



Behind the Mask? Sade and the Cent Vingt Journees de Sodome

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BEHIND THE MASK? SADE AND THE *CENT VINGT JOURNÉES DE SODOME*

[1] **A04491** In the footnote, confirm publication details for Friedman? Not in the online Penguin list: the Bodleian catalogue gives Robert Hale as the publisher, and dates as 2002 or 2009, with the original publication being New York: Free Press, 2001. (NB: publication details are not systematically checked here, only when something seemed wrong or information was missing, as in e.g. nn. 5, 7, and 14.)

In his 1901 study *Le Marquis de Sade devant la science médicale et la littérature moderne*, the sexologist Dr Jacobus X divided Sade's works into 'l'œuvre qu'on peut lire' and 'l'œuvre qu'on ne peut pas lire'.¹ This sense of a safe, or safer, Sade, as opposed to a more dangerous Sade, was evidently reflected in the publishing history of the *divin marquis* in the last century: while Sade's comparatively tame shorter fiction was published from the 1920s without difficulty, the publication of the violent, pornographic works for which Sade is notorious culminated in the 1957 trial of their publisher, Jean-Jacques Pauvert. Although all of Sade's works are now freely available in France in editions ranging from cheap paperbacks to the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Sadean criticism has generally perpetuated the impression of a corpus divided between the superficially respectable (and therefore inauthentic) Sade of the short fiction, the theatre, and the historical novels, and the openly libertine (and therefore authentic) Sade of such works as *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*, and the *Histoire de Juliette*. This impression of a mask worn by the author in certain works and removed in others is often reinforced by Sade himself in the manner in which he recycles material. In the opening pages of *Justine; ou, Les Malheurs de la vertu*, for example, the narrator purports to attack the values expounded by some of the libertines in the text as the 'sophismes dangereux d'une fausse philosophie'.² In his much-expanded and revised retelling of the same story in the *Nouvelle Justine; ou, Les Malheurs de la vertu*, the equivalent passage finds the narrator reversing his earlier position, and now claiming to reveal the truth that he had hitherto concealed: 'C'est, nous ne le déguisons plus, pour appuyer ces systèmes, que nous allons donner au public l'histoire de la vertueuse Justine.'³ However, if the mask of the earlier version has been discarded in the later version, it is not quite clear what, if anything, has been revealed: does the narrator of the later, overtly libertine, text speak for the author, or is this just another mask?

QUERY [1]

It may seem old-fashioned, if not naive, to look for signs of an author hiding behind his narrator. As Wendell Harris has observed, in the far-reaching wake of Roland Barthes's seminal 'The Death of the Author', a generation of critics

¹ (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1901), p. 399. Dr Jacobus X was a pseudonym for Jacobus Sutor, a French army surgeon 'whose travels in service of his country led him to categorize the penile endowments of several indigenous peoples' (David M. Friedman, *A Mind of its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 104).

² *Justine; ou, Les Malheurs de la vertu*, in Donatien-Alphonse-François, Marquis de Sade, *Œuvres*, ed. by Michel Delon, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1990-98), II, 132.

³ *La Nouvelle Justine; ou, Les Malheurs de la vertu*, in Sade, *Œuvres*, II, 396.

has tried 'as hard as possible to avoid all reference to authorial intention'.⁴ Ignoring the author, however, is easier in some cases than others. The literary canonization of Sade over recent decades has not quite succeeded in removing him as a source of anxiety for many of those who read and write about him. Despite the pervasive influence of Barthes on Sade studies, the historical Sade continues to loom large in the imagination of his critics. In his thoughtful examination of *Les Infortunes de la vertu*, for example, William F. Edmiston argues that the sympathy the reader feels for Sade's virtuous heroine 'is at odds with what serves the author's purpose', and, ultimately, results in 'the failure of the Sadean project'.⁵ While the idea of a 'project' is problematic in its implication of an absolute consistency of conscious intention across an oeuvre that stretches over four decades, Edmiston's concern with authorial intentions and purpose reflects the way in which the figure of Sade haunts the interpretation of his works. Just as we are most conscious of those narrators we suspect of unreliability, unreliable authors are particularly difficult to ignore. The difficulty with Sade is evidently exacerbated by a name that has taken on a linguistic and cultural life of its own outside the texts—a name that is now the site of conflicting functions (Sade the literary author versus Sade the sadist) and therefore of ambivalence and uncertainty. This uncertainty is what makes the figure of Sade such a persistent presence in the reader's imagination: our suspicion of the author keeps him to the fore of our interpretative processes, a perpetual question mark hovering over our attempts to pin down the text. Because we do not trust him, we feel we need to watch him all the more closely.

Ironically perhaps, readers may feel they have a clearer impression of Sade's intentions in those works that ostensibly feature moral, and moralizing, narrators. When, for example, the pious narrator of Sade's tale of father–daughter incest, 'Eugénie de Franval', claims to have no other purpose than to 'Instruire l'homme et corriger ses mœurs',⁶ most readers will construct the author in ironic opposition to his narrator. If we do not know precisely what his intentions are, we nevertheless feel confident that they do not include the moral improvement of his readers. Although some readers past and present have no doubt been persuaded by the moralistic rhetoric of the *Crimes de l'amour* and such novels as *Justine*, *Aline et Valcour*, or *La Marquise de Gange*,⁷ one

⁴ *Literary Meaning: Reclaiming the Study of Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 96.

⁵ 'Irony, Unreliability, and the Failure of the Sadean Project', *French Forum*, 12 (1987), 147–56 (pp. 156, 155).

⁶ Sade, 'Eugénie de Franval', in *Œuvres complètes du Marquis de Sade*, ed. by Annie Le Brun and Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 15 vols (Paris: Pauvert, 1986–91), x, 395. Further references to this edition of the *Œuvres complètes* will be abbreviated to OCMS.

⁷ One of the instrumental figures in Sade's recuperation, Gilbert Lely, notably fell for the apparent *sensibilité* of *La Marquise de Gange* (and perhaps the idea of a Sade *sensible*): 'Il semble

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suspects that the author himself would have wanted little to do with such readers. In the case of *Justine*, the veneer of respectability is so thin as to be almost entirely porous. This is reflected both in Sade's public refusal to admit the authorship of 'le roman de J***'⁸ in his 'Idée sur les romans', and in his use of the novel's notoriety to promote one of his other works: *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* is described on its frontispiece as the 'ouvrage posthume de l'auteur de JUSTINE'. This allusion to *Justine* in the context of a work ostentatiously dedicated 'AUX LIBERTINS' reflects that, for both Sade and his contemporary readers, *Justine* was itself a transparently scandalous work. While Sade privately described it to his lawyer, Reinaud, as 'trop immoral pour être envoyé à un homme aussi sage',⁹ the critics of the day typically concurred, describing it as 'bizarre', 'monstrueux', 'dangereux',¹⁰ and 'infâme'.¹¹ The reference to *Justine* on the frontispiece of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* would thus unambiguously have been understood by its prospective readers as an indicator of libertine credentials—and, indeed, of a certain distinction. The very same reviewers that condemn *Justine* also confess their admiration for the imagination that could produce such a work, and even attest to its literary merit:

Si elle est bien dérégulée, l'imagination qui a produit un ouvrage aussi monstrueux, il faut convenir en même temps que, dans son genre, elle est riche et brillante.¹²

Nous ignorons si l'auteur d'un pareil ouvrage, à qui, d'ailleurs, nous ne pouvons refuser un vrai mérite littéraire, doit s'applaudir de ses triomphes.¹³

Sade's use of *Justine* to market *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* suggests that any attempt to divide the Sadean corpus neatly into covertly and overtly libertine texts is misleading. Jean-Christophe Abramowici, outlining continuities between *Aline et Valcour* and the *Cent Vingt Journées*, insists, 'l'œuvre de Sade est bien profondément une', but maintains the distinction between a

que, cette fois, le marquis, éprouvé lui-même par la cruauté de son sujet, ait cédé d'avantage à la sensibilité et aux larmes qu'à sa complaisance habituelle pour les exploits des méchants' (*Vie du marquis de Sade* (Paris: Pauvert, 1965), p. 623). As Mary Trouille, has observed, a number of recent critics and biographers have also underestimated the subversiveness of *La Marquise de Gange* ('The Conflict between Good and Evil, Faith and Irreligion, in Sade's *La Marquise de Gange*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 17 (2004), 53–86 (pp. 54–55)).

⁸ 'Idée sur les romans', in OCMS, x, 80.

⁹ Sade, *Correspondance*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Gilbert Lely, 16 vols (Paris: Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1967), xii, 488. Further references to this edition of the *Correspondance* are identified by the abbreviation C.

¹⁰ In the *Journal général de France* (27 September 1792), reprinted in Françoise Laugaa-Traut, *Lectures de Sade* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1973), pp. 37, 38.

¹¹ In *Le Tribunal d'Apollon; ou, Jugement en dernier ressort de tous les auteurs vivans; libelle injurieux, partial et diffamatoire, par une société de pygmées littéraires*, vol. II (Paris: Marchand, 1799), p. 13; reprinted in Laugaa-Traut, *Lectures de Sade*, p. 56.

¹² *Journal général de France*, in Laugaa-Traut, *Lectures de Sade*, p. 37.

¹³ *Le Tribunal d'Apollon*, in Laugaa-Traut, *Lectures de Sade*, p. 56.

mute Sade and a more strident one when he adds, 'l'écrivain athée et libertin ne s'absente pas de ses productions honnêtes; sa voix y est simplement plus sourd'.¹⁴ If the author's voice is by implication loud and clear in a work such as the *Cent Vingt Journées*, however, the question remains, what is it saying?

As both *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* and the *Histoire de Juliette*, a dialogue and a first-person narrative respectively, are essentially without distinct authorial personae (other than in their preface and footnotes respectively),¹⁵ the only major works of the Sadean œuvre to represent libertine narrators as authorial figures are the *Nouvelle Justine* and the *Cent Vingt Journées*. Of these two texts, the narrator of the *Cent Vingt Journées* is by some margin a more significant and memorable presence—particularly in the early stages of the narrative—than his counterpart in the *Nouvelle Justine*. The opening of Sade's unfinished novel is regal in both tone and content:

Les guerres considérables que Louis XIV eut à soutenir pendant le cours de son règne, en épuisant les finances de l'État et les facultés du peuple, trouvèrent pourtant le secret d'enrichir une énorme quantité de ces sangsues toujours à l'affût des calamités publiques qu'ils font naître au lieu d'apaiser, et cela pour être à même d'en profiter avec plus d'avantages. La fin de ce règne, si sublime d'ailleurs, est peut-être une des époques de l'Empire français où l'on vit le plus de ces fortunes obscures qui n'éclatent que par un luxe et des débauches aussi sourdes qu'elles. C'était vers la fin de ce règne et peu avant que le Régent eût essayé, par ce fameux tribunal connu sous le nom de Chambre de Justice, de faire rendre gorge à cette multitude de traitants, que quatre d'entre eux imaginèrent la singulière partie de débauche dont nous allons rendre compte.¹⁶

The voice here may be authoritative, but it is evidently not to be confused with that of its actual author: it is the voice of a historian, rather than a novelist, bearing witness to the reign of Louis XIV. In adopting the rhetoric, if not the practice, of the historian, Sade echoes the example of the comic novelists he so admired, and perhaps Henry Fielding in particular, in these opening pages.¹⁷ While Sade's novel presents a very different world from the 'new Province of writing' offered in *Tom Jones*, for example, it similarly constructs the narrator in the roles of historian, host, and companion—guiding the reader safely through unfamiliar territory. While the opening chapter of *Tom Jones* presents the author as the keeper of a 'public Ordinary', or inn, serving a feast

¹⁴ 'Écrire et captiver: la lecture piégée d'*Aline et Valcour*', *Europe*, 835–36 (November–December 1998), 34–42 (p. 42).

¹⁵ The preface of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, with its direct appeal to a libertine audience ('Aux libertins'), could be said to imply an authorial persona. For a discussion of Sade's footnotes in the *Histoire de Juliette* see John Phillips, 'Sade's Footnotes', *French Studies*, 56 (2002), 153–63.

¹⁶ *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome; ou, L'École du libertinage*, in *Œuvres*, I, 15. Further page references to this edition are given in the text identified by the abbreviation CVJS.

¹⁷ Sade professes his admiration of comic novelists such as Cervantes, Scarron, and Fielding in the 'Idée sur les romans' (OCMS, x, 67, 70).

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of 'HUMAN NATURE',¹⁸ the opening of the *Cent Vingt Journées* famously offers a banquet of its own for its reader to enjoy:

C'est maintenant, ami lecteur, qu'il faut disposer ton cœur et ton esprit au récit le plus impur qui ait jamais été fait depuis que le monde existe, le pareil livre ne se rencontrant ni chez les anciens ni chez les modernes. [. . .] C'est ici l'histoire d'un magnifique repas où cinq ou six cents plats divers s'offrent à ton appétit. Les manges-tu tous? Non, sans doute. [. . .] choisis et laisse le reste, sans déclamer contre ce reste, uniquement parce qu'il n'a pas le talent de te plaire. Songe qu'il plaira à d'autres, et sois philosophe. (CVJS, p. 69)¹⁹

There is here, as there is in Fielding, an underlying element of tyranny in the narrator's show of hospitality to his readers: the tone is imperious and the mood of the verbs imperative, as the reader is commanded to be receptive—and, when he is unable to be receptive, philosophical. Even at this early stage in the novel, the terms of the bond between the narrator and the reader seem ambivalent and unstable.

It is difficult to determine whether the narrator's *tutoiements* in the early stages of the novel reinforce or further undermine the relationship between narrator and reader. The portrait of the four libertines of Silling, for example, concludes thus: 'Tels sont en un mot, cher lecteur, les quatre scélérats avec lesquels je vais te faire passer quelques mois. Je te les ai dépeints de mon mieux pour que tu les connaisses à fond et que rien ne t'étonne dans le récit de leurs différents écarts' (CVJS, p. 32); the portrait of their unfortunate wives, however, ends a few pages later on a slightly different note: 'Tels étaient donc les huit principaux personnages avec lesquels nous allons *vous* faire vivre, mon cher lecteur' (CVJS, p. 39, emphasis added). Interpreting these *tutoiements* and *vouvoiements*, let alone the shifts between them, is no easy matter, however: does the narrator's *tu* suggest the intimate complicity of two peers, the benevolent authority of a mentor addressing an inexperienced student, or an inadvertent display of contempt? Does his *vous* imply respect for the reader or a degree of coldness towards him? Chantal Thomas, alluding to 'la familiarité insultante du tutoiement sadien', is in no doubt: 'Le tutoiement de Sade à son lecteur n'indique ni sympathie ni complicité, mais plutôt s'apparente au ton de hauteur et de mépris avec lequel le libertin s'adresse à sa victime.'²⁰ The

¹⁸ Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, ed. by Martin C. Battestin and Fredson Bowers, 2 vols (Oxford: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), I, 1.

¹⁹ Sade's varied feast also echoes a more distant precedent in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, where another self-conscious narrator also aims to satisfy his readers' appetites: 'Come raccende il gusto il mutar esca, | così mi par che la mia istoria, quanto | or qua or là piú variata sia, | meno a chi l'udirà noiosa fia' (*Orlando furioso*, ed. by Lanfranco Caretti, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), XIII. 80. 5–8: 'As varying the dishes quickens the appetite, so it is with my story: the more varied it is, the less likely it is to bore my listeners' (trans. by Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)).

²⁰ Sade, *la dissertation et l'orgie*, 2nd edn (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2002), pp. 39, 40.

suggestion that Sade addresses the reader rather as a libertine addresses his victims is intriguing, and chimes with Lucienne Frappier-Mazur's description of the Sadean reader as a victim of textual aggression ('d'un texte qui peut agresser le lecteur, et la lectrice encore plus, de façons parfois intolérables').²¹ Thomas finds further evidence for her argument in Saint-Fond's insistence on being formally addressed in the *Histoire de Juliette*: 'Vous ne m'entendrez jamais vous tutoyer; imitez-moi, ne m'appelez, surtout, jamais autrement que monseigneur'²²—a rule he freely admits is born of vanity. Thomas omits to mention, however, that Saint-Fond almost immediately and repeatedly breaks his own rule in conversation with Juliette.²³ Although such slips could be seen to betray his fundamental contempt for all women (even one as resolutely libertine as Juliette), they could also plausibly be interpreted as indicators of intimacy, and even of his acceptance of the young heroine as one of the *happy few* of the libertine elite. Thomas's insistence upon 'un tutoiement qui s'oppose également au vouvoiement des libertins entre eux ("Bandez-vous, mon prince?") et à son propre égard "lorsqu'il se trouve *en situation de travail, sous l'instance de l'écriture*"²⁴ is ultimately misleading, however, because it implies a consistency of practice that is not supported by the Sadean corpus: the four libertines of the *Cent Vingt Journées*, for example, repeatedly switch between *vous* and *tu* not only when addressing the *historiennes* but also when addressing each other. In Sade's story of incest, 'Eugénie de Franval', the passionate *tutoiements* between father and daughter reflect the inappropriate intimacy of their relationship, and offer a marked contrast with the icy *vouvoiements* exchanged between husband and wife, or mother and daughter.²⁵ While Sade does indeed, as Roland Barthes first observed,²⁶ *vouvoie* himself when annotating his manuscript of the *Cent Vingt Journées*, his prison correspondence shows him to have been as inconsistent as his libertines in this regard. His letters from prison to his wife, for example,

²¹ *Sade et l'écriture de l'orgie* (Paris: Nathan, 1991), p. 5. Equally striking is Frappier-Mazur's distinction between male and female readers of Sade—a distinction that follows the Sadean text in placing the female reader in the role of victim.

²² Sade, *Œuvres*, III, 369.

²³ Two pages later, Saint-Fond and Juliette have the following conversation: 'Comment! me dit cet affreux homme, as-tu donc pris ma proposition pour une effervescence de tête? — Je l'avais cru. — Tu te trompais; ce sont de ces choses nécessaires dont le projet émeut nos passions, mais qui, quoique conçues dans le moment de leur délire, n'en doivent pas moins être exécutées dans le calme. — Mais vos amis le savent-ils? — En doutes-tu?' (*Œuvres*, III, 371). While Saint-Fond is free to break his own rule, Juliette evidently is not.

²⁴ *Sade, la dissertation et l'orgie*, p. 40. The italicized quotation is from Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p. 136.

²⁵ 'Mon ami, mon frère, disait quelquefois Eugénie à Franval, qui ne voulait pas que sa fille employât d'autres expressions avec lui... cette femme que tu appelles la tienne, cette créature qui, selon toi, m'a mise au monde, est donc bien exigeante, puisqu'en voulant toujours t'avoir près d'elle, elle me prive du bonheur de passer ma vie avec toi...' (*OCMS*, x, 490–91).

²⁶ *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, p. 136.

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[2] Please correct the date 1977 in the footnote.

shift from *tutoiements* to *vouvoiements* according to his mood at the time of writing: he typically employs the *vous* form when he is irritated or angry with her,²⁷ whereas his occasional expressions of tenderness invariably use the *tu* form.²⁸

QUERY [2]

As one might expect, when Sade does address himself in his notes at the close of the *Cent Vingt Journées*, his tone reflects his absolute authority over his manuscript (and indeed over his future self) as one command follows another: 'Ne vous écartez en rien de ce plan [. . .] Détaillez le départ [. . .] Adoucissez beaucoup la première partie' (CVJS, pp. 382–83). Although, as we have already seen, his narrator initially assumes a similarly imperious attitude, it soon becomes clear that the latter is far from free to do what he likes. Instead he seems obliged to operate within the same kind of imperatives as the internal storytellers in Silling: like the prostitute *historiennes*, he is first and foremost there to serve his audience and ensure their satisfaction. John Phillips has aptly described pornography generally as 'the most reader-centred of all genres',²⁹ and the *Cent Vingt Journées* specifically as a 'fundamentally reader-centred text'.³⁰ As Abramowici observes, 'il n'est aucun roman de Sade où l'écrivain s'adresse autant au *lecteur* que dans ce livre supposé *illisible*'³¹—although in so doing he risks conflating author and narrator. The narrator indeed appears preoccupied from the outset with the reception of his narrative, demonstrating an acute awareness of the potential difficulties facing the intended readership of the novel—one of which would be simply keeping track of its sizeable cast of characters:

Mais comme il y a beaucoup de personnages en action dans cette espèce de drame, malgré l'attention qu'on a eu dans cette introduction de les peindre et de les désigner tous, on va placer une table qui contiendra le nom et l'âge de chaque acteur, avec une légère esquisse de son portrait. A mesure que l'on rencontrera un nom qui embarrassera dans les récits, on pourra recourir à cette table et, plus haut, aux portraits étendus, si cette légère esquisse ne suffit pas à rappeler ce qui aura été dit. (CVJS, p. 70)

Joan De Jean suggests that the battle in the *Cent Vingt Journées* is 'the battle for memory', but she remains puzzled by the attention Sade's narrator devotes

²⁷ 'Je ne connais rien qui prouve mieux la disette et la stérilité de votre imagination, comme la monotonie insoutenable de vos insipides signaux' (after 21 April 1780, C, p. 234).

²⁸ See, for example, his despairing letter of 6 March 1777, soon after his incarceration in Vincennes: 'Ma chère amie, tu est tout ce qui me reste sur la terre: père, mère, sœur, épouse, amie, tu me tiens lieu de tout; je n'ai que toi; ne m'abandonne pas, je t'en supplie, que ce ne soit pas de toi que je reçoive le dernier coup de l'infortune' (C, p. 117); see also his letter of 14 December 1780: 'moi aussi, va, ma chère amie, je t'assure que je n'ai de moment de gai que ceux où je pense à notre réunion [. . .] Tu m'as encouragé par ta lettre qui est une de celles que j'aime, mais il ne faut pas en abuser en te donnant des vapeurs' (C, p. 260).

²⁹ *Forbidden Fictions: Pornography and Censorship in Twentieth-Century French Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), p. 21.

³⁰ *Sade: The Libertine Novels* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), p. 59.

³¹ 'Écrire et captiver', p. 37.

to his reader, and wonders 'why Sade created a narrator so concerned with sharing control of his narrative with his reader and why Sade and his narrator are so interested in the question of the reader's sense of security'.³² Passages such as these, however, demonstrate the centrality of visualization to the mode of reception Sade anticipates for his novel—a mode that is unarguably pornographic in its connection of spectacle to arousal. Like the *historiennes*, the narrator subordinates himself and his narrative to his audience, making painstaking efforts to ensure the reader's pleasure is not disrupted in any way. He insists, for example, on acquainting the reader with the detailed *règlements* of Silling on the grounds that 'il est essentiel que nous les fassions connaître à notre lecteur, qui, d'après l'exacte description que nous lui avons faite du tout, n'aura plus maintenant qu'à suivre légèrement et voluptueusement le récit, sans que rien trouble son intelligence ou vienne embarrasser sa mémoire' (CVJS, p. 59). If such protracted preliminaries render the opening of the novel unwieldy, their purpose is to ensure that nothing thereafter will distract the reader from his erotic immersion in the subsequent narrative. For De Jean, Sade's strategy achieves its aim: 'Never has the task of reading been made so effortless.'³³ Of all the epithets one might have chosen to describe the experience of reading the *Cent Vingt Journées*, however, 'effortless' remains a surprising choice. Firstly, the process of going back and forth between a particular scene and a 'table' of portraits is likely to hinder rather than help the reader's immersion in the text. Secondly, the readability of Sade's novel may at times be inversely proportionate to the ease with which it can be visualized. Although Barthes insists that fictional excrement does not smell,³⁴ visualizing the scenes of coprophagia in the *Cent Vingt Journées* is likely to make the reading process more difficult for many readers.³⁵ The almost telegraphic list of *crimes meurtrières* by contrast offers minimal material for the reader's imagination, and therefore encourages his or her swift progress. Indeed it offers a test of our willingness to invest ourselves in the text—to fill in the gaps and conjure up mental images from the most basic of scripts. Whether or not one agrees with De Jean about the ease of reading the *Cent Vingt Journées*, the emphasis on reception is such that there is a strong case to be made for identifying the intended reader, rather than the narrator, as a tyrannical influence over the narrative in these opening pages—a case of the guest dominating his host.

As the narrative concludes its preliminaries and embarks on its main business, the narrator is no longer defined simply in relation to the reader—as

³² *Literary Fortifications: Rousseau, Laclos, Sade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 314, 322.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

³⁴ 'Écrite, la merde ne sent pas' (Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, p. 141).

³⁵ Although an erotic response is also possible, and indeed, envisaged by the text.

host—but also in relation to the libertines of Silling—as guest or interloper. Were it not for the tell-tale *tu* with which the narrator on occasion addresses the reader, one might suspect Sade of employing a female narrator in the framing narrative as well as the embedded stories of the *Cent Vingt Journées*. While there are occasional hints of a masculine identity—sometimes once again in the use of personal pronouns ('il conçut ce malheureux écart qui nous fait trouver des plaisirs dans les maux d'autrui' (CVJS, p. 23, emphasis added))—it becomes increasingly apparent that the narrator does not enjoy the same privileges as the male protagonists he describes, and is moreover subject to the same constraints as the female storytellers in Silling. Rather than acting as a figure of authority within the text, he is, like the *historiennes* in their internal narratives, a voyeur and an eavesdropper. Reporting all that he sees and hears, he remains an enigma himself—unnamed, inaudible, and invisible to the other inhabitants of Silling. In a manner that echoes the constraints of a conventional first-person narrative, it soon transpires that he is not privy to all of Silling's secrets: he has no access to the *cabinets* adjoining the *salon*, for example, and can only report what he overhears: 'Je ne sais trop ce que le libertin imagina au milieu de ces sept personnes, mais cela fut long; on l'entendit beaucoup crier' (CVJS, p. 284); he is forced to admit, 'il m'a toujours été impossible de découvrir ce qui se passait dans ces infernaux cabinets' (CVJS, p. 268). Peter Cryle describes these narratorial declarations of ignorance as 'Sadian whimsy', but adds that the 'striking thing for a thematics of narrative power is that the narratorial voice is compelled to confessions of ignorance'.³⁶ The feminized role of the narrator thus confines him to the *salon*, the same storytelling space as the female characters—for all the bravado of the novel's opening, he is far from being the 'authorial dictator' that De Jean suggests.³⁷ Ironically, it is in his lack of authority or power that the narrator's situation most resembles the plight of his author, confined to his cell in the Bastille.

If the narrator of the *Cent Vingt Journées* seems more like a recorder than a maker of events, the implication is that he fulfils the same role for the reader that the *historiennes* perform for the four libertines in Silling. The *historiennes* too relate what they have surreptitiously witnessed over the years in brothels and elsewhere—often through the *trou* of an adjacent room.³⁸ Moreover, just as the *historiennes* are obliged to order their accounts in a manner which respects the controlled gradation of perversions, so the narrator must ensure the orderly escalation of intensity in his own framing narrative. He therefore

³⁶ *Geometry in the Boudoir: Configurations of French Erotic Narrative* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 116.

³⁷ *Literary Fortifications*, p. 290.

³⁸ Duclos's voyeurism is thus placed in the service of the libertines: 'Curieuse d'une telle scène, je vole au trou' (CVJS, p. 191).

self-consciously edits what he sees, repeatedly asking for the reader's forgiveness for leaving 'bien des détails sous le voile' (CVJS, p. 79). Such moments of self-restraint reinforce the impression of the narrator as a moderate figure mediating between the inexperienced reader and the all too experienced and uncompromising libertines he describes. If the disparity between the narrating voice and the matter narrated is not as marked as it is in such novels as *Justine*, or *La Marquise de Gange*, the pious narratorial rhetoric of these later texts is nevertheless anticipated in the *Cent Vingt Journées*:

Comme ces messieurs ne s'expliquèrent pas davantage, il nous a été impossible de savoir ce qu'ils ont voulu dire. Et, le sussions-nous, je crois que nous ferions bien par pudeur de le tenir toujours sous le voile, car il y a tout plein de choses qu'il ne faut qu'indiquer; une prudente circonspection l'exige; on peut rencontrer des oreilles chastes, et je suis infiniment persuadé que le lecteur nous sait déjà gré de toute celle que nous employons avec lui; plus il ira en avant, plus nous serons sur cet objet digne de ses plus sincères louanges, c'est de quoi nous pouvons presque déjà l'assurer. Enfin, quoi qu'on en puisse dire, chacun a son âme à sauver: et de quelle punition, et dans ce monde et dans l'autre, n'est pas digne celui qui, sans aucune modération, se plairait, par exemple, à divulguer tous les caprices, tous les dégoûts, toutes les horreurs secrètes auxquels les hommes sont sujets dans le feu de leur imagination. Ce serait révéler des secrets qui doivent être enfouis pour le bonheur de l'humanité; ce serait entreprendre la corruption générale des mœurs, et précipiter ses frères en Jésus-Christ dans tous les écarts où pourraient porter de tels tableaux; et Dieu qui voit le fond de nos cœurs, ce Dieu puissant qui a fait le ciel et la terre, et qui doit nous juger un jour, sait si nous aurions envie d'avoir à nous entendre reprocher par Lui de tels crimes! (CVJS, pp. 236–37)

The orality of the *historiennes*'s storytelling here is duplicated in the reference to the 'oreilles chastes' of a devout, and therefore uninvited, audience. The suggestion that this is a narrative to be heard, but not overheard—an ironic one, given the eavesdropping of the *historiennes* themselves—reinforces the sense of a narrowly conceived intended readership and of an author preaching to a converted happy few rather than proselytizing the unenlightened masses. The unnamed pamphleteer of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* seems to speak for the narrator of the *Cent Vingt Journées* when he insists,

tant pis pour ceux que ces grandes idées corrompraient, tant pis pour ceux qui ne savent saisir que le mal dans des opinions philosophiques [. . .] ce n'est point à eux que je parle, je ne m'adresse qu'à des gens capables de m'entendre, et ceux-là me liront sans danger.³⁹

There is an echo here of Rousseau's famous preface to *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, in which the only readers at risk—including any 'fille chaste'—are those who

³⁹ *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, in *Œuvres*, III, 126.

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should not be reading in the first place: 'Ce livre n'est point fait pour circuler dans le monde, et convient à très peu de lecteurs.'⁴⁰

In the 'Idée sur les romans', Sade suggests that the historian depicts only the public 'masque' that men use to conceal their true nature. The role of the novelist is to capture the man behind the mask: 'le pinceau du roman, au contraire, le saisit dans son intérieur... le prend quand il quitte ce masque.'⁴¹ Sade's portrayal of the author as the observer of the hidden face of man is reflected within many of his texts in the role played by his narrators as interlopers in, and witnesses of, hidden worlds. It is not without irony, however, that the novelist revealing the faces of others always remains behind a mask himself—like Flaubert's author, 'présent partout, et visible nulle part',⁴² he can see, but not be seen. Sade's author is a voyeur as well as an artist, concealing himself behind his narrators in order to see and paint more truly. However, if the image of the 'pinceau du roman' implies a painter, a canvas, and an external subject, there is also, perhaps, a proto-Romantic suggestion that in order to capture the hidden truth the author must become his own subject and look within his own 'intérieur'. Sade's isolation from the outside world for much of his career arguably imposed just such an approach. Critics have often commented upon the apparent influence of Sade's imprisonment upon fictional topographies dominated by isolated, confined, and subterranean spaces. Phillips suggests that the 'utopia of total sexual and ethical licence' in Silling 'is indeed only possible in the imaginary world conceived in and framed by prison walls'.⁴³ When Sade's prison cell is translated into part of his fictional landscape it becomes a place of fantasy, but one that does not escape the nightmarish reality that produced it. Although Silling offers the libertines total freedom, it also imposes total enslavement for their victims—it remains a prison as well as a castle.

In both the *Cent Vingt Journées* and Sade's other works, the impotent isolation of the author-prisoner is transformed into a fantasy of potent absence, and this is particularly evident in some of the ways in which the figure of the author is represented. As limited as Sade's narrators seem to be in their powers, Sade often represents authors within his texts as figures of influence: Curval, for example, 'était auteur de plusieurs ouvrages dont les effets avaient été prodigieux' (CVJS, p. 31); within Silling, he is also, of course, one of the four contributors to 'le fatal livre' (CVJS, p. 271) in which all infringements against the 'Règlements' are recorded. The powerful author is

⁴⁰ Julie; ou, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, ed. by Michel Launey (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 3.

⁴¹ Sade, 'Idée sur les romans', in OCMS, x, 74.

⁴² Gustave Flaubert, letter of 9 December 1852, in *Correspondance*, ed. by Jean Bruneau, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1973–80), II, 204.

⁴³ Sade: *The Libertine Novels*, p. 42.

a recurring topos in Sade's fiction: Armande, a fellow inmate of Justine in Sainte-Marie-des-Bois, likens the monk, Clément, to

ces écrivains pervers, dont la corruption est si dangereuse, si active, qu'ils n'ont pour but, en imprimant leurs affreux systèmes, que d'étendre au-delà de leur vie la somme de leurs crimes; ils n'en peuvent plus faire, mais leurs maudits écrits en feront commettre, et cette douce idée qu'ils emportent au tombeau les console de l'obligation où les met la mort de renoncer au mal.⁴⁴

If the thought of enduring influence through the written word is imagined to offer consolation to the malevolent author facing his own mortality, one can also imagine its appeal to an author deprived of contact with, let alone power over, the outside world for much of his adult life.⁴⁵ In the *Histoire de Juliette*, the eponymous heroine gives the name of *meurtre moral* to this fantasy when her friend and mentor, Clairwil, declares her desire for the crime that takes on a life of its own:

— Je voudrais, dit Clairwil, trouver un crime dont l'effet perpétuel agit, même quand je n'agirais plus, en sorte qu'il n'y eût pas un seul instant de ma vie, ou même en dormant, où je ne fusse cause d'un désordre quelconque, et que ce désordre pût s'étendre au point qu'il entraînant une corruption générale, ou un dérangement si formel, qu'au-delà même de ma vie l'effet s'en prolongeât encore... — Je ne vois guère, mon ange, répondis-je, pour remplir tes idées sur cela, que ce qu'on peut appeler le meurtre moral, auquel on parvient par conseil, par écrit ou par action. Belmor et moi, nous avons raisonné sur cette matière; il y a peu d'imagination comme la sienne, et voici un petit calcul de sa main qui suffira à te faire voir la rapidité de cette contagion, et combien elle peut être voluptueuse à produire, s'il est vrai comme ni toi, ni moi n'en doutons, que la sensation gagne en raison de l'atrocité du crime.⁴⁶

This fantasy of moral contagion imagines the word acting like an infinitely spreading poison, and indeed is immediately preceded by Clairwil's observation, 'il y a, d'ailleurs, une sorte de perfidie dans l'emploi du poison, qui en accroît singulièrement les délices'.⁴⁷ It is, like its counterpart in *Justine*, a fantasy about influence *in absentia*—about the creation of a text that might serve as a proxy for its author, circulating in the world long after her death. Sade's wishes regarding his own burial have particular resonance in this context. Expressing his desire to be buried in the woods of his property at Malmaison, he gives the following instructions regarding his grave:

La fosse une fois recouverte, il sera semé dessus des glands, afin que, par la suite,

⁴⁴ *Justine; ou, Les Malheurs de la vertu*, in *Œuvres*, II, 272.

⁴⁵ This echoes Laclos's apocryphal remarks to the Comte de Tilly on his motivation for writing *Les Liaisons dangereuses*: 'Je résolu de faire un ouvrage qui sortit de la route ordinaire, qui fit du bruit et qui retentit encore sur la Terre quand j'y aurais passé' (quoted in Laclos, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Maurice Allem (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 732).

⁴⁶ *Œuvres*, III, 650.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Clairwil's predilection is indeed shared by Juliette, who murders fifteen hundred people by poisoning their water supply (*ibid.*, p. 1257).

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le terrain de ladite fosse se trouvant regarni et le taillis se trouvant fourré comme il l'était auparavant, les traces de ma tombe disparaissent de dessus la surface de la terre, comme je me flatte que ma mémoire s'effacera de l'esprit des hommes.⁴⁸

Phillipe Ariès discerne a 'vertige de néant'⁴⁹ in Sade's testament, and the stated desire for physical self-erasure here is particularly striking when placed alongside the previously cited fantasies of a textual afterlife. Long before Barthes, Sade imagines the author exiting the scene to be replaced by autonomous text.

If Sade shared the fantasy of a *meurtre moral* with Clairwil, the Sadean text suggests it was never, for him, anything other than a harmless fantasy (about being harmful). For all the prodigious power claimed for Curval's works in the *Cent Vingt Journées*, it is indeed striking that these have no impact on his own daughter, Adélaïde, whose religious sentiments render her immune to his arguments: 'il avait laissé naître et fomenter le préjugé, imaginant que ses discours et ses livres le détruiraient facilement. Il se trompa' (CVJS, p. 36). The fantasy of authorial power is thus no sooner delineated than it is undermined in a manner that is typically Sadean. It echoes the ways in which most of Sade's most powerful libertines are represented as impotent and inadequate, from the physical infirmities that plague three of the four libertines of the *Cent Vingt Journées* (the skeletal Curval, delicate Évêque, and under-endowed Durcet),⁵⁰ to the mental frailties that afflict the fourth, the Duc de Blangis:

Tant il est vrai que l'âme répond souvent bien mal aux dispositions corporelles, un enfant résolu eût effrayé ce colosse, et dès que pour se défaire de son ennemi, il ne pouvait plus employer ses ruses ou sa trahison, il devenait timide et lâche, et l'idée du combat le moins dangereux, mais à égalité de forces, l'eût fait fuir à l'extrémité de la terre. Il avait pourtant, selon l'usage, fait une campagne ou deux, mais il s'y était si tellement déshonoré qu'il avait sur-le-champ quitté le service. (CVJS, p. 25)⁵¹

⁴⁸ 'Testament', in OCMS, xi, 158–59. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer draws attention to a pertinent footnote in the *Histoire de Juliette*: 'on ne doit à un cadavre, que de le mettre dans une bonne terre où il puisse germer promptement, et se métamorphoser avec vitesse, en ver, en mouche ou en végétaux, ce qui est difficile dans les cimetières; si l'on veut rendre un dernier service à un mort, c'est de le faire mettre au pied d'un arbre fruitier, ou dans un gras pâturage, c'est tout ce qu'on lui doit: tout le reste est absurde' (*Œuvres*, III, 1231; quoted by Vilmer in *Sade moraliste: le dévoilement de la pensée sadienne à la lumière de la réforme pénale au XVIII^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2005), p. 215).

⁴⁹ *L'Homme devant la mort: la mort ensauvagée* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), pp. 61–62.

⁵⁰ Curval, 'usé par la débauche [. . .] n'offrait plus qu'un squelette' (CVJS, p. 27), while the Évêque de *** is described as having 'une taille fine et légère, un corps petit et fluët, une santé chancelante, des nerfs tres délicats' (CVJS, p. 25) and Durcet as having a penis that is 'extraordinairement petit' (CVJS, p. 32).

⁵¹ Blangis's brief military career hints at an autobiographical reference to Sade's own (by comparison distinguished) service in the military. In the *Histoire de Juliette*, Saint-Fond stands up for cowards when he confesses unashamedly: 'Je suis le plus jean-foutre de tous les êtres, et je l'avoue sans la plus petite honte. La peur n'est que l'art de se conserver, et cette science est la plus nécessaire à l'homme: il est absurde d'attacher de l'honneur à ne pas craindre les dangers; je place le mien à les redouter tous' (*Œuvres*, III, 397).

For all of the power he wields in Silling, there is the strong sense that the libertine cannot entirely escape his own weaknesses—indeed, his *libertinage* is both the product of, and his revenge upon, his own inadequacies. The same may be said of the libertine author and the power he wields in his fantasies—as outlandish as these may be, they never quite escape the reality of the prison cell.

The Sade that exists in the reader's imagination haunts every reading of every one of his works. It is not just the more pious narrators that are undermined by this shadowy, ironic presence—the ostentatiously libertine narrators are similarly vulnerable. If the perceived gap between the narrator and implied author of the *Cent Vingt Journées* may seem narrower than its equivalent in a work like *Justine*, it is arguably murkier. Rather than the relatively straightforward opposition between a moralizing narrator and an amoral implied author, the *Cent Vingt Journées* offers an amoralizing narrator who can neither be conflated with, nor opposed to, an ultimately elusive author. The *Cent Vingt Journées* reveals not the 'real' Sade but another mask—a libertine one rather than a devout one. The author and his intentions remain hidden. This unknowable space between the historical author and his libertine narrators has allowed Sade to be all things to all readers: madman, sexologist, surrealist, libertarian, and even feminist. Writing from prison, Sade ironically uses a fictional context to complain about his public transformation into a fictional character; in the satirical *historiette* 'Le Président mystifié', he takes revenge on the magistrates of Provence for their prosecution of the Marseille affair⁵² through the figure of the eponymous Fontanis:

un valet de treize ans que nous avons suborné n'est-il pas venu nous dire, parce que nous voulions qu'il nous le dise, que cet homme tuait des catins dans son château, n'est-il pas venu nous faire un conte de *Barbe-bleue* dont les nourrices n'oseraient aujourd'hui endormir leurs enfants?⁵³

Even before he became an author of fiction, Sade had become a figure of fantasy. While he was no Bluebeard, the mythology of Sade haunts his fiction just as much as he suggests it haunted his trial, offering tempting correlations but no answers.

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Below you should find the contact details (postal and email addresses) that are on file.

⁵² Sade was convicted *in absentia* in 1772 of poisoning four prostitutes in Marseille after giving them Spanish Fly, and of sodomizing his manservant, Latour, on the same occasion. Both he and Latour were sentenced to death.

⁵³ OCMS, II, 122. See also Sade's complaint to his lawyer Gaufridy in October 1775: 'il ne se fouettera pas un chat dans la province sans qu'on ne dise: *C'est le marquis de S'* (C, p. 87).

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