

# **The Marquis de Sade: Sex, Sacrilege and Sublimity**

**by Douglass B. Lynott**

## **Sacrilege!**

*“I wanted only to try to live in accord with the promptings which came from my true self. Why was that so very difficult?”<sup>1</sup>*

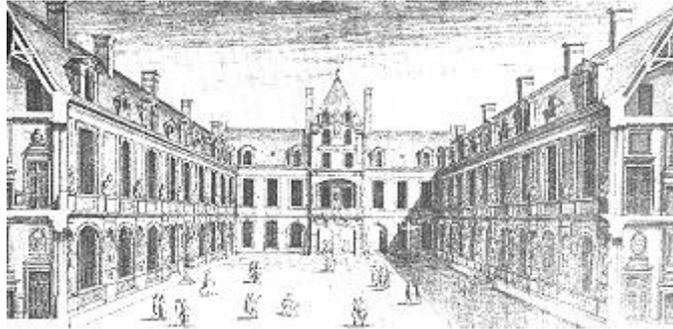
The nattily-dressed young nobleman escorted the comely French prostitute to a rented room on the second floor of a nondescript maison on the outskirts of Paris. The Marquis de Sade had been frequenting such houses during his trip to the capital, a trip he had ostensibly taken for business reasons. The true nature of his business, however, was the pursuit of pleasure, the kind that the nobility of France had enjoyed for generations without repercussion or recrimination. The newly wed Marquis had been staging garden-variety orgies at several maisons he had rented in and around Paris during October of 1763. However, he had a more singular encounter in mind for himself and the young prostitute, Mlle. Jeanne Testard.

Upon entering the room, the Marquis bolted the door behind them and immediately demanded to know if Mlle. Testard had religious convictions, if she was a faithful adherent to the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic faith. When she responded affirmatively, the Marquis proceeded to harangue her with the most vile and degrading insults. To Testard’s horror he also began to engage in the most provocative and blasphemous acts, including masturbating into a chalice, referring to the Lord as “motherfucker” and inserting two communion hosts into the terrified young woman before entering her himself, all the while screaming, “If thou art God, avenge thyself!”

Mlle. Testard, who had already gotten much more than she had bargained for with the Marquis, was mortified by his next request, which was for her to heat a cat-o-nine-tails in the fire until it glowed red, and then to beat him with it. She was then to select the whip of her choosing for him to do the same to her. When she refused to let him beat her, he proceeded to masturbate with a pair of crucifixes, after which he held her at sword-point while forcing her to repeat vulgar, blasphemous impieties.

At 9:00 am the following day, Mlle. Testard’s procuress arrived to find her young charge in a most hysterical state. They rushed immediately to the local police commissioner who took the young woman’s deposition. Donatien Alphonse Francois, Marquis de Sade was arrested ten days later by Paris Police Inspector Louis Marais, and, for the first of several times in his life, the Marquis was imprisoned for acting on his lewd and debauched convictions.

## **Irregular Childhood**



**The Palais de Conde**

Donatien Alphonse Francois de Sade was born on June 2, 1740, to Jean Baptiste, Comte (Count) de Sade, and to Marie-Elonore de Maille de Carman, Comtesse de Sade, his mother and a distant cousin of the Prince de Conde, a junior branch of the royal Bourbon family. His mother served as a lady in waiting to the Princess de Conde, and as a governess to her child, the young prince de Conde, Donatien's senior by four years. The young Marquis' first splash into the history books came as a result of a skirmish between him and his cousin, the Prince de Conde, who had tried to retrieve one of his favorite playthings from the grasp of the four-year-old Donatien. Rather than submitting in acknowledgement of the Prince's rank, the Marquis refused to relinquish the toy, and instead proceeded to pummel his cousin with blows of increasing violence and ferocity. The two had to be separated by adult courtiers, and it was soon after this incident that the Marquis found himself remanded to the care of his extended family. It would not be the first time that the royal authorities would resort to such treatment as a means to controlling the combustible Marquis.



**Portrait of Comtesse de Sade**

As a result of his confrontation with the prince, Donatien was sent to live with his paternal grandmother in Avignon. It was here that the Marquis would spend his early, formative years, surrounded by a gaggle of female relatives who indulged his every whim and smothered him with sensual affection:

Her five daughters visited Grandmother Sade often. Her youngest child, Donatien's aunt Henriette-Victoire, a notoriously promiscuous beauty, was particularly fond of her turbulent little nephew and loved to indulge him. The dowager marquise's other four daughters were

nuns. Convents being relatively worldly in pre-Revolutionary days, these ladies, during their frequent forays into the secular world, doted on Donatien as lavishly as the rest of his female kin. The doting grandmother and the coddling aunts lavished all manner of affection on the child. Plying him with toys, candy, and caresses, they indulged his most capricious whims, with the result that the apprentice tyrant...became more unruly than ever.

The Comte de Sade, Donatien's father, was abroad serving as an ambassador to the court of the Elector of Bavaria during this time, but received reports of his son's upbringing. He became increasingly enraged to hear of how his only son was being corrupted at the hands of his indulgent mother and sisters. Only two years after Donatien had been ordered to move in with his grandmother, his father uprooted him once again. The Comte wished to infuse his son's upbringing with the masculine presence and influence that he himself was not able to provide. Thus, Donatien was sent to live with the Comte's brother, Abbe Jacques-Francois de Sade, a noted scholar and author of his time.

The abbe divided his time between his official residence in Auvergne, and the family castle of Saumane, thirty-five kilometers outside of Avignon.



**Portrait of the Prince de Conde**



**Saumane, the Abbey de Sade's estate**

Abbe de Sade was a contemporary and friend of the noted French philosopher Voltaire. Like his sisters, the abbe possessed a sensual, worldly side, which Voltaire encouraged and celebrated with poems such as the following: "However much of a priest you are, O Sir, you'll continue to love. That is your true ministry, be you a bishop or the Holy Father. You will love, you will seduce, and you'll equally succeed, in the Church and in Cythera (another name for Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, fertility, and beauty)."

And so, the Marquis found himself placed in yet another setting where adults treated sex and sexuality as recreational means to a pleasurable end, and where sensual indulgence was the expectation rather than the exception to the rule. When not looking after his official church duties, which only required his presence in Auvergne a few months out of the year, the abbe occupied his leisure time with the pursuit of a variety of French beauties, women hailing from all settings within the social strata. He was widely known as the "sybarite (one inordinately attached to pleasure and luxury) of Saumane." During the years that Sade lived with his uncle, the abbe housed a number of female companions, including a mother and daughter duo, a maid, and a local prostitute.

When no real people were available for the abbe to interact with, he had simply to turn to his voluminous library to stoke his appetite for worldly, sensual delights. While the scholarly clergyman kept some of the most learned classics of the age among his collection, he also made room for literature with titles such as the Book of Postures, Venus in the Cloister, or the Nun in Her Nightdress, and even John the Fucker Debauched. Donatien was free to read at his leisure, and, in the absence of other playmates his age, he more often than not found recreational refuge within the pages of most of the texts kept in his uncle's library, including those which, according to the French euphemism, "were meant to be read with one hand."

While a more unseemly setting could scarcely be conceived for the upbringing of an impressionable young child, Abbe de Sade was hardly a renegade clergyman. Indeed, for centuries, throughout France and other European countries, the men and women of the cloth availed themselves to the pleasures of the flesh to no less extent, and probably more so, than the lay worshippers to whom they were responsible for providing moral guidance. It was not unheard of for orgies to be held within the walls of convents and abbeys, wherein priest, nuns, prostitutes and nobles commingled to partake of the most scandalous and debauched activities.



**Drawing of young Marquis de Sade, by Van Loo**

Increasingly concerned that his son's upbringing was no less corrupted by his brother's influence than that of his mother and sisters', the Comte de Sade decided to once again uproot Donatien and transplant him into seemingly more appropriate environs for a boy of his age. At the age of ten he moved from Saumane to Paris, where he was enrolled at the College Louis-le-Grand, a Jesuit prep school for young men of noble lineage. While their reputation as educators was unsurpassed anywhere in Europe, the Jesuits were no less worldly than the Abbe de Sade. Sodomy and corporal punishment were equally noteworthy trademarks as scholarship and statesmanship at the College:

As practiced by the Jesuits, who held their whippings in front of the assembled student body and had a notoriously heavy hand, the experience was particularly humiliating. Moreover, floggings can be sexually arousing and often generate what came to be called sadomasochistic behavior. As an adult, Sade would seldom be satisfied by 'normal' sex, and in many ways his carnal preferences seemed arrested at an infantile anal level.

Another important hallmark of the Jesuit regimen was that of confessing one's sins as a means to analyzing and ultimately eradicating one's imperfections. To gain the full benefit of confession requires the confessor to reflect upon some of the more unpleasant and murky aspects of his character, and then bring these very private aspects of the self to the surface where they are to be painfully scrutinized by the peering eyes of another. It was this aspect that seemed to have the most profound impact on Sade in regard to his perception of human nature and the lengths he was willing to go in order to not only fully understand, but also fully live the shadow life hidden in the deepest recesses of the human heart. As an adult he once wrote,

The profound study of man's heart- nature's labyrinth- alone can inspire the novelist, whose work must make us see man not only as he is, or as he purports to be- which is the duty of the historian- but as he is capable of being when subjected to the modifying influences of vice

and the full impact of passion. Therefore, we must know them all, we must employ every passion and vice, if we labor in this field.

After four unremarkable years at the College, his father transferred Donatien to a military academy. In 1755, at the age of 15, Sade entered the King's light cavalry regiment as a sub lieutenant. He was soon called to action through the outbreak of the Seven Year's War. He established himself as a fearless and decisive leader during the battle for the British fortress at Port Mahon. With hundreds of French casualties lying about the battlefield, Sade and a fellow comrade in arms led an assault that ultimately resulted in the French taking of Port Mahon. Not content to see Donatien succeed with the cavalry, Comte de Sade used his few remaining connections to have his son placed with the Carabiniers de Monsieur, which was commanded by a member of the royal family. He prevailed, and Donatien was made the standard bearer for an entire cavalry company with the Carabiniers.

The bravery he demonstrated in battle coupled with his good looks and budding social charm, made for a successful career as a soldier for the young Marquis. He received glowing reviews from his superiors, and was promoted to the rank of captain by the age of eighteen, and was stationed in Germany where he began to unleash his increasing sexual appetite. Yet, despite his success, he received stern rebukes from his father with increasing frequency. Upon hearing that Donatien had been gambling some of his wages, the Comte wrote a furious missive to the abbe, stating in part, "As if that scoundrel had a louis a day to lose! He promised me not to risk a cent. But you can't trust him to keep his word."

Such words had serious ramifications on the young Marquis, who dreaded the prospect of losing the love of the only parent he knew. The relationship he shared with his father took precedence over other friendships, as demonstrated by a letter he wrote was still a soldier: "Friends are like women: when put to the test, the goods often prove defective. I open my heart to you, not as to a father whom one often fears and does not love, but to the most honest of friends, the most tender friend I deem to have in the world."

## **The Comte de Sade**

The Comte de Sade's growing frustration with his only son stemmed from the decline of his own fortunes, and the hope for redemption he had pinned to Donatien's career. His own career had reached its zenith shortly after the birth of Donatien, when he served as ambassador to the court of the Elector of Bavaria. During this time, the War of Austrian Succession broke out, and he was jailed by troops loyal to Empress Maria Theresa of Austria. His release was secured by the fevered lobbying efforts of his wife, but upon returning to Paris he was confronted by accusations of financial mismanagement during his time in Bavaria. The life he had dreamed for himself, that of nobleman and bon vivant, was shattered as personal grudges and enmities were unleashed upon him as a result of this scandal. The Comte was very vulnerable politically, and scarcely blameless for his reversal of fortune. Indeed, he had a direct hand in his own downfall.

Born into a family whose claim to prestige and political influence had been ebbing for several generations, Jean Baptiste Comte de Sade's sole ambition as a young man seemed to be to enjoy the privileges accorded to the nobility without having to work for that right. Despite his family's marginal position within the French noble hierarchy, the Comte pursued the life of a playboy. A bisexual debauch, he was once arrested for soliciting a male undercover agent for the King Louis XV's police. While willing to satisfy his homosexual urges with street prostitutes, the women he sought had the finest pedigrees in all the land. He came of age at a period of French history known as the Regency, which, for its widespread debauchery, has been compared to the Roman Empire. The Regency was named after the Duc d'Orleans, Louis XV's nephew and ruler of France between the boy-king's fifth and thirteenth years. The regent was known to hold suppers with nobles from across the land, who, after they had supped, disrobed and reenacted scenes from assorted classical erotic texts. Group sex, oral sex, and homosexual intercourse were among the more popular after dinner activities.



**Portrait of the Comte de Sade**

In recognition of the fact that he was in need of political connections to compensate for his own family's lack of status, the Comte aligned himself with the Prince de Conde, whose own son would be so savagely attacked by the Comte's son Donatien. However, in choosing the Prince, Jean Baptiste linked his fortunes to one of the most despised noblemen in all of France, a serious miscalculation that would result in serious ramifications for the careless count.

His shortsightedness led him to not only select a poor protector, but to also turn right around and betray the very man to whom he owed his station. The Prince was married to a ravishing young princess from Germany, and to whom Jean Baptiste was immediately drawn. In one of the most cynical schemes hatched in the history of debauchery, the Comte decided to marry a lady in waiting to the Princess, Mlle Maille de Carman, Donatien's mother. He did so in order to create a pretense for being close to the Princess at all times. He later wrote, "I pointed out to her (the Princess) that I had sacrificed my material security by marrying a girl without dowry...for the sole purpose of being closer to her and obtaining permission to see her at all hours. My marriage afforded me considerable familiarity. I could enter her quarters anytime."

What the Comte de Sade's wife lacked in dowry, she made up for in status. It was her connection with the Conde family that secured her husband an ambassadorship to Bavaria. However, it was due to his high living as ambassador, as well as to the many enemies the Conde family had cultivated over the years, that the count found his reputation and career in serious jeopardy upon returning to France after his imprisonment. The Prince had died in 1740, leaving Jean Baptiste completely exposed to the wrath of those who had hated the Prince, but had dared not attack he or his associates while he was alive. And so, just had he had had to rely on the status of another to give his own standing legitimacy, Comte de Sade now found himself equally as dependent upon his own son for the same reason. In the most ironic of twists, this debauched libertine found himself in the unlikely position of having to impose a Puritan standard of conduct upon his son in order to enhance his fortunes at the altar. However, the Marquis was growing harder to control.

## Marriage of Convenience

In 1762, after two years of serious negotiations with a number of noble families, Comte de Sade appeared to have found a marriage partner for his son who was suitable to his purposes. More than one potential bride had ultimately declined to be wed to the Marquis on the basis of his reputation for licentious behavior. However, the parents of Renee-Pelagie de Montreuil, members of the bourgeoisie with powerful connections to the King's court, were amenable to the count's proposition. Pelagie, as she preferred to be called, was a woman of plain features and modest intellect, but it was her dowry that most concerned the count. By marrying off his son, he hoped to free himself of two burdens at once: money and the Marquis himself. "As far as I'm concerned, the best thing about the marriage is that I'll be rid of that boy, who has not one good quality and all bad ones," Comte de Sade wrote to his brother. "I couldn't have paid too high for the pleasure of not hearing about him anymore."

Donatien had plans of his own, however. Having fallen in love with a woman in Provence, he made it clear to his father that he was in no hurry to leave and be wed to a woman he had never met. This romance had complications of its own, not the least of which was the fact that the Marquis had contracted a case of the gonorrhea, a calamity he blamed on his lover who had since left him for another. "I admit that I shall not hide it (the disease) from my rival and that it won't be the only confidence I'll share with him. I swear, I'd be capable of every possible horror," he threatened.

While Donatien had not yet returned to Paris, news of his disease had, terrifying his father who was toiling in preparation for the wedding day which was set for the middle of May.

"He's still capable of messing up the deal (emphasis added),"

he wrote to his sister. And, to further complicate matters, the Comtesse de Sade appeared for the festivities, making a rare appearance in the life of her son. She did, however, refuse to let Donatien stay with her while she was in Paris. "My son will have to stay with me," the count complained to his brother. "His mother no longer wants him."



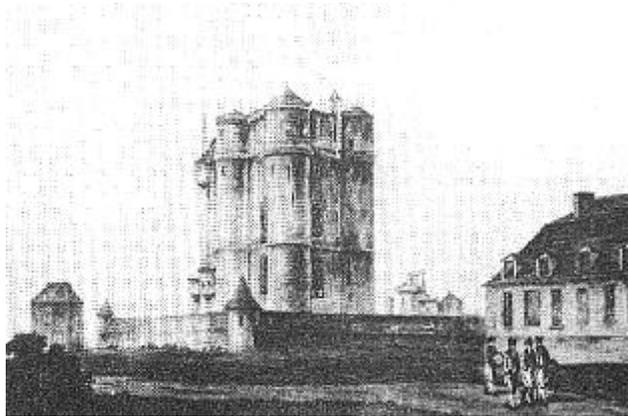
Portrait of Pelagie

Twenty-four hours before his own wedding, the Marquis de Sade finally relented and arrived in Paris. The ceremony was held on May 17 in the Church of Saint-Roc. Settling in to his new life with the de Montreuil went smoothly for the Marquis, who was attentive and loving towards his new bride, as well as charming and gracious towards his new in-laws. Pelagie's mother had the title of the "President" because her husband had been appointed to a prestigious judgeship and, upon his retirement, he retained the honorary title of President. The "President," was quite taken by Donatien, and though she had her suspicions about his fidelity as a husband, she willingly cast them aside as she grew to adore her new son-in-law. The newlyweds were housed with the de Montreuil, and for the first few months, life proceeded gaily, as a playful and affectionate rapport was established between the Marquis and the "President." Donatien's mother-in-law had also grown quite fond of his uncle, the abbe, and wrote to him in glowing terms of the rakish young marquis: "She (Pelagie) will never scold him. She will love him beyond one's wildest expectations. That is fairly simple: he is lovable. Thus far he loves her mightily, and no one could treat her better."

However, as the "Presidente" herself was to find out, she had spoken too soon and too generously of the young man whose reputation and character she had first come to suspect in the early days of his marriage. Indeed, the true nature of the Marquis de Sade, the shadow side, which he had heretofore tucked within the labyrinth of his heart, would soon come to light and provide a very real basis for the "Presidente's" initial misgivings

### **Marquis' Many Scandals**

Sade's encounter with the young prostitute was his first debauch to become fodder for public gossip since his marriage, and the first sign that the young charmer whom the "Presidente" had come to love and trust was indeed the sexual deviant she had first feared he was. Within ten days of the incident, Sade was arrested by Inspector Marais and imprisoned within the dungeon of Vincennes, a historic Parisian fortress. His father, who was only just beginning to see his son in a kinder light thanks to the praise and affection of the "Presidente," was livid. "An outrageous debauch which he went about coolly and alone," raged the Comte, who had spent the better part of his young adult life engaging in passionate orgies. While outraged, the "Presidente" sought to shield her daughter from the nature of Sade's offense, even while Pelagie was fully aware that her husband had been arrested.



**Print of Fortress of Vincennes**

Sade himself, startled to find himself imprisoned for behavior he had thought to be commonplace among the nobility, donned a most contrite face and pleaded for mercy from the police:

This is a favor I dare to ask you on my knees, with tears in my eyes. Be kind enough to reconcile me with a beloved person (Pelagie) whom I am weak enough to have offended so grievously... I beg you, monsieur, do not refuse me the privilege of seeing the dearest person I have in the world. If she had the honor of being acquainted with you, you would realize that her conversation... is capable of restoring to the straight and narrow path a wretch who feels unsurpassable despair at ever having left it.

Thanks in part to the seeming authenticity of Sade's entreaties, but mainly to the lobbying of the de Montreuil family, Sade was released from Vincennes after three weeks of imprisonment. While sternly admonishing the Marquis for his outlandish conduct, the "Presidente" also stated her belief that he was still possessed of a wholly redeemable and trustworthy character. Of this she would be continually proven wrong over the next several years. Indeed, within a year of this first scandal, Sade had taken up with a ravishing young French actress in Paris, Mlle. Colet. The eighteen-year-old beauty was so well practiced in the

art of erotica that she was able to fetch a price of 720 livres, or \$2,800 in today's money, for an evening's "work." A woman of such "high station" was beyond Sade's financial means, and so he had to settle for the occasional tryst at times when she was not with one of her more well-to-do suitors.

Inspector Marais, the police official who had imprisoned Sade after the Testard affair in Paris, had been charged with the task of keeping Sade under official police surveillance since his release from Vincennes. He kept a detailed report of the frequency and location of his trysts with Mlle. Colet, a report he shared with the Presidente, among others. She confronted her son-in-law with her knowledge of the affair, and convinced him to cease his philandering. As with the Testard affair, the two agreed that Pelagie should be kept ignorant of Sade's activities with the young actress. But, what perhaps began as an honorable agreement to keep one or two separate incidents under wraps soon developed into a normalized *quid pro quo*, wherein Sade continued his debauched behavior, the "Presidente" invariably discovering each respective debauch, and the two of them conspiring to keep Pelagie uninformed lest the news shatter her frail sensibilities. Despite such a duplicitous arrangement, the bond between the two remained strong for some time.

However, even the generous patience of Sade's mother-in-law was put to the test. In the spring of 1765, Sade arrived at his ancestral estate of La Coste, a medieval castle just east of Avignon. A woman, who was presumed by the locals to be his wife, accompanied him. In fact, his striking companion was merely his current paramour. Sade was once again "vacationing" from his wife by enjoying the company of another woman. Unashamed of carrying on in this way with his lover, Sade not only shared his bed with her at La Coste, he held elaborate parties at the castle, and invited members of the nobility from across the region to share in the gaiety. Most often, the Abbe de Sade was among the host of guests seen partying at La Coste, a man who knew too well that his nephew's current *amour du jour* was not his wife. This did not prevent the abbe from partying with abandon, and he said not a word of his nephew's shamefully public philandering until local gossip about the subject threatened to implicate him in the scandal. Ultimately, it was the abbe himself who revealed Sade's secret to the "Presidente," whose anger at being betrayed once more by the Marquis frayed the already fragile arrangement they had established. She responded to the abbe: "He can rest assured that even though I've hidden his follies from his wife...in order to spare them from lifetime estrangement...when he'll be in danger of even worse errors and misfortunes I shall firmly inform her, and convince her of her unhappy fate."



**La Coste**

While Sade's affair with the Parisian faded out by fall, his love affair with La Coste blossomed. He returned to the castle in the summer of 1766 to perform much-needed renovation work on the aging fortress. Not to leave his work without a personal touch, Sade also added a secret room with which he used to store some of his more lurid pornographic devices, and a library boasting titles such as *The Voluptuous Life of Capuchins* and *Tales of Priests' and Monks' Fornications*. While unaccompanied by Pelagie, who remained with her parents bedridden and mourning her recently stillborn child, Sade apparently was chaste during this particular summer.

Sade's father, the Comte de Sade, died in January of 1767, but rather than send the Marquis into a prolonged period of mourning and chastity, the event seemed to awaken Donatien's dormant libido. He dallied with a number of women during the spring, but returned to La Coste for another chaste summer. Pelagie, pregnant once again, gave birth to her first son, Louis-Marie de Sade on August 27, 1767. The Marquis returned to Paris to be with his wife, and once again the "President" found herself believing that de Sade's nature, tamed by the mantle of fatherhood, would finally become the faithful and doting husband she believed him capable to be.

However, the "President's" hopes were ill founded once again when, on Easter Sunday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1768, Sade victimized another unsuspecting young woman. Rose Kellor, an unemployed cook and widow, was seen by Sade begging for alms outside of the Church of the Little Fathers in Paris. The Marquis stepped forward and offered her money in return for "domestic" services. She reluctantly agreed, and was brought to a cottage in the countryside outside of Paris, all the while being reassured by Sade that he will take good care of her. Upon entering the cottage, Sade brought her to a room and ordered her to take off her clothes. Frightened and bewildered, the young woman asked why, to which Sade replied, "For fun." She stripped of everything but her shirt, but this only served to enrage Sade, who ripped the shirt from her body. He then flung her to the bed, face down, and began to whip her bare buttocks with a cat-o-nine-tails. Oblivious to the woman's terrified screams, Sade came to orgasm, emitting violent shrieks of his own.

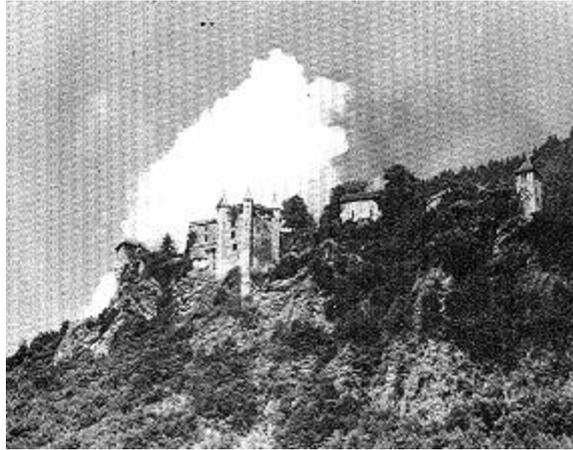
After taking a few moments to regain his composure, Sade left the room. Kellor immediately ripped the bed sheets into long strips, which she tied together into on long rope. She secured the rope to the bed stand, and lowered herself out of the window into the garden, from which she fled back in the direction of Paris. Villagers, responding to her screams, came out to find Kellor half-naked and covered in her own blood. She was taken to the home of the local police, who in turn brought her before a judge the following day to give her deposition. The Marquis had returned to his in-laws' home on Sunday evening, but already news of his assault had reached the family by Monday afternoon. For the first time in all of his history of philandering, the Marquis did not spare Pelagie the details of his sordid encounter with Ms. Kellor. However, rather than being scandalized and devastated by his account, Pelagie instead began to immediately create legal devices by which her husband could be protected from prosecution. It was a role she would, in time, fully usurp from her mother, a role that on certain levels could be likened to Hillary Clinton's defense of her husband's many sexual dalliances. However, it is perhaps in usurping this role that it was ultimately Pelagie who drove the final wedge between the "President" and the Marquis.

Due to the tireless efforts of both the "President" and Pelagie, Sade ultimately served only four months in prison for his offense. However, he learned that he could now count on his own wife to assist him in his never-ending quest for diverse and elaborate sexual outlets, and

would one day enlist her aid in organizing a scandalous six-week orgy at La Coste. This was not accomplished, however, until after Sade had orchestrated an orgy of his own, one that included his valet, Latour, and four prostitutes in the city of Marseilles. This elaborate encounter, which took place on July 27, 1772, involved the consumption of Spanish fly, and a number of ménage à trois scenarios, wherein the Marquis would either whip a prostitute while masturbating his valet, make love with a prostitute while being sodomized by his valet, or sodomize a prostitute who was simultaneously performing fellatio on Latour. Among Sade's more bizarre and startling requests was for his female companions to consume a great deal of his Spanish fly candies: his goal was to give them gas so that he might "take in their wind", as it were. He also requested that he be able to whip the young women with a particularly violent-looking implement, one that was already covered with his own blood.

Frightened by the bizarre and brutal nature of his requests, the women begged to be let go. They departed, but Sade and Latour soon found another young woman named Marguerite Coste. Ultimately, Sade had dismissed Latour for the evening, and was unable to convince Marguerite to allow him to sodomize her. Sodomy being a crime in France, she refused, but not before consuming the entire box of Sade's Spanish fly candies. He departed after this, but soon thereafter she became terribly ill and began vomiting the candies. She was taken to a doctor by concerned neighbors and, once she was stabilized, was then brought to the police where she gave testimony regarding Sade's request for sodomy. Her testimony, along with that of the four other traumatized prostitutes, was more than enough to convince the authorities to issue an arrest warrant for the Marquis and his valet, Latour. Police authorities arrived at La Coste shortly thereafter to arrest the two men, only to discover that they had been tipped off and had fled the castle to go into hiding. Sade's sister-in-law, the ravishing Anne-Prospere, with whom the Marquis was strongly suspected of having an affair, in turn, accompanied them. While she would return to La Coste without the Marquis, her association with him and Pelagie's continued defense of her husband secured the unending wrath and enmity of the "President."

Sade was on the lam for a number of months, roaming across the European continent. Latour remained in his company, while Anne-Prospere returned to be with her family in France. As of November, Sade, Latour, and two additional servants, Carteron and Martin Queros, were holed up reclusively in a villa located in the nation state of Sardinia. For unfathomable reasons, Sade, at the moment when the authorities of the French Crown searching for him and his mother-in-law was determined to use all of her influence to see him destroyed, chose to send a letter to this very woman. Sade effectively handed the "President" his own head on a platter. She seized the opportunity, and, through the French minister of foreign affairs, arranged for the Sardinian authorities to apprehend Sade. This they did on December 8, 1772, and Sade was spirited away to the French prison of Miolans. Although his confines were comfortable enough for a prisoner, for the first time in his life Sade was denied the most basic liberties: he was prohibited from receiving visitors, and even his mail was heavily censored by police authorities.



**Fortress of Miolans**

Immediately, Sade's scheming mind devised a means to escape. As per his habit, the Marquis employed his most common and resourceful tool, his charming personality and ability to manipulate others. Within a few months' stay at Miolans, Sade had convinced the warden that he was a criminal on the mend, a harmless noble who had suffered a momentary lapse of reason. As this impression began to take firmer hold in the warden's mind, he extended Sade's liberties, permitting him to take company with other prisoners and to wander the grounds of the castle. In similar fashion, surveillance of the Marquis became more relaxed, just as the insidious libertine knew it would. Sade had established an irreproachable reputation as a model prisoner, one he finally used to his advantage on the night of April 30, 1773.

That evening, the guard responsible for monitoring Sade's cell found nothing out of the ordinary when he saw a candle flame flickering from within, and did not bother to verify with his own eyes that Sade himself was in the cell. It wasn't until much later in the night, when the candle remained unextinguished, that Sade's captors finally thought to enter the cell, only to find him missing. On a table, next to an almost completely spent candle, Sade had left two letters for the warden: one was a detailed inventory of all of his personal belongings, of which there were many of great value; the other was a bold declaration of independence from the prison. In it, Sade took pains to thank his captors for a most pleasant stay, and even sought to shield them from recriminations by stating that it was his own cleverness, and not their ineptitude, that had made his freedom possible. Finally, Sade warned them that all efforts to pursue him would be met with violence. With his typical Sadeian flair, he wrote: "Fifteen well-mounted, well-armed men await me at the base of the castle... They are all sworn to risk death rather than see me captured again. I shall defend my freedom if it costs me my life. I have a wife, and children, who would pursue you unto death if you harmed me."

Sade spent the next year-and-a-half on the lam, roaming across Western Europe, staying only a few nights at a time in any given location. By December of 1774, however, he had gained enough courage to secretly make his way back to La Coste, once again to be reunited with his wife. Never one to play the contented house-husband, Sade drew Pelagie into his latest conspiracy. He requested that she assist him in orchestrating his latest sexual fantasy, an orgy that was shocking even by Sadeian standards, and that would effectively lead to the events that put an end to his conquests of the flesh

### **The Little Girls' Affair**

The orgy that Sade had in mind for the winter months at La Coste marked a significant and horrifying departure from his already brutal fetishes. Already well-practiced in the art of preying on the poorest and most defenseless whores of France, the Marquis had developed a sexual appetite for those with even less recourse than common whores -- children. With Pelagie's consent and assistance, Sade had six teenage girls hired to work at La Coste, ostensibly as domestic servants. However, Sade's version of servitude had ghastly implications for these young adolescents. As a preliminary smoke screen, Pelagie instructed their lawyer not to disclose that it was she and her husband who had hired the youngsters, but to respond to any inquires on the subject by claiming that another distant member of the family had made the hires.

Once the site of the local jail, the isolated castle of La Coste played host to the torment and abuse of these six girls. Within these dreary stone walls, referred to by some as a "laboratory of sadism," the Marquis de Sade held sway over every moment of the girls' day. While no official record of events exist, it is not difficult to delineate from his writings and former actions the type of behaviors on which Sade must have engaged, and forced upon his young charges. In Sade's later writings, characters were depicted as partaking in elaborately orchestrated orgies, with one character (most likely modeled after Sade himself) directing all actions.

So it must have been for six weeks at La Coste. Assisted by his wife, two other young adult women domestics, and his valet, Sade assembled his captives daily for a mélange of activities: masturbation, fellatio, sodomy (both hetero and homosexual), sodomy chains, and, of course, scourging. The very acts with children that cause most people of reason and morals to recoil in terror provided the Marquis with sensations of ecstasy: the physical and emotional domination of another and the violent destruction of youthful innocence. This ecstasy is portrayed by one of the protagonists of *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, who exclaims, "How delicious to corrupt, to stifle all semblances of virtue and religion in that young heart!"

It is impossible to know how long the bacchanals of La Coste would have lasted had they gone unchecked. As it happened, Sade's unthinkable orgy ran uninterrupted for six weeks, until parents of some of the girls began to make legal inquiries as to their whereabouts and well being. Residents of the local village began to gossip about the goings-on at La Coste. While legendary for his debauches, Sade nonetheless had retained the affection and good will of his peasant charges throughout the years. However, while most villagers were willing to cast a blind eye towards how the nobles carried on amongst themselves, Sade's transgression against the young girls far exceeded the bounds of acceptable noble behavior. As the gossip grew more widespread, Donatien and Pelagie conspired once again, this time to silence the girls lest they reveal details of the past six weeks to the authorities. One by one they were taken to local convents, where the unsuspecting nuns were instructed not to pay heed to the girls' ravings. One of the girls was sent to stay with the Abbe de Sade. Although he protested, Pelagie made it clear that should he decide not to assist them that she had enough information about his own activities to make real trouble for him with the law.

While immediate legal action was not taken against Sade, the orgy had commenced a series of events that would lead to his final incarceration. The "President," who had sworn to avenge her family's honor against the Marquis who had stained it so deeply, put Inspector Marais back on the case. She continued to fret over her daughter's unwavering support of the Marquis and the affect she herself had on him, writing to a friend, "Never expect her to hear a complaint from her. She would allow herself to be chopped to pieces rather than admit that he

could ever do her harm. When he's in his castle with her, he thinks of himself as too powerful, too secure, and he permits himself all kinds of excesses.”

Sade's activities were hardly in keeping with those of a man who was wanted by authorities for escaping from prison. Yet, such was his arrogance, his undying belief that, as a member of the nobility, he was entitled to carry on as he pleased, and that his own sense of righteousness superseded any of the laws governing morality and conduct. This illusion was dispelled when, in July of 1775, police authorities raided La Coste in an attempt to apprehend and imprison him. Sade barely escaped by hiding in the eaves of his estate, and came to the conclusion that La Coste was no longer the safest refuge for him. He fled the country for Italy, accompanied by Carteron. Yet the Marquis was no more secure on foreign soil than he had been at home. The "Presidente" made certain that the fervent Inspector Marais monitored his every move. Between 1775 and 1777, Sade traveled back and forth between France and Italy, enjoying the company of a number of paramours, and taking in the cultural events of Italy like any other inquisitive tourist.

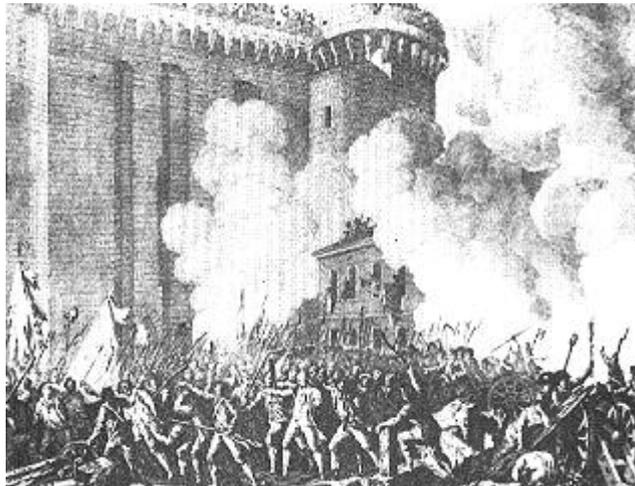
However, as it had been throughout his life, Sade's own arrogance and boundless self-confidence were his own downfall. In late 1776, Sade had returned to La Coste, accompanied by a number of young women procured for him by none other than a local member of the clergy, a Father Durand. However, events quickly degenerated: when word of his deeds reached his abbey, Father Durand was immediately dismissed from the premises. The father of the young women, meanwhile, stormed La Coste in order to extract vengeance from the Marquis. A skirmish ensued, during which the man's pistol fired. While the cartridge was blank, the possibility of being murdered within his own home caused Sade to finally give serious thought to his perilous legal standing within French society.

In what would prove to be a serious miscalculation, Sade concluded that it was high time for him to make amends with his in-laws and the King's court. Against the advice of his lawyer, he set forth for Paris. Pelagie followed in a separate carriage, and the two adjourned to separate quarters upon their arrival. Sade's ability to logically foresee the outcome of such a journey must have been seriously compromised, for his mother-in-law was in anything but a forgiving frame of mind. Quite to the contrary, she had been plotting his arrest for years, a fact that Sade himself was well aware. Therefore, it should have come to no surprise to the Marquis when, upon opening the door of his apartment on February 13, 1777, he found Inspector Marais holding an arrest warrant, signed by King Louis XVI himself. By the end of the day, the Marquis de Sade was a prisoner once again, incarcerated within the walls of the fortress of Vincennes in Cell 11.

### **The Literal Marquis: The Symbols and Psychology of his Written Imagery**

The Marquis de Sade's prison term would last for thirteen long years. He was moved to a variety of prisons during that time, his final destination being the infamous Bastille, from which the forces of the French Revolution in the late 1780s would finally free him. During his imprisonment, Sade's physical appearance deteriorated severely, and he left his confinement as a corpulent, self-indulgent wretch, with no immediate means of supporting himself. However, Sade, like his father before him, was well practiced in the art of being a social chameleon. Accordingly, he managed to form relationships with those who saw fit to help support him until his death in December 1814. He also held elective office in one of the newly formed revolutionary districts of Paris. By these and other means, the Marquis managed to

keep food on his plate and a roof over his head, scarcely the noble standards he had grown so accustomed to in his younger days.



**Revolutionary scene outside of the Bastille**

Despite the myriad changes of circumstance, and despite his self-imposed physical limitations, the one unchanging component of Sade's character was his libido, his sexual imagination. During his period of imprisonment he had secretly penned a number of pornographic texts that he published in the period after his release. His major works include *The 120 Days of Sodom*, *Justine* (or the *Misfortunes of Virtue*), and *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, among others. Anticipating an angry social backlash against their contents, Sade wisely published his works under a *nomme de plume*, and indeed, literary critics vilified his writings for generations to follow. Copies of his texts remained generally unavailable, and where they could be found they were usually kept under lock and key, for adults only.



**Likeness of Sade, 1791**

However, this century has seen the emergence of scholars and critics who have been willing to passionately dissect and defend the value of Sade's work, perhaps making the Marquis one of history's only true criminals to be exonerated and celebrated on legitimate intellectual and philosophical grounds. In a 1951 essay, "Must We Burn Sade," Simone de Beauvoir identifies Sade as a forerunner of Freud with an intuitive grasp of the nature of the human heart:

"It is remarkable, for example, that in 1795 Sade wrote: 'Sexual pleasure is, I agree, a passion to which all others are subordinate but in which they all unite.' Not only does Sade, in the first part of this text, anticipate what has been called the 'pansexuality' of Freud, but also he makes eroticism the mainspring of human behavior. In addition, he asserts... that sexuality is charged with a significance that goes beyond it. Libido is everywhere, and it is always far more than itself. Sade certainly anticipated this great truth. He knew that the 'perversions' that are vulgarly regarded as moral monstrosities or physiological defects actually envelop what would now be called an intentionality. He understood, too, that our tastes are motivated not by the intrinsic qualities of the object but by the latter's relationship with the subject. In a passage in *La Nouvelle Justine* he tries to explain coprophilia. His reply is faltering, but clumsily using the notion of imagination, he points out that the truth of a thing lies not in what it is but in the meaning it has taken on for us in the course of our individual experience. Intuitions such as these allow us to hail Sade as a precursor of psychoanalysis."

It is precisely these perversions, Sade's fascination with and understanding of the underbelly of the human psyche, that author Thomas Moore further dissects in his treatment of Sade's works, *Dark Eros: The Imagination of Sadism*. While no apologist for Sade's personal behavior, Moore defends the Marquis' literature from a psychoanalytical point of view, making the point that, for just as there is inherent value to understanding and encouraging humanity's nobler impulses, there is equal value to understanding, and perhaps on some level encouraging, the darker tendencies of the psyche:

"The foul atmosphere that surrounds him (Sade) is like the sulfuric stench of the devil. It would be a travesty of hell to smell roses when Satan appears. My purpose, then, in turning to Sade is to find a darkening of consciousness, to seek out a foul-smelling imagery appropriate for the amplification of those dreams and fantasies and art pieces that reveal an underworld aesthetic and a shadowy psychological reality."

Foul-smelling imagery abounds in the literary world of the Marquis de Sade. Moore has a treasure of perverted depictions of interactions between human beings, as well as between individuals and their own selves. Perverted is used here not to describe something that is perverse or wicked, but rather an opposite image, a deed that by its nature is diametrically in conflict with the norms and mores of polite society. For instance, Moore remarks on how Sade "perverts" society's traditional image of Love. For most, Love is the one ideal emotion, or state of being. It is placed on a pedestal and revered as the universal aspiration for all humanity. And while there are many forms of Love, it has often been homogenized for commercial purposes; its image is aggrandized, and even trivialized in pop culture by songs, TV programs, and greeting cards. The net result is the creation of the myth of Love as sweet, Love as painless, Love as cheap and available on any TV set, in any record or Hallmark store.



**Frontpiece to original edition of *Justine***

In his works, Sade sets forth to turn this very notion on its head. To the Sadeian mind, Love is most often unavailable, is bitter, and is acquired only after painful struggle. The Sadeian notion of Love is something that cannot be acquired until one gains full knowledge of the self, and this in turn cannot be acquired until one is willing to come face-to-face with all of the horrifying images and realities we have stored within us. Sadeian Love is the pursuit of Eros, the Greek god of love, that for which our soul longs to join, that which provides the soul with inspiration and desire. While for most such inspirations include the desire to be financially secure, to succeed in a chosen professional field, to be a good parent and spouse, Moore postulates that there is validity to Sade's point, that there are always two sides to every coin: "At first it may seem odd to claim that the sickening and frightening issues Sade presents have anything to do with desire, but that is the value of his approach- to unveil the stirrings of love in places that seem void of it."

In all, Sade's point is that, for all the splendor and bliss associated with Love, there is also pain, emptiness, and longing, the value of which is equal to that which society claims to be desirable of love in the first place. To Sade, these are worthless unless and until we are ready to accept and experience Love's ugly sides too: "Although love can be creative, it is also destructive and entropic. If most literature focuses on the pleasures and pains of love, Sade turns our attention to its dark objects." The darkest of these objects is fecal excrement, which Sade advocates that we consume with relish (no pun intended), writing, "No habit is more easily acquired than mard (excrement)-savoring; eat one, delicious, eat another, no two taste exactly alike, but all are subtle and the effect is somewhat that of an olive."

The literal image Sade evokes is one more reprehensible than perhaps any other in the history of literature. However, it is in the interpretation of Sade's ludicrous proposition that Moore sees deeper meaning. Eating feces represents the figurative extreme, the furthest end of the spectrum of human behavior from that end which represents the height of ecstasy and self-fulfillment. In short, true freedom, the ability to be fully one's self, cannot be experienced until one has the courage to both acknowledge and suffer that for which is the worst possible circumstance for that person, to travel to both ends of that spectrum and experience both equally. As Moore writes, "Love has its excremental component, and this, along with the more wholesome diet, has to be consumed."



**Illustration from *Justine***

For Moore, what Sade's work ultimately brings to light is the "shadow self" that exists within each individual. This part of the self is consigned to the shadows of our own being by forces and rules from without. Motivated by the fear that our true nature will be rejected by broader society, we force our very being to conform to expectations not of its making. Despite its pariah status, this side of the self strives to find an outlet for expression, to be granted legitimacy in a polite setting where this cannot be granted. That these impulses form our shadow, darker half becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: if the expectation is that these parts of our very selves are bad, that is how we ourselves will come to view them, and how they themselves will find expression.

Herman Hesse, the German author and contemporary of psychological pioneer Carl Jung, made this the theme of his celebrated novel *Demian*, wherein the young protagonist experiences the awakening of his own psyche and the requisite breach this causes with his familiar childhood world:

"The realms of day and night, two different worlds coming from two different opposite poles, mingled during this time. My parents' house made up one realm, yet its boundaries were even narrower, actually embracing only my parents themselves... It was a realm of brilliance, clarity, and cleanliness, gentle conversations, washed hands, clean clothes, and good manners. The other realm... was completely different; it smelled different, spoke a different language, and promised and demanded different things. All these wild and cruel, attractive and hideous things surrounded us, could be found in the next alley, the next house. Policemen and tramps, drunkards who beat their wives, droves of young girls pouring out of the factories at night -- everywhere this second vigorous world erupted and gave off its scent, everywhere, that is, except in our parents' rooms. For the time being I was not so much afraid of what would happen tomorrow as of the horrible certainty that my way, from now on, would lead farther and farther downhill into darkness. I felt acutely that new offenses were bound to grow out of this one offense, that my presence among my sisters, greeting and kissing my parents, were a lie, that I was living a lie concealed deep inside myself."

The struggle for the true self to find legitimate standing and expression in a hostile, judgmental world is echoed in works as diverse as George Orwell's 1984, Billy Joel's *The Stranger* and Jethro Tull's *Aqualung*. Sade, Freud, Jung, Hesse, Moore, and others are of a school of thought that emphasizes the importance of granting our "other," darker half equal standing as a part of ourselves.

An important criticism of Sade is that he, in order to make his point, took this premise to the extreme. In doing so, he overemphasized one aspect of the self to the exclusion of providing a deeper understanding of the whole self. The human psyche is neither totally shadow nor totally enlightened, but rather exists within a plain wherein both halves intermingle to the extent that, for the undisciplined soul, it may grow increasingly difficult to determine where within this union the true self exists.

Sade as messenger casts a pall on the legitimate contributions his writings have otherwise helped to make in our collective search to know and understand the self, the psyche. In this

sense, Sade leaves a legacy both brutal and sublime. He is an enigma for the ages: he was, on the one hand, a man of heightened self-importance and brutal sexual temperament; simultaneously, he was a man passionately dedicated to the defense of the individual, and possessed of a keen understanding of the complexities of the human psyche, the labyrinth of the human heart. The riddle of how to treat the memory of such a man shall resonate through the ages: if we cannot burn Sade, must we then celebrate him?

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