



In Sade's Shadow

**ANTI-MORALITY MOVEMENT In Sade's Shadow — Formerly published in the magazine April 9, 2001
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In describing the prevailing worldview of our cultural elite, the terms “immoral” and “amoral” are both inadequate. A more suitable description would be “anti-moral.” “Immorality” refers to the conscious violation of ethical principles that one accepts, but either cannot or will not abide; the term “amorality” describes the conceit that one enjoys an exemption from the moral laws that govern the rest of mankind. Isaiah warned: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness.” Adherents of “anti-morality” transpose good and evil in exactly this fashion, as a prelude to the abolition of morality altogether.

Not surprisingly, it is in the realm of mass entertainment that the influence of the anti-morality movement is most visible, and the glut of “bent” stories produced for public consumption offers a useful illustration of the movement's impact. “Bent stories portray evil as good, and good as evil,” advises Oliver Van de Mille, president of George Wythe College. “Such stories are meant to enhance the evil tendencies of the reader, such as pornography and many horror stories and movies.” Other narrative models described by Van de Mille are “broken” stories — which accurately depict good and evil, but allow the latter to triumph — and “whole” stories, in which good is victorious over evil. “Broken” stories, such as *1984*, can be useful if they fortify the moral determination of the reader. However, “bent” stories are innately corrupting and should be shunned.

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Two movies in current release — one of them a critical success and commercial failure, the other a resounding commercial success despite an ambivalent critical reception — offer museum-quality specimens of “bent” stories. *Quills*, an acclaimed film version of the award-winning play by Gregory Wright, exalts the Marquis de Sade as a symbol of persecuted creativity and artistic integrity. *Hannibal*, the sequel to the multiple Oscar-winning 1991 film *The Silence of the Lambs*, makes a cultural icon out of a character of whom Sade would have approved: Hannibal Lecter, an urbane, seemingly invincible cannibal who is cast as the vindicator of good taste and the eccentric defender of truth and beauty. To date, *Hannibal* has grossed more than \$150,000,000, suggesting that the market for “bent” stories is vast and lucrative — and portending ominous developments for the side of tradition in America's ever-escalating culture war.

Maker of the Modern World





Written by [Bonnie Gillis](#) on January 13, 2001

The Marquis de Sade, observes historian Erik von Kuhneldt-Leddihn, has been hailed as the “grandfather of modern democracy.” His influence is primarily attested by the word that bears his name — “sadism,” the practice of extracting personal gratification from the suffering of others. Although it is quite remarkable that an 18th-century degenerate who spent most of his adult life in prison would be immortalized in our language, this doesn’t begin to account for Sade’s impact. As historian Geoffrey Ashe observes in his book *The Hell-Fire Clubs: A History of Anti-Morality*, Sade was “the first clear prefigurer of the world we now live in.” His works of fiction — particularly his detestable magnum opus, *Juliette* — express in remarkable detail the outlook, tactics, and objectives of the revolutionary Left. Those who read that book, or as much of it as they can absorb without retching, cannot help but be astonished by the way in which Sade, as if through diabolical revelation, anticipated the modern world.

The book is a relentless barrage of scatological pornography, profanity, and blasphemy — something like what one would expect were Larry Flynt to dictate a novel under the influence of Tourette’s syndrome. Scattered among the vignettes of perversity can be found occasional soliloquies in which Sade’s characters give voice to the author’s worldview, including the central tenet of Sade’s anti-philosophy: “Were I to discover that my only possibility of happiness lay in excessive perpetration of the most atrocious crimes, without a qualm I’d enact every last one of them this very instant, certain ... that the foremost of the laws Nature decrees to me is *to enjoy myself, no matter at whose expense.*” (Emphasis in original.)

Despite the fact that Sade insisted that “Nature” demanded such an unconditional surrender to depraved appetites, he recognized that this could only be accomplished through the suppression of the conscience. More than a century before cultural revolutionaries, adapting Freud’s dogmas to the assault upon Western moral traditions, would denounce all restraints on individual behavior as “repression,” Sade evangelized on behalf of the “liberating” effects of degeneracy.

“Modesty is an illusion,” insisted one of “Juliette’s” tutors in blasphemy and perversion, “the result of nought but our cultural manners and our upbringing.” Conscience, Sade insisted, is likewise nothing but a reflection of “prejudices inculcated by training and upbringing.... Veritable wisdom, my dear Juliette, consists not in repressing one’s vices.... The true and approved way is to surrender oneself to them, to practice them to the utmost.... It consists simply in reiterating the deeds that have made us remorseful, in repeating them so often that the habit either of committing these deeds or of getting away scot free with them completely undermines the possibility of feeling badly about them. This habit topples the prejudice, destroys it.... This habit at length makes [the vice] wholly bearable and even delicious to the soul.”

These admonitions bear more than a passing similarity to the “safe sex” and pro-homosexuality indoctrination inflicted upon inmates of contemporary public (government) schools — and Sade clearly anticipated this development as well. He urged that his disciples “create public schools where, as soon as they are weaned, the young may be reared; installed therein as ward of the State, the child can forget even his mother’s name. After he has grown up, let him in turn couple indiscriminately, democratically, with his mates and brethren, doing as his parents did before him.”

From Sade’s perspective, the children raised by the State to become sexual predators would be only those considered worthy of life. “The embryo is to be considered the woman’s exclusive property ... she can dispose of it as she likes,” he wrote in a passage that could have been found in a Planned Parenthood press release. “She can destroy it in the depths of her womb if it proves a nuisance to her. Or after it ripens and is born, if she is for any reason displeased with it or irked at having produced it,



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she can destroy it then; whatever the circumstances, infanticide is her sacred right. Her Spawn is hers, entirely hers ... [and] the mother may feed it or she may strangle it, depending upon her preference."

Unlike modern defenders of the "death ethic," Sade did not dissimulate the logical implications of his view that murder could be justified as a "choice": He was as unabashedly "pro-choice" regarding genocide as he was regarding abortion and infanticide. "If from immolating three million human victims you stand to gain no livelier pleasure than that to be had from eating a good dinner," he advises his disciples, "you ought to treat yourself to it without an instant's hesitation." Anticipating radical environmentalism, Sade insisted that "Nature stands in not the slightest need of [human] propagation; and the total disappearance of mankind ... would grieve her very little."

This is not to say that Sade approved of all forms of homicide. He wrote that hearing mention of God "rouses my ire.... When I hear His name pronounced I seem to see all around me the palpitating shades of all those woebegone creatures this abominable opinion has slaughtered on the face of the earth." Despite the fact that Sade played a role in precipitating the French Revolution (imprisoned in the Bastille prior to its "liberation" on July 14, 1789, Sade had propagated disinformation about the mistreatment of its inhabitants), he could not bring himself to approve of the Terror. As Geoffrey Ashe points out, the French Revolutionary Terror "did not please him at all, because the killing was being done from a bad motive, politics instead of pleasure."

But the "pleasures" pursued through sadism — which is born, wrote the Marquis, of "conquered repugnances" — are self-nullifying. "The perfected Sadist has to live on a mental level which very few could attain," observes Ashe. "He asserts freedom by the only nonconformity that is still open: trying coolly to beat horrific Nature at her own game. He has passed beyond ordinary enjoyment into a conscious, experimental stoicism of sex and violence, where every frenzy is self-induced and under control. He has no feelings as most human beings have them; no love, of course; no inclination to value anything for its own sake ... except as it gives him greater pleasure.... He is entangled with nobody, has an exterminatory contempt for everyone except his co-Sadists, and is ready to betray even them."

The dramatic climax of *Juliette* captures the essence of Sade's "exterminatory contempt" for all things decent and beautiful: The heroine, with the help of the Pope, performs a black mass in which a pregnant girl is murdered on an altar in the Vatican.

The Marquis de Sade as Exemplar

Although *Quills* has had little commercial impact, it was a "prestige project" and has garnered almost unanimous critical acclaim — as well as an Oscar nomination for Geoffrey Rush, who plays the Marquis. "I've never had a better time making a film," rhapsodizes director Philip Kaufman. "At every stage, we arrived each day brimming with anticipation, hugged one another and began dialogues that were heated, emotional, philosophical, and wonderfully silly.... The Marquis, we said, would have loved it. Hopefully that love we had has found its way onto the screen."

Screenwriter Doug Wright, who adapted his award-winning stage script for the film, explains that in assembling his screenplay he tried "to write with the same malicious glee de Sade himself must have felt as he catapulted his way through [his lost work] *120 Days of Sodom*." He praises Sade for creating "scenes so depraved — so preposterous — they set a new benchmark for perversity in literature" and insists that *Quills* is intended "to address critical issues in our time." The film's publicity material defines those "issues" as the battle "between the brutality of censorship and the unpredictable consequences of free expression."



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“I saw it as a debate about the forces of repression,” observes star Geoffrey Rush. To embody “repression,” the film’s creators seized upon the figure of Dr. Royer-Collard, the priest-physician who tried to treat Sade during his final days at the asylum of Charenton. Believing that not even Sade was beyond the reach of God’s grace, Dr. Royer-Collard treated his charge with solicitude and compassion. In the film, however, the doctor is depicted — in predictable Freudian fashion — as a depraved hypocrite who derives satisfaction from tormenting Sade, and who indulges in precisely the varieties of hideous perversity that the Marquis celebrated in his works.

The libelous caricature of Royer-Collard is given life by British actor Michael Caine who, boasts the film’s publicity materials, is “fresh off his Oscar-winning role as a far more benevolent doctor in ‘Cider House Rules.’” That “benevolent” doctor, of course, was a drug-addicted abortionist named Wilbur Larch who ran a combination orphanage and abortion mill. “I give [women] what they want — an orphan or an abortion,” explained Larch. If a woman chose the former, her child was given a home at the St. Cloud orphanage until he was adopted; if the latter option prevailed, the child was killed and his remains were destroyed in a nearby incinerator. The “benevolent” Larch was a suitable symbol of Sade’s view that infanticide at any stage is a woman’s “sacred right.”

Quills’ Dr. Royer-Collard, however, is a man without such redeeming “benevolence.” “I like playing characters who are sinister, but I look for a way to give them some kind of redeeming qualities,” said Caine. “But when I first read through my part [as Dr. Royer-Collard], I thought ‘this man is so evil, there is nowhere to go with it.’” In defining the doctor’s malevolence, Kaufman invokes a figure who has become an icon of evil for the Hollywood Left: “We spoke of his character in terms of being a Kenneth Starr-like man who pursues virtue unaware of his own lack of it.... I think the Marquis would have loved this depiction of hypocrisy perfected.” And the *real* Dr. Royer-Collard, we suspect, would have prayed for those who have libeled his good name while extolling the evil Sade.

In his positive review of *Quills*, film critic Roger Ebert complains that Kaufman’s intended analogy with modern times “breaks down ... if we seek a correspondence between de Sade and President Clinton, whose milder transgressions would have flown quite beneath the Marquis’ radar.” Ebert is much too stingy in his assessment of the ex-president’s accomplishments as a sadist. Surely the Marquis would look with fond approval upon a politician who killed people in three countries — Sudan, Afghanistan, and Iraq — by ordering military strikes to divert public attention from the political and legal consequences of his sexual depravity. He would probably express similar approval for an electorate who would allow its president to commit such crimes and remain unpunished.

The Cultivated Cannibal

According to *Premiere* magazine, actors Anthony Hopkins and Julianne Moore were White House dinner guests of Bill Clinton during the production of *Hannibal*, the most recent cinematic treatment of novelist Robert Harris’ mordant cannibal and serial killer, Hannibal Lecter. Harris’ 1999 novel of the same name was an instant best-seller in spite of an ending that was almost universally reviled: FBI agent Clarice Starling (Moore), having zealously pursued Lecter (Hopkins), becomes the villain’s consort and joins him in cannibalism.

Lecter was a peripheral character in two previous films made from Harris’ novels, *Manhunter* and *The Silence of the Lambs*. Having escaped from prison in the second film, Lecter is pursued throughout most of the third movie by a multi-millionaire victim named Mason Verger. Before being imprisoned, Lecter had been a psychiatrist. While treating Verger and his sister (whom Verger had sexually molested), Lecter drugged his patient and then induced him to cut off his own face and feed it to a dog



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— an event that is reportedly depicted in vivid detail in the film. (Although he has read the novel, your author will not see *Hannibal*, nor will he see *Quills*.) As a result, Verger is disfigured beyond recognition.

“Now that ceaseless exposure has calloused us to the lewd and vulgar,” writes Harris in the novel, “it is instructive to see what still seems wicked to us.” Harris makes it clear that “wickedness” can only be found among those who are insufficiently “progressive.” Thus he makes Verger, a drug-abusing incestuous child molester, a professed born-again Christian. In keeping with the well-established conventions of the entertainment industry, it is Verger — not Hannibal Lecter — who is the primary villain of the story. The secondary villain is Agent Krendler, Clarice Starling’s supervisor. Repeatedly spurned by Starling, Krendler seeks to sabotage her career. Predictably, Krendler is a reflexive “sexist” and “homophobe” (at one point he casually comments that Lecter’s refined taste in art, music, and gourmet cuisine suggested that he was a “queer”). Thus in both the book and the movie Krendler meets with a hideous end. Lecter captures and drugs the FBI agent and — while the victim is still conscious — carves up sections of his brain and feeds it to him.

The Marquis de Sade emphasized that in order to vanquish the conscience it is necessary to deaden one’s reaction to violence and depravity. That *Hannibal* was both a record-shattering print best-seller and a monumental box office blockbuster as a film attests to the fact that America’s entertainment consumers have been well-tutored in sadism. “Many still alive will recall when a movie like this could not be contemplated, let alone filmed and released,” comments Roger Ebert (in an indifferently positive review). “So great is our sophistication that we giggle when earlier generations would have retched.” In fact, the largely negative word-of-mouth “buzz” on *Hannibal* doesn’t criticize the film for its lurid, gratuitous gore, but rather because it is “boring.”

In a remarkable review of the film for the cyber journal Salon, Charles Taylor echoes Ebert’s point. “Hannibal ... represents what happens when mainstream Hollywood studios ... adopt the tactics of exploitation films they once shunned, and do so with all the money and gloss at their disposal.” Lecter’s urbanity and suavity are clearly intended to seduce the audience, rather than to reflect reality. “Hasn’t anybody noticed that real-life monsters like Ed Gein, John Wayne Gacy ... Ted Bundy, John List and Jeffrey Dahmer all tend to be bland and blobby and inarticulate?” asks Taylor. Lecter is charismatic, witty, and blessed with almost superhuman abilities — traits generally associated with fictional heroes.

Lecter is a man of “ferocious intelligence; cultured, literate and tasteful,” commented the July 24, 1999 *Manchester Guardian*. “A man whose moral code is, at one level, completely at odds with society, yet a man who is consistently more attractive, intelligent and sensitive than many of the people who are out to get him.” In this most recent — but not final — installment, Lecter “accomplishes nothing less than the final inversion of morality by wooing both the reader [or viewer] and the good guys over to his side.... No wonder his enemies are born-again Christians with a penchant for biblical language. And no wonder the literary editors are drooling over him.... Long live Hannibal. Just so long as one isn’t his next meal. What the hell, at least one would be consumed by a liberal cause.”

Who Consumes Whom?

Los Angeles Times critic Eugen Weber correctly describes Lecter as the embodiment of Sade’s first rule of nature, which is “to seek my pleasure, no matter at whose expense.” Sade’s “first rule” is broadly synonymous with what Lenin called the basic question of politics — “*Kto kogo?*” Typically translated as “Who does what to whom?” the Russian phrase can also be rendered, “Who consumes whom?” The essential assumption of communism, which it shares with its sibling ideologies socialism and



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democracy, is that some people are entitled to consume others by using the state to plunder their wealth — and to liquidate those who resist this arrangement.

Hannibal Lecter, like the depraved characters given fictional life by Sade, glorifies the consumption of other human beings for individual gratification. It took the depraved genius of Marx, Lenin, and their disciples — and other practitioners of modern totalitarianism — to systematize such consumption as an ideology. It is incorrect to regard communism as an economic philosophy; rather, it is a rationalization for total power and a means of mobilizing hatred toward that end.

Lenin defined the “scientific concept of dictatorship” as “power without limit, resting directly upon force, restrained by no laws, absolutely unrestrained by rules.” Italian communist theoretician Antonio Gramsci contributed a critical refinement to Lenin’s doctrine by emphasizing the need to undermine all moral impediments on the consolidation of power by a communist elite. In order for communism to triumph, wrote Gramsci, “The conception of law will have to be freed from every remnant of transcendence and absoluteness, practically from all moralist fanaticism.”

Thus the destruction of “rules” — laws, customs, traditions, and institutions that are rooted in permanent standards of right and wrong — is a necessary prelude to the creation of the total state. This is the objective of the modern anti-morality movement — and the early Bolsheviks were occasionally quite candid about this aspect of their program.

“We reject the old systems of morality,” declared the first issue of *Krasnyi Mech* (The Red Sword), a newspaper published by the Cheka (the ancestor of the KGB). “Our morality has no precedent, and our humanity is absolute because it rests on a new ideal. Our aim is to destroy all forms of oppression and violence. To us, everything is permitted, for we are the first to raise the sword not to oppress races and reduce them to slavery, but to liberate humanity from its shackles.... Blood? Let blood flow like water ... for only through the death of the old world can we liberate ourselves.”

Not surprisingly, the ranks of the Cheka — the chief instrument of Soviet terror — were quickly filled by the most degenerate elements of society. “This organization is rotten to the core,” observed Bolshevik official Serafina Gopner in a March 22, 1919 letter to Lenin. Those who enlisted to be the “sword and shield” of the revolution were, almost without exception, “common criminals and the dregs of society, men armed to the teeth who simply execute anyone they don’t like. They steal, loot, rape ... practice extortion and blackmail, and will let anyone go in exchange for huge sums of money.”

“The Cheka are looting and arresting everyone indiscriminately,” reported a Bolshevik regional secretary in Yaroslavl on September 26th of the same year. “Safe in the knowledge that they cannot be punished, they have transformed the Cheka headquarters into a huge brothel where they take all the bourgeois women. Drunkenness is rife. Cocaine is being used quite widely among the supervisors.”

A dispatch to Moscow dated October 16th informed Feliks Dzherzhinsky, the head of the secret police, that “Orgies and drunkenness are daily occurrences. Almost all the personnel of the Cheka are heavy cocaine users. They say that this helps them deal with the sight of so much blood on a daily basis. Drunk with blood and violence, the Cheka is doing its duty, but it is made up of uncontrollable elements that will require close surveillance.” Although they invoked the doctrines of Marx and followed the directives of Lenin, the depredations committed by the Chekists paid tribute to communism’s little-acknowledged founding father, the Marquis de Sade.

According to Augustine, “A man has as many masters as he has vices.” The desire of adherents of anti-morality, from Sade to his contemporary disciples in America’s entertainment cartel, is to *dominate*, not



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to *liberate* — to entice their victims into surrendering the moral restraints that are indispensable to individual liberty.

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