

SADE: CRITIQUE OF PURE FICTION

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

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

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

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

1. The paradox of the unlimited

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. The Italian journey or the volcanic imaginary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Juliette's passion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'You are mad, Madam', Clairwil said. 'There is no God (...)'.
'Shut up!' La Durand said. 'Give yourself up to the impressions of the flesh, without wondering about those who make you feel them: if you say another word, everything is ruined' (VIII, 508).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOTES

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

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

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The Divine Sade



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