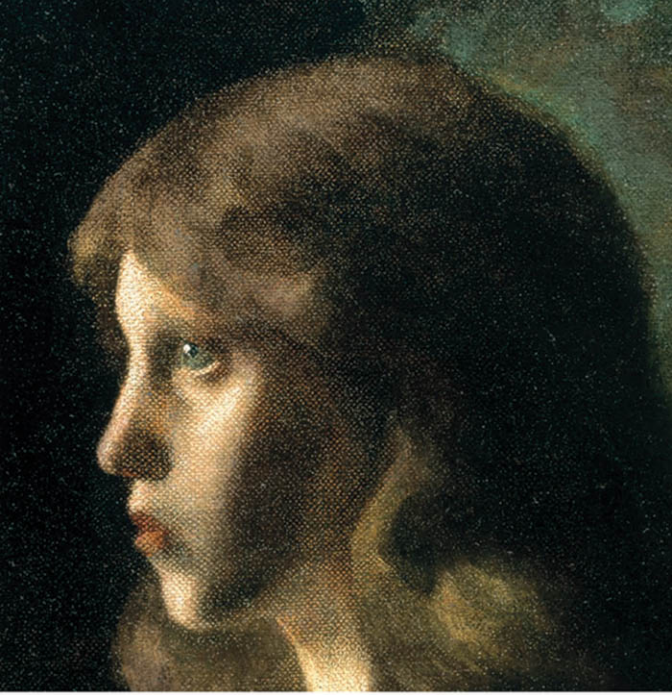

The Marquis de Sade

Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue

A new translation by John Phillips

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JUSTINE,
OR THE MISFORTUNES OF VIRTUE

DONATIEN-ALPHONSE-FRANÇOIS, MARQUIS DE SADE, was born in Paris in 1741 into an old patrician family. He was educated at the Jesuit college of Louis-le-Grand and at military school at Versailles. The end of the Seven Years War in 1763 dashed his hopes of a military career, and that same year he reluctantly made the good match his impoverished father forced on him by marrying Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil, daughter of a recently ennobled but wealthy lawyer. Serious sexual misdemeanours brought him to the attention of the police and he was jailed twice for his excesses. In 1772, for attempted murder and sodomy, he was sentenced to death and his effigy was burned in his absence. In 1777, after years spent in not uncomfortable hiding, mainly at his chateau at La Coste near Avignon, he was jailed and not released until 1790. During his prison years study was his therapy and writing his salvation. It was now that he developed a coherent system of atheistical materialism and wrote plays, novels, and the stories of *Les Crimes de l'amour* (*The Crimes of Love*), which he published in 1800. In the 1790s, having no love for the *ancien régime* which had deprived him of his freedom, he played a minor role in the revolution. Jailed as a political moderate, he escaped the guillotine in July 1794 by an administrative accident. Describing himself as 'a man of letters', he tried to make a living from the novels (*Justine*, 1791; *Aline et Valcour*, 1795; *La Nouvelle Justine* and *L'Histoire de Juliette*, both 1797) which justified their obscenities by reference to a comprehensive system of sexual *realpolitik*. In 1801 he was jailed as the author of *Justine*, and in 1803 was transferred to the lunatic asylum at Charenton, diagnosed as suffering from 'libertine dementia'. He continued to write and even helped to stage plays for the inmates. His applications for release were consistently rejected, and he remained a captive until his death in December 1814. Against his wishes, he was given a Christian funeral, but was buried in an unmarked grave.

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THE MARQUIS DE SADE

Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
JOHN PHILLIPS

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INTRODUCTION

Insane pornographer obsessed with cruel, violent and perverse forms of sex, woman-beater, child rapist, and even murderer—these are just some of the more lurid labels that have been attached to the infamous Marquis de Sade over the last two centuries. Conversely, the French surrealists of the early twentieth century sanctified the 'divine marquis' as arch-transgressor and apostle of freedom. The real Sade, however, is a figure of far greater complexity than allowed by any such simplistic labels, all of which derive from myth rather than fact. He is a figure of uncertainty and contradiction, and at the same time an author of considerable erudition and intellect. His work ranges across a wide variety of genres, from novels, short stories, and plays to political, philosophical, and literary essays. His rhetorical talents and mastery of expression have been widely acknowledged in all of these genres, but it is for his *contes* or novellas, such as the first version of *Justine*, that he has received the most critical praise. It is, however, in the 1791 publication, *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue*, the second, novel-length version of the *Justine* saga, that the author is able to develop and explore at greater leisure the embryonic themes of the original *conte*: the overwhelming force of the sex drive, the corruption of contemporary institutions, especially the aristocracy and the Church, the bankruptcy of certain current philosophical ideas and the astuteness of others, and above all, the absurdity of any notion of divine providence. This doctrine, fundamental to both Christianity and to philosophical optimism, according to which virtue would ultimately be rewarded and vice punished, is dramatically and outrageously reversed in Justine's sorry tale. The effects of such a reversal in the light of the author's declared intention to make the reader prouder of virtue have long been a matter of controversy. We shall return to this question presently. First, given the close relationship between Sade's character and the fictions he created, a brief survey of his life will provide an indispensable context.

The Marquis de Sade, 1740–1814

Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade was born in 1740, son of

Jean-Baptiste-Joseph-François, Comte de Sade, Lord of Saumane and Mazan, cavalry-officer and diplomat, and of Mlle Maillé de Carman, a lady-in-waiting and poor distant cousin of the Princesse de Condé. The main influences on Sade's young life were his father and his paternal uncle, the Abbé Jacques-François de Sade, who were both active debauchees. At the same time, both were highly cultured men. Sade's father was a close friend of Voltaire and himself wrote verses, while Donatien's uncle in particular had a fine and extensive library which, alongside the classic authors, included all the major works of contemporary Enlightenment philosophy as well as a fair sample of erotic writings. As Donatien spent much of his early childhood at the family chateau of Saumane in Provence in the care of his uncle, he had plenty of time to become well acquainted with this library of free-thinking authors.

The future writer and roué grew up, then, in a world of progressive ideas and libertine tastes. It was also a predominantly masculine world. When he was not in the company of his father and uncle, Donatien's early education was divided between the Jesuit college of Louis-le-Grand in Paris, which he attended alongside other boys of the French aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie between the ages of ten and fourteen, and a young preceptor by the name of Abbé Amblet, who taught him reading, arithmetic, geography, and history. Amblet was a gentle and highly intelligent man, and the only male member of the child's entourage who was not a libertine. From the Jesuits, Sade acquired a taste for rigorous intellectual inquiry, the debating skills of classical rhetoric, and above all, a lifelong passion for the theatre. The Jesuits' enthusiasm at this time for both sodomy and corporal punishment may also have helped shape the young Marquis's nascent sexuality. As for his mother, she appeared to take very little interest in her only child. Her relative absence from his childhood is often seen by critics as the possible source of the mother-hatred that permeates Sade's adult writings.

At the age of fourteen Sade was sent to a prestigious military academy to train to serve in the light cavalry regiment of the King's guard. In 1763, following some years of action in the Seven Years War as a junior officer, the now twenty-two-year-old Marquis left one dissolute life as a soldier for another as a Paris socialite, much to the exasperation of his now destitute father, who determined to find him a wife and a dowry without delay. The Comte quickly came up with

the daughter of a senior Paris judge. About the same age as Donatien, Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil came from the recently ennobled bourgeoisie rather than from the traditional aristocracy to which the Sade family proudly belonged, but the Montreuils were well connected and wealthy, and offered a substantial dowry for their eldest daughter. Renée-Pélagie was a plain girl and no great intellect, yet her strength of character and devotion would prove a great support to her husband throughout their long marriage. Her mother, the Présidente de Montreuil, was a formidable woman who would also play a significant role in the Marquis de Sade's destiny.

Following their wedding, on 17 May 1763, the young couple were initially housed by the Montreuils, either in their Paris house or their chateau in Normandy. It was at this time that Sade began to put on plays, allocating parts to his wife and even his mother-in-law, indulging an abiding interest in the theatre.

This domestic harmony was short-lived, however. Only five months after the wedding the Marquis was arrested for the crime of debauchery and imprisoned at Vincennes. Having paid a twenty-year-old Parisian prostitute named Jeanne Testard to spend the night with him, Sade had shocked her religious sensibilities by talk of masturbating into a chalice, and proposing to thrust communion hosts into her vagina. He had then frightened her with whips and other weapons into committing a number of similar sacrilegious acts. On 13 November 1763 the King ordered his release after only three weeks, on condition that he reside at the Montreuils' Norman chateau and stay out of trouble.

In 1764 the Marquis was given permission to move back to Paris. During the next few years Sade fell in and out of love with three women, all actresses that he met while frequenting the theatrical milieu. One might conjecture that this succession of painful amorous experiences eventually had a desensitizing effect on his emotional character. The last of these affairs was with a Mlle Beauvoisin, whom he even passed off as his wife on a visit to La Coste, where the Sade family owned a castle and land.

In January 1767 Sade's father died, at the age of sixty-five. This was a traumatic event for Donatien, who had been very close to the Comte in spite of their many quarrels. Later that year he returned to Paris for the birth of Louis-Marie, the first of Renée-Pélagie's children who would survive into adulthood.

While still in Paris over a year later, on Easter Sunday 1768, Sade picked up a thirty-six-year-old beggar named Rose Keller and, on the pretext of needing a cleaner, took her to a little country house he had rented at Arcueil. Once there, he locked the woman up, ordered her to strip, and whipped her, pouring what felt to her like molten wax into her wounds. Keller later managed to escape from the house and report her experience to the police. Sade was duly arrested and taken to the royal prison at Saumur, where he was held for a fortnight before being transferred to Pierre-Encize, another royal prison near Lyons. After a hearing at which Sade categorically denied any intention of causing Keller serious harm (the medical evidence in fact supported his defence) and claimed that the woman was a prostitute who had accepted money for sexual purposes, he was fined and released after a few months' imprisonment, on condition that he return to Provence and remain there until further notice.

Around this time the huge debts that Sade incurred to pay for his sexual pleasures and also for the theatrical activities at La Coste were beginning to change his mother-in-law's view of him, a process that would culminate eventually in her outright hostility. But the single event that probably did most damage to his relationship with La Présidente was the love-affair with his wife's youngest sister, Anne-Prospère de Launay, who was as beautiful as Renée-Pélagie was plain. Fresh from her convent schooling, and still dressed as a nun, this pretty and, by all accounts, flirtatious twenty-year-old must have represented to Sade all the taboos that his fictional characters would take such pleasure in breaking: virginity, incest, and religion. Another major scandal would soon send them off together into Italy's most romantic city.

On 22 June 1772 Sade and his valet, Latour, set off for Marseilles, ostensibly to secure a loan to pay the Marquis's debts. It was not long, however, before they were looking to spend the money Sade had just borrowed in France's southern city of sin. In humorous self-disguise, the two men swapped names, Sade calling his servant Monsieur le Marquis, while Latour addressed his master as Lafleur (which would later be the name of a valet in *Philosophy in the Boudoir*), and organized a session of debauchery with four young prostitutes, ranging in age from eighteen to twenty-three. The session included acts of flagellation and sodomy. The girls were also asked to swallow pastilles containing cantharides (or 'Spanish fly'), a well-known

aphrodisiac, although the intention on this occasion was to cause flatulence, the effects of which Sade found particularly arousing. One of the girls became ill, and complained to the authorities that Sade had tried to poison her. Less than a week later a warrant was issued for the two men's arrest, and on 9 July the police arrived at La Coste to take them into custody, but an actor in Sade's theatre company having warned of the allegations made in Marseilles, Sade and Latour had already fled, accompanied this time by the ravishing Anne-Prospère. In spite of Renée-Pélagie's attempts to bribe the girls into withdrawing their accusations, the two men were found guilty of all charges and condemned to death in absentia (sodomy alone carried the death-sentence at this time), and on 12 September their bodies were symbolically burned in effigy. By now the three fugitives had reached Venice, Sade travelling under the pseudonym of the Comte de Mazan.

This was the first of three Italian trips that Sade undertook between 1772 and 1776 in his attempts to escape French justice. These journeys prompted him to write his first major literary work, *Travels in Italy* (*Voyages d'Italie*), a sort of travelogue with philosophical and historical commentaries, which would not be published until 1795 but which represented an important stage in his formation as a writer and thinker. On the one hand the travel perspective enabled Sade to develop a theme to which he would repeatedly return in his libertine fiction, and which would come to form the basis of his opposition to the absolutism of religious morality: the cultural and historical relativity of human mores. On the other hand, in their increasing improbability, events in the Marquis de Sade's life were beginning to resemble the picaresque adventures of the typical eighteenth-century hero of fiction, and so would also provide ample inspiration, as well as geographical and cultural material, for the novels he would write in the 1790s. During this period Sade managed to elude capture by the French authorities, until he was eventually arrested in Chambéry in December 1772 by order of the King of Sardinia and detained at the sixteenth-century fortress of Miolans. Renée-Pélagie did all she could to obtain his release, but the Montreuils exercised their influence to keep him locked up. At the instigation of Madame de Montreuil, warrants for Sade's arrest were issued and reissued over the next few years. Before the first extended period of Sade's imprisonment, which began in 1777 and was to last until the Revolution, there was one more

scandal which greatly assisted La Présidente in her vigorous campaign to get her embarrassing son-in-law permanently incarcerated.

During a period of prolonged residence in hiding at La Coste between 1774 and 1775, the Marquis had hired five girls and a young male secretary for the winter. It was Anne Sablonnière, a young woman of twenty-four, otherwise known as 'Nanon', who helped find the girls and was as a consequence alleged later to have acted as procuress. There was probably some truth in this, in that the intention had almost certainly been to organize a little harem. In addition to the six youngsters and Nanon, there was also Renée-Pélagie's maid, Gothon, a young girl from a Swiss Protestant family. In January 1775 Sade was accused of having abducted the five young girls. This situation was exacerbated in the spring of that year by Nanon's giving birth to an illegitimate child and claiming that Sade was the father. This affair was hushed up by the Sade and Montreuil families, who conspired to get Nanon arrested for an alleged theft of three silver plates and locked away in a house of detention at Arles, where she would remain for three years. Her baby died of neglect at La Coste at the age of ten weeks. As for the five girls, four were sent off to various nunneries to keep them quiet, while one chose to stay with Renée-Pélagie as scullery-maid. Nevertheless, the whole business had done Sade's reputation considerable damage, and fearing another police raid on La Coste, he set off again for Italy. It was a year before he felt safe enough to return to France.

Settling down once more in his chateau in Provence, Sade again began to recruit young girls. These included a pretty twenty-two-year-old named Catherine Treillet, whom Sade nicknamed Justine. Her father, a local weaver, gradually became concerned about the goings-on at La Coste and decided to take his daughter home by force. When the daughter refused to go with him, he marched up to the chateau and fired off a shot at the Marquis. This incident obviously had legal repercussions which contributed to a fateful decision. In his legal battle with Treillet, Sade determined to seek satisfaction in the Paris courts, and on 8 February 1777 he and Renée-Pélagie arrived in the capital, where he learned that his mother had died three weeks earlier. This was a perfect opportunity for Madame de Montreuil to get rid of her wayward son-in-law once and for all, and within a week of his arrival in Paris Sade was arrested and again imprisoned in the fortress of Vincennes.

The following year the verdict imposed on Sade and his valet for the Marseilles 'poisoning' was in fact annulled by the court at Aix, but Madame de Montreuil was able to have a new *lettre de cachet* issued to keep her son-in-law detained. On the return journey from the Aix appeal to prison at Vincennes, however, the Marquis managed to give his guards the slip when they stopped at a coaching inn at Vincennes, and disappeared into the surrounding countryside, heading for La Coste, which he reached on foot at eight o'clock the next morning. His freedom was short-lived, however, for just six weeks later a detachment of ten armed men stormed the chateau and hauled him back to Vincennes.

This fleeting taste of liberty was the only interruption in a thirteen-year period of detention, initially at Vincennes and then in the Bastille, to which Sade was transferred in February 1784. To fill the long days and evenings he read voraciously, gradually amassing a varied and extensive library which included the classics he had read as a child (for example, Homer, Virgil, Montaigne, La Fontaine, Boccaccio), works of Enlightenment philosophy by Buffon, La Mettrie, d'Holbach, Diderot, Rousseau, and Voltaire, and of course drama and fiction, by Beaumarchais, Marivaux, Voltaire, Defoe, Rousseau, Shakespeare, and many others. In the solitude of his prison-cell Sade began to write in earnest, producing a remarkable number of works in a relatively short time. Indeed, his literary output was so great that in 1788 he was able to compose a comprehensive catalogue of his works, listing no fewer than eight novels and volumes of short stories, sixteen historical novellas, two volumes of essays, an edition of diary notes, and some twenty plays. From this canon of writings only a small number survived the storming of the Bastille in 1789.

All of the plays and two important works of prose—the lengthy epistolary novel *Aline et Valcour*, and the philosophical short story 'Les Infortunes de la vertu' ('The Misfortunes of Virtue'), which would form the basis of the full-length libertine novel *Justine* that Sade would publish after the Revolution—conformed in every sense to accepted literary norms. On the other hand, of the libertine works composed during these prison years, the novel *Les Cent vingt journées de Sodome* (*The One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom*), written between 1782 and 1785, and a philosophical essay with strong libertine overtones, *Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond* (*Dialogue*

between a Priest and a Dying Man; 1782), show a total disregard for the conventions of form as well as of content. The obscene works that he began to produce in prison in the 1780s and completed for publication in the 1790s are of considerably more interest than anything else he wrote.

In the months and weeks immediately preceding the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789 angry crowds were in the habit of gathering beneath its walls. Sade quickly saw that the present unrest offered his best chance of freedom in thirteen years, and he shouted to the mob below that the guards were about to cut the prisoners' throats. This provocative act immediately got Sade moved to the lunatic asylum at Charenton, a few miles south of Paris. Ten days later the citizens of Paris invaded the fortress, murdering the governor and plundering or destroying those manuscripts that Sade had not been able to smuggle out of the building. Among the lost works was the unfinished manuscript of *The One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom*, which would not resurface until the beginning of the twentieth century. Sade was eventually set free in April 1790 thanks to the abolition by the new National Assembly of *lettres de cachet*, the legal means by which so many had been held indefinitely without trial under the *ancien régime*.

Sade was now a penniless and obese man of nearly fifty. Renée-Pélagie, who had remained utterly devoted to her husband throughout most of his time in prison, had by this time resolved to live alone in a Paris convent and refused to see him. It was not long, though, before the Marquis' old magnetic charm was able to rescue him from dying of starvation in the streets. That summer Sade met the woman who would take his wife's place as lover and loyal companion. Constance Quesnet, a thirty-three-year-old former actress, who was separated from her husband and had a six-year-old son, would remain at his side for the rest of his life. Nicknamed 'Sensible' or 'Sensitive' by Sade because of her highly strung temperament, Constance was a modestly educated but gentle, loving, and intelligent woman. The couple scraped a living on her small allowance, while Citizen Louis Sade, as he was now forced to call himself, tried to get his plays performed at the Comédie française and other leading Paris theatres. These efforts were largely unsuccessful, however, and Sade's increasing poverty, brought about by years of mounting debts and the seizure of his lands under the Revolution, drove him to publish

'well-spiced' novels that he hoped would have a large sale: *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue* in 1791, *Philosophy in the Boudoir* in 1795, *The New Justine* and *Story of Juliette* between 1797 and 1800. Only *Aline and Valcour*, published in 1795, and *Crimes of Love*, a collection of short stories which appeared in 1800, were sufficiently 'respectable' to be published under his own name. Citizen Sade was determined to make money, although in fact, for reasons which have more to do with the prevailing climate of taste in the 1790s than anything else, only the 1791 *Justine* achieved best-seller status.

Although remaining an aristocrat and a monarchist at heart, Sade nevertheless managed to survive the Revolution and the Terror of the Robespierre regime by playing the revolutionary game. This he did admirably, throwing himself energetically into local activities and penning well-received patriotic speeches. Indeed, for a former aristocrat his rise to prominence as a revolutionary was remarkable. He became secretary, then president of his section of the city for a brief period, and was eventually appointed one of the section's twenty judges, positions which he could easily have exploited to avenge himself on the Montreuils, whose death-warrants fate placed before him. A lifelong opponent of the death-penalty, however, Sade saved his in-laws and many others from the guillotine, a decision that eventually led to his arrest on 8 December 1793 on a trumped-up charge. In fact, the real reasons for his arrest were a now unfashionable atheism and 'judicial moderation', an ironic charge in the case of a man whose life and temperament could never have been described as moderate. Moved from one prison to another during the early months of 1794, Sade finally ended up at Picpus near Vincennes, a well-appointed former convent. It was here, from his cell window, that he watched as many of his fellow aristocrats mounted the steps of the guillotine, which had been moved there from the Place de la Révolution (the present-day Place de la Concorde) because of the stench of blood, their corpses being piled into a mass grave dug in the prison gardens. He would later write that the sight of the guillotine did him 'a hundred times more harm' than his imprisonment in the Bastille ever did. Sade himself escaped the guillotine thanks to a bureaucratic mix-up. In July 1794 his name appeared on a list of prisoners to be collected from Paris jails for judgement and execution that day, but as he failed to respond when his name was called he was marked down as absent. Within a short time the political climate had changed

again, with Robespierre's own fall from grace and execution, and Sade was freed on 15 October.

For the next five years Sade and Constance got by as best they could. Sade would frequently write desperate letters to his lawyer Gaufridy, begging him to send money, though with little success. By 1799 the former aristocrat was even reduced to working as prompt in a Versailles theatre for forty sous a day.

After more than a decade of freedom, under the strict new censorship laws of the Bonaparte regime, Sade was arrested at his publishers' on 6 March 1801 for the authorship of *Justine*. For the first time in his life he was imprisoned because of his writings. Sade would remain in detention until his death in 1814. Less than two weeks after his arrest the Sade-Montreuil family arranged for the Marquis to be transferred to the Charenton asylum where he had briefly stayed in 1789, in surroundings far more salubrious than any of the Paris prisons. The authorities justified Sade's continued detention and move to an insane asylum by inventing the medical diagnosis of 'libertine dementia', although in no sense could Sade be described as demented. The arrangement was one of pure convenience for the family. With their father out of the way, the Marquis's two sons would have a better chance of finding suitable brides. In fact, Charenton offered Sade a number of distinct advantages. He had an expensively furnished two-room flat, with agreeable views, a library of several hundred volumes, and the freedom to walk in the gardens whenever he liked. Constance was allowed to move into the asylum with him, there were frequent dinner-parties, and Sade enjoyed a stimulating, if at times stormy, relationship with the asylum director, François de Coulmier. The latter was progressive enough to believe in the therapeutic value of drama. Consequently, for the first time in his life Sade was given free rein to indulge his greatest passion. A full-size theatre was built to house an audience of three hundred, and the Marquis given complete control of the rehearsal and performance of plays, which obviously included works written by himself. All of the plays performed at the asylum were wholly conventional in character (unlike the psychodrama experiments represented in Peter Weiss's 1963 play *Marat-Sade*), and were acted by Sade, Constance, and other inmates with the support of professional actresses brought from the capital. The productions were highly successful and attracted large society audiences.

Sade continued to write at Charenton, producing four novels, of

which only three have survived, all conventional historical narratives, a detailed diary, and a significant body of correspondence.

From the autumn of 1812 until his death two years later a sixteen-year-old girl named Madeleine Leclerc, whose mother worked in the asylum, visited Sade on a regular basis to perform paid sexual services, although diary entries suggest that the ageing prisoner doted on the girl and was jealous of her dalliances with young men.

Sade died on 2 December 1814 at the age of seventy-four. His last will and testament had directed that his body be buried without ceremony or headstone on land he had purchased at Malmaison, near Épernon. Acorns were to be sown around the spot, so that 'the traces of my grave will disappear from the surface of the earth as I trust my memory will disappear from the memory of men, except for those few who were kind enough to love me until the last, and fond memories of whom I take with me into my grave'. In complete disregard of these wishes, however, and as a final ironic twist to the colourful life of the eighteenth century's most infamous iconoclast, Sade's younger son, Armand, gave his father a full Christian burial in the Charenton cemetery. The would-be 'martyr for atheism' must have turned in his grave.

The Birth of Justine

There are three versions of Justine's story, which evolved from a hundred-page novella to a two-hundred-page novel and finally to a marathon saga of more than a thousand pages. The original version, 'The Misfortunes of Virtue' ('Les Infortunes de la vertu') was one among the many works penned by Sade during his long years of imprisonment between 1778 and 1790. A novella or short story with satirical aims (critics describe it as a *conte philosophique* or 'philosophical tale'), it was composed in fifteen days in 1787. It was largely conventional in style and lacked any characteristics that might now be termed obscene. Some have found this first draft of Sade's tale of virtue despoiled to contain an intensity and clarity of vision absent from the two subsequent versions, but it was destined never to reach the reading public in the author's lifetime.[1]

[1] It was not until 1909 that the manuscript came to light, thanks to the efforts of the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, and it was eventually published in 1930 by Maurice Heine. The novel was not available in unexpurgated form, however, until the 1960s.

The unpublished *conte* was to grow into the novel-length *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue* (*Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu*), which appeared in 1791, a year after the author's release from prison. This version, the text translated here, is a predominantly first-person narrative in which Justine herself recounts her adventures to fellow travellers. *The New Justine*, published in 1797, was a greatly extended version of the tale of over a thousand pages, and far more explicit, if not pornographic. This final version, which was accompanied by numerous explicit illustrations, has been described as the most extensive work of print pornography ever undertaken.

Even the 1791 novel was considerably more violent and sexually explicit than the novella, and sold so well that five further editions had to be printed in the space of ten years. While the public's appetite for Sade's first published work was evidently insatiable, critical responses of the time were mixed. A contemporary review praises the author's 'rich and brilliant' imagination, while exhorting young people to 'avoid this dangerous book' and advising even 'more mature' men to read it 'in order to see to what insanities human imagination can lead', but then to 'throw it in the fire'.[2]

Justine was, after all, a 'libertine' novel, and very few such novels were published under the author's real name for fear of imprisonment or worse.[3] Both those found guilty of writing libertine works and their publishers could be sentenced to the guillotine. There were indeed numerous attempts by the authorities during the 1790s to stop sales of the novel, one of many so-called 'philosophical books' sold clandestinely *sous le manteau* or 'under the counter'.

Justine's story consists of a series of increasingly violent episodes of sexual abuse of the young orphan by libertine paedophiles, lascivious monks, murderous pederasts, and a ragbag of colourful characters: thieves, surgeons, counterfeiters, human vampires, and many other sexual predators. Scenes of sexual abuse alternate with long philosophical dialogues, during which the unshakeably devout young heroine attempts to convert all of her abusers to the Christian faith. These dialogues enable the author to lecture the reader on the futility

[2] *Journal général de France*, 27 Sept. 1792.

[3] In the seventeenth century the term 'libertine' was used to mean 'free-thinking' on a philosophical level, and was usually applied to atheists. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, it was increasingly employed to designate publications of a sexually obscene as well as anti-religious character.

of a belief in God or divine providence, the omnipotence of blind and amoral Nature, and thus to justify all acts of self-gratification at the expense of others.

In this version the account of the sexual cruelty and perversions to which Justine is subjected is given in her own voice, the voice of a sexually inexperienced and pious girl, and so obscenity is largely avoided in the main narrative, at least at a linguistic level.

Justine immediately appears to us as a passive creature, destined for martyrdom. A devout young child of twelve at the beginning of her remarkable odyssey, her religious faith remains implausibly unshaken by the unending catalogue of disasters that befall her throughout her relatively short and miserable existence. Suddenly left orphaned and destitute together with her fifteen-year-old sister, Juliette, she is first described to us in terms of what we would now consider to be a stereotype of feminine beauty (big blue eyes, teeth of ivory, lovely blonde hair). For the modern reader, the same physical features make up another stereotype—the dumb blonde—which is reinforced here by character traits connoting 'girlishness' and vulnerability (ingenuousness, sensitivity, naivety). Like her beauty, these traits can be also read on her physiognomy, at the very surface of her body: modesty, delicacy, shyness, and above all, the 'look of a virgin'. Justine's physical appearance immediately suggests that this is the part she will play: in Sade's terms, she is primed to be a victim of her own virtue (which will prevent her from enjoying the sexual attentions forced upon her, but which, more importantly, will determine the very nature of her attraction for the men and women who abuse her). She will also be the victim of the religious and social prejudices of a society that places a high value on the status of virginity, and in so doing creates a taboo that cries out to be transgressed.

In all of these respects Juliette is an exact opposite: not blonde, but brunette, with eyes not credulously blue but dark and 'prodigiously expressive'; not timid but spirited; not naive but incredulous; not innocent, but worldly wise thanks to the best possible education that a father's untimely ruin will deny her younger sister.

When both parents die and the two girls are left penniless orphans, Juliette's only response is the pleasure of being free. Even if we had not already been told at the beginning of the narrative of the fortune her beauty will help her to amass, we would know from this display

of lack of feeling that, far from being a victim, the insensitive and self-serving Juliette will be one of life's winners. Not so the 'sad and miserable Justine'.

In the first two versions, when she finishes her sad tale Justine is recognized by her sister Juliette, whose rich and powerful lover succeeds in rescuing her from the gallows, and she goes to live with them in their chateau. Fate, however, cruelly cuts short Justine's life and her new-found happiness. In a savage metaphor for the sheer perversity of providence, she is finally split asunder by a thunderbolt during a violent thunderstorm. The evolution of this scene and its repercussions in the narrative reflects both the increasingly transgressive sexualization of Justine from one version to the next and, perhaps also, the author's changing attitude to his heroine. In the short story the bolt enters her right breast and comes out through her mouth, whereas in *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue* the bolt exits through her abdomen and in *The New Justine* through her vagina. Furthermore, in the final version, in which there is no happy reunion, Justine's horrific death is not so much an accident as an event engineered by Juliette and her libertine friends, who sadistically drive her outside as the storm reaches its peak.[4]

Justine's Misfortunes

The change of title from one version to another is not without significance. 'Infortunes' connotes the unfortunate fate suffered by virtue through no fault of its own, but the ambiguity of 'Malheurs'—ill-luck, but also misery, the opposite of 'bonheur'—seems to imply that virtue is itself a wretched state, and so anyone embracing it has only herself to blame. In the second version, then, the juxtaposition of the heroine's name with her misery and its cause—*Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu*—personalizes the abstract title of the first version, focusing our attention on Justine as the source of her own misfortune.

The Dedication to this edition is addressed to the woman who by

[4] The ending of *The New Justine* is substantively different from that of the preceding versions. Having escaped from her death-cell, Justine encounters Juliette, who takes her back to her chateau where she recounts her story. Juliette then in turn relates her own life history, to be found in the companion volumes of *The Story of Juliette*, and Justine's death occurs at the very end of the *Juliette* narrative.

this time had become Sade's devoted companion, the aptly named Constance, and is designed to condition the responses, first of Constance, to whom the author speaks directly, and more generally of all those morally upright citizens that she, in her sensitivity, indirectly represents. Virtue, Sade implies, is best served when shown as the pitiful victim of vice, so that the reader will be unavoidably moved by her plight. Moreover, any attacks upon the work could only come from libertines, whose interest it is to show virtue triumphant; like Molière, his crusading predecessor, its author would then be an innocent victim of injustice and malevolence. Coming from the century's best-known libertine, such sentiments seem motivated less by a genuine love of virtue than by fear of imprisonment for the publication of a libertine novel.

At any rate, Sade was well aware of the novel's potential to shock, as a letter written to his lawyer, Reinaud, clearly reveals: 'A novel of mine is currently being printed, but one too immoral to be sent to a man as pious and as decent as you . . . It is called *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue*. Burn it without reading it if by chance it falls into your hands. I disown it . . .'[5] Read in the light of this letter, the Dedication comes across as a transparently hypocritical attempt to construct a moral lesson. It is hard not to read the novel's 'happy ending' in the same way. Juliette and her lover are sufficiently moved by her sister's sudden death to follow the path of virtue to true happiness. Juliette joins a Carmelite convent and becomes the very embodiment of piety, whilst her lover embarks on a successful and exemplary career in government. On the basis of events that directly contradict the lessons in self-interest of the entire preceding narrative, the reader is invited to draw the wholly implausible conclusion that 'true happiness is found in the bosom of Virtue alone, and that if, for reasons which it is not ours to divine, God allows it to be persecuted on Earth, it is to make up for it in Heaven with the sweetest rewards'.

In stark contrast, the ending of *The New Justine* shows that Sade has abandoned all former pretences at writing a morally uplifting tale. Neither Juliette nor any of her companions undergoes a Pauline conversion to virtue—quite the opposite in fact—and the reader of *Juliette* is left in no doubt as to the rewards of vice.

[5] Quoted by Gilbert Lely, Avant-Propos, *La Nouvelle Justine*, 1 (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1978), 9 (my translation).

Philosophical and Literary Influences

Sade's work is rooted in the literary, political, and above all, philosophical climate of eighteenth-century France, and can best be read as part of an existing tradition, dating back to the mid-seventeenth century, a tradition from which Sade borrows extensively. Many well-known writers before Sade, including the philosophers Diderot and Mirabeau, had composed and published libertine works. Indeed, there was a lively commerce in illicit books in Paris throughout the eighteenth century, particularly in the years leading up to the Revolution. During this period 'philosophical' books, as they were known in the trade, included any work considered subversive by the authorities, from religious satires to political pamphlets attacking the monarchy. Obscenity was often used in such works as a satirical weapon to castigate a repressive and corrupt clergy and a decadent aristocracy. The abuse of rank and an oppressive justice system were also popular targets in this underground literature. Driven partly by similarly satirical intentions, Sade's obscene writings sit within this literary historical context, although his representation of libertinism is more extreme, more graphic, and more horrific than that of any of his predecessors or contemporaries. In our own predominantly secular age it is this depiction of a permissive, perverse, and violent sexuality that carries the most transgressive charge. In contrast, an eighteenth-century society steeped in Catholicism would have found the atheistic basis of Sade's moral philosophy and his blasphemous rejection of all religious belief far less tolerable.

Sade's atheism was heavily influenced by the work of two materialist philosophers of the Enlightenment: La Mettrie's *Man Machine* (1748) and Baron d'Holbach's *System of Nature* (1770). Materialism rejected belief in a soul or afterlife, reducing everything in the universe to the physical organization of matter. According to La Mettrie, scientific observation and experiment are the only means by which human beings can be defined, and this method tells us that Man is quite simply a machine, subject to the laws of motion like any mechanism of eighteenth-century science. The sole purpose of existence in this scheme of things is pleasure—a doctrine espoused with relish by so many of Sade's libertine characters. D'Holbach views the human being as a collection of atoms, so that even the conscience has a material origin, acquired from our education and experience. His

system does not, therefore, allow for free will, since all our decisions are determined by our personal interest. For d'Holbach, all morality is a matter of social utility or pragmatism.

Sade described *System of Nature* as the true basis of his philosophy, and indeed lifted whole passages from it practically verbatim to place in the mouths of the libertines as they rail against the various dogmas of religion, especially the illusory concept of virtue. As atheistic materialism's most powerful and most controversial voice, Sade is the dark side of the Enlightenment because he says loud and clear what other Enlightenment philosophers hardly dare to whisper: the death of God and the renaissance of Man from the ashes of a God-centred universe. Sade's originality lies in placing the body at the centre of his atheistic philosophy, in siting philosophy in the boudoir, in making sex the driving force of all human action, more than a century before Freud.

Echoing Voltaire's *Candide*, with which Sade was almost certainly familiar, *Justine* reads as a ferocious satire, attacking the corruption of practically all contemporary institutions, including the judiciary, banking, the bourgeois-dominated world of finances in general, and above all the Catholic Church, its doctrines and its abusive practices.

Sade had good reason to hate all of these institutions. The spendthrift Marquis had frequently been obliged to seek loans at exorbitant rates of interest from greedy bankers. He had suffered years of imprisonment without proper trial at the hands of a corrupt judiciary. As for the Church, Sade's profound hatred of religion had a personal as well as an intellectual origin, given his Spartan education by the Jesuits and, later, his imprisonment for so-called sacrilegious acts. 'When atheism wants martyrs, let it choose them and my blood is ready,' declares the Comte de Bressac, in melodramatic expression of what were essentially the author's own sentiments.

In all these respects Sade's tale is decidedly Voltairean, but where Voltaire never quite found a satisfactory solution to the problem of physical and moral evil, other than to posit the concept of an indifferent God,[6] Sade's libertines dismiss belief in a deity altogether, and

[6] The only logical explanation, for Voltaire, to the problem of evil was that God had created the universe, rather like a clockmaker making a clock, had 'wound it up', and then left it to 'run down' on its own. This was the position of the Deist, for whom God existed but was indifferent to Man. On Voltaire's philosophical thought, see the Introduction to Voltaire, *Candide and Other Stories*, trans. and ed. Roger Pearson (Oxford World's Classics)

draw somewhat different conclusions from the observation, familiar to Candide, that the virtuous perish while the wicked survive. Candide and his fellow truth-seekers do eventually find a kind of contentment in the simple virtue of hard work. In contrast, Justine is repeatedly reminded of what the author-narrator had told the reader on the very first page: that 'in a century that is thoroughly corrupt, the safest course is to do as others do'. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idealistic faith in Man's natural goodness is directly challenged in a dissertation delivered to Justine by Roland the counterfeiter: the only truth is that the strong not only survive but flourish at the expense of the weak. The image of nature presented in the novel is far removed from Rousseau's idealized view of an earthly utopia, inhabited by noble savages and uncorrupted by the evils of civilization. In the original version even Justine herself comes to the conclusion, on encountering the monstrous Roland, that 'Man is naturally wicked'. The note of optimism on which *Candide* ends is completely absent, then, from the far bleaker vision of life and death that closes *Justine*.

The common theme of all three versions of *Justine* is that the heroine's unreasonable attachment to virtue (and in particular to her virginity) attract nothing but misfortune, as she is exploited and abused physically and sexually by almost everyone she encounters, and is even framed for crimes of theft and murder.

This emphasis on Man's wickedness is to be found in two other great works of the period, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady* (1747–8), in which virtue is also represented as an irresistible object of libertine abuse, and Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's masterly tale of Machiavellian manipulation, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, published in 1782. Both must have had some influence on Sade. In his *Note on the Novel* (*Idée sur les romans*) of 1800, he lavishes fulsome praise on 'l'immortel Richardson', and although he never referred to *Les Liaisons* by name, we know that he kept a copy of it in his library at the Charenton asylum where he spent the last fifteen years of his life, and it is implausible to think that he had not read it when it was first published. There are, in fact, distinct echoes in the conception of Justine's character of Cécile Volanges, the young, delectable, and sexually innocent girl whom Laclos's libertines, the Vicomte de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil, take such pleasure in debauching. Other influences on the writing of Sade's novel can be found among the popular genres of the century:

fairy-tales, the Gothic novel ('roman noir'), and in particular the *conte moral* or 'moral tale'. Among fairy-tale elements of a general nature, which clearly detract from any realistic effect, there are giants (Gernande), and magical healing potions, while Justine's unfortunate experiences in the forest at the hands of Saint-Florent, the Comte de Bressac, and others seems directly inspired by stories of the *Little Red Riding Hood* type, and the great many other fairy-tales known to Sade from his youth in which a credulous young girl, lost in the woods, too willingly places her trust in those she encounters. More specifically, the vampiric Gernande's secret chamber filled with the bloody corpses of earlier spouses is strongly reminiscent of the tale of 'Bluebeard'. Gernande's isolated castle, Roland's mountain fortress, and the labyrinthine monastery of Sainte-Marie-des-Bois, together with their sepulchral trappings of torture-chambers, skulls, and the like, seem to come straight out of the Gothic novel, although the atheistic Sadean version is, of course, completely devoid of the genre's supernatural features.[7]

Narrative and Style

While Sade appears merely to borrow from the fairy-tale and the Gothic novel, it is the *conte moral* that undergoes parodic treatment in *Justine*. The 'recognition scene', a stock situation of the genre, in which characters long separated are tearfully reunited, is amusingly counterfeited in the reunion of the two sisters towards the end of the narrative. The style of the moral tale is parodied through excess—the *ton larmoyant* or 'tearful tone', and the heavy emphasis on *sensibilité* are clearly recognizable here, as in Justine's frequent lachrymose pleadings for mercy. Most controversially of all, the genre's moral aims are outrageously inverted: whereas the moral tale seeks to edify and improve its reader by extolling romantic love and showing how

[7] 'Gothic novels', popular in England especially from around the middle of the eighteenth century, were originally fictions depicting cruel passions and supernatural terrors, usually in a medieval setting, although by the nineteenth century any works with a gloomy, violent, and horrific atmosphere, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), came to be described as 'Gothic'. Typical examples contemporaneous with Sade are Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1795), which may itself have been inspired by the *Justine* of 1791. For more on the latter point, see my article, 'Circles of Influence: Lewis, Sade, Artaud', *Comparative Critical Studies* (Spring, 2012).

virtue alone leads to happiness, Sade's narrative demonstrates that virtue leads repeatedly and inexorably to misery and that human relations are motivated mainly by lust or self-interest.

The use of these models drawn from the popular literature of the time clearly has an impact on the verisimilitude of the narrative. Whatever her injuries, Justine always makes a perfect and speedy recovery, often thanks to quasi-magical healing potions, and even the mark of the thief branded on her shoulder by Rodin is completely removed by surgeons following her reunion with Juliette. Like the hero or heroine of some modern comic-book adventure story, she extricates herself with astounding ease from all of those mortal perils that beset her. The bloodthirsty Gernande, for example, forgets to lock the door of her prison, and with one bound, she is free! At the level of characterization, too, there is little concern with *vraisemblance*. In spite of the succession of depraved villains that confront Justine, her naive credulity followed by her amazement when her trust is betrayed remain implausibly unshaken. Equally implausible is the apparently untarnished innocence of a girl who has already been forced to participate in numerous orgies and should by now be well used to the naked bodies of both sexes: 'Being little acquainted with this part of the body,' she earnestly tells her listeners when the loveliness of a particular female posterior is in question, 'you will permit me to remain uncommitted on this point' (p. 233). Characterization is here wholly subservient to plot. At the level of discourse, finally, there is an equally apparent lack of regard for plausibility. That the common thieves, Dubois and Ironheart ('Coeur de Fer'), should discourse like philosophers is unlikely, to say the least, while the necessarily more sophisticated vocabulary increasingly found in Justine's narrative as the years go by does at times strain credulity, when we recall that her education was abruptly terminated at the age of twelve. We should, of course, not be surprised by this lack of attention to verisimilitude. Sade's fiction is a long distance from the realism that will come to dominate and in many ways define the novel genre in the nineteenth century.

Justine's arguments are not only stylistically but also intellectually sophisticated enough to derive from her creator's own self-questioning. That Justine is seen to match her opponents in the art of expression and debate is both essential to the creation of a balanced and therefore intellectually engaging debate, and necessary to ensure the ultimate

strength and supremacy of the libertine view. Contrastingly, the crude terms in which the libertines describe their sexual lusts are equally an expression of the author's own desires and fantasies, couched in a language that, in the dark confines of his cell in the Bastille, he must have found as titillating as did his libertine characters.

Justine's voice acts as an effective counterpoint to the vulgarity of her captors. As a religious prude she is obliged to avoid such vulgarity, while doing her best to recount her adventures as authentically as possible. This narrative structure imposes creatively productive limitations on a writer who is therefore obliged to come up with acceptable circumlocutions for sexual activities that his character might plausibly employ. Such a strategy produces a story of considerable inventiveness, in which different tones and linguistic registers provide interesting variety at the level of expression. In marked contrast to the verbosity of the libertines (which might be said to be the product of Sade's own tendency to write prose that is excessively convoluted in nature), Justine's voice frequently has a refreshing clarity and simplicity. Moreover, even when she is obliged to employ precious figures of speech to describe those perverse sexual activities she finds especially distasteful and abhorrent, the effect of such self-conscious circumlocution is to amuse rather than to arouse the reader.

This sophistication of style is not present in *The New Justine* and *The Story of Juliette*, in which an exclusively third-person narrator is the dominant voice. In these later works circumlocution and euphemism give way to vulgarism and obscenity, as the abstractions of the libertine dissertation find concrete illustration in descriptions of the sexual acts that precede and follow it. In the many lengthy descriptions of these acts Sade's language eschews the metaphorical, providing direct access to the body, its sexual parts and functions. The result is arguably far less successful, at least from a literary point of view.

Sade and Justine

Like its heroine herself, the *Justine* story emerges from circumstances of misfortune and poverty. Both author and character find themselves in dire straits, but both react differently to their situation. While Sade makes a virtue out of necessity, filling his long years of imprisonment with the writing of plays, novels, and essays, his fictional invention bows to her fate, reacting supinely to the sudden

and devastating death of her parents and the ensuing loss of status and wealth.

A minority of critics, however, have argued that Sade actually does identify with Justine as victim, and, given his deep sense of injustice at his treatment by the authorities for actions which he certainly did not consider criminal, this view is perhaps not without substance.

The writing frenzy that produced this first novel-length version suggests an emotional investment in the narrative of the 1791 *Justine* that is absent from *The Story of Juliette*, which was probably written during Sade's prolonged period of freedom in the 1790s. Jean Paulhan has argued that, if the sadistic libertines might be considered personae of the author, he also identifies masochistically with Justine.[8] It is not hard to share this view of a man, writing in the relentless solitude of his prison-cell, tortured by sexual deprivation and by ignorance of the term of his detention, suffering increasingly from eye-trouble—a real problem for the writer Sade had by now become. There is some evidence, too, that the figure of his victim-heroine was drawn from life, which might support the hypothesis of a greater psychological and emotional attachment of the author to Justine than to Juliette. We know that the young female servant at the Sade family chateau of La Coste, whose real name was Catherine Trillet and who went by the nickname of Justine, participated voluntarily in sexual activities with the Marquis, refusing to leave the chateau with her father. She may even have fallen in love with her master, just as the fictional Justine does with the Comte de Bressac. Whatever the truth of their relationship, it does not seem implausible to assume that Sade used the serving-girl as a general model for his literary creation, in the same way that other figures and events from his past appear to have inspired particular scenes in the novel.

Notwithstanding her initial portrayal as the brainless and bashful blonde with an unreasonable and unthinking devotion to virtue, Justine actually behaves in an entirely sensible and sympathetic manner. In spite of himself, Sade creates a figure with whom the reader (and perhaps also the author) is drawn to identify. The centrality of her role as victim is complemented, and indeed enhanced, by the centrality of her

[8] See Jean Paulhan, Introduction to *Les Infortunes de la vertu* (Paris: Point du Jour, 1946), pp. ii–xliii, translated as 'The Marquis de Sade and his Accomplice' in *Marquis de Sade, Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 3–36.

role as narrator. Because it is Justine and not the author-narrator who has charge of the narrative in the first two versions, she is able to condemn the libertines for their views and is even accorded the right to put her own case at length, for instance, on the question of God's existence. Since she is the principal narrator, both libertines and fellow victims speak through her, which means that we mostly share a point of view that is opposed to and sometimes mocks that of her captors. Moreover, Justine's comradeship with other female victims forms a contrast to the isolation of the libertines, whose alliances are always self-serving, usually temporary, and sometimes Machiavellian in motivation.[9]

Contrary to the impressions given by her initial character-sketch, Justine is intelligent and self-assertive in debates with her libertine captors, who always listen respectfully to her arguments and at times even compliment her on her reasoning. Following a sermon from the thief, Dubois, concerning the justification of crime, for instance, Justine is given a strong counter-argument, challenging the logic of the female libertine on her own ground. Dubois seems unable to respond to Justine's powerful and cogent objections, and has to resort to appealing to her good heart. Justine's opponents are not just monsters, but redoubtable theorists, which makes her arguments all the more impressive in their ability to match their knowledge and rhetoric. According to this view, far from being the naive ingénue, Justine, even in her final incarnation, is actually a smart young lady who simply has a disastrous run of bad luck.

If Sade is saying that misfortune 'naturally' strikes the virtuous, then he is positing a *malevolent* providence—in any event, a force of some kind outside of the human dimension, the existence of which would clearly be in contradiction with his atheistic materialism. It is not Justine's virtue that makes life difficult for her—she finds ways of justifying to herself her acquiescence in the various sexual acts demanded of her—but what Geoffrey Bennington has called the 'double bind' situations that so frequently confront her.[10] In these

[9] James Fowler notes the contrast between the isolation of the libertines and the comradeship of their victims: see his *The Libertine's Nemesis: The Prude in Clarissa and the roman libertin* (London: Legenda, 2011), ch. 4. In *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue*, this is particularly noticeable during the Sainte-Marie-des-Bois episode, and to a lesser extent the stay at Rodin's house.

[10] See Geoffrey Bennington, 'Forget to Remember, Remember to Forget: Sade avec Kant', *Paragraph*, 23: 1 (March 2000), ed. John Phillips (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 75–86.

situations, which involve the choice between two evils, Justine shows herself to be as much a pragmatist as a prude. A good example of the 'double-bind' in the 1791 *Justine* is Bressac's demand that his young captive should poison his aunt. If she refuses, the Comte threatens to find other means of carrying out the murder. On the other hand, if she accepts she may be able to save the woman. This is a moral dilemma that most would find hard to resolve. It transpires that Justine's consenting to do the deed but then attempting to warn Bressac's aunt leads indirectly both to the aunt's poisoning and to her own torture and near death. Here, as frequently elsewhere, it is Justine's very virtue that leads to crime, and yet it would seem that the very notion of the existence of a benevolent providence is put in question by such dilemmas. Fate does exist, but it is evil, not good. Sade's universe is consequently more Manichean than materialist, and the responsibility of individuals like Justine for the plight in which they find themselves is diminished as a result.

The double-bind situations which confront Justine also demonstrate that the trials to which those one might call the 'chief' victims in Sade's world are subjected are not just physical but also—and perhaps more crucially—moral and psychological. Victimhood is not just a passive state in Sade: the victim is frequently joined in debate by her libertine captors, her virtue (and arguments in its defence) tested to breaking-point. The libertines derive as much satisfaction from defeating their victims intellectually as they do from subduing and abusing them physically, while the victims themselves (and Justine offers the best example of this) rise admirably to the challenge with equally forceful and reasoned replies. It is as if Sade were constantly drawn to dialogue with the victim that he himself had become, to interrogate the reasons for his own victimhood through Justine, to put the victim's side of his own nature to the test of logical reasoning and debate. Like her, he would prefer to choose virtue, but like her, he is confronted with the problem that virtuous actions can have evil consequences. From the victim's point of view, it is more dangerous to have a girl kept in ignorance of vice than to educate her in the ways of the world. By the same token, the ostensibly well-intentioned attempts to protect society by imprisoning wrongdoers like the author only serve to turn them into hardened recidivists who will then become an even greater threat to others on their release.

What these dilemmas illustrate is that acts of violence in Sade

almost always have a philosophical underpinning and a philosophical context. Such acts are not presented for their own sake, as they would be in some modern forms of violent pornography for example, but as exemplifications of a philosophical point, or as a pretext for philosophical debate. Such episodes also together constitute an important body of evidence for viewing Sade as a moralist. Above all, however, it is the premiss of an authorial identification with his creation emotionally that may most surprise the reader. Justine's most horrendous experiences befall her like the bolt of lightning that finally strikes her dead, without her first being consulted about her readiness to engage in debauchery. She is in a sense, then, a martyr for virtue. The branding Justine receives from Rodin and Rombeau is the mark of the criminal, but it also recalls the stigmata of saints, the outward and visible signs of suffering of the body (like that of Christ during his passion), and as such, the miraculous outward manifestation of inner sanctity. Did Sade, the self-styled martyr, identify unconsciously with his martyred young heroine? Like Justine, Sade suffered much the same reversals of fortune: loss of wealth and property in the Revolution; being branded a criminal (symbolically in his case); what he saw as the abuses of justice in the magistrates courts—Justine's case of arson and murder is heard by a corrupt and lascivious judge—and the threat of the death-penalty; and, not least, the tortures of a captivity whose term was unknown were only too familiar to her creator. When, in the monastery at Sainte-Marie-des-Bois, Omphale tells Justine: 'It is not only the need to requite the passions of these debauchees that is the bane of our lives, it is the loss of our freedom', do we hear the Marquis's own embittered voice?

Reading Justine

Most readers will be shocked by at least some of the sexual activities represented in this novel. In addition to torture and murder, they include paedophilia, sadomasochism, fetishism, and other forms of perversion, much of which is highly problematic from an ethical and moral standpoint. Yet it is these aspects of Sade's work especially that distinguish him from other materialist atheists of his time, and make him unique in the history of literature and philosophy in the modern era. Sade fearlessly explores the darker side of human nature, from which most of us would prefer to avert our gaze: the objectification

of human beings, the utter selfishness of lust, the tyranny of an ego unfettered by laws or lacking the humanizing influences of socialization. Sade's exposure of the sexual motive that frequently lies behind human corruption and crime, of the sexual sadism that drives so much violence in human history, is a valuable message that bears repeating today.

There will always be those who are sexually excited by the violent objectification of women. The pleasure of raping virgins owned by so many of Sade's libertines finds its place in the darkest corners of the male sexual imagination. The majority of readers, however, will follow Rétif de la Bretonne's example in finding the more sadistic scenes of Sade's tale morally and physically repugnant.[11] For some, reading Sade as an author of comic fantasy may be one strategy for coping with all but the most extreme sexual violence.[12] Moreover, Sade's writing is probably most subversive and certainly most entertaining when read in this way. Like some dark comic-strip caper set in the Gothic spaces of eighteenth-century French chateaux and monasteries, his libertine fictions marry the obsessiveness of farce (all bottoms and exaggerated body parts) with the gore of horror, both genres situated at some distance from the real.

Ultimately, readers must decide for themselves whether this text suggests sexual fascination with the libertine as fantasy figure of unlimited power, or loathing for the abuse of that power on the part of an embittered victim of the *ancien régime* (the libertines, we remember, are all wealthy and powerful figures in the institutions of pre-revolutionary France). Do the libertines represent the tyrannical powers that imprisoned him, or are they the advocates of a personal freedom he craves? As so often in Sade, there are no easy answers.

The Marquis de Sade's work is vast in scope and has many extraordinary qualities. But he will always be best remembered for his achievements as a pioneering explorer of human sexuality which follow directly from his materialist thinking. Perhaps, though, Sade's most important bequest of all is less specific and more pervasive than any of these: the gift of a healthy scepticism at a time of multiplying fanaticisms, whether of a religious or a political kind. For Michel

[11] Rétif de la Bretonne was inspired in 1798 to write *L'Anti-Justine* as an antidote to the cruelty depicted in Sade's works.

[12] The nineteenth-century English poet Algernon Swinburne and his friends roared with laughter as they read *Justine* aloud to each other.