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Frederic Conrod

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From Voltaire's
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Frédéric Conrod

In France, the *récit de voyage* became an extremely popular genre in the decades preceding the Revolution, and continued to develop through the turn of the nineteenth century. In parallel and without the experience of travel, the philosophers of the French Enlightenment parodied and recycled these *récits* in experimental writings in order to depict *other* realities and *other* customs in relation to their own reflection of a French political reality in interaction with neighboring national entities. For instance, Denis Diderot writes a *Supplément* to explorer Bougainville's *Voyage*, an account that depicts the social and sexual customs of Tahiti, a country he will never visit, in order to question France's historical morality in compari-

son with the one found in Northern European nations. Meanwhile, Rousseau will develop the concept of the *noble sauvage* from his 1754 *Discours sur les inégalités* to his 1762 prologue to the *Emile*, and seeks the origins of social orders in which the old nations undergo a serious questioning of its philosophical foundations. In order to concentrate and distill this *esprit du temps* in a more democratic and accessible narrative genre, Voltaire writes a series of philosophical tales taking place in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas, places to which he will never travel. But these imaginary travel accounts do not always depict remote lands from other continents. In the tradition of Cyrano de Bergerac's *Histoire comique des états et empires de la Lune* (circa 1650) and the *libertinage d'esprit*, Voltaire likes to treat the old Catholic South as if it were a newly discovered land. After his death and the Revolution, the marquis de Sade will pursue this effort and offer more instances of imaginary travel accounts from the Catholic South of Europe, this philosophical *other* that places France in a position of transition between its religious configuration determined by Rome who claims her at her "eldest daughter" and the ideas coming out of the Protestant nations at its North, that is England, the Netherlands and Germany. I propose to analyze here Voltaire's depiction of the Iberian Peninsula and its ritualistic folklore in juxtaposition to Sade's re-exploration of Italy and the Vatican in order to offer an understanding of the agenda of these philosophers in their use of emerging narrative devices.

From his isolated house in the Jura mountains, a few kilometers from the Swiss border, Voltaire spent a great part of his life overlooking Western Europe while escaping and reflecting upon many of its political regimes. Even though his large house in Ferney was in no way the realization of a utopia, the philosopher contemplated and imagined from his own liminal space the rest of creation in an emerging genre he develops around the juxtaposition of fantastic elements with historical realities, the philosophical tale. In *Scarmentado*, *Candide*, *Zadig*, *L'Ingénu*, *La Princesse de Babylone*, Voltaire almost forces his protagonists to wander frantically through contrasted countries. According to Sánchez y Escribano's *Actitud Neoclásica de Voltaire Ante el Barroco Español* (1953), his descriptions are in no way realistic or neutral but typically neoclassical. On the contrary, scientific progress is often exaggerated, Northern societies are idealized, and southern feudalistic worldviews highly condemned, as we shall see in *Candide* or *La Princesse de Babylone*.¹

¹ Voltaire, *La Princesse de Babylone* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995).

As we know, time periods are often intertwined and factual exactitude is not always of order in Voltaire's philosophical tales. Above all, these tales function as laboratory where Voltaire compares all the opposing energies of eighteenth-century Europe, within the continent as well as without it.

In the emerging genre of the philosophical tale² diffused in the underground of the courts of France, England and Germany, the exiled writer paints the Iberian Peninsula as a place of anti-Enlightenment, an opposite pole of the evolution globe, which would place England as the Enlightened Nation of Newton, Locke and Hume, while Spain is the dark side of that same sphere, the land of all superstitions, the dry plateau that chases its desperate intellectuals and artists out of its borders. In this sense, Voltaire's perception and representation of Spain echoes exiled Spanish painter Francisco Goya's in his series of *pinturas negras*, famous for his *Sueño de la Razón* (Sleep of Reason). Goya confirms in these dark allegories Spain's rejection of the Enlightenment altogether and its desire to remain deeply anchored in repetitive and totalitarian traditions and festivals. Goya's insider's look has a strong correspondence with Voltaire's outsider and remote painting of Catholic practices in Spain and Portugal. As Alfonso de Salvio insisted in his 1924 article titled "Voltaire and Spain," the major difference between the two artists was "that Voltaire possessed little knowledge of Spanish culture."³ French intellectuals rarely passed the natural border of the Pyrenees and often considered its other side to be part of Africa.⁴ Prior to the reign of Carlos III de Borbón (1759–1788), Madrid and the Escorial were not attractive destinations and wished to keep on projecting this image onto the dangerous philosophers of the North, such as Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau.

Of course, these deliberately darker and oftentimes satirical snapshots of the Iberian world in French literature were common publications since the rise of the *nouvelle espagnole* in seventeenth-century court life, a genre that emphasizes the moral contradictions of France's southern neighbor nation. But in Voltaire's tales, it goes beyond the mere entertaining function of stereotypes and double standards of morality. Like Diderot and the marquis de Sade, Voltaire has a whole political agenda against the potential development

² Philosophical tales allow the narrator to intervene more than other narrative genres given its foundation on a comic contrast between the utopia of imagined remote societies and the realities of the Old Christian World (Western Europe).

³ Alfonso de Salvio, "Voltaire and Spain," *Hispania* 7 (1924): 69–110.

⁴ Reference to Buffon's famous interjection: "Mais que doit-on à l'Espagne?"

of a Catholic Enlightenment⁵ along with its religious and political agenda. Paradoxically, their common Jesuit education has turned them into the worst possible ideological enemies of their former teachers. Since Pascal and his *Lettres Provinciales*, French philosophers in general have a clear tendency to associate the Jesuits with southern Europe's refusal to embrace the new philosophical era, and this extremely controversial religious order is particularly linked to Spain, from where their founder Ignatius of Loyola originated.

Spain and Portugal stand as very provocative symbols for Northern Enlightenment philosophy since they embody the material to be criticized, the cradle of all injustices, the artistically unproductive nations, the land of the antihumanistic *conquistadores* who have forced slavery into the New World, and, ultimately, the declining Empires whose political power decomposes between two interventions of an aging Inquisition. The figure of Torquemada, the emblematic Inquisitor-general who lived in the fifteenth century, is the most symbolical instance of Spanish rejection of progress through philosophy, and continues to be a literary motif in France throughout the nineteenth century, as we see in Victor Hugo's play *Torquemada*, published in 1882. Voltaire had come to the clear-cut conclusion that in Spain "sane philosophy was always ignored. The Inquisition and superstition perpetuated their scholastic errors" (Salvio 1924, 159). Spain offers a striking exaggeration of France's own ancien régime.

Voltaire's most famous hero, Candide, arrives to Spain soon after he is thrown out of his original Westphalia, an ideal world that has been destroyed and violated by Bulgarian soldiers. From there he follows the course of the sun to one significant end of the European continent, Lisbon. The Spanish and Portuguese episode in the tale is essential since Candide will embark for the New World as he is trying to escape the horrible reality of the Peninsula. The philosopher does not make any effort to distinguish the two cultures here, in the same fashion that he emphasizes that Inquisitors and Jews are made of the same cloth, since they share the same woman with the same perversion and hypocrisy. With *Candide*, Voltaire rewrites an earlier text, the *Histoire des voyages de Scarméntado*, in which the hero had walked through the same streets. But the superstition Candide experiences is much more detailed than in *Scarméntado*. While in Portugal, Candide and his companion witness an auto-da-fé in response to terrible earthquakes that are destroying the city and taking hundreds of lives. Voltaire stresses here an essentially primitive

⁵ The term "enlightenment" was not yet current, since Kant had not yet named the movement until much later.

quality of the Iberian people: they perform sacrifice in the same manner that the conquered Incas or Mayas are doing in the New World. Yet they claim to evangelize these indigenous people with the excuse that they are bringing a more advanced and civilized spirituality. In this episode, the burning of marginal individuals accompanies the burning of books: the Inquisition who seeks to preserve superstition as the only social law rejects *other* people and *other* ideas equally.

In the first half of the twentieth century, philologists like Salvio who found fascinating the parallels between the Inquisition and the fascist regime of Francisco Franco on the one hand, and between the French enlightenment and the avant-garde on the other hand have extensively studied *Candide*'s passage through Spain and Portugal. Yet *Candide* is not the only text where heroes from different cultural backgrounds get lost in the twilight zone of the Iberian Peninsula, a land that most philosophers considered "incapable of contributing anything of value to the fields of letters, sciences, arts, commerce, and industry" (Salvio 1924, 69). The homeland of the Jesuit founder was to be painted as the land of fanaticism and ignorance, over and over again. Most of France would not disagree with such representation since the Jesuits were becoming the old nation's public enemy. In the years following the publication of *Candide* (1759), the Society of Jesus was expelled from France, Italy, and Spain by order of the pope. However, this decision would not appease the French philosopher in his need to depict Spanish *oscurantismo*. The Lumières emphasize their brightness by plays of contrast with the exaggerated darkness of the Peninsula.⁶

Perhaps the most problematic dimension of Spanish culture, art, and religion for Voltaire was its historical taste for the *dramatic mode*, a term emphasized by Georges Bataille in *L'expérience intérieure*, his voyage through Spanish mysticism. One could even say that Bataille re-explored this same question of modes in his *Histoire de l'Oeil*, a short novel that one could consider an early twentieth-century version of *Candide*, where Spain is depicted as a "ritualistic and unfamiliar environment."⁷ For instance, the whole concept of *auto-sacramentales* is anti-natural to Voltaire since it uses letters and drama to serve the Catholic liturgy. As Donald Schier has shown in a 1959

⁶ Carlos III of Spain who reigns from 1759 to 1788 is very receptive and enthusiastic about the Lumières. Yet his efforts to adapt Spain to the new philosophical era is never truly acknowledged by the French philosophers.

⁷ Anne McConnell, "Spain and the Ritual of Transgression in Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil*," *Transitions: Journal of Franco-Iberian Studies* (Spring 2006): 35–48.

article, Voltaire is aware of the influence that this practice has had on French literature. In other words, the typically Spanish dramatic mode we find in religious autos-da-fé, autos sacramentales, Easter processions, Corpus Christi, etc. has inspired seventeenth-century dramatists such as Racine, Molière and essentially Corneille.

Voltaire despised Spanish literature after *Don Quixote*, a book he often considered to be the only literary oasis in an Iberian cultural desert.⁸ Dorothy McGhee has also shown that Gracián's *Criticón* was another exception in Voltaire's rule since he was a Jesuit who "had defied church traditions" (McGhee 1937, 779). Moreover, Baltasar Gracián's protagonist Andrenio is a source of inspiration for the candid ingenuous hero that Voltaire will reproduce almost mechanically in his philosophical tales. Jesuit dramatist Pedro Calderón de la Barca, on the other hand, represented the *dramatic mode* Voltaire hated to see in literature, which is probably the reason why he decided to translate one of his plays. As the Enlightenment sought to bury the Baroque illusions, seventeenth-century Spanish plays were often regarded as the anti-reference to be studied. Yet, why was Voltaire so concerned with a country that was so unproductive in the 1760s? Why does he send his heroes to the Iberian Peninsula a third time with the publication of *La Princesse de Babylone* in 1768, five years after the disintegration of the Jesuit order? Why such a repetitive exploration of the Spanish rituals at the scale of the philosophical tale?

Voltaire, like the rest of his fellow philosophers, entertained a fascination for the Baroque world, in spite of his hatred of it. Alexandre Cioranescu has shown the complexity of French Neoclassicism's fascination for the Spanish Baroque in his admirable monograph *Le Masque et le Visage* (1983). Outside of autos-da-fé, Voltaire was fascinated with penitential processions, a ritual based on the reenactment of the passion of Christ. Counterreformed Catholicism insists heavily on such graphic representations of the gospels, as if the still images in the churches did not have sufficient impact on the masses. The need to depict and reenact was, of course, enhanced by the Jesuit educative system central to the development of aesthetics around liturgical practices. In *La Princesse de Babylone*, Voltaire paid more attention to the penitential procession of the *nazarenos*, a male-only street procession who

⁸ He cites Cervantes's novel frequently in his correspondence, for example in D5475 to Mme. Denis on 11 August 1753, in D5485 to his friend d'Argental on 19 August 1753, and again in D5528 to the Duchess of Saxe-Gotha on 24 September 1753—three times in just over a month and a half.

gathers about thirty black-hooded participants chanting Bible verses with melancholy while carrying a decorated life-sized representation of Christ or the Virgin. These processions include self-humiliation, walking on the knees, and punishment of the flesh. According to UCLA anthropologist George Barker,⁹ these processions were originally performed "as a means of public blood atonement" (Barker 1957, 138).¹⁰ They continued to be very active through the nineteenth century. Voltaire sought to emphasize how deeply anchored they had become in the culture of the country, even after the elimination of the Jesuit order.

The male protagonist of *La Princesse de Babylone*, Amazan, passes through Spain in his many travels. Unlike Candide, who comes from Europe and passes through Spain to reach the New World, Amazan comes from an imagined Asian utopia, the land of the Gangarides, and witnesses the penitential procession with the eye of a philosophically superior being, puzzled by the primitive nature of the ritual. Amazan is immune to the dramatic mode cultivated by Spanish Jesuit authors like Calderón as well as to the atonement described by Barker.

In the following passage, the Pyrenees appear clearly as a natural border between the Enlightened world and the dark reality of Spanish *oscurantismo*. Voltaire insists on the *candid* and *ingenuous* perception Amazan has of the whole scene:

Quand Amazan fut au pied des Pyrénées, les magistrats et les druides du pays lui firent danser malgré lui un tambourin; *mais sitôt qu'il eut franchi les Pyrénées*, il ne vit plus de gaieté et de joie. S'il entendait quelques chansons de loin en loin, elles étaient toutes sur un ton triste: les habitants marchaient gravement avec des grains enfilés et un poignard à leur ceinture. La nation, vêtue de noir, semblait être en deuil. (1995, 209)¹¹

⁹ George C. Barker, "Some Aspects of Penitential Processions in Spain and the American Southwest," *Journal of American Folklore* 70 (1957): 137–42.

¹⁰ Since the death of Francisco Franco, however, they tend to be less popular during the Spanish *semana santa*.

¹¹ "When Amazan got to the feet of the Pyrenees, the magistrates and druids from the village forced him to dance a *tambourin*; but as soon as he crossed the Pyrenees, he stopped seeing merriness and joy. He could hear some songs in the distance, but they were all sung on a sad tone: the habitants were walking seriously with threaded seeds and knives around their waist. The nation, dressed in black, seemed to be in mourning" (my translation).

First of all, here, the verb *entendre* has the double meaning of *hearing* and *understanding*, and the reader is not sure which one applies in this case since both are a possibility. Second, both the sound and the meaning of the songs are blurred, since Amazan does not have the capacity to *perceive* (that is, *entendre*) these songs since his brain is not formatted for such religious melodies. Nonetheless, he can recognize the tone of the procession and identifies it as *triste* (sad). His anthropologist's eye identifies the participants as *habitants*, confirming that there is no difference between those performing the penitence in the streets and their audience. They both carry the *grains enfilés* (threaded seeds), which is Amazan's way to perceive the rosary beads: this image reflects Voltaire's belief that Catholicism translates into infertility since it pierces the seeds, threads them and makes them useless, ultimately. As we will see in the second part of this article, Sade exploits the rosary pattern to its fullest potential. The juxtaposition of the rosary beads with the knife (*poignard*) is even more puzzling to Amazan since he doesn't have the capacity to associate spirituality and violence in coexisting symbols. The reader, on the other hand, fills in the blanks that Amazan's passive observation offers. Finally, Voltaire ends this passage with the identification of the social event as a *nation*, that is, a unified body of people. This body is dressed in black, the color of death, and walks as in mourning. The overwhelming feeling of silence experienced by Amazan offers a drastic contrast with the *tambourin* that the traveler was obliged to dance (*malgré lui*) before crossing the French/Spanish border.

For Voltaire, what Spain is mourning is its chance to become an enlightened nation. *La Princesse de Babylone* is the philosopher's chance to rewrite *Candide* and turn the tables on Spanish Catholicism and Inquisition. Consequently, the Princess's visit to Seville results in the burning of some Inquisitors at the stake. But above all, Voltaire's philosophical tales emphasize the fascination for the Iberian peninsula of Goya's *pinturas negras*, turned into a vast territory of desolation without pockets of hope. This radically dark representation is necessary for the general economy of the Enlightenment that Voltaire proposes in his popular publications: a world of clear contrasts, of binary oppositions sustained by human nature.

Alfonso de Salvio states, "Not without notable individual exceptions, the France of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries hated Spain, while that of the eighteenth despised her. Nothing found favor with the philosophers of the eighteenth century. For them Spain was the land of fanaticism and ignorance" (1924, 69). In other words, Voltaire had the backing of the majority of France in his disapproval of Spain and certainly did not need to make a new

point. The reason why Voltaire decides to be beat the dead Spanish horse in an almost sacrificial fashion (for its repetitiveness) might therefore be multiple. The extremely successful reception of his texts in the *petite noblesse* and the *haute bourgeoisie* in France ultimately locks Voltaire in a circle of expectations from his audience; they have enjoyed the criticism (and the jokes) and are asking for more. By the same token, the radical and natural division of the Pyrenees minimalizes France's other geographical limits: the English Channel and the Rhine River. There is nothing like a superiority complex to cure one's feeling of inferiority. This North/South dialectic seeks to reaffirm France's centrality in the Enlightenment, but also emphasizes that other borders, such as the one Voltaire faces from his house in Ferney, are not so terrible and dark. And above all, it reassures him that he is not in a territory of desolation.

In order to complement this reading of Voltaire's dark representations in his philosophical tales, I propose now a symmetrical analysis of Sade's *Histoire de Juliette*. While Voltaire's tales are great material to understand the mission of philosophy prior to the Revolution, Sade's imaginary itinerary provides an even darker projection of these ideals in the post-Revolution reality of the marquis. Sade's youth was spent between the Jesuit school of Louis-le-Grand and the Provençal castle of a libertine uncle, who also happened to be an abbe and very good friend of Voltaire. Sade remains formatted by his reading of Voltaire's philosophical tales. He admires the old man in exile for the popularity he had within the bourgeoisie, the social class who rules the Revolution. Voltaire and the marquis also share a fascination for Counterreformed Catholicism and particularly for the Baroque motifs of Mediterranean art.¹² As he develops as a writer, Sade holds Voltaire dear in his personal pantheon of literary figures. The marquis was in a different type of marginalization from his own society than the one Voltaire experienced, however. His imaginary travel accounts were also formed from a space of estrangement. Sade composed most of his novels between his stay at the *prison de la Bastille* (ended on 14 July 1789), and the eleven years he spent at the *asile de Charenton* (1803–1814). Sade is going to participate in this movement of representation of unknown territories through the travels of two sisters, *Justine* and *Juliette*.

The second part of this article attempts to give an example of this complex progression departing from the tales of Voltaire. Through the reconciliation of Materialist arguments with Counter-reformation theologies, Sade pursues Voltaire's mission and offers parodies of the rosary beads in the story

¹² As Eric Boutout has shown in *Sade et les figures du baroque* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

of Juliette's travels throughout Europe. The literature of imaginative exploration to which Voltaire's philosophical tales belong reaches its paroxysm in the novels of the marquis de Sade when the libertine author is imprisoned during and after the French Revolution and writes his *Histoire de Juliette*. As the marquis writes in his *Idées sur les Romans*: "If you have your heroes travel, know well the country you lead them to. . . your descriptions of places must be real."¹³ In this sense, Sade seeks to correct a parameter that has been heavily neglected on purpose by Voltaire. From his cell, Sade is going to participate in this movement of representation of unknown territories through the travels of *Juliette*, the young libertine archetype that he creates. Anyone who reads this large novel in its entirety knows that what fundamentally characterizes this work is its extremely repetitive nature. Just like Nature itself is: reproducing daily cycles of life interaction, but with invisible differences that we like to call evolution. Juliette is, in this sense, as repetitive as Nature itself.

Of all Enlightenment philosophers and essayists, the marquis de Sade is probably the most intriguing figure and has been the object of many theoretical essays since his rediscovery in the 1960s during the French sexual revolution by Pierre Klossowski and Simone de Beauvoir. Although it is justifiable to think that he might not have been the perfect icon to incarnate the ideological expectations of the Lumières, Sade remains formatted by his reading of Voltaire's philosophical tales. Like Voltaire, Sade is educated by the Jesuits in the tradition of the Spiritual Exercises and their graphic tableaux projected in imagination.¹⁴ The sensuality of the Ignatian theology and art is often reflected in the severity of literary and artistic production in the times of his imprisonment. In his essays and novels, Sade developed a certain nostalgia for the theologies of the Absolutist age that contradicted his desire to totally eradicate Christianity from human existence. In this sense, his depiction of the Catholic South is more complex than Voltaire's. His heroes are not passive spectator of rituals, but rather active participants and oftentimes masters of ceremony. Sade follows up on Voltaire's tendency to design itineraries in the form of threaded grains (the rosary), where heroes are following a circular and repetitive pattern through which mysteries are revealed to them.

Unlike her sister, Justine, who timidly remains within the national borders of France—and makes very slow progress going from one place to the

¹³ D. A. F. De Sade, *Idées sur les Romans et sur le mode de la sanction des Lois* (Paris: Editions Mille et Une Nuits, 2003).

¹⁴ Roland Barthes has studied this connection in his application of structuralist readings of *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1980).

next because of all the obstacles that she imposes on herself—Juliette travels all over Europe at the speed of light, overcoming rapidly any obstacle in her way. Unlike Voltaire's *Candide*, Juliette moves from one country to the next with an unshakable belief in the equation that vice equals prosperity. Her circular story is nothing less than a challenge to the Bible itself, since Sade makes it as long as the book of the Christian monotheists in order to provide materialism and libertinism with its own narrative scripture. Juliette is its main prophetic figure; she can only evolve throughout the repetitive episodes of her frantic travels, and all she does is repeat the application of her philosophical beliefs from one *decorum* to the next.¹⁵

Not only does Juliette turn Sade's own fantasies into a discourse of anthropological exploration, but she also travels with no other sense of purpose than that of confirming his philosophical beliefs through orgies with those holding power in every strategic place of Europe. Her itinerary takes her from the most remote kingdoms of Siberia, in the company of the ogre Minski, to the underground caves of the Vatican with the pope, to the edge of the volcano Etna.¹⁶ These actors of history she meets, like Pope Pius VI, are often responsible for the preservation of ritualistic behaviors such as the one *Candide* and Amazan witness in Voltaire. Unlike Diderot with the Tahitians or Rousseau with his noble savage, Sade pushes Juliette to these imagined geographical and social margins of Europe, which still remain unexplored. She will propose the libertine's own project to establish a map of unconquered territories in which Christianity has no other choice but to constantly confront materialism.

Is this holy text of libertinage trying to follow any sort of logic in the itinerary of Juliette, or is it a completely random journey whose only guide would be desire and natural needs as it is implied several times in the text? The libertine, of course, would want his reader to believe that randomness is the only law of existence, including in the act of writing. Barely anyone can remember the *order* of the many episodes of this long *promenade* around Europe once having undergone religiously the six parts of the book

¹⁵ Technically speaking, it would be quite easy to direct *Juliette* on stage, because one would just have to change the background and recycle the scene format many times. In other words, this imaginary travel account is as static as the passivity of Voltaire's protagonists.

¹⁶ In real life Sade met the Pope and his wife used this excuse to say that he was a repented man and that it represented the end of his "vicious life." Even though he visited most of Rome's churches and Saint Peter's basilica, the underground part of the building is a place he can only imagine.

that bring us back to the starting point, like the Catholic prayer of the rosary beads. As a matter of fact, this is the mechanism that Sade sets up for its reader in the same order: instead of prayers there are sexual orgies, but the series is also interrupted regularly by the contemplation of a *mystery*, which in *Juliette* takes the form of a longer philosophical discourse. This is another way in which Sade tries to recycle the mental configuration of Christians in order to turn them to the complete freedom from religion, that is, libertinage. In this sense, rosary beads are the most circular and repetitive tools of prayer in the Catholic tradition: they imitate Nature itself, with its invisible bits of evolution between its repetition. What initially seems to be an extremely systematic and repetitive exercise, like the one we find in Ignatian spirituality as well as in Candide's and Amazan's itineraries, turns out to be a mystical progression leading to the revelation of mysteries. The function of the rosary beads in Roman Catholicism is to liberate the energy of the contemplative act and turn it into theological knowledge and enlightenment. Sade chooses to emphasize the success of this method in order to prove that it is a natural and pre-Christian mechanism; this particular aspect of his novel seeks to underline that religion itself cannot escape the laws of Nature. It doesn't stand against Nature in an even dichotomy; on the contrary, Religion is another consequence of natural order, which dictates relationships of domination and submission.

Let us now focus on the rosary format of Juliette's itinerary in order to understand the logic behind the constant parodying of southern European rituals in her travels. Her point of departure is the convent in which she is raised along with her sister Justine. This is where both sisters receive an underground education from older peers who have been forced to take the veil and embrace religious life. However, the resistance to secluded life has diminished throughout the years and most of the "sisters" have chosen in majority to remain within the walls of the convent in order to enjoy more freedom. Their argument is based on the benefits they enjoy from their separation from the exterior predominantly male world. Their desire to remain in the convent has nothing to do with Christian religious dedication. On the contrary, they re-create in their cells the pre-Christian atmosphere of the island of Lesbos—parodying the utopia of Candide's Eldorado or Amazan's Land of the Gangarides—and praise the works of the materialist philosophers between two consecutive orgies. The repetitive structure of life within the walls of the convent echoes the natural cycles and the evolution deriving from it. One could argue that this lifestyle is entirely regulated by inverted rituals in a logothetic fashion.

Juliette embraces the Materialist philosophy, while her sister Justine will decide to reject it and adopts a Christian lifestyle. One of the first pieces of advice that Juliette receives from her elders in vice is: "Refer yourself again and again to the great theses of Spinoza, of Vanini, of the author of *Le Système de la nature*. We will study them, we will analyze them together."¹⁷ Materialism is therefore the base of Juliette's philosophy, and she will build on it her own practice throughout constant repetition of libertine acts.¹⁸ According to this logic, if the dogmas of the monotheist religions have usurped the human call to obey Nature and participate in its movement, the best way to reverse this process is to underline how unnatural religion is through a libertine parody of its rituals.

Just as in the Catholic prayer of the rosary beads, the evolution from the base comes to a point of diversion. This part of the itinerary, corresponding to the recitation of the Nicene creed in the rosary, is where the two sisters will be confirmed in the philosophy and religion they have chosen: by taking different roads, they recite their own credo. While Justine decides to go in the *right* direction, Juliette will become her systematically negative image. At the end of the six books, the sisters will meet again, close to the starting point, after undergoing the many mysteries of the circular itineraries. Juliette will pray the rosary in the opposite direction, going against the flow of all its mysteries.

Yet this is how she emphasizes that religion is not the antithesis of materialism, such as it was commonly accepted,¹⁹ but just another manifestation of Nature holding up evolution. A materialist like her shouldn't have to restrain from the joys of rituals and liturgy but should, on the contrary, emphasize their *true* nature. The margins of Europe will become the margins of her ritualistic experiments. Her libertine body will circle Europe as it stands after the Revolution in France, that is, an old world trying to overcome its own limits, with a central revolution in constant repetition of its credo, in order to secure its philosophical faith. This is precisely why the Voltairean hero is no longer a viable option at the end of the century: anthropological passivity has lost its meaning with the years of the *Terreur*, and is trying to recuperate it in the transition years of the *Directoire*. Juliette understands her mission in terms of a circle, even if it doesn't look like a perfect one on the map, but rather

¹⁷ D. A. F. de Sade, *Juliette*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Although Materialist philosophy must be uncontrollable because your body dictates what you should do and it is not a deliberate act.

¹⁹ Materialist philosophy was clearly denounced and rejected in the eighteenth century because it was clearly antireligious.

resembles the confusing voyages of *Candide*, *Scarmentado* or the Princess of Babylone. She circles France, her country of origin, taking her desire to the edge between the civilized and the uncivilized, in the philosophical space of opposition between religion and nature.

Juliette transforms the author's theoretical and comparative knowledge of political customs into a frantic depiction of cultural, religious, and political practices. As a woman traveling through patriarchal structures, she must appear to be super-masculine, and each mystery of her rosary journey turns her more into the negative print of the Virgin Mary, the original intercessor of the rosary prayer. Instead of progressing toward the identity of a virgin mother, she becomes its radical opposite: a masculine whore. Unlike *Candide's* Cunégonde, she cannot be raped, unless she decides to stage a ritual in such fashion. Also, in the Catholic tradition, the rosary is a form of prayer mostly designed for and practiced by women who seek refuge from sexual torments. It also symbolizes both their chastity and their union in religious communities. Juliette has enjoyed female company so much in the convent, at the very start of her journey, and she perceives herself as male. Not only does she envision sexuality as a purely ritualistic activity, but she also starts perceiving her interaction with other males as homosexuality, as John Philips has studied in the following terms: "[The] minority of Sade's women that are libertines, [and] are accepted by their male counterparts as equal subjects, the overwhelming majority are consistently repressed as objects."²⁰ He then adds: "Juliette herself is essentially a projection of her creator's male psyche. Anatomically female, Juliette nevertheless masculinizes herself both physically and mentally" (2003, 31). For Marcel Hénaff, Juliette is "the impossible Monsieur Juliette," a woman defined in terms of male fantasies and objectives.²¹ This last point emphasizes the need to be a *male* traveler in order to depict the Catholic South that both Voltaire and Sade present in their work. Sade's fascination for Catholic rituals forces him to present this hypermasculinity in a female body, increasing the effects of the rituals on their audiences.

Of all the many episodes that one could choose to illustrate this phenomenon, Juliette's visit of the Vatican is probably the most significant. Italy is the first place in her long story where she mentions the "rosary beads" to

²⁰ John Philips, "Tout dire? Sade and the Female Body," *Southern Central Review* 19 (Winter 2002–Spring 2003): 29–43.

²¹ Marcel Hénaff, *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body*, trans. Xavier Callahan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

refer to a sexual practice typical of this country, that of women getting in a circle with a dildo wrapped around their waist and penetrating one another following the form of the beads. Like the Jesuit fathers who have educated Sade, and Sade himself, Rome stands as the center of all mysteries, where enlightenment is to be attained through the systematic and ritualistic repetition of an act. The city itself is a rosary of places of pilgrimage coexisting with another line of places of depravation and vice. This coexistence of the two circles is often blurred, since Sade seeks to demonstrate that it is the same mechanisms that motivate Roman Catholic theology and materialist practices. After spending five months in Rome, Juliette has acquired a certain reputation, and has gotten familiar with the dynamics of local customs and practices. We can see this episode as a parallel to *Candide's* extended stay in the Eldorado, or the Ingénu's visit to England: these passages offer a temporary stability toward the middle of the narrative. She can then proceed to the Vatican—the sacred space par excellence—which she has been avoiding until then. The Eternal City is the place where rosary beads are the most common commodities, since pilgrims buy them in Rome to have them blessed by the pope. But Juliette does not bother buying any of these objects, since the only commodity she knows is her own body, her own *matière*.

As a naturally ritualistic entity, Juliette's vicious and prosperous body awakens the interest of the head of the Church of Rome. When the two characters finally meet, they immediately agree to act in complete sincerity and transparency. Juliette is the archetype of the rebellious student—just like Sade was for his Jesuit educators; she imposes her rules on the Pontiff and refuses to be his disciple. She is not only interested in sharing perverse moments with the pope; she has come to tour the Vatican and to comment on the true nature of the sacred space; as an active participant in search of ritualistic experiments, she requires a detailed visit of the entire structure: "I wish to visit every nook, every cranny, to see all of what each contains" (Sade 2004, 756), and reiterates the order "get me a guide, I wish to tour this place" (758). Consequently, her gaze inside the rooms of the Vatican systematically deconstructs the dynamics of the space. This visit becomes a miniature of her entire journey, where Juliette moves from one room of the palace to the next and receives confirmation of her credo as she listens to the Pope's dissertation on crime and Christianity. As Frappier-Mazur points out, "[Juliette's] main innovation is to replace esthetic distance with a high degree of closeness."²²

²² Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, "Sadean Libertinage and the Esthetics of Violence." *Yale French Studies* 94 (1998): 184–98.

Adorno and Horkheimer have pointed to the pagan nature of Counter-Reformation Rome underlined in *Histoire de Juliette*: the most sacred place of Catholicism is directly connected to the extreme libertinage of Roman antiquity since it is its historical foundation.²³ Sade has observed in his travel notes from Rome that: “On y voit toujours les mêmes événements se répéter, les mêmes crimes, les mêmes vertus, la destruction des uns, l’élévation des autres (This is the place where one see the same events repeated, the same crimes, the same virtues, the destructions of some, the creation of others)”²⁴ (Sade 1995, *Voyage*, 244). Her visit to Saint Peter’s basilica turns into a total inversion of Southern Europe’s Catholic rituals. The axis mundi of Christianity becomes the place where Juliette hears the greatest mystery of her rosary journey being revealed to her: the pope’s dissertation on Nature, probably the most explicit materialist manifesto that we find in the entire novel and in Sade’s works in general. At this point of the novel, Juliette has undergone so many ritualistic repetitions that she can culminate in this moment of revelation. In return, she has to acknowledge the materialist nature of the religious practices she observes. By her participation in the rituals orchestrated by the Pope in the basilica, Juliette shows that philosophical transparency is possible even in the ritualistic mystery of the liturgy.

The libertine surrenders to the political principles, participates in its practice, but eventually undermines it completely by emphasizing, for instance, what is common between communion and a total sensual experience. Juliette will only participate in rituals going against the grain. During her very private mass, the pope chooses to crucify a young man upside down in order to prove to Juliette that Catholicism is the European religion with the highest level of visual rituals. The pope wants to demonstrate in a philosophical fashion dear to both Voltaire and Sade the materialist nature of the rituals performed. This is not the only passage in the *Histoire de Juliette* where such cruelty is performed in order to provide her with visual simulation, as Frappier-Mazur reminds us: “Indeed, simulation is a favorite contrivance of the agents and governs numerous episodes, such as that of the insane asylum in *Juliette*, in which the inmates take themselves for God, Jesus and the Virgin Mary” (1998, 187). The reenacted crucifixion in Saint Peter’s echoes this scene commented by Frappier-Mazur: it remains entirely liturgical, and im-

²³ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

²⁴ D. A. F. de Sade, *Voyage d’Italie ou Dissertations critiques sur les villes de Florence, Rome, Naples, Lorette* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).

ages are created for Juliette's own eyes. Following Voltaire's footsteps and by bringing this representation to a more complex level, Sade uses *visual simulation*, one of the Church's favorite tools for conversion, in order to undermine the very essence of the faith.

Juliette's tour of the Vatican happens in the middle of her long journey; it follows a smaller rosary pattern within the greater narrative of the novel at large. Juliette acquires a position of complete superiority over her political master: the pope becomes her disciple in a space that she will soon entirely control. As Jacques Guicharnaud sums up: "The Sadean character Juliette achieves in that episode an extremely rich union between the sexual response to a natural phenomenon and a vision of the biblical symbol of perversion: Sodom and Gomorrha."²⁵ In other words Juliette decides to talk the language of her enemy, and in the process does it from the sexual perspective of the male. Perhaps this episode emphasizes what all the other episodes are already underlining: political power can be subverted when the eros itself engages in the very principles on which that power is based, instead of standing as its opponent. The experience of the French Revolution gives Sade the capacity to revisit Voltaire's preoccupations and deal with this problematic from a different angle. On her long journey through the politically strategic places of Europe, Juliette emphasizes that her capacity to subdue rituals is a universal principle that can be repeated ad infinitum. The image of the inverted rosary beads helps us envision Sade's belief that the same eros can be both the foundation of a power and its worst instrument of deconstruction. The episode of Rome marks the climax of Juliette's enlightenment voyage, the peak of her materialist maturity.

The rosary pattern, implicit in Juliette's itinerary, underlines the circular nature of human existence according to Sade. Existence is a succession of repetitive acts, such as Nature desired it for its elements. Through this repetition, entities reach a point of apogee, where mysteries are revealed. Yet the subject must pursue the course of the circle, as Voltaire's heroes did in his philosophical tales. As she returns to the base of her rosary-shaped itinerary, Juliette comes back to her very origin, with no further need of revelations and enlightenments. Juliette's journey has been long and repetitive, yet she has no use for her experiences at this point. She will eventually die and "disappear from the world's scene, just as it is customary that all brilliant things on earth finally fade away" (2004, 1193). She has followed the circular path of materialist Nature, which religion has imitated but has altered with an economy of salvation.

²⁵ Jacques Guicharnaud, "The Wreathed Columns of Saint Peter's." *Yale French Studies* 35 (1965): 29–38.

Slavoj Žižek wrote in his provocative reading of the Christian narrative from a Lacanian perspective, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: the Perverse Core of Christianity* (2003), that such transgressive reversals of practices such as the ones we find in *Juliette* are provoked by Christianity itself, and that this drive to perversion is at the core of its faith: “nowhere is [the] paradoxical reversal more evident than in the work of Sade, where the unconstrained assertion of sexuality deprived of the vestiges of spiritual transcendence turns sexuality itself into a mechanical exercise devoid of any authentic passion” (2003, 39). This is what Juliette shows in her journey of repetitive acts of inverted rituals. Nature does not stand as the opposite of Religion, as it has been traditionally defined. On the contrary, Sade meets Žižek’s interpretation of Christianity and emphasizes that its very core can confirm the Materialist theories instead of contradicting them.²⁶ The observing nature of her travel account, however, remains essentially inspired from Voltaire’s philosophical tales.

Yet we might wonder if this genre hasn’t reached a point of self-exhaustion when Sade writes *Les Crimes de l’Amour* at the end of his career in Charenton. Perhaps the Voltairean tale has forever lost its meaning in the overly neo-classical France and Europe that Napoleon is conquering. Voltaire’s heroes require an active participation from the reader. They are passive observers who demand an intellectual collaboration, whereas the type of hero embodied by Juliette is an extremely active one who forces passivity on the reader, instead of requiring him/her to fill the blanks of interpretation. Juliette, unlike Amazan, is never truly puzzled by the *primitive nature* of the Southern European Catholic rituals that both Voltaire and Sade seek to emphasize. She does not come from the virgin utopia of a remote land, but from the protected space of a convent in the heart of a society in terror where she was trained to appreciate the philosophical value of inverting Catholic rituals. Nonetheless, her perspective offers a significant complement to the ones we derive from Voltaire’s heroes. After the Revolution, Sade is one of the few to pursue his writing in a genre that seems to have lost its purpose. With the *Histoire de Juliette*, the marquis performs the last rites on a category of tale that will be ignored by the following century. At the same time, with the Napoleonic conquest of both Spain and Italy, this large tale underlines the importance to re-explore the Southern European Catholic rituals and secure the ideas of the Enlightenment.

²⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: the Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).