

MAN AND SOCIETY IN THE WORKS OF  
THE MARQUIS DE SADE

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THE MARQUIS DE SADE

by

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: Much has been written on the Marquis de Sade's pessimistic and nihilistic philosophy. His criminal man and his social ethic, based on an absolute egotism, have been accepted as embodiments of the Sadian vision of the ideal toward which humanity must struggle to achieve liberty. It is the contention of this thesis that the Sadian arch-fiends illustrate the failure of this struggle. The thesis attempts to examine the other side of Sade's thought, -- an aspect which has been largely ignored -- in order to show that Sade was primarily seeking the realization of a positive ideal in both his vision of man and society, and also in his definition of liberty. What becomes evident from this analysis is that Sade was very much a part of his age in terms of the problems which concerned him, and in terms of the solutions which he evolved in answer to these problems.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sade is a problematic, if not enigmatic, writer. His works are the union of philosophy and personal psychology of which the ramifications are so extensive and multifarious that one feels that it would take almost as many words as Sade has written himself in order to explain him adequately. Sade and his oeuvre relate together in a necessary symbiosis:

. . . c'est que la condition de la connaissance, et le fond du problème est ici que le calme de l'étude coïncide avec le mouvement de la passion. Ainsi la muraille d'une prison fut-elle nécessaire à la naissance de la lumière.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of this merging of the self and philosophy, his work, like he himself, "twists and turns throughout a whole life, an apparently acrobatic position where morality is concerned".<sup>2</sup> And Sade is concerned with morality; it is the central issue in his perception of the human condition. The problem which confronts the reader is to determine what his statement actually is. The focus of this thesis is to extract from a selection

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<sup>1</sup>G. Bataille, "Le Secret de Sade", Critique, XVII (1947), 311.

<sup>2</sup>H. Pastoureau, "Sado-Masochism and the Philosophy of Ambivalence", Yale French Studies, no. 35 (1965), 53.

of Sade's major works not only his view of man as he is, but also to demonstrate that Sade develops an image of of man as he would have him, and that this image evolves as a positive view of man. The thesis will also attempt to show that, allied to this view, is Sade's concern with the social condition of man.

Various terms have been used to define Sade's vision of the ideal man. Maurice Blanchot speaks of "l'homme de l'égoïsme intégral"; Maurice Nadeau of the "homme moderne"; Maurice Heine describes Juliette as "la femme nouvelle". None of these terms has been satisfactorily placed in the total context of Sade's work. Both Heine and Blanchot assume that Sade's new man is the literal incarnation of the criminal character:

Cette philosophie est celle de l'intérêt, puis de l'égoïsme intégral. Chacun doit faire ce qui lui plaît, chacun n'a d'autre loi que son plaisir. . . . L'homme de l'égoïsme intégral est celui qui sait transformer tous les dégoûts en goûts, toutes les répugnances en attraits.<sup>3</sup>

This passage is an accurate description of the Sadian malefactors, but it completely ignores another aspect of these same characters which points towards the positive vision of Sade. Nadeau extends this one-sided view even

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<sup>3</sup>M. Blanchot, Lautréamont et Sade (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1963), p. 19.

further and implies that, through the descent into total depravity, in making perversion his ethic, man will emerge cleansed and purified: "Il était lavé, purifié, et délivré".<sup>4</sup> There is no explanation of how this metamorphosis occurs; nor is there any evidence in Sade's work that it does take place. Nadeau further erects the anthropophagous coprophiliac, Minski, as the "modèle achevé de l'homme tel que le voudrait le Marquis".<sup>5</sup> Minski, it is true, is an arch-monster from whom even the other monsters seek to escape. In another quixotic paradox, Nadeau maintains that, through the institution of the morality of Sade's criminal society, there will evolve a perfect community of man:

Humanité de "sadiques", où il sera permis à l'homme d'assujettir son prochain à ses désirs, de le torturer, et de le faire mourir? Oui, humanité qui gagnera cette permission parce qu'elle sera délivrée à jamais de l'envie de s'en servir.<sup>6</sup>

This would seem to contradict Sade's own experience, both as he lived it, and as he expressed it in his work -- that the deep-seated compulsion for cruelty renews itself continuously.

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<sup>4</sup>M. Nadeau, Sade, Oeuvres (Paris: La Jeune Parque, 1949), p. 58.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 57.



In the above instances, it appears that the readers of Sade have stopped with his negative pronouncements and have either made them stand for his entire viewpoint, or have attempted to transform the negative into a positive ideal. There does exist in Sade, amidst all of the hatred and destruction, a move to an affirmative answer, wherein one can see a resolution of the human dilemma of inner duality with its oscillations between good and evil. But one cannot find this note by accepting the criminal society wholly and at face value. Sade's monster characters are really the source of the problem confronting the reader, for they function, simultaneously, on several levels; they never completely represent one single viewpoint.

Sade, in his own life, had experienced intense and uncontrollable sexual needs which manifested themselves in a deviant fashion. While he was in prison he had no outlet for these needs and so he internalized them and sublimated them in the form of fiction.<sup>7</sup> His libertines in, one aspect, fulfill this erotic necessity:

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<sup>7</sup>Sade, Lettres Choies (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1963), pp. 120-121. See passage quoted on p. 6 of Part I, footnote 21. Sade goes on to say: "Si j'avais eu Monsieur le 6 à guérir, je m'y serais pris bien différemment, car au lieu de l'enfermer avec des anthropophages, je l'aurais clôturé avec des filles; . . . ."

. . . parce que son propre rêve érotique consiste à projeter, sur des personnages qui ne rêvent pas mais qui agissent réellement, le mouvement irréal de ses jouissances; l'érotisme de Sade est un érotisme de rêve, puisqu'il ne se réalise la plupart du temps que dans la fiction; mais plus cet érotisme est rêvé, plus il exige une fiction d'où le rêve soit banni; où la débauche soit réalisée et vécue. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Just as Sade regarded this intransigent eroticism as a bane, as a departure from the norm,<sup>9</sup> so do his libertines see their predilections as part of the corruption which they both rail against and experience. Thus they become the embodiments of the dark, unknown forces to which man is subject at one pole of his being.

On another level of meaning, these personnages also act as spokesmen for Sade. They are the critics of man's dishonesty and of his mismanagement of his society and, as such, they reflect Sade's pessimism and anger -- his denunciation of man. In this context, they are also the philosophers whose minds have been freed from the conventional modes of thought and prejudices and who consequently possess new awareness and flexibility.

<sup>8</sup>M. Blanchot, "Préface à La Nouvelle Justine" (Paris: Au Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1963), VI, 29.

<sup>9</sup>Sade, Lettres Choiesies, p. 121. "Il ne faut pas imaginer d'un plein saut retirer un homme de l'abîme."

As well, Sade's criminal characters can be viewed as "caricatures, exaggerations, distortions for the sake of lampooning and satirizing people and tendencies of actual eighteenth century life".<sup>10</sup> As an extension of this idea of caricature, it is possible to see the entire malicious society and its ethical system, especially as it is presented in L'Histoire de Juliette, as a parody of the ideal of Christian morality. This morality, as it was taught by the Church, was the cultural heritage of that epoch, but it was at the time being subjected to critical analysis and questioning. It is not within the scope of this thesis to delve into this aspect of Sade's stylistic devices, but this perspective on his corrupt personages is an important one, for it becomes evident that Sade's emphasis is as much on the idea of virtue as on the idea of evil.

Stylistically, Sade presents vice and virtue at opposite extremes; they are in a situation of exact antithesis. Whatever the traditional morality venerates, the criminal society lusts to destroy. For example, the Christian tradition lauds married love, filial love, motherhood and children; the "enlightened" monster people

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<sup>10</sup>B. Fink, "The Case for a Political System in Sade", Studies on Voltaire, LXXXVIII (1972), 500.

rampantly torture, maim, and kill wives, conventional husbands, pregnant women, and children. They set children against parents; parents incestuously abuse their children. Even the very language with which the criminal characters extol the pleasures of crime has the same intonation, the same phrasing, as the language used by the virtuous to vaunt their side; only the vocabulary has been altered.<sup>11</sup> Both sides begin their argument on behalf of their viewpoint from the idea of "nature" and then move in diametrically opposite directions in their ethical codes and world views.

The criminal society, then, is a satirical counterpoint to a beatific vision of man<sup>12</sup> and its concept of superficial virtue. Furthermore, there is a distinctly Swiftian quality to this satire. Sade, it appears, had read Swift before or around 1779, for there is a reference to Lilliput in a letter which he wrote to his wife from Vincennes prison at that time.<sup>13</sup> There is, among many, one passage in La Philosophie dans le Boudoir which is

<sup>11</sup>Certain words are used interchangeably -- i.e. volupté, jouissance. This use of terminology is discussed in Part II.

<sup>12</sup>This vision is one which is applicable to this period, and is expanded and discussed in Part II.

<sup>13</sup>Sade, Lettres Choisies, p. 36.

strongly reminiscent of Swift's "A Modest Proposal". This is Dolmance's solution to overpopulation in his projected republic -- a situation which is to be remedied by killing babies:

Dans toutes les villes de la Chine, on trouve chaque matin une incroyable quantité d'enfants abandonnés dans les rues; un tombereau les enlève au point du jour, et on les jette dans une fosse; souvent les accoucheuses elles-mêmes, en débarrassent les mères, en étouffant aussitôt leurs fruits dans des cuves d'eau bouillante ou en les jettant dans la rivière. . . . Si pour la splendeur de l'Etat vous accordez à vos guerriers le droit de détruire les hommes, pour la conservation de ce même Etat accordez de même à chaque individu de se livrer tant qu'il le voudra, . . . au droit de se défaire des enfants qu'il ne peut nourrir ou desquels le gouvernement ne peut tirer aucun secours; . . . . Mais ce n'est pas quand l'homme est fait qu'il faut le détruire afin de diminuer la population: il est injuste d'abréger les jours d'un individu bien conformé; . . . . L'espèce humaine doit être épurée dès le berceau; . . . voilà les seuls moyens raisonnables d'amoindrir une population. . . .<sup>14</sup>

There is, in such projects for wholesale destruction, the same quality of outrageous exaggeration that one finds in Swift. It becomes necessary, then, to "sift" through the pronouncements of the criminal characters for it becomes "clear that one can take little at face value in Sade's works, not even the words".<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir (Paris: Au Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1963), III, 520, 521.

<sup>15</sup>L. Berman, The Thoughts and Themes of the Marquis de Sade (Kitchener: Ainsworth Press Ltd., 1971), p. 14.

Although the tendency among readers seems to be to focus entirely on the malefactors and their nihilistic and destructive ethic, it is the contention of this thesis that virtue as defined by Christianity and the Church is at the core of Sade's probings. His aim is not so much to invalidate virtue as an ethic, as it is to criticize its assumptions and practices. Virtue is not destroyed in his work simply because it refuses to join the libertine morality. Sade rejects virtue because of certain qualities of character which it develops and fosters and which leave man incomplete and helpless. His image of the new man evolves out of his treatment of virtue in confrontation with vice. Throughout his work, this image emerges as an attitude rather than as a clear-cut statement on the part of the author. He does, however, realize his ideal in one character, that of Léonore in the novel Aline et Valcour.

In Part I of the thesis, I have attempted to deal with the philosophical positions enunciated by the libertines (and Sade) and their breakdowns and contradictions. This part describes the Sadian world view in relation to his own personal experience, and shows how the criminal characters attempt to deal with this view, and how they fail to do so. At the same time, it defines those

qualities exhibited by the libertines which are part of his positive image of the "new man".

Part II deals with the problem of virtue. It attempts to define the character of virtue and to show how Sade rejects it through his criminals. In the portraits of the virtuous heroines, it seeks to demonstrate why Sade cannot accept the traditional ethic as it is presented by the Church and shows how his view of virtue differs. In the portrait of Léonore, there is the definition of the qualities which emerge throughout Sade's work as the qualities necessary for man to possess if he is to cope with existence.

Part III, whose subject is man and society, is a context in which to place the Sadian man. In his work, Sade depicts many "ideal" societies. This section examines the most significant of them in an effort to further clarify Sade's vision of man, and to examine how they solve, if at all, the conflict of the individual and society.

The thesis is based on Sade's major novels: Les Infortunes de la Vertu, written in 1787, Aline et Valcour, written between 1785-1788, Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu, written in 1788, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, written between 1790-1797, La Nouvelle Justine, written between 1790-1797, Histoire de Juliette ou les Prospérités du Vice, 1790-1797, and La Marquise

de Gange, written between 1807-1812. As well I have relied upon Sade's personal correspondence recently published under the titles: Lettres Choiesies, L'Aigle, Mademoiselle, Monsieur le 6, Journal Inédit, and Cahiers Personnels.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>The personal correspondence is of great value in view of the fact that there is very little material about Sade that has come down to us.



PART I  
"THROUGH THE GLASS DARKLY"

i) Sade and Libertinism

Sade was a libertine. He defined himself as such in a letter to his wife from his prison at Vincennes in 1781:

Oui, je suis libertin, je l'avoue; j'ai conçu tout ce qu'on peut concevoir dans ce genre-là, mais je n'ai sûrement pas fait tout ce que j'ai conçu et ne le ferai sûrement jamais.<sup>1</sup>

However, Sade's libertinism adhered more strictly to the philosophical definition of the term, both in his life and his work.<sup>2</sup> He was a "free liver" whose behaviour took him outside the bounds of the prevailing ethical system, and a "free thinker" who, in his prolific literary outpourings, sought to create an upheaval in the traditional, conventionally accepted mores governing human conduct.

Sade was not a libertine in the more loosely-practiced sense with which the word became associated in the eighteenth century. He was not a roué. Although his libertine characters frequently describe themselves as

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<sup>1</sup>Sade, Lettres Choisies, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>The definition of libertine is based on that of Barry Ivker in his article "Libertinism in French Fiction", Studies on Voltaire, LXXIII, 221-239.

such, neither they nor their author fulfilled this alteration in meaning:

Le roué n'éprouve ni amour ni désir. Il ne travaille qu'à sa gloire et ne vit que pour le monde. Son libertinage est moins l'affaire de jouissance que de puissance. Le roué ressemble aussi peu à Casanova ou à Faublas, qui s'engagent vraiment dans leur plaisir ou leur passion, qu'aux personnages de Sade, qui sont contraints de s'éloigner du monde pour accomplir leurs cérémonies.<sup>3</sup>

The roué is the type of libertine to be found represented in the works of such writers as Crébillon  fils, and Choderlos de Laclos.<sup>4</sup> The focus in these novels is a game which consists of the efforts of a young rake to overcome the resistances of a woman and to make her succumb to him, voluntarily. The prize was much more valuable if the young woman were a virgin, steeped in the ideals of religious morality with its attendant taboo on sex outside of marriage, or simply an upright married woman of known virtue. For such women the situation could be less of a game, than a source of real anguish.<sup>5</sup> If, however, the

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<sup>3</sup>R. Mauzi, L'Idée de Bonheur au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1960), pp. 32-33.

<sup>4</sup>Crébillon, Les Egarements du Coeur et de l'Esprit; Laclos, Les Liaisons Dangereuses.

<sup>5</sup>This is apparent in the portrait of Mme de Tourvel in Liaisons Dangereuses. Her gradual breakdown by Valmont is depicted very tragically.

woman was already corrupt, she had to bring all of her finely-honed skills to bear on the problem of putting up an "official" resistance, while at the same time artfully encouraging the interest. Once conquered, these women, whether innocent or not, were required to live behind a hypocritical facade of moral rectitude in order to maintain a pristine social reputation. For the rake, the goal was to count the woman among his conquests and to publicly ruin her name:

Aussi le galant homme s'est-il fait . . . résolument systématiquement, indiscret. Il clame ses succès. Ce n'est qu'en se vantant de l'une qu'on à l'autre.<sup>6</sup>

As Mauzi states, this interaction necessitated a public to declare a winner and a loser, otherwise the entire process was meaningless.

This was a literary theme which had ample basis in reality, for the sexual mores of the period were extremely flexible (as well as experimental). In fact, sex was one of the principal entertainments of the "beau monde" of the time.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, as the above quotation indicates, this was a situation in which women, for the most part, colluded. They even went so far as to compete for

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<sup>6</sup>R. Guerdan, La Femme et l'amour en France à travers les âges (Paris: Plon, 1965), p. 204.

<sup>7</sup>See Karl Toth, Woman and Rococo in France (London: Harrap, 1931). Iwan Bloch (pseud.), Le Marquis de Sade et son temps (Paris: Michalon, 1901).

their favourite rake, as the case of the Duc de Richelieu illustrates:

On decouvrira à sa mort, encore cachetés cinq billets de rendez-vous, implorant le même jour, au nom de cinq grandes dames, une heure de sa nuit.<sup>8</sup>

Sade did not participate in this form of sex game, for his was an altogether different kind of experience. His sexual interests were centered on prostitutes and actresses -- women of the demi-monde with whom he could directly satisfy a violent and uncontrollable need without any overlay of hypocrisy or pretence, -- for Sade was afflicted with sado-masochistic tendencies.<sup>9</sup> He did not indulge in the typical rake's technique of breaking down virtuous resolve -- a process which served as a mirror in which the narcissistic roué saw the reflection of his power. On the contrary, when he was not at the mercy of his deviant needs, Sade showed himself capable of very passionate involvement with women. His first love affair was with Laure de Lauris, a young noblewoman whom Sade had wished to marry, but was refused permission by his family, for they had

<sup>8</sup>Guerdan, op. cit., p. 202. As well, two countesses duelled one another in the Bois de Boulogne for his favours.

<sup>9</sup>G. Lely, Vie du Marquis de Sade (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1952), I, 163-168. In Chapter V, section 1, entitled "L'Algolagnie du Sade", Lely gives a medical discussion of algolagnia which he relates to Sade's work. The chapter itself deals with the Rose Keller affair in which Sade was accused of committing acts of sadism against this woman.

already arranged a more lucrative match for him with Renée de Montreuil. His second and most enduring involvement was with his sister-in-law, Anne de Launay, with whom he eloped to Italy after the Marseilles affair.<sup>10</sup>

Sade's male libertine protagonists reflect the condition of their author; they likewise exhibit sexual deviance and they, too, are aware of their perversion: "Sade avait pleine conscience de son algolagnie".<sup>11</sup> It is true that these characters prefer virginal girls and virtuous wives as victims but there is no attempt to lead them to a voluntary capitulation; the women are directly abused.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the activities of the Sadian libertines are withdrawn from the world. The victims are led to isolated impenetrable castles situated deep in forests or on mountain tops where the atrocities are perpetrated.<sup>13</sup> The orgies are staged in womb-like settings,

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., Ch. VI, VII Sade was accused of subjecting four prostitutes to illegal sexual acts, and of attempting to poison them. He fled to Italy to escape prosecution.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>12</sup>The use of women is discussed in Part II, The Problem of Virtue.

<sup>13</sup>B. Didier, "Le Château Intérieur de Sade", Europe, no. 522 (October 1972), 54-64.

in sealed rooms or caves. Sade likewise withdrew from society for his sadistic practices. The most notable of such events took place in the winter of 1774 when Sade shut himself up in his château at La Coste along with his wife and several young people whom Mme de Sade had procured for his requirements. There is no clear evidence of what transpired during that time, but it is known that Mme de Sade sent one girl away for an extended convalescence to the château of the Abbé de Sade: "La marquise supplie l'abbé de ne pas laisser examiner par un médecin la fille qui est chez lui".<sup>14</sup> Thus one cannot agree with Ivker's comment that "Sade's libertines thus would follow the tradition of Lovelace and Valmont, who manipulate other individuals and can imitate the passions of love . . .".<sup>15</sup> Neither Sade nor his characters were concerned with imitation.

Sade, then, was not fully a part of the social customs of his time. In fact, rather early in his life he had announced himself as the enemy of hypocrisy and had shown an uncompromising attitude toward the common practices of those in his milieu:

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<sup>14</sup>Lely, op. cit., II, 34.

<sup>15</sup>Ivker, op. cit., p. 238.

J'en fais peu de cérémonie; je ne les aime pas.  
 . . . Il faut faire sa cour pour réussir: mais  
 je n'aime pas à le faire. Je souffre quand  
 j'entends quelqu'un dire à un autre pour le  
 flatter mille choses que souvent il ne pense  
 pas. Il est plus fort que moi de jouer un  
 aussi sot personnage. Etre poli, honnête,  
 haut sans fierté, prévenant sans fadeur; . . .  
 de l'égalité dans le caractère qui vous fasse  
 bien vivre avec tout le monde sans jamais  
 cependant se livrer à personne, car vous ne  
 l'êtes pas plutôt que vous avez lieu de vous en  
 repentir; . . . Voilà mes vertus, voilà celles  
 où j'aspire.<sup>16</sup>

He aspired to honesty and sincerity both within himself and in his relations with others -- a man of idealism at the mercy of a strange compulsion. His was a temperament which did not allow him to attain these aspirations; his work attests to the magnitude of his struggle.

What placed an even greater distance between Sade and the social order, was the fact that he was legally prosecuted for his misbehaviour.<sup>17</sup> There were a number of other high-born libertines whose escapades and abnormalities were well known, but who never suffered any legal reper-

<sup>16</sup> Lely, *op. cit.*, I, 70. This letter was written by Sade to his father in 1760.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182. The following letter was sent to the Abbé de Sade in the aftermath of the Rose Keller affair:

La haine publique est poussée contre lui au-delà de toute expression . . . on veut qu'il ait fait cette folle flagellation en dérision de la Passion. . . . Il est victime de la férocité publique; . . . il est certain que, depuis dix ans, il est inconcevable tout ce qui s'est fait d'horreur par les gens de la Cour.

cussions because of them.<sup>18</sup> They never lost any of the power or status that accrued to their social class. Sade, conversely, found himself in conflict with, and more and more excluded from the milieu of his birth.<sup>19</sup> This undoubtedly chagrined his famous mother-in-law, Mme de Mertreuil, for whom the match with the noble name of de Sade was to have been her entry into the court society.

This, then, is the point at which Sade begins as a commentator on the human condition. Simone de Beauvoir has pointed out that Sade had never exhibited any inclination to take his stand among the philosophes of his day while he was a free agent:

Il est frappant que hors les murs de sa petite maison il ne songe aucunement à faire usage de ses forces; on n'entrevoit nulle ambition en lui, nul esprit d'entreprise.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid. The bloody orgies of the Comte de Charolais were common knowledge.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 383. "Le marquis lui-même frappé de mort civile, ses biens saisis et annotés. . . . [ses] pauvres enfants porteurs d'un nom qui évoque . . . dans l'esprit public le vice et le crime."

<sup>20</sup>S. de Beauvoir, "Faut-il brûler Sade?", Temps Moderne, no. 74 (1951), 1006, 1007.



Whenever Sade was out of prison, he spent his time either presenting lavish stage productions at La Coste or travelling, always at great expense to his family. It was only in prison that Sade became a revolutionary, in writing some of the most startling and violent novels of his century. In these works, he expresses with extreme anger his conflicts -- within himself, with society, and with the universe.

Sade was very much aware of the degree to which his life was dominated by irrational and violent impulses:

. . . vous avez imaginé faire merveille, je le parierais, en me réduisant à une abstinence atroce sur le péché de la chair. Eh bien, vous vous êtes trompés; vous avez échauffé ma tête, vous m'avez fait former des fantômes qu'il faudra que je réalise.<sup>21</sup>

It is these phantoms that unleashed the prolific outpourings which comprise his work. They dictate the form and direction of his writing; they are the focus of all of his ideas, for, in effect, they rest at the center of the dilemma in Sade's life.<sup>22</sup> The tendencies which he finds in himself, he also perceives and abhors in mankind, yet the problem remains acutely within himself, for he experiences these tendencies in more extreme proportions

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<sup>21</sup> Sade, Lettres Choisies, p. 120.

<sup>22</sup> G. Bataille, "Le Secret de Sade", Critique, no. 17 (1947), 307: ". . . entre le déchaînement des passions et la conscience subsiste une opposition fondamentale: . . .".

than most. Thus, in his writings, there is both a rejection and an angry lamenting of these realities superimposed upon the desire to extend and fulfill their implications to the utmost. In short, Sade is simultaneously operating on the rational and the irrational levels:

C'est que ces pensées théoriques libèrent à tout instant des puissances irrationnelles auxquelles elles sont liées; ces puissances à la fois les animent et les dérangent par une poussée telle que les pensées y résistent et y cèdent, cherchent à la maîtriser, la maîtrisent en effet, mais n'y parviennent qu'en libérant d'autres forces obscures, lesquelles à nouveau les entraînent, les dévient et les pervertissent.<sup>23</sup>

As a result, one detects in Sade's writings many different threads which express the complexities of the needs of his inner being. These needs are, invariably, in confrontation with an unsympathetic world outside him, and, consequently, realize their apotheosis in his philosophy of destruction.

In one aspect, Sade's philosophy of destruction becomes necessary to him as a vicarious satisfaction of his erotic need. His particular sexuality, without any of the normal outlets possible to him, attains its fulfilment in his imagination, in the unlimited world of fiction, and this fulfilment is the one peculiar to the sado-masochist,

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<sup>23</sup>Blanchot, Lautréamont et Sade, p. 19.

-- that is, the need to inflict and to receive pain which transforms itself into pleasure, one of the ultimate pleasures being that of death.<sup>24</sup> One senses, as a concomitant of this function of his writings, a large measure of self-justification, an attempt to raise his sexuality to the level of an ethical system: ". . . nous pouvons saisir comment de ses goûts il a fait des principes".<sup>25</sup> But one cannot simply dismiss Sade as guilt-ridden and seeking expiation. There is yet another dimension to him, one which is strongly active, which transcends the passivity of guilt and manifests itself as an intellectual quest:

Il doit exister chez Sade un fil directeur, une constante qui permet de réaliser des oeuvres aussi disparates que "Juliette" et les "Ecrits politiques". Cette constante nous paraît être la recherche d'une logique et d'une explication rationnelle à son propre comportement.<sup>26</sup>

This "fil directeur", at least for Sade, was the elaborate philosophical system which he attempted to base on the principles of scientific materialism. However, beneath this attempt to thus systematize his impulses, one realizes the extent to which Sade had become intuitively

<sup>24</sup>Wilhelm Stekel, Sadism and Masochism; the Psychology of Hatred and Cruelty (New York: Grove Press, 1963-4), II, p. 358.

<sup>25</sup>Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 1006.

<sup>26</sup>J. Neboit-Mombet, "Un Logicien de la Dérison", Europe, no. 522(October 1972), p. 49.

aware of his unconscious drives and had engaged in a considerable confrontation with the self. As a consequence of this awareness of his own state, he gained an immense sensitivity to human nature in general. He sounded out certain psychological forces and motives which are operative in human society and which underlie man's actions. The essential philosophical meaning of Sade's work derives from the confrontation with the predicament of duality inherent in man's nature. Out of all the orgies, the blaspheming, the tortures and the spilling of blood, there does emerge a picture of man which stands as Sade's resolution of this predicament. Although his prevailing attitude concerning man is a pessimistic one, there is a thrust to create a positive and viable image of human possibility.

## ii) The Rejection of God

Sade's view of man and of the universe is a pessimistic one, based on the idea of the "forces obscures" which pervert man's aspirations to the ideal of the good: ". . . ce sont les égarements du coeur humain que je développe, et je n'en dois laisser aucun pli de caché".<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Saint-Fond, another of the monster characters, intones:

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<sup>27</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette (Paris: Au Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1963), IX, 444.

Je lève les yeux sur l'univers, je vois le mal,  
le désordre, et le crime y régner partout en  
 despotes. Je rabaisse mes regards sur l'être  
 le plus intéressant de cet univers, je le vois  
 également pétri de vices, de contradictions,  
 d'infamies: . . . .<sup>28</sup>

The forces which are operative in the universe are those of discord and disorder, of "corruption, putrefaction, dissolution, exhaustion and annihilation".<sup>29</sup>

As the basis of his philosophical system, Sade asserts that the destructive energies are inherent in the natural state of things, that the drive to destroy is embodied in all matter. For Sade, evidently, this drive by far supersedes in impact the fact of creation in the world of natural phenomena. Thus his deductions regarding man in the state of nature are those of Hobbes;<sup>30</sup> for primitive man to survive in such a universe his primary motivating impulse had to be ego-centric cruelty:

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., VIII, 383.

<sup>29</sup>P. Klossowski, "A Destructive Philosophy", Yale French Studies, no. 35 (1965), 73.

<sup>30</sup>Hobbes, Leviathan (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 96. "... during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man".

". . . la cruauté, bien loin d'être un vice, est le premier sentiment qu'imprime en nous la nature".<sup>31</sup> Cruelty is each individual's attempt to assert his strength in a world which is incomprehensible and, in the Sadian perspective, overwhelmingly hostile. Such a world view is, for Sade, totally irreconcilable with concepts of Christianity which postulate order and benevolence. Thus he treats the very notion of God as a deception of the highest order and the superstructure of the Christian Church as a monstrous farce. Sade is emotional and vehement in his denial of the existence of God, and in his rejection of his role as the creator and prime mover of the universe:

Voilà le Dieu des hommes, Juliette; voilà la sottise chimère de leur débile imagination. . . . Voilà pourtant le Dieu des mortels, voilà l'être abominable qu'ils ont inventé, et dans les temples duquel ils ont fait couler tant de sang.<sup>32</sup>

There is, in this rejection, anger against man who has made God into his own image, as well as a statement of Sade's own ideal vision of the deity:

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<sup>31</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 437.

<sup>32</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, VIII, 44, 45.

Ah! cessons de faire de Dieu un être matériel  
 comme nous . . . courroucé de nos invectives,  
 sensible à nos éloges, facile à nos prières;  
 nous voulons toujours le regarder comme un  
 monarque humain. Voilà comme . . . le plus  
 célèbre adorateur de Dieu ne se trouve au fond  
 qu'un idolâtre. Dieu est trop grand, trop  
 spirituel pour toutes ces choses humaines; . . . .<sup>33</sup>

Paradoxically, however, although Sade dismisses God as a chimera of man's mind, the source of his anger appears to reside in the fact that he has been betrayed by God and by Christianity by their promise of love, peace and happiness. What Sade wants is for these ideals to exist; he cannot reconcile himself to the fact that they do not. It is Sade's criminal characters who pose the significant question; "N'allons-nous voir enfin régner que le bonheur?"<sup>34</sup> God is a trickster who has cheated man of his full potential: "De ce moment, c'est donc à plaisir qu'il perd la créature que lui-même a formée".<sup>35</sup> It is the people who are in the grip of a destructive urge who

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<sup>33</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour (Paris: Au Cercle Précieux du Livre, 1963), V, 41.

<sup>34</sup>Sade, Justine ou les Malheurs de la Vertu (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1969), p. 75.

<sup>35</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 395.

realize how far short of possibility the Christian ideal falls:

Mais si . . . votre exécration Dieu a caché aux hommes ce qui devenait nécessaire à leur bonheur, son projet n'était donc pas de les rendre heureux; il ne les aime donc pas, il n'est donc alors ni juste, ni bienfaisant.<sup>36</sup>

As pointed out by Lorna Berman, Sade's arguments against the idea of God and religion mean nothing in themselves:

What they do reveal with startling clarity is a trait which exists in almost all of Sade's characters and without doubt in Sade himself -- namely, an intense idealism, a fervent desire for complete harmony within the universe, an ardent longing to have all things conform with one another.<sup>37</sup>

His anger at the disjunctions between the realities of man's life-experience and his aspirations, then, lead Sade to establish his criminal society as a kind of revenge. In the world of his "fantasmes affectifs",<sup>38</sup> where Sade is able to be omnipotent, he inverts the established moral order and, in a style well laced with irony, creates an ethical structure which is a parody of the ideal of Christian morality. It is important to note, that,

<sup>36</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, VIII, 47.

<sup>37</sup>Lorna Berman, "Sade and Religion", R.U.O., XXXIX (1969), 635. It is necessary to make a distinction here. Sade's "proofs" against the existence of God are meaningless. His argument with religion has a very specific meaning. See Part II, The Problem of Virtue.

<sup>38</sup>Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 1026.



according to the comments of the libertines, both in the above quotations and throughout Sade's work, they never regard the ethical system which they postulate, as the achievement of the ideal human situation; they continue to see themselves as imperfect. They continue to fall short of the ideal of human happiness which they apprehend but cannot attain.

Sade's emphasis, then, is psychological and moral, but he attempts to integrate this into a system of nature which is based on the tenets of materialism,<sup>39</sup> and whose emphasis, therefore, is physical. Thus the disjunction exists not only between Sade's moral idealism and the universe, but also within the philosophy which he develops to answer this schism. Furthermore he must maintain his philosophical contradiction in order to feed his need for libidinous fantasies, for one of the auxiliary functions of his system of nature is to justify his deviant sexuality.

### iii) Nature Instead of God

Thus Sade has established the failure of God:

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<sup>39</sup>Sade's system of nature is based on the philosophies of La Mettrie and d'Holbach. Cf. J. Leduc, "Les Sources de l'athéisme et de l'immoralisme du Marquis de Sade", Studies on Voltaire, LXVIII (1969), 7-66.

"Quel être faible que ce Dieu-là. Comment! il a pu créer tous ce que nous voyons, et il lui est impossible de former un homme à sa guise? . . ."<sup>40</sup> If God has abdicated his position as the omnipotent force in the universe, there remains, according to Sade, nothing but the world of natural phenomena which is its own creator and its own prime mover. This world of nature works according to its own fixed laws which it simultaneously has created and must obey. It is important to Sade that this nature be indifferent to man in order to liquidate the categories of good and evil, for one of the objectives of his philosophical system is to prove "Que ce que nous appelons improprement le mal, ne l'est point . . ."<sup>41</sup> Thus nature is simply an amoral force which is in perpetual motion, eternally involved in the creation and destruction of a visible, tangible material world. Its self-sustaining and self-perpetuating methods are the cycle of life and death, both of which involve the reorganization of matter; in passing through the process of decay, it is recreated in some other form of life.<sup>42</sup> Matter, then, is indestructible. In this

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<sup>40</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 395.

<sup>41</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, VIII, 383.

<sup>42</sup>See also Diderot, Le Rêve de d'Alembert and Lettre sur les Aveugles.

context, man also is seen as mere matter, as a specific organization of atoms. One has no control over how these atoms are organized, but one is completely determined by their arrangement. Since the entire human being is so materially constructed, his temperament or his predilections for certain modes of behaviour are not in his control. The essential corollary to this is that men cannot change the patterns of behaviour with which he is endowed: "Est-ce ma faute si la bizarre nature m'a créée coquine à ce point?"<sup>43</sup>.

Thus Sade locks himself into a deterministic position, in which he attempts to make nature responsible for man's condition:

On nous objecte que le matérialisme fait de l'homme une pure machine, ce qu'on juge très déshonorant pour l'espèce humaine, mais cette espèce humaine sera-t-elle bien plus honorée, quand on dira que l'homme agit par les impulsions secrètes d'un esprit ou d'un certain je ne sais quoi qui sert à l'animer sans qu'on sache comment?<sup>44</sup>

But, even as he is propounding the doctrine of material determinism, he is evolving the theory of man's uniqueness:

<sup>43</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, IX, 439.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., VIII, 55.

Les rapports de l'homme à la nature, ou de la nature à l'homme sont donc nuls; la nature ne peut enchaîner l'homme par aucune loi; l'homme ne dépend en rien de la nature; ils ne doivent rien l'un à l'autre, et ne peuvent ni s'offenser, ni se servir; . . .<sup>45</sup>

Here then, is the desire to be autonomous in the face of the need to be determined. Man, he asserts, operates according to his own laws which are distinct and peculiar only to him and which do not touch upon the laws of nature working indifferently around him.

Elsewhere, Sade shifts his ground yet again, and presents another, qualitatively different, view of nature -- this time anthropomorphized, taken out of the realm of moral indifference into the realm of the human experience of good and evil. In spite of his efforts to create an amoral universe in which his criminal man can operate as an amoral force, Sade never succeeds in escaping from the categories of the established ethical codes. In La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, when the Chevalier makes a defence of virtue, his sister answers him: ". . . nous te faisons grâce de la morale; elle est trop douce pour des roués de notre espèce".<sup>46</sup> Juliette, after a particularly long and bloody orgy, exclaims:

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., IX, 171. Sade seems to have an accute sense of having been determined by forces and factors which are unknown and are unknowable to him.

<sup>46</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 528.

Quelque savante que je fusse, j'ai appris encore,  
et j'avoue que je n'aurais jamais cru que  
l'imagination humaine put s'élever à cet  
incroyable degré de corruption et de perversité.<sup>47</sup>

In spite of his protestations to the contrary, Sade does accept the fact of evil; his characters readily see themselves as corrupt, as deviants from the acceptable. It is their own qualities which they project upon nature: ". . . rien n'est égoïste comme la nature".<sup>48</sup> Hence, because man is egotistical and cruel, it must be that nature made him so; therefore nature also is egotistical and cruel and demands that man also be so.

The idea of nature undergoes still another very significant transformation in Sade's mind -- one that ultimately leads to his rejection of it. When Juliette and Clairwil take their friend, Olympe, to Mount Vesuvius in order to destroy her, they conceive of the act as a kind of sacrifice to nature, which now has become a malevolent metaphysical force:

Nous venons d'y commettre un crime . . .: eh, bien! s'il est vrai que cette action outrage la nature, qu'elle se venge, elle le peut; qu'une éruption se fasse à l'instant sous nous, qu'une lave s'ouvre et nous engloutisse. . . .<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, IX, 504.

<sup>48</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 469.

<sup>49</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, IX, 417.

When nature does not respond to their exhortation, they assume that she has acquiesced in their act: "Aucun bruit ne se fit entendre; le crime était consommé, la nature était satisfaite".<sup>50</sup> In this sense, nature is as confounding as God. Instead of releasing man from the responsibility of his own essence, it has become a collaborator in man's imperfections. Consequently, nature also elicits defiance and is discarded. The sacrifice of Olympe is not only an appeasement of this force, it is, more significantly, an attempt to be greater than it:

Nous insultons la nature, nous la bravions,  
nous la défiions: et, triomphantes de l'impunité  
dans laquelle sa faiblesse et son insouciance  
nous laissaient, nous n'avions l'air de profiter  
de son indulgence que pour l'irriter plus  
grièvement.<sup>51</sup>

Sade's concept of nature, then, is as unfulfilling as is the God of Christianity. It delimits man's possibilities, makes his world finite, and thus renews the perpetual problem of man's attempting to make his reach exceed his grasp. The criminal characters are caught in the dilemma of being human within the materialistic context of which Sade has made them the exponents. They continuously seek to transcend their own philosophical

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

positions. Propelled by the "forces obscures" which escape material definition and make man's experience of himself and of the universe defy his biological limitations, they must come to the point where they separate themselves from such a constrictive system. There is the same illogical operation in the laws of such a nature as there is in those of God:

Et loin de remercier cette nature inconséquente du peu de liberté qu'elle nous donne pour accomplir les penchants inspirés par sa voix, blasphémons-la, du fond de notre coeur de nous avoir autant rétréci la carrière qui remplit ses vues; outrageons-la, détruisons-la, pour nous avoir laissé si peu de crimes à faire, en donnant de si violents désirs d'en commettre à tous les instants.<sup>52</sup>

Nature is a "force aveugle et imbécile" which inspires the desire for vengeance because of "la méchanceté que tu fais éprouver aux hommes, en ne leur fournissant jamais les moyens de se livrer aux affreux penchants que tu leur inspires!"<sup>53</sup> God is rejected because of its contradiction with the undeniable reality of human experience, but the ultimate betrayal is from nature itself, for it was nature which gave birth to the race of monsters known as man.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>54</sup>There is no chronological development or progression in Sade's shifting view of nature. Characteristically, he is operating simultaneously from all viewpoints. I have imposed an order on his many "faces" of nature,

iv) Man Alone: The Criminal Man as Solution

In spite of his efforts to make biology accountable for man's moral dichotomy, Sade in fact effectively strips man of his ontological rationales and leaves him in "l'isolement où nous a créés la nature".<sup>55</sup> Although his system leaves him in an impasse, in the very act of reducing man to a network of atoms, fluids and electrical currents, Sade is dedicated to confronting man with his lack of importance, his powerlessness, in the universe:

De toutes les extravagances où l'orgueil de l'homme dût le conduire, la plus absurde, sans doute, fut le cas précieux qu'il osa faire de son individu. . . . A la première folie où ce même l'avait entraîné, à cette stupidité révoltante de se croire sorti d'une divinité de se supposer une âme immortelle, ouvrage céleste de cette main savante, à cet aveuglement atroce, il devait, sans doute, ajouter celui de se croire sans prix sur la terre.<sup>56</sup>

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because in order to arrive at his image of ideal man (only partly realized in his criminal characters), he may have gone through an unconscious progression in his attitudes. It is when they have achieved the ultimate state of criminality -- i.e. the greatest sense of their power -- that they separate from and attempt to transcend nature. Nature is also rejected when they experience their greatest sense of powerlessness -- in their orgies, where fantasy far outstrips the limitations imposed by human reality. Also, one senses, in Sade, degrees of anger, from scathing contempt for "irrational man" to the highly charged, unrestrained emotional anger at God which is also projected onto nature.

<sup>55</sup> Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 470.

<sup>56</sup> Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, IX, 170.



Man is nothing, yet he has an irrepressible apperception of himself as significant. From this sense of his uniqueness, he creates ideals of good and happiness, which, because of his unfathomable and apparently perverse nature, he transforms into evil, and thus falls short of his aspirations.

Sade finds himself at both poles of the human experience. From this situation, he establishes a society in which he describes a set of libertines who, like himself, are at the mercy of their own human natures. They are, as Delbène explains, victims who are compelled by some violent inner forces and needs which they must satisfy because they cannot be repressed. Unlike their creator, however, these characters are untouchable politically, economically and socially, and so they are able to create their own value system which is an inversion of the traditionally accepted one and which takes the realities of their experience of self as its ethical principle. Yet they demonstrate the same moral paradox as does Sade himself;<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Sade left the following note to the commandant of Fort Miolans when he made his escape: "Si quelque chose peut troubler la joie que j'ai de m'affranchir de mes chaînes, c'est la crainte où je suis qu'on ne vous rende responsable de mon évasion. Après toutes vos honnêtetés et toutes vos politesses, je ne puis vous cacher que cette pensée me trouble. Lely, op. cit., I, 476.

even as they are enunciating their mores as champions of crime, they give vent to their anger and criticism at the wrongs which beset man and society. Juliette finds such a discrepancy quite compatible; as she is preparing to join Ferdinand, King of Naples, in a series of vile orgies, she delivers to him an unsparing critique of his policies and actions as a ruler:

Eh bien! Ferdinand, est-ce la peine de vouloir dominer une nation pour la conduire de cette manière? Et crois-tu qu'un souverain, même un despote, puisse être heureux quand son peuple n'est pas florissant? Où sont les maximes économiques de ton Etat? J'en ai cherché, et n'en ai trouvé nulle part. Augumentes-tu l'agriculture? encourages-tu la population? protèges-tu le commerce? donnes-tu l'émulation aux arts? Non seulement, chez toi, l'on ne voit rien de ce que les autres font, mais je vois qu'on fait même tout le contraire. Qu'arrive-t-il de tous ces inconvénients? Que la triste monarchie languit dans l'indigence; que toi-même deviens un être nul au congrès des autres puissances de l'Europe, et que ta décadence est prochaine. . . . Songe que les rois ne sont rien dans le monde; les peuples tout; . . . Rends [au peuple] donc l'énergie qu'enchaîne ton pouvoir. . . .<sup>58</sup>

Sade's libertine characters, then, fulfill the functions which reflect the preoccupations of their author. They are the actors in a series of frenzied, sadistic orgies; they are the embodiments of the corrupt and evil possibilities in man. But they are also philosophers and critics of man and, in conjunction with this function, they

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<sup>58</sup> Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, IX, 333; 336.

also manifest, although incompletely, the spirit of Sade's ideal human character.

The link between philosophy and sexuality is an important one, not only because of Sade's need to exteriorize his fantasies, but because, for Sade, sex becomes a symbolic mode of expression. In man's sexuality lies the synthesis of the duality of man's being, of the physical and spiritual experiences, -- the latter category encompassing the imaginative and the intellectual faculties. The sexual experience is a transcendental one;<sup>59</sup> for Sade, it also seeks to break the bounds of the repressive mores of society:

. . . la volupté n'admet aucune chaîne, elle ne jouit jamais mieux que quand elle les rompt toutes; or, plus un être a d'esprit, plus il brise les freins; donc l'homme d'esprit sera toujours plus propre qu'un autre aux plaisirs du libertinage.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>A. Huxley, The Devils of Loudun. (Penguin, 1971). "Like intoxication, elementary sexuality, indulged in for its own sake and divorced from love, was once a god, worshipped not only as the principle of fecundity, but as a manifestation of the radical Otherness immanent in every human being.", p. 315.

<sup>60</sup>Sade, ibid., VIII, 62.

All libertines, then, are possible "hommes d'esprit"; they seek to break the bounds both physically, -- that is, sexually, -- and intellectually, in the realm of ideas. Conversely, all "hommes d'esprit" are at least aware of the forces of libertinage because they, by virtue of philosophy and knowledge have made themselves "individual", have separated themselves from the mass of human beings who form the fabric of society. Such people stand at the threshold of personal anarchy, for the more one perceives of oneself and of the world around one, the more one tends to abstract oneself from the codes of behaviour by which the social institutions seek to govern the actions of man. For Sade, (as the foregoing quotation indicates) sexuality as an intense and overwhelming experience, becomes one of man's strongest impulses to be free. It remains with the philosopher to take cognizance of this. In Sade's experience, however, sex is also the medium through which one sees into man's negative side:

C'est là, mes amis, je le répète, oui, c'est là qu'il faut suivre l'homme pour le bien connaître; c'est dans le sein de la lubricité que son caractère, absolument à nu, fournit à la fois toutes les teintes nécessaires au philosophe qui veut les saisir, et c'est après l'avoir vu là qu'on peut deviner à coup sûr le résultat des jets de son exécration et de ses effrayantes passions.<sup>61</sup>

It is this certain knowledge which Sade is never able to

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., IX, 505.

overcome and which his libertine characters take as their starting point.

Knowledge is essential to the criminal characters. All of Sade's libertines are presented as intelligent people; Lady Clairwil, already well established in her way of life, is introduced to Juliette as a model to emulate:

A ces grâces impérieuses, Mme de Clairwil joignait un esprit très élevé; elle était fort instruite, singulièrement ennemie des préjugés . . . déracinés par elle dès l'enfance; il était difficile à une femme de porter la philosophie plus loin.<sup>62</sup>

These are the people who see themselves and the world around them and face the consequence of their perceptions. The immediate result of their perspicacity is the rejection of society and its Christian norms with the assertion that the accepted moral codes are a hypocrisy which mask the human realities that continue to assert themselves obliquely, hidden behind the veils thrown up by the adroit manipulation. A continuous theme reiterated by the libertines is that of their rejection of the codes of virtuous behaviour because of the dishonesty and insincerity with which they are generally practised. Somewhat nostalgically, Dolmancé states his reason for embracing the principles of crime to the Chevalier:

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., VIII, 262.

. . . je vous attends quand [l'expérience] vous aura mûri; alors, mon cher, vous ne parlerez plus si bien des hommes, parce que vous les aurez connus. Ce fut leur ingratitude qui sécha mon coeur, leur perfidie qui détruisit dans moi ces vertus funestes pour lesquelles j'étais peut-être né comme vous. Or, si les vices des uns rendent dans les autres ces vertus dangereuses, n'est-ce donc pas un service à rendre à la jeunesse que de les étouffer de bonne heure en elle?<sup>63</sup>

Indoctrination into the society of these characters, then, is indoctrination into the ways of the world. The purpose of the libertine education is to teach the initiate how to exist in a corrupt world by outdoing it in corruptibility. According to this ethic, one needs to learn vice in order to co-exist in the existing society. Saint-Fond counsels Juliette: "Souviens-toi que l'hypocrisie est un vice essentiel dans le monde".<sup>64</sup> The morality of the libertines, then, is simply that of society extended to its utmost, perverse limits. The education of libertines, who are invariably female, forms the pivotal interest of much of Sade's work;<sup>65</sup> each young novice, who has had the conventional religious upbringing, is systematically stripped of the illusions she has absorbed regarding herself, human nature, and the universe, and is simultaneously introduced

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<sup>63</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 526.

<sup>64</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, VIII, 249.

<sup>65</sup>The use of women and Sade's adherence to literary convention are discussed in Part II.

to the pleasures of physical sensation in the realm of every sexual possibility. She thereby expands her knowledge of herself and of human nature by facing its negative side. This knowledge should be a source of strength, for it entails the bold confrontation of reality, but in the libertines it remains their weakness, for they throw themselves into the very abyss from which they are seeking escape.

For the libertines, physical sensation constitutes an all-encompassing reality, and Sade's characters find their solution to the problem of happiness in this constantly repeated experience of intense sensation. For them, being beyond the perimeters of accepted behaviour yields a greater piquancy than being at the center. One's life, then, becomes the fulfilment of one's particular predilections: ". . . nos goûts, notre tempérament doivent seuls être respectés".<sup>66</sup> Whatever tastes one has, whatever one's temperament, Sade assumes that they are given; they derive from the disposition which nature has bestowed upon man. One of the canons by which Sade's people direct their lives is to accept and yield to their nature, no matter how despicable, and, more significantly, to consciously seek it.

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<sup>66</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 401.

Thus while they are at the mercy of their violent passions and are determined by them, the criminal characters attempt to establish mental control in the form of the deliberate and conscious act.<sup>67</sup> They attempt to abstract themselves from their inner being, to impose an order and control while at the same time retaining an intense awareness of sensation.<sup>68</sup> Sade, then, insists on the supremacy of the mind. It is the intelligence which must direct one's path; the imagination contributes its inventiveness. There is no place for blind emotional passion. Sade's contempt for such uncontrolled passion is clearly enunciated in this finely-drawn anatomy of cruelty:

Nous distinguons en général deux sortes de cruauté; celle qui naît de la stupidité, qui, jamais raisonnée, jamais analysée, assimile l'individu né tel à la bête féroce: celle-là ne donne aucun plaisir, parce que celui qui y est enclin n'est susceptible d'aucune recherche; les brutalités d'un tel être sont rarement dangereuses; il est toujours facile de s'en mettre à l'abri; l'autre espèce de cruauté, fruit de l'extrême sensibilité des organes, n'est connue que des êtres extrêmement délicats, et les excès où elle les porte ne sont que des raffinements de leur délicatesse; c'est cette délicatesse,

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<sup>67</sup>A frequently recurring phrase during the orgies is, "mettons un peu d'ordre". The orgies are "staged", directed and orchestrated by one chief libertine figure.

<sup>68</sup>In this aspect, the libertines are similar to those depicted by Laclos in Les Liaisons Dangereuses.



trop promptement émoussée à cause de son excessive finesse, qui pour se réveiller, met en usage toutes les ressources de la cruauté. Qu'il est peu de gens qui conçoivent ces différences! . . . Comme il en est peu qui les sentent!<sup>69</sup>

This is a sensibility which, rather than being a state of emotional indulgence,<sup>70</sup> depends upon the conscious and developed awareness of the nebulous and often ephemeral interactions of one's intellectual and imaginative faculties with the emotional and physically based drives. This is the refinement of sensation which comes with intelligence, and which is a prerequisite in the characters of all of Sade's libertine people. It is also the level of awareness which he postulates in his ideal individual.

The passions arise from the well-spring of the "forces obscures" and are the fruit of these strong and overwhelming impulses. Since they cannot suppress them, the libertines consider it essential to know them. In Sade's criminal society, ignorance or misunderstanding of the passions is a weakness and can lead to one's undoing. Characters who are so guilty are punished. Queen Charlotte of Naples, a notorious libertine who falls in love with

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<sup>69</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, pp. 438-39.

<sup>70</sup>In his depiction of virtuous characters, Sade invariably describes them as being sensibles. The term appears to designate a disposition to emotional sensation. There is never any attempt to analyse these sensations; the characters simply give themselves over to them. See Part II, i) Aspects of Virtue.

Juliette, commits the error that is her downfall:

Charlotte, aveuglée par son amour pour moi, par l'extrême désir de se défaire de son mari, en signant tout ce que je voulus, me prouva que la prudence est rarement la compagne des grandes passions.<sup>71</sup>

As an extension of the idea of mental control, the ultimate achievement, it would seem, is the complete transcendence of the power of one's passions over one's being, even though, at the same time, one is indulging them in a highly quintessential way. This is the state of "apathie", a state, described by Clairwil, of "cette tranquillité, . . . ce repos des passions . . . ce stoïcisme qui me permet maintenant de tout faire et de tout soutenir sans émotion".<sup>72</sup> The term "apathie" is an ambiguous one which is never explicitly defined by Sade. It seems to signify, at different times, moral indifference which allows man to escape the opposition of the conscience, emotional invulnerability, defense against the outside world. It is actually the suppression of human empathy:

L'apathie, l'insouciance, le stoïcisme, le solitude de soi-même, voilà le ton où il faut nécessairement monter son âme, si l'on veut être heureux sur la terre.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, IX, 404.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., VIII, 291.

<sup>73</sup>Sade, La Nouvelle Justine. Quoted from L. Berman, An Appraisal of the Works of the Marquis de Sade and his Portrayal of Man (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1960), p. 131.

The term may also reflect a desire for inner peace on the part of the author. Sade never resolves his attitude concerning the passions; they are for him "cette tare profonde . . . qui est de ne pas savoir se reposer".<sup>74</sup> He both seeks to be free of them and sees them as necessary. There exists in Sade a tension between the desire for action, change, flux, impelled by passion and the need for inner tranquillity. Most importantly, the term represents the effort on the part of the libertine characters to be independent, to be free: "O Juliette, moins on est sensible, moins on s'affecte, et plus on approche de la véritable indépendance".<sup>75</sup>

Although the libertine characters assert the need for an emotional limbo, they continue to remain highly passionate people, not only in the sense that they are driven by their libidinous needs, but also through the fact that they are the ones who are intensely involved with the problems of existence. The term passion has expanded in significance to mean a quality of mind, as well as of temperament. They are the people who are involved with philosophy, with the struggle to make sense out of the universe. In this context they are the people who are

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<sup>74</sup>Mauzi, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>75</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, VIII, 104.

alive, as opposed to the vague mass of humanity which is not. There can be no intense involvement with ideas, or anything else, without passion: "On déclame contre les passions, sans songer que c'est à leur flambeau que la philosophie allume le sien".<sup>76</sup> Those who are passionate can never be indifferent:

Ce n'est qu'aux passions fortes que sont dues l'invention et les merveilles des arts; elles doivent être regardées . . . comme le germe productif de l'esprit et le ressort puissant des grandes actions. Les individus qui ne sont pas animés de passions fortes ne sont que des êtres médiocres. Il n'y aura jamais que les grandes passions qui pourront enfanter de grands hommes; on devient stupide dès qu'on n'est plus passionné, où dès qu'on cesse de l'être.<sup>77</sup>

Sade's criminal characters, then, are a response to the disjunctions man confronts within himself and with the outside world. In the face of the solitude, of the destructive drives and strange complexities which beset man, of an unconsoling universe, Noirceuil proffers only this counsel to Juliette: ". . . il faut apprendre à marcher et à se soutenir isolément dans le chemin que tu choisis".<sup>78</sup> They have perceived that man can address himself to no one else: "Pourquoi se plaindre du sort qu'il

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., VIII, 177.

ne dépend que de soi de maîtriser?"<sup>79</sup> In so far as they have asked the right questions, these characters stand as a partial answer to the ontological problem posed by Sade. Because of their intelligence, their heightened awareness of self and, consequently, of their fellow human beings, they seek to surmount, philosophically, both time and culture in order to enlarge their view, to see that all things are possible. In their questioning of established thinking, in their energy and in their effort at independence they embody the spirit of the Sadian ideal.

They fail, however, to provide a final answer. Though they are aware of man's solitary state, they have not been able to accept it. In the place of God, they erect their own divinities -- nature and themselves -- which they then attempt to transcend. Thus, by pitting themselves against the vision of superhumanity, which attempts to transcend both life and death, they remain guilty of that pride which seeks to make man more significant than he is. Furthermore, by postulating an ethic which is based on egocentricity, they remain bound to the source of man's unhappiness:

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<sup>79</sup>Sade, *Les Infortunes de la Vertu* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1969), p. 41.

Et voilà, dit Saint-Fond, toujours ce perfide égoïsme, qui devient la cause de toutes les erreurs des hommes. On arrange ses plans d'après ses goûts, ses caprices, et toujours en s'éloignant de la vérité.<sup>80</sup>

The Sadian criminals never solve the problem of the self in relation to society, and the universe. Their morality is simply an extension of corruption; their rage at the irresolvable nature of their situation is systematized into a nihilistic viewpoint. As a result, they seem to indulge in a conscious self-deception:

Eh! mes amies, en fussions-nous à ce dernier degré de turpitude, nous ne nous paraîtrions pas encore viles, et nous aimerions mieux diviniser nos erreurs que de nous méestimer nous-mêmes! Voilà comment la nature sait nous ménager à tous du bonheur.<sup>81</sup>

They cannot accept themselves as they are, nor yet are they able to solve their dilemma, except to aspire to a kind of absolute of their condition. Thus they never achieve the freedom and independence they seek in their state of "apathie", but remain bound and limited in their "downward self-transcendence".<sup>82</sup> One cannot accept Crocker's view

<sup>80</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, VIII, 388.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid, p. 96.

<sup>82</sup>Huxley, op. cit., p. 315.

that "the evil they do comes from the commitment of a free will",<sup>83</sup> for, rather than accept the responsibility of self and of choice inherent in such a freedom, they remain enclosed in their determinism.

Sade does not make a final statement with his criminal characters and their ethic. He creates another possibility which evolves out of an ideal of virtue.

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<sup>83</sup>L. Crocker, An Age of Crisis: Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p. 437.

PART II  
THE PROBLEM OF VIRTUE

i) Aspects of Virtue and the Role of Women

The nihilistic ethic of Sade's criminal society centers on the desire to expose and destroy virtue. In the Sadian context, this virtue is defined as the Christian moral tradition as taught by the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> Virtue and religion are inseparable and even synonymous terms; to possess one is to possess the other.

Sade was not alone in his interest in virtue. The term was in fact fundamental to the great philosophical question debated by the eighteenth century -- namely, what is man and what constitutes the happiness of man. Virtue was equated with Christian morality and held by many to be the key to man's well-being. In theory, the virtuous individual would be the ideal human being; in actuality, the ideal was adapted to man. As he did with the concept of God, man redefined virtue in his image, all the while claiming that he was fulfilling the ideal. In practice, the principal purpose of the ideal of virtue was to provide

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<sup>1</sup>All of Sade's virtuous heroines are religious and accept the codes of morality as taught by the Church: ". . . belief in the existence of God is the origin from which all virtue springs". Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 68. See also p. 79, quote 47: "Point de véritable morale sans religion; . . . ."



the "raison d'être" of the existing institutions and mores.

First of all virtue required society. Rather than being a self-contained quality, an inner state of being, virtue required the presence of the other person on whom it could be bestowed; "Elle désigne exclusivement une aptitude sociale".<sup>2</sup> The advantage gained in this arrangement was that one could rightfully expect there to be a reciprocity of good deeds: "C'est engager autrui à une réciprocité de services, où il y a toujours quelque chose à gagner. . . . La vertu est en somme la banque du bonheur".<sup>3</sup> Out of this grew the cult of bienfaisance which became an exaggerated form of self-indulgence and self interest:

Le goût de la bienfaisance prend quelquefois des formes morbides. Il ne suffit pas d'être un bienfaiteur; on se veut encore le créateur, le possesseur de l'être qu'on oblige. . . . Dégradée en cette obsession possessive, la bienfaisance peut être idéalisée, au point de s'identifier avec l'idée même de la divinité. . . . Si la bienfaisance est la source du bonheur, plus un homme aura l'occasion et le pouvoir d'être bienfaisant, plus il sera heureux.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>R. Mauzi, L'Idée du Bonheur au Dix-Huitième Siècle, p. 580.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 582..

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 608, 609.

Thus, one sought happiness through virtue for a specific end; beneficence was a way of experiencing the divine. The singular and arresting aspect of this concept of virtue was the ease with which one could attain the apotheosis. Rather than being a difficult path of inner conflicts, virtue was an appealingly easy achievement. One simply allowed oneself to be given over to it; virtue was, then, a spontaneous outcome, a "natural" phenomenon:

Si la vertu est conforme à la nature, il serait  
surprenant qu'elle coûtât beaucoup de peine.  
Etre vertueux n'est pas se vaincre, mais  
s'accomplir.<sup>5</sup>

The experience of virtue was decreed by natural law, and with this argument one simply eradicated "cette dualité qui est l'essence de la vie morale".<sup>6</sup> All sense of man struggling against himself was simply swept away and instant harmony instituted in its place:

Désormais, la vertu est automatique; l'homme  
produit de belles actions comme le rosier  
produit des roses. . . . On ne s'élève plus  
à la vertu; on s'y laisse tomber, on s'y  
noie avec délices.<sup>7</sup>

In the jargon of the virtuous, those who had achieved this felicitous state were designated "âmes sensibles". Sensibilité was a requisite characteristic

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 582.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 615.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

of the virtuous individual, but it was a sensibility whose meaning had altered from that of introspective awareness of emotional states to that of the susceptibility to attendrissement:

Dans un être miraculeusement unifié par la vertu, la vie de l'âme ne s'exprime plus que sous forme d'explosions. Si l'homme sensible est condamné, quoiqu'il arrive, à s'attendrir, c'est qu'il est d'une seule coulée; à chaque sollicitation, son être entier déferle et se répand. La sensibilité est cette disponibilité totale qui résulte de l'absence de toute complexité. Il n'existe aucune réticence, aucune ambiguïté, aucune pensée de derrière dans une âme vertueuse: . . . .<sup>8</sup>

The heart was the seat of all of these qualities of virtue; the rational processes were submerged in the transports of the heart.

In Sade, the depiction of virtue is completely consistent with this pattern. His exemplars of virtue, among them, Justine, the Marquise de Gange, and Aline de Blamont,<sup>9</sup> are all immoveably committed to the institutions which dictate the official moral codes of society. Unfailingly, they identify the greatest source of pleasure in the practice of virtue as the beneficent act. In the attempt to convert one of her assailants, Justine rhapsodizes:

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 616. Sade's virtuous heroines are all depicted according to this pattern.

<sup>9</sup>Léonore, who is also a virtuous figure, stands in

Ah! monsieur, interrompis-je avec chaleur, peut-il en être une jouissance plus douce que celle de soulager l'infortune? Laissons à part la frayeur de souffrir soi-même: . . . . Jouir des larmes de la reconnaissance, partager le bien-être qu'on vient de répandre chez les malheureux qui, semblables à vous, manquaient des choses dont vous formez vos premiers besoins, les entendre chanter vos louanges et vous appeler leur père . . . , non, monsieur, nulle volupté dans le monde ne peut égaler celle-là; c'est celle de la divinité même, et le bonheur qu'elle promet à ceux qui l'auront servie sur la terre ne sera que la possibilité de voir ou de faire des heureux dans le ciel. . . . Et le miracle de la nature, après ce foyer de la lumière céleste, est l'âme honnête, délicate et sensible dont la félicité suprême est de travailler à celle des autres.<sup>10</sup>

In her outpouring, Justine has drawn the shining vision of virtue which Sade rejects.

The form which Sade chooses as the vehicle for his statement is the conventional one of the young virgin who becomes the prey of the sex-hungry villain. In so doing, he is being consistent with the literary genres of his time -- the sentimental novel in the manner of Richardson, and the libertine novel. His virtuous heroines are young, convent-educated, impressionable, naive, sensitive and emotional. At the outset of their travails, the struggle centers around their honour, a term which is exclusively sexual in meaning. Virtue succumbs; villainy triumphs. In Sade, the defeat of virtue has serious

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a separate category. She is not the "typical" virtuous heroine.

<sup>10</sup>Sade, *Justine ou les Malheurs de la Vertu* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1969), p. 231.

consequences, for the heroine invariably dies.

Although this format provides ample opportunity for satire, and Sade certainly avails himself of it in the story of Justine, his pre-occupation with virtue is not superficial. As with all of the institutions which he attacks, the barrage which he hurls at the traditional concept of virtue is in deadly earnest. Overlying the basic "plot" of his stories of besieged heroines, there is the philosophical concern with truth, with what the traditional moral code, designated as virtue, means to the actual human experience. His interest is in examining the true nature of this ethical system and in measuring its impact on the human character.

In his choice of thematic pattern -- the persecution of women -- Sade is not only borrowing from the traditions of the genre; nor is he simply manifesting the sadistic urge to subjugate a willing victim, although this aspect surely exists in his work. There is as well an element of misogyny in Sade, for a frequently recurring phrase among the male libertines is "le tort d'être femmes".<sup>11</sup> Sade's aversion is particularly strong for the mother figures who are well entrenched in the traditional

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<sup>11</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette ou les Prospérités du Vice, IX, 86.

codes of morality. In society they are considered to be the exemplars of virtue; for Sade, they are: "Acariâtre, superstitieuse, dévote, grondeuse . . .et d'une prudence révoltante. . . ." <sup>12</sup> These women he unceasingly and ferociously subjugates, humiliates and stamps out of existence. Alternately, however, some of his evil protagonists are also women. Through the educative process, they become the arch-libertines, the foremost exponents of a philosophical system which propounds crime extended to its most heinous possibilities as the ultimate good and way to happiness. They are Sade's most enthusiastic iconoclasts.

In this focus on women, Sade is, again, consistent with his age. The eighteenth century devoted much energy to discussing the nature of women and their position in society. For Sade, women are particularly apt as the vehicles by which he develops his philosophical viewpoint. Women have always been regarded as the repositories of social convention. As such, they are much more bound, in the sense of subjugated, by society's mores. It is women who bear the burden of maintaining a reputation for moral rectitude: "C'est que tous les préjugés sont contre l'inconduite des femmes; c'est qu'elles ont, pour être

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<sup>12</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 391.

libertines, une infinité de liens à franchir. . . ."13

Because of this, women are more suited to demonstrate the conversion to a more "enlightened" ethic. However, most salient to Sade's purpose is the fact that their social conditioning leaves women entirely without resources to live in the world:

Mlle de Donis, modestement élevée, n'ayant reçu, dans la maison dont elle sortait, que les meilleurs principes, était nécessairement dans une affreuse situation; et rien ne vous amusait comme les combats violents de sa pudeur et de la nécessité.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, his women become the embodiments of the human condition. Whether virtuous or libertine, Sade's women, at a very tender age, face the world alone.

## ii) The Vice of Virtue

Sade moves on several levels to discredit virtue. His most frequently recurring argument is that based on the materialist doctrine of an indifferent, or rather evil, nature which arranges man's material components in such a

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<sup>13</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, IX, 81.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 573.

fashion that he has a disposition for crime.<sup>15</sup> One's organization is thus more responsive to the stimulus offered by criminal acts. Since this is an involuntary neurological reaction, it is, therefore, both necessary and legitimate.

As he does with all his assertions of determinism, however, Sade contradicts his own position in frequent statements which imply that man is free to choose his ethical values:

Dans tous les événements de la vie . . . dans tous, au moins, qui nous laisse la liberté du choix, nous éprouvons deux impressions, ou si on aime mieux, deux inspirations; l'une nous porte à faire ce que les hommes appellent la vertu, et l'autre à préférer ce qu'ils appellent le vice.<sup>16</sup>

He never succeeds in resolving this dilemma of determinism or free will. Instead, he overrides the contradictions by imposing his pleasure principle:

. . . il [le bonheur] . . . peut donc se rencontrer également dans le triomphe de la vertu et dans l'abîme du vice: . . . mais que dis-je? dans le triomphe de la vertu. . . . Ah! ses chatouillements alors seraient-ils aussi piquants? Quelle est l'âme froide qui pourrait s'en contenter? Non, mes amis, non, jamais la vertu ne sera faite pour le bonheur.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See quotation, Part I, p. 34, number 52.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., VIII, 142.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., IX, 95. In its choice of phrase and intonation, this quotation is an example of the satirical tone of Sade's libertine arguments denying virtue and extolling vice.



It is the last statement which is most germane to Sade's violent denunciation of virtue. As the quotation indicates, virtue and vice both serve as instruments of pleasure. Thus virtue, at its core, is as self-centered in its motives as is the practice of vice for the libertines. It is Noirceuil who gives the definitive exposé of the true character of virtue:

Et ce qui achèvera plus encore de détériorer à mes yeux le sentiment de la vertu, c'est que non seulement il n'est pas un premier mouvement naturel, mais il n'est même, par sa définition, qu'un mouvement vil et intéressé qui semble dire: Je te donne pour que tu me rendes. D'où vous voyez . . . que la plus belle de toutes les vertus, analysées, ne se trouvant plus qu'égoïste, devient elle-même un vice. Tout donc est vice dans l'homme; . . . . Il est vicieux quand il préfère son intérêt à celui des autres; il est encore vicieux dans le sein même de la vertu, puisque cette vertu, ce sacrifice à ces passions, n'est en lui ou qu'un mouvement de l'orgueil, ou que le désir de faire refluer sur lui une dose de bonheur plus tranquille que celle que lui offre la route du crime. Mais c'est toujours son bonheur qu'il cherche, jamais il n'est occupé que de cela; . . . . Soyez assurée que l'homme ne pratique la vertu que pour le bien qu'il compte en retirer ou la reconnaissance qu'il en attend. Que l'on ne m'objecte pas les vertus du tempérament: celles-là sont égoïstes comme les autres puisque celui qui les pratique n'a d'autre mérite que de livrer son cœur au sentiment qui lui plaît le plus. . . . Le vicieux travaille dans les mêmes vues, mais avec plus de franchise, et n'en est, par là, que plus estimable: . . . .<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., VIII, 144-145. One may recall Justine's speech on virtue on p. 55.

Thus Sade lays bare the hypocrisies of easy virtue. This ideal, by which man is supposed to approximate the deity, is in reality the servant of man's egotism, of the need to generate pleasure for oneself. But even personal pleasure is not a sufficient reward for the majority of Sade's virtuous characters, for they anticipate as a payment for their beneficence a subservient gratitude. Therefore, they also create victims by their deed, for the expectation of gratitude is an act of total possession, just as certainly as are the acts of physical violence perpetrated by Sade's criminal characters. Sade even suggests that virtue achieves this goal of self-satisfaction by an easier route than does vice, for virtue refuses to seek its pleasure through the passions and thus circumvents the disturbing fluctuations and extremes of human experience. Rather, virtue sublimates the passions to a form of sensibility which expresses itself less violently, but procures the same end -- namely, jouissance.

Jouissance is a term often used by Sade's heroines to describe the extasies inherent in the practice of virtue. It, like the term volupté, is used interchangeably in the language of both the virtuous and the vicious.<sup>19</sup> Thus the Chevalier, after participating in the corruption of

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<sup>19</sup>Thus Sade keeps the term deliberately ambiguous. He is perhaps commenting on the fine line between the "extasy" of virtue and that of the sexual experience.

young Eugénie, in a moment of reversal, intones:

. . . mais n'abandonnons pas les vertus que la sensibilité nous inspire; ce ne sera jamais qu'en les pratiquant que nous goûterons les jouissances de l'âme les plus douces et les plus délicieuses.<sup>20</sup>

There is an ironic element to this particular juxtaposition of circumstances which occurs again in Juliette. After having escaped from the murderous Saint-Fond, Juliette establishes a brothel in a new location. Here she meets M. de Lorsange who immediately falls in love with her and, upon hearing the story of her life, moves directly into a saccharin dissertation on virtue, religion and duty:

Oh Juliette! que la vertu et la religion ont de douceurs! J'ai vecu comme les autres hommes, vous le voyez, puisque c'est dans une maison de plaisir ou j'ai l'avantage de vous connaître; mais au milieu de toutes mes passions, . . . la vertu m'a toujours paru fort belle.<sup>21</sup>

Ecce homo. Sade, in a lighter mood, points to the unconscious hypocrisies of the individual who slips so easily into an emotional, rather than a moral, relationship with virtue.

Virtue, then, becomes a masquerade. The codes of

<sup>20</sup>Sade, Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 526.

<sup>21</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, VIII, 531.  
(Underlining mine.)

Church morality are ineffectual and unrelated to the realities of human experience. At best, Sade views the traditional moral system as a tool used by society to gain the results in behaviour which are deemed desirable and useful in perpetuating the institutions of that society. Since these institutions are corrupt, virtue is a hypocrisy and the individual need not attempt to understand it in any depth as a moral ideal:

. . . c'est n'est pas la vertu qui est bon aux hommes, c'est son apparence, on ne demande que cela dans la société; les hommes ne vivent pas assez ensemble pour avoir vraiment besoin de la vertu; l'enveloppe suffit à qui n'approfondit jamais.<sup>22</sup>

This statement is a curious one, coming as it does from the man who, in his "alternate" ethic, appears to be asserting that to be truly happy one must become a totally indifferent and fragmented individual, completely atomized and living in isolation from all fellow human creatures. Sade is in fact saying that this is the human predicament. That is why his criminal characters, in their personal apologiae, center their self-justifications on the corrupt and hostile world which exists around them and which they, in their behaviour, mimic in a much exaggerated form. The statement also indicates that Sade does indeed have a

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<sup>22</sup>D. A. F. Sade, La Nouvelle Justine (Paris: Au Cercle du Livre Précieux, 196 ), VI, 340.

vision of ideal virtue.

It is in one of his inverted situations that Sade depicts the workings of true morality. Ironically, the ideal is found among the bands of Bohemians and thieves which Léonore encounters on her voyage into life's actualities. Only those who are outside the pale -- the anti-social -- in short, those who have escaped the established modes of thought imposed by society, are capable of the true disinterested virtue which fulfills the Sadian concept of concern for one's fellow. These are the moral people; those who live within the bounds of society are not:

Vous avez trouvé des scélérats chez ceux qui vous devaient l'hospitalité, de l'hypocrisie et de la débauche, du libertinage et de l'infamie, parmi les chefs de la justice, et partout les coeurs de rochers. . . . Venez, vous dis-je, c'est au milieu d'une troupe de Bohémiens que vous allez rencontrer des amis. . . .<sup>23</sup>

It is significant to note that none of these bandit figures exhibits the characteristics of the virtuous protagonists; not yet are they the depraved and murderous libertines, who in their nihilism, are bent only on destruction. The latter characters, it must be remembered, live and act within the protective precincts of established society.

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<sup>23</sup>Sade, *Aline et Valcour* (Paris: Au Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1962), V, 111.

The Bohemians represent the ideal, both as individuals and as a society, by which man may realise a solution to the moral dilemma and find a point at which he can deal with his inner polarities.<sup>24</sup>

The real importance of Sade's denunciation and destruction of virtue is not in the alternate system of the criminal ethic, but is found rather in the clash between the two systems. Confrontation is the vehicle through which the new man emerges. These confrontations are in the genre form of virtue harassed by villainy, but in developing his portraits of virtuous heroines, Sade tells quite explicitly why this conventional form of virtue cannot work, and in so doing outlines the characteristics which are necessary for the attainment of his ideal of virtue.

### iii) Portraits: Justine and Juliette

There are three versions of the story of Justine. The first, Les Infortunes de la Vertu was written in 1787; the second, Justine ou les Malheurs de la Vertu was written in 1788 and published in 1791. The third and most notorious is La Nouvelle Justine suivie de l'Histoire de Juliette, sa Soeur, written between 1790 and 1797.<sup>25</sup> All

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<sup>24</sup>The Bohemians will be discussed in Part III.

<sup>25</sup>It is worth noting that the three versions show an attitudinal progression on the part of the author. In

three deal with the misfortunes suffered by the heroine who has been raised in the protective circumstances of social position and comfort and who suddenly finds herself deprived of these supports. She thus stands denuded on the threshold of the wide world with only her education, which has given her a system of ethical values, to guide her.

Justine's problems begin the very moment that she and her sister are ousted from their convent for having become suddenly impoverished. From the outset she demonstrates the quality of character which will lead to her undoing:

Juliette, enchantée d'être sa maîtresse, voulut un moment essayer les pleurs de Justine, puis voyant qu'elle n'y réussirait pas, elle se mit à la gronder au lieu de la consoler; elle lui reprocha sa sensibilité: . . . .<sup>26</sup>

Armed with her religiosity, Justine encounters one dilemma after another in the corrupt world. Like most young girls of her background, Justine has been taught nothing about her sexuality except that she must keep her virginity intact. Such a limited view leads her into situations which are overtly comic. One of the first villains that she encounters is Coeur-de-Fer who attempts to persuade Justine

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the first version Justine is a more roundly drawn figure than in the second, where she has become two-dimensional. By La Nouvelle Justine, she is completely flat and caricaturesque. The last version, along with Juliette, is most violent and depraved -- a paroxysm of bloodshed.

<sup>26</sup>Sade, Les Malheurs de la Vertu, p. 16.

to yield to his preference, which is sodomy:

. . . il voulut, pour donner plus d'empire à la leçon joindre aussitôt la pratique au précepte; et ses mains, malgré mes résistances, s'égarèrent vers l'autel où le traître voulut pénétrer. . . . Faut-il vous l'avouer, madame? aveuglée par ces séductions de ce vilain homme; contente, en cédant un peu, de sauver ce qui semblait le plus essentiel; . . . j'allais m'abandonner, et par vertu devenir criminelle; mes résistances faiblissaient; . . . .<sup>27</sup>

She is, this time, saved from the actual sin, but not from the fact that she has compromised herself because she is ruled by the letter of the law and does not understand the spirit. Parrot-like, she can only repeat the maxims of moral behaviour which she has been taught; she never attempts to comprehend their significance in relation to her own self-experience and to her experience of others. Sade delights in confronting Justine with these quandaries where she must "be virtuous" at the price of committing immoral acts. She is aware that she is in such predicaments, but can only lament her fate; ". . . je deviens . . . catin par bienfaisance et libertine par vertu".<sup>28</sup>

The consummate irony in Justine's story occurs when she falls in love with Bressac, a homosexual with feminine traits, who arouses in her emotions which are

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 212.



completely new and incomprehensible. This experience goes directly contrary to any of her ethical beliefs and yet she cannot rid herself of her infatuation; she is the victim of an irrational impulse which she is unable to control in spite of his despicable character and her "virtuous soul". Rather than attempting to confront this aspect of herself, she shapes the situation to her notion of morality in order to salvage her self-image of religious virtue. Thus she chooses to be dishonest with herself and becomes guilty of the most outrageous sophistry:

. . . il ne se pouvait pas qu'il n'entrevît mes prévenances; trop aveugles sans doute, elles allaient au point de servir ses erreurs, autant que la décence pouvait me le permettre. . . .<sup>29</sup>

By invoking a vague and evidently very flexible notion of decency, she retains the external outlines of her morality. She does not even appear to be unduly alarmed by her recognition of her attraction to Bressac's depravity:

". . . et le perfide comte ne me paraissait jamais plus aimable que quand j'avais réuni devant moi tout ce qui devait m'engager à le haïr".<sup>30</sup> In this episode, Justine comes face to face with her "other" self; she is on the threshold of the dark, labyrinthine side of human nature and she will not be cognizant of it. There is no experience

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

of inner conflict, no attempt to sound the philosophical implications of this duality within herself. With Justine, Sade illustrates the incompleteness of those who blindly appropriate the codes which are arbitrarily superimposed on them and who never begin to internalize their significance or to examine them in the light of personal and external realities:

. . . et il est frappant qu'elle n'apprenne rien  
 . . . elle a appris un certain nombre de choses  
 qui se numérotent mais elle n'a pas appris  
 grand' chose en ce qui concerne le coeur  
 humain. . . .<sup>31</sup>

There is no inner growth, no altered self-awareness, no changed concept of reality. Justine never succeeds in freeing herself of her limited perspective and so she continues to fall prey to misfortune -- a symbol of her bondage.

There is a quality of character which serves to imprison Justine and which Sade perceives as being generally a part of the virtuous make-up. This is her tendency to remain passive. Rather than attempting to

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<sup>31</sup>H. Coulet, "La Vie intérieure dans "Justine". Centre Aixoïs d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le dix-huitième siècle, Le Marquis de Sade (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1968), p. 90.

deal actively and forcefully with adverse situations so that she might manipulate events in her favour, she readily relinquishes her autonomy and allows people and circumstances to assume mastery over her. This, in Sade's view, stems from the lifelong habit of permitting others, especially the Church, to determine for her her mode of thinking and her definition of reality. Thus Justine has no inner resources which are her own and consequently possesses no strength as an individual:

C'est Justine, mon oncle, dit Bressac, une héroïne de vertu, un individu tout sentimental, et dont les mœurs et les infortunes forment, avec nos principes, les plus singulières oppositions. Gernande en a fait la demoiselle de sa femme; elles pleurent, elles prient, elles se consolent ensemble. . . .<sup>32</sup>

Against this passivity, Sade projects the energetic natures of his libertines. It is not by remaining submissive that one deals with life; it is in dynamism that man realizes his potential, in being part of the flux necessary to maintain an ontological dialectic. This, for Sade, is the principle operating at the basis of all life and this is the principle which the ethos of virtue seeks to deny and suppress in man. Paradoxically, it is Sade's libertine characters who, in their "energy" and

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<sup>32</sup>Sade, La Nouvelle Justine, VII, 172.

and individualism, though not in personal philosophy, are more actively involved with life than the exponents of the Christian ethic.<sup>33</sup> In Justine, religion and virtue culminate in a death-wish:

. . . celle à qui ses cruels revers ont enlevé  
parents, amis, fortune, protection et secours;  
celle qui n'a plus dans le monde que des pleurs  
pour s'abreuver, et des tribulations pour se  
nourrir, celle-là, dis-je, voit avancer la mort  
sans la craindre, elle la souhaite même comme  
un port assuré où la tranquillité renaîtra. . . .<sup>34</sup>

Justine and her ethic are anti-life.

Juliette, Justine's intrepid sister, doubtlessly because of her particular "organization", moves in a diametrically opposite direction from her sibling. Her story is a study in contrast to Justine's; it is actually a parody by use of inversion of the Justine narrative. It has often been noted in commentaries on Sade that both Justine and Juliette undergo the same kinds of experiences, particularly in the orgy scenes; the two girls simply view them from different perspectives. Whatever Justine finds an affront to her religion, her modesty, her honour, Juliette indulges with relish and is, in this respect, as

<sup>33</sup>Blanchot, Lautréamont et Sade, p. 21.  
". . . celui-là seul est puissant qui sait le devenir par son énergie." The libertines channel this energy into crime. (Fascism)

<sup>34</sup>Sade, Les Malheurs de la Vertu, p. 312.

much an exaggeration and caricature in her bloodthirst and penchant for destruction as is Justine in her virtuous zeal. However, she, like Justine, also contains the element of truth which makes a statement of Sade's position. This is not to say that Sade is presenting Juliette as the prototype of the "new man", for Juliette, as do all of the criminal characters, remains bound by the fact that they are also representations of the failure of man to conquer his baser self. As stated earlier, they provide themselves with justifications for mirroring and extending the corruption already existent in society. There is the same egotism and therefore the same self-deceit as to motive operating in their arguments on behalf of crime as there is in the protestations of the virtuous characters. Thus Maurice Heine is only partly correct when he states:

Justine, c'est l'ancienne femme, asservie, misérable, et moins qu'humaine. Juliette, au contraire, représente la femme nouvelle qu'il entrevoyait, un être dont on n'a pas encore d'idée, qui se dégage de l'humanité, qui aura des ailes et qui renouvellera l'univers.<sup>35</sup>

Juliette is the product of a libertine education which is the other extreme of that inculcated by the Church. As it is presented, in all of its viciousness, this form of learning is, one feels, Sade's way of stating that the

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<sup>35</sup> Maurice Heine, Le Marquis de Sade (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), p. 10.

religious indoctrination is far from absolute; it is, on the contrary, thoroughly ineffectual for it is very easily discarded. However, the graduates of this libertine system are no more capable of ascending to their ideal, which is a kind of superhumanity, -- the counterpart of virtue's divinity. But where Juliette exceeds Justine, as the unscrupulous exceed and have advantage over the virtuous, is in her expanded knowledge of human nature. Like their author, the libertines, through their deformities, have achieved a profundity of vision, but they are unable to resolve the moral dilemma which their vision uncovers.

However, Juliette, as a counterpoint to Justine, does represent the liberation of an important aspect of Justine's mental enslavement, which is in the domain of sexual knowledge. As indicated earlier, convention equated virtue with virginity, but told the young woman nothing concerning the nature of sexual passion or that she herself may some day be subject to it.<sup>36</sup> What Sade appears to say, especially in his depictions of the older virtuous women -- the mothers and the wives -- that, what begins as a naivety in a Justine, ends by ossifying into a narrow

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<sup>36</sup> Compare the fate of Justine to that of Cécile in Laclos' Les Liaisons Dangereuses.

prudery in the mature woman. He treats such women to disdainful subjugation: ". . . quelle différence faites-vous entre une esclave et une femme . . . épouse?"<sup>37</sup>

Juliette's career is thus an equalizing process whereby she attains status among the male philosophers. To become aware of one's physicality is to discover a new dimension to one's being.

Initially, even Juliette is prepared to assume the traditional partnership with her mentor, Noirceuil:

. . . comme femme je me mets à ma place, je sais que la dépendance est mon lot.  
-- Non, pas, absolument, me dit Noirceuil;  
l'aisance dont tu jouis, ton esprit, et ton caractère te sortent absolument de cet esclavage.  
Je n'y soumets que les femmes-épouses ou les putains. . . .<sup>38</sup>

Thus she possesses the qualities which place her above the norm. This attitude is strongly reminiscent of a passage in which Simone de Beauvoir describes the status of woman as wife in ancient Greece:

In Athens, the wife was shut up in her quarters, held under severe constraint by law and watched over by special magistrates. She remained all her life a perpetual minor, under the control of her guardians, who might be her father, her husband. . . .<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, IX, 247.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>39</sup>S. de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 81.

After placing their wives in this abject state, men sought more stimulating liaisons with a class of courtisans known as the hetairas:

. . . it is well known that several shared the glory of their lovers. Free to make disposal of themselves and of their fortunes, intelligent, cultivated, artistic, they were treated as persons by the men who found enchantment in their company. By virtue of the fact that they escaped from the family and lived on the fringes of society, they escaped also from man; they could therefore seem to him to be fellow beings, almost equals.<sup>40</sup>

Once again, it is by their position outside the existing social bounds that such women were able to achieve a strong presence. By not being subject to the conventional demands of woman's place and role, they attained the status of individuals and engaged in relationships with men which were reciprocal.<sup>41</sup>

Juliette appears to represent this possibility in Sade's work. In her ability to go beyond the rules that bind her sister she escapes the intellectual limitations which they impose and, for Sade, intellectual freedom and sexual freedom coexist, as a logical necessity.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-84. The aim of this thesis is not to discuss the male-female relationship in Sade, although this is a theme which runs through his work.

<sup>41</sup>In this regard, Juliette resembles Mme de Merteuil in Liaisons Dangereuses.



iv) La Marquise de Gange: Virtue Idealized

Euphrasie de Gange, like Justine, possesses all of the requisite characteristics of the virtuous heroine. She is "une âme sensible", imbued with religious faith and the belief that this faith is the protector and salvation of virtue. Unlike the portrayal of Justine, however, Euphrasie is drawn more three-dimensionally, with none of the elements of caricature. In fact, Sade has given her a strength and a dignity which would imply a sympathy on the part of the author.<sup>42</sup> She differs from Justine also in that she appears to have some philosophical basis for her ethical values. In the great confrontation between herself and the villainous Théodore, she puts forth an impressive argument to answer Théodore's dissertation in favour of divorce. In contrast with Justine, she does not rhapsodize emotionally about God, duty and the extasies of familial love, but argues from the aspect of social necessity: "Que voulez-vous que deviennent des enfants qui n'ont plus de mère, dès que cette mère s'éloigne d'eux par son inconstance; . . . ." <sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>She is reminiscent of Mme de Tourvel in Les Liaisons Dangereuses.

<sup>43</sup>Sade, La Marquise de Gange (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1971), p. 163. Sade regarded virtue or morality as essential to the social state. See Part III.

There is also a purity to her belief which separates her from the other virtuous characters in Sade. Euphrasie does not appear to be virtuous for the sake of jouissance; nor is her morality simply the result of the superimposition of religious credos which she then repeats as a formulae. Rather, she seems to have a deep-seated sense of a universal ideal for which each person is responsible. The individual must evaluate and act within his own conscience to determine its true import, regardless of whether the act is legally permissible:

. . . c'est l'action seule qu'il faut considérer, et non pas les motifs du législateur qui la permet ou qui la défend. . . . On ne compose point avec sa conscience; descendez au fond de la vôtre, Théodore, et voyez si elle vous conseille l'infamie où vous voulez m'entraîner. Dans quelque situation enfin que puisse être un homme, croyez qu'il cesse d'être vertueux, dès qu'il légitime ses travers, ou par ses sophismes, ou par ses passions.<sup>44</sup>

In Euphrasie de Gange, Sade has presented the possibility of a true virtue, as opposed to the hypocritical virtue which is denounced by Noircueil. Hers is a principled virtue, but it too succumbs because Euphrasie exhibits the flaw of all the virtuous characters:

". . . elles aiment presque mieux céder au mensonge que de travailler à connaître le vrai".<sup>45</sup> Her traditional con-

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 67, 68.

ditioning has given her the particular mentality which seeks to side-step realities and which does not allow her to believe in her own strength. It is the tradition which pre-empt's her personal responsibility to see and to know the situation which confronts her.

As the above quotation demonstrates, Euphrasie is, at the outset of her story, the equal of her assailant. After the first incident designed to compromise her in her husband's eyes, she challenges Théodore directly to reveal his complicity. Here she is in control of herself and therefore of the situation. Little by little she loses this control because she allows her emotions to dominate her and thus hands the advantage over to her enemy:

Cette assurance que la marquise avait placée dans ses regards s'affaiblit ici par degrés; peu à peu sa tête se pencha sur son sein; ses beaux yeux se remplirent de larmes; . . . .<sup>46</sup>

~~She abandons her initiative and becomes the passive recipient~~ of a series of intrigues which are designed to ruin her. Now, like Justine, she has no power to affect the direction of events which determine her fate. She is rudderless and buffeted by external forces of evil, and by her own inner helplessness. At the first, very transparent, implication of her husband's infidelity, Euphrasie is fired with

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

jealousy and overwhelmed with grief; she subsequently act impulsively and imprudently, thereby intensifying her emotional and mental confusion.

Her sense of helplessness further extends her passivity and causes her more and more to defer to those around her for advice and guidance. This is her final, fatal step in which she voluntarily abandons her autonomy and seeks the counsel of the church and of her mother, who, in Sade's view, is an extension of that institution. They, of course, reply in terms which have no relevance to Euphrasie's torment. By reiterating the clichés of religion and virtue, they intensify her paralysis:

. . . ce n'est que parafaitement pénétrée de sa religion qu'elle parviendra à se garantir de tous les dangers qu'elle court. Point de véritable morale sans religion; elle seule l'étaie, la soutient; et comment ne triompherait pas de tous les pièges des hommes celle qui réunit à la crainte d'y succomber l'espoir certain des récompenses dont l'éternel doit un jour couronner ses vertus?<sup>47</sup>

It is not fear, nor the promise of reward, nor a soul suffused with religious faith that protects the innocent from the ravages of the unscrupulous. As Sade indicates in all of his works, to be successful in crime requires a wily intelligence, an awareness and control of emotional states and a daring independence of spirit; what he is saying in his portrayals of virtue is that morality

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

requires these qualities if it is to be effectively operative. He is not speaking only of a manipulative cleverness, although this too is at least an indication of wit and is often a necessary device, but of intellectual open-mindedness. To aspire to virtue under any other principle is a folly and a fantasy. As the case of Euphrasie de Gange illustrates, one cannot stand up to life, with its challenges and vicissitudes, by relying on a system which has little meaning for temporal reality, Sade demonstrates this in his characterization of Léonore.

v) Léonore: The Sadian Solution<sup>48</sup>

It is in the character of Léonore that Sade achieves the synthesis, or rather the compromise, of his two extremes of virtue and vice. In her he perfects the flaws which destroyed Euphrasie and arrives at his ideal individual -- the one who is most able to cope with the actualities of human nature and society.

The history of Léonore is contained within the story of Aline and her fiancé, Valcour. Except that it is in the epistolary form, this narrative has all of the elements of the typical Sadian novel. Both Aline and Valcour

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<sup>48</sup>"Léonore [est le] porte-parole privilégié de Sade, selon son propre aveu." J. P. Han and J. P. Valla, "A propos du Système Philosophique de Sade", Europe, no. 522 (October 1972), 110.

are virtuous figures, who endure the systematic destruction imposed on them by Aline's father, M. de Blamont. Aline, Mme de Blamont and Valcour all end their travails in death. Léonore, who undergoes a picaresque adventure similar to that of Justine, survives and moves on to live happily with her husband, even though her story describes, typically, the continual efforts of corruption to subdue and destroy her. Léonore, then, possesses some advantage over the others.

When Léonore first appears in the Blamont household, she projects a presence which immediately separates her from Aline and her mother:

Elle a le ton gracieux et poli; sans doute, l'air d'excellente éducation; mais en l'examinant un peu mieux, on voit qu'il y a plus d'art que de nature dans ce qui lui donne les dehors de la bonne compagnie. Ses manières sont étudiées, ses gestes arrangés, sa prononciation belle, mais affectée; elle est compassé dans ses mouvements, et au travers de tout cela, cependant, on trouve de la candeur et de la modestie.<sup>49</sup>

These qualities are negative in the eyes of Aline's entourage; the virtuous eschew what in Léonore is a guarded manner, although she is honest and sincere. What accounts for this singular character is the early experience which developed in her an unusual cast of mind. Léonore's early education was a secular rather than a religious one. It was not a libertine education, such as that of Juliette; instead,

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<sup>49</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, IV, 155.

Léonore had the good fortune to have been exposed to a philosophical learning, instruction in the realm of ideas. Thus she is accustomed to using her intellect rather than working from spontaneous emotion:

. . . une amie de la comtesse de Kerneuil me prêta ces livres; je les dévorai; elle en raisonnait avec moi . . . et se plut aussi, pendant deux ans à nourrir mon âme d'une philosophie dont elle était enthousiaste. L'expérience, mes malheurs, l'image du monde ont vivifié dans moi ces systèmes. . . . je les crois compatibles à la plus saine vertu; . . . .50

For Léonore there is no sense of anomie, of invalidation between what she has learned and what life reveals. Although her education was a-religious, she does not fall into immorality; nor is she amoral, but defines herself as virtuous. Her virtue, however, is a "saine vertu" -- an important qualification for it means that she has a different understanding of the word. She is not concerned with virtue as an emotional experience, but as a principle of behaviour based on intelligent awareness: "Léonore prône les mouvements 'vraiment vertueux'. Elle dénonce les préjugés, donc ce qui est faux".<sup>51</sup>

As Léonore recounts her adventures, it becomes evident that there are parallels between her and Justine.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., V, 45.

<sup>51</sup> J. P. Han and J. P. Valla, op. cit., p. 112.

Justine had tried to defend her virginity; Léonore's goal is to keep herself sexually pure: "De m'y conserver aussi pure que le l'ai toujours été depuis que j'ai quitté mon époux. . . ." <sup>52</sup> After a considerable battering, Léonore emerges victorious; Justine is sullied, compromised, ridiculed and annihilated. By being alert to the possibilities for action, she outwits her captors; she uses her sex to lead them on until they are fully in her power, but she does so with full awareness and control over the degree of her involvement: ". . . il est des cas où il faut savoir accorder un peu pour obtenir beaucoup". <sup>53</sup>

In the course of her travels, Léonore meets another woman, Clémentine, who plays the role of the devil's advocate. She is a Juliette type of character who propounds the system of ego-centric pursuit of sensual pleasure. When she and Léonore find themselves penniless, Clémentine suggests prostitution as the means of earning a living; Léonore refuses, preferring to work rather than slide into that abyss. <sup>54</sup> When she realizes that their principles are

<sup>52</sup> Sade, ibid., V, 158.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>54</sup> Sade, Lettres Choiesies, p. 56. Sade writes to his son: "Si vous avez une soeur, une nièce, une fille, Monsieur Quiros, conseillez-lui d'être putain; je lui défie de trouver un plus beau métier. Et, en effet, où peut être mieux une fille que dans un état où, à côté du luxe, de la mollesse, d'une continuelle ivresse de débauche, elle peut



contradictory, Léonore recognizes that she must rely only on herself. She is cognizant of the fact that her choice is the more difficult one, for the rewards of corruption are always greater: "Oh! qu'il en coûte pour faire le bien; en vérité le vice ne donne pas autant de peine".<sup>55</sup>

Such a statement differs markedly from that made by Noirceuil regarding the "ease" with which virtue seeks its pleasure.<sup>56</sup> It indicates, moreover, a markedly different concept of virtue from that accepted by Justine and those like her. Léonore has perceived virtue as a principle much like that which Euphrasie de Gange enunciates to Théodore. It involves a personal commitment, a personal struggle -- often with oneself. Mauzi, in separating Rousseau's awareness of virtue from that of his contemporaries, comments:

Rousseau eut effet le mérite de révéler à ses contemporains ce qui n'était pas pour eux une évidence; la vertu n'est pas toujours facile. . . . Elle oblige l'homme à se diviser, à prendre parti contre lui-même, à se résister et à se vaincre.<sup>57</sup>

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encore trouver autant de soutien, autant de crédit, autant de protection que la plus honnête bourgeoise? Voilà ce qui s'appelle encourager les moeurs, mon ami; voilà ce qui s'appelle dégoûter les honnêtes filles de la crapule. . . . Oh! M. Quiros', qu'on a d'esprit dans ce siècle-ci!"

<sup>55</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, V, 109.

<sup>56</sup>Contrast also with points made in section (i) on aspects of virtue.

<sup>57</sup>Mauzi, op. cit., p. 613.

Sade, through his personal experience, was certainly aware of the enormity of self-conflict in the desire to fulfill the ideal of a moral self which succumbs to the uncontrollable urge to do harm. That is why the comfortable vision of a facile virtue is to him an anathema.

Although unshakeable, Léonore's virtue has none of the opacity of Justine's. Like the latter, she also encounters various philosophies and viewpoints in her travels. She does not embrace the new ideas immediately, but considers them and reviews them in the light of what her own experiences have taught her. She is prepared to alter her ideas when she feels new truths have become evident. Thus her journey is an ongoing process of self-instruction, wherein the scope of her mind is forever expanding with new insights.

In Sade, all arguments lead to religion. Léonore's experiences have, naturally, led her to a negative view of mankind and to speculation on the nature of God:

Quelle foule de maux m'ont affligée depuis que  
j'ai eu le malheur de quitter ma famille; et  
voilà donc les hommes! Est-il possible qu'on  
ne trouve jamais avec eux que fourberie, débauche,  
méchanceté, violence? . . . Est-il donc là l'ouvrage  
d'un être bon?<sup>58</sup>

Even here, Léonore demonstrates the equanimity of the philosophical mind. Her education, in the logic imposed by

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<sup>58</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, V, 220.

by Sadian necessity, makes her the enemy of religion, but of religion separated from the idea of God of whom she has formulated a different concept from that which Christianity imposes:

Je n'ai pourtant anéanti l'idée d'un Dieu. . . ; mais je crois ce Dieu très au-dessus de tous les cultes, je suis fermement persuadée qu'il n'en mérite et n'en exige aucun, et que de tous, le nôtre, étant le moins raisonnable, serait celui qui devrait l'offenser le plus grièvement, s'il se mêlait des folies humaines.<sup>59</sup>

Man's follies are of his own making. If so, one can reject the need for religion as an antecedent to morality:

" . . . eh quoi! faut-il absolument révéler des chimères pour avoir le droit d'être honnête homme?"<sup>60</sup> Virtue then, must be an ideal which each individual has the capacity to apprehend and to accept as a personal principle. This is "la saine vertu", divorced from coercion and the obscurities of dogma.

In expressing such an independence of view point, Léonore inevitably comes to a confrontation with her mother who is the exponent of the traditional attitudes. Mme de Blamont frankly attempts to blackmail Léonore into returning to the fold with an emotional appeal based on family ties:

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

O Léonore! préfère la morale de ceux qui t'aiment. . . . Vois ta malheureuse mère en pleurs te conjurer d'aimer le bien, parce que ton bonheur en dépend; te supplier de la laisser jouir de l'espérance de voir prolonger ce bonheur, même au-delà du terme de la vie. Lui raviras-tu cette consolation?<sup>61</sup>

When Léonore refuses to respond by acquiescence to her mother's emotionalism, she is faulted by her family; she is cold, heartless, unlike the others. Yet she cannot go back on what she knows, by all of the faculties available to man. It is noteworthy that Léonore never attempts to change her mother's values; she is content to let them be. It is her mother who cannot tolerate her daughter's independence of mind and must convert her to accept the norm.

At the core of their altercation is the fact that Léonore has learned to recognize and accept the plurality of human nature and experience -- a plurality which defies being pinned to one narrow set of values. She attempts to define the individual nature of experience to her family:

Il y a des sensations qui n'ont pas sues de tout le monde. . . .

Nous n'en sommes pas moins sensibles l'une et l'autre, les choses violentes ébranlent également nos âmes; mais ceux qui arrivent à la mienne ne sont pas de l'espèce qui convient à la vôtre. . . .

Comment alors les sensations d'une âme accoutumée à vaincre le préjugé et à secouer les chaînes de l'habitude, seront-elles semblables à celles d'une âme livrée à l'empire de ses causes?<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Nothing concerning human nature is completely defined; everything is a possibility. One of the first lessons she learns on her travels is to admit and allow for the complexities of human dynamics which run the spectrum between "good" and "evil":

. . . tels sont ces abordements incroyables, . . .  
 que le sot ignore, que l'épais rigoriste punit, et  
 que le philosophe respecte, parce que lui seul  
 connaît le cœur humain, et que lui seul en a  
 la clef. . . on voit souvent dans les actions  
 du même être, une foule de vices liées à des  
 vertus. . . .<sup>63</sup>

Sade insists that it is precisely this ambivalence which Christian morality seeks to suppress in favour of a vision of harmony -- a vision attainable only by denying one half of human reality. What Sade had intuited and never really articulated was that: ". . . psychology and morality are only conventionally separated aspects of the same psychic reality".<sup>64</sup> He was hampered by a limitation in vocabulary, for it becomes apparent in his efforts to subject the human character to a materialistic nature that he was, in part, attempting to define a psychological reality. As an aspect of their multi-faceted purpose in Sade's work, the outrageous libertines are also designed

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>64</sup> H. Pastoureau, "The Philosophy of Ambivalence",  
 53.

to draw attention to this fundamental truth: ". . . ambivalence is the human spirit's chief characteristic".<sup>65</sup>

He is, in a form of shock therapy, hammering at the obstinate ideology which refuses to allow such a reality and which seeks, through its teachings, to cloud men's minds from ever approaching it. Two centuries before it became fashionable, Sade had perceived the tension of yin and yang -- a tension which must be kept in balance, not denied:

C'est par un mélange absolument égale de ce que nous appelons crime et vertu que ses lois se soutiennent; . . . la main savante de la nature fait naître l'ordre du désordre; . . . tel est l'équilibre profond qui maintient le cour des astres. . . .<sup>66</sup>

As his delineation of conventional virtue demonstrates, Sade further accuses Christianity, as it is presented by the Church, of delimiting the individual's scope of mind. The young are saturated with dogma and credos so that, in their minds, the Church's doctrine is cast as an archetypal form, which becomes the only frame of reference for every new experience one encounters in life. One is not permitted to meet experience prima facie and hence gains no new awareness, no personal growth through

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>66</sup> Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, IX, 168.

introspection; one simply compartmentalizes experience in the predetermined categories of acceptable or non-acceptable and then recoils from the unacceptable.

Juliette put the matter very succinctly: "tu ne connaîtras rien si tu n'as pas tout connu".<sup>67</sup> To achieve this, one must attain an inner liberation, which is not to be equated with "doing as one likes". Such a freedom presupposes self-awareness, and, as Léonore illustrates, self-control and self-reliance. Essentially it means not being subject to established modes of thought. Sade's ideal man must be able to stand outside of and critically evaluate the norm and must be prepared to differ from it, if necessary. One must sustain one's solitude in the form of self-contained independence. There is a need for individual responsibility in confronting one's inner motives, for, it must be remembered, both the virtuous and the criminal characters are guilty of self-deception; both prefer half the truth and make it stand for the whole. Man, Sade appears to say, must attempt to bring his duality, as much as possible, into one focus.

In Léonore, Sade has achieved the "égalité dans le caractère".<sup>68</sup> of which he wrote to his father, a balance

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>68</sup>See Part I, p. 18, quote 16.

which he himself was never able to attain. She has accepted her solitude and her humanity; she neither seeks dependence on God, nor does she strive against her own human limitations, but rather seeks to understand herself in the light of all that she has learned. In her rejection of the old system, Léonore automatically becomes part of the vanguard of new ideas; thus she, like the libertines, accepts the re-definition of man contained in the materialist philosophy. However, her goal in doing so is not to rationalize extreme and aberrant behaviour, but to participate in a new possibility which forces man to re-examine his relationship with the world. For Sade, materialism has also this significance; it becomes a vindication of his rejection of the existing social institutions such as the Church and the law:

Pédants, bourreaux, guichetiers, législateurs, racaille tonsurée, que ferez-vous quand nous en serons là? Que deviendront vos lois, votre morale, votre religion, vos potences, votre paradis, vos dieux, votre enfer, quand il sera démontré que tel ou tel cours de liqueurs, telle sorte de fibres, tel degré d'âcreté dans le sang ou dans les esprits animaux suffisent à faire d'un homme l'objet de vos peines ou de vos récompenses?<sup>69</sup>



Unlike the conventionally virtuous figures, Léonore is aware of the depths and strange aspects which passion can have. She also knows that people experience pleasure in different ways: ". . . il est aussi simple que je sois entièrement insensible à ce qui vous émeut, qu'extraordinairement chatouillée de ce qui vous blesse".<sup>70</sup> As well, Léonore is against passivity, and thus rejects practices which rob man of his independent spirit, of his "energy" to confront and deal with life. Her position is summed up in her attitude toward charity; she like the libertines rejects it as an egotistical indulgence on the part of the "virtuous" which actually works to the detriment of the recipient:

Votre refus, votre résistance, tous les mouvements vraiment vertueux qu'il vous plaît de nommer dureté, rendaient à ce malheureux l'énergie que votre aumône lui enlève; repoussé partout comme de vous, il allait chercher du travail. . . .<sup>71</sup>

Léonore is here acting from "principle" which she defines as "vraiment vertueux" because her stand, she feels, has only the interests of the other person at heart.

Although she seems harsh and unfeeling in the above instance, Léonore does not deny her emotional being; she

<sup>70</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, V, 258.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

loves and lives happily among her family and friends. Where she differs from the other virtuous heroines is in the fact that she does not accept the ascendancy of spontaneous emotions without understanding. Nor yet does she resemble the villains who profess to live by the head, with the aim of attaining a completely emotionless state -- "apathie", but who nevertheless remain the prisoners of obscure drives and forces. Neither alternative can stand as a solution. In Léonore, this intellect-emotion dichotomy has found equilibrium. She is the one figure in Sade who has achieved liberty of self and, consequently, strength -- an idea which is put forth by Rousseau of "liberté morale, qui seule rend l'homme vraiment maître de lui, car l'impulsion du seul appétit est esclavage et l'obéissance à la loi qu'on s'est prescrite est liberté".<sup>72</sup>

There exists, in Sade's correspondence, a passage which seems pertinent to the depiction of the character of Léonore. This is a description of Sade's sister-in-law and mistress, Anne de Launay, a person for whom Sade cared deeply for most of his life:

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<sup>72</sup>Rousseau, Du Contrat Social (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), p. 56.

De bonne heure elle s'accoûtuma à laisser parler sa raison, et secouant avec philosophie tous les préjugés de l'éducation et de l'enfance, elle apprit à connaître et à juger, dans l'âge où les autres savent à peine penser.

Que de découvertes fit Julie avec d'aussi fines perceptions! . . . Le bandeau tombé, tous les objets parurent nouveaux à Julie, et toutes les facultés de son âme acquirent un nouveau degré de force. Tout, jusqu'à sa figure, y gagna. . . . Quel froid se répandit sur ses anciens plaisirs! et quelle chaleur sur ses nouvelles pensées! Les mêmes choses ne l'affectèrent plus. L'oiseau chéri qu'on aimait autrefois de tout son coeur, on ne l'aima plus que comme un oiseau.<sup>73</sup>

There is in this passage the sense of an awakening, a transformation and a gaining of new perspective -- the stages of the Sadian process to the "new man".

What is important to keep in mind here, is that this "new man" is a moral being. Léonore illustrates that one can survive in the world without becoming like it, without succumbing to the corrupt and violent aspects of man's nature. Virtue as an ideal is important to Sade. It is a term which recurs continuously in his fictional "societies", where it becomes apparent that what Sade ardently desires is that men live together in a harmony generated by humanitarian principles.

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<sup>73</sup>Lely, op. cit., I, 296-297.

PART III  
THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

i) "C'est le gouvernement qui fait l'homme"<sup>1</sup>

"As Sade was exclusively interested in the fate of man, it follows that his system should above all be a political system."<sup>2</sup> Sade's work amply demonstrates his interest in the influence of politics on human life. Like others in his time, he was concerned with the dichotomy between the individualist and the social dimensions in man, and with the problems inherent in the organization of many individuals into "le moi commun".<sup>3</sup> Throughout his work, the Sadian iconoclasts, the criminal characters, make innumerable digressions on the nature of law and on the conflict between the demands of the individual and his particular needs and the exigencies imposed by society which seeks to establish an optimum situation for the community. In Sade, this division of interest is expressed as an ongoing conflict:

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<sup>1</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 522.

<sup>2</sup>W. Mead, "The Marquis de Sade: Politics on a Human Scale", L'Esprit Créateur (Winter 1963), 189.

<sup>3</sup>Rousseau, Du Contrat Social, p. 52.

Parce que les lois ne sont pas faites pour le particulier, mais pour le général, ce qui les met dans une perpétuelle contradiction avec l'intérêt personnel, attendu que l'intérêt personnel l'est toujours avec l'intérêt général. Mais les lois, bonnes pour la société, sont très mauvaises pour l'individu qui la compose, car, pour une fois qu'elles le protègent ou le garantissent, elles le gênent et le captivent les trois quarts de sa vie; . . . .<sup>4</sup>

The problem which confronts man is to bring into some sort of focus this divergent situation. To this end, Sade has established, with varying detail, many "societies" which attempt to resolve different aspects of the problem. The Royaume de Butua functions as a vehicle of comparison and criticism of the existing situation in France. Tamoë is a fully-developed utopian vision which differs markedly from the Sadian style in its straightforward expression of idealism and depiction of harmony and happy tranquillity. In this society also, Sade uses the imperfections of Europe as a basis for contrast. The most extensive social theorizing occurs in Dolmancé's "Republic". Here again one finds the Sadian paradox in which the most negative and dehumanized characters raise the salient questions and make the plea for a more humane system -- a system which would see the implementation of traditional Christian values tempered by a knowledge and understanding of man as gained by Sade through his own experience. The society of the

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<sup>4</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 470.

Bohemians is interesting because it is presented less abstractly than the others. These are "real" people<sup>5</sup> living in and contending with the actual world as Sade presents it; they are also a demonstration, in a more idealized vein, of a "just" society.

Sade's preoccupation with the schism between the individual and society mirrors not only his personal predicament but also the predicament of the eighteenth century, which in the challenging of the traditional institutions which governed man and his behaviour, was experiencing a sociological upheaval. This disequilibrium is manifested by the invalidation of social institutions and the emergence of individualism:

Le dix-huitième siècle est un siècle déséquilibré:  
le déséquilibre est entre l'homme, enfin arrivé,  
lui, . . . au stade de l'individu, et la société  
restée, elle, fondée sur la lignée, c'est à dire  
le groupe.<sup>6</sup>

At the core of the issue was the question of moral behaviour

<sup>5</sup>They are real in the sense that they are not caricatures, exaggerations or idealizations.

<sup>6</sup>R. Guerdan, op. cit., p. 213, also Stanley Taylor, Conceptions of Institutions and the Theory of Knowledge (New York: Bookman Associates, 1956), p. 31. Chapter 2, "Individualism", "Historically, the rise of pronounced individualism whether ancient or modern is paralleled with the decay of religion and the growth of secular knowledge".

-- whether or not it is innate in man, and how is it best to motivate it.<sup>7</sup> This is the problem which is central to Sade's struggle to formulate an improved social organization. As Part II tried to show, Sade rejected the traditional method of inculcating moral principles, based on Church doctrine, as inadequate and oppressive to the human character. In the person of Léonore he brings together the qualities of character which he champions and which he adumbrated in the antics of the libertines in their confrontation with the virtuous. Sade opts for individualism, for the "caractère élevé" -- strong, dynamic, intelligent, inquiring and prepared to change and reformulate ideas. Léonore erects her own moral codes, based on philosophical knowledge, rather than religion, but these codes continue to partake of the laws of social behaviour. In fact, Sade implies that by arriving at an ethical code through the medium of philosophy, these principles are more firmly understood and therefore are stronger. With the exception of Butua, the leaders of Sade's societies all follow the pattern of Léonore. As well as morality, however, society must provide an ambience of liberty, to allow scope for

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<sup>7</sup> L. Crocker, op. cit., Chapter 6, "The Moral Consequences" and Chapter 7, "The Theory of Human Nature", p. 182, "Is man by nature good?".

individualistic character. Sade thus confronts himself with the task of defining a society in which the individual has freedom and which, at the same time, is based on an ethic of harmony and benevolence. Man experiences two necessities -- that of being alone and being left alone, and that of communication and contact with one's fellow:

Oh! que vous avez raison, mon cher avocat, quand vous dites que le souverain bien consiste à vivre indépendant des autres! Néanmoins, la société est nécessaire, je l'ai senti dans ma longue retraite. . . .<sup>8</sup>

In this comment to his lawyer, Gaufridy, Sade is expressing a negative view of society because of its malefic influence on him; this is a theme often stated by his libertine characters. Allied to this view is the idea that society, by imposing restrictions through its laws, delimits human possibility:

-- Ambroise, dit Severino, tu me parais, comme Sylvestre, bien ennemi des conventions sociales et des institutions humaines. -- Je les abhorre, dit Ambroise, elles entravent notre liberté, elles atténuent notre énergie, elles dégradent notre âme, elles ont fait de l'espèce humaine un vil troupeau d'esclaves que le premier intrigant mène où bon lui semble.<sup>9</sup>

Thus the social laws contravene the individual drive for

<sup>8</sup>Sade, Lettres Choisies, p. 176.

<sup>9</sup>Sade, La Nouvelle Justine, VI, 337.



self-assertion and self-fulfillment. Maurice Blanchot paraphrased the conflict succinctly: "Contre la loi, qui partout me contraint, il n'est pas de recours; la loi veut que je sois toujours privé de moi-même, toujours sans passion, c'est à dire, médiocre et bientôt stupide".<sup>10</sup>

The law then deprives man of his fundamental right to liberty. As the above passages indicate, Sade's concept of liberty is more complex and sophisticated than the simple notion of doing as one likes. The need for freedom is inherent in the need to experience a sense of one's own being in order to determine one's own definition of self. Society, on the other hand, seeks to achieve a uniformity through the imposition of standards and thus makes its own definition of man. The laws, by demanding conformity to this social definition, are thus incompatible with a basic human drive.

Another aspect of this incompatibility resides in the fact that human behaviour is a complicated thing, deriving from myriad factors, many of which are unknown, but which nevertheless can exert an overwhelming influence. Thus, as Sade experienced it, behaviour is in a state of continuous flux, whereas the laws governing it remain fixed and rigid. As a further extension of this, Sade

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<sup>10</sup>Blanchot, "Français encore un effort . . .", La Nouvelle Revue Française, XXVI (1965), 611.

perceived clearly the absurdity of law which attempts to control the uncontrollable through legislation. Because of their deviance, it is the malefactors who are most conscious of this clash and consequently one is again confronted with the paradox of the most anti-social characters in Sade's work making the plea for a more enlightened and humane consideration of the entire question of the interaction between man and government:

Je conviens que l'on ne peut pas faire autant de lois qu'il y a d'hommes; mais les lois peuvent être si douces, en si petit nombre, que tous les hommes, de quelque caractère qu'ils soient puissent facilement y plier. . . . Or quel sera le comble de votre injustice si vous frappez de la loi celui auquel il est impossible de se plier à la loi! . . . Il découle, on le sent, la nécessité de faire des lois douces, et surtout d'anéantir pour jamais l'atrocité de la peine de mort, parce que la loi qui attente à la vie d'un homme est impraticable, injuste, inadmissible.<sup>11</sup>

The solution to the harmonious co-existence between the individual and society seems, then, to rest on the nature of the laws governing the society.

In conjunction with this view, one can see more clearly the inference made by the criminal characters when they claim that they are corrupt because they are living in a corrupt world. They are, in a neatly ironic twist which expresses Sade's criticism of his own society,

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<sup>11</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 493.

actually conforming to social requirements, not as preached but as practised:

Quand l'intérêt général des hommes les portera à la corruption, celui qui ne voudra pas se corrompre avec eux luttera donc contre l'intérêt général. . . . Me diras-tu que c'est le vice qui contrarie l'intérêt des hommes? Je te l'accorderais dans un monde composé d'une égale partie de bons et de méchants parce qu'alors l'intérêt des uns choque visiblement celui des autres; mais ce n'est plus cela dans une société toute corrompue; . . . .<sup>12</sup>

Preceding the corruption of the individual is the corruption of his society. Man carries within him the seeds, the disposition for evil doing; society provides the ground in which it may or may not flourish. Maleficence is innate in man, but he apparently can arrive at virtue, which, one must assume, is also an innate possibility. Whether or not this happens depends on the social structure. If the laws are punitive, repressive, unjust and harsh, the misery and degradation of the populace ensues. Man defends himself against such humiliation with vengeance:

. . . en dégradant l'homme, vous aigrissez son esprit, vous avilissez son caractère; le mépris est d'un poids si cruel à l'homme, qu'il lui est arrivé mille fois de devenir violateur de la loi pour se venger d'en avoir été la victime.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Sade, Les Malheurs de la Vertu, p. 267.

<sup>13</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, IV, 324.

If the laws are just, sensible, lenient and corrective, then the condition of man is enhanced. In his expression of theory, Sade succeeds in perceiving the ideal of the very delicate balance which must exist between the individual and social requirements:

. . . de la confrontation de l'homme et de la société doit résulter, au terme d'une élaboration réfléchie, une amélioration de la condition humaine. Il faut que l'homme, individu social, reste libre, puisqu'il était libre dans l'état de nature; mais étant en société, et tirant avantage de cette situation, sa liberté doit s'accommoder des limitations que comporte cet état, le législateur s'attachera seulement à ce que ces limitations soient les plus légères possibles. Correlative-ment, la société doit permettre à l'homme, non pas de satisfaire toutes ses passions, puisqu'il en est socialement de corrosives, mais d'en satisfaire le plus grand nombre possible.<sup>14</sup>

However, in his attempts to depict the actual functioning of this ideal, Sade confronts a more difficult task.

Sade's societies demonstrate the same antithetical polarities as do his characters; they are also divided between virtue and vice. Similarly, the criminal societies also contain the ideas, the germ, of the humanitarian concerns of their creator. Both types of society have reference to the term republicanism; in theory, Sade saw the republic as the political form best able to resolve the divergent requirements of the individual and the state. As

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<sup>14</sup>p. Favre, Sade Utopiste (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), p. 59.

well, they all demonstrate the view that the social organization is the critical influence on man:

Another common characteristic of political philosophy is an explicit treatment of personality and psychology as they are conditioned by political institutions and as they in turn influence the latter. This is really what lies behind the Sadian models.<sup>15</sup>

ii) The Criminal Societies: Butua and Dolmancé's Republic

As perceived by libertines, when they are at their most pessimistic and nihilistic, all political structures take their first principle from the ineradicable egotism of man which sets him in conflict with his fellows and exhorts him to suppress the other:

J'affirme donc que le premier et le plus vif penchant de l'homme est incontestablement d'enchaîner ses semblables et de les tyranniser de tout son pouvoir.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>B. Fink, op. cit., p. 495.

<sup>16</sup>Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, VIII, 173. As Sade's societies show, the disposition to corruption or to virtue depends on the leadership. He assumed that the general mass of people are motivated by the baser instincts. Cf. Rousseau, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

There seems to be little doubt that Saint-Fond, who utters the above statement, reflects Sade's bitter disillusionment with the events following the French Revolution. The drive for power is the motivation of political action as it is in sexual relations. The desire to overthrow kings is not connected to a desire for justice, equality and fraternity, but receives its impetus from the desire to gain and hold power for oneself. Everyone wants his turn to be a despot. Sade depicts the situation in a thinly disguised parallel to the revolution in France:

-- quels sont les motifs qui vous font détester le despotisme des rois?  
 -- la jalousie, l'ambition, l'orgueil, le désespoir d'être dominé, le désir de tyranniser moi-même les autres.\* [Footnote]  
 \*Esprit de la révolution de Stockholm, n'auriez-vous point, par hasard, passé dans Paris?<sup>17</sup>

These words are spoken by one of the leaders of a revolutionary movement in Sweden. If, from the viewpoint of the leadership, this is the prevailing motive, then this is what will influence and determine the tenor of the whole society, as well as the moral ethic of the individual.

The kingdom of Butua illustrates this cyclical interaction, and in so doing mirrors by implication the French social and political milieu. Through the character of Sarmiento, who is describing the political system to

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., IX, 265.

Sainville, he delineates the organization of this African kingdom. Governmentally, Butua is a despotism, ruled over by a debauched tyrant, Ben Mâacoro. The class stratifications are the same as those of eighteenth-century France, with a privileged aristocracy and a sacerdotal caste, both of which have unlimited power to oppress the people:

Si le Royaume butua . . . ne contient aucune allusion directe à l'Europe, c'est parce qu'il en est la caricature exotique. . . . Dans son essence le despotisme butua ne diffère pas de celui d'une quelconque tyrannie européenne; . . . . Cette autorité royale sans limites s'appuie sur une classe privilégiée: . . . . La religion butua joue le même rôle que la catholique dans une tyrannie européenne.<sup>18</sup>

The state is divided into provinces, each under the direction of a chief ". . . qui y jouit à peu près de la même autorité que le roi. Ses sujets lui sont immédiatement soumis; il peut en disposer à son gré".<sup>19</sup> The people are subjected to their rulers' whims and prevarications. Furthermore they are equally helpless before the law: "Ce n'est pas qu'il n'y ait des lois dans ce royaume: . . . mais elles ne tendent, toutes, qu'à soumettre le faible au fort. . .".<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>J. M. Goulemot, "Aline et Valcour", Centre Aixois d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Dix-Huitième Siècle, Le Marquis de Sade (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1968), p. 124.

<sup>19</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, IV, 220.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

There is the same inequality of justice in Butua as there is in France: "Les crimes de vol et de meurtre, absolument nuls parmi les grands, sont punis avec la plus extrême rigueur chez l'homme du peuple. . . ." <sup>21</sup> Thus tyranny, corruption and licentiousness are the principles on which this society is built. The people are subjugated and humiliated, a situation which weakens and degrades the moral fibre of the nation. In another context, Saint-Fond discusses this very fact with Juliette; corruption serves a political function:

Apprends, Juliette, qu'il est de politique de tous ceux qui mène un gouvernement d'entretenir dans les citoyens le plus extrême degré de corruption; tant que le sujet se gangrène et s'affaiblit dans les délices de la débauche, il ne sent pas le poids de ses fers, on peut l'accabler sans qu'il s'en doute. La véritable politique d'un Etat est donc de centupler tous les moyens possibles de la corruption du sujet. Beaucoup de spectacles, un grand luxe, une immensité de cabarets, des bordels, une amnistie générale pour tous les crimes de débauche; . . . . <sup>22</sup>

Butua illustrates the validity of this observation.

The despotic behaviour of the king and his courtiers is reflected and repeated in the attitudes and behaviour of the people -- especially in the men. As the king has absolute rights over the people, the men have absolute rights over the women. In Butua, the women are at the very bottom of the social scale and are reduced to beasts of burden. Not only are they mistreated by the king, but by their husbands

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Sade, L'Histoire de Juliette, IX, p. 308.



as well. Women, then, symbolize the weak and powerless who are at the mercy of the powerful. Consequently, it is a woman in Butua who demonstrates the "other" qualities which exist in the human being, but which are obscured and submerged and a corrupt setting. When Sainville goes to the rescue of a woman who is being abused by her husband, she repays him with tears of gratitude:

. . . elle ne peut concevoir qu'il existe dans la nature un être qui peut la secourir et la venger . . . ; bientôt les larmes de sa reconnaissance arrosent les mains de son bienfaiteur.<sup>23</sup>

In this society the decent human characteristics have been perverted and overwhelmed. Just as the woman is surprised by Sainville's kindness, he is amazed to see her response:

Sade a l'habileté de montrer que les mœurs butuas ne tiennent pas à la nature du peuple, mais bien plutôt à la forme politique sous laquelle il vit.<sup>24</sup>

Butua, then, is another society in which crime is the primary fact, the prevailing principle. The result is human misery.

<sup>23</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, IV, 240.

<sup>24</sup>Goulemot, op. cit., p. 125.

Butua illustrates the enslavement of the people, both morally and physically; the "Republic", as outlined by Dolmancé, is a request both for liberty and for a more felicitous arrangement between man and society. However, as with much of Sade's work, the republic which Dolmancé envisions is full of contradictions and paradoxes as well as satire. One must, therefore, be wary of accepting it at face value as the final statement made by Sade as to the best of all possible social situations. As with the image of man represented by his criminal characters, this "criminal" republic embodies both the ideal and its anti-thesis, for it is a theoretical exposition put forth by a character committed to the principles of crime because of his disillusionment with the existing human and social conditions. This republic is never put into a utopian format in which one may see the actual operation of a political philosophy. Thus Sade, in this tract, does not face the resolution of the problems which are posed by the ideas on which the hypothetical state is to be founded. However, more important than the actual structuring of the government is the manner in which the issues confronting man in society are elucidated.

The first question which the new republic faces concerns the basis of its ethical system. Religion,

especially the "ténèbres du christianisme",<sup>25</sup> is rejected and denounced as the enemy of liberty and equality:

Oui, citoyens, la religion est incohérente au système de la liberté; vous l'avez senti. Jamais l'homme libre ne se courbera près des dieux du christianisme; . . . . Cessons de croire que la religion puisse être utile à l'homme. Ayons de bonnes lois et nous saurons nous passer de religion.<sup>26</sup>

Sade establishes that the Christian religion is incompatible with liberty because it is in fact part of the political hierarchy of the ancien régime which enslaves and oppresses man. What then will be the moral inspiration operative in this society? Dolmancé answers:

Remplacez les sottises déifiques dont vous fatiguez les jeunes organes de vos enfants par d'excellents principes sociaux; qu'au lieu d'apprendre à réciter de futiles prières qu'ils se feront gloire d'oublier dès qu'ils auront seize ans, ils soient instruits de leurs devoirs dans la société; apprenez-leur à chérir des vertus dont vous leur parliez à peine autrefois et qui, sans vos fables religieuses, suffisent à leur bonheur individuel; faites-leur sentir que ce bonheur consiste à rendre les autres aussi fortunés que nous désirons l'être nous-mêmes.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 478.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 483.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 486.

Individual happiness lies in the fulfillment of one's duty to society; happiness is achieved by making others as happy as we ourselves wish to be. Dolmancé thus has returned to the traditional concepts of moral behaviour and accepts them as universal ideals. Morality lies in social duty.

Juxtaposed with the vision of the social good, are the demands of the individual needs, which in the Sadian context, are eccentric, abnormal and outlawed by normal social convention. Thus sexual deviance, especially sodomy, becomes important in the legislation of the new republic.<sup>28</sup> But when Dolmancé advocates the legalization of calumny, theft and murder, one must take note of a shift in the tone of these passages, for Sade slips quickly into ironic hyperbole:

Les délits que nous devons examiner dans cette seconde classe de devoirs de l'homme envers ses semblables consiste dans les actions que peut faire entreprendre le libertinage, parmi lesquelles se distinguent particulièrement, comme plus attentatoires à ce que chacun doit aux autres, la prostitution, l'adultère, l'inceste, le viol et la sodomie.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Sexual aberrations are the focus of the "virtuous" societies as well.

<sup>29</sup>Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, pp. 497-98. Again, one finds the technique of inversion of the traditional notions.

The state in which these are considered social duties is one which takes as its only ethical reality and criterion for behaviour personal tastes and inclinations. It is a state in which there is perpetual insurrection against any attempt to impose limits on these indulgences of the self; nor, as the criminal characters maintain, should there be any self-imposed restraints.<sup>30</sup> It is significant that Sade equates such a code with total immorality. What such a society would mean is the total freedom for each individual to exercise his despotic urges on every other individual. This state would be closer to the situation described in *Butua* which, in turn, is a depiction of the existing practices in France.

So far as sexual misbehaviour is concerned, Sade's main thesis is that, as long as such behaviour is not harmful to society, it should be dealt with in a more humanitarian manner, and not be punished by harsh measures:

. . . nous devons attendre de nos législateurs assez de sagesse, assez de prudence, pour être bien sûrs qu'aucune loi n'émanera d'eux pour la répression de ces misères qui, tenant absolument à l'organisation, ne sauraient jamais rendre plus coupable celui qui y est enclin que ne l'est l'individu que la nature créa contrefait.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Part I, p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 513.

Sade is not advocating generalized debauchery. His contempt for the widespread and public lubricity of the court society is clearly expressed:

Exercez, au contraire, des procédés différents, imposez sur ces objets de la luxure publique les ridicules entraves jadis inventées par la tyrannie ministérielle et par la lubricité de nos Sardanaples; . . . .\*

[Footnote]

\*On sait que l'infâme et scélérat Sartine composait à Louis XV des moyen de luxure, en lui faisant lire trois fois par semaine, par la Dubarry, le détail privé et enrichi par lui de tout ce qui se passait dans les mauvais lieux de Paris. Cette branche de libertinage du Néron français coûtait trois millions à l'Etat.<sup>32</sup>

In fact he regards such open depravity as a measure of the decay of the society. What he does suggest, however, is that such dispositions should be given a degree of expression in some sort of private arrangement, so that they are not imposed on society in any pathological and harmful way:

Si . . . aucune passion n'a plus besoin de toute extension de la liberté que celle-là, aucune sans doute n'est aussi despotique; c'est là que l'homme aime à commander, à être obéi, à s'entourer d'esclaves contraints à le satisfaire; or toutes les fois que vous ne donnerez pas à l'homme le moyen secret d'exhaler la dose de despotisme que la nature mit au fond de son coeur, il se rejettera pour l'exercer sur les objets qui l'entoureront, il troublera le gouvernement.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 500.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

Sade, then, even in his seemingly "anarchic" government is in actuality dividing morality into a social behavior, based on the notion of what is best for the whole, which he sees in traditional terms, and a private behavior which allows some measure of individual expression, but which is overseen by the state.

In connection with the apparent advocacy of liberty to do as one likes, one must examine Sade's treatment of murder, which is the ultimate extension of such a freedom. Murder is the preferred topic of discussion among the Sadian malefactors. The recurring rationalization for the acceptability of murder is that of a destructive nature:

". . . quelle autre voix que celle de la nature nous suggère les haines personnelles, les vengeances, les guerres, en un mot tous les motifs de meurtres perpétuels?"<sup>34</sup> It becomes apparent, however, as Dolmancé's discussion continues, that Sade is operating on the level of social criticism in his exposition of certain inconsistencies:

Etrange aveuglement de l'homme qui enseigne publiquement l'art de tuer, qui récompense celui qui y réussit le mieux et qui punit celui qui, pour une cause particulière, s'est défait de son ennemi!<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 516.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Not only does the state legalize murder in war, but it also practices vengeful murder in its imposition of the death penalty. Sade sums up his position in the form of a question put to his contemporaries:

Le meurtre est-il un crime ou ne l'est-il pas?  
S'il n'en est pas un, pourquoi faire des lois qui  
le punissent? Et s'il en est un, par quelle  
barbare et stupide inconséquence le punirez-vous  
par un crime semblable?<sup>36</sup>

One cannot have it both ways. If the norms by which the state exists are immoral, then one must not pretend that it is otherwise, and one must be prepared to tolerate the immorality of the individual.

If, however, one seeks an amelioration of the social and human condition, one must work in the other direction. Consequently the very discourse which on the one hand apparently established all of the most reprehensible of human possibilities as the basis of social norms, on the other hand contains some of the most perceptive and humane ideas concerning the function of law:

Faisons peu de lois, mais qu'elles soient bonnes.  
Il ne s'agit pas de multiplier les freins; il  
n'est question que de donner à celui qu'on emploie  
une qualité indestructible. Que les lois que nous  
promulguons n'aient pour but que la tranquillité  
du citoyen, son bonheur, et l'éclat de la république.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 522.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 523.



Dolmancé's final exhortation to the French is to eschew the vainglory of foreign conquests and to attain a self-sufficiency which will point the way to the inner strength of the new state:

Quand l'ennemi sera de l'autre côté du Rhin,  
croyez-moi, gardez vos frontières et restez chez  
vous; ranimez votre commerce, redonnez de  
l'énergie et des débouchés à vos manufactures;  
faites refleurir vos arts, encouragez l'agri-  
culture. . . .<sup>38</sup>

Such a nation is far from the one which ". . . ne se conservera que par la guerre. . . ." <sup>39</sup>

Dolmancé's republic is not a document proposing criminality as a means of achieving liberty; it is not a state in which everyone achieves personal freedom in the untrammelled exercise of self-centered impulses. Rather, it attempts a vision of social and individual happiness motivated by humane concerns, in which every man will regard his fellows "comme des frères, comme des amis; . . . avec lesquels nous devons vivre d'autant mieux dans un Etat républicain que la disparition des distances doit nécessairement resserrer les liens".<sup>40</sup> In this tract, Sade's idealism aspires to finally bring to fruition the old dream of man achieving the highest good.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 498.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 492.

iii) Tamoé: Sade's Utopia<sup>41</sup>

Tamoé, oddly enough, represents the implementation, or rather the attempted fulfillment, of the principles of the ideal republic as they are expressed in Dolmancé's dissertation. It is the idyllic land in which a religious ethical system has been replaced by a social morality, in which equality reigns, in which the laws have been wisely chosen and applied, in which there is a humane attitude taken toward aberrant sexual behaviour, in which the contravention of the law is not dealt with in a punitive fashion but rather in a corrective manner, in which the death penalty has been abolished, and, finally, in which the ultimate happiness, peace and tranquillity of the citizens has been achieved. Tamoé is also the exemplar of the felicitous self-sufficiency which Dolmancé propounds as the goal of the new republic, and consequently has no reason for war, except as a contingency measure, for self-defense. Tamoé is thus described by its ruler Zamé to Sainville as being the apotheosis of social government in which the favourite Sadian ideals have been realized. However, the actuality does not fulfill the philosophy; although Zamé enunciates the principle of liberty as being the basic right of man

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<sup>41</sup>Tamoé has been minutely analysed by Pierre Favre in his book Sade Utopiste.

(La liberté et la vie sont les deux seuls présents que l'homme ait reçus du ciel),<sup>42</sup> he, in his efforts to bring his subjects to a state of virtue, in fact scuttles his first premise. The difficulty with the political system of Tamoé is that it is not a republic.

The figure of Zamé resurrects the platonic ideal of the philosopher king; he is the benevolent dictator, for it is he who determines and directs the lives of his people. Thus Sade, whether he is describing a corrupt and despotic monarchy or attempting to erect a republican system, cannot divorce himself from the basis of all traditional political organization -- ". . . the concept of elitism, that is of rigid leader/led dichotomy".<sup>43</sup> Consequently, the description of Tamoé sustains a fundamental contradiction throughout:

L'analyse de Zamé . . . est . . . en contradiction avec cet idéal républicain dont Zamé se faisait le porte-parole. . . . [L]'état féodal apparaît comme un âge d'or. . . .<sup>44</sup>

This breakdown resides in the discrepancy between the aim and the means by which Zamé seeks to attain this aim, and

<sup>42</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, IV, 307.

<sup>43</sup>Fink, op. cit., p. 510.

<sup>44</sup>Goulemot, op. cit., p. 130.

in the figure of Zamé himself. It is interesting to note that Zamé is not native to the country which he rules. He is of European parentage, and had the good fortune to have been reared by a philosophically enlightened father. The first prerequisite for Zamé as incumbent ruler was to gain a thorough knowledge of man and so his training was a twenty year long voyage of experience in which he widened his perspectives, and, in acquiring knowledge, also acquired wisdom.

The structuring of Zamé's government is very simple. In order to ensure that the government be incorruptible he eliminates all other governing bodies but himself:

Et combien d'ailleurs la malheureuse facilité donnée au magistrat, d'interpréter la loi comme il veut, ne rend-elle pas cette loi bien plus l'instrument de ses passions, que le frein de celles des autres?<sup>45</sup>

There are no intermediaries between himself and his people. As for the populace, the task which confronts Zamé here is to unify the interests of the individuals to form a social whole: "Dans la société mélangée, tous les intérêts sont divers; voilà la source d'une infinité de malheurs; . . . ." <sup>46</sup>  
His travels have instructed Zamé that material inequality

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<sup>45</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, IV, 309.

<sup>46</sup>Sade, Justine ou les Malheurs de la Vertu, pp. 108-109.

is at the core of the disparate needs of the people and so he sets out to establish equality by arrogating everything to the state. The state then is a body unto itself, existing above and beyond the individual whose life is determined by the needs of this body. The hierarchy is firmly established:

. . . car l'Etat est tout ici; c'est l'Etat qui nourrit le citoyen, qui élève ses enfants, qui le soigne, qui le juge, qui le condamne, et je ne suis de cet Etat que le premier citoyen.<sup>47</sup>

Once he has established the egalitarian state, Zamé still has to face the possible intransigence of the individual. As with all key Sadian figures, Zamé accepts the reality of the basic perversity of man, but he also believes that this fault can be muted with the proper handling. He criticizes and accuses European society for its failure: ". . . vous n'avez encore rien changé à la perversité naturelle de l'homme",<sup>48</sup> and sets out to rectify the error in approach of European government: "Une de vos chimères, à vous autres Européens, est d'imaginer que l'homme, semblable à la bête féroce, ne se conduit jamais qu'avec des chaînes. . . ." <sup>49</sup> He himself aspires to

<sup>47</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, IV, 343.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

"correct" man by more humane methods -- by eliminating le mal first from government and then from the inhabitants:  
 ". . . l'idée que le mal puisse jamais amener le bien, est un des vertiges le plus effrayant de la tête des sots".<sup>50</sup>

Here is where Zamé seeks to implement the Sadian ideals regarding the law and man. Like that of his creator, his approach is psychological; through his sensitivity to and knowledge of man he can make man happy and useful to society in spite of himself:

Le législateur doit d'abord être un psychologue.  
 . . . L'homme qu'il connaît pervers, il doit avec subtilité, en exploitant cette perversité même, le rendre heureux et bénéfique à la société.<sup>51</sup>

His first theoretical step toward making man more amenable to the social state is to alleviate the burden of crimes and punishments with which traditional society, with its compendium of religious sanctions, seeks to direct human behaviour:

Ce sont les crimes qui ont nécessité les lois; diminuez la somme des crimes, convenez que telle chose que vous regardez comme criminelle, n'est plus que simple; voilà la loi devenu inutile; or combien de fantaisies, de misères n'entraînent aucune lésion envers la société, et qui, justement appréciées par un législateur philosophe, pourraient ne plus être regardées comme dangereuses, et encore moins comme criminelles? . . . [V]ous trouverez,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>51</sup> Favre, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

tout cela fait, la masse des freins réduite à bien peu de choses, et par conséquent l'homme qui souffre du poids de cette masse, infiniment soulagé. Le grand art serait de combiner le crime avec la loi, de faire en sorte que le crime quel qu'il fût, n'offensât que médiocrement la loi; et que la loi, moins rigide, ne s'appesantît que sur fort peu de crimes; et voilà encore ce qui n'est pas difficile.<sup>52</sup>

This passage is a summation of the theme which runs consistently throughout the works of Sade. It is the idea which is the central issue in the endless arguments put forth with varying degrees of exaggeration by the Sadian criminals when they insist that their perversions are not crimes. Zamé expresses the point in the form of a criticism: ". . . insensiblement vous avez fait des crimes de vos péchés; . . . ." <sup>53</sup> Human beings are innately imperfect creatures; it is fruitless to punish them for this imperfection.

Yet this is just what Zamé does; because he insists on leading man to perfection, he thus commits the error which accounts for his inconsistency between theory and practice. Zamé establishes those aspects of human behaviour which are deemed undesirable and then takes steps to eradicate them. The categories of unacceptable behaviour

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<sup>52</sup> Sade, Aline et Valcour, IV, 268.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

are, not surprisingly, those which have always been denied by traditional mores; they comprise not only those acts which are harmful to the other members of society, such as robbery and murder, but also the usual sexual transgressions:

. . . je ne reçois jamais ni un libertin, ni une femme adultère; ces avilissements les mettent au désespoir, ils m'aiment, ils savent que ma maison n'est ouverte qu'a ceux qui chérissent la vertu.<sup>54</sup>

This statement has a strange and disquieting echo of the traditional ultimatum of the Church. Zamé has become the deity who rejects and thus punishes the sinner. It is evident that nothing has changed in Tamoé. People are still contained by external forces; the compulsion to virtue comes from the constraints imposed by established public opinion and the approbation of the sovereign-deity: "Nos punitions ne consistent ici que dans l'opinion établie. . . ."<sup>55</sup> Zamé, by application of a kind of behavioral psychology, has learned how to manipulate his people emotionally so that they heel to his directives with utmost passivity.

What Sade has actually described is a form of Machiavellianism in reverse, for the system of Zamé rests

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.



squarely on his absolute power and on his uncanny ability to perceive and manipulate human beings. He differs from other rulers only in that he happens to be a man of humanitarian principles.<sup>56</sup> His success depends on his personal charisma which he shamelessly exploits: "Rien ne flatte et n'honore ces jeunes gens comme d'être admis chez moi; j'ai saisi cette faiblesse, j'en ai profité".<sup>57</sup> He has established a state based on a paternalistic relationship between ruler and subject in which he is adroit enough to ensure that the child never rebels.<sup>58</sup> Thus personal liberty has been sacrificed to the achievement of a felicitous society. Individual liberty has now been transposed, cleverly, to mean individual happiness which is achieved through acquiescence to the interests of the state:

. . . le schéma selon lequel s'ordonne la pensée de Zamé commande que l'individu accepte les limitations de sa liberté, afin que la société dans laquelle il vit atteigne l'équilibre le plus harmonieux possible. La solution trouvée est psychologique; ne pouvant diminuer le poids d'un totalitarisme qu'il juge indispensable, il introduit les mécanismes visant à insensibiliser

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<sup>56</sup>The figure of Zamé parallels that of "le législateur" in Rousseau's Du Contrat Social.

<sup>57</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, IV, 328.

<sup>58</sup>There are many similarities between Tamoé and the society at Clarens described by Rousseau in La Nouvelle Héloïse. Zamé and Wolmar are the platonic legislators; the inhabitants of both Tamoé and Clarens realize their happiness

ceux qui le subissent. L'intérêt social et le bonheur individuel peuvent ainsi coexister.<sup>59</sup>

Sainville is instructed by Zamé to return to Europe to relate the wonder he has seen: ". . . j'ai vu un peuple doux, sensible, vertueux sans lois, pieux sans religion".<sup>60</sup> But, in achieving this happy social vision, Sade has stifled that other necessity of man's existence which Zamé had enunciated at the beginning of his discourse. Sade recognized the contradiction which he had arrived at, for he has Zamé say as a parting comment to Sainville concerning the future of Tamoé:

. . . elle a eu besoin d'un législateur, mes devoirs sont remplis. A ma mort les habitants de cette île heureuse jouiront des douceurs d'un gouvernement libre et républicain.<sup>61</sup>

As a hasty addenda, to salvage the ideal of liberty, he forsee the inhabitants of Tamoé moving from a situation of totalitarian control to one of self-directed freedom in government. There is no indication of how this transition will take place; presumably the habit of social virtue is expected to persist, for the people of Tamoé have had no

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in contributing to the needs of the society. Personal pleasure is found in innocent games; simplicity and modesty are the canons which govern life.

<sup>59</sup>Favre, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>60</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, IV, 349.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

experience of personal responsibility.

Tamoë, then, as an expression of the ideal of individual liberty and social happiness, is a failure.

Favre attributes the breakdown to two causes. One is

that Sade was limited by the utopian genre: "La première de ces raisons peut être recherché dans le fait que

l'île de Tamoë est, et se veut être, une utopie. . . .

[L]'utopie est une facilité".<sup>62</sup> The second reason is bound up with Sade's algolagnia:

Son utopie n'est pas une protestation en faveur de la liberté, puisque ses idées le portent foncièrement à l'absolutisme, au despotisme par le biais de sa sexualité. . . . [U]ne utopie idyllique est en contradiction absolue avec l'expression pathologiquement maléfique de la personnalité de Sade.<sup>63</sup>

Added to these is the fact that Sade, like most utopists, could draw his model state only in the terms that he already knew.

#### iv) The Bohemians: The Sadian Compromise

Tamoë aspires to achieve a vision of perfect harmony and fails because such perfection is an impossibility.

<sup>62</sup>Favre, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. 91-92.

In a more realistic vein, Sade describes another society which also operates on the ubiquitous Sadian principle of few and non-punitive laws. This is the society of the Bohemians which Léonore encounters in her travels. As indicated in Part II, this group, considered outlaws by the established society, is in fact the exemplar of a moral conduct which is unknown in the latter. Again, Sade takes as his starting point the inconsistency of corrupt authority making itself the guardian of morality:

. . . et si la plus grande somme de crimes se trouve toujours sous le manteau de l'autorité, les freins dont elle nous accable ne sont-ils pas plutôt les instruments de ses passions que les moyens de la vertu?<sup>64</sup>

If the source of law is corrupt, then it is difficult to take seriously the application of this law. The bohemian society is designed to show the functioning of justice, which, like virtue, is a principle which can be apprehended by some wise men:

Sade comme soucieux de réalité pratique, a voulu montrer, en campant la figure de Brigandos, le bohémien justicier et philosophe, une manière d'être heureux et juste dans un monde marqué du sceau de l'injustice. La figure de Brigandos le justicier complète celle de Zamé le législateur.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Sade, Aline et Valcour, V, 231.

<sup>65</sup>Goulemot, op. cit., p. 124.

The difference between the two societies is that the Bohemians live in the "real" world where the alternatives are not always as simply clear-cut as in Tamoé.<sup>66</sup> However, like Tamoé, this group is one which is tightly circumscribed by the laws and customs which govern it. All of the Sadian societies are rigid on this point. Once one has elected to be a part of this band, one is compelled to follow its customs:

Nous ne faisons ce que vous sollicitez, pour qui que ce soit, si la personne qui le demande n'accepte d'être reçue parmi nous, de faire le même métier que nous, de vivre sous notre religion et nos lois, et de suivre, en un mot, toutes nos coutumes.<sup>67</sup>

As in the case of Zamé, Brigandos is the enlightened head, the Solomon, of the group; he is likewise a man of philosophical learning and a man of humanitarian principles: ". . . le devoir d'un juge n'est pas de punir, il est de rendre les deux parties contentes autant qu'il est possible".<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Brigandos has to judge a case of attempted rape. Being a Sadian figure, he has to recognize the validity of the man's need to rape the girl; he has also to consider the girl's refusal to be abused. He finally arrives at a cash settlement congenial to both parties.

<sup>67</sup> Sade, Aline et Valcour, V, 114.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

In social mores, the Bohemian society differs from that of Tamoé in that it moves away from the absolutism apparent in the latter. In Tamoé, virtue is traditional in concept; Zamé is as uncompromising in the permitting of transgressions as is the Church. Human weaknesses are considered to be sins against the beatific vision. Because of the nature of the outlaw group -- a small band living "illegally" on the periphery of society -- certain practices must be allowed: "Nous nous permettons le vol et l'inceste".<sup>69</sup> Theft is a means of livelihood for the band. Brigandos, however, gives the practice a further rationalization by bringing it under the aegis of egalitarianism:

Dès que cette nature nous a tous créés égaux,  
nous a donné à tous les mêmes sens et les mêmes  
besoins, de quel droit divin ou naturel un homme  
doit-il être plus riche qu'un autre?<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, incest is necessary for the perpetuation of the group. However, in spite of his reasonings, Brigandos is aware that these acts contravene moral behaviour:

Quoi qu'il en soit, notre métier, sans doute, nous  
oblige à de grands écarts, mais les attrait de  
la vertu n'en sont pas moins toujours respectés de  
nos coeurs, . . . .<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

Brigandos and his followers, then, are the imperfect people, the people of moral ambivalence, who are neither good nor bad, but are both. Thus the chief is able to be lenient towards sexual aberrations and permits an active lesbian to live amongst them, on the grounds that such a presence does no harm to the group as a whole: ". . . goût triste et solitaire, sans doute, mais qui n'a nulle espèce d'inconvénients, dépravation légère, qui n'apporte aucun tort à la société".<sup>72</sup> But what actually makes the lesbian tolerable is the fact that she has all of the other qualities of a decent and humane person. This far outweighs her error. It is Léonore who perceives and comments upon this as she watches the girl go to the aid of a wounded man:

Un tel trait, ce me semble, honore bien le cœur de cette fille, et quand la vertu se montre avec tant de puissance dans des âmes aussi corrompues, ou il faut plaindre un pareil sort ou il faut croire que cette corruption, qui s'unit à tant de qualités, pourrait bien n'être qu'idéale.<sup>73</sup>

The Bohemians, then, seek acts of virtue as a chance to rectify the actions which have sprung from a baser impulse: "O mes amis, volons! dit Brigandos, peut-être voilà-t-il une occasion de faire le bien; nous nous livrons si

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

souvent à celles de faire le mal".<sup>74</sup> The human condition is one of perpetual moral fluctuation. The penance for ill-doing is not, in this group, punishment, but the opportunity to do good. This is the way in which the conscience functions, as Sade himself knew from his experience.<sup>75</sup>

The society of Brigandos is a very incomplete one. Since it consists of a small troupe of nomadic people, there is no need for any specific political form. In theory, the bohemian chief is a republican; his vision for Europe is that of the continent divided into four equal republics, each one self-sufficient, but there is no detailed exposition of governmental structure. What makes this group important in Sade's social theorizing is that, although Brigandos is the central commanding figure, it comes closest to demonstrating how the Sadian principles can be operative in human interaction.

Although Sade saw and articulated the problems of the conflict, he never resolved the individual-state dichotomy. He is biased towards the individual and his concern with society derives from his sensitivity to the

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>75</sup>Sade, Lettres Choiesies, pp. 76-77. "Je suis un libertin, mais trois familles domiciliées dans votre quartier



psychological ramifications to man of society's attempt to constrain him. Sade perceived that there rarely exists a causal relationship between the law and good behaviour. That is to say that the spectre of punishment does not necessarily prohibit criminal actions. He saw that morality has another basis, another reality, and that this reality resides within the individual. His failure to define a successful society arises from his inability to reconcile individualism and morality. Sade's work has shown that the individual can be brought to a moral state through enlightened learning, but he maintains a division between such intelligent beings and the rest of humanity. The populace of any society can only reflect the morality of its leaders.

Sade aspires to an ideal vision:

Que l'humanité, la fraternité, la bienfaisance nous prescrivent d'après cela nos devoirs réciproques, et remplissons-les individuellement avec le simple degré d'énergie. . . .<sup>76</sup>

The ideal is rarely to be transferred to reality, in theory or in practice. In his work, Sade has dealt with all of the alternatives. In the criminal "utopias" only personal tastes and needs form the basis of the ethical system; there are no other criteria for there is a denial of any

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ont vécu cinq ans de mes aumônes. . . . Je suis un libertin, mais j'ai sauvé un déserteur de la mort, abandonné par tout son régiment. . . ."

<sup>76</sup>Sade, Le Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 492.

validity but the self. In the virtuous utopia of Tamoë, the state supercedes the individual; there is a denial of the self and a merging of the individual with the social needs. The Bohemian society reaches a more realistic compromise, far from absolute perfection but truer to human actuality. For, despite his yearning for the brotherhood of man, Sade knew well the difficulty of such a vision:

Quel est l'homme qui ne réformerait pas à l'instant ses goûts; ses affections, ses penchants sur le plan général, et qui n'aimerait pas mieux être, comme tout le monde, que de se singulariser, s'il en était le maître? Il y a l'intolérance la plus stupide et la plus barbare à vouloir sévir contre un tel homme; il n'est pas plus coupable envers la société quels que soient ses égarements, que ne l'est . . . celui qui serait venu au monde borgne ou boiteux. . . . L'homme doué de goûts singuliers est un malade; c'est si vous le voulez, une femme à vapeurs hystériques. . . . Soyons également justes pour l'homme dont les caprices nous surprennent; parfaitement semblable au malade ou à la vapoureuse, il est comme eux à plaindre et non pas à blâmer.<sup>77</sup>

This statement is the crux of Sade's dilemma; it is also the key to his social idealism, for from it evolves the entire Sadian struggle with the issue of man and society.

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<sup>77</sup>Sade, Justine ou les Malheurs de la Vertu, p. 169.

## CONCLUSION

Il faut beaucoup de philosophie pour me comprendre . . . je le sais; je suis un monstre, vomé par la nature pour coopérer avec elle aux destructions qu'elle exige . . . je suis un être unique dans mon espèce. . . . Oh! oui je connais toutes les invectives dont on me gratifie, mais, assez puissant pour n'avoir besoin de personne, assez sage pour me plaire dans ma solitude, pour détester tous les hommes, pour braver leur censure et me moquer de leurs sentiments pour moi; assez instruit pour pulvériser tous les cultes, pour bafouer toutes les religions et me foutre de tous les Dieux.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Sade expresses his defiance of his own condition and of whatever powers are responsible for this condition. As well, he reveals his self-vilification, his sense of self-defeat and consequent negativism in his desire for isolation and indifference. However, his work belies his avowed misanthropic self-sufficiency as a fait accompli.

It is true that his criminals and their ethic represent this misanthropy, his anger and frustration at being caught in the labyrinth of human imperfection. They are also Sade's revenge on the existing social situation, on the disintegration of principle and human value, and ultimately, the failure of the idealism which was to attain

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Mead, op. cit., p. 191.

its realization in the French Revolution. As well, they embody the struggle for freedom, the struggle to transcend the eternal human conflict of the finite and the infinite being. They also represent an effort at freedom from the difficulties of co-existence among men. But the malicious expression of these strivings in the ethic of the criminals is not a satisfactorily complete picture of Sade.

The freedom which Noircueil, Juliette, Clairwil et al envision begins with the unlimited expression of all that is negative and violent in human nature. It completely denies the existence of the other side of man, which even for Sade was a reality, an aspiration. Among the libertines, evil systematically surmounts and eradicates any vestige of compassion, of human empathy. The highest "good" of this system is beyond even individualism; it is total fragmentation. It is a self-sufficiency which finally turns in on itself and attempts to consume and annihilate this very self, for it is, in Sade's experience, reprehensible. This is the essential point which cannot be overlooked. Even as this philosophy denies the validity of whatever is humane, it cries out for the very values which would end the inner schism, and seeks to make peace with the self and with one's fellow man. Thus the criminal "freedom" is but the expression of the profoundest of struggles -- the perpetual tension of dualities, the simultaneous thrust

to destroy and create, to sink into nihilism and to forge ahead positively. This is the "mouvement perpétuel", the "énergie" which keeps man forever in a state of flux, and this is what makes the libertines fascinating as characters. They are an amalgam of the struggle which allows man to challenge and overcome whatever obstacles he encounters, to once and for all be his own master, and of a totally nihilistic outlook. Thus they unite both the inspiration and the pessimism of their author.

This state of being is both the great frustration and the glory of mankind and it is, according to Sade, the truth which every man must recognize and allow himself to experience. As Part II attempts to show, Sade rejects whatever influence seeks to lure man away from this realization; people who are insulated against awareness of the high and the low extremes of human potential are regarded as mediocre creatures: "Il s'opposa moins au sot et à l'hypocrite qu'à l'honnête homme, à l'homme normal, en un sens, à celui que nous sommes tous".<sup>2</sup> The circum-spection which grew out of Sade's personal predicament made him aware that man cannot rest with his comfortable assumptions and facile resolutions for the human condition.

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<sup>2</sup>Bataille, "Préface à La Nouvelle Justine", VI, 46.

In the confrontation between the evil and virtuous characters, Sade wants the average man to be shaken out of his soporific state and to examine the breakdown between his accepted system of moral beliefs and the unconscious ease with which he compromises and corrupts them.

Society is the institution which attempts to anesthetize the individual and thereby to deny him the right, the liberty to experience his true inner self and strive for his own self-definition:

Renoncer à sa liberté c'est renoncer à sa qualité d'homme, aux droits de l'humanité, même à ses devoirs. . . . Une telle renonciation est incompatible avec la nature de l'homme, et c'est ôter toute moralité à ses actions que d'ôter toute liberté à sa volonté.<sup>3</sup>

Pierre Favre expresses a similar view: "En effet, l'absence totale de liberté de l'homme entraîne son irresponsabilité absolue".<sup>4</sup> In their functions as the extensions of individual and social corruption, as mirrors of the breakdowns which were taking place in Sade's time, the libertines demonstrate what happens when the social structure attempts to deny man that liberty which each must have at the core

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<sup>3</sup>Rousseau, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>4</sup>Favre, op. cit., p. 48.

of his existence. If such a freedom is suppressed it will surface in a destructive, self-centered and even pathological manner.<sup>5</sup>

Sade wants very much to resolve the thorny issue of the individual and society. Along with that of the strong individual, he attempts to realize the vision of a harmonious community of man, where finally humanitarian principles will achieve a viability. As Part III indicates, he fails in his endeavour, for Tamoé, his only working model of this fraternal society, arrives at the very point from which Sade has set out, with the inhabitants reduced to a state of unconscious acquiescence.

But, in spite of the oscillations to extreme viewpoints, one finds in Sade a definite move toward a balance -- a compromise -- in which perfection and idealism are toned down to practical reality. With the character of Léonore and in the depiction of the Bohemian society, Sade appears to arrive at a solution for coping with an imperfect world. Léonore finds the necessary degree of withdrawal in order to maintain her individual stance; she manages to live alone within the group. The Bohemians represent humanity, with self-awareness, striving to maintain

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<sup>5</sup>This idea is expressed by Sade, in a more limited context, in the idea of the need to express the secret "dose de despotisme". See Part III, p. 113, quote 33.

an equilibrium between the forces of good and evil. With them, Sade has revised the golden rule to a more workable form: "Fais ton bien avec le moindre mal d'autrui qu'il est possible".<sup>6</sup>

This thesis does not want to suggest that Sade makes a definitive statement regarding the character of Léonore and the Bohemian society as final answers or ideals. As indicated in the introduction, they emerge as an attitude, a direction, which grows out of the interplay of the many conflicts and themes and from the stance which Sade takes in relation to them. Sade in fact never remains with one resolution for the problems which he confronts. He moves from one philosophical position to another, one feels, as his pessimism and anger mount or subside. Essentially, Sade vacillates continuously between two views, that "human nature does not include ethical norms, responses or ideas", and that "man is in essence a moral being".<sup>7</sup> One feels that the former was the result of his empirical

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<sup>6</sup>Rousseau, Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 77.

<sup>7</sup>Crocker, op. cit., pp. 183, 191.



experience of his epoch,<sup>8</sup> as well as of the influence of the philosophical currents of his day. The latter seems to spring from his own desire to salvage the dignity of man, for what Sade strives toward in his work is a controlled individualism. The one consistent fact which runs throughout all of his oeuvre is his belief in reason.

Sade's work has a singular impact on the reader:

Sade est peut-être fou, comme nous devrions tous l'être à nos belles heures nocturnes, mais ce qu'il écrit ne tombe pas sous le coup d'un tel jugement. Le signe, c'est que toujours nous sortons de sa lecture, moins troublés dans notre sensibilité que démentis dans notre pensée, non pas convaincus, mais comme proposés à une manière de comprendre qui nous échappe et cependant nous attire.<sup>9</sup>

One senses in him the intense personal struggle which is more than a simple self-justification: ". . . aucune trace chez lui d'inquiétude métaphysique; il est bien trop occupé à revendiquer son existence pour s'interroger sur son sens et sa fin".<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, Sade was primarily concerned with the sense of life. Beginning with himself,

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<sup>8</sup>The most virulent and nihilistic of his works, La Nouvelle Justine and L'Histoire de Juliette were written just after the Revolution.

<sup>9</sup>Blanchot, "Français, encore un effort . . .", N.R.F., no. 154 (1965), 601.

<sup>10</sup>Beauvoir, "Faut-il brûler Sade", no. 75, 1207.

his imperfections, he perceived and felt the significant questions to such a degree that he could not remain with any one answer; his idealism succumbs continuously to his pessimism; his pessimism strains toward idealism. For Sade, philosophy and reality are never reconciled.

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