

Black Sun: Bataille on Sade

Geoffrey Roche

University of Auckland

Georges Bataille is one of the most influential thinkers to have seriously considered the work of Donatien Alphonse François, the Marquis de Sade. What is undeniable is that the two thinkers share a number of thematic and theoretical commonalities, in particular on the subject of human nature and sexuality. However, there are serious theoretical divergences between the two, a fact generally overlooked in the secondary literature. Rather than being a mere precursor to Bataille, as himself implies, I suggest that Sade is a very different thinker, a fact that Bataille does not fully acknowledge.

...if [Sade] had not existed he would have had to be invented...

—Bataille *The Accursed Share* (AS Vol. III: 252).

In the last five or so decades, a number of philosophers, writers, artists and film makers have implied that there is some profound significance to the work of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814). One of the most prominent and influential of these was thinker and author Georges Bataille (1897-1962). Bataille almost single-handedly established Sade's place in the realm of ideas, and is unusual, as a non-specialist, in having had a major influence on Sade scholarship. A good deal of the secondary literature on Sade (for example, that of Michel Foucault, Marcel Hénaff, David Allison, David Martyn, Deepak Narang Sawhney, Alphonso Lingis, and Béatrice Didier) takes for granted that there is a natural intellectual affinity between his work and that of Bataille. Bataille frequently introduces Sade into his meditations in such a way as to suggest a complete identification. He takes Sade to be largely in agreement with his own discussions of sexuality, 'general economics,' and what he refers to as the 'Sovereign.' This paper will function as a critique of Bataille's utilization and identification of Sade. I aim to clarify whether we actually learn anything of Sade's thought from reading Bataille (or vice versa), that is, whether Bataille is a help or a hindrance in coming to terms with the Sadeian labyrinth. Firstly, I will outline the thematic preoccupations that Bataille shares with Sade. Secondly, I will map the theoretical continuities and discontinuities between the two thinkers.

In the 1930 essay "The Use-Value of D.A.F. Sade (An open letter to my current comrades)" (hereafter *UV*), Bataille discusses what, for him, is Sade's

true message—total revolution, and the wish to “release dangerous movements and be their first victims.”¹ In so doing, he lambastes those members of the Surrealist circle who he felt had entirely misunderstood Sade, who instead ‘worship’ him in the manner of “primitive subjects in relation to their king” (*UV*: 17). Given the anodyne version of Sade embraced by André Breton and others, Bataille’s has the merit of being under no illusions as to what Sade’s work entails, this being the most striking, and vital, feature of his interpretation. Sade reappears again in most of Bataille’s subsequent works, in particular *Erotism* (hereafter *ER*, 1957), *The Accursed Share* (hereafter *AS*, written 1949, published 1967) and *Tears of Eros* (hereafter *TE*, 1961).²

Bataille shares with Sade a number of thematic preoccupations. Bataille’s fictional work, in particular *Story of the Eye*, is similar to that of Sade to the point of appearing derivative. As in Sade, in Bataille there is a great deal of scatology, sex scenes in churches, blasphemy, humiliation, rape, torture, and necrophilia.³ There are also philosophical similarities, although these have often been exaggerated. The most obvious theoretical commonality is in their ethical orientation. Sade’s view that civilization and morals have softened man is close to Bataille’s attitude (*Juliette*, hereafter *J*, 776). Both writers draw a link between the absence of God and the nullity of morality, suggesting a traditionally religious view of moral thought (Bataille’s project of founding an ‘anti-ethics’, without reason or justice, is explicitly a *Godless ethics*).⁴ Bataille states that Sade took the mentality of the aristocracy to its limit under the *pretence* of criticizing it (*ER*: 166). Bataille also notes that, though Sade’s work remains on the fictional plane (*ER*: 175; *AS* Vol. II: 183) he “stated his [principles] but never really put them to practice” (*TE*: 142). Bataille admires Sade for his nihilism and his total disregard for his fellow man, and notes that he was a “connoisseur of torture” (*ER*: 171-172, 189; *TE*: 206).⁵ Yet he also describes Sade as in some sense an *ethical* figure. In *Erotism*, Bataille holds that, because “violence is silent,” Sade’s attitude is “diametrically opposed to that of the torturer” (*ER*: 186, 252). The paragraph below illustrates the tension in this account. Sade, for Bataille, represents both the attitude of ‘sovereignty’ that stands beyond concern for the fellow man, and the (assumedly) moral attitude of the revolutionary.

He was an enemy of the *ancien régime* and fought against it...He worked out his criticism but he was a Jacobin and the secretary of a section. He worked out his criticism of the past along two lines: on one he sided with the Revolution and criticized the monarchy, but in

the other he exploited the infinite possibilities of literature and propounded to his readers the concept of a sovereign type of humanity whose privileges de Sade visualised were outrageous compared with those [of] kings and lords (*ER*: 166).

Ironically, Bataille continues the Surrealist attempt to retain Sade as a figure of revolutionary liberation from morality, and, simultaneously, as a revolutionary moralist (insofar as revolution, unless it is a nihilistic revolution, requires a moral centre). This tension is not resolved in his work.

Despite appearances, Bataille and Sade are actually very different thinkers. Bataille, lacking a formal philosophical education, was largely informed by his reading of Nietzsche, Hegel (as interpreted by Alexandre Kojève; 1902-1968), and the Christian mystical tradition. He was also taught briefly by Lev Shestov (also known as Leon Chestov, 1866-1938). Whereas Sade referred to himself as a philosopher, Bataille's attitude towards conventional philosophy was largely negative, and he often referred to himself as a mystic.⁶ Nor did he regard Sade's thought highly, noting its incoherence and its lack of persuasive force (*ER*: 179, 188, 191, 195; *AS* Vol.II:177; *LE*: 110-111). Instead, Bataille associates Sade with his own interest in the interrelationship of taboo, sacrifice, transgression, and sexuality. Sade, largely informed by the 18th century *philosophe* tradition, was familiar with a very different philosophical outlook, and lacked a concept of the sacred (as he wrote in the poem *La Vérité* [1787], “[i]l n'est rien de sacré”).⁷ Bataille, like Sade, describes life as endless flux and destruction, and holds that harmony would destroy the natural order (*ER*: 55, 86; *AS* Vol. I p.23; *Sade J*: 768, 771). The ontological similarities end there. Bataille, unlike Sade, holds that humans have a “certain dignity, a certain nobility” and a “sacred truth” that distinguishes them from animals, whereas Sade emphasises the continuity of humans and other animals (*ER*: 29, 149, 150). Further, unlike most of Sade's libertines, Bataille maintains that there is a soul that survives the physical annihilation of the body (*I E*: 19; *Sade, J*: 401). These differences have led Michael Richardson to remark that, whereas Bataille implicitly admits idealism, “Sade was the materialist that Bataille claimed to be, for his materialism was consistent and unyielding.”⁸

Another divergence between Sade and Bataille is their use of Christian sources. Sade's discussion of the Bible and other Christian texts betrays an encyclopaedic knowledge of scripture and religious scholarship. Yet, unlike Bataille, his attitude towards the Christian heritage is entirely negative, using

his knowledge of Christian sources purely order to discredit their doctrine. He would not, unlike Bataille, cite the Saints or Christian religious art in defence of the claim that a woman's body is 'dirty,' that sex leads to death, is basically sinful, or is linked with sex and sadism (*AS* Vol. I: 38; *ER*: 230-231; *TE*: 83).⁹

Throughout his writings, Bataille retains two psychological assumptions: a) there is an innate human instinct for sadism, and b) this instinct for sadism is inseparable from the sexual instinct. In defence of both of these associations, Bataille relies largely on the authority of Sade. Sade, in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, *Juliette* and *La Nouvelle Justine* in particular, insists that the taste for cruelty is shared by all with the strength to express it, and typically describes heterosexual intercourse as *ideally* involving rape, sadism and murder (writes Sade: "[m]urder is a branch of erotic activity, one of its extravagances"; *J*:940). Like Sade, Bataille insists that all men have a desire for violent, destructive behaviour. Bataille also notes the public's universal taste for violence in the manifestation of barbaric activities in the most 'sophisticated' cultures (Bataille notes for example "lynch law" as practiced in the United States; *ER*: 186). Bataille goes on to suggest that all people desire dangerous and expensive—"sovereign," as he calls them—activities, in proportion to their strengths and means, noting that most people must fulfill this need through the imagination, in spy novels and suchlike (*ER*: 72, 86-87, 186). Bataille also takes at face value Sade's contention that there is a natural association (Bataille calls it a 'general mechanism') linking erection, ejaculation and 'breaking the law': "[i]ndependently of Sade, the sexual excitement of burglars has not escaped notice. But no one before him had grasped the general mechanism linking the reflex actions of erection and ejaculation with the transgression of the law" (*ER*: 196; *Sade J*: 124).

The most important associations Bataille makes with his own thought and that of Sade are those concerning sexuality. To a large extent, this association is apt. Neither has a conception of sexual relationships as such, nor sexual love or mutual care. Sex is described entirely in terms of the attainment of a sensation. Bataille occasionally discusses more commonplace, though by no means less disturbing, associations of sex and death, for example the association of sexual jealousy or possession with the destructive impulse (*ER*:20). But, for the most part, Bataille does not seek to diagnose or explain such tendencies. Instead, he describes violence as *essential* to sexual activity. Bataille holds that "[p]hysical eroticism has in any case a heavy, sinister quality," that sexuality, when taken to its natural limit, leads to murder,

and that Sade was the great pioneer who affirmed this ‘truth’ (*ER*: 19; *TE*: 140). Bataille describes sex above all as a ‘limit-experience,’ which, in general terms, involves the experience of merging with the universe (*AS* Vol. II: 168,169,171). As “filth,” for Bataille, is the “secret of being,” this does not in itself entail a positive account of sexuality (*AS* Vol. II: 118). It is frequently the violence and ‘disorder’ of sex that Bataille regards as of central importance, rather than the sex itself.¹⁰ Therefore, actions such as torture may suffice to attain this state also, insofar as such an activity would be both violent and nauseating. The following passage, from *Inner Experience* (1943, published 1957), makes clear this association of ‘limit-experience’ independent of actual penetrative sex. Sovereign activities, such as torture, beating up one’s spouse, or simply laughing may suffice.

The extreme limit of the “possible”—We are there in the end. But so late?...what, without knowing it we reached it? (in truth, nothing is changed) by a detour: one man bursts out laughing, the other is goaded and beats his wife, we become dead drunk, we make others perish in torture (*IE*: 37).¹¹

A recurring theme in Bataille’s discussion of Sade is the idea that the ‘sovereign’—invariably a male—plays the active role, whereas the female is described variously as a victim or as *sacrificial* victim. To take sexuality to be concerned with communication or harmony at all, according to Bataille’s Sade, is to deny its ‘truth.’

De Sade makes his heroes uniquely self-centred; the partners are denied any rights at all: this is the key to his system. If erotism leads to harmony between the partners its essential principle of violence and death is invalidated. Sexual union is fundamentally a compromise, a half-way house between life and death. Communion between the participants is a limiting factor and it must be ruptured before the true violent nature of eroticism can be seen, whose translation into practice corresponds with the notion of the sovereign man. The man subject to no restraints of any kind falls on his victims with the devouring fury of a vicious hound. (*ER*: 167; similar *AS* Vol.II:174-178)

Again, the male is in the active role, whereas the woman is ‘dissolved.’ The two sexually engaged people realize their ‘discontinuity;’ they merge into the

one entity. Yet a non-symmetrical relationship remains—the male remains as an active subject; the *female* loses her identity.¹²

What does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its practitioners?—A violation bordering on death, bordering on murder?

The whole business of erotism is to strike to the inmost core of the living being, so that the heart stands still. The transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity.... In the process of dissolution, the male partner has generally an active role, while the female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity (*ER*: 17-18).

Later in this same text, Bataille states that the woman is not fully alive when being penetrated, suggesting that, were she to be killed during sex, she would not actually be present. She is not *merely* sick; she is *already dead*. Bataille discusses the ‘surprise’ a person would feel, were he ignorant of the association between madness and eroticism, if he were to watch “some woman who had struck him as particularly distinguished” passionately making love.

He would think she was sick, just as mad dogs are sick. Just as if some mad bitch had usurped the personality of the dignified hostess of a little while back. Sickness is not putting it strongly enough, though; *for the time being the personality is dead*. For the time being its death gives the bitch full scope, and she takes advantage of the silence, of the absence of the dead woman. The bitch wallows-wallows noisily—in that silence and that absence... (my italics; *ER*: 106).

On most of the points outlined above—the association of sexuality with the desire to kill the ‘partner’ (the *victim*, in fact); the ‘inauthenticity’ and inferiority of shared erotic pleasure; the reduction of the other (invariably a woman) to the level of inert object—Bataille is quite correct in reading Sade as advocating much the same doctrine (*J*: 268-269). In the passage above, like Sade, Bataille tends to conflate the living with the dead—an ‘erotics’ that denies the *presence* of the other person. It is, essentially, masturbatory or even necrophilic, as neither Sade nor Bataille can distinguish between sex with another person from merely penetrating a cadaver.

An implication of Bataille's description of the primacy of male sexuality is that female sexuality cannot exist. That a man may be an erotic object of a woman's desire, Bataille concedes, is a theoretical possibility, but implausible. Women "put themselves forward as objects for the aggressive desire for men." Consequently, "prostitution is the logical consequence of the feminine attitude;" an essential part of a woman's role in sex is to renounce her pride, for the essence of sex is to "despoil" (*ER*: 130-131, 145).

It is intentional like the act of the man who lays bare, desires and wants to penetrate his victim. The lover strips the beloved [*la femme aimée*] of her identity no less than the blood-stained priest his human or animal victim. The woman in the hands of her assailant is despoiled of her being. With her modesty she loses the firm barrier that once separated her from others and made her impenetrable. She is brusquely laid open to the violence of the sexual urges let loose in the organs of reproduction; she is laid open to the impersonal violence that overwhelms her from without (*ER*: 90).

Bataille briefly considers the possibility that only neurotics are attracted by the thought of sexual murder, or that sadism is merely an atavistic throw-back. In a section of *Eroticism* entitled "Vice is the deep truth at the heart of man," Bataille writes:

It might be said that we wear our sadism like an excrescence which may once have had a meaning in human terms but now has lost it, which can easily be eradicated at will, in ourselves by asceticism, in others by punishment. This is how the surgeon treats the appendix, the midwife the afterbirth, and the people their kings. Or are we concerned on the contrary with a sovereign and indestructible element of mankind, yet one that evades conscious appraisal? Are we concerned; in short, with the heart of man, not the muscular organ, but the surge of feelings, the intimate reality that it symbolizes?

If the first of these alternatives holds, the reasonable man would be justified; man will produce instruments for his own well-being indefinitely, he will subdue all nature to his laws, he will be free from war and violence without having to heed the fateful propensity which has hitherto bound him to misfortune. (*ER*: 184)

But Bataille rejects this interpretation, hence aligning himself with Sade's account of the human condition. Bataille reasons that sadism cannot be dismissed as a non-essential human trait, for two reasons. The first is that sadism brings humanity "into harmony with the ceaseless and inevitable annihilation of everything that is born, grows, and strives to last." This principle is very similar to the naturalistic thinking of Sade's character Pope Pius VI, in *Juliette*, who reasons, "In all living things the principle of life is in no other than that of death;" that is, as death and destruction are part of the natural order, so too is the instinct to destroy (*J*:769). (Yet, in both Sade and Bataille, this is an argument as to why destruction, not *sadism* per se, is a part of the natural order). The second reason offered by Bataille is essentially a restating of Bataille's affirmation of destruction, and its association with the sacred and the 'sovereign.' This reasoning is uniquely Bataillan—Sade, as noted above, has no concept of the sacred.

Secondly [sadism] bestows a kind of divine or, more accurately, sacred significance on that excess and that harmony. Our desire to consume, to annihilate, to make a bonfire of our resources, and the joy we find in the burning, the fire and the ruin are what seem to us divine, sacred. They alone control sovereign attitudes in ourselves, attitudes that is to say which are gratuitous and purposeless, only useful for being what they are and never subordinated to ulterior ends (*ER*: 185).¹³

Bataille also credits Sade for revealing a link between sexuality and a wish to destroy *oneself*; "this tormenting fact: the urge towards love, pushed to its limit, is an urge towards death" (*ER*: 42). (One could perceive here a hint of the Surrealist's interest in love, and sexuality, as a rendering asunder of the categories of the 'reasonable'). Besides appealing to the authority of Sade in defending this claim, Bataille cites examples from natural history, of animals who expend themselves in coitus (suggesting the danger of sex), the mystic insights of St. Theresa, and the association of sex and death implicit in the French expression for orgasm, 'la petite mort' ('the little death') (*ER*: 29, 170, 234-240, *AS*: Vol. II: 105, 177; *TE*: 20). Bataille also notes that childbirth is dangerous (although its relevance to the sex-self destruction association is not clear) and that "depression following the final spasm [of orgasm] may give a foretaste of death" (*ER*: 102, 232). Bataille takes the character Amélie (in *Juliette*) to be representative of this association of sexuality with the will to self destruction. Amélie, an impressionable young woman, tells

Borchamps that she wishes to be killed as the “victim of the cruel passions of a libertine.” She adds: “[n]ot that I wish to die tomorrow—my extravagant fancies do not go as far as that; but that is the only way I want to die; to have my death the result of a crime is an idea that sets my head spinning” (*ER*: 175-176; similar; *AC* Vol.II:182). In *Erotism*, Bataille writes:

An impersonal denial, an impersonal crime!
 Tending towards the continuity of beings beyond death!
 De Sade’s sovereign man does not offer our wretchedness a transcendent reality... But in [the character] Amélie de Sade links infinite continuity with infinite destruction.
 (*ER*: 176).¹⁴

Sade’s characters are extremely glib about life and death, so it is not possible to dismiss Bataille’s interpretation out of hand (Durand, in *Juliette*, states that she once avoided execution “merely for form’s sake”; *J*: 1025). It is, however, problematic to interpret Sade as a theorist of a universal death drive on the strength of a single minor character in a single novel, who is given only twelve lines of a text of some 2,000 pages. Annie Le Brun has argued that Bataille’s assertion that ‘eroticism opens onto death’ contradicts fundamental aspects of Sade’s thought, observing that the chief Sadeian characters do virtually anything in order to survive.¹⁵ The character Borchamps cited in the passage above thinks in fact that Amélie had not been sincere in her desire to be killed: “what she had told me about the way she wanted to end her days, this, the more I pondered it, had simply been an effort on her part to be ingratiating; it did not correspond to her real feelings” (Amélie is killed in appalling agony regardless; *J*: 876). The lesson to be drawn would seem to be that one should be careful with what one agrees to when dealing with post-morality sophisticates. But Annie Le Brun’s criticism of Bataille is not entirely correct either—it could simply be that Bataille has cited the wrong example. In *Juliette*, the character Durand contends that “sensual excitement may even bring on thoughts of death and induce in one an eager expectancy of death,” and Juliette herself suggests that death would be orgasmic (*J*: 1014; 1039).¹⁶ Sade’s characters also enjoy strangling or hanging themselves to enhance orgasm, and deliberately catch sexually transmitted diseases (*LNJ2*: 328, 340n, 344; *J*: 1147).¹⁷ (Even Justine exhibits an eroticized death wish; she falls in love with the evil Marquis de Brassac despite his depravity, and states that she would gladly sacrifice her life to him; *Misfortunes of Virtue*:

35). Sade's characters, although perverse, do not kill themselves in self-annihilating paroxysms as a rule.

A more complex theme in both Sade and Bataille is the relationship between sexuality and sin. Bataille acknowledges that there is no such thing as 'obscenity' in a fundamental sense, accepting that it exists entirely 'in the mind' (*ER*: 215). Bataille's work incessantly associates sex and sin nevertheless. His numerous comments on the physical, sexualized body, on the sex act, on prostitutes, and childbirth suggests a negative attitude concerning sexuality and the body in general, as does his obsession with the 'filthy.' Bataille describes sex as infernal, anguished, and disgusting, and avoids discussing any particular sexual act. He describes prostitutes as "fallen beings," "vomited forth" from nature, who "live like pigs" (*E*: 135, 246; *AS Vol. II*: 140, 147, 178). According to Bataille, nudity is, in a fundamental way, 'obscene,' and the sight of a woman's breasts "the pure incarnation of sin" (*ER*: 17, *AS Vol. I*: 5; *IE*: 127). The penis is variously described as 'accursed,' as a 'larvae,' and a 'bestiality' (*ER*: 138-139; *SE*: 74); semen as a type of excrement (*UV*: 21); the vagina as a "swampy region" (*SE*: 21); or a "wound about to suppurate" (*AS Vol. II*: 130, 149). He writes of the womb as 'muck,' and refers to the stench of the bodies of mothers and sisters (*SE*: 49; *AS Vol. II*: 63). He describes the cycle of birth, sex and death a "shipwreck in the nauseous," and cites Leonardo da Vinci and St. Augustine to defend this association of sexuality with disgust (*TE*: 23, 66, 69; *ER*: 58; 144-145; 178; *AS Vol. II*: 126; 81; 62-63 104). Even childbirth is described as a 'transgression.'

The menstrual discharge is further associated with sexual activity and the accompanying suggestion of degradation: degradation is one of the effects of violence. Childbearing cannot be disassociated from this complex of feelings. Is it not itself a rending process, something excessive and outside the orderly course of permitted activity? Does it not imply the denial of the established order, a denial without which there could be no transition from nothingness to being, or from being to nothingness? There may well be something gratuitous about these assessments... (*ER*: 54).

With this outlook, Bataille must explain why anyone would want to have sex at all. He gives three responses. Firstly, he holds that we express our true love for someone by overcoming our nausea of the physical act of having

sex (*AS* Vol.II:95-96, 113).¹⁸ Secondly, Bataille suggests that “every horror conceals a possibility of enticement” (*AS* Vol. II: 96). This claim becomes problematic however, as Bataille cannot explain why corpses are not sexually attractive (*AS* Vol.II:97).¹⁹

Finally, for Bataille it is the very *sinfulness* of sexual activity that makes it significant. Without the sin of breaking taboos, according to Bataille, sex is not ‘erotic.’ Therefore, sex within marriage, where there are no traditional taboos against sex, is not erotic; marriage itself providing only a “narrow outlet for pent-up violence” (*ER*: 109- 112). Bataille’s affirmation of the sinfulness of sex, rather than sex in and of itself, is clearest in the introduction to his pornographic novel *Madame Edwarda*. In this text, Bataille lambastes against ‘freethinkers’ who would seek to eradicate sexual ‘sinfulness’ (*ER*: 17, 128, 135, 266).

Bataille’s work suggests a commonality with Sade that overcomes the overt theoretical differences of the two thinkers. On the one hand, Bataille’s association of sex with sin seems to have little in common with the stated views of Sade’s characters. Sade, in particular in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (hereafter *PB*) and *Juliette*, writes repeatedly on the groundlessness of sexual prudery. Accordingly, he refers to prostitutes, in their cynicism in sexual matters, as the “only authentic philosophers” (*PB*: 208, 318). Further, Sade wrote incessantly on particular sexual acts, whereas Bataille in fact appears reluctant to discuss the specific ‘transgressive gestures’ in Sade’s work.²⁰ Yet, under the surface, Sade and Bataille appear to speak with the same voice. Having affirmed death and destruction, and not birth and creation, as the central life-principles, both Sade’s libertines and Bataille appear to find the concept of procreation deeply disturbing. In both Sade’s *The 120 Days of Sodom* (hereafter *120*) and Bataille’s pornographic novel *Story of the Eye*, the protagonists avoid vaginal penetration, showing a marked preference for voyeurism and play with excrement (*SE*: 8, 13, 14, 15, 20, 37, 46, 48, 51, 75). The one vaginal penetration in *Story of the Eye* is described as ‘insipid’ and physically painful (*SE*: 67); likewise, the ‘friends’ of *The 120 Days of Sodom* describe the horror of the female form, as does Belmor of *Juliette*, who describes the vagina as a “fetid gulf” (*J*: 510).²¹ Sade repeatedly portrays the sexualized body as punished and degraded, as if to imply that sexuality is evidence of a Fall.²² Secondly, both Bataille and Sade associate sex with death, a natural enough association for a Catholic, given the association of sin with death, and sex with sin. Sade’s characters frequently ‘punish’ pregnant women for daring to reproduce, effectively extending the

sin of sex to the sin of reproduction—it is not only the sexualized, but the *reproductive* body that is punished (120:440; J:502-517). Both writers, in the name of ‘authenticity’ and the ‘natural,’ seek to convince the reader that sexuality cannot and should not be separated from the notion of sin and from the infliction of pain. Both insist on the naturalness and desirability of torturing and killing people, which they take to be innate drives. Further, both Bataille and Sade regard mutually caring sexual relationships and the will to introduce new life into the world, as unnatural and undesirable; as, in Bataille’s words, ‘degradation’ and ‘violence.’ They take the perverse for the ideal, and the natural (specifically the instinct for mutual care, and for reproduction) for the perverse.

On this theme, it can be argued that Bataille’s intuitive ‘method,’ his sweeping claims and juxtapositions, discloses aspects of Sade’s thought that a more scholarly, textual approach would miss. Bataille places Sade in the context of the Occult, in the shadows cast by Christianity, rather than in the light of the Enlightenment. Bataille writes that, in pre-Christian societies, passions were unleashed and taboos temporarily lifted in particular ritualistic contexts, which allowed for the controlled release of psychic forces. In *Erotism*, Bataille writes that “[t]ransgression in pre-Christian religions was relatively lawful; piety demanded it” (ER: 126). Under Christianity, the possibility of transgression is no longer sanctioned; it is made evil, and the ritual transgressions are transformed into Christianity’s imagined other—the Witch’s Sabbath and its attendant horrors. Writes Bataille, “[i]maginary or not, the stories of the Sabbaths mean something; they are the dream of a monstrous joy. The books of de Sade expand these tales; they go much further but still in the same direction” (ER: 127). On the face of it, this association is questionable. There are no positive references to witchcraft or other superstitious beliefs in Sade’s surviving works, and a number of explicit rejections. In the short story *An Inexplicable Affair Vouched for by an Entire Province*, Sade writes of “feeble-minded people” who believe that they can summon the ‘prince of darkness’ through strange rituals (MV: 170). In the same Enlightenment spirit, a character in *Aline et Valcour* criticises supernatural beliefs (an astrologer and *voyant* who exploits the gullibility of his clients; AV: 523). Nevertheless, insofar as it brings to light the relationship between the notion of sin and Christianity in Sade’s work, Bataille’s association is illuminating. As Nietzsche noted, Eros and sin were associated by Christianity: “Christianity gave Eros poison to drink—he did not die of it, to be sure, but degenerated into vice.”²³ The implication here is

that Bataille and Sade's association of sexuality and sin is an artefact of the Christian age. Both Sade and Bataille frequently return to it in their work, despite avowals to the contrary.

According to Bataille's 'general economics,' any system (the biosphere, or a nation, for example) receives more energy than it can expend in simply maintaining itself. Bataille holds that the supply of energy available is endless, owing to the output of the sun, and that growth is limited only by the roundness of the earth.²⁴ Part of the excess has to be expended, whether destroyed or lost without profit (it is not clear if Bataille is offering a descriptive or prescriptive thesis; insofar as he extrapolates from an *is* to an *ought* about how the world works, his theory appears to commit a straightforward naturalistic fallacy).²⁵ Bataille discusses this 'spending' in terms of luxury or 'sovereign spending,' yet his use of language suggests that it is not a straightforward economic model. He associates this 'sovereign economics' to eroticism—itself taken to be a spending of resources—the sacred, in turn defined in terms of overturning taboos, and to the notion of sacrifice, in particular human sacrifice. In turn, as noted above, Bataille associates sexuality with human sacrifice. Sade takes a central place in Bataille's association of spending, sadism, violence, and eroticism, and implies rather than directly imposes these associations onto Sade's work. In *Erotism*, Bataille writes that Sade does not formulate the principle of wasteful expenditure, "but he implies them by asserting that pleasure is more acute if it is criminal and the more abhorrent the crime the greater the pleasure..." (*ER*: 169; see also *AS* Vol. I: 23).

[Erotism] demands a boundless *energy* which, stopping at nothing, limits the destruction. In its ordinary form, it is the vice to which physicians gave the name sadism; in its reasoned, doctrinaire form, elaborated by the Marquis de Sade himself in the interminable solitude of the Bastille, it is the pinnacle, the fulfilment of limitless eroticism...eroticism responds to man's determination to merge with the universe (Bataille's italics) (*AS* Vol. II: 168).

Bataille here assumes both an innate instinct for destruction, and that such destruction is associated with a will to unify with the cosmos. The following passage, from the same discussion, is more problematic.

De Sade's doctrine is nothing more nor less than the logical consequence of these moments that deny reason. By definition, excess stands outside

reason. Reason is bound up with work and the purposeful activity that incarnates its laws. But pleasure mocks at toil, and toil we have seen to be unfavourable to the pursuit of intense pleasure (*E*: 168; similar: *AS* Vol.II:180)

Bataille makes the following assumptions here and elsewhere: a) Sade is concerned with excess; b) excess stands outside of reason; c) reason is bound up with purposeful activity and toil; and d) hence Sade is not concerned with reason. The first assumption—that Sade stands for excess, is sound, to a point (in *La Nouvelle Justine*, the character Madame d’Esterval remarks, “que serait la volupté sans excès?”; *LNJ* 2:107), as is the association of Sade with destruction and ‘limit’ experience. In Sade, there are numerous descriptions of ruinous luxury, wastage and excess. *Juliette* features elaborately staged orgies that follow roughly the same plan. There is a description of the scene, in Baroque style, detailing the drapery, the bouquets and so on, accounts of the types of food and drink, the table settings; the costumes worn by the libertines and those to be raped and killed. The action moves on to frenzied rutting, the participants and their victims dissolving into a single mass of flesh. Finally, the scene is laid waste—dead and injured victims and animals are piled high, and the pyre, described variously as the “Greek sacrifice” or “holocaust,” is lit (*J*:240-241, 585, 873, 747, 963-965, 1112, 1178; *120*: 672).²⁶ Sade, like Bataille, discusses the sublime of the spectacle of destruction, and his characters express the will to become volcanoes, that is, pure agents of destruction (Bataille *IE*:125; Sade *LNJ*2:43-45; *J*: 522, 1016-1018). Although Sade did not discuss mystic or alternate states of consciousness in his work, as Bataille implies (*LE*: 115-116, 119), his characters indeed speak of the attainment of the “greatest possible upheaval in the nervous system,” and “the final limit of what our human faculties can endure” (*J*: 340). Transgression and the overcoming of restraints through ultimately murderous acts are clearly a commonality between the two thinkers. Yet there are other aspects of Sade’s work that elude Bataille’s ‘general economy.’ In particular, Bataille’s opposition of reason, purposefulness and toil, on the one hand, and pleasure, the ‘sovereign,’ and the cessation of thought, on the other, is problematic. Here I will note that Bataille’s association of Sade with excess is problematic, and suggest that Sade’s accounts of economics, and pleasure, are very different to those of Bataille.

Sade’s characters, in particular in *Juliette*, are certainly concerned with destruction and chaos on a large scale, and spending their resources in point-

lessly extravagant ways. Although they appear to reason in terms of utility, their rationalizations are quite clearly just that—rationalizations. Where they offer reasons as to why the poorer regions of Rome should be torched, or the entire Catholic population of France should be killed, the reasons offered—usually the pretext of ‘the health of the nation’—are frequently revealed to be secondary to the urge to destroy (*J*:499-501, 726). A dialogue in *Juliette*, between Chigi and Olympia, illustrates this deep complicity between the two thinkers. Chigi, in attempting to rationalize his call for universal anarchy, makes the following claim:

I grant you that without laws the sum of crime increases, that without laws the world turns into one great volcano belching forth an uninterrupted spew of execrable crimes; and I tell you this situation is preferable, far preferable to what we have at present (*J*:732).

Likewise, in the essay “The Use Value of D.A.F. Sade,” Bataille calls for a total overturning of the established moral order, and describes Sade as the figurehead of such a revolution. His rationale, like Sade’s in the passage above, is that total chaos is preferable to the present situation—the “crushing...yoke of morality” (*UV*: 27).

Without a profound complicity with natural forces such as violent death, gushing blood, sudden catastrophes and the horrible cries of pain that accompany them, terrifying ruptures of what had seemed to be immutable, the fall into stinking filth of what had been elevated—without a sadistic understanding of an incontestably thundering and torrential nature, there could be no revolutionaries, there could only be a revolting utopian sentimentality.

...[s]ince it is true that one of a man’s attributes is the derivation of pleasure from the suffering of others, and that erotic pleasure is not only the negation of an agony that takes place at the same instant but also a lugubrious participation in that agony, it is time to choose between the conduct of cowards afraid of their own joyful excesses, and the conduct of those who judge that any given man need not cower like a hunted animal, but instead can see all the moralistic buffoons as so many dogs. (*UV*: 29, 30)

Here the similarity is clear: both Sade's Chigi and (the early, pre-World War II) Bataille call for total surrender to a purported human potential for complete chaos and destruction, on the grounds that such disorder is morally right, as morality, commonly understood, is 'oppressive.' Both essentially argue that morality should be abandoned, on allegedly moral grounds. Sade's characters do not propose a way out of this impasse, yet are apparently aware of a deeper structure at work. On several occasions in the text of *Juliette*, Sade's characters note that irrational forces are responsible for the doctrines proposed (Noirceuil, notes Juliette, has few peers "where it comes to constructing rational bases to one's irrational extravagances" ;*J*: 139). Likewise, Saint-Fond suggests that Juliette's vaunted atheism is grounded on nothing more than personal taste, or some cognitive error:

"Profoundly an atheist," I [Juliette] replied, arch enemy of the dogma of the soul's immortality, I will always prefer your system to Saint-Fond's, and I prefer the certitude of nothingness to the fear of an eternity of suffering."

"There you are," Saint-Fond rejoined, "always that perfidious egoism which is the source of all the mistakes human beings make. One arranges one's schemes *according to one's tastes and whims*, and always by drifting farther from truth. You've got to leave your passions behind when you examine a philosophical doctrine. (my italics; *J*: 401)

Hence, Sade's work coheres, although not in a straightforward way, with the notion of an 'unreason' that, for Bataille, in some sense lies beneath or outside of reason. Sade's characters' 'tastes and whims,' in this text, usually involve the desire to destroy and kill. As such, he notes the ease with which the most malignant urges can present themselves to the council of reason. Insofar as Bataille takes Sade to see in man an innate, irrational drive for destruction, and that reason plays a secondary causative role in human activity that leads to such destruction, his interpretation is correct.

Bataille's adoption of Sade is less accurate with regards to his 'economic' theory, however. According to Bataille's 'general economy,' the 'economics of scarcity,' concerned with utility, is a denial of the vitality of life. Bataille holds that societies produce more than required, and their defining operation, rather than their modes of accumulation, is 'exuberant spending;' the purposeless destruction of resources (*AS* Vol. I: 23). Yet it is straightforward to read Sade as the *opposite* of Bataille's characterisation.

The acquisition and *hoarding* of money is a recurring theme in Sade, characters obtaining almost as much pleasure from amassing wealth as from spending it. Just as, for Marx, capitalism leads to the fetishization of wealth, both Juliette and Clairwil are frequently moved to masturbation surrounded in gold. States Clairwil:

I idolize money, I've often frigged myself sitting amidst the heaps of *louis d'or* I've amassed, it's the idea that I can do whatever I like with the money before my eyes, that's what drives me wild. I find it quite natural that others have the same taste; but nonetheless I won't have you deprive yourself: only fools are unable to understand that one can be simultaneously niggardly and lavish, that one can love wasteful squandering upon one's pleasures and refuse a farthing to charity. (*J*:286; also 324, 410)

Sade's characters are, in keeping with Bataille's description of the 'sovereign,' economically parasitic (*AS* vol. III: 198). But they lack the 'sovereign indifference' to money that Bataille associates with sovereignty (*AS* Vol.I:76). The libertines are both canny and careful with their money, and know how to make it, whether selling warrants for arbitrary arrest, running brothels or gambling dens, or the contract killing of entire towns with chemical agents (*J*:213, 540, 551, 683; *120*:191). Juliette, who repeatedly states her holdings (her narrator occasionally notes the exchange rate to ensure that the reader knows exactly how wealthy she is), invests her money wisely, living on the interest. She only spends disposable income on her exploits (*J*: 409, 648, 806, 940, 1080). The Society of the Friends of Crime, a secret society of very wealthy paedophiles and murderers described in *Juliette*, is similarly prudent. It is managed in accordance to common sense, 'non-sacrificial' economic principles, and has as its primary concern the interests of its 'shareholders.' It only accepts members who can foot the annual fee of twenty-five thousand *livres* (virtually defining the libertines as an economically privileged group); where the Treasurer reports a favourable balance at the end of the year, the surplus is divided amongst the members. As a precaution, the society maintains an emergency fund to help members who get into legal difficulties (*J*: 419). The libertines also know how to acquire wealth ("for some months we had been living this frivolous and *profitable* life..." [my italics] *J*:627). In sacrifice, for Bataille, one destroys things or people for two reasons—to maintain balance, in some sense, with the cosmos,

or the biosphere, and to confront the reality of death. In Sade, as we have seen, there is a concern with unifying with the destructive principle of the world, but Sade's characters, and their societies, are equally concerned with the simple acquisition of pleasure, and with fiscal stability.

It should be noted that Bataille's outlook has points of contact with the interpretation of Sade offered by Adorno and Horkheimer, moral views excepted. On the surface, Adorno and Horkheimer's interpretation is the exact opposite of that of Bataille. Whereas for Bataille, Sade is a hero of psychic liberation, for Adorno and Horkheimer, Sade anticipates the murderous cynicism of the Nazis, and of the collapse of Enlightenment reason into instrumental exploitation. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Bataille is critical of what he considers the superficiality of contemporary thought, and, in similar tones, writes of modern thought as having reduced itself to banality, to the "belief in machines" (*IE*:28). Bataille also associates the Nazi death camps with the 'government of reason.' In keeping, seemingly, with Adorno and Horkheimer's 'negative dialectics,' Bataille places the Holocaust and Hiroshima squarely in a historical dialectic. In a review of Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive* (*Reflections on the Jewish Question*), Bataille writes: "comme les Pyramides ou l'Acropole, Auschwitz est le fait, est le signe de l'homme. L'image de l'homme est inséparable, désormais, d'une chambre à gaz" ("like the Pyramids or the Acropolis, Auschwitz is the fact, the sign of Man. From now on, the image of Man is inseparable from a gas chamber.") (*BCE* Vol. XI: 226).²⁷ If one does not hold, like Bataille, that Sade's killers are *opposed* to the exercise of reason in their killing, his interpretation of the Shoah approaches that of Adorno and Horkheimer. As Sade, according to Bataille, is opposed to 'passionate' killing (clearly, not killing per se), Bataille takes it to be an error to associate Sade with the atrocities of the Nazis. In a lecture given in 1947, Bataille states that "the definition of evil given in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* is the profound condemnation of everything that we have seen the Germans do. Because it is clear that compared to the executions of the Terror that Sade contemplated in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, Nazi executions responded still more to the images, to the suggestions of Sade."²⁸ But also, they responded continually to the fundamental objection that Sade made to the executions of the Terror since, from beginning to end, the unchaining of the passions that raged at Buchenwald or Auschwitz was an unchaining that was the government of Reason" (*EPS*: 253-254, also 244; similar *AS* Vol.III:253).²⁹ Interestingly, in this very statement, Bataille states that there is a direct relationship—that the Nazis had 'responded' to

Sade, itself a claim that goes even further than that of Camus or Adorno and Horkheimer in associating Sade with Nazism.

In conclusion, there are two related problems with Bataille's 'merge' with Sade. Firstly, Bataille's interpretation is informed by only one principle text, *The 120 Days of Sodom*, and his comments on other texts are cursory. Bataille's interpretation misses Sade's complexity. His reading is not incorrect as such; it merely fails to acknowledge a number of basic contradictions, or juxtapositions, within Sade's work.

There are a number of other generally un-Bataillian suggestions in Sade, suggesting that any monolithic interpretation is incorrect. Sade's narrative voice describes St. Peter's as a wastage of talent and resources, and criticizes duelling, dismissing it as a revolting anachronism. Additionally, his philosopher-king, Zamé, in the novel *Aline et Valcour* rejects state execution precisely *because* it is merely a secular version of human sacrifice rituals, based, as they were, on "the absurd supposition that there is nothing more dear to the Gods than human blood" (J: 657, 948; AV: 332).

The second problem with Bataille's relationship with Sade is that he (and his critics) reduce Sade to the status of esteemed but superseded antecedent of himself; someone who "knew nothing about the basic interrelation of taboo and transgression...but [who] took the first step" (ER: 196).³⁰ Nevertheless, Bataille's interpretation can be said to reveal a deeper animus within Sade's text that goes beyond the myriad contradictions at the surface level of meaning.

References

I Works by Bataille.

Bataille, Georges. *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*. trans. Micheal Richardson. London and New York: Verso, 1994.

_____. *The Accursed Share* (3 vols.) trans. Robert Hurley. New York/Zone Books, 1991- 1993.

_____. *Le Bleu du Ciel*. Paris: Collection 10:18, 1957.

_____. *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. trans. Mary Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986.

_____. "Evil in Platonism and Sadism" trans. El Albert, in *Must we burn Sade?* ed. Deepak Narang Sawhney, 243-262. New York: Humanity Books, 1999.

_____. *Literature and Evil*. trans. Alaiaster Hamilton. New York and London: Marion Boyars, 1997.

_____. *Inner Experience*. trans. Leslie Anne Bolt. New York: SUNY Press, 1988.

—————. *Madame Edwarda, La Mort, Histoire de l'œil*. (in one volume). Paris: Collection 10:18, 1973.

—————. *Ma Mère*. Paris 10:18, 1966.

—————. *Story of the Eye by Lord Auch*. trans. Joachim Neugroschel. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1977.

—————. *The Tears of Eros*. trans. Peter Connor. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989.

—————. “The Use Value of D.A.F.Sade (an open letter to my current comrades)” trans. Allan Stoekl, in David B. Allison, Mark S. Roberts and Allen S. Weiss, editors, *Sade and the Narrative of Transgression*, 16-32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

II. Works by Sade.

Sade, Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de. *The Crimes of Love*. trans. Margaret Crosland. London: Peter Owen, 1996.

—————. *The Gothic tales of the Marquis de Sade* trans. Margaret Crosland London: Picador, 1990.

—————. *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writing*. trans. Richard Seaver. New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000.

—————. *The Misfortunes of Virtue and other early tales*. trans. David Coward . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

—————. *La Nouvelle Justine* (2 vols). Paris : Collection 10 :18, 1978.

—————. *Œuvres complètes* (15 vols). édition mise en place par Annie le Brun et Jean-Jacques Pauvert. Pauvert: Paris, 1986-1991.

—————. *Aline et Valcour ou le Roman philosophique*. ed. Jean M. Goulemot Paris : le livre de poche, 1994.

—————. *[the story of] Juliette [or, Prosperities of Vice]*. trans. Austryn Wainhouse. New York: Grove, 1968.

—————. *The 120 Days of Sodom and other writings*. trans. Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver. New York: Arrow, 1990.

III Other Sources.

Bennington, Geoffrey. “Introduction to Economics I” in *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*. Ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill, 46-57. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Champagne, Roland A. *Georges Bataille*. New York: Twane Publishers, 1998.

Hegarty, Paul. *Georges Bataille: Core Cultural Theorist*. London: SAGE Publications, 2000.

Josephs, Herbert. “Sade and Woman: Exorcising the Awe of the Sacred” in *Studies in Burke and his Time* 18 (177): 99-113.

La Mettrie, Julien Offray De. *Machine Man and Other Writings* translated and edited by Ann Thomson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Laugaa-Traut, Françoise. *Lectures de Sade*. Paris : Armand Colin, 1973.

Le Brun, Annie. *Sade: A Sudden Abyss* trans. Camille Nash. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* trans. R.J. Hollingdale with an introduction by Michael Tanner. London: Penguin, 1999.

Richardson, Michael. "Introduction," in Georges Bataille *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* trans. Micheal Richardson, 1-27. London and New York: Verso, 1994.

Surya, Michel. *Bataille: An Intellectual Biography* trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. London and New York: Verso; 2002.

Endnotes

¹ Georges Bataille "The Use Value of D.A.F.Sade (an open letter to my current comrades)" trans. Allan Stoekl, in David B. Allison, Mark S. Roberts and Allen S. Weiss, editors, *Sade and the Narrative of Transgression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) pp.16-32. See also Michel Surya *Bataille: An Intellectual Biography* trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London and New York: Verso; 2002) p.264.

² Georges Bataille *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986)

———. *Literature and Evil* trans. Alaister Hamilton (New York and London: Marion Boyars, 1997)

———. *Story of the Eye by Lord Auch* trans. Joachim Neugroschel (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1977)

———. *The Tears of Eros* trans. Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989)

———. *The Accursed Share* (in three volumes) trans. Robert Hurley (New York/Zone Books. Vol. I: 1991; Vol. II and III: 1993).

³ In Bataille's Novel *Story of the Eye*, for example, a "scrumptious streetwalker from Madrid" is raped in a pigsty full of liquid manure, and the spectacle of a decapitated car crash victim- a young girl- is described as "very beautiful." In an outline for a sequel (set fifteen years after the original, placing the action in 1943), the heroine 'accidentally' finds herself in a 'torture camp' and is beaten to death in a scene Bataille describes as, again, very beautiful (*SE*: 5, 55,102). According to Bataille's biographer Michel Surya, in 1944 Bataille planned to make a pornographic film based on *The 120 Days of Sodom*. The main character, a soap manufacturer, acts out scenes from Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* with some prostitutes, eventually killing one of them. See Surya p.349.

⁴ For discussion, see Surya p.430.

⁵ For discussion of Bataille's moral nihilism, see *IE*: 136; *E*: 171 *AS I* p.152-153; III: 370; 448 n37; *EPS*: .250; also Surya p.323.

⁶ Bataille frequently dismisses traditional philosophers as 'system builders', 'babblers,' 'insects' and 'careful little men' (*IE*: xi, xxii, 14, 66) and reason itself as 'puerile' (*AS* Vol. III p.256). For explanations for Bataille's mystic epistemology, see *ER*: 123, 149,162, 256; *AS* Vol. I: 58, 191.

⁷ “La Vérité” In *Œuvres complètes du Marquis de Sade* edited by Annie Le Brun and Jean-Jacques Pauvert (Paris: Pauvert, 1986). Vol. I: 553-556, p.556.

⁸ Michael Richardson, “Introduction,” in Georges Bataille *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* trans. Micheal Richardson (London and New York: Verso, 1994):1-27, p.19.

⁹ Nevertheless, Bataille insists that he is in fact free from Christian doctrine and, further, that there is an “indefinite and general taboo” against sexual liberty as opposed to that associated with Christianity; *ER*: 92.

¹⁰ Paul Hegarty *Georges Bataille: Core Cultural Theorist* (London: SAGE Publications, 2000) pp.105-106.

¹¹ Georges Bataille *Inner Experience* trans. with an introduction by Leslie Anne Bolt (New York: SUNY Press, 1988). In *The Story of the Eye*, Bataille describes “going beyond all limits” as sucking the breast of a girlfriend and simultaneously urinating in the presence of her mother. *Story of the Eye* p.39-40.

¹² ‘Critics’ of Bataille often describe his work as preoccupied with ‘play’ and ‘communion,’ as opposed to total egotism and the treatment of the other as a mere victim of aggression. Roland Champagne writes that “[e]roticism for Bataille is an avenue of access into the playfulness of human sovereignty and the abyss, an image crucial to Bataille’s literary art of death and anxiety.” In similar terms, Micheal Richardson writes: “[w]hat is at stake in sex for Bataille is communication between two beings, and in pushing sexuality to its limits, he wants to test to breaking point the emotional boundaries of the personality of the man and the woman.” Bataille’s treatment of Sade complicates this interpretation. Roland A. Champagne *Georges Bataille* (New York: Twane Publishers, 1998) p.65; Richardson p.16.

¹³ Note that this argument does not actually concern sadism as such, but the destruction of objects.

¹⁴ In *Juliette*, this character is referred to as Amélie, not “Amélie de Sade.”

¹⁵ Annie Le Brun *Sade : A Sudden Abyss* trans. Camille Nash (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990) p.91.

¹⁶ Juliette’s argument is poor. She reasons that, as all of life’s necessities carry some element of pleasure, and death is a necessity, then death must be pleasurable. Juliette states that it is common knowledge that death is accompanied by a ‘discharge’, probably referring to the common knowledge that a hanged man has an erection and ejaculates. This illustrates Sade’s understanding that female orgasm, like that of men, is accompanied by a ‘discharge.’ The idea that death could be sexually exciting is one of the central themes of Nagisa Oshima’s film *the Realm of the Senses* (1976).

¹⁷ La Mettrie, for whom death is “not without a certain voluptuousness,” may have had an influence on Sade on this point. La Mettrie also wrote that he wished to die accompanied by beautiful women, preferably while having sex- “I want it to be difficult to say which

contributed most to my end, Fate or voluptuousness.” Julien Offray De La Mettrie *Machine Man and Other Writings* translated and edited by Ann Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp.107-108, 114). This image is repeated in Sade’s *Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man*; PB: 175.

¹⁸ The ‘proof of love’ theory does not really explain why anyone would want to show their love though overcoming their physical revulsion with *sex*. One could show one’s goodwill or even love by cleaning or unblocking a friend’s toilet, but this is done for the benefit of having a toilet that works and is clean. In Bataille’s scheme, there is no parallel function to sex, as it is not pleasurable as such. In any case, the lack of fit with psychological reality hardly requires comment.

¹⁹ Sade discusses the piquancy of sex with hideously ugly people in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, but his theory is based on a comparatively straightforward theory of pleasure (120: 233). Bataille discusses necrophilia in *Le Mort*. See Bataille *Madame Edwarda, Le Mort, Histoire de l’œil* (in one volume) (Paris: Collection 10:18, 1973).

²⁰ Bataille makes a single reference to coprophilia, in the novel *Le bleu du Ciel* (Paris: Jean-Paul Pauvert, 1957) pp.84-85.

²¹ For discussion of the absence of vaginal penetration in Bataille, see Paul Hegarty *Georges Bataille: Core Cultural Theorist* (London: SAGE Publications, 2000) p.127.

²² Edmond and Jules de Goncourt (1860) and J.K.Huysmans (1885) regarded Sade’s apparent hatred of the body as a symptom of Catholic atavism. For discussion, see Françoise Laugaa-Traut, *Lectures de Sade* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1973) pp. 147,165; Herbert Josephs “Sade and Woman: Exorcising the Awe of the Sacred” in *Studies in Burke and his Time* 18 (177): 99-113 pp.102, 104, 111. In *La Nouvelle Justine*, Sade does indeed refer to the “exécrables chairs” (execrable flesh) of his characters’ victims (LNJ 2: 73).

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil* trans. R.J. Hollingdale with an introduction by Michael Tanner (London: Penguin, 1999) § 168 p.105.

²⁴ Geoffrey Bennington “Introduction to Economics I” In Bailey Gill, Caroline, ed. *Bataille: Writing the Sacred* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995): 46-57, p.49.

²⁵ Where Bataille- paradoxically- offers *reasons* as to why one should spend excessively, his goals seem reasonable. For example, Bataille held that the extravagant spending of resources would prevent wars. Bataille had not considered the opposite claim- that wars are frequently brought about by competition for scarce resources or territory. See Bennington “Introduction to Economics I” p.50.

²⁶ Sade appears to be the first writer to associate the term ‘holocaust’ with mass murder. In his age, the word was applied to fires of great destructiveness- although his usage follows the original sense. Three further examples: “Laurette, leur mère, et mme de Verneuil devaient contenir les holocaustes...” (LNJ 2:216) “...atop the holocaust, bound hand and foot, the

old crone was burned alive...: (*J*: 747). "...go undress the four destined for holocaust..." (*J*: 1178).

²⁷ For discussion of Bataille's thoughts on Hiroshima revealing a 'new morality,' see Surya pp. 360- 362, 416, 433.

²⁸ There are no Terrors or executions actually described in *Bedroom*, although there are allusions to the Terror in the inserted pamphlet, *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans*. Bataille may also be referring to the executions that Sade witnessed during the Terror, which took place as Sade was writing this text.

²⁹ Georges Bataille "Evil in Platonism and Sadism" trans. El Albert, in Deepak Sawhney, editor *Must we burn Sade?* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999) pp.243-262.

³⁰ Roland A. Champagne, for example, writes that Bataille "projects Sade's insights farther than could be seen in the Eighteenth century." Ronald A. Champagne *Georges Bataille* (New York: Twane Publishers, 1998) p.25.

Author's note: Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Geoffrey Roche. Email: geoffreythomasroche@lycos.com.