rétif to Janin were likely to recoil in horror before Bandole’s lake, where he drowns his children once they reach eighteen months of age (Œuvres 2.573-574), or when reading about the murderous orgies at Dorothee’s inn, where carefully timed pistol fire assures that two unfortunate merchants “expirent en déchargeant,” so that “Le visage et le sein de Justine sont inondés du sang et de la cervelle de celui qui déchargeait dans ses bras” (2.830), Flaubert instead reacts with laughter and sexual arousal. His reference to masturbation brings up another aspect of his attitude toward Sade’s oeuvre, which, as he wrote in an August 1, 1858 letter to Eugène Delattre (regarding Delattre’s humoristic novel, Tribulations des voyageurs et des expéditeurs en chemin de fer. Conseils pratiques), he viewed as a sex aid that one should place alongside dildos in one’s travel luggage.134 Flaubert himself admitted to masturbating while re-reading La Philosophie dans le boudoir in a July 3, 1864 letter to Duplan—“Je me suis retrémpé hier au soir, au débotté comme dit Villemessant,” he wrote, “en relisant le 2e volume de La Philosophie, et toujours avec un nouveau plaisir” (3.398)—, and it is presumably with the same activity in mind that he would later recommend that Edmond Laporte read the work “seul dans le silence du cabinet,” taking the time to savor the text since “Une soirée ne serait pas suffisante pour le connaître et le déguster” (5.179). This same emphasis on enjoyment appears in his insertion of Duplan

134 “Mais dans la liste des objets que M. *** emporte en vacances, tu aurais dû mettre parmi les objets de première nécessité plusieurs g… pour ses cousins, et parmi les bons auteurs, de Sade, Delattre, etc.” (2.827-828).
into Sade’s narrative, as well as in other instances where the names of Sadean libertines become affectionate nicknames. In addition to his salutation “Vieux Bandole” in his September 1857 letter, in a letter written after February 19, 1859 Flaubert asks Duplan to return a copy of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*: “Ne crois pas, ô Saint-Florent, que tu sois à perpétuité propriétaire de la Philosophie. J’ai besoin de ces deux petits volumes pour un savant qui désire les lire. Donc apporte-les dimanche, avec ton infâme personne” (3.18). Similarly, an August 7, 1861 letter to Duplan concludes with “Adieu. Tâche d’avoir le portefeuille de Saint-Florent, spécule sur les grains, cause la misère publique. Je t’embrasse” (3.169). While the wide range of characters and episodes mentioned attests to Flaubert’s familiarity with the texts, it also indicates a fascination with Sade’s penchant for endless accumulation, which Flaubert in turn imitates in his letters. Flaubert himself would assume numerous Sadean personas, such as in a January 20, 1863 letter to Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, where he suggests that they meet up before attending a dinner together, proposing that “On fumera chez vous une dernière pipe, et l’on poussera une dernière merde, peut-être?” before signing his letter “ROMBAUD!” in reference to “Rombeau,” Rodin’s partner in the vivisections of *Justine* and *La Nouvelle Justine* (2.292). Similarly, albeit with less scatological emphasis, Flaubert would sign a July 20, 1865 letter to Duplan as “Minski,” referring to the cannibalistic Russian giant in *Juliette* (3.448). This imitation of style through accumulation also appears in the very structure of Flaubert’s sentences, such as in his description of Duplan “Râlant, beuglant, pâle, épouvanté, la merde au cul, la bave aux lèvres et la gueule cassée,” which provides a realist description of the various torments inflicted upon the victims of Sade’s colorful villains.
In Flaubert’s view, however, the humor he found in “ce pauvre vieux” was often not in line with the author’s intentions: “Comme personnages vicieux je ne connais que ceux du marquis de Sade qui me fassent rire et ce n’était pas l’intention de l’auteur, bien au contraire,” he wrote in his Carnets de travail in January 1860. “Mais ici, le crime arrive à être un ridicule car la nature est tellement exaltée, poussée à outrance qu’elle devient impossible et disparaît” (214). For Flaubert, Sade becomes ridiculous because the crimes he describes are too outrageous to appear realistic. According to the Goncourt brothers in a November 1858 journal entry, Flaubert had made a similar remark during one of their Sunday afternoon gatherings. Describing Flaubert as “une intelligence hantée par M. de Sade, auquel il revient toujours, comme à un mystère qui l’affriole,” the Goncourts add that Flaubert is “Friand de la turpitude au fond, la cherchant, heureux de voir un vidangeur manger de la merde et s’écriant, toujours à propos de Sade: C’est la bêtise la plus amusante que j’ai rencontrée!” (1.554). (Incidentally, Flaubert’s attachment to vidangeurs would resurface in a May 26, 1865 letter to Duplan, where he composes an ode on the “la grève des vidangeurs,” complete with a “Chœur des merdes” and an obligatory reference to Sade.)

Whereas Peignot and Janin had condemned Sade as a diabolical monster, and authors such as Soulié and Borel would in turn celebrate him for his devilish reputation, Flaubert sees Sade’s exaggerations as another example of the “bêtise” that would interest him so much in his own fiction.

The discordance between Flaubert being “une intelligence hantée par M. de Sade” and viewing the Marquis as an amusing “bêtise” points toward the difficulty the

Goncourt brothers had in assessing the author’s attachment to the notorious libertine. For instance, in their journal entry for January 29, 1860, made after another visit with Flaubert, they make note of a “causerie sur Sade, auquel revient toujours, comme fasciné, l’esprit de Flaubert” (3.870), while in their April 9, 1861 entry they note that “Il y a vraiment chez Flaubert une obsession de de Sade.” (3.876). While Flaubert may have only considered Sade to be a sort of running joke, his repeated recurrence to the Marquis in casual conversation seems to have led the Goncourts to suggest that he may have been suffering from some sort of mental problem. Such was Sade’s reputation at the time—Janin, after all, had proclaimed that those who read Sade for pleasure “sont au bagne ou à Charenton.” The Goncourt brothers were not the only ones to take Flaubert’s conversation on Sade too seriously, however. In a May 30, 1857 letter to Théophile Gautier anticipating his approaching visit, Flaubert states that he would somehow arrange to offer his guests “un De Sade complet” and that “Il y en aura des volumes sur les tables de nuit!” (2.727). Rumors would subsequently spread throughout Flaubert’s circle about his collection, to the point that Louis Bouilhet would bring up the subject in a June 25, 1857 letter to the author: “Crépét, qui va toujours chez la Muse [Louise Colet], m’a dit que cette dernière qui a su, je ne sais comment, le voyage à Croisset de Théo et de Saint-Victor, répète à qui veut l’entendre une prétendue phrase de ta lettre d’invitation, ainsi conçue : « Viens vite, j’ai sur ma table de nuit les œuvres complètes du marquis de Sade »” (2.977). (“Est-ce vrai?” Bouilhet goes on to ask; “peu importe, mais il m’a dit de te communiquer cela.”)

Despite his promise, Flaubert does not seem to have ever obtained “un De Sade complet,” and his correspondence only provides evidence of his having possessed a copy
of La Philosophie dans le boudoir in early 1859, before lending it to Duplan and then another “savant,” as he mentions in a previously cited letter (3.18). By January 1877, he would have to ask Alfred Baudry for a copy of the dialogue, this time in order to pass it along to Edmond Laporte. “Seriez-vous assez aimable pour me prêter La Philosophie du Vieux,” Flaubert asks Baudry in a January 24 letter; “Je vous la garderais cinq ou 6 jours. Bref vous l’auriez à la fin de la semaine prochaine. C’est pour faire connaître ce divin livre à un ami qui viendra chez moi” (5.176). Although his numerous references to the episodes of La Nouvelle Justine and Juliette suggest he had read the novels in full—indeed, in addition to mentioning a wide array of Sadean characters, his October 20, 1857 letter to Duplan also alludes to a passing remark on Italian bankers in the embedded “Histoire de Jérôme” that occupies the eleventh chapter of La Nouvelle Justine, a reference so precise that Flaubert must have either just read the passage or knew it well enough to recite from memory—he does not appear to have ever owned the works himself.136 In fact, it would not be until late January 1878 that Flaubert, at the age of fifty-six, would finally find someone who possesses all of Sade’s editions: “Enfin,” Flaubert wrote to his friend Laporte, a year after lending him La Philosophie dans le boudoir, “j’ai trouvé un Bonhomme qui possède toutes les éditions du VIEUX! Avec une lettre de recommandation, nous irons chez lui quand vous voudrez!” (5.353). Reading each and every “divin livre” of “le Vieux” had been one of Flaubert’s goals since the late 1830s. What is important, however, is that, by 1857, Flaubert had become sufficiently

136 “Ce n’est pas là « cette politesse » des banquiers italiens, dont se louait Jérôme,” (2.767) Flaubert writes to Duplan. The allusion is to the following passage from La Nouvelle Justine: “Le banquier qui m’escompta me fit plus de politesses que n’en reçoivent les Siciliens, quand ils se présentent, pour le même objet, chez les banquiers de Paris […]” (Oeuvres 2.755).
associated with Sade for others to accept that he might in fact have possessed the illegal editions himself.

The dangers such misunderstandings posed to Flaubert’s reputation emerge during a minor polemic with Sainte-Beuve that occurred following the publication of *Salammbô* in November 1862. In order to fully understand the context of their discussion, one must first move back to Flaubert’s trial in 1857, following the publication of *Madame Bovary* in the *Revue de Paris* between October and December 1856. The writing of the novel, one will recall, coincided with the reemergence of Sade’s name in Flaubert’s correspondence, beginning in 1853 and becoming increasingly prevalent thereafter. In fact, the specter of Sade hovers above Flaubert’s trial for the double crime of “offenses à la morale publique et à la religion” in February 1857. As Imperial prosecutor Ernest Pinard explains in his February 7 argument against the novel, “L’offense à la morale publique est dans les tableaux lascifs que je mettrai sous vos yeux, l’offense à la morale religieuse dans des images voluptueuses mêlées aux choses sacrées” (*Œuvres de Flaubert* 1.653). The “pages lascives” of *Madame Bovary*, according to Pinard, contained “la poésie de l’adultère,” along with passages such as Emma’s death that featured “le mélange du sacré au voluptueux” (658, 664). Flaubert had painted “la nature dans toute sa nudité, dans toute sa crudité,” yielding a work “d’une immoralité profonde” that risked falling “dans des mains de jeunes filles, quelquefois de femmes mariées,” with disastrous consequences (661, 658, 666).

If Pinard’s characterization of *Madame Bovary* sounds strikingly familiar to the denunciations of Sade that appeared from the 1790s onward, Flaubert’s defense attorney Jules Senard would borrow a technique from the Marquis himself, claiming that “la
pensée” of Flaubert’s book is “une pensée éminemment morale et religieuse pouvant se traduire par ces mots: l’excitation à la vertu par l’horreur du vice” (668). As Ladenson remarks, “As was to be the case for almost all the authors brought to trial for offending public morals during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Flaubert’s defense was essentially the one implied by the text of the verdict: to the extent that his novel depicted vice, it was only in order to promote virtue” (26). Sade had of course made the same dubious argument in his preface to both Justine and La Nouvelle Justine, explaining that the justification for his endless accounts of rape and torture was to turn his readers to virtue by painting the horror of vice. Predicting Senard’s plan of defense, an unconvinced Pinard affirmed that des détails lascifs ne peuvent pas être couverts par une conclusion morale, sinon on pourrait raconter toutes les orgies imaginables, décrire toutes les turpitudes d'une femme publique, en la faisant mourir sur un grabat à l’hôpital. Il serait permis d’étudier et de montrer toutes ses poses lascives! Ce serait aller contre toutes les règles du bon sens. (665)

Based on Pinard’s language, one might very well assume that Flaubert had published something along the lines of Justine, which does indeed relate “toutes les orgies imaginables” before covering them with a moral conclusion, or Juliette, with its detailed description of “toutes les turpitudes d'une femme publique” and “toutes ses poses lascives.” Indeed, as Ladenson argues, “It is as though Pinard were trying to turn Flaubert into Sade, a writer the author of Madame Bovary greatly admired, but whom he was hardly imitating in his work” (38). In her endnotes, Ladenson adds that “Flaubert’s preliminary notes for Madame Bovary often, in fact, read like passages from Sade, although he removed all discernable traces of such material from the final version of the novel” (241). One can indeed sense Sade’s influence in Flaubert’s Plans et scénarios
behind the image of Emma “noyée de foutre, de cheveux, de larmes et de champagne” (8-10) or in the outline of a particularly passionate encounter: “sang au doigt de Léon qu’elle suce / amour si violent qu’il tourne au sadisme / plaisir du supplice / Manière féroce dont elle se déshabillait jetant tout à bas” (17). Furthermore, Flaubert’s notes for the passage where Emma looks in the mirror and exclaims “j’ai un amant! Un amant!” after surrendering to Rodolphe use the very language of Sade’s novels: “la bombe éclate. elle l’aime. elle l’aime” (39-41).137

Some later readers would even discern traces of Sade within the final version of the novel. Mario Praz, for example, interprets the “livres extravagants où il y avait des tableaux orgiaques avec des situations sanglantes” that Emma reads in search of excitement as “an obvious allusion to Sade” (155).138 Indeed, the manner in which a half-naked Emma hides in her bedroom to read the books until dawn, at times screaming in terror, could probably describe more than a few initial encounters with the Marquis (although Senard would cite the passage as evidence that Madame Bovary actually discouraged immoral behavior, remarking sarcastically that “Ceci donne envie de l’adultère, n’est-ce pas?” [Œuvres de Flaubert 1.696]). Still, there is no concrete indication of Emma’s reading material being the actual editions of Sade; instead, she could, for instance, simply have been reading any number of works.139

137 Leclerc transcribes Flaubert’s manuscript as “la bonde éclate,” but it is difficult to distinguish whether Flaubert wrote “mb” or “nd.”

138 Geoffrey Wall builds upon Praz’s interpretation in “Thinking With Demons: Flaubert and de Sade,” 123. The passage from Madame Bovary can be found in (Œuvres de Flaubert, 1.588).

139 Elisabeth Ladenson writes that the reference “is reminiscent of Sade and would appear to be a reference to the Gothic novels that took their cue from his works. (One shudders to contemplate what would have happened to Emma had the local lending library offered access to Justine or Juliette)” (228).
In any case, *Madame Bovary* was certainly not *Justine*, and if Senard wisely refrains from mentioning Sade, he does allude to “des livres licencieux dans lesquels les auteurs ont cherché à exciter les sens” in order to distinguish them from Flaubert’s novel (700). His main strategy is to demonstrate that Pinard stops short in his readings, picking out suggestive passages and presenting them to the court out of context (“Quel est celui qui échapperait à une condamnation,” Senard asks, “si, au moyen de découpages, non de phrases mais de mots, on s’avisait de faire une liste de tous les mots qui pourraient offenser la morale ou la religion?”[681]). With painstaking thoroughness, Senard in turn reads lengthy excerpts from the novel, in order to show how the book as a whole does in fact support Flaubert’s professed moral goal. Moreover, Senard affirms that, even when isolated, the passages of *Madame Bovary* contain no “détails obscènes.”

Interestingly, it is Senard and not Pinard who uses the term “obscene,” as if to remind the court that books far worse than *Madame Bovary* are available to French readers. In its final ruling, the court essentially accepts the arguments of both the parties, judging that Flaubert’s novel indeed displays “un réalisme vulgaire et souvent choquant,” but that “il n’apparaît pas que son livre ait été, comme certaines oeuvres, écrit dans le but unique de donner une satisfaction aux passions sensuelles, à l’esprit de licence et de débauche, ou de ridiculiser des choses qui doivent être entourées du respect de tous” (717). In other words, taken as a whole, *Madame Bovary* neither appealed to the prurient interest, nor undermined Catholic values, unlike “certaines oeuvres” that no one dared mention by name.

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140 “Mais M. l’Avocat impérial m’arrête et me dit : Quand il serait vrai que le but de l’ouvrage soit bon d’un bout à l’autre, est-ce que vous pouviez vous permettre des détails obscènes, comme ceux que vous vous êtes permis ?

Très certainement, je ne pouvais pas me permettre de tels détails, mais m’en suis-je permis ? Où sont-ils ?” (693).
If the discussion with Sainte-Beuve over *Salammbô* provides any indication, the experience understandably left Flaubert somewhat wary of future accusations. In the December 8, 15, and 22 entries of *Nouveaux Lundis*, Sainte-Beuve published a lengthy analysis of the novel, in which he interspersed a detailed plot summary with mostly negative critical assessments: judging *Salammbô* to be “plus fatigant qu’ennuyeux,” Sainte-Beuve found the novel’s descriptions to be monotonous and overly concerned with grotesque imagery, and questioned the wisdom of writing a historical novel about a largely unknown era (4.69). Flaubert would address these criticisms point-by-point in a December 23-24 letter to Sainte-Beuve, defending his novel with much the same amicability and respect that the critic had demonstrated in his review. But one aspect of Sainte-Beuve’s article struck the author as unnecessarily harmful. In “L’aquaduc,” the seventh chapter of the novel, Flaubert provides a meticulous description of the different funeral rites practiced by the various nationalities that make up the rebellious mercenary army; in Sainte-Beuve’s view, “C’est une scène de funérailles très bien étudiée, scrupuleusement rendue: l’auteur a ainsi voulu qu’il y eût dans son livre un tableau de toutes les scènes que l’archéologie peut fournir” (70). The passage’s concluding paragraph, however, stresses the mourning of the funeral participants, as “les larmes excitaient les larmes, les sanglots devenaient plus aigus, les reconnaissances et les étreintes plus frénétiques.” With increasing elaboration, Flaubert goes on to describe how “Des femmes s’étalaient sur les cadavres, bouche contre bouche, front contre front; il fallait les battre pour qu’elles se retirassent” and how “Les moribonds se roulaient dans la boue sanglante en mordant de rage leurs poings mutilés” (*Œuvres de Flaubert* 2.934-935). For Sainte-Beuve, this novelistic license was simply taking things too far, going
beyond “l’archéologie incontinent” to invent, “sur la fin de ces funérailles, des supplices, des mutilations de cadavres, des horreurs singulières, raffinées, immondes.” In a pointed remark that recalls his ascertainment of “un fonds de De Sade masqué” some twenty years earlier, Sainte-Beuve then concludes that “Une pointe d’imagination sadique se mêle à ces descriptions, déjà assez fortes dans leur réalité” (71).

The word “sadique” caught Flaubert’s attention, and prompted the author to defend himself in a letter to Sainte-Beuve dated December 23-24, 1862. “Et puisque nous sommes en train de nous dire nos vérités,” Flaubert writes, “franchement, je vous avouerai, cher Maître, que « la pointe d’imagination sadique » m’a un peu blessé” (Correspondance 3.281-282). Sainte-Beuve’s words hurt Flaubert because the author was concerned about his public reputation. Since Sainte-Beuve was such a respected critic (“Toutes vos paroles sont graves,” Flaubert reminds his friend), such word becomes “presque une flétrissure” from the moment it is printed (3.281). “Oubliez-vous que je me suis assis sur les bancs de la correctionnelle comme prévenu d’outrage aux mœurs,” a frustrated Flaubert asks his reader, “et que les imbéciles et les méchants se font des armes de tout?” “Ne soyez donc pas étonné,” Flaubert continues,

si un de ces jours vous lisez dans Le Figaro quelque chose d’analoge à ceci: « M. G. Flaubert est un disciple de De Sade. Son ami, son parrain, un maître en fait de critique l’a dit lui-même assez clairement, bien qu’avec cette finesse et cette bonhomie râleuse qui, etc. » Qu’aurai-je à répondre — et à faire? (3.281)

Five years after taking the stand for Madame Bovary, Flaubert once again imagined himself on trial, being forced to answer to Sainte-Beuve’s public association between him and Sade. Responding to such a linkage, as Flaubert realizes, would of course be impossible, so great was the power Sainte-Beuve exercised over public literary discourse.
Flaubert’s fears were perhaps justified, given that the Goncourt brothers had already judged him to be haunted by and obsessed with Sade, suggesting that his own playful reading of the Marquis was subject to misinterpretation. Being labeled “un disciple de De Sade” could thus have damning effects on his literary career.

What is especially intriguing, however, is what Flaubert attempted to write in the remainder of the letter, before eventually deciding against it. In a discarded draft version, Flaubert continues by acknowledging the affinity between him and Sade (“eh bien j’accepte le rapprochement,” he writes), but goes on to highlight their differences: “Je suis au contraire dans mes férocitys/excès sanguins tout à l’autre bout du Marquis. Il haïssait la Nature, et moi je l’adore. Car c’était l’antiphysis incarnée” (3.1224). If Flaubert’s novels dwell on grotesque scenes of cruelty, it was because he loved Nature, whereas the disgusting scenarios found in Sade’s works stem from the Marquis’s deep abhorrence of Nature. “Je vous défie,” Flaubert continues, “de trouver dans tout Sade un arbre ni un animal (pas même une bête féroce ni une couleur) ni même (ce qui va vous paraître plus fort) une description de femme nue.” Instead, all that one finds in Sade, as Flaubert himself knew well, were “description d’organes sexuels c’est tout. —À chaque pas c’est vrai — Mais de femme ou d’homme jamais.” In an acknowledgment of Sade’s stylistic shortcomings, similar to his admission that the humor he finds in Sade was not the author’s intention, Flaubert confirms that Sade “n’a pas même voulu peindre” (3.1224).141 In his letter to Sainte-Beuve, Flaubert criticizes Sade from the perspective of a fellow writer, one whose own realist fiction portrays a much more faithful vision of reality. At the same time, however, Flaubert provides insight regarding a more serious

141 In another version, Flaubert used the verb “essayé” instead of “voulu.”
reading of “le Vieux,” one that goes beyond bawdy humor to focus on an underlying rejection of the natural world. His remarks copy almost verbatim a statement the Goncourt brothers attributed to him in their journal entry for January 29, 1860, where he is quoted as saying of Sade, “« C’est le dernier mot du catholicisme, dit-il. Je m’explique: c’est l’esprit de l’Inquisition, l’esprit de torture, l’esprit de l’Eglise du Moyen Âge, l’horreur de la nature. Il n’y a pas un arbre dans de Sade, ni un animal»” (3.870). Sade represented the “last word of Catholicism” through both his descriptions of torture and his apparent hatred of nature, conveyed through his lack of realist detail and his fictional destructions of human bodies. On April 9, 1861, the brothers would record a similar conversation regarding Flaubert’s interpretation of Sade: “Il en fait l’incarnation de l’Antiphysis et va jusqu’à dire, dans ses plus beaux paradoxes, qu’il est le dernier mot du catholicisme, la haine du corps” (1.90).

Flaubert’s notion of Sade as “le dernier mot du catholicisme” echoes the Romantic image of the satanic and sadistic “Divine Marquis,” one that would continue to resonate among the surrealists during the twentieth century. Similarly, his observations regarding Sade’s lack of realism frames much of Breton’s influential surrealist reading of the 1920s. When Breton and Bataille argued over Sade, for instance, their conflicting interpretations stemmed from this same underlying problem regarding whether or not Sade’s outrageous criminal orgies could be read in realist terms. By proclaiming that “Sade est surréaliste dans le sadisme,” Breton sought to praise the Marquis for favoring

142 Carolyn Dean notes how “Huysmans, Flaubert, Stendhal, Barbey d’Aurevilly, and other writers linked [Sade’s] sadism […] to a kind of Catholicism a rebours,” and ties Flaubert’s remarks to how “Sade was perceived as a mirror of the fin de siècle’s own latent Catholicism, its own malaise” (154). In 1851, critic Armand de Pontmartin alluded to Barbey d’Aurevilly and other writers “qui pensent comme M. de Maistre et écrivent comme le marquis de Sade” (cited in Barbey d’Aurevilly, Œuvres romanesques complètes I, 1295), while Huysmans explicitly made the connection between Barbey and Sade in his 1884 novel À Rebours. The famous (and imaginary) 1829 portrait of Sade surrounded by devils, which appeared in Apollinaire’s 1909 compilation Œuvre du Marquis de Sade, communicates a similar image (see Dean 156).
fantasy over the natural world in a manner that foreshadowed the surrealist movement

(*Œuvres complètes* 1.329). While Flaubert may have been correct in observing that one cannot find “une description de femme nue” in Sade’s entire oeuvre, however, he seems to have misjudged the author’s intent in creating such outlandish characters as Minski, Bandole, Dorothée, and Rombeau. As Breton would argue in the entry on Sade in his 1937 *Anthologie de l’humour noir,*

Les excès même de l’imagination à quoi l’entraîne son génie naturel […], le parti pris follement orgueilleux qui le fait, dans le plaisir comme dans le crime, mettre à l’abri de la satiété ses héros, le souci qu’il montre de varier à l’infini, ne serait-ce qu’en les compliquant toujours davantage, les circonstances propices au maintien de leur égarement ont toute chance de faire surgir de son récit quelque passage d’une outrance manifeste, qui détend le lecteur en lui donnant à penser que l’auteur n’en est pas dupe. (*Œuvres complètes* 2.891)

To illustrate this “outrance manifeste,” Breton provides a lengthy quote from the Minski episode in *Juliette,* describing the “living furniture” (composed of “groupes de filles artistement arrangés”) that adorns the insatiable giant’s dining room. From his correspondence, we know that Flaubert probably chuckled over this very same passage, over half a century before Breton. Flaubert, however, did not give “le Vieux” enough credit, and felt that the author was in fact “dupe,” and that what Peignot deemed Sade’s “monstruosités licencieuses” were actually intended to horrify the reader. In this respect, Flaubert follows the prevalent interpretation of his era, when Sade was either condemned or admired as the incarnation of evil. Nonetheless, his reading emerges as one of the few during the history of the reception of Sade’s works to reject both the dour sermonizing of moralists and the politicizing tendencies of public intellectuals by considering the notorious Marquis to be an amusing “bêtise.”
In the end, Flaubert decided not to send the additional paragraph on Sade to Sainte-Beuve, most likely because he felt it best not to give the critic any confirmation of his interest in the forbidden author. (His prudence seems warranted, as Sainte-Beuve would go on to publish Flaubert’s letter in the collected fourth volume of *Nouveaux Lundis* in 1865.) Sade thus remained for Flaubert a source of private pleasure, the origin of numerous jokes he shared with his inner circle, as in a January 2, 1862 letter to Edmond and Jules de Goncourt about finishing *Salammbô*, where Flaubert plays with his reputation in the wake of the *Madame Bovary* trial by claiming to partake in “des farces qui soulèveront de dégoût le cœur des honnêtes gens” and accumulating “horreurs sur horreurs” in his literature: “« Bestialitaire et meurtrier, je ne sors pas de là » (Hist[oire] de Jérôme, tome II),” he adds, providing the specific reference from the second volume of *La Nouvelle Justine* (3.195). Similarly, after complaining that “*Salammbô m’épuise*” in a letter to Duplan date December 19, 1860, Flaubert exclaims, “Si au moins j’avais le Vieux dans ma solitude!” (3.128), providing another example of how he read Sade not to consider heavy moral and political questions, as would later readers from Bataille to Pasolini, but to enjoy himself, “afin de charmer mes loisirs,” as he wrote in an 1862 letter to Paul de Saint-Victor asking for a copy of Réif de la Bretonne’s *Anti-Justine* (3.288).

Whereas Baudelaire’s poetry—which, as Ladenson argues, “is immoral, in the sense of flouting traditional Christian morality,” thereby placing him “not far from the immoralism à la Sade that Pinard had inaccurately ascribed to the author of *Madame Bovary*”—differs from Sade’s fiction in that it “is melancholy, and expresses great torment about his transgressions” (Ladenson 67), Flaubert’s lighthearted approach to sadism more closely resembles that found in the works of “le Vieux” himself. Although
Flaubert’s respectful moniker suggests a deep sense of veneration, his criticisms regarding Sade’s lack of realism and the supposedly unintentional humor of his excesses in fact distinguish him from later admirers such as the surrealists, who were unwilling to acknowledge any fault in the Divine Marquis.
Chapter Four
Sade on the Margins of Surrealism: Apollinaire, Aragon, and Bataille

In the April 15, 1925 issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Jacques-André Boiffard composed an entry for the ongoing “RÊVES” project of dream narratives, describing a dreamed visit to the castle of the Marquis de Sade (*La Révolution surréaliste* 4: 5). While Boiffard merely mentions the setting of his vision without going into any details, his text would provide the first of several references to Sade in the journal that year, each of which envelops the Marquis in a similar, dreamlike aura. In another installment of “RÊVES” in the June 15, 1926 issue, Marcell Noll tells of dreaming that he was one of the king’s aides on the day that the Marquis de Sade was arrested (*La Révolution surréaliste* 7: 6-7). Unlike Boiffard, Noll does include a vague acknowledgment of Sadean themes when he describes the king’s daughter, Augustina “presque nue, le dos couvert de traces de coups de cravache” after having barely escaped an angry mob, and comments upon the similarity between her name and that of Justine. Mentioning Sade’s name enabled the surrealists to enhance their movement with a hint of vaguely subversive eroticism, in order to shock and provoke the bourgeois society against which they were rebelling. Such is the effect Aragon sought to communicate when, in a fall 1922 interview with *La Revue hebdomadaire* (entitled *Enquête sur les maîtres de la jeune littérature*), he defiantly claimed, “mes amis et moi nous avons lu Sade dès l’enfance” (qtd. in Bonnet 243). Opposing conventional sexual morality remained a constant theme in surrealist publications throughout the decade, such as in the dialogue “Recherches sur la sexualité” published in the March 1928 installment of *La Révolution surréaliste*, where Aragon, Boiffard, Breton, Noll, and others discuss such taboo topics as their favorite
sexual positions and “la pédérastie.” Breton resolutely condemned the latter, proclaiming that “J’accuse les pédérastes de proposer à la tolérance humaine un déficit mental et moral qui tend à s’ériger en système et à paralyser toutes les entreprises que je respecte,” but added that he was prepared to make an exception for Sade, since “Tout est permis par définition à un homme comme le marquis de Sade, pour qui la liberté des mœurs à été une question de vie ou de mort” (33). (In case you were curious, Breton also lists his favorite sexual positions, in order of preference, as “La femme assise de face perpendiculairement à l’homme couché, le 69, la sodomie”). Although scholars today may criticize the surrealists for their lack of sensitivity toward gender issues, the fact remains that the group envisioned itself as advocating sexual freedom, and published texts on Sade in the same subversive spirit as that displayed in “Recherches sur la sexualité.”

However, most surrealist evocations of Sade would largely avoid any direct mention of the Marquis’s infamous sexual inclinations, and would instead establish him as a heroic martyr for both political revolution and the power of the imagination. For instance, Noll’s dream begins by stating “C’est la révolution,” suggesting that Sade was somehow arrested for opposing royal authority, while Breton likewise admires Sade because for him “la liberté des mœurs à été une question de vie ou de mort.” Paul Éluard would make a similar remark in a December 1, 1926 piece appropriately entitled “D.A.F. de Sade, écrivain fantastique et révolutionnaire,” where he writes of Sade that “La

143 In his discussion on “Surrealist Sex,” Nicolas Harrison praises Aragon for his sensitivity to gender issues but berates Breton for his sexism: “Aragon, to his credit, raised the objection in this session that much of what was being said was made invalid by its masculine bias, but Breton was unable to recognize this, and even when women were present at a couple of the later sessions the male participants were uninhibitedly sexist.” Harrison then observes warily that, “In terms of sexual politics, there is perhaps little to choose, on balance, between the prejudices circulated by someone like Breton, and those released by the urge to transgression of someone like Queneau, or Bataille, or Sade” (165-166).
Révolution le trouva dévoué corps et âme” (La Révolution Surréaliste 8: 8-9). As a testament to how seriously the surrealists protected Sade’s character, Éluard’s entry responds to two unsympathetic articles published by Maurice Talmeyr (the pen name of Marie-Justin-Maurice Coste) in Le Figaro that attack Sade for his harshness toward his wife in his prison correspondence. In a typical formula, Éluard praises Sade “Pour avoir voulu redonner à l’homme civilisé la force de ses instincts primitifs, pour avoir voulu délivrer l’imagination amoureuse et pour avoir lutté désespérément pour la justice et l’égalité absolues.” Sade is thus credited with liberating the human imagination, a practice inexorably linked with establishing universal justice and equality.

Robert Desnos would later echo many of these claims in his 1927 text, La Liberté ou l’amour! which contains an enthusiastic eulogy for the Marquis, celebrating “l’indépendance de son esprit” and proclaiming him a “héros de l’amour et du cœur et de la liberté, héros parfait pour qui la mort n’a que douceur” (389-390). Demonstrating a certain degree of familiarity with Sade’s biography, Desnos correctly identifies him as a “Membre de la section des piques” during the Revolution, but then goes on to exaggerate the rhetorical contributions of “ce citoyen éclairé et éloquent”: “Les paroles qu’il sut trouver pour exalter parmi nous la mémoire de l’Ami du peuple retentissent encore dans nos mémoires républicaines.” For Desnos, revolutionary engagement represents the principal force behind Sade’s literature, which landed Sade in political trouble through its denunciation of aristocratic excess: “Né dans les rangs des aristocrates, le citoyen Sade a pourtant souffert pour la liberté ! […] Il a dépeint les mœurs corrompues des aristocrates et ceux-ci l’ont poursuivi de leur haine.” In a remarkable exaggeration, Desnos even makes the Marquis responsible for the Revolution itself, claiming that Sade’s usage of a
sewage pipe to yell from the Bastille instigated the events of July 14: “Nous l’avons vu enfin aux premiers jours de juillet attirer la sainte colère du peuple sur la Bastille. On peut, on doit, pour la justice, reconnaître qu’il fut l’instigateur de la journée du 14 juillet où naquit la liberté!” Desnos had most likely found the anecdote in Apollinaire’s “Le Divin Marquis,” the biographical preface to his 1909 compilation *L’Œuvre du marquis de Sade*, where the celebrated precursor to surrealism suggests somewhat more tentatively that “Il n’est pas impossible que ce soient les appels du marquis de Sade […] qui, exerçant quelque influence sur les esprits déjà excités, aient déterminé l’effervescence populaire et provoqué la prise de la vieille forteresse” (*Œuvres en prose complètes* 3.788). In the surrealist vision, the Revolution, liberty, and the Marquis de Sade are all conflated into one multi-dimensional image that would be evoked and celebrated in order to vaunt the surrealists’ own revolutionary credentials.

What is especially striking about the surrealists’ recreation and rehabilitation of the Marquis de Sade is how much their approach differs from those prevalent among earlier writers. For the most part, nineteenth-century responses to Sade consisted either of public condemnations of his works on moral grounds or pseudo-scientific studies declaring his usefulness as a case study on sexual perversions.144 Admiration for the Marquis was largely confined to the private sphere, as in the personal correspondence of Flaubert. The surrealist celebration of Sade thus stands out for both its public praise of the Marquis on both literary and political grounds and its subsequent denial of the violent and unorthodox sexuality that forms the core of his work. On the one hand, the surrealists rebelled against convention by turning the object of conservative indignation

144 See, for instance, the documents collected in Laugaa-Traut’s *Lectures de Sade*, as well as Carolyn Dean’s *The Self and Its Pleasures*. 
into an icon. At the same time, however, the group’s insistence on Sade’s political relevance and repeated evocation of his imaginative powers manages to overlook the violent sexuality that made him such a subversive and dangerous figure in the first place. For the surrealists, Sade was to be publicly lauded whenever possible, yet in a manner that provides no indication of their ever having read him. Breton, for instance, would twice refer to Sade in the works he published during in 1924, a crucial year for the surrealists. Sade’s name figures among a list of admired authors in the Manifeste du surréalisme, where Breton states that writers such as Sade, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Jarry, and others are all surrealists in their own particular way, claiming them all as precursors in order to lend literary legitimacy to the fledgling surrealist movement. Yet when he proclaims that “Sade est surréaliste dans le sadisme,” Breton merely reduces the sadism in Sade’s oeuvre to dreamlike hallucinations or poetic wordplay, without providing any textual evidence or further elaboration as to what his enigmatic statement actually means (Œuvres complètes 1.329). Another publication from 1924, Les Pas perdus, claims Sade as one of Breton’s favorite moralists—“Les moralistes, je les aime tous, particulièrement Vauvenargues et Sade”—in an apparent attempt to shock his audience through a seemingly incompatible juxtaposition (Œuvres complètes 1.195). The fact that Breton begins his brief discussion of morality with a quotation from the conservative Barrès (whom Breton, Aragon, and others had attacked in a mock trial in 1921) highlights the manner in which Breton often used Sade’s name to signify a rejection of bourgeois values. As Svein Eirik Fauskevag argues in Sade dans le surréalisme, the surrealist Sade was primarily a codified figure used to convey a general sense of rebelliousness (49, 239).
Other scholars have also taken note of how, in the words of Carolyn Dean, the surrealists “developed an image of Sade as both victim and visionary and made his name synonymous with a persecuted truth,” so that “the movement thus both poeticized and politicized Sade. He emerged as one of the major figures in the surrealist pantheon, at once a prophet, a pioneer, and a martyr to modernity” (162). Similarly, Harrison remarks how, “By 1924 […] Sade had already emerged as some sort of mascot or role model for the Surrealist group” (139). Despite the surrealist dominance of public discourse on Sade during the 1920s and the subsequent attention it has received among scholars, however, their version of the Marquis did not go unchallenged. Instead, alternative readings of Sade emerged from figures situated on the margins of the surrealist movement, each of which shares a common focus on the more disturbing details of Sadean eroticism that Breton and others chose to ignore. The earliest of these readings was that of Guillaume Apollinaire, who was initially responsible for coining the term “surréalisme” in the first place.\footnote{Apollinaire uses the term in his preface to the 1917 play Les Mamelles de Tirésias, which is subtitled “drame surréaliste”: “Pour caractériser mon drame je me suis servi d’un néologisme qu’on me pardonnera car cela m’arrive rarement et j’ai forgé l’adjectif surréaliste qui ne signifie pas du tout symbolique […], mais définit assez bien une tendance de l’art que si elle n’est pas plus nouvelle que tout ce qui se trouve sous le soleil n’a du moins jamais servi à formuler aucun credo, aucune affirmation artistique et littéraire, […] Quand l’homme a voulu imiter la marche, il a créé la roue qui ne ressemble pas à une jambe. Il a fait ainsi du surréalisme sans le savoir” (11-12).} Apollinaire’s approach to Sade was characterized by a minute attention to textual detail made possible by the poet’s brave descent into the Enfer of the Bibliothèque Nationale, where he read Sade’s works while preparing his prudently truncated 1909 compilation L’Œuvre du marquis de Sade. Tellingly, Apollinaire supplemented his public, scholarly treatment of Sade with a more private and highly sexualized endeavor manifested in his clandestine 1907 novel Les Onze Mille Verges, ou Les Amours d’un Hospodar, an imitation of Sadean fiction that goes even further than the Marquis in its
sexual explicitness and extreme violence. As a clandestine erotic text, *Les Onze Mille Verges* stands as an aberration within Apollinaire’s oeuvre, a work that he presumably produced for fun as a response to reading Sade. Perhaps as a result of such humor, Breton and the surrealists failed to take *Les Onze Mille Verges* seriously as an interpretation of Sade’s work. In *Les Pas Perdus*, for instance, Breton references Apollinaire’s “amour du scandale,” and praises him for demonstrating “une liberté relative assez grande pour que je prenne plaisir à la licence sincère des *Onze Mille Verges* […]” (*Œuvres complètes* 1.303-304). There is more to *Les Onze Mille Verges*, however, than a mere love of scandal and licentiousness. While the surrealists would follow Apollinaire in emphasizing Sade’s humor (Breton would later include both authors in his 1937 *Anthologie de l’humour noir*), Apollinaire’s novella also stresses the scatological and violent excesses of Sade’s oeuvre, which the surrealists tended to overlook in their effort to champion Sade as a hero of poetic and political revolution.

Not all surrealists followed Breton’s lead in their approach to the Marquis, however. In fact, Aragon, Breton’s right-hand man, distanced himself from the rest of the group during a period of personal turmoil during the summer of 1923, when he retreated to Giverny with a recently acquired copy of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* and began work on his first erotic novel, *Le Con d’Irène*. Significantly, Aragon could only carry out his reflective writing in private, as if the intimate details of Sadean eroticism could only be considered away from the internal politics of the surrealist group. Although Aragon is perhaps best remembered for his lifelong dedication to the Communist cause, his surrealist period during the 1920s was in fact characterized by what his friend Drieu de la Rochelle called a “curiosité maligne de toutes les formes de
l’amour” (qtd. in Œuvres romanesques complètes 1.1151), and saw Aragon dabble in erotic fiction on several occasions. Like Apollinaire’s Les Onze Mille Verges, Le Con d’Irène constitutes Aragon’s reaction to reading the Marquis, but in a much more introspective manner that highlights Aragon’s difficulties in coming to terms with both Sade and eroticism in general. Aragon’s conversion to Communism in the early 1930s brought an end to both his association with the surrealists and his youthful fascination with Sade and eroticism, pointing toward a clear separation between sex and politics in his fiction. Le Con d’Irène thus stands as an aberration within his oeuvre, an initial response to reading Sade that would later be rejected in favor of politically engaged literature.

The greatest challenge to the surrealist monopoly on Sade, however, came from Georges Bataille, who during the 1920s associated with members of the surrealist clique without ever joining the movement. Like Apollinaire, Bataille was able to read the original versions of Sade’s works in the Enfer of the Bibliothèque Nationale, and, like both Apollinaire and Aragon, he responded by producing his own clandestine erotic novel, Histoire de l’œil, published in 1928, the same year as Le Con d’Irène. Bataille’s novel more closely resembles Aragon’s brooding composition than the light-hearted Les Onze Mille Verges: in a manner similar to Aragon, Bataille focuses on the disturbing psychological effects of reading Sade, conveying a sense of anguish found in neither Sade nor Apollinaire. Histoire de l’œil was but the first of many erotic texts to explore similar themes, and was later followed by Madame Edwarda (which was written and published in 1941 under a pseudonym), Abbé C. (which was published openly in 1950), and the posthumously published Le Mort (written in early 1940s) and Ma Mère (written
between 1954 and 1955). What sets *Histoire de l’œil* apart from Bataille’s later works is its context in relation to surrealism. Through both the novel and contemporaneous writings, Bataille expresses his opposition to the watered-down surrealist version of Sade, objecting to their blatant denial of the base material realities of Sadean sexuality. The resulting polemic with Breton, who openly attacked Bataille in the *Second Manifeste du surréalisme* in 1929, tore the surrealists apart, bringing an end to the group’s dominance of the French intellectual scene. The ostracization of Bataille and eventual implosion of the surrealist movement showed that making Sade’s forbidden sexuality public provided a recipe for disaster, as if such themes could only be discussed safely in private.

**Two Faces of Apollinaire: “Le Divin Marquis” and *Les Onze Mille Verges***

Two decades before the divisive 1929 *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, however, Apollinaire was aware of the dangers of openly bringing Sade into the public realm, and instead approached Sade from a scholarly perspective in his 1909 compilation *L’Œuvre du marquis de Sade*, which features inoffensive excerpts from Sade’s works along with a biographical preface, “Le Divin Marquis.” The result of Apollinaire’s research in the *Enfer de la Bibliothèque nationale*, where Sade’s works had been kept since the early nineteenth century for isolation and preservation, the compilation was part of the “Maîtres de l’amour” series, which also contained *L’Œuvre poétique de Charles Baudelaire*, for which Apollinaire had also written the notes and introduction. In “Le Divin Marquis,” which bases its biographical information on the recent works of sexologists Eugen Dühren and Dr. Jacobus X, Apollinaire interprets Sade’s life in a manner that would later be copied by the surrealists, stressing his political merits and ties
to the Revolution ("Le marquis de Sade était un vrai républicain, admirateur de Marat, mais ennemi de la peine de mort et ayant en politique des idées qui lui appartenaient"), his influence on "Un grand nombre d’écrivains, de philosophes, d’économistes, de naturalistes, de sociologues," and the overall relevance of "Le marquis de Sade, cet esprit le plus libre qui ait encore existé" to the present (Œuvres en prose complètes 3.789, 799-800). Stressing Sade’s political credentials became one of the preferred ways for Apollinaire and the surrealists to redeem Sade by associating him with the Republic and its advocacy of individual liberty ("Qu’on ne s’étonne point de voir dans Sade un partisan de la République," Apollinaire writes). Apollinaire differed from his surrealist admirers, however, in that he actually took the time to go to the library and read the texts themselves, and his preface features accurate summaries of La Nouvelle Justine, Juliette ou Les Prospérités du vice, and Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome. Nonetheless, L’Œuvre du marquis de Sade prudently steers clear of the sexually explicit descriptions found in the original editions, thereby presenting a thoroughly distorted view of the Marquis and his oeuvre. Since the only Sade Breton and Aragon knew in the early twenties was the one tame version presented in Apollinaire’s compilation (Bonnet 121), they themselves had little idea of the violence and scatological detail contained in his works, and could therefore easily transform the aristocratic libertine into an icon for political and poetic revolution.

Apollinaire, on the other hand, demonstrated a much more thorough understanding of the forces at work in Sade’s texts through his clandestine publication. If his Œuvre du marquis de Sade presents a publicly acceptable version of the Marquis and a testament to Apollinaire’s scholarly interest in the eighteenth-century author and
historical figure, his clandestine 1907 novel *Les Onze Mille Verges* shows a private fascination with Sadean eroticism, which the novel explores in depth. As is stated in an anonymous note that prefaces one early edition of the work, *Les Onze Mille Verges* is in fact “Plus fort que le marquis de Sade,” and goes much further than Sade in terms of violence and scatological detail: “Il laisse loin derrière lui les ouvrages les plus effrayants du divin marquis,” the prefatory note continues (*Œuvres en prose complètes* 3.1319). Indeed, Apollinaire makes full use of literary realism in depicting the sexual adventures of Hungarian Prince Mony Vibescu, particularly in one early orgy where the prince requests that two French women defecate on him. As the brunette Culculine d’Ancône “baissait un peu le cul et commençait à faire des efforts,” Apollinaire meticulously illustrates every element of the exchange, moving from the way the woman’s clothing highlights the beauty of her legs and buttocks to an eventual focus on her “troufignon brun et rond, tout plissé,” chronicling each step of the process from the dilation of her sphincter to the eventual appearance of “un des plus beaux étrons qu’un gros intestin eût jamais produit” (3.899). Burlesque exaggeration combines with realistic description and poetic mockery, as Apollinaire describes with relish how “La merde sortait onctueuse et ininterrompue, filée avec calme comme un câble de navire. Elle pendillait gracieusement entre les jolies fesses qui s’écartaient de plus en plus” (3.899). The use of maritime metaphors to describe the charms of the female body evokes the poetry of Baudelaire, and in a later passage the actress Estelle even recites Baudelaire’s “Invitation au voyage,” “l’admirable poème où Baudelaire a mis un peu de sa tristesse amoureuse, de sa nostalgie passionnée,” before Mony improvises his own Baudelairean pastiche as Estelle...
masturbates him with her feet (3.907).\textsuperscript{146} Similarly, in \textit{Les Onze Mille Verges}, Apollinaire presents a parody of Sade’s oeuvre, expanding upon the scatological aspects of his texts to the point where they become overwhelmingly humorous. This parodic element extends to the names of the characters themselves: once Culculine d’Ancône finishes defecating and “la merde tomba, toute chaude et fumante, dans les mains de Mony” (3.899), her blonde companion Alexine Mangetout does the same. Again, Apollinaire is careful to incorporate both tactile and olfactory components into his vivid visual descriptions, with “la merde, jaune et molle” of Alexine appearing as several “limaces odoriférantes” on Mony’s torso (3.899-900). Whereas in Sade’s pre-realist texts the feces, urine, blood, and “foutre” that incessantly flows form his characters seems to magically disappear upon release, Apollinaire dutifully keeps track of bodily emissions throughout the orgies: following the dual defecations, the reinvigorated trio engage in further intercourse (“Mony tout emmerdé jouissait profondément,” the narrator notes) until, exhausted, “les nerfs se relâchèrent après quelques soubresauts et le trio s’étendit dans la merde, le sang, et le foutre” (3.900-901). Later that night, a burglar entering the room immediately notices the odor, remarking “Ça sent très mauvais,” before eventually stepping in feces, once again illustrating Apollinaire’s fascination with sensory detail, descriptive thoroughness, and scatological humor (3.901).

More than a mere imitation, Apollinaire’s novel seeks to outdo the Marquis in both form and content, and not only manages to surpass Sade in terms of stench, but with respect to sexual violence as well. In a later passage, Mony takes a voyage on the Orient-

\textsuperscript{146} Maritime metaphors in \textit{Les Fleurs du mal} appear in “Le Serpent qui danse,” where the poet compares his soul to a “navire qui s’éveille / Au vent du matin” as it takes to sea upon the “Mer odorante et vagabonde” of the woman’s “chevelure profonde,” and in “Le Beau navire,” where the sight of the woman “balayant l’air” with her large skirt makes him think of “un beau vaisseau qui prend le large.”
Express, where he runs into the burglar Cornabœux, French actress Estelle Ronange, and her servant, Mariette. The quartet have an orgy that soon turns fatal through a comic sequence of events: while Estelle is straddling Mariette’s face as Mony penetrates the servant vaginally and Cornabœux in turn sodomizes the prince, Estelle accidentally kicks the burglar in the nose, causing Cornabœux to pinch Mony’s buttocks and Mony to bite Mariette’s shoulder, leading Mariette to bite Estelle’s vagina, which makes the actress clench her thighs so tightly around Mariette’s neck that the young woman suffocates. Essentially, Apollinaire creates a slapstick version of Sadean violence, as the ensuing denouement is both gruesomely horrific and outlandishly humorous. Mony ejaculates “dans un con inerte,” and it is only “avec une grande peine,” the narrator insists, that he can eventually “arriver à sortir son vit du con qui s’était effroyablement serré”; whereas Sade’s libertines constantly preach the pleasures of ejaculating into an expiring victim, for Mony the situation instead causes a minor inconvenience. Following the typically Sadean convention of simultaneous orgasms, Cornabœux then ejaculates into Mony’s anus, yelling, “Si tu ne deviens pas enceinte, t’es pas un homme!” mocking the necessarily non-reproductive nature of sodomy between males. In comically melodramatic fashion, Apollinaire reveals that “Mariette était morte étranglée par les jambes de sa maîtresse, elle était morte, irrémédiablement morte” (3.910). Mony then pauses for a moment and looks out the window “pour contempler le panorama romantique du Rhin qui déployait ses splendeurs verdoyantes et se déroulait en larges méandres jusqu’à l’horizon,” in a brief pastiche of romantic sentimentalism bizarrely juxtaposed with the horrors occurring inside the train. The situation quickly degenerates even further, as Cornabœux responds by sodomizing Mariette’s corpse, disemboweling
her, wrapping himself in her intestines, and vomiting (“Parmi les cheveux sanglants, les boyaux et le sang se mêlaient au dégueulis,” notes the narrator in a characteristic attention to bodily fluids [3.911]). Eventually, the burglar defecates on Estelle’s face and stabs her to death, while Mony ends up violating her corpse: “Quand il eut déchargé,” Apollinaire writes, “l’actrice ne remuait plus. Elle était raide et ses yeux révulsés étaient pleins de merde” (3.911-912). Estelle’s death recalls many similar passages in Sade, where sexuality and death are combined with a disturbing touch of humor and ironic detachment. For instance, in Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome, Sade follows a vivid description of the disembowelment and vivisection of the young girl Augustine with the outline of comically inappropriate eulogy: “Ainsi périt à quinze ans et huit mois une des plus célestes créatures qu’ait formé la nature, etc. Son éloge” (Œuvres 1.372). But Apollinaire essentially takes the most extreme moments in Sade and pushes them even further, exaggerating the already outrageous violence and filth of the model text beyond the point of absurdity. The bloodied belly and shit-filled eyes of Estelle’s corpse effectively take Sadean eroticism to a new level, as Apollinaire demonstrates enough familiarity and comfort with the original Sadean text to expand upon it using the techniques of literary realism.

With Les Onze Mille Verges, Apollinaire continues a tradition begun by Sade’s bitter rival Rétif de la Bretonne wherein reading Sade inspires artistic imitation, as if Sade’s texts were especially open to re-writing and adaptation. The novel effectively inaugurated a modern literary (and, eventually, cinematic) underground where Sade could be read independently of mainstream interpretations. Like Apollinaire, Aragon, and Bataille, these later writers and filmmakers would concentrate on the details of Sadean
erotism, responding to Sade through the erotic genre in which he himself worked. Indeed, during the twentieth century, astute readers of Sade from Apollinaire onward have frequently responded to the Marquis through their own erotic fiction, yielding a hybrid genre that combines explicit eroticism with literary criticism. Apollinaire’s *Les Onze Mille Verges* follows Rétif in singling out excrement and violence as the defining characteristics of Sade’s oeuvre, yet implicitly takes a stance opposite that of the openly published “Le Divin Marquis,” where Apollinaire defends Sade’s worth on literary and intellectual grounds. The manner in which *Les Onze Mille Verges* blatantly omits any reference to Sade’s debt to philosophy, combined with the way Apollinaire adorns his novel with an attention to detail and poetic flourish absent from the original texts, suggests a reading that systematically removes Sade from his eighteenth-century context. It is as if Apollinaire attempted to correct perceived shortcomings in Sade’s works, such as the distracting philosophical digressions and Sade’s bland and overly repetitive prose, in order to highlight and expand upon the sex and violence. Above all, however, Apollinaire discerningly seizes upon the underlying humor of Sade’s novels, emphasizing a crucial component of the Sadean system that later adaptations of Sade would tend to overlook.

“Des abîmes de regret et de songe”: *Le Con d’Irène* and Aragon’s Reading of Sade

Humor is decidedly absent from Aragon’s *Le Con d’Irène*, for instance, although the seriousness of the novella should not come as a surprise given the circumstances in
which it was written. Although Aragon may best be remembered as the faithful servant to Elsa Triolet and the Communist cause, his surrealist years were in fact characterized by periods of depression and melancholy, culminating in a failed suicide attempt in September 1928. Aragon’s personal misfortunes began when his father threatened to cut off financial support after the twenty-four-year-old aspiring poet, who still lived with his family in Neuilly, decided to abandon his medical studies in January 1922. Breton helped Aragon by securing the sponsorship of fashion designer and art enthusiast Jacques Doucet, who provided both poets with a monthly stipend in exchange for updates on current literary trends. Aragon responded by using his newfound financial independence to write novels, despite the official surrealist position against the bourgeois genre and its detailed psychological accounts. His ongoing novelistic project during the 1920s, the multi-volume *La Défense de l’infini*, frequently provoked the ire of Breton, such as during a discussion held on November 23, 1926 between surrealists and contributors to the Communist journal *Clarté*, where Breton harshly criticized Aragon for his stubborn attachment to *La Défense de l’infini*:

> On m’a dit qu’Aragon poursuivait une activité littéraire: la publication par exemple, d’un ouvrage en 6 volumes à la N.R.F. intitulé *Défense de l’infini*. Je n’en vois pas personnellement la nécessité. Les passages que j’en connais ne me donnent pas une envie folle de connaître le reste. *(Œuvres romanesques complètes 1.1170)*

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147 Information on the biographical circumstances surrounding *Le Con d’Irène* can be found in Pierre Daix’s *Aragon: Une Vie à changer*, as well as in Daniel Bougnoux’s notes to Aragon’s *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, vol. 1.

148 Aragon would end up destroying much of *La Défense de l’infini* in Madrid in late 1927, in the middle of a crisis that would cumulate in his attempted suicide a few weeks before his thirty-first birthday, when, on September 7, 1928, he over-dosed on sleeping pills. *Le Con d’Irène* is the only section of the project that appeared during his lifetime, published anonymously and clandestinely in 1928.
To make matters worse, Aragon had missed the surrealists’ first hypnotic experiments while he was in Berlin in August 1922. A few months later, Breton forced Aragon to abandon his post as director of the newspaper *Paris-Journal* in April 1923, as Breton viewed journalism as an unacceptable compromise of surrealist integrity. Reaching a moment of crisis regarding his relationship with the surrealists, Aragon therefore left Paris for Giverny in May 1923, where he began writing *Le Con d’Irène*, a short, erotic text that he planned to be the first part of *La Défense de l’infini*.

Conflict with Breton and the surrealists was not all that pushed Aragon to Giverny, however. His love life had been in a state of constant turmoil since the summer of 1922, when he fell in love with the American artist Elizabeth Eyre de Lanux, who was the girlfriend of Aragon’s close acquaintance, fellow novelist Pierre Drieu La Rochelle. The relationship between Aragon and Drieu was a complex one, based upon mutual admiration and amorous rivalry. Together, the pair frequented bordellos and even engaged in some secretive “unorthodox gymnastics” in private; Drieu’s 1925 novel, *L’Homme couvert de femmes*, which he dedicated to Aragon, describes a sexually promiscuous group of young friends vacationing together over the summer, and was partially based upon their own experiences (Daix 219, 174). Realizing that Eyre was off-limits for him, Aragon fled to Berlin in August 1922, where he encountered a city so

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149 Eyre, as she was known, was the bisexual wife of the diplomat Pierre de Lanux, but the two had agreed to allow each other to take lovers; a successful “open marriage,” theirs would last until her husband’s death in 1955.

150 When Aragon dedicated *Le Libertinage* to him, Drieu would call it one of the happiest moments of his life.

151 The brothel was an essential element in Aragon’s maturation, and it is worth recalling that he served as doctor of the military bordellos in Sarrebruck (Daix 206). Although Aragon would admit towards the end of his life that he was bisexual, his sexual experimentation with Drieu provides a rare, concrete example of such behavior.
filled with prostitutes that it was difficult to find a hotel that was not a maison de passe. Upon his return to France, Aragon fell in love again, this time with the already married Denise Lévy, a cousin of Breton’s wife who would never return his affections, and who eventually left her husband to marry one of Aragon’s closest friends, Pierre Naville (Daix 165-67). By retreating to Giverny in order to write Le Con d’Irène, Aragon attempted to work through his unrequited love for Denise and Eyre. At several points in the text, Aragon apostrophizes Denise, informing her that she, and not Eyre, is his intended audience, and explaining that he invented the character of Irène in order to erase her from his memory (Œuvres romanesques complètes 1.447, 466). While waiting to see Denise again and looking forward to receiving some additional funds, Aragon turned to the only outlet he knew, and began to write: “J’écrivais donc. Le temps devait être brûlé par quelque pierre infernale. La seule que je connaisse est la pensée, et j’ai dit qu’écrire est ma seule méthode de pensée. J’écrivais” (1.449).

Aragon did not write just any novel, however, but an erotic one. His decision stems in part from his own experience during the summer of 1923: the opening narrative describes his sexual frustration and unsatisfying visit to a brothel in Commercy (C*** in the novella), where Aragon vacationed with his family in August and September. In addition to its autobiographical origins, however, Le Con d’Irène was the result of Aragon finally having obtained and read one of Sade’s uncensored works earlier that

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152 Aragon and Eyre would, however, become lovers for a few months in the spring of 1925. Aragon chronicled his experience in Berlin in “Le Dernier été,” an article dated September 1922 and published in the November 1922 edition of Littérature: “Enseignes lumineuses de Potsdamer Platz, d’ici quelques jours le téléphone sans fil dans la ville, luxe des quartiers de l’ouest où voisinent millionnaires et putains, on n’a pas idée de ça dans notre village. Je recommande aux voyageurs une visite au Passage, avec son Panoptikum où l’on peut considérer toutes les races de femmes, nues, et le ventre ouvert pour montrer les infinies variations des organes dans leur cavité naturelle” (qtd. in Daix 153).
spring. Contrary to his claim, in a fall 1922 interview with *La Revue hebdomadaire* entitled *Enquête sur les maîtres de la jeune littérature*, that “mes amis et moi nous avons lu Sade dès l’enfance,” Aragon had not actually read anything other than the tame passages in Apollinaire’s compilation prior to 1923, according to Marguerite Bonnet (Bonnet 243). In fact, he and Breton had attempted to acquire Sade’s texts for Doucet’s library precisely so that they might read them for the first time, and wrote the designer a letter in February 1922 recommending the purchase of “l’œuvre complète du marquis de Sade, y compris, si possible, tant de manuscrits égarés que nous ne nous résignons pas à croire perdus” (Breton Œuvres complètes 1.632-633). In his autobiographical *Mon Dernier Soupir*, Luis Buñuel recalls the surrealist fascination with Sade, and explains how he supposedly joined Desnos in looking at a German edition of *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* sometime during the mid-1920s (268). Obtaining access to Sade’s works was not easy, however; as Buñuel writes, “Une librairie de la rue Bonaparte, chez qui me conduisirent Breton et Eluard, m’inscrivit sur une liste d’attente pour *Justine*, qu’il ne me procura jamais” (269). For the most part, Buñuel therefore had to borrow editions from his more fortunate friends: “J’ai emprunté à des amis *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, le *Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond*, *Justine* et *Juliette*.” According to Buñuel, Breton was one of the lucky few to own a copy of *Justine* (“Breton possédait un

153 Should Sade’s complete works be unavailable, the pair recommend four particularly representative works of “cet auteur si imposant à tous égards,” *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, *Justine*, *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* (which Breton mistakenly refers to as “jours”), and the Revolutionary *Discours prononcé à la Fête décernée par la section des Piques aux mânes de Marat et de Le Peletier*. As their mention of the *Discours* demonstrates, Breton and Aragon focus on Sade’s political credentials, claiming that the Marquis “apparaît comme la première incarnation de l’esprit révolutionnaire que le XIXe siècle n’est pas parvenu à étouffer.” They also observe that his “influence va grandissant,” and cite Baudelaire and Apollinaire as prominent authors indebted to Sade.
exemplaire de *Justine,*” he claims), but he never clarifies when the poet might have purchased the novel.

It is certain, however, that Breton and Aragon’s efforts with Doucet paid off in the spring of 1923, when his library acquired a copy of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir,* printed clandestinely that year by the “Société des études sadiques” (with “Sadopolis” listed as the place of publication), for the price of eighty francs.154 As Aragon later recalls in his 1969 “Je n’ai jamais appris à écrire, ou les incipit,” reading *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* pushed him to write the erotic passages of *La Défense de l’infini,* which, the Communist Aragon claimed, would have been a sociological novel on the brothel and society:

> Et bien plutôt, faut-il songer que je venais de lire, de faire, afin de pouvoir lire, acheter à Jacques Doucet, mon patron, pour sa bibliothèque *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* du marquis de Sade, qui est certainement l’origine, inconsciente mais vraie, du bordel comme critique de la société dans le roman que j’écrivais alors. Ou pour être plus précis, du bordel comme horizon, etc. (*Œuvres romanesques complètes* 1.585-586)

The “roman que j’écrivais alors” is *La Défense de l’infini,* in particular the part that would eventually be published as *Le Con d’Irène.* There is nothing in either the project as a whole or *Le Con d’Irène* to suggest that Aragon was actually trying to use erotic fiction to convey sociological observations, however; in fact, for much of the 1920s Aragon remained one of the least politically committed surrealists, until he met Elsa Triolet at the end of the decade. Writing in 1969, the Communist Aragon apparently

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154 The edition still sits tucked away at the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet in Paris, and lists the price in pencil on one of the first pages. According to François Chapon in *Mystère et splendeurs de Jacques Doucet,* it was a rare edition of *Justine,* and not *La Philosophie dans le boudoir,* that the library acquired: “En juin 1923, Doucet, toujours par l’entremise de Breton, acheta l’exemplaire de *Justine* qu’Eluard, un peu gêné d’une acquisition par trop lourde par son budget, désirait revendre” (381). The library today does not possess a copy of *Justine* published before 1930, however.
wanted to lend an air of social critique to his lost *Défense de l’infini* project, and perhaps implicitly deny, as he would consistently do throughout his life, the authorship of so disengaged a work as the introspective and sexually explicit *Le Con d’Irène*. In fact, however, the Doucet library’s copy of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, the one that Aragon read in 1923, bears the traces of a decidedly apolitical reading, since the pages of the one overtly political section of the novel, the pamphlet “*Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être républicains*,” remain uncut. In reading that particular copy, Aragon thus skipped the pamphlet entirely, and only resumed separating the pages and reading again after the next sexually explicit engraving. Although he could not admit as much in public, Aragon in fact approached *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* with his characteristic “curiosité maligne de toutes les formes de l’amour,” and read the dialogue primarily for its racy sexual passages. *Le Con d’Irène* thus stands as his creative response to the particular brand of eroticism found in Sade.155

What becomes clear through a close reading of the text, however, is that *Le Con d’Irène* is above all a failed erotic novel, and a novel about erotic failure. “[J]’envie beaucoup les érotiques, dont l’érotisme est l’expression,” Aragon remarks at the beginning of the narrative, before acknowledging his own shortcomings: “Magnifique langage. Ce n’est vraiment pas le mien” (1.446). Although the inaccessible language of eroticism fills him only with bitterness (“Érotisme, ce mot m’a bien souvent mené dans un champ de réflexions amères,” he admits), Aragon nonetheless tries to imitate the “érotiques,” such as the author of the recently read *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, in his

155 In his recent article on Louis Aragon in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Pierre Taminiaux hints at a possible connection between Aragon and Sade when he notes that *La Défense de l’infini* “introduces us to the darkest side of the writer’s imagination: its crude eroticism, similar in many ways to that of the marquis de Sade, is inspired by an existential disgust toward all aspects of conventional morality” (386).
opening description of the brothel in C***. The tone of the passage, however, 
communicates the author’s depression and inability to achieve sexual satisfaction. After 
dwelling on the unattractive appearance of the prostitutes—they all smell of bad food, 
having apparently just had lunch, and the fattest of the three, with putrid blond hair and 
small, stubby hands still stained with food, is described as having “l’air d’une grosse 
merde qui se trémousse”—, the narrator tells how he chose the best woman available, 
only to ejaculate as soon as her tongue touched his member (1.441-442). When the 
woman diligently tries to revive her client by showing him an orgy in a neighboring 
room, where a portly, nymphomaniac prostitute simultaneously serves three men, the 
narrator only turns away in disappointment. “Quelle sacrée tristesse dans toutes les 
réalisations de l’érótisme!” he exclaims, lamenting at length about the boring repetition 
that necessarily plagues such multi-partner orgies:

Puis ça retombe toujours dans le même poncif architectural. Quand ils ont 
bâti une pyramide avec leurs corps, ils sont au bout de leur imagination. 
Tous lâchent leur coup, un peu au hasard, et finalement le pantin multiple 
se dégonfle et s’aplatit dans la sueur les poils et les foutres. Grotesque 
baudruche. (1.444)

Aragon’s commentary seems a direct reply to the elaborate structures that appear in 
Sade’s texts, where no matter how much effort and creativity is involved in constructing 
geometrical pyramids of bodies, the result is nonetheless always the same grotesque 
deflation into a mess of sweat, hair, and genital secretions. In Sade’s orgies, the 
simultaneous penetration of a woman’s three orifices often stands as a climactic event: 
the monks at Sainte-Marie-des-Bois, for instance, conclude Justine’s welcoming 
ceremony by enthusiastically exclaiming “Mettons nous tous les six sur elle” (Œuvres 
2.615). Aragon’s narrator, however, bemoans the lack of imagination in such typically
Sadean scenarios. The scene he is shown in another room makes an even more direct reference to Sade, as the narrator sees the mayor of C*** with a beautiful woman, but immediately turns away in disgust when he learns that the scene will conclude with the mayor defecating following his ejaculation (1.445). Although Aragon acknowledges the universal contributions of Sadean eroticism—“Que celui qui n’a pas rêvé à l’idée d’une mort au milieu de la fornication, ici m’interrompe,” he writes (1.446)—, he ultimately concludes that it is not for him, since such “stupéfiants excès” and “écarts admirables” only end up plunging him “dans des abîmes de regret et de songe” (1.447).

In the end, the conventions of erotic literature all fail to respond to Aragon’s desire. He must therefore move outside of the confines of the genre and create a new kind of erotic fiction, one that more closely responds to his needs by focusing on an idealized female character, Irène. After describing the brothel in C*** and how he turned to writing in search of satisfaction, Aragon begins the story of his title character, whom he reveals through the eyes of her grandfather, a mute invalid paralyzed from syphilis who nonetheless maintains a voracious sexual appetite, gladly watching servant girls and farmhands as they have sex in front of him. Eventually, his own daughter (Irène’s mother, Victoire) makes it a point to conduct all her trysts with both male lovers and servant girls within his view, and Aragon places himself in a similar position in his novella as the admirer of a woman he cannot touch. The central part of the text features a description of Irène in the midst of sexual intercourse (where she clearly dominates her male partner) that soon expands into a poetic paean as the voyeuristic narrator focuses in on Irène’s genitalia:

156 Such references to sexual impotence might in fact reflect Aragon’s own physical difficulties: in the surrealist’s “Recherches sur la sexualité,” published in La Révolution surréaliste, Aragon admits to being unable to achieve a full erection. See La Révolution surréaliste, n.11, mars 1928.
Appearing in the text for the first time since the work’s title, the vulgar word “con” situates Aragon’s novella within the tradition of obscene literature, where the term has served since the seventeenth century as the most frequent means to designate the female organ. Even in the brothel passages, Aragon instead used terms such as “vulve” and “motte,” as if his own obscene work could only really begin with the appearance of Irène. The juxtaposition of the harsh sounding “con” with “délicat” sets the tone for the remainder of Aragon’s narrative, which maintains the utmost respect toward its female object despite the use of offensive language, intermingling sophisticated poetry with vulgar realism as “le con d’Irène” takes center stage.

Aragon withholds nothing in the description that follows, describing every aspect of Irène’s vagina with a combination of metaphor and explicit detail. He situates himself as a suppliant before her sex, urging the reader to approach his (or her) face, even though the tongue will not be able to resist performing cunnilingus:

> Si petit et si grand! [...] Ce lieu, ne crains pas d’en approcher ta figure, et déjà ta langue, la bavarde, ne tient plus en place, ce lieu de délice et d’ombre, ce patio d’ardeur, dans ses limites nacrées, la belle image du pessimisme. Ô fente, fente humide et douce, cher abîme vertigineux. (1.462)  

Throughout his description, Aragon will repeatedly refer to cunnilingus, which he compares to an act of worship (“ô mon église,” he writes of Irene’s vagina). Irene’s vagina is a source of poetic inspiration that activates not only the observer’s “langue” but also the language of the poet in his eulogy as he catches a glimpse of eternity in her “abîme vertigineux.” For Aragon, the vagina evokes the beauty of the sea, and he goes
on to praise its intrinsic qualities, such as its humidity, its liquidity (“ce sillage humain”
where “les navires enfin perdus […] dressent à un mât de fortune la voilure du
désespoir”), and its overall physical beauty (“Entre les poils frisées comme la chair est
belle, […] pure, écumeuse, lactée”). No anatomical aspect is ignored, from the
apostrophized “Charmantes lèvres” ready to receive a kiss, to the venerable clitoris, “le
point le plus dur, le meilleur, qui soulève l’ogive sainte à son sommet, […] le bouton
adorable qui frémit du regard qui se pose sur lui, le bouton que j’effleure à peine que tout
change” (1.462-463). Fittingly, at the end of this atypical blazon, Irène reaches orgasm,
“discharging” as do Sade’s characters, a choice of vocabulary that expresses Aragon’s
debt to the Marquis: “Enfer, que tes damnés se branlent, Irène a déchargé” (1.463-464).
The passage even seems to perform a direct pastiche of one of Madame de Saint-Ange’s
many orgasms in La Philosophie dans le boudoir, when she blasphemes at length during
the cinquième dialogue: “Ô Lucifer ! […] double nom de Dieu, dont je me fous… sacré
bougre de Dieu ! je décharge…” (Œuvres 3.88).

Despite such references to Sade, however, Le Con d’Irène ends up pursuing a
different direction altogether. In fact, Aragon’s decision to focus on the vagina
constitutes a conscientious refusal of Sadean eroticism, which praises the anus as the
preferred sexual orifice and often singles out the vagina as a site for mutilation. Whereas
Sade’s libertines, both male and female, tend to reject the vagina in favor of the penis and
the anus, Aragon privileges the female sex above everything else: even Irène’s breasts do
not interest him (“elle a les seins un peu longs pour mon goût,” he admits), and he never
mentions her anus or buttocks (1.461). Despite its lavish praise of Irene’s vagina,
however, Le Con d’Irène does not merely constitute another typical surrealist homage to
a mythical, idealized female muse. Rather, unlike his surrealist counterparts, Aragon acknowledges the central components of Sadean eroticism, even if he eventually moves away from them. In this way, his approach more closely resembles Apollinaire’s poetic reconfiguration of the Sadean text in *Les Onze Mille Verges*, with the notable distinction that Apollinaire amplifies Sade’s sexual violence while Aragon distances himself from it.

Although Sade was clearly on Aragon’s mind as he wrote *Le Con d’Irène* (he even mentioned the Marquis in a printed envoi in the copy he gave to Nancy Cunard in 1928), his dismissal of Sadean eroticism would never become a point of contention with Breton, who was instead upset with Aragon’s stubborn attachment to the novel. For instance, in order to gain Breton’s acceptance of “Le Passage de l’Opéra,” another text filled with erotic melancholy that he composed during the spring and summer of 1923, Aragon simply claimed that the work was a prose poem and not a novel. His strategy appears to have worked, perhaps because Breton was eager to reintegrate Aragon into the

157 Aragon’s dedication to Cunard reads as follows: “Avec un souci tout particulier de lui plaire, avec le souci de ne pas finir de lui plaire, mais cette vie n’est que soucis et c’était encore la couleur de l’habit du Marquis, le jour qu’à Marseille tant de gens le virent aller et venir, avant qu’avec son domestique et son insolence il allât donner à ces dames les mystérieuses pastilles qui par une allitération bien compréhensible le menèrent à la Bastille, et cette vie n’est qu’un souci, une grande fleur sur l’eau, jaune-malheur, ô mes pensées, celui qui tombait en traversant le pont, très pâle” (1.1198). The melancholic tone reflects the deterioration of their relationship, as well as Aragon’s deepening depression, which would lead to his attempted suicide in September 1928. Despite the dedication, Aragon’s relationship with Cunard did not actually begin until January 1926, well after he had written *Le Con d’Irène*, eliminating the possibility that she and not Denise was the woman he addressed within the novella itself.

158 “Le Passage de l’Opéra” features a discussion of subway “branleuses” as well as several other sections devoted to Parisian brothels. In one particularly poignant and introspective passage reminiscent of Aragon’s reflections on eroticism in *Le Con d’Irène*, the narrator describes the melancholic seriousness that he brought with him to brothels as he sought solace from unrequited love: “Il ne me vient pas à l’idée, la gauloiserie n’est pas dans mon cœur, que l’on puisse autrement aller au bordel que seul, et grave. J’y poursuis le grand désir abstrait qui parfois se dégage des quelques figures que j’aie jamais aimées” (*Œuvres poétiques complètes*, 1.221). Although Aragon would eventually admit, in 1969’s *Je n’ai jamais appris à écrire*, that the whole of *Le Paysan de Paris* was, in fact, a novel, the initial classification of the work as a prose poem has remained influential, as *Le Paysan de Paris* appears in the first volume of the Pléiade edition of Aragon’s *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, rather than in his *Œuvres romanesques*.
group after his hiatus: when Aragon read the opening passages of the text to a number of surrealists at Breton’s home in January 1924, Breton became angry at the listeners’ consternation, and did his best to defend the work.\textsuperscript{159} On a similar note, when Aragon published the collection of short texts \textit{Le Libertinage} in May 1924, he added a gratuitous, last-minute reference to Sade in his preface, evoking the figure of the Marquis as a martyr for intellectual freedom: “Le marquis de Sade en butte aux persécutions depuis cent quarante années n’a pas quitté la Bastille : et comme lui presque tous ceux qui ne connurent aucune borne et que l’on devrait comme lui appeler des \textit{divins} sont prisonniers aux mains des ignorants” (\textit{Œuvres romanesques complètes} 1. 277). Despite the prefatory reference and the suggestive title of the work, however, \textit{Le Libertinage} had little to do with Sade, and was mostly written in 1922, before Aragon had read \textit{La Philosophie dans le boudoir}. In fact, as Aragon explains in his \textit{Avant-lire} added to \textit{Le Libertinage} upon its republication in 1964, the word “libertinage” should not be taken in a Sadean sense, but instead refers to libertine intellectuals of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{160} Moreover, the initial preface, according to Aragon, was actually a reaction to Breton’s militant \textit{Manifeste} and an attempt to placate the surrealists and compensate for Aragon’s inexcusable attachment to the novel; the preface, he writes, “était là pour \textit{me faire pardonner} la part de l’imagination romanesque, c’était une grande précaution oratoire à l’usage de mes amis” (1.257). Linking \textit{Le Libertinage} to the surrealist image of the Divine Marquis thus constituted part of Aragon’s effort to make amends with Breton. By the end of the

\textsuperscript{159} See Bougnoux’s “Chronologie,” in \textit{Œuvres romanesques complètes} vol. 1, XLVIII.

\textsuperscript{160} As Aragon explains: “[...] \textit{Le Libertinage}, que je n’ai jamais entendu qu’au sens de ces \textit{libertins} du XVII\textsuperscript{e} siècle, c’est-à-dire les libres-penseurs dont Théophile de Viau est l’image” (\textit{Œuvres romanesques complètes} 1.257).
decade, however, erotic literature would in fact become a point of contention between
Breton and Aragon, but for entirely different reasons, and only after surrealist fellow
traveler Georges Bataille and Breton had engaged in a public dispute regarding their
respective interpretations of the Marquis.

Dipping Flowers in Manure: Bataille as a Reader of Sade

Bataille claims to have first encountered Sade’s texts in 1926, some three years
after Aragon read the 1923 edition of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (*Œuvres complètes*
8.615). Unlike Aragon, however, Bataille publicly declared his fascination with the
Marquis from the start, and by June of 1926 Marcell Noll could link the two names in his
aforementioned “Rêve,” where Augustina begins a sentence with “Vous savez, Bataille,”
and the dreaming narrator immediately explains “je comprends : Sade,” suggesting that
Bataille’s name was already tied to that of Sade by association. As was the case with
both Apollinaire and Aragon, reading Sade prompted Bataille to begin composing his
own erotic fiction, and in 1926 he began writing the now lost text *W.C.* As the work’s
title suggests, Bataille seizes upon the more scatological elements of Sadean eroticism,
and eventually incorporated such themes in his 1927 novella *Histoire de l’œil,* which was
published during the summer of 1928 under the pseudonym “Lord Auch” (short for
“Lord aux chiottes”) by René Bonnel (who had also published *Le Con d’Irène* a few

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161 In reality, Bataille could have discovered Sade much earlier, as since 1922 he was employed at the
BNF, where he would have had full access to all the texts of the *Enfer,* including the works of the Marquis.
While Breton and Aragon—or virtually anyone else, for that matter—would have been allowed to consult
Sade and other forbidden works held in the *Enfer,* the process did require a considerable amount of time
and paperwork, not to mention a willingness to read Sade at an official establishment such as the BNF.

162 “« Vous savez, Bataille (je comprends : Sade), ne se doutait pas que Justine… »” (*La Révolution
surréaliste* 7: 6-7).
months earlier). In many ways, *Histoire de l’œil* evokes several specific components of Sade’s works, such as the novella’s two opposing female characters (the dark-haired libertine Simone and the innocent, blond-haired victim Marcelle, who recall Juliette and Justine), or Sir Edmond’s remark about ejaculation during hanging (which brings to mind Roland from *La Nouvelle Justine*), or Bataille’s typically Sadean recourse to sacrilege.

But the main area of dialogue between the *Histoire de l’œil* and Sade lies in their shared fascination with violent, excretory, and decidedly non-reproductive sexual behavior, a topic that Bataille explores extensively in his novella. Whereas Aragon experiments with Sadean themes, only to reject them in favor of the sublime specter of Irène’s genitalia, Bataille explores Sadean eroticism in much greater detail, describing his narrator’s gradual descent into sexual crimes. However, the sense of torment and anguish that Bataille exhibits when confronting such themes distinguishes *Histoire de l’œil* from Apollinaire’s violent and scatological *Les Onze Mille Verges*, and makes the novella darker and more introspective than its grotesque predecessor. Even more directly than either *Les Onze Mille Verges* or *Le Con d’Irène*, *Histoire de l’œil* provides its author with a means to work through the psychological experience of reading Sade, wherein

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163 W. C. (préface à l’*Histoire de l’œil*), in *Romans et récits*, 363. Whereas the most widely accepted timeline (that adopted by Michel Surya in *Georges Bataille, la mort à l’œuvre*, and presented by Marina Galletti in the Pléiade edition of Bataille’s *Romans et récits*, for example) maintains that Bataille started writing *Histoire de l’œil* in 1927, Gilles Ernst hypothesizes that the text may have been composed from 1920 onward. See his *Notice to the Histoire de l’œil*, also in *Romans et récits*, page 1019.

164 Sir Edmond says to Don Aminado, “Tu sais que les pendus ou les garrottés bandent si fort, au moment où on leur coupe la respiration, qu’ils éjaculent. Tu vas donc avoir le plaisir d’être martyrisé ainsi en baisant la girl” (*Romans et récits*, 97). The final orgy takes place inside the Church of Don Juan in Seville, where a young priest is forced to urinate in the chalice and ejaculate on the hosts before being murdered.
responding to the Marquis through a complimentary work of erotic fiction becomes a therapeutic experience.  

Like Sade’s works, *Histoire de l’œil* privileges non-reproductive sexual practices, to the extent that Simone and the narrator manage to commit various acts of debauchery before ever partaking in conventional sex, ironically leaving Simone a virgin for most of the story. Their first sexual experience together involves masturbating together after Simone bathed her vagina in a bowl of milk (52), while their second, which eventually involves Marcelle as well, ends in an orgy of saliva, urine, mud, and “foutre,” the term for both male and female genital discharge that Bataille copies from Sade (53-54). Soon thereafter, Simone and her companion turn a tame gathering of young men and women into a wild, drunken orgy that ends with everyone passed out on the floor amidst broken tableware; as the narrator relates, “Il en résultait une odeur de sang, de sperme, d’urine et de vomi qui me faisait déjà presque reculer d’horreur” (59). In much the same manner as Apollinaire before him, Bataille keeps careful track of bodily fluids throughout the text, but describes his horror and disgust upon encountering the corporeal emissions that accompany human sexuality. Bataille’s attitude is similar with respect to the erotic appeal of death, a theme that he shares with both Sade and Apollinaire. While driving a car, Simone and the narrator run over a young, attractive female cyclist (“son cou avait

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165 *Histoire de l’œil* was actually written while Bataille was undergoing treatment, and he would show his drafts to his analyst Adrien Borel, as if composing the work was part of his therapy. As Bataille would later admit in an interview, “Le premier livre que j’ai écrit [*Histoire de l’œil*] je n’ai pu l’écrire que psychanalysé, oui, en en sortant. Et je crois pouvoir dire que c’est seulement libéré de cette façon-là que j’ai pu écrire” (qtd. in Surya 126).

166 As the narrator notes, “Je dois dire toutefois que nous restâmes très longtemps sans nous accoupler. Nous profitions seulement de toutes les circonstances pour nous livrer à des actes inhabituels” (*Romans et récits* 53). When he awkwardly tries to have sex with Simone in her bed, he is harshly rebuked: “Tu es complètement fou, cria-t-elle, mais mon petit, je n’ai pas d’intérêt : dans un lit, comme ça, comme une mère de famille!” (63).
presque été arraché par les roues,” the narrator explains), and remain transfixed before her mutilated corpse:

Nous sommes restés longtemps quelques mètres plus loin sans descendre, occupés à la regarder morte. L’impression d’horreur et de désespoir provoquée par tant de chairs sanglantes, écœurantes en partie, en partie très belles, est à peu près équivalente à l’impression que nous avons habituellement en nous voyant. (52)

Whereas murder and the resultant corpses appear solely as means to pleasure in Sade and Apollinaire, Bataille experiences a combination of attraction and repulsion at the site of the young woman’s mutilated body, which in turn yields a greater psychological sense of horror and despair. Yet the experience proves to be nonetheless arousing, and in later episodes death will frequently stimulate Simone and the narrator to sexual activity, such as when the pair finally have sexual intercourse next to Marcelle’s dead body after the young girl has hanged herself, with Simone punctuating the painful yet enjoyable defloration by urinating on Marcelle’s face (81), or at the tale’s conclusion, when Simone strangles the young priest Don Aminado to death as she rides him, causing him to ejaculate into her just as he dies (99). In his later post-war essays on Sade, Bataille would describe the experience of “l’homme normal” reading the Marquis as a similar process of identifying with even the most revolting behavior.167 In Histoire de l’œil, Bataille first illustrates what he would later analyze from a theoretical perspective, conveying his own disturbing mixture of emotions brought on by Sade’s text through an imitative obscene narrative.

167 “Et si l’homme normal, aujourd’hui, entre profondément dans la conscience de ce que signifie, pour lui, la transgression, c’est que Sade prépara les voies. Maintenant l’homme normal sait que sa conscience devait s’ouvrir à ce qu’il avait le plus violemment révolté : ce qui, le plus violemment, nous révolte, est en nous” (Œuvres complètes 10.194-195).
With the publication of *Histoire de l’œil*, Bataille established a reputation among the surrealists for following Sade in his relentless focus on scatological detail. Bataille would in a sense summarize his view of Sade in the concluding passages of *Le Langage des fleurs* (published in the June 1929 edition of *Documents*), where he provides an anecdote about Sade at Charenton, ordering beautiful roses so that he could dip them in manure: in the concluding sentence of his essay, Bataille evokes “le geste confondant du marquis de Sade enfermé avec les fous, qui se faisait porter les plus belles roses pour en effeuiller les pétales sur le purin d’une fosse […]” (*Œuvres complètes* 1.178). While Bataille appears to have thought the legend to be true, the significance behind his reference is clear: the heart of Sade’s literary enterprise, according to Bataille, involves taking beautiful women and dragging them through excrement. He would expand upon this notion in his subsequent polemic with Breton, who openly attacked Bataille in his *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, published in the December 15, 1929 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*. Sade, as Breton reveals at the end of a lengthy tirade, was at the root of their disagreement, and Breton cites Bataille’s anecdote about Sade “enfermé avec les fous, se faisant porter les plus belles roses pour en effeuiller les pétales sur le purin d’une fosse” before attacking Bataille personally, remarking “pour que cet acte de protestation perde son extraordinaire portée, il suffirait qu’il soit le fait, non d’un homme qui a passé *pour ses idées* vingt-sept années de sa vie en prison, mais d’un « assis » de bibliothèque” (*Œuvres complètes* 1.827). Unlike Sade, the unjustly persecuted visionary, Bataille was a mere librarian, a conformist who could not possibly understand the Marquis. “Tout porte à croire, en effet,” Breton continues,
l’esprit humain à secouer ses chaînes, a seulement voulu par là s’en prendre à l’idole poétique, à cette « vertu » de convention qui, bon gré, mal gré, fait d’une fleur, dans la mesure même où chacun peut l’offrir, le véhicule brillant des sentiments les plus nobles comme les plus bas. (1.827)

Even though Breton had probably never read Sade to the extent that Bataille had, he maintained enough confidence in his own endlessly reiterated clichés to view Sade’s will toward moral and social liberation as an undisputed fact. If unseemly events appear in the works of the venerable Marquis, it is only because he wanted to liberate the human imagination by rebelling against all that traditional poetry held dear. And even if the lowly librarian’s anecdote were true, it would merely stand as further evidence of his revolutionary heroism: “Il convient, du reste, de réserver l’appréciation d’un tel fait qui, même s’il n’est pas purement légendaire, ne saurait en rien infirmer la parfaite intégrité de la pensée et de la vie de Sade et le besoin héroïque qu’il eut de créer un ordre de choses qui ne dépendît pour ainsi dire pas de tout ce qui avait eu lieu avant lui” (1.827).

For Breton, dipping roses in manure was yet another means to rebel against tradition by creating a new intellectual order, one that eventually culminated in the surrealist movement.

Bataille and a group of eleven disillusioned surrealists soon responded to Breton’s Second Manifeste in Un Cadavre, a scathing pamphlet published on January 15, 1930, written and signed by Bataille, Boiffard, Desnos, Leiris, Prévert, and Queneau, among others. At the same time, however, Bataille attempted again and again to refute Breton’s stance on Sade, beginning with a December 1929 letter to Maurice Heine asking the scholar whether or not the flower anecdote was true (most likely not, Heine politely replied [Bataille Œuvres complètes 2.422-423]). He also composed several unfinished
letters and essays in the aftermath of the *Second Manifeste*, all of which convey essentially the same message. It was simply inaccurate to sterilize Sade by explaining away his disturbing excesses as poetry or as part of some other sublime and noble agenda. “Ils pourraient même,” an exasperated Bataille writes of the surrealists, prétendre que Sade a pris soin le premier de situer le domaine qu’il a décrit en dehors et au-dessus de toute réalité. Ils pourraient facilement affirmer que la valeur fulgurante et suffocante qu’il a voulu donner à l’existence humaine est inconcevable en dehors de la fiction ; que seule la poésie, exempte de toute application pratique permet de disposer dans une certaine mesure de la fulguration et de la suffocation que cherchait à provoquer si impudiquement le marquis de Sade. (*Œuvres complètes* 2.56-57)

For Bataille, Breton and the surrealists erroneously dissociated Sade’s texts from reality by placing them in the more elevated spheres of fiction and poetry. In Bataille’s view, however, Sade should have a more direct impact on his readers’ daily lives, since the author intended to provoke a “dazzling and suffocating” effect. In transforming Sade into some sort of moralist, the surrealists effectively emasculated the Marquis, as Bataille wrote in “La « vieille taupe » ou le préfixe *sur* dans les mots *surhomme* et *surréaliste*”:

“Peu importe aux surréalistes […] que Sade, lâchement émasculé par ses apologistes, prenne figure d’idéaliste moralisateur” (*Œuvres complètes* 2.103). Through this mistaken reversal, Bataille continues, the surrealists end up confusing the base materialism of Sade with the sublime, and stubbornly maintain their Icarian attitude despite Bataille’s more accurate reading: “Toutes les revendications des parties basses ont été outrageusement déguisées en revendications des parties hautes : et les surréalistes, devenus la risée de ceux qui ont vu de près un échec lamentable et mesquin, conservent obstinément la magnifique attitude icarienne” (*Œuvres complètes* 2.103). According to Bataille, the primary thrust of Sade’s works, which the surrealists failed to recognize in their phony
admiration of the divine Marquis, lies precisely in his determination to lower even the most pure women to a state of abjection: “[Q]ue la vieille loque surréaliste ne me démentira pas,” Bataille summarizes, “quand j’écris des femmes qu’ils aiment, des femmes que nous aimons, dont, si l’on veut bien, nous sommes malades, qu’il n’en est pas, si pures, si bouleversantes qu’elles soient, dans la bouche de laquelle Sade n’eût pas excrété” (2.421-422). This, in essence, is what Bataille intended to communicate through the anecdote about dipping roses in manure, which does not involve merely subverting poetic convention, but physically degrading the very women the surrealists would celebrate as muses in their poetry.

Such was the message Bataille sought to convey in both Histoire de l’œil and his historically inaccurate anecdote in Le Langage des fleurs, restated more directly as a result of Breton’s aggressive manifesto. None of these letters would ever be sent, however, nor would his essays in response to Breton appear during Bataille’s lifetime. Instead, Bataille would only publish his disdain for Sade’s surrealist admirers in his 1957 novel Le Bleu du ciel (the manuscript of which was composed in 1935): “Ceux qui admirent Sade sont des escrocs—entends-tu ? […] Mais pourquoi ont-ils fait ça avec Sade ? […] Est-ce qu’ils avaient mangé de la merde, oui ou non ?” (Romans et récits 150). Of course, the surrealist version of Sade provides no indication that his oeuvre even contained instances of coprophagia, since, for them, the words of the divine Marquis preached only poetic and political revolution. In order to truly admire Sade, Bataille suggests, one must be willing to recognize that his words do indeed have real-world implications, and that eating shit for Sade was more than just a metaphor. Nonetheless,

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168 The original 1935 manuscript contains “Les gens” in place of “Ceux.”
by the time this final assessment appeared, the surrealist celebration of the Marquis de Sade had long since lost its relevance, and Bataille himself had moved toward distinctively metaphysical (as opposed to material) readings.

Shortly after the virulent polemic of the *Second Manifeste* and *Un Cadavre*, Breton’s group would lose another key member when Aragon definitively abandoned the surrealists in favor of the Communist Party. Before converting to communism, however, Aragon would once again return to the Marquis de Sade and the realm of erotic literature while working on a preface to a 1930 edition of Apollinaire’s *Les Onze Mille Verges*. Aragon’s unsigned essay would praise Apollinaire as “lui qui mit Sade, même tronqué, entre les mains d’une génération,” implicitly acknowledging the poet’s role in introducing him and Breton to the Marquis in the first place.169 As was the case with his encounter with *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* in 1923, re-reading *Les Onze Mille Verges* inspired Aragon to try his hand at erotica once again, and he wrote the burlesque tale *Les Aventures de Jean-Foutre la Bite*, a rather awkward attempt at erotic humor featuring a walking, human-sized penis and other appropriately personified characters (such as the Countess de la Motte, Inspector Etron, and M. Pisse). When Aragon read a draft to Breton in 1929, however, the latter expressed his stern disapproval, and, taking Breton’s advice, Aragon decided not to pursue the project further (*Œuvres romanesques complètes* 1.1254).

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169 “Il faut attacher un grand prix à cette activité qu’il [Apollinaire] déploya en faveur des livres défendus, lui qui mit Sade, même tronqué, entre les mains d’une génération, et qui prit à la traduction de Baffo le secret de l’accent d’un grand nombre de ses poèmes […] Une conscience aussi claire des liens de la poésie et de la sexualité, une conscience de profanateur et de prophète, voilà ce qui met Apollinaire à un point singulier de l’histoire, là où brutalement se brisent les faux-simulants millénaires de la rime et de la déraison” (qtd. in Daix, 67-68).
Then, in 1932, the French Communist Party lashed out against a racy *Rêverie* published by Dali in the fourth installment of *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, in which the artist describes his masturbatory habits and a sexual fantasy that involves sodomizing an eleven-year-old girl named Dulita (*Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* 4:31-36). In the Communists’ view, the text complicated “les rapports si simples et si sains de l’homme et de la femme”; a Party official supposedly even exclaimed that the text “stink[s] of bourgeois rottenness!” (qtd. in Aragon, *Œuvres romanesques complètes* 1.LX, and Lewis 111). The tension between austere Communists and immoral intellectuals had been present throughout the 1920s; Nicholas Harrison observes, for instance, that “it was on his expulsion from the Communist Party in 1923 that Maurice Heine founded his Société du Roman Philosophique and dedicated himself to Sade” (153). Similarly, as Robert Short notes, when Breton first joined the party in 1927, he had to undergo several rounds of interrogation before the Communist Control Commission (who apparently could not understand “why he still needed to call himself a Surrealist now that he had become a Communist” [Short 25]). In particular, Short writes, “The contents of *La Revolution surrealiste* caused consternation and moral outrage of his interrogators” (25). This time, Aragon and other surrealist intellectuals were scolded over Dali’s “pornographic” text, which the PCF saw as undermining the seriousness of class struggle (Thirion 336-337). The Party’s stance against “pornography” was a result of the phase of “Bolshevisation” that began in the late 1920s, which, as Sudhir Hazareesingh observes, “endowed the party organization with ideological, institutional, and sociological features similar to those of the Stalinized Russian Communist Party”

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170 See also Gateau167-169 and Lewis 111-113.
This “new orthodoxy,” Hazareesingh writes, “stressed the superior value of ideological unity” (72), and apparently required that the PCF adopt similar moral standards to those officially accepted in Stalinist Russia.

Although Aragon had been among the least political of the surrealists during the 1920s, his relationship with Elsa Triolet had strengthened his commitment; in addition, as Thirion remarks, by late 1931 Aragon’s attitude “reflétait peut-être les réactions victoriennes des milieux russes qu’Elsa lui faisait fréquenter” (336). Helena Lewis observes that “Triolet is either praised or blamed, depending on one’s point of view, for persuading Aragon to abandon Surrealism, but it is generally believed that she was responsible,” noting how “she soon realized that their art, with its emphasis on fantasy and its flagrant eroticism, was unacceptable to the Party” (106). In a show of solidarity with the Communists, Aragon publicly rejected Breton’s *Misère de la poésie*: « *L’Affaire Aragon* » devant l’opinion publique, an article he had written in Aragon’s defense over his politically seditious poem “Front rouge,” which had led to legal troubles. Aragon’s main problem with the pamphlet revolved around Breton’s brief discussion of the reasons the surrealists were excluded from l’Association des artistes et écrivains révolutionnaires: “On tente, pour justifier cette éviction,” Breton writes, “de faire passer la revue *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, dont deux numéros particulièrement significatifs viennent de paraître, pour une publication pornographique et contre-révolutionnaire” (*Œuvres complètes* 2.23). In a footnote, Breton provides further elaboration: “on tente d’exploiter misérablement contre nous le contenu manifeste de la très belle « Rêverie » de Dali paru dans le n° 4 du *Surréalisme A.S.D.L.R.*. « Vous ne cherchez qu’à compliquer les rapports si simples et si sains de l’homme et de la femme », nous dit une buse” (2.23).
As Lewis notes, “Aragon did not oppose the sentiments expressed in *Misère*, and, according to Breton, he would have agreed to its publication except that he wanted no mention of the Dali affair because it was wrong to air conflicts with the Party in public” (112). When the pamphlet was published with reference to Dali in tact, however, Aragon’s association with the surrealists came to an end: “One way or another, it was this issue that brought about the final rupture and, after *Misère de la poésie : « L’Affaire Aragon » devant l’opinion publique* appeared, the Surrealists never heard from Aragon again” (Lewis 112). Ironically, Aragon, who spent the 1920s composing erotic literature, would finally turn against his former friends in the name of Communist sexual austerity.

While Breton and the surrealists may have presented Sade as a political revolutionary, Aragon and the Communists decided that pornography had no place within the struggle against capitalism.

In addition to bringing an end to Aragon’s involvement with both surrealism and eroticism, the text of Dali’s *Rêverie* holds implications for Bataille’s reading of Sade as well. In his fantasy, Dali mentions how the smell of manure stimulates him sexually as he prepares to sodomize Dulita in a stable. This is precisely the sort of scenario evoked throughout *Histoire de l’œil* and Bataille’s later comments about roses in manure and eating shit. While Bataille’s later erotic fiction, particularly the short text *Le Mort*, maintains a constant focus on scatological detail and unorthodox sexual practices. However, Bataille would demonstrate a marked difference in his approach to Sade in his popular post-war essays on the Marquis. Despite all his complaints about the surrealists’ inaccurate perception of Sade, Bataille the essayist seems to adopt the same “Icarian” perspective that he observes in Breton and the surrealists. Most of Bataille’s later essays
on Sade are actually not about the author at all, but are instead reviews of his friends’ recent publications. His 1947 article “Secret de Sade,” for instance (which was later reprinted in his 1957 collection La Littérature et le mal), is actually a review of three recently published texts: Klossowski’s Sade mon prochain, Paulhan’s preface to Les Infortunes de la vertu, and the forthcoming publication of a four-volume edition of Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome. Throughout the article, Bataille is careful to dole out plenty of praise to both Paulhan and Klossowski, as well as their mutual friend Blanchot. He does not seem to have bothered re-reading Sade for the occasion, or at least not extensively. Most of his quotations from Sade’s correspondence, and Bataille spends a large portion of his article discussing Sade’s biography. The only other Sade quotations he provides come from Klossowski’s essays (9.245) and the opening pages of Maurice Heine’s 1931 edition of Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome (9.251-256). Most importantly, he also contradicts his earlier stance on Sade when he writes, “Entendons-nous; rien ne serait plus vain que de prendre Sade, à la lettre, au sérieux” (9.245). In the late 1920s, Bataille had been arguing for a literal reading of Sade that takes his violent and scatological passages seriously; in 1947, however, he changes his position. Instead, Sade becomes for Bataille a vehicle through which he can explore topics that currently interested him, such as mystic states of ecstasy (“[Sade] connut des états de déchaînement et d’extase qui lui parurent de beaucoup de sens à l’égard des possibilités communes” [9.253]) or the theme of transgression (“il allait le plus loin qu’il est imaginable d’aller” [9.255]).

171 See Jane Gallop’s Intersections for a detailed discussion of the way Bataille respond to his friends Blanchot and Klossowski through his writings on Sade.
This movement away from Sade’s texts would continue in Bataille’s subsequent writings, such as his 1949 article “Le bonheur, l’érotisme et la littérature,” the second half of which is a review of Blanchot’s Lautréamont et Sade, or his 1950 preface to Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu, which reappeared as a preface to Pauvert’s edition of La Nouvelle Justine in 1954. “Le bonheur, l’érotisme et la littérature” contains lengthy quotations from Blanchot, and also of Blanchot quoting Sade, suggesting that Bataille did not bother to return to the original texts; likewise, the 1950 preface is entirely lacking in close readings or textual examples. Following Blanchot, one of Bataille’s main themes in both essays is the solitude of what Blanchot calls Sade’s “homme souverain,” or the isolated individual who sets himself above the masses. In 1957, both of these essays were modified and reprinted together as part of Bataille’s compilation L’Érotisme, where Bataille draws connections between Sade and his own theories, such as the notions of expenditure (Œuvres complètes 10.170), transgression (10.174), sacrifice, and the sacred (10.180-181). Bataille’s “readings” are thus extremely personal, and reveal more about his own troubled attitudes toward sexuality than those of Sade: “Le bonheur, l’érotisme et la littérature” thus begins by linking voluptuousness to fear and anguish (292), while the conclusion to his preface states that Sade causes his readers to realize that “ce qui, le plus violemment, nous révolte, est en nous” (10.195). Although Bataille was further removed from the act of reading Sade in his theoretical period during the late 1940s than he was in the late 1920s, one notion that remains constant from Histoire de l’œil onward is Bataille’s own sense of malaise before Sadean eroticism. As he writes in “Secret de Sade,” “Personne à moins de rester sourd n’achève les Cent Vingt Journées que malade : le plus malade est bien celui que cette lecture énerve sensuellement” (9.254). As Jane
Galloé notes, Bataille’s response to Sade is entirely idiosyncratic, and overlooks the capacity of his works to arouse: “Bataille plays down the attractive, titillating side of Sade, because he feels the violence of Sade lies in the ability to elicit repulsion. Yet the virulence of a reading of Sade stems from the mixture of disgust and arousal the reader feels” (Intersections 28). Perhaps Bataille’s discomfort with the repulsive sex acts found in Sade’s oeuvre led him to focus on more metaphysical and theoretical concerns somewhere above the actual, textual material, just as the surrealists had done before him.
Chapter Five
Returning to Literature: Sade and the Post-war Erotic Novel

In the second act of Pierre Klossowski’s 1954 *Roberte, ce soir*, the title character finds herself accosted by the ethereal specters of a giant and a hunchbacked dwarf as she undresses in her private bathroom late one night. A prominent public official (“médaillée de la Résistance, commandeur de la Légion d’honneur, membre de la commission de l’Intérieur”), atheist of Protestant origin, and “femme « émancipée »,” Roberte had just spent the day on a censorship committee, obtaining the interdiction of the latest work written by her Catholic husband Octave, a pornographer and “éminent professeur de scolastique à la Faculté de…” who specializes in canonical law (*Les Lois de l’hospitalité* 26, 107). While sitting on the toilet to urinate before going to bed, Roberte notices the pages of a chapter of her husband’s banned work, *Tacita, le colosse et le bossu*, sticking out of the toilet paper box, and begins to reread “pour la centième fois ces élucubrations qui la vexent.” Her reading is suddenly interrupted, however, when none other than the colossus himself appears before her, armed with a riding crop and a “gigantesque membre qui pointe vers Roberte son gland lisse et admirablement bombé.” After numerous attempts at resistance, Roberte eventually succumbs, and ends up getting sodomized by the giant while the dwarf performs cunnilingus upon her. In a humiliating climax, the government censor farts three times as the colossus withdraws from her anus, and then shamefully masturbates herself to orgasm after the dwarf had mockingly placed her wedding ring on her clitoris (138-147).

At first glance, the reluctant submission of Roberte appears to be a reaction against the hypocritical institution of censorship, and resembles several other scenes
throughout Klossowksi’s *Les Lois de l’Hospitalité* trilogy where the supposedly prudish minister succumbs to erotic temptation. After all, the very language Klossowksi uses ridicules censors by substituting Latin euphemisms for genitalia, such as “utrumsit” for vagina, “quidest” for clitoris, and “vacuum” for anus, parodying a time-honored technique of literary censorship (wherein Latin replaced offending terms) while at the same time protecting *Roberte ce soir* from the legal proceedings that threatened contemporary publications such as Pauvert’s re-edition of Sade or the erotic novels *Histoire d’O* and *L’Image*. However, Klossowski soon makes it clear that the conquest of Roberte involves something more than artistic freedom. Shortly after abandoning herself to the giant and the dwarf, Roberte gets into an argument with her husband over one of his books, which she caught her nephew reading the night before: “Rien que le titre est à faire vomir : « Sade mon prochain ! »” *Sade mon prochain* was of course the title of Klossowksi’s 1947 collection of essays on Sade, most of which had originally been published in the 1930s, and which attempted to point out weaknesses in Sade’s atheism. Klossowski goes so far as to argue, in the chapter “Sous le masque de l’athéisme,” that Sade’s cruelty in fact constitutes a sort of homage to both the Virgin Mary and God: “[…] ainsi la cruauté chez lui est une fidélité et un hommage à la vierge et à Dieu, hommage devenu incompréhensible à lui-même” (148). Even Sade’s supposed political leanings are discussed in religious terms in the section “Le Marquis de Sade et la Révolution,” which describes Sade’s “angoisse perpétuelle” before the possibility of evil erupting in the young Republic (64), and proclaims that, for Sade, “L’exécution du Roi devient ainsi le simulacre de la mise à mort de Dieu” (71).
Unconvinced by Klossowski’s argument, Roberte ridicules the manner in which the author turns Sade’s atheism against itself. In response to Octave’s question of who would vomit at the title *Sade mon prochain*, Roberte voices a scathing criticism of Klossowski’s book:

**OCTAVE**

Faire vomir qui ?

**ROBERTE**

Tout athée qui se respecte. Pour ce qui est de votre Sade, je vous l’abandonne volontiers. Mais le moyen de s’en servir pour chercher à nous convaincre qu’on ne saurait être athée sans du même coup être pervers ! Pervers, on insulte Dieu pour le faire exister, on y croit donc, preuve qu’on le chérit secrètement ! De la sorte on croit pouvoir dégoûter l’incroyant de sa sainte conviction ; opération facile, il est vrai, puisque tout esprit malade a toujours été mûr pour le christianisme—pour le crétinisme, faudrait-il dire. (153-154)

Through Roberte’s dismissal of his argument in *Sade mon prochain*, Klossowski points out the weaknesses in his earlier essays, most notably his unconvincing attempt to show that Sade perversely cherished the God that his characters so vehemently deny. *Roberte ce soir* thus appears to offer the rare example of an author who consciously undermines his own critical positions through his fiction. Despite Roberte’s objections, however, Klossowski does not abandon the arguments of *Sade mon prochain*; on the contrary, when he republished the work in 1967, he would in fact hold on to many of his initial views.\(^\text{172}\) Instead, a reexamination of the bathroom scene reveals it to be an eroticized, literary enactment of the very sort of “perversion” that sickens Roberte in Klossowski’s essays: in an imitation of Sade’s own fiction, the giant repeatedly interrupts his advances to give lectures on theology and metaphysics, scolding the Roberte for her stance against both pornography and Catholicism all while feeling her breasts (140-142). Unable to

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\(^{172}\) For a discussion of the differences between the two editions, see Jane Gallop, *Intersections: A Reading of Sade with Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski*. 
convince his more skeptical readers through the format of the essay, Klossowski thus uses the racy passages of *Roberte ce soir* to illustrate how a self-respecting atheist can in fact find herself overcome by the lures of Catholic theology and forced sodomy.

The example of Klossowski is indicative of a general trend in post-war France, which saw a host of essays and articles on Sade published between 1945 and 1952. While these essays have attracted considerable attention from scholars over the years, they nonetheless tend to present a muddled and incoherent reading of the Marquis, often hindering rather than helping the task of interpretation. The reason for such shortcomings in the essays of Klossowski and others is that, as Jane Gallop has demonstrated, publishing on Sade came to be more about writing for one’s colleagues and the intellectual concerns of the time, rather than about producing a work of literary criticism dedicated to the oeuvre of an eighteenth-century aristocrat (*Intersections* 85-90 and 101-103). The Catholic Klossowski, for example, sought to undermine Sade’s atheism in order to counter the atheism of his close friend, Georges Bataille, who in turn used Sade to write to both Klossowski and their mutual friend, Maurice Blanchot. Whether publishing on Sade as a means to praise one another, as Eleanor Kaufman has shown in her study of the laudatory essay, or as a vehicle to reflect upon the era’s charged political climate, as Philippe Roussin has suggested in a recent article, post-war intellectuals consistently returned to the foreboding specter of the Marquis in order to focus on contemporary concerns.173 In fact, many of the essays devoted to Sade in the late 1940s build upon the reading of Jean Paulhan, whose interest in Sade coincided with his distaste for the increasing politicization of literature. Publishing on Sade thus became a means to

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173 See Kaufman’s *The Delirium of Praise: Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze, Foucault, Klossowski*, and Roussin’s “Comment revenir à la littérature après 1945: déplacements de la référence nationale et autonomie (Sartre et Blanchot).”
align oneself with Paulhan against Sartre’s notion of politically engaged literature. What was at stake was not merely the work of an obscene author of dubious literary merit, but the very definition of literature itself.

Lost in this focus on the grand themes of literature, politics, and friendship, however, was the very sex that made Sade’s oeuvre intriguing in the first place. Beginning in the 1950s, several authors began publishing their own clandestine erotic fiction, responding to the Marquis through the genre in which he himself had written. As was the case with Klossowski’s *Roberte ce soir* and its combination of philosophy, sodomy, and scatological detail, these novels can be read as an attempt to respond to certain tendencies in both Sade’s texts and the earlier essays devoted to him. While Klossowski was not involved in the postwar polemic on engaged literature to the degree that his friends Blanchot and Bataille were (partly because Klossowski’s arguments had first been presented before the war), his novel was nonetheless characteristic of a return to literature through eroticism during the 1950s. In much the same way, other highbrow erotic novels from the 1950s, such as André Pieyre de Mandiargues’s *L’Anglais décrit dans son château fermé*, Dominique Aury’s *Histoire d’O*, and Catherine Robbe-Grillet’s *L’Image*, attempt to create a more sophisticated brand of eroticism better suited to the tastes of the author and his or her audience. When considered in relation to Sartre’s “Qu’est-ce que la littérature?” however, these novels exhibit a similar tendency to move away from political engagement and toward the pleasure of reading a well-written erotic text. Fittingly, the figure of Jean Paulhan represents a point of intersection between all three works, as he was a close friend of Pieyre de Mandiargues, the intended audience of the “love letter” written by his mistress Aury, and an implicit target in Catherine Robbe-
Grillet’s novelistic response to *Histoire d’O*. Paulhan’s reading of Sade thus served as the catalyst for much of the debate on Sade and the definition of literature that took place in both the critical essays and erotic novels of the post-war period.

**Is It Literature? Paulhan as an Early Reader of Sade**

Although Paulhan is seldom discussed in studies on reception of Sade’s works, his influence on framing the debate on Sade during the post-war period should not be overlooked. Paulhan’s interest in Sade actually dates back to the 1920s, when he first shifted the parameters of the discussion on Sade away from the surrealists in a brief 1930 essay. At around the same time that Aragon and Bataille were discovering Sade’s works on their own, Paulhan began to demonstrate a similar desire to obtain access to Sade’s original, unabridged editions (Badré 207-208). In a letter written to Franz Hellens sometime before October 1, 1925, Paulhan describes his initial reaction at having just read *Justine*: judging the novel to be “rudement fort,” Paulhan writes that “il y a longtemps que rien d’ « écrit » ne m’avait empoigné comme ça” (*Choix de Lettres* 1.102).

Paulhan’s approach to Sade during the 1920s was similar to that of André Malraux, and the Marquis would frequently turn up as a topic of discussion in their correspondence over the course of the decade, in a manner similar to the way Flaubert discussed Sade in his own letters during the preceding century. Malraux had first demonstrated an interest in Sade in 1921, when, with the help of Pascal Pia, he published two clandestine editions of excerpts from *Juliette*, entitled *Les Amis du crime* and *Le* 

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174 Bookseller Robert Chatté lent Paulhan the two-volume edition of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, and might have sold him an original edition of *Justine*. Paulhan would eventually own copies of both *Aline et Valcour* and *La Nouvelle Justine*. 
Bordel de Venise, while working as artistic director for Lucien Kra’s newly founded Éditions de Sagittaire (Claire Paulhan and Christiane Moatti, 63-75). While the luxurious editions (which supplement Sade’s text with explicit, modern illustrations, conveniently leaving out Sade’s philosophical digressions in the process) seem to have been a means for Malraux to advance his career, he nonetheless returned to Sade with a more academic focus later in the decade. In 1927, Malraux oversaw a re-edition of Sade’s Historiettes, contes, et fabliaux, which had just been published for the first time by Maurice Heine a year earlier, and announced its appearance with a brief essay on Sade in the June 1928 issue of the Nouvelle Revue Française. The publication of the banal and relatively innocuous stories, combined with the scholarship of Heine and the article in the NRF, led Malraux to approach Sade as a literary critic, one who shows no hesitation in denigrating Sade from a literary perspective. “Il est clair,” observes Malraux, “que le langage de Sade est pauvre, son style affecté, marqué par les modes les plus niaises de son temps ; qu’une extrême puérilité recouvre sans cesse ce qu’a de singulier sa pensée” (Moatti, “André Malraux, Lecteur de Sade,” 27-28). With his interchangeable characters (“comme des mannequins,” Malraux remarks) and predictable scenarios, Sade even fails as an erotic author; according to Malraux, “On chercherait en vain (j’écris ceci après avoir tenté l’expérience) à travers les milliers de pages qu’il a écrites, une seule scène voluptueuse” (Ibid.). What Malraux deems “la faiblesse essentielle de son œuvre” is the fact that “Sade ne voyait pas, et, ne voyant pas, il était obligé de conter des histoires à la façon des enfants qui conquièrent en rêverie des royaumes, et un pouvoir nécessaire pour en abuser” (Ibid.) Reproaching Sade for his lack of realism just as Flaubert had done

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175 See also Olivier Todd’s biography André Malraux, une vie, 33-37, 96. Les Amis du crime was anonymously illustrated with woodcuts, while Le Bordel de Venise contained “scandalous aquarelles” by the Belgian artist Géo A. Drains (identified on the title page as “Couperyn”).
before him, Malraux removes his works entirely from the realm of literature, reducing his oeuvre to childish fantasy. While Malraux’s insistence on the separation between literature and reverie may in fact be an implicit attack against the surrealists, whose work Malraux had always disdained, with respect to Sade, at least, the fact that his work was not literature did not mean it was without interest: “L’œuvre n’est pas sans intérêt, loin de là, mais elle ne ressortit pas à la littérature ; elle ressortit à la rêverie, et c’est pourquoi elle a gardé tant de force malgré le fatras dont elle est souvent habillée” (Ibid.). Sade’s works thus held value only when read as fantasy or dream visions.  

While Malraux simply concluded that Sade’s works were not literature, Paulhan continued to examine their literary merits. Although Malraux would acknowledge, in a letter sent to Paulhan along with his article, that he may have been over-critical in his assessment, Paulhan’s attachment to the “Sade myth” nonetheless perplexed him. In a November 1929 letter to Valery Larbaud, Paulhan mentions the possibility of having the NRF publish the first ever edition of Les Infortunes de la vertu, which had recently been discovered by Maurice Heine (Choix de Lettres 1.180). Although Fourcade would eventually publish Heine’s edition, Paulhan reviewed the novella in the September 1930 issue of the NRF. Comparing Les Infortunes de la vertu to the other versions of the Justine saga, Paulhan argues that “Elle est, des trois, la plus sobre, la plus mesurée—si l’on veut, la plus classique, et la seule qui dise moins qu’elle ne donne à entendre” (“Les Infortunes de la vertu, par le Marquis de Sade,” 414-417). According to Paulhan, this first draft of Justine represents the most literary in its willingness to leave certain details

176 For Malraux’s views on the surrealists, see “Présentation des lettres d’André Malraux à Jean Paulhan, 1926-1958,” 67.

up to the reader’s imagination, and Paulhan praises the version “ où la description cède à l’idée.” In response to Malraux, Paulhan questions why Sade is so appealing despite his literary shortcomings, which include a lack of suspense (“L’œuvre n’est pas moins privée de surprise qu’une tragédie grecque,” Paulhan observes) and dull style: “Le style en est parfaitement plat : point de trompe-l’œil, peu d’ornements, pas une image. Si les péripéties appellent le roman noir d’Anne Radcliffe, si l’imagination annonce Proust, le ton est celui de Restif ou de Stendhal.” While Paulhan attempts to describe why “chaque page cependant nous frappe et nous attache” by evoking their sadistic pleasure and Sade’s “esprit rigoureux et absolu” (417), he essentially leaves the question unanswered, which perhaps explains why he remained unsatisfied with his article, as he wrote in an August 1930 letter to Marcel Arland: “J’ai écrit une assez longue note sur Sade et les Infortunes de la vertu. Je serais porté à croire qu’elle ne vaut rien” (*Choix de Lettres* 1.191). Significantly, one of the earliest attempts to read Sade from a literary perspective would yield dissatisfactory results.

In his 1930 article, Paulhan also distances himself from the partisan politics of the surrealists, affirming that Sade escapes political readings. Instead, Paulhan identifies the imprisoned Sade as the writer par excellence, noting that “Il se délivre en écrivant, comme Proust.” Paulhan presents Sade as “un écrivain qu’il faut placer sans doute parmi les plus grands,” and offers a literary critique of his oeuvre based on its actual content. Surprisingly, Paulhan takes issue with the coarse language of *La Nouvelle Justine*, which he feels loses the ability to be taken seriously: “La plus célèbre [of the three versions of *Justine*] est malheureusement la dernière en date, celle de 1797. L’obscénité y reçoit une

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178 “Mais Sade est de ces écrivains qui embarrassent tous les partis, et, dans chacun de nous, les idées partisanes” (414).
aisance de rêve, l’abondance des supplices leur ôte toute gravité.” Paulhan explains the literary shortcomings of La Nouvelle Justine by linking it to the excesses of the Revolution, remarking that “C’est un livre d’époque. La Terreur, le Directoire invitaient à ces excès. Sade n’était d’ailleurs que trop porté à relire ses œuvres à coup d’ajouts et de béquets. S’il mérite un reproche, c’est pour avoir parfois cédé à la mode.” Whereas the surrealists admired Sade as a Revolutionary hero, Paulhan instead sees the Revolution as having a deleterious effect on his literature, and goes so far as to remark that “L’Ancien Régime, en survivant, eût peut-être bien servi les lettres.” Paulhan would maintain his somewhat conservative stance on Sade throughout the ensuing decades, when he would use the Marquis as a means to advocate a return to literature in reaction against the increasing politicization of the world of letters.

“What Is Literature?”: Sade and Post-war Politics

In the inaugural October 1945 issue of Les Temps Modernes, Sartre published an introductory essay outlining the combined literary and political aims of his new journal. His “Présentation” begins by attacking the “irresponsibility” of bourgeois writers up to the present, singling out certain authors for criticism over their lack of political engagement: “On regrette l’indifférence de Balzac devant les journées de 48, l’incompréhension apeurée de Flaubert en face de la Commune ; on les regrette pour eux : il y a là quelque chose qu’ils ont manqué pour toujours. Nous ne voulons rien manquer de notre temps […].” Sartre then goes on to outline a different view of the writer, one who is “« dans le coup », quoi qu’il fasse, marqué, compromis, jusque dans sa

179 “Tous les écrivains d’origine bourgeoise ont connu la tentation de l’irresponsabilité : depuis un siècle, elle est de tradition dans la carrière des lettres,” Sartre claims (Les Temps Modernes 1.1:1).
plus lointaine retraite.” “L’écrivain est en situation dans son époque,” Sartre continues; “chaque parole a des retentissements. Chaque silence aussi. Je tiens Flaubert et Goncourt pour responsables de la répression qui suivit la Commune parce qu’ils n’ont pas écrit une ligne pour l’empêcher.” Literature has “une fonction sociale,” and it is the author’s responsibility to engage with his time (4-8). According to Sartre, engagement does not imply neglecting literature, but rather infusing it with new blood; the social function of “littérature engagée,” as he specifies in his conclusion, involves serving the common interest by giving it a literature appropriate to its needs (21). Realizing that “littérature engagée” required further clarification, however, Sartre set out to defend his doctrine in Qu’est-ce que la littérature? a lengthy manifesto published in six installments from the February to July 1947 issues of Les Temps Modernes.

The essay begins by responding to perceived objections against “littérature engagée” (Sartre imagines contemporaries making such statements as “Les plus mauvais artistes sont les plus engagés : voyez les peintres soviétiques” or “Vous voulez assassiner la littérature ; le mépris des Belles-Lettres s’étale insolemment dans votre revue”), before stating his thesis in unequivocal terms: “nous estimons que l’écrivain doit s’engager tout entier dans ses ouvrages” (Les Temps Modernes 2.17:787). “L’écrivain « engagé »,” according to Sartre, “sait que la parole est action : il sait que dévoiler c’est changer et qu’on ne peut dévoiler qu’en projetant de changer. Il a abandonné le rêve impossible de faire une peinture impartiale de la Société et de la condition humaine” (780). Writing prose necessarily involves engaging oneself politically, on the side of democracy: “L’art de la prose est solidaire du seul régime où la prose garde un sens : la démocratie.
l’une est menacée, l’autre l’est aussi.”

In a rousing conclusion to the first section of Qu’est-ce que la littérature?, Sartre goes on to envision a moment when writing will not suffice, so that the writer will find himself obliged to take arms:

Et ce n’est pas assez que de les défendre par la plume. Un jour vient où la plume est contrainte de s’arrêter et il faut alors que l’écrivain prenne les armes. Ainsi de quelque façon que vous y soyez venu, quelles que soient les opinions que vous ayez professées, la littérature vous jette dans la bataille ; écrire c’est une certaine façon de vouloir la liberté ; si vous avez commencé, de gré ou de force, vous êtes engagé. (805)

Regardless of one’s political affiliation, composing literature thus means that one has become an “engaged writer.” After embarking upon a lengthy historical analysis that places literature in relation to politics—covering figures such as Richard Wright, the African-American author and former Communist living in exile in Paris (whose Black Boy, incidentally, appears in French translation immediately after the first five installments of Qu’est-ce que la littérature?), Flaubert, whom Sartre accuses of “mauvaise foi” and criticizes for his reactionary response to the Commune, and Breton and the surrealists, whose iconoclastic rebellion against poetry, in Sartre’s view, lacks political seriousness—Sartre finally summarizes his own political stance in the July 1947 issue of Les Temps Modernes, where he envisions a unified, European socialism as a middle ground between Anglo-Saxon capitalism and Soviet communism, and argues that the writer should maintain the modest goal of stirring his immediate audience toward socialism. “Quoi qu’il en soit et tant que les circonstances n’auront pas changé,” Sartre

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180 “La prose est utilitaire par essence ; je définirais volontiers le prosateur comme un homme qui se sert des mots,” Sartre adds (778).

181 On socialism, see, in particular, pages 107 and 113 of Les Temps Modernes 2.22 (July 1947). On Wright, see Les Temps Modernes 2.18 (March 1947): 967-69, 987. Sartre’s 1945 presentation was also followed by a translation of Wright’s “Le feu dans la nuée.” Of Flaubert, Sartre writes, “Et d’autre part il est si loin de vouloir du mal à la bourgeoisie qu’il ne lui conteste même pas le droit de gouverner. Bien au
concludes, “les chances de la littérature sont liées à l’avènement d’une Europe socialiste […] Puisque nous sommes écrivains, c’est notre devoir d’aider à faire l’Europe par nos écrits” (Les Temps Modernes 2.22:113).

Such lofty political ambitions could not be further from the concept of literature that Paulhan had been advocating over the preceding decades. In the 1930s, when Aragon and Malraux were writing Communist novels and Drieu de la Rochelle was gravitating toward Fascism, Paulhan was instead working on an essay dedicated to such topics as language and rhetoric, which would eventually be published in 1941 as *Les Fleurs de Tarbes, ou la Terreur dans les lettres*. Paulhan divides writers into two camps, those who embrace the flowers of rhetoric and the “terrorists,” such as the surrealists, who reject them. While arguing in favor of classical rhetoric, Paulhan appears to observe the phenomenon from a neutral perspective, and notes its importance to the very definition of literature itself, posing the question “Qu’est-ce que la littérature?” a decade before Sartre (24). The influence of *Fleurs de Tarbes* was such that Sartre twice mentions the essay after the war, first in his October 1945 “Présentation,” where he reformulates Paulhan’s notion of terror in terms of the “irresponsible” bourgeois author before his public (Les Temps Modernes 1.1:2), and again in *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?*.

Flaubert le lui a reconnu nommément et sa correspondance abonde, après la Commune qui lui fait si grand-peur, en injures ignobles contre les ouvriers” (Les Temps Modernes 19 [April 1947]: 1202). Sartre first mentions the surrealists in the March 1947 segment, reducing their revolution to a mere literary phenomenon (Les Temps Modernes 2.18:1207-1208). The May 1947 issue deals exclusively with history of French literature in the twentieth century, and devotes no less than nine pages to the surrealists (Les Temps Modernes 2.20:1420-28).

182 “[L]a Terreur,” writes Paulhan, “admet couramment que l’idée vaut mieux que le mot et l’esprit que la matière : il y a de l’un à l’autre différence de dignité, non moins que de nature.” It also holds that “le langage est essentiellement dangereux pour la pensée : toujours prêt à l’opprimer, si l’on n’y veille. La définition plus simple que l’on puisse donner du Terroriste, c’est qu’il est misologue” (Les Fleurs de Tarbes, ou la Terreur dans les lettres 64).
where he claims that “Aujourd’hui, nous sommes au delà du terrorisme et nous pouvons
nous aider de son expérience et des analyses précédentes pour fixer les traits essentiels
d’une littérature concrète et libérée” (Les Temps Modernes 2.19:1214). While Sartre
seeks to move beyond Les Fleurs de Tarbes, arguing that the post-war political context
had irreparably altered the terms of debate, Blanchot, who published three articles in
response to Les Fleurs de Tarbes upon its republication during the Occupation, would
instead borrow from Paulhan’s analysis of terror, a concept that would have major
influence on him in his journey from right-wing journals to a concentration on literary
purity. 183 The post-war essays on Sade by Paulhan and Blanchot would thus provide a
point of intersection in what was already a growing intellectual affinity.

If Les Fleurs de Tarbes moved away from politics, Paulhan would become much
more outspoken regarding engaged literature after the war, despite his brief stint on the
editorial committee of Les Temps Modernes in 1945 (Badré 236-237). In late June 1945,
Gallimard published the first novel by René Forgeot (under the pseudonym Noël
Devaulx), L’Auberge Parpillon, with an afterward by Paulhan that implicitly blames
Sartre for the poor state of contemporary literature. 184 The following year, he contributed
an essay entitled “La Rhétorique était une société secrète” to Les Temps Modernes, and
from June 1946 onward began publishing articles in the journal under the pseudonym
“Maast.” Paulhan even had the audacity to publish an essay in the June 1946 installment

183 See Blanchot, “La Terreur dans les lettres” (Journal des débats [October 21, 1941]), and “Comment la
littérature est-elle possible ?” (published in two parts in the November 25 and December 2, 1941 issues of
Journal des débats). The latter was also reprinted in Faux Pas (Gallimard, 1943).

184 Evoking the “extrême misère (littéraire) de notre temps,” Paulhan exclaims, “Quel petit monde où nous
sommes enfermés, entre la métaphysique allemande et le roman américain (qui s’entendent très bien, qui
ont même conclu une sorte de pacte, personne ne sait pourquoi)!” (L’Auberge Papillon 149). As Frédéric
Badré remarks, “Cette allusion sans voile à Heidegger et à Dos Passos dit bien qui est visé” (236).
of *Les Temps Modernes* on the purge, entitled “Épures,” which warns of the dangers involved in subjecting literature to political concerns, a position he would reiterate in his 1948 pamphlet *De la paille et du grain*. A January 1947 letter to Giuseppe Ungaretti sums up his stance on committed literature in unequivocal terms: “Il y a un peu partout une atmosphère de complot, une peu oppressante : pour une organisation soviétique de la France, pour l’établissement d’une nouvelle Résistance aux Etats-Unis. Enfin, tout ce qui nous tient à cœur en souffre. Mais ne changeons pas, et au diable la littérature engagée” (qtd. in Badré 236). For Paulhan, literature should be determined by its quality, and not its political slant.

The post-war essays that Paulhan and others published on Sade appeared at a moment when, in light of recent history, intellectuals began to take Sade “seriously.” Raymond Queneau laid out the difficulties surrounding the interpretation of Sade in a post-war context in a couple of articles he wrote for the Resistance newspaper *Front National* in 1945. In a June 16 piece on Breton’s recently published *Anthologie de l’humour noir*, Queneau relates the concept of “dark humor” to the events of the war, and then draws a connection between the Nazis and the authors included in Breton’s anthology, claiming that Nazi Germany “a mis en œuvre une sorte de dadaïsme politique dont les précurseurs, sur le plan littéraire, pourraient être Nietzsche et Sade” (*Bâtons, chiffres et lettres* 192-193). For Queneau, the belated publication of Breton’s anthology serves as a reminder that the surrealists had lost their relevance, and perhaps provides the

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185 Frédéric Badré places the quote in context by remarking that, “En 1945, la littérature est menacée par la politique, qui infeste le manifeste sartrien […].”

186 In “Pourquoi le XXe siècle a-t-il pris Sade au sérieux ?” a pair of lectures given at the *Institut d’études lévinassiennes* on December 13, 2007, and January 24, 2008, Éric Marty claims that French writers did not take Sade seriously until after World War II.
former signatory of the 1929 pamphlet *Un Cadavre* with the opportunity to settle a few old scores. More importantly, however, Queneau argues that, after the concentration camps, it was no longer feasible to retreat from reality into a fantastic dreamscape where one could blindly admire an author who championed rape and murder. Literature and ideas involve real-world implications, and although Queneau does not suggest that the surrealist precursors listed in *Anthologie de l’humour noir* were also precursors of Nazism, he nonetheless finds the connection between dark humor and the war worrisome:

“J’ai simplement voulu indiquer un motif d’inquiétude : que le nazisme est l’humour noir pris au sérieux et non moins « destructif », sur le plan « réel », que l’humour noir sur le plan des « idées ».” Sade in particular stands out as a troublesome figure in the anthology, and, like Bataille before him, Queneau takes issue with Breton’s tendency to dismiss the excesses found in Sade’s texts: “La notice de Breton sur Sade est curieuse à cet égard, car elle montre quelle dose d’arbitraire il faut utiliser pour « ne pas prendre au sérieux » ce qui l’est, après tout, peut-être (je dis : peut-être) terriblement pour l’auteur.”

It was perhaps time Sade was taken seriously, Queneau concludes, especially since Nazism had brought Sade’s “mauvaises plaisanteries” into the Real.

By the November 3, 1945 installment of *Front National*, Queneau’s perception of the link between Sade and Nazism had become even more explicit. There, in a review of Bertrand d’Astorg’s 1945 essay *Introduction au monde de la Terreur* (where d’Astorg

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187 Queneau judges that Breton’s work “date un peu, et je ne parle pas seulement des allusions politiques” (193).

188 Queneau writes in conclusion: “L’humour noir se révolte, dit Breton. Entre autres, contre le monde bourgeois. Il en donne une peinture outrée qui a une valeur dissociative puissante. Mais cette peinture outrée n’est accomplie que par le nazisme, qui fait passer dans le réel les mauvaises plaisanteries d’un Sade ou du Rajah d’Alphonse Allais. Or, la lutte contre le nazisme, elle, ne s’est pas faite sur le plan de cet humour noir. Elle s’est faite à coups de mitraillelettes et de bombes de dix tonnes. Voilà où nous en sommes.

Et après ?” (194).
lists Saint-Just, Sade, and Blake as precursors to the nihilism of National Socialism), Queneau writes that “il est incontestable que le monde imaginé par Sade et voulu par ses personnages (et pourquoi pas par lui ?) est une préfiguration hallucinante du monde où règnent la Gestapo, ses supplices et ses camps” (216). Queneau stresses that Sade was tied to the recent history of the war, and that any discussion of the Marquis in the post-war context would have to take such a connection into account. Now that history has shown how “Les charniers complètent les philosophies, si désagréable que cela puisse être,” as Queneau concludes, Sade would have to be dealt with more carefully (216). In identifying the Second World War as a dividing point in both the history of literature and literature in general, the articles in Front National place Queneau alongside Sartre in his call for a politically engaged literature that would hold writers accountable for their political positions. Even the authors of past centuries would now have to be re-examined in light of the concentration camps.

Paulhan’s post-war writings on Sade and the later essays that bore their influence nonetheless rejected Queneau’s reading, in accordance with Paulhan’s overall stance against the politicization of literature. Even before Queneau, Paulhan had placed Sade in relation to contemporary events while discussing the current state of France in an April 1945 interview published in the Resistance newspaper Lettres Françaises, where he remarked that the war had taught nothing new; one need only read Sade to learn that “l’homme est capable, pour peu que l’on y pousse, d’immondes raffinements dans les cruautés” (Badré 224). Whereas Queneau argues that Sade must be re-read with the war in mind, however, Paulhan instead references his works to place recent events in a wider historical context. Sade thus does not prefigure a “monde où règnent la Gestapo, ses
supplices et ses camps,” as Queneau would claim, but instead shows how such worlds had existed for centuries. A few months later, Paulhan would make a similar gesture in “Le Marquis de Sade et sa complice, ou Les Revanches de la pudeur,” an essay published in the July 1945 installment of Table ronde that would soon reappear as a preface to a 1946 edition of Sade’s Les Infortunes de la Vertu.\textsuperscript{189} Arguing that the horrors in Sade are nothing new, Paulhan refers back to “la Très Brève Relation du père Bartholomé de Las Cases” as a precursor to Sade’s descriptions of torture, and repeats a sentence almost verbatim from his earlier 1930 essay to advance his point, altering the structure slightly to emphasize the fact that in Sade at least the atrocities were imaginary: “Que l’homme puisse éprouver un très vif plaisir à découper l’homme (et la femme) en morceaux, et d’abord—et surtout peut-être—à imaginer qu’il les découpe, je ne sais trop quelle lâcheté nous fait dissimuler à l’ordinaire un fait trop évident” (Œuvres complètes de Jean Paulhan 4.28).\textsuperscript{190} Much of “Le Marquis de Sade et sa complice” attempts to situate Sade within an eighteenth-century historical context, far from the recent horrors of the concentration camps, and Paulhan goes so far as to imagine dialogues between Sade and Voltaire and Rousseau to illustrate how “Sade est de son temps” (22-28). By stressing Sade’s relation to the Revolution, Paulhan aims to make him a historical figure safe to discuss in the present. Along the way, he repeats many of the clichés that the surrealists had circulated about Sade two decades earlier, portraying him as a progressive political figure opposed to the death penalty and in favor of Communism, in order to undermine

\textsuperscript{189} The novella was published by René Bertelé of Point du jour as part of the collection “Incidences,” and also featured a prefatory note by Maurice Heine (Badré 259-260).

\textsuperscript{190} The sentence appeared as follows in the 1930 review of Les Infortunes de la vertu: “Que l’homme puisse éprouver un vif plaisir à couper l’homme en morceaux, et d’abord à imaginer qu’il le coupe en morceaux, je ne sais quelle lâcheté fait que l’on dissimule à l’ordinaire ce fait trop évident” (414).
the link with Fascism. But the main conclusion toward which his unfocused essay tends is the revelation that Sade is in fact a masochist: “Justine, c’est lui,” Paulhan states in a reformulation of Flaubert’s legendary observation about Emma Bovary (36). While this “étrange secret de Justine” would prove popular for the remainder of the decade, the implicit comparison between Sade and Flaubert concisely summarizes Paulhan’s valorization of the politically detached author, placing Paulhan at odds with Sartre and his repeated attacks on Flaubert’s political disengagement during the Commune.

Paulhan’s “Le Marquis de Sade et sa complice” set the precedent for much of the discussion that Blanchot and Bataille would hold around Sade for the remainder of the decade. The Marquis de Sade, according to these authors, exemplified the distance between an author’s œuvre and political engagement. As Blanchot argues in “Quelques remarques sur Sade,” published in Bataille’s journal Critique in August-September 1946, Sade presents an apparent paradox because, while his literature was extreme and despotic, his real-life political views showed both moderation and progressive humanist values: “Sade fait l’apologie du meurtre et la critique de la peine de mort.” The Sadean model proved particularly attractive to Blanchot, who may have been eager to deflect attention from his involvement with the right-wing press during the Occupation at the very moment that Sartre advocated purging literature of its Fascist elements. While Sartre was calling for solidarity, Blanchot instead returned to the solitary figure of the Marquis de Sade writing in his prison cell. Like Paulhan, who emphasized prison as the “fin unique” of Sade’s entire œuvre (13), Blanchot closes “Quelques remarques sur Sade” by

191 For Paulhan, Sade expresses his political views through the character Zamé from Aline et Valcour and the pamphlet Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être républicains.

192 Like Paulhan, Blanchot (erroneously) cites Français, encore un effort as evidence of Sade’s own philosophical and political positions (“Quelques remarques sur Sade,” 239-243).
portraying the Marquis as “un homme à jamais réduit à la misère d’une éternelle prison” who nonetheless “a su faire de sa prison l’image de la solitude de l’univers sur lequel règne sa seule gloire à jamais toute puissante. Cette prison ne le gêne pas, elle est son œuvre” (249).

Solitude would remain a common theme in Blanchot’s post-war writings on Sade, including the essay “A la rencontre de Sade” that appeared in the October 1947 issue of Les Temps Modernes, just a few months after Qu’est-ce que la littérature? Blanchot had already contributed two articles to the journal, which perhaps explains his attempt to seek a middle ground between Paulhan and Sartre, placing Sade’s destructive philosophy in relation to the concept of solidarity while expressing open praise for Paulhan and his conclusion regarding Sade’s masochism. Blanchot even lends a dimension of social critique to Sade, observing how his heroes hail from both the highest and lowest ranks of society, and how aristocrats are often sacrificed at the behest of the lower classes (582-583). Nonetheless, the overall theme of the essay remains the solitude of the imprisoned Marquis, “lui qui a toujours aspiré à la solitude des entrailles de la terre, au mystère d’une existence souterraine et recluse. Sade, de l’homme exigeant le secret, l’obscurité de l’abîme, la solitude inviolable d’une cellule” (578). The fundamental philosophy expressed in Sade’s works, according to Blanchot, “est celle de l’intérêt, de l’égoïsme intégral. Chacun doit faire ce qui lui plaît, chacun n’a d’autre loi que son plaisir. Cette morale est fondée sur le fait premier de la solitude absolue” (580).

The recurrent theme of Sade as the isolated, imprisoned, and Revolutionary writer would eventually culminate in Blanchot’s 1949 “La Littérature et le droit à la mort,” the final essay in his 1949 collection La Part du feu, and its celebration of the solitary author,
imprisoned yet free through his writing. As Denis Hollier, Philip Watts, and Philippe Roussin have argued, Blanchot’s essay argues against the conception of committed literature Sartre outlined in *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* and other post-war writings, where Sartre rejects both solitary writing (which he calls “le pire échec”) and other attempts to flee the present through historical relativism. In “La Littérature et le droit à la mort,” Blanchot strategically focuses on Sade writing during the Revolution as a means to distance himself from Sartre’s insistence on contemporary history. Although Sartre seems to dismiss Sade’s importance in *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* he nonetheless implicitly follows Queneau’s earlier reading by remarking that evil in general must now be taken seriously after the war. On the one hand, Sartre maintains that “Sade s’évertue à nous gagner et c’est tout juste s’il scandalise : ce n’est plus qu’une âme rongée par un beau mal, une huître perlière” (*Les Temps Modernes* 2.17: 785). On the other, he writes, “On nous a enseigné à le prendre [le Mal] au sérieux : ce n’est ni notre faute ni notre mérite si nous avons vécu en un temps où la torture était un fait quotidien. Châteaubriant, Oradour, la rue des Saussaies, Tulle, Dachau, Auschwitz, tout nous démontrait que le Mal n’est pas une apparence […]” (*Les Temps Modernes* 2.21: 1626). Sartre’s ensuing eroticized discussion of torture, which appears to allude to Sade in its reference to “le rapport étroit et presque sexuel du bourreau avec sa victime” and its description of the victim as “cette créature gémissante, suante et souillée, qui demande grâce et s’abandonne avec un consentement pâmé, avec des râles de femme amoureuse” (*Les

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Temps Modernes 2.21: 1626-1627) constitutes what Roussin terms one “primal scene” of post-war literature. Instead of the recent terrors of the Nazi camps, however, Blanchot instead returns to the Bastille and the Terror of 1793, where he imagines Sade writing from within his cell: “En 1793, il y a un homme qui s’identifie parfaitement avec la révolution et la Terreur. C’est un aristocrate, attaché aux créneaux de son château moyenâgeux […] mais il écrit, il ne fait qu’écrire […]” Although separated from the Revolution through his social rank and solitary confinement, Sade nonetheless incarnates the ideas of liberty through the act of writing, which is in itself a revolutionary act: “la liberté a beau le remettre dans la Bastille d’où elle l’avait retiré, il est celui qui la comprend le mieux, comprenant qu’elle est ce moment où les passions les plus aberrantes peuvent se transformer en réalité politique, ont droit au jour, sont la loi” (La Part du feu 311). The Revolution, and not the aftermath of the Second World War, is “le temps où la littérature se fait histoire,” the moment of truth in which the writer recognizes himself: “Tout écrivain qui, par le fait même d’écrire, n’est pas conduit à penser : je suis la révolution, seule la liberté me fait écrire, en réalité n’écrit pas.” Although Sartre had claimed that writing necessarily engaged the writer in the politics of his time, for Blanchot, the revolutionary quality of writing is tied to its very solitude, and separate from any overt political activity; one need only look toward the imprisoned Marquis, “Seul : de tous les hommes le plus seul, et toutefois personnage public et homme politique important.” Blanchot, in any case, certainly identifies with Sade, author of an œuvre that is always à venir: “Perpétuellement enfermé et absolument libre, théoricien et symbole de la liberté absolue. Il écrit une œuvre immense, et cette œuvre n’existe pour

194 In his article, Roussin writes of Blanchot: “Par un effet de substitution et de surimposition, il met la Révolution en lieu et place de la guerre récente qu'invoquait Sartre lorsqu'il se pose la question de savoir comment écrire pour son époque.”
personne” (311).

Blanchot’s vision of Sade is of course rife with historical inaccuracies: Sade did not return to the Bastille after 1789, his political involvement in the Revolution was nothing extraordinary, and his multivolume editions certainly existed for others from the 1791 publication of *Justine* onward. The return to Sade in “La Littérature et le droit à la mort” nonetheless completes the process Paulhan had begun in the 1930s, looking to the Marquis to isolate literature from politics. As if to further solidify his separation from Sartre, Blanchot’s “A la rencontre de Sade” was republished in 1949 as “La Raison de Sade,” the first half of *Sade et Lautréamont*. In a show of support for his close friend, Bataille consistently relies upon Blanchot’s readings in each of his post-war essays on Sade, beginning with “Secret de Sade,” which appeared in two parts as a review of both Paulhan’s “Le Marquis de Sade et sa complice” and Klossowski’s *Sade mon prochain* in the August-September and October 1947 issues of *Critique*, and continuing through “Le bonheur, l’érotisme et la littérature,” an article in the April and May 1949 issues of *Critique* that follows Blanchot’s argument in “La Raison de Sade.” Bataille’s praise for both Blanchot and Paulhan throughout his writings stands as part of his response to Sartre, who had openly attacked him in both his 1943 article “Sur Bataille, Un nouveau mystique” (where he calls him “paranoïaque” and “fou,” recommending that he receive psychoanalytical treatment) and *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* While the journal *Critique* provided an alternative to *Les Temps Modernes*, Bataille also argued against

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195 The essay was modified slightly and republished as “L’homme souverain de Sade” in Bataille’s 1957 study *L’Érotisme* (Éditions de Minuit; reprinted in *Œuvres complètes* 10).

engaged literature in a 1950 letter to René Char that was first published in the Italian journal *Botteghe oscure*, where he writes, “L’incompatibilité de la littérature et de l’engagement, qui oblige, est donc précisément celle des contraires. Jamais homme engagé n’écrivit rien qui ne fût mensonge, ou ne dépassât l’engagement” (*Œuvres complètes* 12.16-28). 197 By this time, however, Paulhan, whose earlier publications serve as the basis for the post-war essays of Blanchot and Bataille, began to move his opposition to engaged literature in another direction.

**Returning to Literature through the Erotic Novel**

In late 1951, Paulhan informed Gaston Gallimard that he had two manuscripts ready for submission (Badré 265). One was *Lettre aux directeurs de la Résistance*, a denunciation of the purge that Paulhan wrote between 1949 and 1951. The other was an anonymous erotic novel entitled *Histoire d’O*. Gallimard was the first in a long line of publishers to reject each of the texts for being too scandalous: while the highly controversial *Lettre* was eventually published by Éditions de Minuit in 1952, it was Jean-Jacques Pauvert who finally published *Histoire d’O* in June 1954, with Pauline Réage listed as the author. In a sense, *Histoire d’O* seeks to achieve on a literary level what *Lettre aux directeurs de la Résistance* does more explicitly: dissolve the bond between literature and politics that Sartre had sought to establish since the end of the war. 198 Much

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197 In the letter, Bataille also refers to Blanchot, remarking that “La littérature et le droit à la mort » dénie le sérieux de la question : « Qu’est-ce que la littérature ? » qui jamais n’a reçu que des réponses insignifiantes.” See also Bataille’s article “L’existentialisme” (*Critique* 41 [October 1950]: 83-86), which appears in the same edition of his complete works, and Anna Boschetti, *The Intellectual Enterprise: Sartre and Les Temps Modernes* (Northwestern University Press, 1988), 159-166.

198 Sensing the novel’s political significance, Francis Ponge writes in an August 1954 letter that *Histoire d’O* is a “roman à thèse (nettement plus long que ceux de J.-P. Sartre), très influencé par la philosophie politique de Jean Paulhan” (*Correspondance 1923-1968*, 141).
as Blanchot had moved from Sartre’s call for solidarity to champion the image of the solitary writer, Paulhan moved away from engaged literature to celebrate the private pleasure of reading an erotic novel.

Although the publication of *Histoire d’O* resulted in Paulhan’s being interrogated by “la brigade mondaine” on August 5, 1955, he was not the novel’s author, but rather its intended reader (Badré 271).¹⁹⁹ *Histoire d’O* was written for Paulhan by his mistress, Dominique Aury (née Anne Desclos). The two had first met during the Resistance, when Aury distributed underground copies of *Les Lettres Françaises*, and were later colleagues when Aury became secretary general of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1950. Their love affair continued for three decades, throughout Paulhan’s second marriage. As she would later admit in an interview with *The New Yorker*, Aury wrote *Histoire d’O* for Paulhan as “both a private document of their passion and *une entreprise de séduction*, designed to ensnare—her word—a highly sophisticated man” (De St. Jorre 42). In the short text “Une Fille amoureuse,” published by Pauvert in 1969, Réage explains how “Une fille amoureuse dit un jour à l’homme qu’elle aimait : moi aussi je pourrais écrire de ces histoires qui vous plaisent… Vous croyez ? répondit-il” (9). Feeling that Paulhan might turn elsewhere as she entered her forties, Aury sought to rekindle his affections by writing an erotic novel similar in theme to those of the Marquis de Sade, whom he admired so much.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ It was thanks to Aury’s connection with Édouard Corniglion-Molinier—who held numerous ministerial posts in the mid-1950s including that of Minister of Justice (Aury was friends with Odette Poulain, herself a close friend of Corniglion-Molinier)—and Paulhan’s friendship with Andre Malraux that the proceedings were eventually stopped (Badré 271; Paulhan and Moatti, 75).

²⁰⁰ See Aury’s obituary in *The Times*, May 7, 1998.
What *Histoire d’O* in fact does is transform Paulhan’s reading of Sade, as expressed through his 1930 article and his 1946 preface, into an erotic novel. In many respects, Aury’s novel recalls specific elements of Sade’s texts, such as the secret château at Roissy, which copies both Silling from *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* and Sainte-Marie-des-Bois from the *Justine* saga. Upon entering the castle, O is subject to an opening “discours” similar to that given by the duc de Blangis at Silling, and is informed of “le détail des règles qu’elle aurait à observer dans le château pendant qu’elle y serait,” which, as at Silling, involves adherence to a rigid schedule and the service of after-dinner drinks (15-17, 33-34). In “Une fille amoureuse,” Réage acknowledges the affinity between *Histoire d’O* and the oeuvre of Sade, remarking that

> on pouvait sans crainte aménager des châteaux clandestins, à condition de les peupler de filles amoureuses, prostituées par amour, et triomphantes dans leurs chaînes. Aussi les châteaux de Sade, découverts bien après qu’eurent été dans le silence édifiés les miens, ne m’ont-ils jamais surprise, non plus que ses Amis du Crime : j’avais déjà ma société sécrète, autrement inoffensive et mineure. (21-22)

Similar to Baudelaire in his 1865 letter to Poulet-Massis, Aury states that she did not need Sade, since her own imagination was perfectly capable of creating its own sadomasochistic scenarios. While Aury appears to suggest that her own private castles were imagined before she encountered those of her illustrious predecessor, the novel is nonetheless filled with allusions to the Marquis. The other women at Roissy are “vêtues comme de jolies servantes du dix-huitième siècle” (4-5), and O eventually dons a similar outfit consisting of corset, skirt, dress, and lace (16). The sex in *Histoire d’O* centers on such Sadean staples as flagellation and sodomy, the latter of which is described using euphemisms borrowed from *Les Infortunes de la vertu*, Paulhan’s favorite Sadean text. For instance, O’s inaugural night at the castle recalls Justine’s initial orgy at Sainte-
Marie-des-Bois in that she receives a treatment almost identical to that of her predecessor:

[…], on la fit remettre à genoux, mais cette fois le buste reposant sur un pouf, toujours les mains au dos, et les reins plus haut que le torse, et l’un des hommes, la maintenant des deux mains aux hanches, s’enfonça dans son ventre. Il céda la place à un second. Le troisième voulut se frayer un chemin au plus étroit, et forçant brusquement, la fit hurler. Quand il la lâcha, gémissant et salie des larmes sous son bandeau, elle glissa à terre […]. (10)

In addition to the manner in which O is passed between the men so that each can use her in his preferred fashion, the designation of her anus as the “plus étroit” passage, along with the use of “ventre” for vagina, recalls the manner in which Justine timidly tries to veil the salacious details of her narrative. In keeping with Paulhan’s distaste for the coarse language of La Nouvelle Justine, Histoire d’O consistently avoids vulgar terminology, favoring instead such indirect designations as O’s “lèvres entre les jambes” and her “reins,” while the term “sexe” identifies the male organ and the verb “s’y répandre” describes ejaculation (21-28). However, although the evocation of “celui des quatre qui n’aimait les femmes que dans ce qu’elles ont de commun avec les hommes” (15) directly cites the chaste language of Justine, suggesting that the author had indeed read Les Infortunes de la vertu before writing Histoire d’O, her own erotic vocabulary conveys events in much greater detail than Sade’s heroine, thereby managing to be explicit without being vulgar. Such attention to the language of eroticism enables Histoire d’O to avoid the “plat” style Paulhan had bemoaned in Sade, providing detail while nonetheless creating a novel “où la description cède à l’idée,” as in Les Infortunes de la vertu. Indeed, in his signed preface to the novel, entitled “Le Bonheur dans l’esclavage,” Paulhan further solidifies the link between Histoire d’O and Sade’s Justine
saga, expressing his amazement that a woman would dare to confess her dream to “be Justine.” However, in contrast to the disappointing “obscénité” of La Nouvelle Justine, Histoire d’O stands apart from Sade through its fundamental decency: “S’il est un mot qui me vienne d’abord à l’esprit quand je songe à O, c’est le mot de décence” (238).

With its literary language, secretive castle, and narrative by a woman who takes pleasure in her punishment, one could read Histoire d’O to be the Marquise’s fictional response to her husband, which is perhaps what Aury intended to suggest with the pseudonym “Pauline Réage,” which bears a striking resemblance to the name “Renée-Pélagie,” Marquise de Sade.

While Histoire d’O may be the most popular French erotic novel of the 1950s, it is not the only sexually explicit work published by a member of the literary establishment. In 1953, André Pieyre de Mandiargues, writing under the pseudonym Pierre Morion, published a short erotic novel entitled L’Anglais décrit dans le château fermé. Pieyre de Mandiargues shared much in common with Paulhan (whom he befriended in 1946), including an interest in eroticism and Sade, as well as the desire to create an erotic novel that was nonetheless a work of high literature. It was thus fitting that Paulhan was the first to read the manuscript of L’Anglais décrit dans le château fermé, and even suggested that Gallimard publish the novel in a special, “reserved” collection, along with Histoire d’O, although the publisher refused.

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201 “Il est peu d’hommes qui n’aient rêvé de posséder une Justine. Mais pas une femme, que je sache, n’avait encore rêvé d’être Justine. En tout cas, rêvé à haut voix […]”(Œuvres complètes de Jean Paulhan 4.239).

202 According to Aury, the first name Pauline was borrowed from “deux célèbres dévergondées, Pauline Borghèse et Pauline Roland” (Une fille amoureuse 12-13), while Réage refers to the Norman town where Aury spent her childhood vacations.
le château fermé 13). Like Paulhan, Pieyre de Mandiargues also attempted to analyze Sade in essay form, contributing a preface to Pauvert’s 1967 re-edition of “Juliette,” where, in the tradition of laudatory essays centered on Sade, he praises both Blanchot and Paulhan while jumping from one topic to another without any coherent structure or argument. As was the case with Aury’s Histoire d’O and Klossowski’s Roberte ce soir, however, L’Anglais décrit dans le château fermé engages much more openly with the details of Sadean eroticism, providing a more satisfactory response to Sade than the author could achieve in his essay.

Narrated in the first person, the novel relates the adventures of an anonymous Frenchman (nicknamed “Balthazar”) at the Breton castle of Sir Horatio Mountarse, a wealthy English diplomat who changed his name to Montcul to adapt to his new country. At the center of the work is the castle Gamahuche, a “vieux fort acheté sur la côte bretonne” that, as Pieyre de Mandiargues notes in a 1979 preface to L’Anglais décrit dans le château fermé, models itself after the château de Silling in Sade’s Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome. As the names suggest, the novel belongs to the genre of parody, and more closely resembles Apollinaire’s Les Onze Mille Verges than the serious Histoire d’O. Nonetheless, both L’Anglais décrit dans le château fermé and Histoire d’O find common ground as fictional responses to Sade influenced by Paulhan and his views on

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203 For instance, although the author announces that “le problème du mal” will constitute the focus of his essay, he instead moves back and forth between discussions of Sade’s supposed homosexuality (328), his aristocratic arrogance (331), and especially the presence of humor and fantasy in his works (334-337). See “Juliette,” in Troisième Belvédère. The passages pertaining to Paulhan appear on pages 327-332.

204 “En frappant d’une sorte de sceau le donjon marin de Gamehuche, domicile du jeu criminel de mon héros, c’est à la façon strictement impitoyable dont est scellé l’athanor sadien du château de Silling, dans une haute vallée de la Forêt-Noire, bien entendu, que je songeais” (L’Anglais décrit dans son château fermé 13). Like Silling, Gamahuche is “situé hors du monde,” and constitutes the “lieu idéal” for private debauchery. As Montcul explains, the tides and deserted location of the property “suffisent à retrancher absolument notre château de la commune terre des hommes et à la soustraire à leurs lois.” (45).
literature and postwar politics. From the moment Balthazar sets foot in Montcul’s lair, Pieyre de Mandiargues clearly places his novel within the Sadean register, providing a forthright list of the characters locked up at Gamahuche, just as Sade does in the opening section of *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*: in addition to Montcul and Balthazar, the harem includes two African male slaves (“le nègre Gracchus” and “le nègre Publicola”), a seventeen-year-old female mulatto named Viola, a nineteen-year-old African woman named Candida, the German aristocrat Mademoiselle Luneborgé de Warmdreck, the thirty-year-old prostitute Mademoiselle Edmonde (whom the author describes, in a typically Sadean formula, as “une jeune fille du monde, et, dans ce monde-là, son renom était de posséder le plus beau cul de Paris et de savoir s’en servir”), and the thirteen-year-old virgin Mademoiselle Michelette (47-48). (Sade’s oeuvre contains its share of appropriately named characters, such as the victims Michette, Cupidon, and Narcisse from *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* or the libertine Bandole from *La Nouvelle Justine.*) In another homage to Sade, the opening dinner at the castle features “des béatilles de merde à la parisienne” excreted by Candida, with the English host providing a pertinent reflection on the French penchant for coprophagia: “c’est chose aussi française que la Béchamel, Mme de Sévigné, la Légion d’honneur ou le Concert Mayol qu’un beau plat de merde humaine” (54). The remainder of the novel builds upon the basic components of Sade’s tales, combining sex with sadistic violence in some nonetheless original scenarios. Mademoiselle Edmonde, for example, who prepared the inaugural meal, is brutally sodomized by “un gros vit sculpté dans la glace” that she herself had created, measuring “trente-neuf centimètres de long, vingt-quatre de tour au milieu de la branche et vingt-cinq au plus large du gland lui faisaient un calibre
assurément redoutable” (58-59); after the painful introduction, complete with blood and “hurlements de douleur,” the phallus is left to melt in her bowels, until all that remains is “une petite flaque sanguinolente” (77). In another innovative sequence, the young Michelette is thrown into a tank full of octopi, and then raped and sodomized by Montcul with the creatures still clinging to her body; two large dogs then take turns violating her (one in each orifice), before she is sent away to her death.205 Recalling Sadean scientists such as the doctor Rodin, the novel eventually concludes with a cruel “experiment,” where an infant is sliced up and murdered before the eyes of its mother, who is then raped by Montcul (142-146).206

In a manner similar to Réage in *Histoire d’O*, Pieyre de Mandiargues seeks to improve on Sade’s novels by making his own text more valuable as a work of literature. One of the author’s stated goals in writing *L’Anglais décrit dans le château fermé* was to create an erotic novel superior in literary terms to both Sade and Apollinaire. The novel’s title, “peu encourageant, sans doute, pour les amateurs du commun porno” (12) in the author’s view, constitutes one attempt to reach a more selective readership. Another way he hoped to accomplish this was by avoiding the repetitions that characterize the works of both authors, as he states in a 1979 preface:

> Si *L’Anglais* a le défaut, dont je suis conscient, d’être bref avec excès, c’est d’abord et comme je disais pour rebuter les grivois, qui dans tout livre érotique sont en quête de répétitions sempiternelles d’orgies ou de tortures, répétitions que je trouve un peu fastidieuses, même en l’œuvre des plus grands, même chez Sade, même dans le merveilleux roman...

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205 67-72, 79-86. Michelette’s death is not described, but alluded to (86); at breakfast the next morning, the narrator remarks, “je trouvai la compagnie à laquelle je m’attendais ; c’est-à-dire qu’il ne manquait que Michelette, qui avait fait sont temps et dont les crabes devaient avoir déjà nettoyé les petits os” (105).

206 The point of the (ultimately successful) experiment is to prove that the woman, no matter how “cold” she may normally be, will experience a particularly powerful orgasm after witnessing the murder of her child.
Pierre de Mandiargues finds the endless repetition of basic erotic structures tedious, and instead bases his novel on a more fluid model, as Balthazar moves from one episode to another without waiting for the predictable conclusion. While the author professes his admiration for both Sade and Apollinaire, he nonetheless acknowledges that even their works could be skimmed to isolate the racy passages, which are conveniently packaged into neat and conclusive episodes. By avoiding the endlessly monotonous structure of build-up and release, Pierre de Mandiargues seeks to put off those readers merely in search of smut. Instead, he aims to attract a more sophisticated readership that could appreciate its literary value, by making his novel incomprehensible for the lowbrow reader merely in quest of orgasm.

_L’Anglais décrit dans le château fermé_ breaks up the episodic uniformity common to erotic fiction through two primary techniques. The first is an avoidance of realism that goes so far as to make the novel, according to its author, “l’un des rares exemples du roman surréaliste qui se puissent aujourd’hui citer” (12-13). As he remarks later in his 1979 preface: “Pas plus de réalisme, d’ailleurs, dans _L’Anglais_ que dans une gravure de Hans Bellmer. Preuve en est donnée, me semble-t-il, par la description du sexe de Montcul, objet essentiel du roman et objet totalement fantastique, propre à rebuter le lecteur en quête de grivoiserie […]” (16-17). (The description in question states that Montcul’s penis contained “une membrane dentelée comme la crête de certains sauriens, marbrée de rose et de violet, qui pendait sous ce vit depuis le gland jusqu’à la bourse,” 69). Secondly, the novel carefully avoids a linear structure, interrupting the principal narrative with minor ones and moving ceaselessly between past, present, and
future. According to Pieyre de Mandiargues, such shifting between temporal and emotional registers was a goal of all his texts, whether the Goncourt-winning *La Marge* or *L’Anglais décrit dans le château fermé*: “Un peu comme la mer, dont est entouré son lieu, l’irréel château sombre, *L’Anglais* va du temps riant au plus noir et au plus tempétueux si vite que le lecteur, comme un plaisancier surpris par la bourrasque, risque de perdre le gouvernail” (*L’Anglais décrit dans le château fermé* 17). Thus, the narrator attempts to throw the reader off course by jumping ahead to the apparent death of Montcul at the novel’s conclusion, and beyond: “Je parle de lui au présent, comme s’il était vif, car malgré ce que j’ai appris (et que l’on apprendra dans la suite), je doute encore qu’il ne le soit plus” (94). Later, the typical trajectory toward increasingly violent orgies at the end of the erotic tale is interrupted by Montcul’s recollection of how Princess Luneborge de Warmdreck became part of his seraglio in June 1942, a tale that ends up being the most violent of the entire novel despite its location in the past (111-131). By jumping back into the war, when Montcul arranged for the Resistance to capture two German officers and the Princess, Pieyre de Mandiargues rejects Queneau’s view that Sade must now be taken seriously. In fact, the outrageous wartime orgy at the castle—where Montcul orders two Jews to circumcise a Nazi lieutenant, sodomize him, and devour his testicles, before Montcul himself sodomizes both the Princess and the colonel, twice forcing the colonel to fellate his “vit tout merdeux”—constitutes yet another “signe d’intelligence fait au lecteur pour qu’il ne prenne pas trop au sérieux ce

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207 Elsewhere, Pieyre de Mandiargues explains: “[…] je voudrais que les trois temps principaux interviennent dans la narration, et que, comme j’ai cherché à faire dans *La Marge*, il y ait superposition et parfois coïncidence du passé, du présent, et du futur” (“Autoportrait,” in *Récits érotiques et fantastiques* 81). In that same essay, the author also remarks that “Le roman, le conte même, ont tout à gagner à être construits sur des temps différents, et depuis longtemps il est fait usage, à cette fin, de l’inscription d’un récit dans un autre récit.”
qu’il est en train de lire” (12). At precisely the same moment that French intellectuals were taking Sade seriously enough to place him at the center of their debate on literature, politics, and the purge, Pieyre de Mandiargues reduced the sadism of wartime torture to a mere farce. In a mockery of post-war adulation for Resistance heroes, the narrator explains how the newspapers published a posthumous eulogy honoring “M. de Montarse, Montcul dans la résistance, un riche anglais, un philantrope, un démocrate, un patriote exemplaire et un fidèle ami de la France,” and began taking up a collection to erect a statue in his honor (150).

The third French erotic novel of the 1950s to participate in the debate on postwar literature was Catherine Robbe-Grillet’s L’Image. Published by Éditions de Minuit in 1956 under the pseudonym Jean de Berg—which, according to Frappier-Mazur, is an anagram for “je bande ARG,” or Alain Robbe-Grillet (“Marginal Canons” 117)—, L’Image was dedicated to Pauline Réage, and touches upon many of the themes presented in Histoire d’O, ranging from public humiliation to the victim’s pleasure in being abused, with a noticeable attention to flagellation, fellatio, fashion, and sodomy as well. Unlike the novels of Aury, Pieyre de Mandiargues, and Klossowski, however, L’Image does not directly respond to the Marquis de Sade. Rather, as Alain Robbe-Grillet would later write in Angélique ou l’enchantement, L’Image was “fort influencé par mes propres goûts

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208 Pieyre de Mandiargues shared Paulhan’s views against engaged literature, as is evident in a March 15, 1952 letter to Paulhan regarding his Lettre aux directeurs de la Résistance: “J’ai devant moi votre Lettre, avec laquelle (est-il besoin de vous le dire ?) je suis complètement d’accord. Une phrase, surtout, m’enchante : « si fiers de s’être un jour trouvés du bon côté qu’ils en sont tous devenus moralistes ». C’est tout à fait cela qui me les rend insupportables. Et pas seulement Vercors, Sartre, Éluard, mais aussi Camus et René Char qui renie son passé de (grand) poète pour essayer de « garder une attitude résistante ». Quelle triste baraque !” (André Pieyre de Mandiargues Jean Paulhan Correspondance 1947-1968, 79).

See also “À cœur ouvert,” a post-war homage to Breton, where Pieyre de Mandiargues recalls approvingly a conference the leader of the surrealists gave at Yale in 1942: “En un temps où la bêtise partisane s’exaltaux journaux ou dans les haut-parleurs, c’est avec joie que nous voyons Breton nommer un Allemand et un Italien parmi les maîtres qu’il propose à ses jeunes auditeurs [...]” (Le Belvédère 62-63).
sexuals, mais sans doute aussi par le roman de Pauline Réage” (169). At once a reaction to the private reading of an erotic novel and to the sexual tastes of her (then) fiancé, Catherine Robbe-Grillet’s novel nonetheless plays upon the separation between public and private that characterizes much of the post-war essays and novels that do evoke Sade directly.

Such playfulness becomes most apparent in the preface, written by Alain Robbe-Grillet and signed “P.R.” Robbe-Grillet had originally intended to include the full name of Pauline Réage, but was forced to use the rather transparent initials after Jérôme Lindon, director of Éditions de Minuit, innocently showed a copy of L’Image to Paulhan while the two were playing boules one Sunday morning. Surprised and annoyed at the anonymous prefacer’s audacity, Paulhan borrowed the manuscript, informing Lindon a week later that “le livre lui-même a de grandes qualités, mais la préface est stupide et seul un médiocre imposteur peut l’avoir écrit!” (Angélique ou l’enchantement 170). As a gesture of “bonne volonté envers une éminence grise de lettres à qui je devais beaucoup, et que je tenais en grande estime,” Robbe-Grillet replaced the offending name with the initials (“ce qui dans mon esprit signifiait, par exemple, Paul Robin,” Robbe-Grillet jokes, adding that “Paul est mon second prénom” [Angélique ou l’enchantement 170]).

There is some truth behind Robbe-Grillet’s declaration of respect for Paulhan, whose reading of Sade in particular Robbe-Grillet singles out for praise. However, a closer examination of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s preface provides another reason why Paulhan may have disliked the falsely attributed essay, as Robbe-Grillet essentially mocks Paulhan’s earlier preface to Histoire d’O. After Paulhan posed the question “Qui est Pauline

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209 “D’où le mot qu’on lui [Sade] prête « Mademoiselle Justine, c’est moi », qui à mon sens est bien plus qu’une boutade” (Angélique ou l’enchantement 213).
Réage?” he went on to list stereotypical traits of femininity, such as the fact that O notices her lover’s slippers are torn, to argue that the text could only have been written by a woman: “Que vous soyez femme, je n’en doute guère […] c’est qu’O, le jour où René l’abandonne à de nouveaux supplices, garde assez de présence d’esprit pour observer que les pantoufles de son amant sont râpées, il faudra en acheter d’autres” (Œuvres complètes 4.238-239). In a direct echo of Paulhan’s old-fashioned notions, Robbe-Grillet (who was thirty-eight years younger than Paulhan) begins his preface by asking “Qui est Jean de Berg?” doubting that a man could be responsible for L’Image since it sides too often with the women’s point of view. While continuously stressing how the prefacer herself is a woman, musing about “notre sexe bizarre, qui se livre à autrui mais n’a conscience que de soi,” Robbe-Grillet’s preface turns the traditional notion of dominance on its head, observing, as did his wife Catherine in her journal shortly after their marriage, how the woman is always in command and how the slave is really the god (L’Image 10-11). The point of Robbe-Grillet’s reversal of “Le Bonheur dans l’esclavage,” however, is that erotic literature should not be taken too seriously; after all, the second sentence of the preface proclaims that the author will “[s’] amuser aux devinettes” over the following pages. In fact, L’Image itself is structured as a series of games, with the protagonists constantly devising new scenarios to “have fun” with their slave. Whereas Paulhan presented Histoire d’O to Gallimard alongside his Lettre aux directeurs de la Résistance, Alain and Catherine Robbe-Grillet suggest a more playful approach toward the role of literature in society.

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210 Paulhan concludes his preface with additional reflections on femininity, noting, for example how “Une femme s’entend très bien à mille choses qui m’échappent. En général, elle sait coudre. Elle sait faire la cuisine” (245).

211 See also Catherine Robbe-Grillet, Jeune Mariée, journal 1957-1962, 11.
The post-war penchant for taking Sade “seriously” thus came to a temporary halt with the publication of Catherine Robbe-Grillet’s first erotic novel. As the atrocities of war faded from memory and the Pauvert trials reached an anticlimactic conclusion, Sade and the sadistic genre of literature he had created remained free of political interpretation, at least until the advent of the Tel Quel group and Pasolini’s *Salò*. Turning to Sade and erotic fiction thus became a means to turn, however temporarily, away from politics. Although the primary public discourse on Sade in post-war France would focus on serious political and philosophical issues, the erotic novel was where writers could work through and eventually move away from such social concerns in order to return literature to a more intimate level. This did not mean, however, that rejecting engaged literature meant returning to the political indifference of Flaubert that had bothered Sartre so much. On the contrary: Paulhan and Aury were much more involved in the Resistance than was Sartre, and Robbe-Grillet, despite the lack of political engagement in the “new novel,” would join Sartre and Beauvoir as a signatory of the 1960 *Manifeste des 121* protesting the war in Algeria. What these writers and intellectuals shared was a common tendency to keep their political and literary agendas separate, in much the same way that their private interest in eroticism remained largely distinct from their public personalities.

By the time Sartre’s camp finally produced a public response to the post-war essays on Sade, in the form of Beauvoir’s “Faut-il brûler Sade?” which appeared in two parts in the December 1951 and January 1952 issues of *Les Temps modernes*, publishing on Sade had largely fallen out of fashion. While her title evokes the censorship

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212 Albert Camus did include a chapter on the Marquis in his discussion of “la révolté métaphysique” in his 1951 *L’Homme révolté*, where he follows both Klossowski’s *Sade mon prochain* (*Essais* 450) and especially Blanchot’s “La Raison de Sade,” which he paraphrases (455-456).
proceedings being organized against Pauvert at the time, Beauvoir relies heavily upon the essays of Paulhan, Klossowski, and Blanchot, whom she cites at length.\textsuperscript{213} In her conclusion, however, Beauvoir targets Blanchot, who, in keeping with his celebration of Sade as the solitary writer, had ended “A la Rencontre de Sade” with the argument that Sade’s merit lay in his ability to help the “normal man” understand himself (611-612).\textsuperscript{214} As she gradually moves away from Blanchot’s analysis, Beauvoir comes to the conclusion that the “suprême valeur” of Sade’s work is not that he helps the individual understand himself, but that he forces his readers to consider a disturbing yet inescapable problem: “Il nous oblige à remettre en question le problème essentiel qui sous d’autres figures hante ce temps : le vrai rapport de l’homme à l’homme” (82). Refuting Blanchot’s retreat into isolation and the past, Beauvoir thus brings Sade back to the concerns of the present, stressing the importance of solidarity and inter-human relationships. In a return to Queneau’s journal entries from 1945, Beauvoir argues that Sade should not be burned precisely because he serves as a constant reminder of man’s capacity to destroy his fellow man.

In opposition to Beauvoir’s serious, politicized consideration of Sade and censorship stands Klossowski’s eroticized caricature of his fictional, book-burning spouse Roberte. In \textit{La Révocation de l’Édit de Nantes}, Klossowski’s 1959 sequel to \textit{Roberte ce soir}, Roberte explains how she could perform the public role of government censor while engaging in promiscuous and adulterous behavior in her personal life. For Roberte, there exists a fundamental separation between what she calls “mon acte justicier

\textsuperscript{213} On Paulhan, see \textit{Faut-il brûler Sade?} 37 and 64; on Klossowski, 14, 21-22, and 55; on Blanchot, 70-72.

\textsuperscript{214} Perhaps after reading a draft of Blanchot’s essay, Bataille arrived at a similar conclusion in “Le Secret de Sade,” “Après Sade, nous pouvons savoir ce que nous sommes” (312).
par lequel je condamne publiquement l’obsénité” and what she does in the privacy of her own bathroom, one that her husband Octave unfortunately fails to recognize:

Octave veut à tout prix que dans mon cabinet de toilette je demeure la même que je suis à la Chambre, ou à la place Beauvau, que j’ « incarne » la Censure, etc. […] Il ne se doute pas un instant que dès que je suis chez moi, dans mon domaine (la salle de bains), rien ne saurait me prendre au dépourvu ; et que quelqu’un même d’ aussi « redoutable », mais familièrement redoutable que Vittorio vienne à faire irruption, je n’en reste pas moins capable de l’accueillir avec décence, la décence même appartenant à la promesse d’un plaisir, imminent certes, mais différé, et cela d’autant mieux que la décence est de bonne guerre vis-à-vis d’un agresseur que l’on désire d’autant plus peut-être qu’on le déteste royalement au-dehors pour d’autres raisons. […] Pauvre Octave ! Pourquoi me vouloir si bégueule quand tu me sais si belle ? me refuser le geste si naturel de chercher de mes doigts l’oiseau de Vittorio. (Les Lois de l’hospitalité 67-68)

In explaining how she is not the same person in Parliament or at the Ministry of the Interior as she is in her bathroom, Roberte underscores the separation that exists between her public and private personas. Decency, the word that was so important to Paulhan in his evaluation of Sade and Histoire d’O, entails adapting a behavior suitable to one’s environment. Thus, while propriety might require Roberte to censor pornography in public, the very same doctrine allows her to make the appropriate and indeed natural gesture of seizing the penis of Vittorio, another of Octave’s guests to whom he extends the laws of hospitality, in the intimate confines of her bathroom (although she does not name his penis directly but instead calls it a “oiseau”). As Roberte suggests, Klossowski’s erotic literature, which, like Histoire d’O, avoids vulgar language, possesses a degree of decency in its consistent deferral of pleasure. By extension, even Sade’s literature can be labeled decent, provided it is confined to the appropriate context. By insisting upon the philosophical seriousness of Sade in order to justify his presence in society, Beauvoir, like Blanchot, Bataille, Klossowski, and Paulhan before her, deforms
Sade in order to fit him artificially into the public domain. Roberte, however, in a manner similar to the other erotic novels of the 1950s, suggests that, while there is no place for Sade in public society, he too can be decent in a private setting (such as the bathroom) where sexuality is appropriate.

As was the case with the surrealists during the 1920s, the Marquis de Sade thus appeared at the center of a wider conflict between sex and politics, and, more generally, between public and private space. In order to discuss Sade in public, intellectuals from the surrealists onward continuously stressed the political and philosophical components of his works while de-emphasizing the erotic. During the 1950s, Paulhan stood at the center of a small group of writers who instead enjoyed the sexual aspects of Sadean fiction in a comparatively private setting, at precisely the same time that Paulhan himself joined others in defending Sade’s intellectual seriousness at the Pauvert trial. This return to the erotic would prove to be short-lived, however. During the 1960s, the *Tel Quel* group would repeat many of the claims of their surrealist predecessors, idolizing the Marquis as a subversive and revolutionary hero. Pier Paolo Pasolini took an opposing yet similarly politicized view in his 1975 film *Salò, o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, linking Sade to Fascism as Queneau had done thirty years before him. Just as the erotic novels of Aragon and Bataille or Aury and Pieyre de Mandiargues counterbalanced the predominant public discourse on Sade in their respective eras, however, Pasolini’s film was offset by a series of largely apolitical and somewhat obscure erotic films that instead sought to emphasize the sexually stimulating nature of his works, showing how the tension between public, politicized readings and private, erotic interpretations remains constant throughout the reception of Sade’s works in the twentieth century.
Chapter Six  
Sodom on the Silver Screen: Sade in the Sixties and Seventies

On November 22, 1975, Pier Paolo Pasolini’s much anticipated *Salò, o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* premiered at the Paris Film Festival. Billed as an adaptation of the Marquis de Sade’s *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*, with the setting moved from the Black Forest of the early eighteenth century to the final days of Mussolini’s Republic of Salò in 1944, *Salò* confronted its audience with shocking scenes of rape and brutality reminiscent of those found in Sade’s original text. As in *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*, Pasolini’s four libertines retreat with their wives and daughters to a secured castle in order to listen to a group of former prostitutes share their stories. After a careful selection process, the libertines decide upon a harem of adolescent male and female victims, along with four well-endowed “soldiers” (Pasolini calls them “militi,” whereas they are known as “fouteurs” in Sade’s text) to satisfy the libertines’ penchant for passive sodomy. Over the course of the film, the young victims undergo various forms of humiliation and torture, until the final execution scenes showcasing several torments (tongue cutting, eye puncturing, scalping, mastectomy) in all their gory detail. Some of the sequences, such as when the young girl Renata is forced to eat the duke’s feces off the floor, are taken directly from Sade’s text, while others, such as the infamous banquet of feces, or the scene in which the victims are made to beg for food like dogs, were Pasolini’s own invention.

Since the release of Pasolini’s film, *Salò* has become the best known and most controversial of all cinematic adaptations of Sade. It may come as a surprise, however, that *Salò* was by no means the first film that attempted to bring the works of the Marquis
to the silver screen. Although Foucault remarked in a 1975 interview that he had been “frappé—du moins jusqu’à ces derniers temps—par l’absence de sadisme et l’absence de Sade [dans le cinéma],” cinematic adaptations of works such as *Justine* and *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* had actually become common long before *Salò* (*Dits et écrits I*, 1686). In fact, in the year 1969 alone, five films dedicated to Sade and his works were either released or produced, while several others appeared during the early 1970s. This massive attention to Sade stemmed partly from the increased availability of his texts during the 1960s, thanks to the editions of Jean-Jacques Pauvert and Gilbert Lély in French, as well as the Grove Press English translations and Tatsuhiko Shibusawa’s Japanese editions. Unlike *Salò*, these popular cinematic adaptations of Sade demonstrate little knowledge of *Tel Quel* and other theoretical readings that form such an important part of Pasolini’s film. However, despite their apparent superficiality, the political and social concerns of the time nonetheless resurface in many of these films, which, as Pasolini would later do in *Salò*, use Sade to reflect upon the consequences of the sexual revolution. While Pasolini may not have been familiar with the work of directors such as Jesus Franco and Kumashiro Tatsumi, for instance, their entertaining softcore erotic features essentially paved the way for his more consciously serious

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215 Gideon Bachmann makes a similar assertion: “Nobody has ever used a de Sade book as material for a film” (“Pasolini on de Sade,” 39).

216 1969 featured the release of *Marquis de Sade’s Justine* in April, followed by a biographical piece entitled *De Sade* in August 1969. In December, *Juliette de Sade*, played at the Rialto East and Rialto West in New York, provoking the frustration of *New York Times* film critic Roger Greenspun. That same year, production began on two films supposedly based on *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, *Eugenie: The Story of Her Journey into Perversion* and *The Marquis de Sade’s Beyond Love and Evil*. Interest in adapting Sade to film continued into the early 1970s, which saw the release of *Eugenie de Sade* and *Plaisir à trois*, as well French and Japanese adaptations of *Justine*. I discuss each of these films in greater detail below, except for *Juliette de Sade*, which has yet to resurface on DVD, and *Beyond Love and Evil*, which has little to do with Sade aside from its title.
From Sodome to Salò: Pasolini on Sade

The intellectual seriousness of Salò becomes apparent from the opening credits, which feature a bibliography of recommended readings on Sade done by celebrated twentieth century French thinkers. Included in Pasolini’s list are the post-war essays of Blanchot (Lautréamont et Sade) and Beauvoir (Faut-il brûler Sade?), along with Seuil’s 1967 re-edition of Klossowski’s Sade mon prochain (which re-printed most of the essays from the original 1947 collection along with the newer “Sade ou le philosophe scélérat”) and two studies that emerged from the recent interest in the Marquis among the Tel Quel group, Barthes’s Sade Fourier Loyola and Sollers’s L’écriture et l’expérience des limites. Among all these apparent sources, the three texts borrowed from the winter 1967 issue of Tel Quel (number 28), which was devoted to “La pensée de Sade”—those by Klossowski, Barthes, and Sollers—seem to have had a particularly strong influence on Pasolini as he transferred Sade’s tale to film. As the very inclusion of the prefatory bibliography suggests, Salò is a film that should be read as a text, a notion that coincides with the

217 Although definitions of the terms may vary, for the most part, hardcore pornography depicts both the genitals and actual penetration, whereas softcore pornography may or may not show genitals, but necessarily lacks penetration. For more on the distinction, see Walter Kendrick, The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture, and Linda Williams, Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible.”
textual focus of the *Tel Quel* group. In keeping with both their own ideological concerns, Barthes and Sollers concentrate extensively on the discursive patterns of Sade’s works in their essays. Barthes, for instance, claims that “il n’y a jamais de réel, chez Sade, que la narration,” and emphasizes that it is only “les performances du discours” that make Sade interesting (*Œuvres complètes* 3.714; *Tel Quel* 28:24). Sollers, in turn, argues that Sade shows how language has “nothing to say,” that his characters are only signs, and that his work should not be read as having any reference to reality, since, for Sollers, the main focus of Sade’s writing is to destroy rules, not to express or represent (*L’écriture et l’expérience des limites* 66, *Tel Quel* 28:50). One can see the results of Pasolini’s critical readings in *Salò*, where the discordance between language and act contributes to the overwhelmingly unreal and nightmarish quality of the film. The narrators’ stories, for instance, stand alone as discursive performances that have no bearing on the ensuing action, whereas in Sade’s manuscript they serve as guidelines for the libertines’ orgies; as Armando Maggi observes, “What takes place within this narrative space seems to be irrelevant both for the libertines (Signora Vaccari’s story triggers no reaction in them) and for the victims” (326). Pasolini’s characters, who come across as even less distinct than Sade’s, are indeed mere signifiers themselves, without individuality or identity, that the director uses to convey a greater ideological message. Barthes observes that it is

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218 In “L’arbre du crime,” his contribution to *Tel Quel* 28, Barthes affirms that “Sade est monotone, si nous fixons notre regard sur les crimes rapportés et non sur les performances du discours” (37). Barthes changed his formulation slightly in *Sade Fourier Loyola*: “Sade n’est ennuyeux que si nous fixons notre regard sur les crimes rapportés et non sur les performances du discours” (*Œuvres complètes* 3.731).

219 Armando Maggi notes that, “In creating scenes that almost make sense, Pasolini achieves two different goals: on the one hand, he destabilizes his narrative, turning it into an oneric flow that resembles reality without becoming a realistic representation of something occurring ‘out there’; on the other hand, he summons a different form of completion through his beloved analogical process of bringing together two unrelated entities (two images, two stories, two characters, two historical moments, etc.), which leads to a new, baffling, result […]” (316).
speech that distinguishes the libertine from the victim in Sade’s work, and in the film Pasolini’s libertines effectively convey their power through language, such as when they order their victims to eat (either feces or nails, as the case may be) with the simple command “mangia,” whereas the victims mostly emit animalistic noises such as sobs, screams, or a dog’s bark (Œuvres complètes 3.726, Tel Quel 28:32). At the same time, however, the libertines’ speech itself exists in a realm entirely isolated from reality in Pasolini’s film, such as when the President attempts to make a joke during the scatological feast.²²⁰ During their intoxicated evening conversations, Pasolini’s libertines also quote both Barthes and Klossowski, replacing the materialist philosophy of Sade’s texts with the words of twentieth century philosophers who were themselves commenting on Sade.²²¹ In each instance, the speech act occupies a world of its own, separated from both the realms of everyday reality and from the nightmarish world of Salò. Thus, Salò ends up occupying a metatextual space, as far removed from Sade’s original manuscript as it is from reality. Significantly, Pasolini does not list any edition of Sade’s works in his bibliography, suggesting that actually reading Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome would not provide any further insight on Salò, since the film in fact has more to do with the twentieth-century reception of Sade’s works than with the works themselves. Pasolini himself had obviously read through the text, as the personal stories of his female narrators copy those found in Sade. However, it is not necessary to have read Sade to

²²⁰ He tells Carlo to spread his mouth wide with his fingers and asks him, “Sei capace di dire ‘non posso mangiare il riso tenendo le dita così?’” When Carlo obliges, the President replies, “E allora mangia la merda!”

²²¹ For instance, at one point the bishop uses Barthes’s phrase “un principe de délicatesse” from Sade Fourier Loyola (Œuvres complètes 3.849-850).
understand Pasolini’s film, in the same way that reading Sade is only marginally helpful in understanding the essays of Barthes, Blanchot, and Klossowski.

A closer examination of Salò in conjunction with Sade’s prison manuscript makes it clear that Pasolini’s film differs considerably from its supposed source. As Maggi observes, “Instead of following Sade’s narrative development, Pasolini offers a seemingly awkward rewriting of his text […]” (316-317). According to Maggi, “Pasolini picks and chooses tales from The 120 Days of Sodom with no respect for its actual narrative sequence. He gives Sade’s short narratives a new and different connotation by making them into pieces of a new narrative puzzle that conveys a totally new meaning” (327). This new meaning, as it turns out, has little to do with the erotic impulses that first pushed Sade to write his titillating narrative, which combines elements of the nascent gothic genre with the traditional erotic model of the whore’s tale. In fact, the goal of Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome, as Sade tells his potential readers in the early portion of his text, is to provoke ejaculation.222 Pasolini, on the other hand, deliberately attempts to make Salò as unerotic as possible, despite the fact that his young and attractive actors appear naked for much of the film.223 While penises are shown throughout Salò, they are always in the flaccid state, and sometimes, in the case of the libertines and their well-endowed “soldiers,” ridiculously elongated with latex extensions. While the women may bare their breasts and pubic hair, the camera merely moves over their attributes in

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222 “Sans doute, beaucoup de tous les écarts que tu vas voir peints te déplairont, on le sait, mais il s’en trouvera quelques-uns qui t’échaufferont au point de te coûter du foutre, et voilà tout ce qu’il nous faut” (Œuvres 1.69).

223 This lack of eroticism may stem in part from Pasolini’s reading of Barthes, who had argued that Sade was not erotic: “Mais qu’est-ce que l’érotisme ? […] pour nous l’érotisme ne peut être défini que par une parole perpétuellement allusive. A ce compte-là, Sade n’est pas érotique : on l’a dit, il n’y a jamais chez lui de « strip-tease » d’aucune sorte, cet apologue essentiel de l’érotique moderne […] La différence ne tient pas à ce que l’érotique sadienne est criminelle et la nôtre inoffensive, mais à ce que la première est assertive, combinatorie tandis que la seconde est suggestive, métaphorique” (Œuvres complètes 3.722-723).
passing, and the genito-anal region is never shown. (By way of comparison, Pasolini clearly shows both the vulva and an erect penis in *Il Decameron*, the first installment of his “Trilogy of Life,” which, according to the director, harkens back to a more innocent age of sexuality [*Lettere luterane* 71-72].) Thus, when one of the wives is forcibly sodomized during the inaugural dinner, the camera focuses on the wicked laughter of onlookers, rather than on the young woman’s prone body, which remains hidden in a corner next to the table. Similarly, when the libertines hold a competition among the victims to determine who possess the most attractive buttocks, the relevant body parts are eclipsed in shadow, so that the viewer sees only a uniform mass of curved spines (Signora Maggi had carefully arranged the group in order to assure anonymity). Whereas the libertines themselves scrutinize the nether regions of each unwilling participant, the audience instead watches the libertines engaged in the act of looking. In both instances, Pasolini focuses on the voyeur, rather than the object viewed, a process that eventually culminates in the final executions that the libertines watch through binoculars.
Pasolini had in fact claimed that all of his films were “antipornographic” (qtd. in Schwartz 15), and even though Salò contains considerably more nudity than his earlier films, the same characterization nonetheless applies. Whereas visual pornography relies upon what Linda Williams has called the “frenzy of the visible,” staging sex to be “maximally visible at every moment” (Hard Core 36, Screening Sex 4), Salò instead keeps sex hidden behind strategically placed tables or clothing. Just as Salò denies its viewers the satisfaction of seeing more of the victims’ bodies, the film also highlights the libertines’ own inability to achieve sexual satisfaction, as each scene cuts away long before the climactic “discharge” that closes so many of Sade’s orgies. Throughout the film, Salò portrays sex as a cold and unsatisfying affair: the soldier shows little enjoyment while raping his victim during the dinner, for instance, while the resigned wife reveals no further emotion after emitting a blood-curdling scream that accompanies the (implied) violent anal penetration. The scene then quickly deteriorates into a farce, as the President exposes his buttocks to the assembly in quest of a partner, while the Duke leads the group in singing the patriotic war hymn “Sul ponte di Perati, bandiera nera,” before
Signora Vaccari uses a mannequin to teach the young women how to masturbate a man. Commenting upon the portrayal of sexual frustration in the early scenes of Salò, when both the male and female victims prove unskilled in masturbating the libertines, Maggi notes how “Pasolini sets the tone of his film by emphasizing the failure of sex, and in particular the failure of an encounter between two men,” who would presumably know how to satisfy one another (297-298). While this depiction of sex may result in part from the influence of Barthes and other critics who point toward the rigidly structured organization of Sade’s orgies, it also reflects Pasolini’s commentary on the state of sexuality in the aftermath of the sexual revolution, which brought, among other things, the legalization of divorce and abortion to Italy.

In speaking of Salò, Pasolini revealed that he “wanted to make a film in which there is always the problem of sexuality, but not understood as pure freedom, because this has been seized and falsified by consumerism, in the most problematic and dramatic way.” Thus, “Pasolini’s emphasis,” as Maggi remarks, “is less on the sex described in a given situation than on the ideological meaning expressed through the sex act” (316-317). According to Pasolini, despite all its nudity and simulated sex scenes, Salò was not pornography “because the context is that of the mercification which power has made of

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224 Barthes, for instance, argued that in Sade’s texts “L’orgie est organisée, distribuée, commandée, surveillée comme une séance d’atelier; sa rentabilité est celle du travail à la chaîne (mais sans plus-value) […] Ce qui est décrit ici est en fait une machine (la Machine est l’emblème sublimé du travail dans la mesure où elle accomplit et l’exonère en même temps)” (Œuvres complètes 3.811). Pasolini’s stance against abortion and other results of the sexual revolution can be found in his essay “Il Coito, l’aborto, la flasa tolleranza del potere, il conformismo dei progressisti,” in Scritti Corsari. I use the term “sexual revolution” to refer to the widespread changes in sexual mores experienced in developed countries beginning in the late 1960s. For more on the subject, see Jeffrey Escoffier’s collection of pertinent documents, Sexual Revolution, as well as Linda Williams’s introduction to Screening Sex.

225 “[…] vorrei fare dei film dove ci sia sempre il problema sessuale, ma non inteso come pura libertà, perché questo è stato preso e falsificato dal consumismo, ma in un modo più problematico e drammatico” (Volgar eloquio 76). This and all subsequent translations can be found in Barth David Schwartz, Pasolini Requiem, unless otherwise noted.
bodies, that is the reduction of bodies to things, which Hitler did in the physical sense of
the word and which today’s new power has done in the sense of genocide.’”

(Another reason that Salò does not portray its nude actors in an attractive light is because
consumerism had disfigured the human body—as Pasolini would proclaim, “I now hate
the [Italian youths’] bodies and sex organs. That is to say the bodies of the new Italian
youth and boys, the sex organs of the new generation of Italian youth and boys.”)

Likewise, Salò deliberately avoids using sex to arouse its viewers because, as Pasolini
stated during filming, sex is used metaphorically: “My film is planned as a sexual
metaphor, which symbolizes, in a visionary way, the relationship between exploiter and
exploited” (qtd. in Bachmann 40). “Liberty in heterosexual relationships,” the director
continues, “has become obligatory. That liberty is a form of exploitation, a dictatorship
of conformity” (qtd. in Bachmann 44). “Sex in Salò,” Pasolini would remark elsewhere,
“is a representation, or a metaphor of this situation: that which we are living in these
years: sex as an obligation and ugliness.”

This notion of sex as obligation and ugliness appears throughout the film, such as
in the mandatory marriage forced upon the victims Renata and Sergio. As a premarital
ritual, Signora Vaccari masturbates Renata, while Guido, a soldier, does the same to
Sergio, in order to verify the couple’s sexual maturity. The answer turns out to be

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226 “[…] perché il contesto è quello della mercificazione che il potere fa dei corpi, cioè della riduzione dei
corpi a cose, che Hitler ha fatto proprio nel senso fisico della parola e che il nuovo potere di oggi fa nel
senso del genocidio […]” (Volgar’eloquio 73).

227 “[…] se anche volessi continuare a fare film come quelli della Trilogia della vita, non lo potrei: perché
ormai odio i corpi e gli organi sessuali. Naturalmente parlo di questi corpi, di questi organi sessuali. Ciò
dei corpi dei nuovi giovani e ragazzi italiani, degli organi sessuali dei nuovi giovani e ragazzi italiani”
(Lettere luterane 73). Translation from “Trilogy of Life Rejected,” in Lutheran Letters, 50.

228 “Il sesso in Salò è una rappresentazione, o metafora di questa situazione: questa che viviamo in questi
anni: il sesso come obbligo e bruttezza” (Betti et. al., 149).
affirmative when Guido wipes his hand on his leg and exclaims, “Evviva! evviva! è venuto, un homo!” while Signora Vaccari hugs Renata, proudly announcing “Ed ecco qua una donna.” Any erotic appeal the scene might otherwise have is eliminated by Pasolini’s use of an extremely wide angle to shoot the sequence, so that the bodies appear as tiny forms in the distance. Instead, the overall mood of this premarital ceremony is cold and clinical, as the somberly clad libertines sit at the other end of the large and empty room, discussing political philosophy while observing their victims’ coerced orgasms (“Noi fascisti siamo i soli veri anarchici,” the Duke remarks). Later, when Sergio and Renata are ordered to caress one another following their “marriage,” the same wide angle is used, so that the couple appears frail and isolated in the distance, thereby highlighting their vulnerability during a rare and all-too-brief moment of tenderness before the libertines move in to rape both male and female, obscuring the young nude bodies with their dark and somber clothing. Marriage and heterosexual intercourse thus come across as elements through which those in power exert control over their subjects. Significantly, the Duke speaks of Renata and Sergio as “these two bodies that belong to
us” (“quei due corpi che ci appartengono”), thus illustrating Pasolini’s notion of “the reduction of bodies to things.”

However, while the “antipornographic” qualities of Salò are easily discernable, Pasolini’s proposed connection between wartime Fascism and 1970s consumerism appears tenuous at best. According to the director, Salò uses the oppressive structure of Italian Fascism to convey his views on Italy in the 1970s, and to “attack the permissiveness of our new ways. So far, society has repressed us. Now, it offers only a false front of permissiveness” (qtd. in Bachmann 41). Thus, although the film may take place in the Republic of Salò, the historical setting becomes almost allegorical: “And I am not really linking the action in a direct way with the Republic of Salò,” Pasolini concedes, “it’s just the ambiance of the era” (Ibid.). The setting of Salò serves to denounce “the powers of consumption” that were in Pasolini’s view “the new Fascism.”

The sexual revolution had not really brought new freedoms, but rather a false permissiveness that constituted “the mark of the worst repression ever exercised by Power on the masses of citizens.”

Despite the noble aims of those who, like Pasolini himself, participated in the struggles of the fifties and sixties, the forces of consumerism have been able to manipulate the movement to their own advantage: “the progressive struggle for democratization of expression and for sexual liberation has been brutally

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229 “Ma questa libertà del coito della « coppia » così com’è concepita dalla maggioranza—questa meravigliosa permissività nei suoi riguardi—da chi è stata tacitamente voluta, tacitamente promulgata e tacitamente fatta entrare, in modo ormai irreversibile, nelle abitudini? Dal potere dei consumi, dal nuovo fascismo” (Scritti Corsari 83).

230 “[...] in effetti—come ho appunto sempre detto e ripetuto—il consumismo altro non è che una nuova forma totalitaria [...] e che quindi la sua permissività è falsa: è la maschera della peggiore repressione mai esercitata dal potere sulle masse dei cittadini” (Scritti Corsari 102).
superseded and cancelled out by the decision of consumerist power to grant a tolerance as vast as it is false.”231

The “false permissiveness” of the 1970s certainly comes across in the film, such as in Salò’s only satisfactory sexual encounter, a scene of homosexual sodomy involving the bishop and one of the soldiers, who copulate with such intensity that they end up rolling off the bed and onto the floor (where, we are led to believe, the soldier ejaculates into the bishop’s anus). Homosexuality is now permitted, the scene suggests, but only in so much as it coincides with the rigid hierarchy of the society: significantly, this brief portrayal of mutual pleasure occurs between two male partners on relatively equal terms, as the soldiers, like the collaborators and the libertines themselves, are permitted to carry weapons and to behave with relative freedom. In his discussion of the scene, Maggi argues that Salò actually imposes “male homosexuality as the only lawful form of sex” (Maggi 330), thus transforming previously outlawed sexual practices into a forcibly imposed obligation. This rare instance of mutually enjoyed copulation is in fact interrupted when the bishop must leave to perform his duty, inspecting the victims’ dormitories; moreover, in the scene immediately prior to the encounter, the bishop had presided at the marriage ceremony uniting the cross-dressing libertines and their soldiers, a wedding that further solidifies the bond between those in power.

But there is nothing in the film itself to suggest that Pasolini is really commenting upon the 1970s rather than the 1940s, other than the director’s countless statements linking the rise of Fascism to that of consumerism, such as his remark to Gideon Bachmann that “maybe at this moment Italy resembles Germany when Hitler came on the

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231“Primo la lotta progressista per la democratizzazione espressiva e per la liberalizzazione sessuale è stata brutalmente superata e vanificata dalla decisione del potere consumistico di concedere una vasta (quanto falsa) tolleranza” (Lettere luterane 72).
While the specter of Fascism is never as present in the later states of the film as it is in the opening sequences, when German SS troops help to round up the “militi,” “collaborazionisti,” and “vittime,” historical references to the 1940s nonetheless remain constant throughout, from the military weapons and clothing of the collaborators and soldiers to the art nouveau and bauhaus décor of the libertines’ estate. Thus, although Pasolini himself explained the scatological themes in Salò as a metaphor representing “that the producers, the manufacturers, force the consumer to eat excrement. All these industrial foods are worthless refuse” (qtd. in Bachmann 45), a viewer unaware of Pasolini’s comments during the filming of Salò would be unlikely to interpret the film allegorically. For this reason, Maggi laments the fact that “the two unforgettable ‘shit scenes’ in Salò […] are usually ascribed to Pasolini’s disgust with capitalistic society,” and that “Critics all too often reduce Salò to a metaphor for the universal objectification produced by capitalism […]” (257-258). In fact, the banquet of excrement, which supposedly communicates how capitalism forces consumers to ingest their own refuse, actually begins with a broadcast from one of Hitler’s speeches, and contains a shot of two uniformed collaborators sitting near the radio, with a silver Fascist eagle perched atop a mantel. Salò certainly showcases “the relationship between exploiter and exploited,” as Pasolini remarks, but seems to examine such a relationship solely within the context of

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232 “Io sono arrivato a dire ch’è forse l’Italia in questo momento assomiglia alla Germania di quando è venuto Hitler” (De Guisti 153).

233 The majority of critics support the political interpretation of Salò as a film against consumerism. Maggi’s recent book, however, proposes an alternate, psychoanalytical reading that follows Lucienne Frappier-Mazur in relying upon both Klossowski’s early essays on Sade and the work of Julia Kristeva. For instance, Maggi stresses Sade’s supposed hatred of nature and the mother, and uses it to interpret various elements of Salò (17, 256-257). While Maggi’s turn from politics to psychoanalysis seems problematic given Pasolini’s own statements about the film, it nonetheless opens up the question of how much Salò actually conforms to its creator’s interpretation.
wartime Fascism, despite the director’s statements to the contrary.

Unaware of Pasolini’s claims to be using Fascism as a metaphor, early viewers of Salò interpreted the film in a much more straightforward manner as an adaptation of Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome set in Fascist Italy. In fact, despite the philosophical affinities between their own work and that of Pasolini, both Foucault and Barthes responded harshly to the film, in part because of its treatment of Fascism. Foucault, for instance, called the use of Fascism in such films as Salò and Liliana Cavani’s Il portiere di notte “une erreur historique totale.” “Le nazisme,” Foucault continues, “n’a pas été inventé par les grands fous érotiques du XXᵉ siècle, mais par les petits-bourgeois les plus

234 Just as Pasolini relied upon Barthes’s reading of Sade in creating his film, his negative assessment of the sexual revolution somewhat resembles that outlined by Foucault in the first volume of his Histoire de la sexualité, which problematizes the supposed link between sexual and political liberation regarding what Foucault labels the “hypothèse répressive,” or the notion that sexual expression has been forcibly repressed since the Victorian era. The central argument of La Volonté de savoir is of course that this hypothesis is invalid, and that, instead of repressing sexuality, those in power have on the contrary consistently solicited additional information on the sexual practices of their citizens: “Police du sexe,” as Foucault explains, “non pas rigueur d’une prohibitions mais nécessité de régler le sexe par des discours utiles et publics” (Histoire de la sexualité I : La volonté de savoir, 35). In the early pages of his study, Foucault mocks the subversive pretensions of the sexually liberated in their zeal to overcome repression (11-14).
Moreover, Foucault questioned the very process of putting Sade on film, remarking that

il n’y a rien de plus allergique au cinéma que l’œuvre de Sade. Parmi les nombreuses raisons, d’abord celle-ci : la méticulosité, le rituel, la forme de cérémonie rigoureuse que prennent toutes les scènes de Sade excluent tout ce qui pourrait être jeu supplémentaire de la caméra […] Vouloir retranscrire Sade, cet anatomiste méticuleux, en images précises, ça ne marche pas. Ou Sade disparaît, ou on fait un cinéma de papa. (1686-88)

Likewise, Barthes would later affirm that “aucune image n’est possible de l’univers sadien : celui-ci, par une décision impérieuse de l’écrivain-Sade, est tout entier remis au seul pouvoir de l’écriture.” Like Foucault, Barthes also adds that “Du point de vue politique, Sade [perhaps Barthes means Pasolini?] s’est trompé aussi. Le fascisme est un danger trop grave et trop insidieux, pour qu’on le traite par simple analogie, les maîtres fascistes venant « tout simplement » prendre la place des libertins” (Œuvres complètes 4.945). Although Pasolini was not the first to link Sade with Fascism, as Queneau (in the Resistance newspaper Front national), Horkheimer and Adorno (in Dialektik der Aufklärung), and, more recently, director Roger Vadim (in his 1963 film Le Vice et la vertu, starring Catherine Deneuve) had all made the same association before him, it was this conflation that most upset his contemporaries. Reacting to the use of a street sign for Mazabotto—“where,” he notes, “a terrible massacre actually took place”—Italo Calvino wrote: “It greatly displeases me to see appear on a street sign the name of the town, Marzabotto. The evocation of the Nazi occupation can only reawaken a depth of emotions that is the complete opposite of the paradoxical ruthlessness that Sade poses as the first rule of the game, not only to the characters but to the readers as well” (109). In short, Pasolini made two grievous errors with Salò, since Sade belongs neither on film nor to Fascism. As Barthes succinctly summarizes, “En somme, Pasolini a fait deux fois
ce qu’il ne fallait pas faire. Du point de vue de la valeur, son film perd sur les deux tableaux : car tout ce qui irréalise le fascisme est mauvais ; et tout ce qui réalise Sade est mauvais” (945).

The reactions of Calvino, Foucault, and Barthes outline two major problems posed by Pasolini’s Salò. On the one hand, there is the technical question of whether or not Sade’s texts can be transferred to film, and how one might go about doing so. For Barthes and Foucault, Salò fails on this point because works like Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome exist solely on the textual level: when one moves from written text to visual image, Sade disappears entirely. But neither critic bothers to discuss precisely what Pasolini did to Sade’s Sodome, modifying the text to such an extent as to make the film much more than a simple adaptation. Secondly, the three writers all disagree with Pasolini’s choice of associating Sade with the darkest period of Italian Fascism. When one places Salò within the context of Pasolini’s wider political views, however, it becomes apparent that the film’s use of Fascism differs considerably from that of earlier figures such as Queneau, Horkheimer, and Adorno, who first associated the Marquis with Nazism in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Although both Barthes and Foucault interpreted Salò as a cinematic version of Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome, Pasolini was in fact trying to accomplish something entirely different with his use of both Sade and Fascism. In fact, when one considers Pasolini’s politics at the time of Salò’s filming, it becomes clear that adapting an eighteenth-century text to film and linking the notorious libertine with Fascism were not his primary concerns after all. Instead, the director merely used both historical and textual sources to communicate his own views against falsely permissive consumerism. It is therefore in search of a more
nuanced interpretation of Sade and his works that I now turn to the films produced prior to Pasolini’s undeniably bleak offering, films much less concerned with advocating any specific political agenda.

**Free Love in the Boudoir: Sade and the Spirit of ’69**

As I mentioned earlier, the year 1969 saw no less than five films possessing at the very least a titular relationship to the Marquis and his works: Warren Kiefer’s *Juliette de Sade*, Cy Endfield’s biographical *De Sade*, Jacques Scandelari’s *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (known in English as *Marquis de Sade’s Beyond Love and Evil*), and Spanish director Jesus (Jess) Franco’s *Marquis de Sade’s Justine* and *Eugenie: The Story of her Journey into Perversion*, a modern adaptation of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*. Before turning to this eruption of Sade-inspired films in 1969, however, it would be best to examine the works of Luis Buñuel, who had been incorporating elements from Sade’s oeuvre into his films from the surrealist collaboration *L’Âge d’or*, released amidst much controversy in 1930, to his 1969 comedy *La Voie Lactée*. In *Mon Dernier Soupir*, the book of memoirs that Buñuel published toward the end of his life, the director lists Sade among the favorite authors of his youth (“J’ai aimé Sade,” he admits), and acknowledges that “l’influence qu’il exerça sur moi fut sans doute considérable” (268-270). Most of Buñuel’s references to Sade make use of the author’s staunch opposition to Catholicism, presenting the Marquis as an antithesis to conventional morality. In *L’Âge d’or*, for instance, the surrealist iconoclasm that drives much of the film’s attacks against the bourgeoisie and organized religion reaches its apex in the memorable closing sequence, which depicts the “quatre scélérats profonds et reconnus qui n’ont de loi que leur
dépravation, des roués sans Dieu, sans principes, sans religion” from Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome as they leave the château de Silling (mistakenly called “Selliny” in the film) after four months of what the film calls “la plus bestiale des orgies.” The title card’s announcement of “Le premier et principal des quatre organisateurs, le Duc de Blangis” is followed by an actor dressed like Jesus Christ leading his three exhausted companions out of the castle, his eyes directed heavenward and his hands spread out before him. After a bleeding woman collapses at the doorstep, this “duke” brings her back inside and presumably finishes her off (a female scream is heard). The final frame of L’Âge d’or then shows a cross decorated with female hair that was apparently taken from the libertines’ victims. Like most surrealist representations of Sade, the incorporation of Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome into L’Âge d’or demonstrates little familiarity with the text itself, but instead uses the Marquis within the framework of a more widespread rebelliousness.

Later Buñuel films would in fact show evidence of a close textual encounter, however, using elements borrowed from Sade’s texts in the context of an otherwise unrelated narrative. For example, Buñuel’s 1953 film El, a tale of obsessive male jealousy involving the abusive husband Francisco and his faithful wife Gloria, contains a sequence where Francisco gathers together two ropes, a razor blade, shaving cream, and a needle and thread, before entering Gloria’s bedroom in the middle of the night. As soon as he tries to tie his sleeping wife’s hands to the bed, however, she awakens and screams loudly, alerting the servants and forcing Francisco to flee. Although the audience never knows for sure what Francisco intended to do with his array of instruments, André Pieyre de Mandiargues provides a convincing explanation in a June 22, 1954 letter to Jean
Paulhan. “Le dernier film de Bunuel, _El_, est plutôt mauvais,” Pieyre de Mandiargues writes. “Mais il y a de curieux détails, que les gens n’aperçoivent pas. Ainsi ils croient que le jaloux veut tuer sa femme ; en réalité c’est pour la coudre (après avoir rasé l’endroit) qu’il prend fil, aiguille, ciseaux et lame Gillette” (_Correspondance 1947-1968_, 121). As a fellow reader of Sade who was aware of Buñuel’s admiration for the Marquis, Pieyre de Mandiargues understood that the director was including a subtle allusion to the conclusion of _La Philosophie dans le boudoir_, where Madame de Mistival has her vagina sewn shut.

An even more direct citation of Sade appears in _La Voie Lactée_, after Monsieur Richard, the hotel maître d’ who leads a theological discussion among his staff, states that atheists either “sont des fous, ou alors ils se disent athées mais ils ne le sont pas,” citing Psalm 14 as evidence: “C’est l’insensé qui dit dans son cœur il n’y a pas de Dieu.” The scene then cuts to a stone dungeon, where a proud voice is heard repeating those exact same words, proclaiming precisely that “il n’y a pas de Dieu.” In the sequence that follows, an eighteenth-century aristocrat (who is obviously the Marquis de Sade) is shown putting on his clothes, lecturing a chained and bloodied young woman on the absurdity of her religion. Much of the text is taken from the 1791 version of _Justine_, combining a lecture given by Bressac—“Toutes les religions partent d’un principe faux, Thérèse […]” (Sade, _Œuvres_ 183)—with the final efforts of la Dubois to sway Justine from her attachment to virtue: “Tu comptes sur un Dieu vengeur, détrompe-toi, Thérèse, détrompe-toi, le Dieu que tu te forgès n’est qu’une chimère dont la sotte existence ne se trouva jamais que dans la tête des fous […]” (364). Buñuel even has Sade call the woman “Thérèse” (which is the pseudonym Justine chooses for herself to protect her
identity) and paraphrase the epigraph to *La Nouvelle Justine*, “Ce n’est pas un crime que de faire la peinture des bizarres penchant qu’inspirent la nature.”

When Thérèse defies her tormentor by insisting that God does indeed exist, the face of the Marquis darkens in anger, and the scene cuts away as he approaches her, presumably to inflict further punishment. As he does throughout *La Voie Lactée*, Buñuel refuses to state who is truly crazy, the theologizing maître d’ or the atheist libertine, each of whom accuses the other of insanity.

In the course of its examination of heresy, *La Voie Lactée* also touches upon the more widespread questioning of authority that occurred in the late 1960s. A clear reference to the events of May 1968 appears during the doctrinal pageant at the Catholic Institution Lamartine, when the head mistress refers to the “circonstances bien connus de tous” (“Les temps, dit-on, sont à la violence. Heureusement, Dieu nous en a préservée, et toutes nos classes sont déroulées dans le calme”). In the midst of her speech, Jean imagines a group of armed anarchists (mostly middle-aged, working class men, led by a somewhat younger woman) marching through the streets, carrying a red and black flag in a clear reference to the events of May 1968. As the young girls recite various heresies and condemn them with the chorus “qu’il soit anathème,” Jean then envisions the anarchists executing a pope. While the sequence aptly summarizes the revolutionary pretensions of the participants in May 1968 and their aim to overthrow bourgeois society by attacking its core beliefs, the remark made to Jean by one of the pageant spectators—that he would never see a pope executed—underscores the ultimate failure of the movement and the continued dominance of the bourgeoisie and its values. In fact, one

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235 The epigraph to *La Nouvelle Justine* reads “On n’est point criminel pour faire la peinture / Des bizarres penchant qu’inspirent la nature” (391).
possible interpretation of the film is that Catholicism serves as an allegory for Marxism, which at the time faced its own heretical challenge and dogmatic crisis.

The theme of sexual liberation also appears in the *La Voie Lactée*, such as when the Priscillians engage in orgies directly after mass renouncing sins of the flesh, or when the Protestant Rodolphe abstains from approaching the beautiful young woman who magically appears in his bedroom out of respect for the Virgin Mary. Jean and Pierre, one will recall, actually never make it to Santiago de Compostela after all; the last time we see them, they head off into the woods just outside the city in order to have sex with a prostitute. Even more so than *La Voie Lactée*, however, sexual politics constitutes a more prevalent theme in Buñuel’s previous film, *Belle de Jour*, which was released in 1967. In order to escape the confines of her bourgeois marriage, Catherine Deneuve’s Sévérine turns to particularly masochistic fantasies, including the central storyline of becoming a prostitute, which Buñuel copies rather accurately from Joseph Kessel’s 1928 novel. The fantasies not included in the novel, however, often contain a noticeably Sadean element, embodied in the recurrent and anachronistic image of the horse and carriage. The opening sequence in particular, in which Pierre stops the carriage in the middle of the woods, orders his coachmen to strip and whip Sévérine, and then allows one of them to rape her, recalls the works of Sade through its setting, themes, and participants. In *Belle de Jour*, such fantasies enable Sévérine to temporarily escape her dull existence, while at the same time solidifying her confinement in marriage (if, that is, one interprets her entire experience at the brothel as mere fantasy). Similarly, in *La Voie Lactée*, the Marquis de Sade seems to offer the perfect counterpoint to the prudishness of both Catholic and Marxist orthodoxy. At the same time, however, Buñuel is careful to
show the other side of the picture as well, presenting Sade as a brutal and potentially homicidal fanatic, similar to the villainous Francisco in *El*. His treatment of the Marquis questions the popular usage of the notorious libertine as symbol of sexual liberation during the late 1960s, a phenomenon that James Steintrager has discussed in his article “Liberating Sade.” As it turns out, the link between an eighteenth century aristocrat and twentieth century calls for sexual and political revolution returns as a common theme in many of the films dealing with Sade at the time, which often follow Buñuel in both his usage of surrealist imagery and rather indirect references to contemporary events.

In order to fully appreciate the significance of filming Sade in 1969, one must first consider the general state of the counter-culture movement by the end of the decade. If 1967 is perhaps best known for the “Summer of Love,” 1968 will forever be remembered as a year of political protest, as student demonstrations spread throughout Europe, Japan, and the United States. It was in this politically charged atmosphere that Spanish director Jess Franco and English-born writer/producer Harry Alan Towers created the first feature-length cinematic adaptation of Sade based on the 1791 novel *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu*. Filmed in Barcelona in 1968, *Justine ovvero le disavventure della virtù* was first released in Italy on April 3, 1969, and would eventually become known internationally under the title *Marquis de Sade’s Justine*. Upon first glance, Franco’s *Justine* seems to participate in the widespread call for sexual liberation

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236 “At the time,” Steintrager writes, “Sade was enjoying considerable exposure and his name brought with it a certain bawdy cachet; while the Marquis was certainly not somehow constitutive of 1960s culture, he was a reference of some importance from high theory to pop culture and many stops in between” (352).

237 Although Franco directed over one hundred fifty films throughout his (as yet unfinished) career, little scholarship exists regarding his œuvre. Much of the biographical information contained in this chapter comes either from Carlos Aguilar’s *Jess Franco: El Sexo del Horror*, or from the interviews included as bonus material in the Franco DVDs distributed by Blue Underground.
common to the late 1960s, as the film’s opening sequence presents the Marquis de Sade himself as an artist unjustly imprisoned for his sexual behavior. Towers’s screenplay intertwines the story of Sade’s ever-suffering heroine with that of the persecuted Marquis (played by a wigged and appropriately attired Klaus Kinski), who is shown in his cell suffering hallucinations of bound and bloodied nude women, accompanied by ominous music playing in the background. As Sade peers through the bars to display his troubled face before the camera, we are led to believe that his madness and unwarranted detention cause him to suffer just as much as the fictional Justine. By extension, his notorious works are merely an attempt to work through his mental anguish, as Sade first sits down to write after an imagined female scream rouses him from his bed. With the camera focusing on the nude body of Justine cowering in a corner, a voiceover begins the narration by announcing, “This is the story of Justine, and the misfortunes of virtue.” At other times, Sade is shown sobbing over the fate of his heroine (such as when he laments, “Oh what infamies poor Justine had yet to suffer. It seemed that in her innocence she could not even comprehend the evils that still lay before her”). Appropriately, the film ends with a shot of the exhausted author finally finishing his manuscript and collapsing into his notebook.

This image of the Marquis de Sade as an unfairly persecuted martyr appears throughout the reception of his works, from Pétrus Borel’s 1839 novel Madame Putiphar to the surrealist publications of the 1920s and onward to Gilbert Lély’s 1952 biography Vie du Marquis de Sade (which Alec Brown had translated into English for Grove Press in 1962). During the social upheavals of the 1960s, Sade resurfaced in popular culture as a symbol for freedom, as can be seen in both Peter Weiss’s 1963 play The Persecution
and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade and Guy Endore’s well-researched 1965 novel Satan’s Saint: A Novel About the Marquis de Sade. Weiss’s play in particular became influential through Peter Brook’s award-winning New York production, which ran from late 1965 through 1966 and formed the basis for a filmed version of the play in 1967. Indeed, as James Steintrager observes, “The success of Brook’s production helped spur a Sade industry that was dedicated to the notion that the Marquis must be free and that we should be too” (“Liberating Sade” 365-366). In Marat/Sade, the stoic Marquis appears alongside the wild and mentally ill patients of Charenton, calmly preaching his views on human nature while eliciting protests from the asylum’s director (the Abbé de Coulmier) over his play’s politically subversive content. The implication is that Sade was imprisoned because his ideas presented a danger to the authorities, and that modern audiences concerned with their own freedom would do well to liberate Sade from the stigma that has surrounded him since the eighteenth century by heeding his message.238

Following Towers and Franco, Americans Richard Matheson and Cy Endfield tap into this notion of the Marquis de Sade as an unfortunate victim of society in their 1969 film De Sade, which stars the handsome Keir Dullea (best known for his 1968 performance in Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey) in the title role. De Sade attempts to portray the life of the Marquis as a libertine aristocrat, from his affairs with actresses and courtesans to the beating of Rose Keller, and onward to Madame de Montreuil’s role in securing his imprisonment under a lettre de cachet. Screenwriter Matheson takes a

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238 As Steintrager remarks, the play not only considers such universal themes as “human nature, revolution, and oppression,” but “[c]ontemporary political and social issues are allusively present throughout the drama: the cold war, mass annihilation, and the antipsychiatry movement” (“Liberating Sade” 364).
liberal approach in his appropriation of biographical material, ignoring, for instance, Gilbert Lély’s refutation of earlier sources claiming that Sade fell madly in love with his sister-in-law Anne Prospère de Launay from the moment he first laid eyes on her (Lély, 1.288ff). In fact, Matheson’s script appears to copy a passage from Endore’s novel describing this initial encounter, in which Sade mistakes Anne for Renée-Pélagie when he sees the younger sister playing the piano, even though Endore himself reconstructs the event only to underline its lack of credibility (Endore 41-43). While the point of contention concerns only the beginning of their liaison, and not its importance in Sade’s life, Matheson goes much further than either Lély or Endore, giving the impression that the Marquis would have behaved properly if only he had wed the right Montreuil daughter. Other deviations from biographical sources include the addition of Sade’s uncle the Abbé de Sade (alongside Madame de Montreuil and the Parisian Inspecteur de Police Marais) as one of Sade’s tormentors, as Matheson would have us believe that it was during a childhood stay with his uncle that Sade first encountered promiscuous sexuality and physical abuse.

What most stands out in De Sade, however, is how the film portrays Sade’s biography through the distinctive lens of the late 1960s. While its characters may be clad in eighteenth-century costumes, the film is clearly a product of its era, from the James Bond-inspired music and animation during the opening credits to the plot’s focus on psychedelic hallucination and its sympathetic treatment of extramarital sex. Although it does not become apparent until the film’s conclusion, De Sade is structured as the dying Marquis’s hallucinatory, nightmarish recollection of his life as he lies in bed at Charenton. Following Marat/Sade, De Sade deals with both psychiatry and the theater,
making the stage at La Coste a central component of Sade’s inability to distinguish between dream and reality. As befits both its subject matter and the spirit of the sexual revolution, the film also shows plenty of female nudity, as practically every young female actress exposes her breasts or buttocks at one point or another (there are even a few fleeting glimpses of pubic hair if one looks closely enough). Such scenes became increasingly common during the late 1960s, particularly in artsy European films such as, De Sade, which was filmed in West Germany and produced by American International Pictures. Sex in De Sade, however, does not come across as universally benign. Rather, as the Marquis journeys through the memories of his youth, two distinct versions of sexuality surface. On the one hand, Sade’s numerous trysts are portrayed as harmless amusements with prostitutes that take place in between a few fleeting moments of true love (“moments of reality,” as Sade calls them in the film) with Anne. At the same time, however, there is something sinister about Sade’s more violent excesses, many of which are shown through blurred red lighting. Still, despite his abuse of Rose Keller and a few other women, the film intends for its audience to sympathize with the Marquis. Indeed, as James Steintrager has observed, in the end De Sade favors the hippie ideal of free love over the persecuting powers of the family, the church, and the state. The only true

239 Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1966 Blow-Up is often cited as the first mainstream film to show female pubic hair (see, for example, Albert Montage, Histoire juridique des interdits cinématographiques en France (1909-2001, 149). For a historical perspective on the presence of nudity and sexuality in mainstream cinema, see Linda Williams, Screening Sex.

240 “Sade is caught in a nightmarish trap of various agencies of power: the police inspector Marais and his minions (Marais was in fact a head of Paris’s vice squad and Sade’s real-life nemesis); the Présidente de Montreuil, Sade’s mother-in-law, who represents the evils of the family as well as the subordination of economic concerns to personal freedom; the Abbé, Sade’s uncle, who stands for the corruption and hypocrisy of authority […] If only poor Sade were allowed his pleasures—if only he had not been exposed to traumatic experiences—then he could no doubt ‘self-actualize’” (“Liberating Sade,” 367). Later in his article, Steintrager adds that “Not only was Sade not free to have his pleasures—repressed by family, church, and state—he was not free to love. Sade becomes a doubly innocent victim of a corrupt age that
crime of which Sade might have been guilty—indeed, the only one he seems to regret in the film—is the corruption of Anne, who, the film suggests, died as a result of her excesses with the Marquis.

In *Marquise de Sade’s Justine*, Towers and Franco cast a similarly sympathetic light upon not only the Marquis, but upon his supposedly notorious novel as well. Towers’s screenplay actually modifies the plot of *Justine* considerably, turning it into an upbeat tale with a typical Hollywood happy ending. Although the film begins with Justine and Juliette expelled from a convent following the death of their parents, whereupon Juliette begins a successful career as a prostitute while Justine finds her attachment to virtue rewarded with continual misfortune, the remainder of the script strategically limits both the scope of Justine’s misfortunes and the sexual content of her encounters. For instance, after Justine escapes Madame Dubois and her gang (without ever having to participate in the orgies that appear in the novel), instead of being raped by Saint-Florent, she finds refuge with a benevolent artist named Raymond, who is entirely Towers’s invention. This replacement of Saint-Florent with Raymond enables Justine to remain a virgin while providing a temporary sense of relief from her suffering. In a strange twist, Justine enjoys a glimpse of conjugal bliss with the artist, and even surprises him by appearing naked on his couch after he tells Justine that he wants to do a portrait of her. (Rather than take advantage of her as one might expect from Sade’s characters, Raymond instead covers Justine with a blanket and tells her that he loves her.)

Presumably, Justine finally loses her virginity among the monks at the Château du Bois, but there is never any direct evidence of this in the film; instead, we see only a few surreal shots of Justine having pins stuck into her back, and of she and her topless...
companions chained to a wall. Moreover, the lightning that kills Justine in each of Sade’s textual versions instead frees her from the monks, interrupting the ceremony at which she was to be sacrificed. The film then concludes with Justine happily reunited with both Raymond and a suddenly virtuous Juliette.  

For viewers unfamiliar with Sade’s text, Justine would thus appear to be nothing more than a mildly naughty tale with a few instances of female nudity. Like De Sade, Marquis de Sade’s Justine takes several opportunities to exploit the charms of the female form, apparently relishing in the newfound sexual liberties of the late 1960s. Although Justine bares her bosom with increasing frequency as the film progresses, most of the nude shots involve either Juliette (played by Towers’s wife, Maria Rohm), her companion Claudine (another of Towers’s inventions, played by Rosemary Dexter), or the Marquise de Bressac (played by former Playboy model Sylva Koscina). Throughout the film, Franco’s voyeuristic lens captures fleeting moments of female exposure. For instance, during Juliette’s first night in the brothel, when she and Claudine undress and begin to caress one another, Juliette’s body is shown from behind a lace curtain, allowing a glimpse of her breasts but nothing more. Although a window permits the viewer to observe Claudine’s breasts as Juliette in turn disrobes her companion, their ensuing embrace is once again filtered through a lace curtain. Like Sade’s text, which uses only the veiled language of its heroine to describe the sexual acts she is forced to endure, Franco often obscures instances of nudity with strategically placed obstructions. While

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241 In an interview included on the Blue Underground DVD for Marquis de Sade’s Justine, Franco states that, in his interpretation of Justine (which he may have borrowed from Paulhan’s preface), Sade’s heroine grows to enjoy her torments, a development that he had hoped to convey in the film but could not due to Romina Power’s childlike appearance and limited acting skills in the title role. Although Franco originally wanted Rosemary Dexter for the role of Justine, his Hollywood backers insisted that Power star since she was the daughter of Golden Age American actor Tyrone Power.
the director gradually allows for increasingly frequent and prolonged shots of breasts, the pubic region constitutes a forbidden pleasure, continuously evoked but almost always denied, in reference to its taboo status. Later, when Justine serves as the attendant and confidant of the Marquise de Bressac (in a sequence that combines the Bressac and Gernande episodes from the novel), the Marquise appears fully naked on camera as she undresses to take a bath. This first instance of full frontal female nudity, however, is yet again filtered through a curtain, so that it is only when the rose petals that fill her tub begin to float away that the audience can catch an unobstructed glimpse of the Marquise’s breasts. Bathing provides yet another excuse to portray female nudity in what is perhaps the most revealing sequence of the film, when Juliette finally betrays Claudine and drowns her in a river. Although some carefully chosen branches obscure the lower halves of their bodies as they wade into the water, their breasts are nonetheless shown at length during the ensuing struggle, until an angled shot briefly captures Juliette completely nude as she emerges victorious from the water. Then, in the film’s climactic sequence, Justine herself finally seems about to appear fully nude before the camera when, in another of Towers’s liberal modifications to the original plot, the heroine stands naked with her back to the audience on the stage of a burlesque performance run by Dubois and her gang. When she does at last turn around, however, the camera (and the theatergoers) instead fixate upon the letter M that the Marquis de Bressac had branded onto her chest in order to frame her for the murder of his wife. Justine is immediately cloaked in a blanket, and the film eventually ends without any further exposure of her body. Unlike Pasolini, who uses the constant presence of nudity to express the
degradation of the human body under consumerism, Franco’s tantalizing manipulation of female nudity instead highlights the attractiveness of the feminine form.

In stark contrast to Salò, Marquis de Sade’s Justine thus uses Sade’s text to celebrate the loosening of restrictions regarding nudity and sexuality in cinema. The film also appears to participate in the political movements of the late 1960s as well, by making subtle calls for revolution. Spanish cinema had been strictly controlled by government censors ever since General Franco rose to power during the Spanish Civil War in 1937. The one possible way for Spanish directors to escape censorship was through international co-productions, which were filmed in Spain but distributed internationally, and thus escaped government restrictions (Higginbotham 7-17). Since Marquis de Sade’s Justine was an American production intended for an international audience, it was never subject to procedures that constrained most Spanish films, such as the prior submission of scripts and eventual government scrutiny of the finished product. Filming an erotic work in Francisco Franco’s Spain was nonetheless a risky endeavor, and the director’s decision to accord so prominent a role to the Barcelona landscape for his settings seems an outright provocation of the government censors. The Barrio Gótico, the Palau Nacional, and the unmistakable architecture of Gaudí (including his Church of Colònia Güell) all appear in Justine, showing the world that the Marquis de Sade’s scandalous novel could be filmed under the watch of the Generalissimo.242 Furthermore, Franco’s use of Barcelona showcases the very Catalan identity the dictator had tried so vehemently to

242 According to Towersin an interview on the Blue Underground DVD, Spain’s Minister of Culture supposedly stole away one afternoon while on a diplomatic mission to Rome to watch what he thought would be an Italian erotic film, and was understandably surprised to see the streets and monuments of Barcelona. Jesus Franco claims that the film nonetheless managed to escape prosecution because the dialogue was not in Spanish. In fact, the dialogue was not in any language, but was filmed without sound, with the soundtrack and dialogue (in either Italian, French, English, or German) added in later.
repress. By deliberately setting his film in some of Gaudí’s most recognizable buildings, Franco seems to make a proclamation of solidarity against an oppressive regime: with their reliance on traditional Catalan motifs, Gaudí’s structures stand as a testament to Catalan culture, and the architect himself had displayed a distinctly Catalan political consciousness during his lifetime.\footnote{243} Moreover, the months between the filming of \textit{Marquis de Sade’s Justine} and its theatrical release in April 1969 coincided with revolts by Spanish students and workers that led the Franco government to declare a national state of emergency for the first time since the end of the Civil War. The political turmoil of the era even makes a surprising appearance in the film when the police are shown walking through the \textit{Barrio Gótico} to arrest Justine for theft, and the camera focuses at length on the slogan “Vive la Revolution” written on a wall. Like Sade’s 1791 novel, Franco’s film presumably takes place before the Revolution, and highlights several instances of social injustice under the Old Regime, such as when a herald announces that begging will now be punishable by death, or when Justine is falsely accused and condemned without trial. “Vive la Revolution” takes on an additional significance in late 1960s Barcelona, however, and one cannot ignore the political impact of a pro-revolutionary slogan appearing in the center of a busy tourist district. Although “Vive la Revolution” is written in French and could be somewhat explained by the film’s historical context, the slogan nonetheless presents a poignant instance of political contestation in a seemingly apolitical film, suggesting an association between the abuses of the Old Regime and those of Francisco Franco’s twentieth century dictatorship.

\footnote{243 See, for instance, Juan Jose Lahuerta, \textit{Antoni Gaudi (1852-1926): architettura, ideologia, e politica}, and Gijs Van Hensbergen, \textit{Gaudi}.}
With its provocative political messages, happy ending, and celebratory depictions of the female body, *Marquis de Sade’s Justine* appears to stand alongside *De Sade* as another argument in favor of free love and contemporaneous calls for liberation. The remainder of Franco’s Sadean adaptations, however, would present a drastically different image of the sexual revolution and political rebellion. In fact, the next Sade-inspired collaboration between Franco and Towers, the 1969 film *Eugenie: The Story of Her Journey into Perversion*, deals exclusively with the corruptive capacity of late-1960s libertinage. A loose adaptation of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, *Eugenie* relates the young and impressionable heroine’s weekend of sexual education at the “boudoir” of Madame de St. Ange (which, in this case, is an island estate near Cartagena), where the pair are joined by St. Ange’s stepbrother Mirvel and their friend Dolmance. Instead of recreating eighteenth-century France as they did in *Justine*, however, Towers and Franco transfer Sade’s tale to late 1960s Europe, where the stepsiblings Madame de St. Ange and Mirvel thrive as a wealthy and promiscuous couple who belong to a secret cult devoted to
the Marquis de Sade. After having sex with Eugenie’s father, Madame de St. Ange convinces him to allow his daughter to spend a weekend with her on her island. Once the young girl arrives, Madame de St. Ange gradually begins her sexual initiation, first by introducing Eugenie to sex between females after they share a bath together, and then by drugging her so that she will participate in orgies involving both her hosts.

Along with drugs and the influence of immoral adults, the film also examines the corruptive effect of the sexually explicit literature that became increasingly available during the 1960s. As in Sade’s text, Eugenie’s education involves both intellectual discussion and physical demonstration. However, while the philosophy in Sade’s dialogue is that of the Enlightenment, this Eugenie instead encounters the perverse teachings of Sade himself when she stumbles upon a volume in Madame de St. Ange’s library. In a telling commentary about the sort of people who supposedly read Sade in the sixties, the criminal Mirvel casually quips that “No modern home is complete without the works of the Marquis,” and goes on to quote a passage from *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, in which Sade’s Madame de St. Ange instructs Eugénie to “profit from the fairest period of [her] life.”244 (In a later interview, the actress who portrayed Eugenie, Marie Liljedahl—who later regretted having appeared naked on camera as a nineteen year-old—would specify that she, for one, had never read “those sort of books.”) Sade’s texts play an important role throughout the film, beginning with the opening sequence,

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244 In the film, Mirvel truncates the passage considerably, avoiding the profanity of Sade’s original text: “‘Tis but folly in our parents when they foretell the disasters of the libertine career; there are thorns everywhere, but along the path of vice, roses bloom above them. Profit then from the fairest period of your life. These golden years of pleasure are only too few and too brief. For we are so fortunate as to have enjoyed them. Delicious memories console and amuse us in our old age. ‘Tis us, my dear. You will remain in human memory.” In the actual passage from the third dialogue of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (which can be found on pages 30 and following of the Grove Press edition or on pages 37 and following of the third volume of Michel Delon’s Pléiade edition), Dolmancé actually concludes, “‘tis by fucking, my dear, you will remain in human memory.”
which shows Madame de St. Ange (a scantily clad Maria Rohm) reading Sade in her bedroom. The book inspires a daydream, which is actually a recollection from one of her cult’s rituals: as Dolmance (played by Christopher Lee) reads from the preface to *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, Madame de St. Ange sacrifices a nude female victim laid before her on an altar, removing her heart and placing it in a cup from which she and the other participants drink. The theme of black masses and secret libertine societies, which appears often in Sade’s texts but not in *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, becomes central to the plot of *Eugenie*, as Mirvel later stands in a red-lit room and announces over eerie music that Eugenie herself will be sacrificed to the order, before proceeding to rape and deflower his semi-conscious victim. Fittingly, when Eugenie is first tortured as part of her initiation, physical and textual education combine, with Dolmance reading his own character’s pronouncements on cruelty from *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*.\(^\text{245}\) However, although Dolmancé’s remark in the text that women “contain themselves, and they suffer” refers to their inability to satisfy their cruel tastes, in the film the added phrase “as you, Eugenie, must suffer, too” refers not to Eugenie’s own developing sense of cruelty, which does not surface until the very end of the film, but to the torment she endures as Madame de St. Ange and Mirvel whip and bludgeon her before inserting a jagged, phallic object into her vagina (with the presumed insertion taking place off-screen).

Contrary to Sade’s text, which presents Eugenie’s depravity in a positive light, *Eugenie* instead comes across as a warning against taking the doctrines of the Marquis

\(^\text{245}\) Picking through a much longer passage in Sade’s text, Christopher Lee sternly reads, “Cruelty, far from being a vice, is the first sentiment nature injects in us all. Cruelty is natural; cruelty is simply energy in man which civilization has not yet altogether corrupted. Female cruelty is if anything more active than the male. Announce a cruel spectacle—a burning, a battle—you will see droves of women come running. But these occasions are not numerous enough to feed their fury. They contain themselves and they suffer, as you, Eugenie, must suffer, too.” The actual passage appears on pages 55 and following of the Grove Press translation (pages 68 and following of the third volume of Michel Delon’s Pléiade edition).
too literally, as do Madame de St. Ange and Mirvel. While proponents of the sexual revolution, as Steintrager suggests, might turn to Sade as a source of liberation, the film highlights the fundamentally repressive nature of his works, as, in addition to tormenting Eugenie, both Madame de St. Ange and Mirvel frequently abuse their lower-class servants, the pious maid Therese and the boatman and musician Augustin (who, tellingly, is portrayed by Anney Kablan, a black actor). In the film, the real revolution in the boudoir is not sexual but political, when Augustin eventually turns against Madame de St. Ange and participates in her murder. Although Eugenie shares several common elements with the contemporaneous De Sade, such as a continual focus on hallucination and dreams, as well as an abundant display of female nudity, that highlight the more attractive aspects of late 1960s culture, the film ultimately demonstrates how easily that environment could be used to manipulate the young and innocent. While Eugenie confesses to feeling some pleasure during her drug-induced erotic “dreams” for instance, she ultimately ends up killing both Mirvel and Madame de St. Ange, and is left alone on the island by Dolmance, who promises her that the police will arrive shortly to apprehend her for the murders. Using Sade’s texts to become a true disciple, the film warns, does not merely involve harmless orgies and playful whippings, but rape and murder.

Another examination of the negative influence of Sade and sexual liberation takes place in Franco’s 1970 film Eugenie de Sade, which is based upon Sade’s novella Eugénie de Franval. As he did with La Philosphie dans le boudoir, Franco takes the basic premise of Sade’s plot—in this case, the incestuous and eventually criminal relationship between a father and his daughter—and brings it into the twentieth century. Set amidst the dreary mid-winter landscape of suburban Berlin, Eugenie de Sade stars
Soledad Miranda in the title role as the stepdaughter of Albert Radeck de Franval, a celebrated author of erotic fiction with a secret taste for murder.\(^{246}\) Whereas Sade’s tale only features one homicide (the poisoning of Eugénie’s mother, which in turn brings about Eugénie’s own death through remorse and her father’s subsequent suicide), in Franco’s film father and daughter go on a homicidal rampage, using Eugenie’s beauty to lure unsuspecting victims to their deaths. The film opens, for instance, with Eugenie playfully undressing and caressing an unnamed woman, whom Albert promptly strangles, and later shows the murder of two other female victims, an erotic photo model and a hitchhiking student, both of whom perish after removing all or most of their clothing. (Eugenie later confesses that she and her father had murdered several other young men and women, disposing of their bodies in a lake behind their home.) As in Eugenie: The Story of Her Journey Into Perversion, one of the main themes of Eugenie de Sade is how the free-love culture of the era allows criminals to take advantage of unsuspecting, naive young victims. Like the incestuous stepsiblings Madame de St. Ange and Mirvel, the fashionably dressed Eugenie and her father come across as a typical wealthy “swinging” couple, and frequent posh nightclubs filled with jazz music and topless women. As a result of their chic image, when they stop to pick up the Austrian student Kitty she is immediately drawn to them, and gladly accepts both Eugenie’s invitation to stay the night and her gift of an open-front blouse that reveals her breasts, leaving no doubt as to the couple’s sexual intentions. Similarly, the anonymous photo model willingly provides her

\(^{246}\) As Franco explains in an interview included in the Blue Underground DVD, this shift from father to stepfather was required in order to avoid censorship: “I never made De Sade stories because I wanted to fight the establishment. I just wanted to be free to tell the story that I think is a beautiful story, with a wonderful relationship between the father and the daughter. I like it but I accepted to use a political father not a real father because I couldn’t do that anywhere in the world at that period. […] It’s a problem of taboo because it was impossible to do anywhere, you know?”
customers with S&M devices, unaware that they would only be used to immobilize and strangle her. Like Franco’s earlier *Eugenie, Eugenie de Sade* illustrates the dangers of free love, and shows how easily sex with strangers can become fatal.

In addition to its portrayal of anonymous and extramarital sex, *Eugenie de Sade* also comments upon another by-product of the sexual revolution, the increasingly widespread availability of erotic fiction. Like *Eugenie: The Story of Her Journey Into Perversion*, *Eugenie de Sade* focuses on the role of the erotic text in corrupting youth, as it is through the volumes of her father’s library that Eugenie awakens both her sexual and homicidal urges. One day, while her father is away, Eugenie uncovers a tiny hidden tome, “an old, rare edition of an erotic book which had survived many generations, and had become a classic.” At first, the book in question seems to be a standard erotic work, full of clichés and overused metaphors (“Oh, her breasts pressing against my chest!” Eugenie reads, “Oh, her eager mouth! Her sex opening like a flower before my own”). However, it soon becomes apparent that Eugenie has stumbled upon a book that, if not actually by Sade himself, certainly belongs to the Sadean vein, as the narrator describes not some banal romantic coupling, but an eroticized murder: “Her look—in which pain and pleasure was so intimately entwined so as to be indistinguishable. A bloody string of pearls graced her neck, dropping one by one on my body, each leaving a stain upon it. The gaping wound in her chest….” While Albert’s return home interrupts Eugenie’s reading, prompting her to return the volume to the shelf, later that evening her father informs her that he is aware of her literary tastes, and suggests that she continue to read such texts from now on. In the next sequence, Eugenie retires to her room, where she removes her stockings and panties and begins caressing herself, grinding her hips into the
bed with the door open for her father to see. Significantly, a book lies next to her body, solidifying the role of erotic fiction in awakening Eugenie’s senses. The next day, Eugenie finds another book that her father had deliberately left out for her, one that tells the story of an incestuous relationship between a father and his daughter Eugenie. While the work is not actually Sade’s Eugénie de Franval, but a more explicit variation on the novella, it is clear that Franco intends to suggest that Eugenie is in fact reading Sade, especially since the volume is of an even smaller format than the preceding one, recalling Sade’s original eighteenth century editions. Moreover, Alfred speaks to Eugenie later that night as if the book had given her some profound philosophical insight into “life’s deepest purpose,” which involves taking pleasure in the pain and suffering of others. Convinced by her reading, Eugenie immediately agrees to follow her father on a path to pleasure through “wounds and blood and death.”

Eugenie de Sade highlights the dangerously seductive nature of both literature and sex, a pairing that the film portrays symbolically through the murderous couple of the sexy Eugenie and her well-read father. Through its juxtaposition of real homicides with erotic fiction, the film pokes fun at the general public’s fascination with morbid eroticism, suggesting that most readers of such works remain ignorant of their deeper implications. For instance, shortly after murdering the photo model, Alfred appears at a conference in Paris, where he is hounded by a group of autograph-seeking female fans, all of them middle-aged bourgeois women. Unbeknownst to them, Alfred’s writings are

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247 The novel read in the film describes intercourse far more graphically than does Sade: “Eugenie had opened her eyes. Before her stood her father who had surreptitiously come into her room. She was naked, and she knew that her small, pointed breasts often caught his eye. That’s why she offered them to her father’s lips, as he knelt by the bed and began to bite her nipples, his desire showing, while his hand sought out her sex—fresh, wet. His caresses made her realize for the first time that she had become a woman, and now, at this very moment, her father was but a man breathing hard with desire, a Machiavellian look in his eyes.”
so appealing precisely because he has firsthand experience with murder. Fittingly, the only person who sees through the couple’s facade is another author, Attila Tanner (played by Franco himself), whose close reading of Alfred’s work convinces him that the writer has moved from fiction and theory to practice. In addition to its warnings about free love and erotic fiction, however, *Eugenie de Sade* also comments upon its historical context through a reference to contemporary politics. Like Madame de St. Ange and Mirvel in *Eugenie: The Story of Her Journey Into Perversion*, Alfred and his daughter belong to the social elite, and use their status to take advantage of the lower classes; while Madame de St. Ange and Mirvel abuse their black servant Augustin and eventually murder their maid Therese, Alfred and Eugenie prey upon young and isolated victims on the margins of society, such as sex workers and poor students.

One such victim is Paul, a scruffy trumpet player whom Eugenie, on her father’s instruction, seduces in order to lure him to his death. As Eugenie and Paul enter the musician’s tiny attic apartment on the outskirts of city, ducking to avoid laundry hanging from a clothesline across the room, the contrast between the Franval residence and Paul’s dwelling becomes striking. Whereas Eugenie had grown up amidst the signs of luxury, Paul leads the life of a struggling artist, possessing little more than his tiny bed and radio. His concrete walls are covered in posters, including one of a topless blonde woman, whose nipple Eugenie absentmindedly caresses during a later scene. On the opposite side of the room, another poster features a black and white image of Che Guevara, shown laughing with Fidel Castro and smoking his trademark cigar. Recognizing Guevara, probably because she had seen his image used in student movements over the preceding years, Eugenie walks over to the poster, but is initially unable to remember the man’s
name. When she finally exclaims, “I know! It’s Che Guevara,” she mispronounces “Guevara” and Paul has to correct her. As a privileged child of the upper class, Eugenie possesses only a superficial familiarity with Guevara’s image, but knows nothing about his ideas or achievements. Paul, however, claims to have a much more thorough understanding of Che. His voice filled with admiration, Paul explains that Guevara “knew what he wanted: revolution against a continent’s exploiters and sundry tyrants. They got him in the end.” Placing a fist on the poster in a sign of solidarity, Paul continues: “But he fought them, and he fought ‘em well. And yet, they killed him as if he were a mad dog. They thought they’d cripple the revolution. And all they did was give it a hero.” For Paul, Che’s dream did not end with his assassination in Bolivia in 1967; rather, the revolution persists even after his death, and the struggling musician seems to envision himself as somehow contributing to the movement. Turning toward Eugenie, Paul finally asks her why she came to his apartment. “To make love,” she replies, before the scene ends with the couple kissing in bed, with Che’s picture overlooking them in the upper left-hand corner of screen.

At first, the visit to Paul’s apartment appears to show how the political and sexual liberation movements of the late 1960s coincide. Eugenie, however, sees things differently. “Paul,” she reflects, “was the ideal victim. Father was right: he was highly sensitive, a fact which he tried to hide behind tough-guy attitudes. Deep inside, he was a hopeless romantic.” In the end, Paul’s leftist romanticism ends up making him just as susceptible to manipulation and abuse as the sexually promiscuous Kitty; his admiration

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248 The French version of Paul’s salute is slightly different: “Lui, il savait ce qu’il voulait : la révolution contre les mecs qui profitent un peu trop des autres. Ils ont fini par l’avoir. Pourtant il s’est battu contre tout le monde. De son vivant, il ne craignait personne. Quand ils l’ont eu, ils ont cru que tout était fini. Au contraire, ils vont voir que ça ne fait que commencer.”
for Che comes across as being just as naive as the enthusiasm of sexual revolutionaries in their call for free love. Eugenie even passes judgment regarding Paul’s political views, remarking how “He still hurled himself headlong into political monologues. I’d qualify his views as dreamy idealism; a quality which suited him perfectly well, and, made him a passionate lover.” As Eugenie quickly realizes, Paul’s desire for revolution was not entirely sincere, but merely springs from displaced sexual energy. Of course, Paul’s choice of posters first hinted at inconsistencies in his political convictions, as the photo of a topless blonde woman would surely conflict with Che Guevara’s Marxist notions of moral purity. Impressed by his passion, Eugenie quickly falls in love with Paul, and suffers just as much as he does when, in accordance with her father’s instructions, she is forced to abandon him for a few weeks. Unable to spend a few days without Paul, let alone participate in his murder, Eugenie disobeys her father, and the two lovers plan to

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249 Further evidence of Franco’s rather critical view of the fascination with Che Guevara can be found in his participation in Richard Fleischer’s 1969 film *Che!* (where Franco held a minor role as a sergeant), which presents both Guevara and Castro in a decidedly unflattering light.
run off together. Before they have a chance, however, as Alfred kills Paul, fatally wounds Eugenie, and then commits suicide himself, giving Franco’s *Eugenie de Sade* an ending as bleak as that of the novella upon which it is based.

In fact, Franco’s mockery of student revolutionaries in *Eugenie de Sade* reflects the director’s general sense of wariness regarding political involvement at the close of the 1960s. Although the summer of 1969 may have featured the pinnacle of the counterculture movement at Woodstock, the year also saw the horrendous Manson murders and the outbreak of violence at the Altamont Free Concert. Both incidents attest to the decline of the hippie movement as it began to attract a host of undesirable characters, and it is the manner in which such figures prey upon their victims that emerges as a common theme within Franco’s films.\(^{250}\) The Manson murders, for instance, coincided with the filming of *Eugenie: The Story of Her Journey into Perversion* and its fictional tale of a highly literate yet nonetheless dangerous cult. Franco’s films of the period also attempt to point out the inconsistencies between free love and political radicalism by presenting an essentially hedonistic view of sexuality. His two *Eugenies* highlight paradoxes within calls for sexual liberation by stressing that sex is a violent and potentially dangerous activity. Indeed, if *Marquis de Sade’s Justine* seems to emulate the hippie ideal, it stands alone as an aberration within Franco’s oeuvre. At the same time, however, Franco’s erotic horror films exploit the very attractiveness of sexually charged murder, in way that somewhat parallels Sade’s dubious moral excuses at the beginning of *Justine* (*Œuvres* 2.127-132). Like Sade, Franco makes frequent use of irony

\(^{250}\) As historian Josh Sides notes, “By 1968, antihippie hostility was driven much more by the threat of violence from hardened criminals who had come to exploit the naiveté of hippies” (68). Such criminals, according to Sides, included “AWOL soldiers and draft evaders, white and black winos, black and white thugs. What they generally had in common was their rejection of LSD and marijuana in favor of opiates, barbiturates, and amphetamines, and their predisposition to criminal—often violent—activity” (75).
throughout his films, providing half-serious moral justifications for his use of sex and violence to entertain. If his films often question the revolutionary spirit of the sixties and highlight how easily the permissive environment could lead to abuse, he does so playfully, mocking his own era from the perspective of an involved participant rather than a disgruntled exterior critic. Thus, Paul’s misguided admiration for Che communicates the director’s greater frustration with the intellectual establishment of his day, which stressed political engagement through art, often at the expense of entertainment. As Franco explained in a 1991 interview, he began his career when “Everybody had the pretense […] of spreading messages through cinema,” and felt that “using the camera for this kind of thing strikes me, in the end, as a symptom of incapacity. And the best example of this trend is Antonioni […]” (Aguilar 152). (In this respect, Franco’s attitude resembles that of Buñuel, who likewise affirmed “Je n’aime pas la politique. Dans ce domaine, je suis délivré de toute illusion depuis quarante ans. Je n’y crois plus” [Mon Dernier Soupir 285]). Unlike Antonioni (or, one might add, Pasolini), Franco refused to incorporate political messages into his cinema. Instead, his adaptations of Sade present a bleak yet erotically enticing world of perverse and murderous libertines.

Celebrating Decadence: Sade and the Hedonistic Seventies

Outside of Salò, cinematic adaptations of Sade during the 1970s tend to celebrate the very atmosphere of permissiveness and consumption that Pasolini sought to denounce. Franco himself participated in this consumer society through the sheer volume
of shamelessly repetitive (and often forgettable) films he directed during the period.\footnote{After \textit{Eugenie de Sade}, Franco began work on an adaptation of \textit{Juliette}, but had to stop production midway through the film when lead actress Soledad Miranda was tragically killed in a car accident on August 18, 1970. He again attempted to film \textit{Juliette} in 1975 with Lina Romay in the starring role, but for some reason the film was never released (instead, Italian director Joe D’Amato spliced together footage from \textit{Juliette} and two other Franco films to make \textit{Justine and the Whip}, a 1979 film about an abused prostitute). Franco had considerably more success with \textit{La Philosophie dans le boudoir}, however, and made several remakes of \textit{Eugenie: The Story of Her Journey Into Perversion} during the 1970s: \textit{Plaisir à trois} (1974), \textit{Cocktail Spécial} (1978), and \textit{Eugenie (Historia de una perversión)} (1980). He also filmed a liberal adaptation of the Bressac episode from \textit{Justine} entitled \textit{Sinfonía erotica} (1980).} A more sophisticated take on Sade prior to \textit{Salò} is French director Claude Pierson’s 1972 film \textit{Justine de Sade}, an “adaptation fidèle en roman-film” that closely follows the text of Sade’s novel by using condensed passages from \textit{Justine} to compose the film’s dialogue.\footnote{For instance, the opening sequence, in which a suspicious brothel matron inspects Juliette’s virginity, directly quotes the text of the novel, as does the following scene, which places an abbreviated version of Sade’s preface over scenes of a topless Juliette receiving clients on her way to a successful career in vice (the passages appear in \textit{Œuvres} 136-137 and 131-132). \textit{Justine de Sade} also features a significant dose of philosophy, as many of Justine’s captors take the time to explain their personal doctrines to her, from La Dubois’s defense of poor criminals to Bressac’s praise of passive sodomy and Clément’s lecture on the pleasures of making women suffer, each of which uses direct quotes from the novel (\textit{Œuvres} 153ff., 181ff., and 261-271, respectively).} Perhaps the most interesting of these adaptations, however, comes from the Japanese genre known as \textit{roman poruno} (short for either “romantic pornography” or the French “roman pornographique”), a high-budget version of softcore erotica produced by the mainstream Nikkatsu studio between 1971 and 1988.\footnote{William Johnson provides further insight into “roman poruno” in “A New View of Porn: The Films of Tatsumi Kumashiro,” where he also explains why Kumashiro should be considered a “serious” director. See also the essays collected in Jack Hunter’s \textit{Eros in Hell: Sex, Blood, and Madness in Japanese Cinema}, and Jasper Sharp’s \textit{Behind the Pink Curtain: The Complete History of Japanese Sex Cinema}, especially pages 123 and following.} In 1973, Japanese filmmaker Tatsumi Kumashiro became the first to make a \textit{roman poruno} based on one of Sade’s works with \textit{Onna Jigoku: Mori wa Nureta} (which translates to “Female Hell: The Woods are Wet”), a literal adaptation of an episode from the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of \textit{La Nouvelle Justine}. Kumashiro had obviously read Shibusawa’s 1965 translation of \textit{La Nouvelle Justine}. 

\textit{Justine de Sade} also features a significant dose of philosophy, as many of Justine’s captors take the time to explain their personal doctrines to her, from La Dubois’s defense of poor criminals to Bressac’s praise of passive sodomy and Clément’s lecture on the pleasures of making women suffer, each of which uses direct quotes from the novel (\textit{Œuvres} 153ff., 181ff., and 261-271, respectively).
Nouvelle Justine, as he chose for his film a lesser known passage that appears only in the final, expanded version of the Justine saga, in which the heroine encounters a wealthy homicidal couple, Monsieur and Madame d’Esterval, who maintain a hotel deep in the forest solely for the pleasure of raping and murdering their guests. Transporting the setting of the tale from eighteenth-century France to Depression-era Japan, Kumashiro otherwise follows Sade’s text to the letter, changing only the names of the characters to suit their Japanese nationality (Justine’s character is called Sachiko, while Monsieur and Madame d’Esterval go by the names of Ryonusuke and Yoko, respectively), and replacing the merchants who are the first victims in Sade’s version with a pair of hunters. Several of the characters’ lines are taken directly from the novel, such as when Yoko convinces Sachiko to join her at the hotel or when Ryonusuke instructs Sachiko of her task, which is to attempt to warn the guests of their impending doom and help them escape (alas, the hotel is full of booby traps, and the guests end up dying despite the heroine’s best efforts). Even the orgy scenes meticulously follow Sade’s text, as Ryonusuke whips everyone indiscriminately and sodomizes the two hunters as they copulate with Yoko and Sachiko in order to save their lives. As in the novel, Yoko and Ryonusuke fatally shoot the men just as everyone is about to climax; Yoko then trembles in a prolonged state of orgasm thanks to her dead partner’s rigid member, while Sachiko ends up covered in blood, and Ryonusuke eventually places the two women (along with the couple’s two female servants) on top of his victims for further intercourse. Despite such graphic violence, however, the orgies in Onna Jigoku appear as festive occasions, especially when the rhythmic cracking of Ryonusuke’s whip provides a mesmerizing musical accompaniment to the revelry. As in Sade’s novel, the unbridled joy of the
libertines (in this case, Ryonusuke, Yoko, and their two servants) clearly overshadows the terror of their victims, leading the viewer to identify more closely with the tormentors than the tormented.

Like Franco and Pierson before him, Kumashiro faced the challenge of transferring Sade’s sexually explicit texts to film without venturing into hardcore pornography, but to an even greater extent than his European counterparts since he had chosen the most obscene version of Justine. Moreover, showing pubic hair was strictly forbidden in Japan, and so Kumashiro had to somehow convey to his viewers precisely what was going on without showing the lower half of his actors’ bodies. While Kumashiro mainly relies upon the time-tested technique of conveniently placed objects and carefully positioned bodies to achieve this effect, he also obscured scenes of intercourse by editing large black boxes, sometimes covering as much as half the screen, into the film’s final cut. In fact, the primary use of the boxes was not really to hide forbidden images, since the actors engaging in simulated intercourse were always partially covered in any case. Instead, Kumashiro inserted the black boxes to protest against the arbitrary standards of Japanese censors, whose guidelines against pubic hair prohibited him from making the film he wanted. As a result, the film’s scenes of rape and murder end up becoming comical, as the black boxes appear and disappear from view with no apparent relation to the actors’ movements, at times obscuring inoffensive body parts or furniture rather than the actors’ covered genital regions. Later, during the 1976 trial of the film Ai no korrida (better known in English as In the Realm of the Senses), the judges would argue that the use of such bokashi, or masking devices,
actually increased the image’s ability to arouse by suggesting what was hidden.\textsuperscript{254}

Kumashiro’s use of \textit{bokashi} in \textit{Onna Jikogu} seems to anticipate this interpretation by turning his film into an absurdist response to the artistic limitations imposed by censorship.

\textsuperscript{254} For more on the use of \textit{bokashi} by Kumashiro and others, see Cather (203) and Johnson (16).
In terms of artistry, *Onna Jikogu* by far surpasses Franco’s adaptations of Sade, a superiority that results as much from Nikkatsu’s high budgets and professional actors as it does from the skill levels of the two directors. Nonetheless, Kumashiro’s take on Sade shares much in common with Franco, notably in its defiant approach toward censorship, the one political cause both directors seemed willing to adopt. Moreover, Kumashiro and Franco express a mutual fascination with aristocratic decadence, a theme that, incidentally, remains relatively consistent from Sade’s original works through their later literary and cinematic adaptations, including Pasolini’s *Salò*. It is not by chance, for example, that Kumashiro set his film in the Japan of the 1930s, as the period became known for its sexual immorality, characterized by the *Ero guro nansensu* movement in art and literature and the scandalous Sada Abe incident of 1936 (which would later provide the basis for *Ai no korrida*).\(^{255}\) The hedonistic and relatively open atmosphere of the 1970s provides a convenient parallel with the *Ero guro* period, making the aftermath of the sexual revolution an implicit subject in the films of Kumashiro and other roman poruno directors, just as it appears more openly in the work of Franco and Pasolini. However, whereas Pasolini would reject his era’s “false permissiveness” as yet another method in which neo-capitalist Fascism enslaves mindless consumers, Franco and Kumashiro would instead exploit the theme of promiscuous sex, accentuating rather than degrading the erotic appeal of the nude body. Contemporary society may be decadent, their films suggest, but that does not preclude using such corruption as a source of enjoyment.

In a sense, Kumashiro and Franco held a more realistic view of the sexual politics of their era than Pasolini. Surprisingly, despite Pasolini’s view of the subtle machinations through which consumerism ensnares its victims, the structure of power appears entirely forthright in Salò, as the libertines exert immediate and obvious dominance over their prisoners from the onset. The villains in Franco and Kumashiro, on the contrary, rely upon deceit to lure their victims to their deaths, often through the promise of sexual fulfillment (for instance, the two hunters in Onna Jikogu lose their chance to escape when they rape Sachiko, whom they believe is a prostitute, just as Kitty is murdered while participating in a sexual game in Eugenie de Sade). Thus, on one hand, when Ryonusuke tells Sachiko, “What you accept as ethical is contrived by those in authority so they can control people,” he expresses Kumashiro’s stringent opposition to censorship as a mechanism of political control. At the same time, however, Ryonusuke is of course attempting to manipulate Sachiko so that she will participate in his cruel and murderous games. Thus, when compared to the hedonistic and decadent behavior of Franco and Kumashiro’s characters, Pasolini’s treatment of politics appears rather naïve and unrealistic. Despite its darkness, Salò does contain its brief moment of sexual and political liberation, when Ezio, one of the collaborators, is caught having sex with a black maid. Although race plays little role in Salò (which is rather surprising for a film supposedly about Fascism), Ezio’s forbidden interracial affair embodies the spirit of the sexual revolution and its advocacy of love regardless of social and racial boundaries. As the four libertines rush into the room, Ezio jumps out of bed and, calmly and resolutely, raises his fist in a Communist salute. In what Pasolini would claim to be the only

256 This is the argument Sharp makes in his chapter “Roman Porno: The Films, Their Makers and Their Stars” (Behind the Pink Curtain 137-138).
A positive moment in *Salò*—“a moment of political consciousness, which throws an unexpected light over the whole film”—, the camera focuses in on Ezio standing defiantly, his gaze directed toward the horizon in a visionary fashion.\(^{257}\)

Astonished, the libertines temporarily lower their weapons, as if aware that Communism represents the one true threat to their hold on power. Although the duke eventually pushes forward and begins firing, killing first Ezio and then the maid, Pasolini’s message is clear: only Marxism can resist the Neo-Fascist powers of consumerism.\(^{258}\) This is

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\(^{257}\) In response to the question “Questo mondo ‘buono’ [which Pasolini had identified as ‘il grande mondo dei contadini, degli artigiani, dei sottoproletari, e anche della piccola borghesia innocente’] entra in qualche modo nel film?” Pasolini replied: “No, perché le vittime non è che siano molto migliori dei signori: soltanto uno—ma questo non ve lo dico perché voglio che sia una sorpresa—soltanto uno improvvisamente ha un attimo di coscienza politica, e getta un’improvvisa luce su tutto il film” (De Giusti 173).

\(^{258}\) Such is the statement Pasolini made in his 1975 essay “La droga: una vera tragedia italiana”: “Il grande fenomeno della perdita non riscarita dei valori—che include il fenomeno estremistico di massa della droga—riguarda dunque tutti i giovani del nostro paese (eccettuati per ora, come ho già avuto occasione di dire, coloro che hanno fatto l’unica scelta culturale elementare possibile: i giovani iscritti al Pci)” (*Lettere Luterane* 90). In English: “The great phenomenon of the uncompensated loss of values, which includes the extreme mass phenomenon of the use of drugs, therefore affects all the young people in our country (with the exception, as I have often said, of those who have made the only elementary cultural choice possible, the young people who have become members of the PCI)” (*Lutheran Letters* 62).
precisely the sort of political and intellectual posturing that Franco sought to ridicule with his portrayal of the young pseudo-revolutionary Paul.

Franco and Kumashiro, on the contrary, show politics to be no match for the alluring appeal of sexual and criminal pleasure. Unlike Pasolini’s cold and detached libertines, their villains actually enjoy their crimes, and the directors present scenes of sex and murder in a deliberately arousing manner. In this respect, they more closely follow the tone of Sade’s texts, which combine sexual stimulation with philosophy, humor, and social commentary, without ever making eroticism subservient to intellectual or political matters, as does Pasolini. For instance, although both Pasolini and Franco would use Sade to criticize the sexual revolution, Franco does so in a more playful and sexually arousing manner. Calvino was thus half right when he called *Salò* “a film more faithful to the words of Sade than was necessary and much too far from the spirit of Sade to justify this literal fidelity” (109). Pasolini may not have followed Sade’s words as literally as Calvino tends to believe, but he certainly did stray from Sade’s spirit. Perhaps the main problem with Pasolini’s *Salò* is that the director tries too hard to fit Sade’s *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* to his own ideological aims. Sade may in fact be impossible to film, as Barthes and Foucault argue, but if there is a place for the Marquis in cinema, it would certainly be closer to the sort of artsy erotica of Jess Franco and the *roman poruno* of Kumashiro than to the rigorous intellectualism of Pasolini.
Conclusion: Censoring Sade in the Twenty-First Century

In 2005, the United States Department of Justice, under the leadership of then Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, created the Obscenity Prosecution Task Force (OPTF), a special unit “dedicated exclusively to the protection of America’s children and families through the enforcement of our Nation’s obscenity laws.” The laws in question appear in Title 18, Part I, Chapter 71, Sections 1461, 1462, and 1465, respectively, of the United States Criminal Code, and make it is a federal crime to mail “obscene or crime-inciting matter,” to import or transport “obscene matters,” including over the internet, and to produce and transport “obscene matters for sale or distribution.” (As the OPTF notes in its “Citizen’s Guide to Federal Obscenity Laws,” “it is a crime to use the mail to send or receive obscene materials, to import obscenity, to ship or receive obscenity by a common carrier, or to transport obscene materials across state lines for sale or distribution, including by computer”). Although creating, possessing, and viewing obscene material is no longer illegal in the United States, the act of sending or receiving such material is. Unfortunately, the only guidelines to determine what in fact constitutes obscenity remain those outlined in the 1973 Supreme Court Decision in Miller v. California, which poses a tripartite test to identify illegal obscene material: “whether ‘the average person, applying contemporary community standards’ would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest […] ; (b) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the


260 As the website’s “Citizen’s Guide to Federal Obscenity Laws” notes, “While even the mere possession of child pornography is a crime, private possession of obscenity is not, although the act of receiving obscenity could violate the statutes prohibiting use of the mails, carriers, or interactive computer services for the purpose of transporting such material.”
applicable state law; and (c) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.” Thus, an individual could unknowingly commit a federal offense by merely downloading sexually explicit images over the internet or receiving them through the mail, since the question of whether or not they constitute obscenity can only be determined by a jury. (Helpfully, the “Citizen’s Guide to Federal Obscenity Laws” provides definitions of the relevant terms in Miller, lest there be any confusion: “the prurient interest” means “an erotic, lascivious, abnormal, unhealthy, degrading, shameful, or morbid interest in nudity, sex, or excretion,” while “sexual conduct” includes “ultimate sexual acts, normal or perverted, actual or simulated, masturbation, excretory functions, lewd exhibition of the genitals, or sado-masochistic sexual abuse.”)

The OPTF is but the latest in a long line of federal efforts to combat obscenity, appearing two decades after former Attorney General Edwin Meese III created the National Obscenity Enforcement Unit in 1986. What makes the OPTF different from its previous incarnations is its success in prosecuting obscenity in a society where the unit’s stated primary target, “hardcore pornography,” has evolved into a multi-billion dollar industry whose revenue belies its mainstream status. Nonetheless, the task force has been remarkably diligent over the past few years, as over 360 defendants were charged with obscenity violations during the Bush administration, including 54 in 2008 alone. (Under current Attorney General Eric Holder, the OPTF has been noticeably less active, charging only 20 defendants in 2009.)

Taking advantage of the federal government’s vast resources, the Department of Justice has mobilized various law enforcement agencies to

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help prosecute obscenity, including the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and local police departments.

In 2007, for instance, the Los Angeles Police Department Vice Squad sent Detective Michael Ozaki undercover to the annual Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas. Ozaki’s “investigation” resulted in an FBI operation against Evil Angel, one of the most successful companies in the industry. FBI Special Agent Daniel Bradley ordered 2 Evil Angel DVDs—Milk Nymphos and Storm Squirters 2: Target Practice—from a website based in Baltimore, Maryland, and had them sent to a mailbox in Washington, D.C., where another agent allegedly picked them up and brought them to Bradley’s Virginia office (Bradley also viewed the five-minute internet trailer for another Evil Angel film, Fetish Fanatic 5, in January 2008). In April 2008, Evil Angel owner John Stagliano was indicted on federal obscenity charges for distributing the two DVDs and the internet trailer, facing a maximum prison sentence of 32 years and over $7 million in fines. In addition to the standard close-up shots of vaginal, anal, and oral penetration, the material in question featured milk enemas, urination, and even a foot insertion. During the ensuing trial, however, which took place in July 2010 at the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, the prosecution’s CD-R copies of the trailer to Fetish Fanatic 5 failed to play in court, leading the judge to dismiss all charges pertaining to the video. In the end, the judge dismissed all remaining charges because the Assistant U.S. Attorneys prosecuting the case had failed to establish any link between Stagliano himself and the two DVDs.262

A similar dismissal had taken place in October 2007, when charges were dropped against JM Productions and its owner, Jeff Steward, because federal prosecutors were unable to verify business records that they claimed linked the defendants to the four DVDs suspected of obscenity (Filthy Things 6, American Bukakke 13, and Gag Factor 15 and 18, all of which featured female performers covered in ejaculate and ingesting large quantities of semen). Like the Stagliano case, the prosecution of JM Productions began with the LAPD and later involved the FBI, which ordered copies of the DVDs from an Arizona-based distributor, Five Star Productions, and had them shipped to the FBI headquarters in Virginia. During the course of the trial, lack of evidence led to all charges being dropped against the employees of Five Star Productions as well, so that the only remaining defendant was the corporation itself, which the jury eventually found guilty of violating 18 USC 1465, the section pertaining to the “transportation of obscene matters for sale or distribution,” for the DVD Gag Factor 18. By the time Five Star Productions was sentenced to two years’ probation in February 2008, however, the company had already gone out of business.263

While Stagliano and Steward were fortunate to have their cases dropped as a result of prosecutorial incompetence, other defendants have not been so lucky. On October 3, 2008, Paul Little of Max World Entertainment was sentenced to 46 months in prison following his conviction on twenty counts of federal obscenity charges for transmitting obscene material via the internet and for mailing five DVDs (Max Hardcore


Extreme Vol. 20, Pure Max 19 Euro Edition, Fists of Fury 4: Euro Edition, Planet Max 16: Euro Edition) to an undercover postal inspector in Tampa, Florida. In March 2009, Robert Zicari and Janet Romano, co-owners of Extreme Associates, pleaded guilty to distributing three DVDs (Forced Entry: Director’s Cut, Cocktails #2: Director’s Cut, and Extreme Teen #24) through the mail and six video clips over the internet in Western Pennsylvania. In July 2009, Zicari and Romano each received prison sentences of a year and a day, followed by two years of supervised release. As in the Little case, the investigation had been conducted by the United States Postal Inspection Service, with the assistance from the Pornography Unit of the LAPD’s Organized Crime and Vice Division. Other notable victories for the OPTF include Danilo Croce’s 2007 guilty plea in Orlando for distributing DVDs containing scenes of defecation and coprophagia, the


265 Mark Kernes, “Behind the Extreme Associates Guilty Plea,” Avn.com, 11 March 2009. In a press release, the United States Attorney’s Office in Pittsburgh provided a detailed account of the content of the DVDs: “Forced Entry portrays the rape and murder of three women, who are slapped, hit, spit upon and generally abused and degraded throughout graphic portrayals of forced sex acts. In Cocktails #2, women engage in sex acts with multiple partners while a bowl, placed in front of the women, is filled with various bodily liquids. At the conclusion of each vignette, the women drink the concoction. Finally, Extreme Teen #24 portrays abusive sexual acts between adult males and females dressed to look like minor children” (“Extreme Associates and Its Owners, Robert Zicari and Janet Romano, Plead Guilty to Violating Federal Obscenity Laws,” US DOJ Press Release, 11 March 2009, http://www.justice.gov/usao/paw/pr/2009_march/2009_03_11_01.html). It should be noted that the rapes and murders in Forced Entry were simulated, and that all female performers (including Romano herself) testified that they were not harmed during filming.

266 In a statement, U.S. Attorney Mary Beth Buchanan remarked, “Extreme Associates produced and distributed sexually degrading material that portrayed women in the most vile and depraved manner imaginable. These prison sentences affirm the need to continue to protect the public from obscene, lewd, lascivious or filthy material, the production of which degrades all of us” (http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/extreme-associates-and-its-owners-robert-zicari-and-janet-romano-sentenced-for-violating-federal-obscenity-laws-62099612.html; US DOJ memo 1 July 2009).
2008 conviction of online distributor Loren Jay Adams for shipping DVDs depicting bestiality and fisting to an FBI agent in Martinsburg, West Virginia, and the July 2010 guilty plea of Barry Goldman, operator of the website *Torture Portal*, for shipping the bondage DVDs “Torture of a Porn Store Girl,” “Defiant Crista Submits,” and “Pregnant and Willing” through the mail to FBI agents in Montana and Virginia.\(^{267}\) The OPTF’s efforts have not been limited to visual obscenity, however, as writer Karen Fletcher pleaded guilty in Pittsburgh in August 2008 for publishing stories that, according to a Department of Justice memo, described “the sexual abuse, rape, torture, and murder of newborn to teenage children.” (Fletcher was sentenced to five years probation.)\(^{268}\) Iowa resident Chris Handley, for instance, pled guilty in May 2009 to receiving “Japanese manga drawings of minor females being sexually abused by adult males and animals.”\(^{269}\)

The recent efforts to prosecute visual and written obscenity in the United States open the question of whether the works of the Marquis de Sade might once again face trial, as they did in France in the 1950s and Japan in the 1960s. After all, Sade’s texts hold the distinction of containing all the elements that made the aforementioned DVDs and stories obscene: violent sexual acts, urination, rape, torture, defecation, coprophagia, incest, pedophilia, bestiality, and murder can all be found in his works. Yet future


attempts to bring obscenity charges against Sade’s publishers seem unlikely in twenty-first-century America, for several reasons. First of all, it remains to be seen whether the Obama administration will maintain the anti-obscenity zeal of its predecessors (although the Obscenity Prosecution Task Force does indeed appear to be here to stay). Secondly, a century’s worth of arguments defending the social value of Sade’s texts, from intellectuals such as Bataille, Beauvoir, and Breton, would most likely suffice to establish their “serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” under the Miller test. (Although the prosecution could conceivably counter, as I have done in the preceding chapters, that many intellectuals have responded to Sade’s works by stressing their appeal to the prurient interest.) Third, Sade’s works are extremely dated, and the Department of Justice seems primarily interested in prosecuting individuals who are currently active in the production and distribution of obscene material. With the Extreme Associates case, for instance, the government chose to focus on the company’s 2002 remake of Shaun Costello’s original 1971 film, even though the original version, which also contained scenes of simulated rape and murder, was re-released on DVD by After Hours Cinema in 2007, and, until recently, was available for sale on amazon.com (I ordered a copy from Amazon in December 2009). Originally written and published in the late eighteenth century, Sade’s texts were last reprinted by Grove Press in the early 1990s, using the same English translations that first appeared in the 1960s. Thus, while a contemporary written (or cinematic) remake of one of Sade’s texts might face prosecution, the Grove Press translations, with their scholarly prefaces and lack of illustrations, appear to be safe, at least for the time being.

But perhaps the main reason Sade’s works are unlikely to be prosecuted today is
that, in many respects, the Marquis de Sade is already censored in twenty-first-century American society. The fact that the Grove Press editions omit the sexually explicit engravings that adorn Sade’s original editions is but one example of how contemporary representations of the Marquis steer clear of his most offensive attributes. In Philip Kaufman’s *Quills* (2000), for instance, Sadean sexuality is drastically toned down, so that all that remains is a rather vague suggestion of naughty behavior and scandalous texts, which in turn become symbols of artistic freedom. Doug Wright’s 1995 play (on which the film is based) actually provides several fictional excerpts from Sade’s works, which do feature typically Sadean themes such as torture, murder, and homosexuality, but fall far short of what can actually be found in *La Nouvelle Justine* and *Juliette*; in the film, only two of these stories are referenced.270 Both the theatrical and cinematic versions of *Quills* depict the laundress Madeleine Leclerc eagerly asking Sade if his latest novel is “awfully violent” and “terribly erotic” (183), suggesting that nothing in his texts extends beyond what a working-class woman might conceive of as simple entertainment. In fact, in the film the introduction to a tale about “a man whose sexual appetites might discreetly be described as postmortem” can be heard when Madeleine reads to her blind mother, pushing both women to laughter rather than terror. As Madeleine tells Dr. Royer-Collard, Sade’s literature is “preposterous […] So extreme, sir, one can’t take it as truth. One can only laugh” (198). Thus, if we take offense at Sade’s stories, it is because our

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270 In the play’s Ganymede story, for instance, the Duc de Blangis ensnares his beautiful male victim in an uncured hide, and proceeds to feed Ganymede until his body collapses upon itself (177-180). The Dolmance story involves a libertine who kidnaps, rapes, and tortures virgins (198-199), the introduction to another tale involves necrophilia (205-206), and the unfinished story of the prostitute Fanchon ends with De Curval cutting out her tongue before perforating her body (214-216). Only these last two “texts” appear in the film.
excessive prudishness prohibits us from receiving the works in their intended spirit. The film shows the working-class servants at Charenton enjoying Sade’s tales without scruple and the people of Paris eagerly purchasing copies of *Justine*, making the novel a bestseller. Although neither the play nor the film provides any indication of the vulgar language that fills Sade’s pages—instead, in both versions the abbé de Coulmier notes “the tireless repetition of the words ‘nipple’ and ‘pikestaff’” (190)—the film goes even further in exonerating Sade’s works, stripping them of their offensive content and reducing them to conventional erotica.

For instance, after Royer-Collard’s innocent wife Simone (who, in the play, is promiscuous from the very beginning) sneaks out to a book dealer to purchase a copy of *Justine*, we are provided with a voiceover of the novel’s supposed opening: “To the young maidens of the world: wrest yourselves free from the tyranny of virtue and taste without shame the pleasures of the flesh. Male power lies in the clench of a fist, but a woman’s power lies elsewhere: in the velvet cavity betwixt her thighs.” While this provocative call for feminine liberation corresponds perfectly to the image of Sade presented in the film, the actual opening of *Justine* is entirely different, evoking tiresome subjects like philosophy that remain noticeably absent from *Quills*. As Simone turns

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271 In the play, Sade even reflects at length on the nature of literary reception: “The experience of art [...] is a collaborative affair. The author provides the stimuli; the reader his response. All I can control is the art itself; my subject, culled from life, and told with an eye to truth, or, at least, truth as life has taught me to perceive it. [...] But—the response to my work. Well, [...] that’s a fickle thing indeed. It may be prompted by the reader’s race! His sex! His politics! The potency of the beer he drank with dinner! The angle of his bed! *Even the last time he diddled his wife!* In short, variables well beyond the scope of the artist. What am I to do, police my readers as you police me? Ha!” (224).

272 The actual beginning of the novel reads: “Le chef d’œuvre de la philosophie serait de développer les moyens dont la Providence se sert pour parvenir aux fins qu’elle se propose sur l’homme, et de tracer, d’après cela, quelques plans de conduite qui puissent faire connaître à ce malheureux individu bipède, la manière dont il faut qu’il marche dans la carrière épineuse de la vie, afin de prévenir les caprices bizarres
the pages of her edition, the camera catches a glimpse of an obscene engraving that in fact comes not from the 1791 *Justine*, but from the sixth volume of *Juliette*, published several years later. The illustration itself shows Juliette masturbating Cornaro as he whips the buttocks of four people stacked atop the torso of another, and appears to highlight Sade’s infamous penchant for whipping and multi-partner orgies. The corresponding text of Sade’s novel, however, by far surpasses anything present in *Quills*. After Cornaro gives Juliette a lengthy lecture on the role of morality in government, a pregnant woman appears before the Venetian nobleman with her four adolescent children (two boys and one girl), begging for alms. In response, Cornaro stacks her children atop her belly in order to destroy her unborn child, and then proceeds to “flagelle à la fois, en remontant avec la rapidité de la foudre, et le ventre le plus dur, le plus blanc, et les huit fesses les plus appétissantes.” A few paragraphs later, Cornaro brings the orgy to a conclusion: after suspending the mother upside down from the ceiling, “afin que son enfant l’étouffe,” the libertine begins to slowly decapitate each of the children while sodomizing them: “et ce n’est que dans le cul du dernier des garçons et qu’en déchiquetant le col de cette dernière victime, que le scélérat perd enfin les flots du sperme écumeux […]” Juliette relates (*Œuvres* 3.1197-1201). Surely, a woman freshly plucked from the convent, as is Simone in the film, would do more than blush at reading Sade’s detailed description of the rape and murder of a pregnant mother and her children. Yet nothing in *Quills* suggests the true scope of Sade’s works. Ironically, the film that argues strongly in favor of artistic expression ends up performing censorship itself, stripping Sade’s works of both their philosophical and sexual content.

de cette fatalité à laquelle on donne vingt noms différents sans être encore parvenu, ni à la connaître, ni à la définir” (*Œuvres* 2.131).
Such censorship is typical of contemporary attitudes toward Sade. As Elisabeth Ladenson points out in her conclusion to *Dirt For Art’s Sake*, the Sade in *Quills* is not the eighteenth-century libertine author, but “the Sade of our times: a hero, a master of self-control, and a liberating force through his writings and teachings” (234). Thus both he and his texts are “thoroughly domesticated,” so that Sade becomes “the perfect figure for our time, the incarnation of an abstract ideal of transgression, purged of content” (“It is significant that *Justine* plays such a large and yet veiled role in these films,” Ladenson continues; “the actual text of the novel is never alluded to”). Remarkably for a film supposedly based on the notorious libertine, *Quills* actually features very little sexual content. Instead, the film provides a brief shot of the laundress Michette (Rebecca R. Palmer) sandwiched between two male Charenton employees during a naked threesome, with the bodies arranged so that no offending organs are shown. In a later scene, Dr. Royer-Collard’s young wife Simone is seen licking her lips after apparently performing fellatio upon her lover, and Kate Winslett’s Madeleine eventually bears her breasts when the abbé hallucinates over her corpse. What is particularly interesting is that none of these sexually suggestive scenes appear in Wright’s original play, as if Hollywood felt that Sade’s story needed to be mildly stimulating in order to appear on the big screen. In a faithful adaptation of the play, however, the only character to appear fully nude is the Marquis himself after the abbé strips him of his clothing, providing the viewer with a brief glimpse of Geoffrey Rush’s flaccid penis (albeit without Madeleine’s witty remark, “I must say, sir, in your novels you stoke the most unrealistic expectations” [211], which in the play prompts the Marquis to cross his legs). Since full frontal male nudity represents one of the greatest taboos in American cinema, Rush’s split-second of
exposure seemingly makes *Quills* into the scandalous offering one might expect, even though it does not appear in an erotic context.

Benoît Jacquot stayed closer to historical fact in his 2000 film *Sade*, which was based on Serge Bramly’s 1994 erudite novel *La Terreur dans le boudoir*. Bramly had clearly studied both Maurice Lever’s 1991 biography and most of Sade’s works, incorporating various passages from *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* and *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* into his narrative. While obviously fictional, both *La Terreur dans le boudoir* and *Sade* imagine what could have taken place between the materialist author of *Justine* and his aristocratic inmates at Picpus during the height of Robespierre’s Terror. Daneil Auteuil’s pensive aristocrat in *Sade* presents a stark contrast to Geoffrey Rush’s Marquis, a rather deranged old man whose speech is filled with sexual puns and double-entendres: whereas Auteuil’s Sade proudly places editions of d’Holbach on his shelves, the room of Rush’s character instead contains obscene sculptures and furniture made of human bones. While Jacquot’s film significantly tones down the climatic, eight-person orgy from Bramly’s novel (*La Terreur dans le boudoir* 243-255), the comparably tame defloration of Mademoiselle de Lancris by the gardener Augustin nonetheless features far more erotic content than would be acceptable in an R-rated American film, particularly in its prolonged full frontal shots of the completely naked young woman (played by Isild Le Besco). In an acknowledgement of Sade’s own tastes, the Marquis (who essentially performs the role of *metteur-en-scène* during the scene) also insists that Augustin whip him, and presumably has intercourse with the effeminate Chevalier de Coublier, who timidly enters the barn just before the scene ends. Unlike Kaufman and Wright, Jacquot and Bramly situate the interplay of eroticism and
philosophy as an essential component of Sade’s work. Like their American counterparts, however, they fail to indicate exactly what sort of material is found in his texts; instead, the viewer only sees Mademoiselle de Lancris promptly fleeing the room after spending a few seconds perusing his manuscripts.

For the twenty-first-century filmgoer, then, the Marquis de Sade does not come across as a monster at all, primarily because the sexual content of his texts is so acutely attenuated. According to the most recent incarnation of the divine Marquis, there is practically no sex in Sade, let alone any of the rape, scatology, torture, and murder that actually appears in his oeuvre. Even films that deal explicitly with Sade in an erotic context provide little indication of either the material found in his works or the antics that landed him in trouble with the law. For instance, in 1994 Italian filmmaker Joe D’Amato attempted to portray Sade as simultaneously erotic and intellectual in his pornographic feature *Il Marchese de Sade*, which stars Rocco Siffredi in the role of the Marquis. Borrowing a concept from Franco’s *Justine*, the film opens with a bleary-eyed Siffredi writing in his prison cell, wondering why he has been punished when all he wanted to do was awaken people to their instincts and the pursuit of pleasure. After a flashback to Sade’s youth, where a chambermaid exposes herself to him and apparently awakens his taste for perversion, the film continues through his adult sexual exploits, which mostly consist of orgies involving rough sex, urolognia, anilingus, and a heavy dose of heterosexual sodomy (Siffredi’s Sade uncharacteristically rejects the advances of an interested male). Aside from his characters’ eighteenth-century costumes, D’Amato’s film makes no pretenses regarding historical accuracy, as neither the Keller nor the Marseilles affairs are referenced. Instead, Sade and his female partners enjoy a series of
mutually pleasurable sexual encounters largely devoid of violence. In the end, we are even led to believe that Sade was in fact deeply in love with his wife Renée after all, as their lovemaking provides the most passionate moments of the film, which concludes when Renée’s successful intervention manages to save her husband from the guillotine.

*Il Marchese de Sade* belongs to a group of D’Amato films from the 1990s focused on literary or historical subjects, such as Romeo and Juliet and Marco Polo. (*Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* actually appears as an alternate title to *Anal Palace*, a 1995 film showcasing aristocratic orgies immediately prior to the Revolution.) D’Amato’s grossly inaccurate adaptation of Sade’s biography nonetheless represents one of the few attempts to incorporate the Marquis into contemporary pornographic film since the creation of the genre. Prior to the advent of plot-driven pornographic feature films in the 1970s, Sade would pop up from time to time in the short “loops” that were shown to peep show customers in urban sex districts such as New York’s Times Square or San Francisco’s North Beach. One such film, for instance, shows a young woman caressing herself with a whip while reading an unidentifiable book entitled “De Sade.”

Again, the content of the text is never referenced; rather, both the name “Sade” and the whip merely suggest some vaguely unorthodox and therefore “liberating” sexuality, in keeping with the popular image of the Marquis during the 1960s. Sade remained relatively absent from the more elaborate pornographic films released during the 1970s and 80s, with the sole exceptions being Alex de Renzy’s 1976 *Femmes de Sade*, which follows a seven-foot tall rapist named Rocky de Sade as he abuses San Francisco’s prostitutes following his release from San Quentin, and Charles de Santos’s 1977 *China de Sade*, a spy spoof.

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273 The loop can be found on the DVD *Bucky Beaver’s Triple XXX Rated Stags, Loops, and Peeps* volume 15, released by Something Weird Video (2006).
starring Linda Wong as a former Communist Agent who now organizes orgies for a depraved American colonel. *China de Sade* makes no mention of the Marquis outside its title, however, and *Femmes de Sade* deals with his biography on a purely superficial level (significantly, the images of suspended, bound, and chained women that appear on the film’s promotional poster depict not the unfortunate victims of Rocky, but consenting participants who willingly engage in masochistic behavior at a fetish party). This pattern would persist in the pornographic films of ensuing decades, and continues in the present. Although the name of the Marquis de Sade often appears in film titles (particularly in bondage films featuring latex-clad dominatrixes), none of these films actually makes reference to either the man or his works. Instead, the name “Sade” has been reduced to a mere code word, used as were terms such as “philosophy” during the eighteenth century, to signify a particular sort of pornography, in this case films containing some form of sadomasochistic content.

The absence of Sade in contemporary pornography, when considered alongside the obfuscation of his texts in films such as *Quills*, suggests that Sade may have finally met his death in the twenty-first century. Mentioning his name no longer constitutes a subversive act, despite Philippe Sollers’s repeated insistences to the contrary.274 Instead, after a century spent either overlooking or over-interpreting Sade’s violence, the end result is the “thoroughly domesticated” Marquis that Ladenson observes in *Quills*. At best, Sade can only suggest some vaguely dark romanticism, as the Enigma song “Sadeness (Part I),” which climbed to the top of the charts in early 1991. Featuring Gregorian chants (including sections from *Psalms 24:7-8*) and an electro-dance beat,

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274 See, for instance, “De la Main de Sade,” his review of Michel Delon’s *Vies de Sade*, in the October 11, 2007 issue of *Le Nouvel Observateur*. 
“Sadeness” comes across as a sophisticated yet sensual hymn to the “divine Marquis.” The song’s whispered chorus, “Sade dis-moi / Sade donne-moi,” demands both verbal and physical instruction, and leads to a series of questions directed toward the infamous author and libertine. “Sade, dis-moi, qu’est ce que tu vas chercher?” a Frenchman asks, “le bien par le mal, la vertu par le vice?” a reference to Sade’s Justine and Juliette. “Sade, dis-moi,” the man continues, “pourquoi l’évangile du mal?” borrowing a phrase from Paulhan’s preface to Les Infortunes de la vertu. The only suggestion that Sade was somehow associated with violence appears in the later question, “pourquoi le sang pour le plaisir?” while the song appropriately reaches its climax with the man asking, “Sade, es-tu diabolique ou divin?” followed by sounds of a woman panting heavily. While Enigma’s lyrics do convey some sense of familiarity with the reception of Sade’s works, the actual material of his texts is noticeably absent, which is perhaps for the best, as references to coprophagia and dismemberment would probably ruin the sensual effect for most listeners. Of course, most of Enigma’s non-Francophone audience had no clue as to what was being said (“Sadeness” was easily mistaken for “sadness”), and that the French language was used merely to sound sexy.

If this is the only Sade we encounter today, if the real-life criminal and his horrific writings are in effect dead, then Akio Jissoji’s 1988 film Akutoku no sakae perhaps stands be seen as providing an appropriate funeral dirge for the Marquis. Known in English as The Marquis de Sade’s Prosperities of Vice, Akutoku no sakae was released in late August as part of Nikkatsu’s short-lived Rapponica label, immediately following the studio’s discontinuation of its softcore roman poruno line (Sharp 129). As a late twentieth century adaptation of Juliette, the film borrows elements from previous
cinematic interpretations, especially that of Pasolini. Set in the Japan of the 1930s, amidst the *Ero Guro* artistic movement that had also formed the backdrop for Kumashiro’s *Onna Jigoku, Akutoku no sakaе* centers around a secret “société des amis du crime” similar to that found in *Juliette*, which in this case is headed by a decadent Marquis who spends his time poring over the French editions of Sade’s works (when he is not whipping his topless maids or dining copiously on delicacies with his fellow libertines). The texts themselves feature prominently throughout the film, which shows illustrated editions of *Justine, Juliette*, and *Aline et Valcour* during the opening credits.

Sharing Sade’s passion for the theater, the Marquis decides to stage a (textually accurate) production of *Juliette* in order to spread corruption throughout society. In an apparent nod to *Marat/Sade*, he uses convicted criminals for most of the roles, and casts his wife Tamae as Juliette. As in Cy Endfield’s 1969 *De Sade*, the rest of the film blurs the boundaries between the play and reality, as the Marquis continues to behave like his character Noirceuil even offstage, while the middle-aged libertine Moriko copies Clairwil and Tamae wonders whether she might not be closer to Justine than to the Juliette she portrays in the production. Echoes of Pasolini’s *Salò* can also be seen throughout the film, such as in the prominent place of a table in many scenes to obscure bodies, the use of wide-angle shots, and the decadent modernist décor of the Marquis’s estate. (In one particular scene, Moriko orders the maids to get down on all fours like dogs and eat sea cucumbers that bear a remarkable resemblance to feces, a sequence that combines several separate moments in *Salò*.)

With its apocalyptic conclusion, *Akutoku no sakaе* rightfully suggests that Sade’s moment on the silver screen is now over. Japan’s military coup of 1936 puts a stop to the
aristocratic excesses of the Marquis and his friends, leading to mass executions in a manner parallel to the Revolution of 1789. The Marquis himself is somehow spared, however, and returns to his ruined mansion to finish the performance of *Juliette* by himself. After reciting the last words of Sade’s novel, which relate Juliette’s death and the fact that the final years of her life shall remain forever a mystery, he turns his right cheek to the camera, revealing a stone face painting in the manner of Man Ray’s famous 1938 portrait. Standing amidst the crumbling remains of his theater, he then mysteriously proclaims, “I am the Marquis de Sade. In other words, a clown!” Pushing aside his cape to uncover his clown outfit, the Marquis then disappears in between the cracks of the stage. This seemingly bizarre conclusion brings to a close the genre of *roman poruno*, emphasizing the fact that Nikkatsu’s empire now lay in ruin. While the image of the Marquis de Sade as a clown may serve to remind viewers that the *roman poruno* were meant above all to entertain, it also suggests that the notorious Marquis is himself no more than a clown who cannot be taken seriously. *Akutoku no sakae* represents one of the last films to take Sade’s texts into consideration, showing that his works do indeed contain some disturbing (yet nonetheless enticing) material. Now, however, although his books are readily available in Western Europe, Japan, and the United States, Sade is primarily used in ways that require one to “pass over” the obscene material of his œuvre, as Breton suggested we do in his letter defending Pauvert. Sade thus remains heavily censored today, in one way or another.
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