

# Are You Suffering?

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## A Comprehensive Examination of Interpretations of Sadeian Literary Tropes and the Effects of Aggressive Sexual Practices



## Abstract

This thesis aims to examine how sadomasochism has been altered from the time of its production. Furthermore it aims to display how the dynamics of pleasure and pain in a sexual context can have an effect on general attitudes towards violence against women. To trace sadomasochism and its literary tropes through history, it is evident that the gothic period in England served as a distributing landscape that brought a censored version of the Marquis de Sade's *Justine* into public domain. Romantic comedies in the 1950's have also played a part in distributing Sadeian tropes as well as depicting desired traits of femininity, which are still prevalent today. Lastly, the contemporary cultural landscape suggests an increased demand for violent pornography. This demand functions as a regressive indicator of many conventional sexual practices. By examining sadomasochistic tendencies in popular erotic fiction, it is evident that traits of sadomasochism are common doing both sexual and non-sexual exchanges between men and women. Moreover, the increased aggressive discourse in pornography does not serve a common purpose with its inspirations, rather it affects online Incel communities which thrive on sexual frustration and exclusion. The effect of this discourse paves the way for the increasingly regressive conventions regarding free sexual expansion, biological power and finite freedom.

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## Introduction & Methodology

What is the difference between pleasure and pain? According to the Marquis de Sade there is none. According to some Victorian libertines, pain could vindicate you from your sins, and according to contemporary romance novelists, the exercise of pain is strictly a masculine engagement. This thesis aims to describe how a literary movement, which originated in France during the last years of the 18th century, became a salient component of the Western perception of sexual practices and dynamics, many centuries later. Moreover, the thesis will also aim to uncover some aspects and features which originally characterised sadomasochism. Moreover, this thesis will aim to uncover how these features have changed as a result of their adaptation into contemporary perceptions, and depictions, of sexual pleasure. The purpose of this thesis is to point towards traits and aspects in contemporary interpretations of sadomasochism and pornography which may have had effects and cultural consequences in context of the language of sex and the exercise of sexuality. Ultimately, the question is: **how has sadomasochism been expressed and interpreted in various periodic contexts? Furthermore, how does the expression of the dynamics between pleasure and pain affect our relationship with gender and sexuality?**

The thesis has been divided into three chapters which each exhibit dynamics of sadomasochism, and sexuality in general. Thus, the composition of this thesis is structured in a chronological manner. As each chapter aims to exhibit its own individual period of time, the manner with which the relevant theories and historical pieces of background information are presented is in context of their own chronological chapter. As a result, one will find that each chapter will introduce new theories and items of analysis. The purpose of this structure is to provide an overall comprehensive overview of the sexual dynamics which are prevalent at each time period and in order to do so in the most efficient manner possible, the theories, as well as the historical pieces of background information, will be introduced gradually. By tracking the sexual mode of expression through history, it will thus become evident how the components and core values of sadomasochism have slowly been altered and changed. As a primary account, the first chapter concerns the origin of sadomasochism, that is, before it was recognised by that name. By looking at the life, as well as the publications, of its very first supporter, as well as introducing his cultural context, it will be significantly easier to comprehend the movement and its appreciation for violence and pain. Therefore, that chapter includes Michel Foucault's account of the ancient Greek practices of sexuality

and as well as his historic perspective on the religious influences regarding sexual dynamics and practices of erotica. Furthermore, in order to relate the notions of a French author to that of the English literary tradition, an analysis, which will uncover a ripple effect from Sade and well into the early gothic period, will be carried out. This contextual analysis will include the iconic *The Monk* by Matthew Gregory Lewis and *Zofloya, or the Moor* by Charlotte Dacre. This is to show that not only is Sade by definition relevant in terms of the theory and expression of sexuality and pornography, but he is also relevant when one is looking to achieve an increased comprehension of the gothic literary period.

The second chapter will provide the reader with an account of the sexual and cultural landscape of the 1970's and 1980's. These years are extremely relevant in terms of sexual history, due to the paradigm shift of sexual and cultural representation, and the activism which affected various social issues. However, before the chapter will dive into the analysis of the cultural landscape of the 1970's and the texts which it produced, it will highlight the 1950's blonde bombshell. The popular Marilyn Monroe films will function as a backdrop. The assessment will show that these films were part of the cause of several reactions a few decades later. It is the goal to highlight how sadomasochism was adopted by the LGBTQ community in America, and thus, how it became a core feature in film and literature which originated from this community. One example which will be put into context of this thesis is Richard O'Brien's cult film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Furthermore, it was also during this time that Pier Paolo Pasolini, the Italian director, produced *Salò*; a cinematic adaptation of the Marquis de Sade's most notorious and infamous work, *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*. The chapter will also serve as an introduction to Angela Carter's theory of sexuality and pornography. The reason for this inclusion has to do with the landscape she is occupied with, which is contemporary to the 1970's. Furthermore, Carter's theory will be utilised in order to thoroughly comprehend the components of heteronormative sexuality and the sexual expression of pornographic contents. This theory is relevant, firstly in order to understand how the aforementioned cultural objects of the 1970's differ from the mainstream mentality. But likewise, because it will serve as a salient component when the following chapter aims to dissect contemporary pornography and its effects on its cultural context.

Lastly, the thesis redirects its focus towards a more contemporary setting. As sadomasochism has grown significantly in popularity during the last 15 years, it only seems appropriate to attempt to

uncover features of this popularity, as well as its potential consequences. Massively popular romance novels like E. L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* and Sylvia Day's *Crossfire* series will be utilised in the analysis in order to achieve the aforementioned comprehension. Segments from these books will undergo a contextual analysis in which the overall lines and assumptions regarding sexuality and the pleasure-pain dynamics will be put forward. Moreover, this chapter will include an introduction to mainstream pornography as a step towards an understanding of the sexual landscape. With a comprehensive overview, the chapter will include a discussion of how mainstream literature portrays sadomasochism, or an interpretation of it; and how such interpretations have had any plausible effects on the uprising of the Incel community. This community is generally known for its radical and misogynistic beliefs, its violent and aggressive discourse, as well as its recent spawn of mass murderers.

This thesis will provide a general overview of relevant forms of media. However, it should be noted that when there is a reference to "media" it is simply to say that the texts which are undergoing analysis belong to different kinds of textual categories. Therefore, the term media is utilised in order to avoid the further specification regarding films, interactive fora, books and online pornography. Moreover, this thesis does not aim to view pornography as an inherently bad or unethical form of media. Nor does it claim pornography to be a less important form of cultural expression, as it has been proved by countless studies that various types of pornographic contents can be healthy for the sexual expression and sexual practices of the individual. It also does not aim to point towards pornography as a form of media that by definition is inherently degrading or oppressive towards women, which will also be asserted not to be the case. One can point towards several different types of pornography as an expression of culture and celebration of the body; in reality some of the most celebrated artists in history have been known to produce cultural objects of pornographic character. The thesis is neither concerned with a misleading discontent towards the genre as an entirety, nor does it attempt to communicate that the genre is based on misogynistic perspectives. What this project aims to exhibit is how the genre of sadomasochism initially was a critical movement and a commentary towards traditional, conservative and oppressive family values, which monopolised sexuality and captured it in a sacred and holy form. Contrastingly, the same movement now falls back on aspects and concepts which one may render are regressive in contrast to its prior forms of expression. This project aims to highlight how the possessive discourse towards women which is evident in contemporary sadomasochistic cultural objects becomes a foundation of a cultural attitude

regarding the exhibition of sexuality and its dynamics. The project will show how a regressive exhibition of sexual frustration may result in a form of aggression and hatred that is not necessarily rooted in sexual adventurousness or power plays, but rather becomes an indication of a dangerous movement promoting restrictions and exploitation of the individual and its exercise of sexual freedom.

## 1. Before Sadomasochism, the Early Gothic Novel

### Introduction: From French Critique to English Influence

During the 1840's, the well-read English journal, *The London Pioneer*, published a series of stories entitled: *The History of Justine* (1848). The stories came from France, however they were both published and translated anonymously into English. They followed a young unfortunate girl, Justine, and her difficult journey through vice and misfortune. The young girl was herself virtuous and pure in spite of her many tragedies. The stories were published during a span of a few weeks and during this time they were wildly popular. Many of the readers of *The History of Justine* had no idea that what they were actually reading was a mildly censored version of the infamous and banned work of the Marquis de Sade, *Justine, ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu* (1791). A work of fiction fixated on pleasure and pain, written by one of the most notorious writers in Western literary history, Donatien Alphonse François de Sade (McMorran, 2017). His texts experienced what one could perhaps call a shift in discourse during their translation, as the vivid sexual imagery, as well as the harsh and gruesome topics were presented to the English audience in a concealed and soft manner. As one of the first writers in Europe, Sade placed the body in the center of his philosophy, his metaphors and imagery were vividly sexual and often nauseatingly violent. However the translations followed the tradition of the gothic novel and were increasingly focused on the melodramatic essence of the stories. The stories concerned strange places, unfair misfortunes, villains and archaic locations (Hale, 2000). Furthermore, Sade's own texts did not prescribe any value to virtue and purity, however the English translations of the texts functioned in alignment with the common perception of morality; which was fundamental during its contemporary publication in England. In example of the shift in discourse is seen in this original statement from *Justine, ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu*: "O vous qui lirez cette histoire, puisse-t-elle vous pénétrer de l'obligation où nous sommes tous de respecter ses devoirs sacrés" became a rather functional and subtle reduction that was coexistent to the gothic philosophy: "The moral lesson of this story will be obvious to the reader" (McMorran, 2017). Thus,

Sade's sexualised imagery<sup>1</sup> was removed from the narrative, which caused the translations to hide their original intent.

This chapter aims to highlight how the Marquis de Sade, a banned and imprisoned writer from France, had an impact on the tradition of English gothic literature. In order to do so, several iconic gothic works will be put into a comparative analysis during which the overall inspirations will be accounted for. These works have been chosen firstly because of their iconic value and thus their impact on both future and contemporary culture. Secondly, these works have been chosen due to their temporal qualities; they are all written or published during a contemporary period which aligns with the lifetime of the Marquis de Sade, and one will therefore be able to prescribe some impacts and influences to his notorious fictions. The works will include *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Gregory Lewis and *Zofloya, or the Moor* (1806) by Charlotte Dacre. These works all exhibit the human condition, as well as the writers' reflections of morality. Furthermore, they are deeply focused on the contrast between vice and virtue. Sade did not display the crude essence of human sexuality in order to portray romance or any notions of sacred sex, however he did it to portray materialism, religious critiques and commentaries, as explained by John Phillips, professor in French Literature and Culture at London Metropolitan University, in his work *How to Read Sade* from 2005. It is therefore also of essence that the aforementioned authors display a similar curiosity in religious discussions of morality and naturalism.

However, before one is able to deduct any alignment between the writings of the Marquis de Sade and the publications of the two gothic novels, it is essential to introduce Sade and his works in a manner that thoroughly accounts for his controversies as well as his fame. In addition to the account of the life and writings of Sade, an introduction to the philosophy of sexuality, as described by Michel Foucault will also be relevant. The reason why this thesis has chosen to incorporate Foucault, is because he, in this work *History of Sexuality*, accounts for the ancient Greek mentality which surrounded the body, and its cravings and needs. Furthermore he also accounts for the later introduction of religious sexual morality, which was enforced by Christianity. It is salient to comprehend these movements in sexual history, because it is these self-same movements which Sade exhibits and critiques in his writings.

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<sup>1</sup> Sade's original imagery suggests that a thought or an idea manifests itself as a penetration of the mind, thereby he refers to the sexual imagery of penetrative sex in a context that is not necessarily related to a sexual scenario.



## **Historical Background: The Life of the Marquis de Sade**

In 1740, Donatien Alphonse François de Sade was born in Paris. This man would later be notoriously known as the Marquis de Sade. Donatien was born into a family of noble status and extensive power, both within the French military and national politics. He was also the only surviving son of his family. This caused him to grow up without any boundaries in his childhood, and thus, he became spoiled and vain, according to Margaret Crosland, an English literary biographer and translator. Accounts show that even in Donatien's early childhood he had shown interest in the macabre and grotesque, furthermore, Donatien also took an early interest in societal issues of injustice and could often be found commenting upon them (Crosland, 1991). He followed a conventional pattern of education for a noble boy of this time, which led him to join the military at age fourteen; he returned to Paris in his mid-twenties. At this point, Donatien had never been in a serious relationship with a woman, he had only experienced the brief entertainment of the nightlife in Paris. His father was severely displeased with the reputation Donatien was making for himself and thus, he arranged a marriage between his son and the daughter of his business associate (Ibid). Donatien had little interest in marriage and family, instead he had developed unhealthy habits in the form of drinking and gambling. As a response to his father's decision, he committed his first crime. He spent the night with a young woman from Paris, by the name of Jeanne Tesard. While they were in bed together, he tormented her, beat her with sticks and spanked her (Ibid). Sade was arrested shortly after; this would be the first of many arrests in Donatien's life, and although he was sentenced to death several times, his family's connections, as well as the connections of his parents-in-law, always seemed to save his life. During his lifetime, Donatien spent a remarkable number of years in prison. It was also during this time that he wrote most of his works, many of which reflect his frustration of captivity. The crimes of the Marquis ranged from rape, prostitution, blasphemy, homosexuality, which in France in the 1700s was considered a capital offense, to the use of illegal aphrodisiacs, orgies, prison escapes and illegally fleeing the country with his lover and valet, Latour. Interestingly, many of Sade's texts focus on the notion and consequences of a faulty and unfair justice system, so it seems that he was aware, and rather critical, of the processes with which his life was spared. As such, Sade's lesson of privilege and freedom teaches that only the ones who create the law will inherit its freedom (Carter, 1979). It should be noted that most of the crimes of Sade's were categorised as sodomy, and that became the infamous reputation that would outlive him by centuries (Ibid).

One of the key features which separated Sade from his contemporaries was the fact that no matter what he believed he believed it so fully and unapologizing that no peer of his matched his engagement. Sade's critique upon religion is an example of this; it is also a focal point in most of his writings, which often include corrupt priests or the general moral decay of the institution of the Church. John Phillips accounts for this:

“*The Dying Man*<sup>2</sup> expresses Sade's own atheistic view that there is nothing after death. It is easy to overlook the shock-value of atheism in eighteenth-century Catholic France, when even the free-thinking authors of the *Encyclopaedia*, Diderot and d'Alembert, felt obliged to condemn it in public” (Phillips, 2005).

Furthermore, Sade expresses in a letter to his wife how he fears he will be imprisoned forever, as a result of his reluctance to change his beliefs (Ibid). Sade's focus was thus not with divine forces, nor with the concept of infinity, rather it was with materialism; and he placed the human body in the center of this philosophy, as a tool with which one could experience immense pleasure and power. An influence which was not irrelevant to his worldview was that of determinism (Ibid). A principle upheld by many thinkers of the Enlightenment, Hobbes and Locke among them. It concerns the notion that all things on earth are continuously subjected to casual law; everything that happens has to happen. Likewise, everything that does not happen, simply cannot happen. This view supported Sade's libertine lifestyle as it rendered all ethical and moral questions redundant. “One is not criminal for painting the strange tendencies inspired by nature” so reads the epigraph of Sade's *The New Justine* from 1799. Because of this, Sade looked at the state as a villain who had committed the highest form of treachery. If all one can do is act according to passion, and thus Nature, then there can be no such thing as a sodomy, then to receive a death sentence as the punishment for sodomy would be a crime against the natural world (Ibid). However, Phillips remarks that it is rather difficult to uncover whether Sade actually believed that there were no such things as criminal acts, or whether he was playing the devil's advocate, as it is the case in many of his writings.

Sade wrote his most infamous text *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome, ou l'École du Libertinage* on a scroll, whilst he was imprisoned in the Bastille. The text is also known by the English name *120 Days of Sodom*, however this project will refer to the works in their original titles. The

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<sup>2</sup> Written by Sade in 1782

scroll was hidden in an iron cylinder and it is for many theorists unclear what the purpose of the text was. Many will choose to see it as his personal manifesto, or his revenge upon the world. However, most literary theorists can agree that Sade did not necessarily write the text with the intention of publication (Crosland, 1991). The text was lost for almost a century, as Sade was moved from his cell in the Bastille to an asylum outside of Paris, and thus, Sade lost his manuscript before he was able to finish it. The manuscript has belonged to several private collectors throughout the 1800s before being published in 1904. Iwan Bloch, who was a German sexologist and a pioneer of sexual science, decided to publish the work. However the English translation was banned up until the 1950's (Ibid). Although *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* might be the most infamous of Sade's works, it can be discussed whether or not it has been the most influential. In 1791, whilst still being imprisoned under the charges of sodomy, Sade published *Justine, ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu*, which would be the only comprehensive work of his that he would see published in his own lifetime. Although, he did publish several smaller pieces of prose and essays, many of which have now been lost. One of the reasons why Sade's writing continuously spawns reactions of wonder, or disgust, is often to be found within its display of reason – and the fact that there is none. John Phillips remarks that one of the key features that completely separates Sade from most other Western writers is the tools with which he displays the crude and honest sexual deviances of humans, men, women and children alike. Sade's practice of sexuality is to be found within pure and spontaneous passion, a notion which renders all laws and rules vastly obsolete (Phillips, 2005). Contrastingly, the society which Sade describes is dependent upon reason, and applies it to all its functions. Sade's narrative can be seen as a free expansion of human sexuality, and the rationale for his focus on passion is to be found within his captive state, as he himself was not permitted to pursue these passions. According to Francine du Plessix Gray, a Sadeian biographer, he most likely suffered from a venereal disease or a prostate infection. As a result, ejaculating was severely painful to him and would often send him into states of epileptic shock (Ibid). This notion is supported by the fact that many of Sade's fictional characters suffer from similar pains. Furthermore, the fixation upon sperm in his writings can also be explained by his own inability to engage in penile masturbation: "the arrow refuses to leave the bow and that is the most exasperating part – because one wants it to leave" (Ibid). This he writes to his wife in a letter from prison. One may render that the pain Sade experienced from penile masturbation inspired many of the sexual acts on his writings, the main features of which being the coexistence of pleasure and pain, later known as masochism, which was exactly how Sade experienced arousal himself.

## Theory: The Greek Principle of Pleasure

“If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression” (Foucault, 1992).

Before being able to thoroughly comprehend the notions with which Sade created his narrative of pleasure and pain, which would later to be known as sadomasochism, it is of great salience to understand how his works differed from the practice of sexual conduct in his contemporary time. In order to efficiently do so, this chapter aims to account for the practice of sexual conduct prior to the traditional sexual dynamics influenced by the Christian church. This is relevant to the project as the applicability of the ancient Greek sexual practices are highly visible in the genre of sadomasochism, and thus, in direct opposition to the dominant culture and education of sex during the origin of sadomasochism. In his work, *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault accounts for the sexual practices of the Greeks 300 BC, through the eyes of Aristotle. One of the most fundamental terms of the Greek sexual practices was the notion of ‘aphrodisia’. The desire for sexual intimacy, which in various ways functions in complete opposition to the sexual moral which was later promoted by the Christian church, where sex was described as a biological function of reproduction, and a sacred bond (Foucault, 1992). In contrast, the concept of aphrodisia, as described by Aristotle, is by definition inherently emotionally bound, and thus, exists on the outskirts of biology, with pleasure as a primary objective, and not sacred reproduction. Foucault describes how the ancient Greeks practiced sexual self-indulgence in a manner which was equal to the indulgence of drinks or food; and as one can eat or drink too much, so can one fall too deep into one’s sexual desires (Foucault, 1992). The excess of vice, as described by Aristotle, is phrased as ‘akolasia’ and a person of reason and moderation would aim to avoid this. The variables which should assist the individual in determining whether they were experiencing akolasia was, according to Aristotle, divided into two variables: the act itself and its intensity. Thus the amplification of the act and the bare nature of the act itself. (Ibid). The reason why such a distinction is interesting in context of sadomasochism and its origin is that it was up to the individual to determine whether they had indulged too excessively. In contrast, religious institutions, such as the Christian church, would later monopolise this distinction and create rules for what was right and wrong. However such distinctions did not exist in ancient Greece, and interestingly, nor did they exist in the narrative of Sade.

## **Analysis: Echoes of Sade in the Gothic Novel**

Now that some introductions to the comprehension of Sade and his texts have been established, along with a brief, but no less significant, outline of the historic, and contemporary, cultural landscapes which influenced Sade's writings, it is possible to venture into the author's own influence. This chapter will align notions of the gothic with that of its French influences, in order to portray how the Marquis de Sade has had a consistent leverage on the general gothic narrative, as well as a selection of literary tropes.

The gothic is a literary genre which is typically described to have influenced literary Western culture through the late 18th and the 19th century. John Bowen describes the genre as a family of texts, which do not necessarily share all characteristics and traits, however they do share similar notions and influences, which tie them together (Bowen, 2014). Gothic novels and poems occupy themselves with issues of taboo, with the perverse, the supernatural, the melancholic and the odd; which makes it a perfect setting for many of Sade's narratives. It is also a genre which is fascinated with strange locations and the beauty of decay; these notions are deeply tied to the gothic focus on the past - the ancient and the archaic (Ibid). A rather essential distinction which is made within the gothic family of texts is that between horror and terror. In 1826 Ann Radcliffe, a pioneering writer within the field, published an article which explained these distinctions. Although Radcliff's distinctions between terror and horror are not necessarily applicable to all contemporary media, they do function in context of late 1700's literature. Radcliffe characterised terror as a textual response which could be morally uplifting; terror suggests the macabre without showing it - rape, murder or incest where terrifying by their suggestion, so when the events do not occur, in spite of their suggestion, the reader is rescued. Thus, terror takes its root in the mind. She argued that terror "expands the soul". In contrast, Radcliffe underlines how horror: "freezes and nearly annihilates the senses of its readers because it shows atrocious things too explicitly" (Radcliffe, 1826). Within horror there is no suggestion, only honest and crude exhibition. Sade's works may very well be described as utterly horrifying, as he leaves no one to be saved and nothing to be suggested. However, when the French author's influence is manifested in English literature, it will undergo interpretation of cultural and historical applicability, and doing so, it will resemble something of the terrifying complexion instead.

The works of the Marquis de Sade was banned in France throughout the nineteenth century due to its grotesque and blasphemous contents. However, according to John Phillips, people continued to discuss his works in spite of the bans. The discussions was no longer public, but instead authors, theorists, atheists, and libertines freely discussed the works of the Marquis de Sade in the privacy of their homes. The nineteenth century English writer Swinburne were to have read *Justine* aloud to his friends while roaring with laughter (Phillips, 2005). Moreover, Phillips highlights that Sade's fundamental thoughts and perspectives became the center of verbal discussion and conversation, but his texts were seldom read due to the sparse copies available. Therefore, there are very few literary accounts directly related to Sade in French literature from this time, but merely implicit references and homages. The French author Jules Janin describes the Marquis in his 1834 essay: "Voilà un nom que tout le monde sait et que personne ne prononce" (Janin, 1834). "This is the name that everyone knows and no one says".

With Sade and his publications being under such strict regulations and restrictions, it seems unlikely that his posthumous voice could in any way influence the future authors and theorists throughout Europe. However that was nonetheless what happened. Although the entirety of these works did not necessarily find their way across the channel, it is most certain that selected writings did. *Justine, ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu* (1791) and *Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* (1785) became the foundation for a philosophical movement which placed the human body in the center of its world view (Phillips, 2005), and thus functioned as a fundamental school of thought which inspired many English authors.

### **Analysis: The Commentary of Religious Vice**

English author Matthew G. Lewis wrote *The Monk* in 1796, and was thus a contemporary with the Marquis de Sade and the writings which he had published in his lifetime. Lewis even prescribes Sade a salient importance as an influence for his own writing (McMorran, 2017). The novel concerns Ambrosio, a famous monk from Madrid. Ambrosio is described as the most virtuous of all the monks in the city; however when he begins to desire the young woman, Matilda, he abandons his vows and falls into temptation, as a result, he has intercourse with her inside the church. The monk's pursuit of pleasure leads him to murder whoever is in his way, including Elvira, the mother of Antonia, another women desired by the monk. Ambrosio falls deep into a spiral of desire and vice, as he drugs and rapes Antonia, in the crypt under the church. When Antonia tries

to escape, he stabs her to death. Upon Ambrosio's capture, he bargains with the devil and sells his soul in order to avoid execution. The devil informs him that Elvira was his own mother, and Antonia was his sister. Furthermore, the devil shows him that Mathilda, the first woman he desired, was merely a demon who took human form and lured him into temptation. At the end, the monk dies in agony, as eagles rip his flesh apart and throws his body into a river.

*The Monk* portrays the corruptible flesh of humans, even of holy men, and it is to be understood as a general commentary upon the vulnerability of humans and their imperfections. Lewis' novel contains many notions which can be related to the Sadeian narrative; as such, *The Monk* is to be understood as one of the primary entries of Sadeian tropes in English literature. Lewis' novel is an important piece of literature as it combines the aspects of the gothic novel with that of the French influence. *The Monk* has a similar plotline to Sade's *Justine* - a story about a young girl who, amongst other misfortunes, encounters a monastery during her search for rescue and safety. She expects the monks to be noble, honest and refraining. However, as it is also the case in Lewis' narrative, the monks have become corrupted and evil. Lewis' work does therefore perfectly portray how the Marquis had a salient role to play in the early gothic novel; an influence which will be evident all throughout literary history, and a salience which is also applicable to later forms of expression and media.

So why include Charlotte Dacre and her less recognised *Zofloya, or the Moor* from 1806, when Lewis' work shows Sade's influence exceedingly well? Dacre wrote her novel approximately 12 years after Lewis' first publication and it is clear to see that his influence is present within her writing, however as Professor of English at York University, Kim Ian Michasiw points out, her writing also offers something that Lewis' left out of his novel, and thus, Dacre is a relevant writer whose works are significantly applicable in the context of Sadeian tropes in English literature. Lewis portrays many typical Sadeian figures (The hidden demon, the corruptible innocence, the strong patriarchal figure, and the notion of religion imperfection) but he leaves out one: the viceful woman. The female heroine who dives into her desires, and impulses. The woman who abuses and manipulates for her own gain and who objectifies her fancies. The character who Sade named Juliette, the viceful counterpart to her virtuous sister Justine, rose from poverty and homelessness to become a major political influence in France and Italy. In the Sadeian narrative there is nothing greater than

a woman who breaks the societal ties of reproduction to serve themselves. The most significant and essential Sadeian trope belongs to women and their independent sexuality (Michasiw, 2008).

### **Analysis: The Creation of the Blonde Fantasy**

*Zofloya, Or the Moor* concerns the young woman Victoria through her life of mischiefs and desires. She falls in love several times during the novel, each time with a man who initially is involved with someone else. Her first love is Berenza, and five years into their marriage, she encounters his brother, Henriquez, whom she then attempts to pursue. Only, Henriquez is in love with Lilla. In a dream Victoria sees the face of Henriquez' servant Zofloya, and she decides to tell him about her love of Henriquez; together they conspire to kill her husband, so she can be with Henriquez and they succeed. However, Henriquez has grown to despise Victoria's nature and has no desire for her. Zofloya and Victoria decide that in order for her to gain the affection of Henriquez they must eliminate his lover, Lilla. They tie her in a cave and enchants Henriquez with a spell so he for one day will see Victoria as his beloved Lilla, whom he unknowingly spends a night with. Upon learning that he was with Victoria, Henriquez kills himself in his room. His death infuriates Victoria, who in sorrow and anger stabs Lilla and throws her off a cliff. Victoria realises that Zofloya is able to read her thoughts as he shows an evil and possessive side of himself: "thou shalt be mine, to all eternity". He leads them to a cave inhabited by banditti. One night, the banditti, led by Victoria's lost brother, Leonardo, capture a man and a woman who turns out to be Victoria's mother and lover. Their mother dies in the cave, however, Victoria refuses to forgive her mother and feels joy upon her demise. In the end, Zofloya reveals that he has led Victoria into vice and that he in fact is the devil, as he annihilates her.

The novel is especially salient in terms of how it portrays its women. It displays temptation and vice as strong factors within the nature of women and that may be related to Sadeian influences: "Thus, though Victoria in childhood gave proofs of what is termed, somewhat injudiciously, a corrupt nature, yet a firm and decided course of education would so far have changed her bent, that those propensities, which by neglect became vices, might have been ameliorated into virtues (Dacre, 2008, pp. 14). In particular the contrast between Victoria and Lilla shares many similarities to that of Sade's Justine and Juliette. Victoria is a brunette while Lilla, who is childlike and innocent yet far more desired by the men of the story, is a blonde. Sade often points towards specific figures of sexuality, as the dark haired Juliette engages in unethical acts and viceful behavior



as Victoria, and Justine's worth is valued by her virtuousness and her naiveté, so is the case with Lilla in the story by Charlotte Dacre. Interestingly, the notion of women's hair colour and their association with sexuality is a trope which has been prevalent all through literary history, as well as up through cinematic history. Furthermore, as it will be pointed as in the next chapter as well, the blonde bombshell of the 50 and 60's blonde Marilyn Monroe and her brunette counterpart Jane Russell, in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), proves this notion to be of great importance in more contemporary contexts. Victoria is easily tempted, as well as aware of her sexuality and desires. It is also her initial desire for her dark skinned servant Zofloya which acts as her motivation to pursue her sexual passions. In contrast to Victoria, there is Lilla. She is described as a desirable women due to her childlike appearance. She embodies innocence and passivity, both features for which she is praised. Thus, Dacre builds a perfect scenario during which it is possible to recognise virtue and vice as direct Sadeian counterparts. The heroine commits three murders, as well as various minor crimes, during the work of Dacre, and she also watches with content as her mother dies; also in alignment with the Sadeian narrative. Matricide is, to Sade, a vital feature of his commentary. It unties the woman from her supposed reproductive duties which society, government, religion and her family, have places upon her. It is only when a woman's mother is dead that the woman can exercise her freedom. Sade would often punish the ones who symbolised the institutionalised sexuality, the monopoly on sex; perfectly represented by the matriarch of sacred sex, in the mother figure (Carter, 1979).

Another salient aspect which is worthy of mention, and which effectively divides Dacre's work from Lewis', is the how the characters each perceive their own vice. The complexity between ethics and personal gain is a notion which is explored in great depth in both books. Ambrosio finds himself lusting for women and feels controlled by pleasure and stimuli despite of his vows and devotion to the monastery. Victoria falls in love with a man who does not share her affections, and he desires another woman as well. Therefore, the love for one person and the hatred for another embodies Victoria's division of pleasure and pain, as well as love and hate. Furthermore, the tempters which lure both characters into maleficence, Mathilda and Zofloya, were both evil embodiments. Mathilda turned out to be a demon, and Zofloya turned out to be Satan himself. However, one major difference is to be found within the characters' exercise of vice. Ambrosio believes that his actions are justified, and he regards his vice as a task which he must fulfill in the name of a divinity: "But God will show mercy, though you show none. And where is the merit of your boasted virtue? What temptations have you vanquished? Coward!" (Lewis, 1959, pp. 15). Victoria knows that her actions

are wrong, however she continues to pursue her riches despite of the methods with which she obtains them. Victoria ends up broken in tears by the weight of her guilt. Victoria acknowledges her vice as malicious acts, but continues to pursue them because of her own advantages; she is thus a heroine which is closer to the Sadeian trope of viceful Juliette: “Either we must suppose that the love of evil is born with us (which would be an insult to the Deity), or we must attribute them (as appears more consonant with reason) to the suggestions of internal influence” (Dacre, 2008, pp. 268).

However, as Michasiw points out, Dacre has for the better part of English literary history been left out, forgotten, or hidden away (Michasiw, 2008). This fact can be prescribed to many various reasons, however, one of which may be related to the notion that Dacre chose to exhibit a female character which was so close to the figurines from the banned texts of the Marquis de Sade, which not only left little room for the an English interpretation of the movement, but also left little division between her narrative and Sade’s. In contrast, Lewis’ did something with the Sadeian narrative, which many authors, directors and artists have continued to do all throughout literary history - he changed it. The dynamic between virtue and vice which is exhibited by Lewis is vastly different from Sade’s original texts. Sade punishes the innocent for not possessing the character of vice - or for disregarding it. However, Lewis exhibits a dynamic within which the vice and virtue often exists as a constant battle within a single individual: “Ambrosio was yet to learn, that to a heart unacquainted with her, Vice is ever most dangerous when lurking behind the Mask of Virtue” (Lewis, 1959, pp. 92), and this exhibition of Sade’s philosophy is a notion which one will find exceedingly frequent in contemporary texts as well. One of the aspects which made Sade and his works so vastly different from his contemporaries, and the notion that banned most of his work as well, was his materialism. Sade put the body, its cravings and needs, in the center of his philosophy. In the Sadeian narrative, the world revolves around the dynamic of pleasure and pain and how one chooses to interpret those impulses (Phillips, 2005). However, Lewis’ narrative revolves around the divine, the internal, and the condemnation of one’s actions. This interpretation of Sade’s narrative and philosophy have thus made it increasingly more applicable to the contemporary English literary landscape, as it does not completely distinguish itself from the preexisting religious and cultural discourse: “Ambrosio, learn to know me better. I love you for your virtues: Lose them, and with them you lose my affections. I look upon you as a Saint; Prove to me that you are no more than Man, and I quit you with disgust” (Lewis, 1959, pp. 50). Therefore, Lewis does not punish or shame the keeper of virtue in a similar manner to Sade, however, he does exhibit the vulnerability of virtue and how

easily it is corrupted. It is within this spectrum of interpretation that Sade will continue to be understood in the future.

## **Accumulation: Sadeian Tropes in English Literature**

*The History of Justine* (1848) embodies perfectly the shift of discourse which Sade's texts and philosophies underwent during their translation into English. As his texts were banned, their translation offered reduced notions of sexual imagery and horror. However, Sade's philosophies, although manifested through sexual indulgence and perversions, also teaches morality and structural criticism of institutionalised religion. Being imprisoned most of his life himself, Sade was concerned with freedom and privilege. In order to thoroughly comprehend Sade's notions of sexual indulgence, and its expansion from its contemporary practice of sacred sex, theories regarding previous notions of sexuality was introduced. The concept of sacred sex functions in direct opposition to previous comprehensions of intercourse. Michel Foucault accounts for the ancient Greek sexual practice, which renders sex a desire that suits the body, rather than a reproductional mechanism. Sade's thoughts placed the body in the center of his philosophy, and became the foundation for a school of thought and materialism which inspired many authors and theorists during the gothic period. Matthew Gregory Lewis, in his work *The Monk* (1796), draws upon Sadeian inspirations, especially regarding the notion of religious critique. Furthermore, Lewis portrays the notion of trusted holy men who corrupt themselves and thereby misuse their power, a scenario which may be seen as identical to Justine's experience at the monastery in Sade's *Justine, ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu* (1791). Lewis' work also portrays the dynamic between vice and virtue and how these traits are interconnected with divine forces. This interpretation of Sade's narrative and philosophy have thus made it increasingly more applicable to the contemporary English literary landscape. However, Lewis fails to incorporate Sade's most significant trope, which is the notion of free sexual expansion. Rather, *The Monk* portrays sexuality as a gender-bound notion which does not have equal outlets for men and women. Contrastingly, in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya, or the Moor* (1806) the main character, Victoria, strongly resembles that of Justine's viceful sister, Juliette. Dacre's work portrays vice and virtue, not as internalised traits, but as characteristics embodied by different individuals. As a result, Dacre displays female sexuality as a contrasting element to restriction. This contrast is supported by the difference between experience and innocence, symbolised by the colours of the women's hair. Thereby, it is evident that the notion of the desirable blonde is a literary trope which can be traced from the English gothic through its Sadeian influences. By extension, this chapter determines that Sade did indeed

inspire writers within the gothic literary movement in England; furthermore it build towards the argumentation that Sade's original philosophy was altered in order to support a pre-existing discourse of sexuality and individualism. Furthermore, the chapter also displays the fact that ideas of beauty and desire that may be regarded as universal, like the sexually attractive blonde, is not universal after all, it is rather a trope that was created to communicate a structural critique of punishment and power.

## **2. Exhibiting Deviances: Sexuality in the 20th Century**

This thesis will now move on from the gothic period and step into the 1950's. This chapter aims to exhibit how Carter's theory of pornography and gender dynamics are significantly applicable to objects of media that fall outside the pornographic spectrum. Furthermore, this chapter will put the previously introduced Sadeian tropes into context with 20<sup>th</sup> century romantic comedies. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight how tropes of sexuality, introduced and promoted by Sade and his contemporaries, have become embedded notions in an increasingly more modern comprehension of sex and gender. In order to do so, two films starring Marilyn Monroe will be utilised as objects of analysis in order to thoroughly highlight how the depictions of experience and innocence, vice and virtue, pleasure and pain not only function as mechanism of sexual expression but also as fundamental components of the general dynamic between men and women. When such an analysis have been carried out it will subsequently function as a stepping stone towards a wider comprehension of sexual deviance and sadomasochism. The chapter will engage in a historical overview of the rise of sadomasochism and then apply that knowledge during an interpretation of two respective Sadeian adaptations from 1975. The contrast between the sexual representations displayed in the 1950's and in the 1970's will thus function as an indicator of the salience regarding Sade's narrative and sexually deviant universe. It will show how sadomasochism is edited and altered in order to function in its given context. Some of the Sadeian concepts function rather as leisure activities than activism. However, this chapter will also explain how the notions of Sade's tropes may be utilised in order to promote ideas and concepts regarding gender and sexuality can does not necessarily relate to the Sadeian philosophy.

### **Theory: The Ideology of Sacred Sex**

Angela Carter determines several significant characteristics of pornography and its continuous influence on mainstream culture in her exercise in cultural theory *The Sadeian Women*

*and the Ideology of Pornography* (1979). Her dissection of pornography and its influences will thus function as a theoretical background with which it will be possible to gain a thorough understanding of how and why notions of pornography are culturally relevant in terms of this context. Furthermore, this chapter will seek to highlight various ideas and aspects which are often associated with pornography. Moreover, the goal is also to exhibit how these aspects have a significant effect upon other products of media within the pornographic spectrum, but even more vitally, how these aspects are translated into other types of media. Initially, how they break the spectrum and thus affect non-pornographic genres as well. Therefore, this chapter will show how the pornographic nature of several products of media are influenced by the societal context and contemporary audience for which it is produced, and vice versa.

Carter highlights that because pornography is often categorised as demeaning or gross, and therefore disregarded as a cultural form of media, it is often left out when one attempts to analyse a given cultural phenomenon or movement. However, Carter regards pornography as a form of media that mirrors the culture of its production in the most brutally honest and crude manner (Carter, 1979). Pornography is rendered a rather specific form of media, as it is produced for a consumption that is not only massive, in terms of demography, but also rapid and superficial. In order to ensure profit, it has been carefully manufactured to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. It plays on features that are universally known as facts, or at least features that are obvious and recognisable to the majority of its consumers (Ibid). Carter theorises that the reason why actors in most pornographic films, texts etc. have features and traits that make them easy to stereotype, and nothing overtly personal or unique, is related to the notion that the actors in pornography are often disposable or, at the very least, anonymous<sup>3</sup>. As she describes, you should be able to remove the head and the personalities of the actors in order to become them yourself (Ibid). The bodies of the actors become their entirety, and fucking becomes their *raison d'être*; this mechanic allows the audience to place themselves into the scenario and thus experience arousal and relief, as a form of leisure activity (Ibid). Like Foucault, Carter aims to describe how cultural institutions, such as the Christian church, have monopolised the sexual intercourse. Furthermore, she argues that religion often tends to focus on masculine sexuality as the primary form of expression. By default, female sexuality becomes a function of reproduction, and a mere effect of the primary engagement. Carter and Foucault both

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<sup>3</sup> There is of course the expectation of pornographic satire in which the actors are impersonating famous people in an erotic situation.

underline that this development has been evident for centuries and is indeed still evident in contemporary culture. These mechanics are visible in most forms of pornography today as well. Before moving further, it should be noted that when Carter published her work in 1979, the cultural landscape of sexual representation was severely different from today. In 2019, there are several companies that specialise in the production of pornography for women, and by women; many of these companies are, furthermore, actively seeking to avoid the aforementioned mechanics of the male perspective. However, as those companies may still be rendered significantly less popular than sites like PornHub<sup>4</sup>, Digital Playground, and RedTube, Carter's points are still exceedingly applicable to the current landscape of pornographic, and thus still relevant in terms of this context.

Carter exemplifies that female sexuality is seldom displayed in its own, but rather by extension of a more prominent notion. An instance of this dynamic is evident in the manner with which many heteronormative couples have intercourse, namely through the missionary position (Foucault, 1992). This position was monopolised by the Christian church, who excluded any expansion of arousal that did not fit this format; with religion as a guide into sexuality, it was understood to be the only form of sacred and holy reproduction. By extension, Carter points out the effects of categorising some positions and "legal" and other as "sodomy". She argues that because it is only possible for heteronormative couples to engage in the reproductive missionary position, the church could thereby categorise all other varieties of sexual intercourse as wrong, and thus, not sacred and holy, and thereby illegal. This was exactly what happened in France in the 1700's as homosexuality became a capital offense during the lifetime of the Marquis de Sade. The church have had vastly more power than it does today, although it is still in possession of a great deal of cultural significance which varies, depending on the geography and demographic. Therefore, the impact of the church has been massive, as religion has assisted in formulating laws and codes of morality for centuries. Especially when labeling lifestyles which were in opposition to the religious agenda as "sodomy" of all kinds. This counted polyamorous relationships, homosexual relationships, positions that would increase the female sexual pleasure, or actions that did not require penetration, like oral sex (Carter, 1979). As a result, the sexual dynamics promoted by Christianity would therefore favour the masculine pleasure above the female pleasure. Foucault phrases the aforementioned dynamics by stating that the sexual practices established by religion, and the practices that to this day are still extremely prevalent, are completely dependent upon the female submission and the utter possession

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix 4

of the female form (Foucault, 1992). The male actor is the penetrative force which is on top of the women. Interestingly, he points towards the ancient Greeks to show that men was not always regarded as the penetrative force, and this is a discourse and a dynamics which have been furthered through a cultural institution (Ibid). One may speculate how the influence of the Christian church has any relevance to the topic of this thesis. The point of this chapter is to exhibit how notions regarding gender roles, sexual positions or cultural assumptions may seem universal or fixed, they have all been manufactured or edited throughout history. Therefore, before one is able to discuss any notions of free sexual expansion, or, for that matter, any variation of gender roles and their depiction, it is of the utmost importance to remember how these notions came to be; that they are neither universal nor ancient.

Carter draws upon the same aforementioned characteristics when talking about more contemporary pornography. She states that in most sexual encounters, the woman is only made interesting when: “the male principle fills [her] with something”. This notion is evident throughout literary history, it is visible in culture and in language. It is something so fundamental that we often never realise what it is, and it is especially with topics like this that is it crucial to remember that such a truth is fabricated in order for an institutional system to gain power and influence (Carter, 1979). The origin of sacred sex is of course rather difficult to trace, and its primal influences are almost impossible to pinpoint, however, Foucault prescribes a great deal of importance to religion in this context. Foucault’s theories match the historical accounts of Sade. In spite of popular belief what Sade was most known for was neither his torture, his matricide nor his display of coprophagia. It was his display of female sexuality in a setting which required her to create and pursue nothing but herself. An egocentric practice of pleasure was almost unheard of before Sade published his first work, especially in terms of the female practice of sexuality. As McMorran argues, many consumers of literature and media have been unaware that what they were actually consuming was mildly censored versions of the Sadeian tropes, thus, they were seldom prescribed to his name. This account provides a picture of how large the impact of Sade has been on contemporary culture, as well as how embedded previous ideas and ethics are within Western culture today. The noteworthiness of the missionary position is often brought into the context of sadomasochism, because it encapsulates perfectly how one sexual dynamic is rendered the norm amongst the vast majority of Western culture, whereas others are often disregarded as a deviance. It is noteworthy that the origin of the missionary position in related to Christianity because it derives from the consequence of textual fundamentalism.

Professor of Drama and English, Martin Puchner, explained in his book *The Written World* that textual fundamentalism manifests itself when a culture looks towards a text, often a sacred text such as the Bible, and with that as a foundation creates a code of morality, ethics, norms and laws (Puchner, 2017). Thus, textual fundamentalism explains why one sexual act between two parties were perceived as sacred and one were perceived as deviance. Because of the division between the sacred and the deviant sexual practices, Carter looks toward Sade as a moral pornographer, because his work dissects any moral or ethical comprehension of sexuality (Carter, 1979). In the Sadeian narrative, sex exists as a commentary to a faulty society, perfectly exemplified in the castle of Silling, or the monastery where Justine seeks rescue. These are both secluded and remote locations, as well as pivotal points for the most depraved sexual acts, completely disconnected from an unjust and corrupt society, which Sade strongly believed gave birth to his fantasies.

Another aspect regarding depictions of sexuality, whether those are of pornographic nature or not, is the notion of its desired audience. Carter points out that pornographic contents, as well as other depictions of sexuality, are exclusively targeted at men; or so were they during the decades of the 50's, 60's and most of the 80's. Producers of pornography were men, most directors of films and plays were men; as it will show, the films starring Marilyn Monroe were directed and produced by men. The effect of a male dominated entertainment field is evident in both perspective and tone (Carter, 1979). The entire narrative structure of any given text is reflective of its narrator. Carter points towards pornography, which is often focused on the view of the women, the spectacle that is her body. This notion reinforces the male perspective: hence the pornographic texts are produced with the purpose of being consumed by men: the reader or consumer of pornography is usually a man who subscribes to a particular social fiction of manliness" (Ibid). Later, Laura Mulvey would coin the term "male gaze" in feminist theory, which included the notion of the female spectacle and her depiction as concepts which are directed and manufactured to please a male audience. Carter points out that gender is a vital factor when determining hierarchy both in pornographic and non-pornographic films, the difference between which is the vastness with which it is done. Therefore, she argues, if one is seeking to say something about concepts regarding sexuality in any type of media, one should begin in porn as the features and dynamics in pornography are identical to the dominant beliefs and values of the culture in which it is produced (Ibid).



## Theory: The Beautiful Death

As the thesis concerns itself so exceedingly with the exhibition of the female body, which one may render is an applicable essence of the pornographic objects of which Carter speaks, this section will thus introduce Elisabeth Bronfen's perspective of the depiction of female bodies. In her work *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and Aesthetic* (1992), Bronfen establishes a continuous cultural fascination with the female dead body. As Carter has also pointed out, the beautiful death is a central trope throughout literary history. In the continuous cultural landscape of Western literature, a dead woman's body has been a symbol of creative and aesthetic death, and this trope is evident in the literary work of prominent and iconic writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Virginia Woolf, Mary Shelley and many more (Bronfen, 1992). It is of great salience that one is able to deduct cultural movements and tendencies, and map them as significant tropes, because the categorisations of such tropes will automatically explain the effect and consequences of such tropes. The effect of a literary trope is perhaps most perfectly embodied in the photo of 23 year old Evelyn McHale, a photo that has been referred to as the most beautiful suicide in history<sup>5</sup>. The photo was taken by photographer Robert C. Wiles, and much like the photographs of the deceased Marilyn Monroe in her bed<sup>6</sup>, it indicates that tragedy involving beautiful woman become spectacle. One may render that due to the fact that dead women's bodies often function as a focal point in media and literature, the bodies of actual women, or even simply the suffering of actual women, propose a similar spectacle.

Bronfen dissects this tendency, and argues that death when represented in the form of a beautiful woman, becomes less daunting. The female form becomes a medium which simultaneously communicates the terrifying nature of death and immense earthly beauty. Thus, when death is represented in the shape of a woman it will momentarily make the audience forget its irretraceable consequences in favour of utter curiosity and admiration (Kemp, 1994). According to Carter, Sade's Justine is possible one of the best examples of the spectacle of female death, however, the trope, as Bronfen highlights, is far from rare in the Western cultural landscape. Throughout genres and periods of production, women's dead bodies, and the tragedy of which, is put on display as a spectacle for people to admire, Poe's lost Lenore in *The Raven* (1845), the displayed corpse in Disney's *Snow White* (1937), Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), and *Thelma and Louise* (1991) (Ibid). As a result, women have been dying throughout literary history with the purpose of creating art. Bronfen points

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix 9

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 10

towards the words of Anne Sexton to embody the trope of the dead female body as such: “When [to me] death takes you and puts you thru the wringer, it’s a man. But when you kill yourself it’s a woman” (Kemp, 1994). As a result of this literature trope, the dead woman embodies both the notion of pain and pleasure, as she both represents an object of desire as well as daunting despair, a notion which renders her a precise rendering of the mechanisms which constitute sadomasochism. This dissertation utilises depictions of the body as a focal point in a larger dissection of structural critiques and societal commentaries, it seems rather applicable to the overall context to connect the fascination of suffering women and the increasing interest in sadomasochism. Thus, Bronfen’s theories will function as a vital feature of comprehension regarding the depictions of women in pain.

### **Analysis: The Sadeian Bombshell of the 1950’s**

Angela Carter wrote *The Sadeian Woman* based on the sexual dynamics which were evident during her contemporary cultural context, and how these dynamics were tied directly with Sadeian tropes of sexuality. Her exercise in cultural theory therefore is based on a pre-existing comprehension of sexual expression and pornography, one that is not necessarily identical to the spectrum which is currently evident in 2019. However, it is not without salience nonetheless, as the pre-existing landscape plays a significant role in today’s depiction of sexuality. Carter especially refers to the cultural landscape of the 1950’s as a period which was largely influenced by Sadeian tropes. Therefore, this chapter will aim to include works of media from this period in order to fully be able to highlight why the LGBTQ community in the US during the 1970’s created a such vast oppositional response to the prior exercise of personal sexual expression, and as well as the common depiction of gender and sex during the 1950’s.

*The Seven Year Itch* (1955) directed by Billy Wilder, starring Marilyn Monroe and Tom Ewell, is based on the three-act play from 1952. The film contains one of the 20th century’s most iconic images, Marilyn Monroe standing on a subway grate in a white dress, and thus the film has been found to be of significant importance in Western media history<sup>7</sup>. The film portrays Richard Sherman, whose wife has left Manhattan to go on an up-country vacation, and a young beautiful woman who spends the summer in the apartment upstairs from Sherman’s. The film displays the dynamic between older men and young women, and furthermore how the perception of innocence and youth makes a woman desirable. Monroe’s character acts nameless in the film: “Goodnight,

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<sup>7</sup> See appendix 2

whatever your name is” (Wilder, 1:25:10), and thus exists in alignment with Carter’s notion that women are not sexual beings on her own, but must be made interesting by the influence of a man. The film plays upon the notion of contrast between men and women, innocence and experience, vice and virtue, and interestingly, the film portrays the young woman as being so overtly unaware of her sexual appeal that the lack of reflectiveness of her own nature makes her increasingly attractive to men:

“You won’t believe this, but men keep falling desperately in love with me. And suddenly they get this strange idea in their heads. (...) They ask me to marry them, all the time. I don’t know why they do it” (Wilder, 0:47:10).

Thus, the film plays upon the same understanding of vice and virtue which Matthew Gregory Lewis portrayed in *The Monk*: “(...) Vice is ever most dangerous when lurking behind the Mask of Virtue” (Lewis, 1959, pp. 92). Furthermore the film exhibits a vast variation of sexual tensions all of which Monroe is unaware of. The iconic scene above the subway grate is a good example of this. Monroe’s character did not stand there in order to reveal herself to her company, but rather to cool off in the wind from the bypassing subway trains. It is highlighted through the film that Manhattan is exceedingly hot, often referred to as “an oven”. Furthermore the heat intensifies as a metaphor for the increasing sexual tension, which ultimately forces Sherman to flee to Maine, where his wife is spending the summer. In contrast to the Sadeian separation of vice and virtue, Monroe is unaware of her sexuality; even though she is in no way modest or shy and appear almost nude, she does so without noticing the effect her appearance seems to have on her downstairs neighbours. Carter compares the attitude and depiction of Monroe’s character to Sade’s Justine, as she too is unaware of the effects of her appearances. In the Sadeian narrative, what makes Justine a continuous target of male affection is the fact that she is innocent and unaware. Effectively, Sade punishes Justine for keeping with virtue instead of giving in to vice (Carter, 1979), because the value of innocence is just as much a violent act upon women as physical punishment, as Sade makes it evident in his dramatic dialogue *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir* (1795).

The dynamic between submission and dominance is highly on display within the classic 1950’s depictions of the blonde bombshell. Especially within the genre of romantic comedies; it is not without significance that these dynamics play such a fundamental part of the humour, as well as

the plot. Carter proposes that sexuality displayed in film, both of pornographic and non-pornographic nature, often have the ability to reflect the contemporary status quo of the cultural landscape (Carter, 1979). Thus the dynamics between submission and domination have some level of applicability with its audiences. An instance which in this case is worthy of mention is a scene from *The Seven Year Itch*. As Sherman fantasies about his irresistible, although imaginary, appeal towards women: “Ms. Finch, you’re not fit to wear that uniform. You’re rotten to the core” says Sherman, in his fantasy, to a nurse whom he has made fall madly in love with him beyond her own will. He slaps her across the face, four times in total, to which she replies: “Beat me. Hit me. Beat me until your arms ache. You know I’ll only come crawling back for more” (Wilder, 0:18:28). Thereby the notion of pain in relation to pleasure is not exclusive to fetishism or horror. By the context of the 1950’s, a notable feature in the mainstream feature film, and by extension, not an uncommon dynamic to the audience of the film.

The Sadeian contrast between vice and virtue is exceedingly evident in Howard Hawks’ *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), also starring Marilyn Monroe. This film was released a few years prior to the aforementioned picture. The film displays the dynamics between the blonde Lorelei Lee, played by Marilyn Monroe and the brunette Dorothy Shaw, played by Jane Russell. Lee and Shaw display two vastly different types of women. Lee utilises her charm and charisma which she derives from notions of innocence, youth, and ignorance to lure men into providing her with jewels and gifts: “Find a gentlemen who is shy or bold, or short or tall, or young or old, as long as the guy is a millionaire” (Hawks, 0:03:31). As a result, Lee attracts men that are exceedingly wealthy, however, they are often older or less attractive, and even unpleasant company. In contrast, her friend and travel companion, Shaw, is looking for a man who is in shape and good looking, his wealth is less important; Lee comments that her friend is always falling in love with ordinary men, and that she feels a great deal of sadness for her friends poor choices of lovers. The character of Shaw is furthermore rather sharp tongued and played in an increasingly angry note, which generates negative responses from many of the men in film, and thus excludes her as a potential partner “The brunette is her friend, Dorothy Shaw, never mind about her, we don’t care what she thinks” (Hawks, 0:09:16). Furthermore, she often uses sarcasm, which displays intelligence and reflection, a trait which Lorelei Lee keeps hidden. As it was the case in Dacre’ *Zofloya, Or the Moor*, the brunette possesses some characteristics which are less attractive to the majority of men in comparison to her platinum blonde counterpart.

The blonde bombshell of the 1950's, embodied by Marilyn Monroe, is far from as virtuous as the original Sadeian Justine was described. However that does not prove the trope of vice and virtue inapplicable to its more contemporary setting. Instead, the blonde bombshell seems to be a trope which plays upon the awareness of the desirable nature of vulnerability and innocence. However, without actively practicing it, but rather by giving the impression of the fact. Effectively embodied in Lorelei Lee who is well aware of her appeal, however she chooses to act unaware as it is evident that the men she is attracting prefer to play the role of rescuer, teacher or provider. By letting these men do so, it allows Lee to pursue her goals, without the men knowing it. An example of this is seen in one of the opening scenes of the film, Lorelei Lee tells her friends that she has spotted a jewelry box in the pocket of her admirer to which Shaw replies: "I think you're the only girl in the world who can stand on a stage with the spotlight in her eyes and still see a diamond inside a man's pocket" (Hawks, 0:05:03). This part establishes that Lee is indeed not unaware nor without skills of deduction. However, as her admirer enters the room, Lee switches the tone of her voice, making it increasingly high pitched; as a result, she starts to sound submissive and confused. More importantly, her discourse changes from a determined and deductive mode to an innocent and passive tone: "Daddy, I bet you'd made me the happiest girl in the world" (Hawks, 0:05:54). Thereby, Lorelei Lee depicts the dynamics of gender and sexuality which was extensively described in *The Sadeian Woman* (1979).

Furthermore, Carter deconstructs the representation of authority figures of the Sadeian narrative and how these are also appearing in the 1950's. She points out that in Sade's philosophy, there are some positions in society which grants you the license to practice violence, because they come with an inherent power and freedom. These positions are that of the rescuer, teacher or the provider - embodied by the soldier, the police, the priest and the father (Carter, 1979). Furthermore, these positions have been known throughout history to come with a significant authority or power, and thus, they are in the 1950's still regarded as desirable positions, as it is evident within the film: "I can be smart when it is important, but most men don't like it" (Hawks, 01:29:11). Furthermore, the film exhibits how Carter's theory is not solely applicable to pornographic contents. Instead, aspects of her theory is evident throughout common exchanges between men and women. Men are the active component, influencing a passive counterpart - he made her happy. Interestingly, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* exhibits the Sadeian trope of innocence and experience, however in a similarly effective manner it also completely contradicts Sade's philosophy regarding gender dynamics. Sade describes women and men as able to possess the ability to be equally active and passive within the spectrum of

sexuality. Thus, the bombshell of the 1950's is not a direct contemporary translation of the Sadeian trope, however it does utilise what was initially invented by Sade as a paratext and as a measure of characterisation. It is quite possible that neither Hawks nor Wilder were aware that they were actually utilising elements of Sadeian philosophy in their films, which is initially one of Carter's most important conclusions; the understanding of the dynamics between innocence and experience is so vastly embedded within Western culture that it has become fundamental (Carter, 1979). Writers, directors, critiques and consumers are simply unaware of the reason why exactly we perceive blondes as sexier, or why innocence and virtue are often considered attractive, why the blondes are often the central character or why sexually adventurousness in women are seldom a positive trait, if she is even included. Those are difficult questions to answer comprehensively, however it is not without importance that these tropes have existed for centuries in Western literature. Furthermore, it is possibly not without credit to the popularity of *The History of Justine*, published in the London Pioneer during the Victorian era, or Lewis' interpretation of Sadeian Tropes in *The Monk*, which gained significant momentum. Sade and his tropes have continued to thrive since his death, although significant aspects of his philosophy have since been forgotten or lost. Furthermore, the interpretation of Sade's tropes in the 1950's are still prevalent in contemporary culture today, and thus it is possible to deduct the shift in discourse and exhibition of the Sadeian philosophy; As McMorran pointed out in his essay, people have been reading Sade within even knowing it (McMorran, 2017).

During the decades of the 50's and 60's, blondness came to carry relevance and meaning beyond hair colour. The traits and characteristics which were associated with blonde hair was that of the dynamic between immense sexuality and complete innocence. As Norman Mailer writes in his biography Marilyn from 1973: "None but Marilyn Monroe could suggest such a purity of sexual delight. The boldness with which she could parade herself and yet never be gross, her sexual flamboyance and bravada which yet was the voice of a tiny child - these complications were integral to her gift. And they described a young woman trapped in some never-never land of unawareness" (Mailer, 1973).

Carter describes this period as a time which was so largely dominated by the likeness of the Sadeian philosophy; because Norma Jean was sculpted from the body of Justine: "See how they look! Marilyn Monroe, the living image of Justine (...) they look as if they will bruise at a touch, carrying the exciting stigmata of sexual violence for a long time, and that is why gentlemen prefer

blondes” (Carter, 1979). The evolution of Sade’s tropes, which is embodied in these works, shows the opposition to his frustration and dread. Sade also lived in a society which favoured Justine over Juliette, which is why he decided to punish her, and thereby punish the world. Sade’s works are by extension not only important works of literature, they are also his manifest and his commentary upon common morality. Carter points towards the death of Justine. She is struck by lightning in the end, which is why her viceful sister Juliette is the narrator of Justine’s story. Her clothes are burned off and her blue eyes spark fire. That is how Sade chose to portray Justine, just as she lived; with the innocence of her body in complete focus and a hungry world watching. The importance of Justine’s death will aim to encapsulate the fascination with Marilyn Monroe; as her body and its suffering too was out on the world’s stage upon her death (Ibid). The death of Marilyn Monroe thereby perfectly displays the dynamics between pleasure and pain and how these nuances are extremely prevalent in our contemporary comprehension of attractiveness and sexuality. Furthermore it also embodies how the Sadeian tropes are not necessarily exclusive to literature, but are just as evident throughout politics, philosophy and social sciences; as psychiatrist Jacques Lacan described it in his work *Kant Avec Sade* (1971) what feels good and comfortable to people are universally understood and shared concepts, one of these aspects of well-being is to be found within “happiness in evil”, perhaps perfectly described as watching a beautiful woman degrade and suffer.

### **Accumulation: Innocence and Experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

This chapter connects Carter’s display of Sade’s depictions of structural criticism with Bronfen’s theories regarding the dying women as a literature trope. This combination proposes an overall comprehension of the continuous fascination with pain and pleasure, as well as suffering women as a spectacle, both within, and outside, the pornographic spectrum. Furthermore, Carter’s starting point of pornographic deduction utilised in order to comprehend Sadeian tropes of sexuality in 1950’s Marilyn Monroe films. Because pornography mirrors the given landscape of its production it effectively exhibits its source culture in the most honest and crude manner. As Sade places the body in the center of his materialistic philosophy, so does pornography portray bodies with fucking as their *raison d’être*. Carter argues that religion often tends to focus on masculine sexuality as the primary form of expression, and by default, female sexuality becomes a function of reproduction, and a mere effect of the primary engagement. The effect of a male dominated entertainment field is evident in both perspective and tone. As a result, the exhibited sexual dynamics are exceedingly dependent upon female submission. Contrastingly, Carter looks toward Sade as a moral pornographer, because, he

portrays these concepts both with criticism and commentary. However, the Sadeian tropes, which have been found to be prevalent in the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are increasingly related to the dynamic between innocence and experience, although they do seldom portray an equivalent notion of critique. *The Seven year Itch* (1955) displays the dynamic between older men and young women, and furthermore how the stroke of innocence and youth makes a woman desirable. The dynamic between submission and dominance is highly on display within the classic 1950's depiction of the blonde bombshell. Furthermore, the film shows how the notion of pain in relation to pleasure is not exclusive to fetishism or horror. Carter describes this period as a time which was largely dominated by the likeness of the Sadeian philosophy; because Norma Jean was sculpted from the body of Justine.

An analysis of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) uncovered striking similarities between the film's two main characters and Dacre's portrayal of the dynamic between Victoria and Lilla in *Zofloya, or the Moor*. Moreover, the film exhibits the Sadeian trope of innocence and experience, however simultaneously it also exhibits the possession of the female form which actively contradicts the notion of free sexual expansion. As a result, it is visible that although Sade's tropes are prevalent centuries after their creation, they are continuously altered and edited; rather than being homages to the French writer, they have become culturally embedded notions which often appear as universal facts. By extension, the Sadeian tropes are not necessarily exclusive to literature, but are just as evident throughout politics, philosophy and social sciences.

## **Historical Background: BD/SM and Its Contemporary Applications**

Before it is possible to apply the concepts and dynamics which Sade introduced in his texts it is of great salience that the terms are properly accounted for. Although Sade fathered the fundamental idea of sadomasochism, it was not until 1898 that the terms were introduced. One explanation for the timespan between the texts and the introduction of their descriptive terms may be rooted in the fact that Sade's texts were banned, and thus taboo in most social contexts. However, many of his texts were also lost or missing throughout a large part of the 1800's. Therefore, one may render that the origin of the term and the publication of his most infamous texts are perfectly aligned. *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* was published in 1904 and thus recreated the focus on Sade and his philosophy, which so far merely had been suggested through textual influences and impacts.

The terms 'sadism' and 'masochism' were initially coined by sexologist Richard von Kraft-Ebing in his work "*Psychopathia Sexuali*" from 1898; the terms were used in order to describe



a condition in which one experiences sexual arousal when inflicting pain upon others or having others inflict pain upon you (Hunt, 2015). Interestingly, the terms 'sadism' and masochism' are both terms that is still grounded in pathology and sexual deviance, this notion was pushed further when Freud later described the combined term as 'sadomasochism', a deviance from natural sexuality and fetishised power plays (Ibid). The difference between the aforementioned terms of 'sadism', 'masochism' and 'sadomasochism' is found in the fact that Kraft-Ebing, as well as Freud, initially described the terms as unrelated, or separate. According to their theories, one was to easily experience arousal from inflicting pain upon others, or engaging in a power plays as a dominant role, however the same person would often feel no need, or lust, to engage in opposite acts. Freud theorised that men were inclined biologically, as well as psychologically, to the perversion of sadism, the dominator, whereas women was biologically, and psychologically, inclined to the perversion of masochism, the submissive (Hunt, 2015).

Later research shows that most people who are inclined to seek out pleasure/pain power plays are for the most part equally interested in inflicting pain upon others as well as having others inflict pain upon them, and thus, there are no scientific data to support a notion that the categorisations of the fetishism should be rooted in a biological and gender-based component. In 1929 the British psychologist and the founder of sexology Havelock Ellis published a seven-volume study, where he refutes Freud's notion that sadism is stereotypically a male perversion, but rather a branch of sexuality which expresses love and affection through pain and violence. (Lowrey 2004). Furthermore, it was also in Ellis' study that the abbreviation SM first appeared, acknowledging that both the components of giving and receiving applies to both genders, as well as all participators of sadomasochistic dynamics. All the way up through the 1900s, the sadomasochistic curiosity found its way into mainstream culture. In 1947, Alfred C. Kinsey founds the Institute of Sex Research at Indiana University, where he later publishes the Kinsey Report. This report can be prescribed with a great deal of credit for the mainstream interest in sexual deviances. It stated that 12 percent of female and 22 percent of male participators found an erotic response when listening to a sadomasochistic story. Furthermore, 55 percent of females and 50 percent males participants experiences sexual arousal from being bitten (Ibid).

Literature from this point in history was also largely influenced by the sadomasochistic movement. In 1954 the French author Anne Desclos published *L'Histoire d'O* under the pen name of

Pauline Réage, which concerned a woman's fantasy of submission to unknown sexual dominators. Furthermore, in 1955 Vladimir Nabokov publishes *Lolita*, which concerns a male obsession with a 12 year old girl, and thus, also draws upon the notions of submission and domination. Up through the 70's and 80's the abbreviation BD/SM, short for bondage, domination, sadism and masochism, became an increasingly significant feature of the larger gay male subculture in America and the underground club scene. BD/SM became a cultural movement which inspired American literature and media such as Larry Townsend's *The Leatherman's Handbook* (first published in 1972) Richard O'Brien's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), which not only displays the iconic leather look, often associated with BD/SM culture, but also exhibits the performative gender through drag culture. In the early late 70's BD/SM also became a significant feature with the American lesbian community. The foundation of Samois, an organisation that which became visible in the public eye due to its activism for the American gay communities. Samois, took their name from the Samois-sur-Seine, the location of Anne-Marie, the female dominatrix from *L'Histoire d'O*. The writer Pat Califia, a transgender man and a bisexual feminist became a prominent figure during this time and creating both fiction and non-fiction, like *Sapphisty: The Book of Lesbian Sexuality* (first published in 1980) and *Doing It for Daddy. Short and Sexy Fiction about a Very Forbidden Fantasy* (first published in 1994), all of which centered on the BD/SM culture of the gay community and the outspokenness of equality and sexual freedom. Samois inspired several similar organizations through the 80's and 90's which all gained a significant amount of popularity (Lowrey, 2004).

### **Historical Background: The Reintroduction of Pleasure and Pain**

In the 1970's and 1980's the view on gender and sexuality was reevaluated and reconstructed by several communities and movements in order to pursue sexual freedom and increased ability of personal expression. Furthermore, these movements were criticizing and confronting the previous understanding of gender and sexuality. One of the increasingly significant notions of which was the rejection of innocence as a sexual advantage. The Marilyn Monroe heroine remained a mainstream trope, however it spawned reactions and counter tropes from subcultural productions and oppositional movements. During the 1970's Richard O'Brien wrote, and Jim Sherman directed, the musical comedy *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), in the same year the Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini made *Salò (or Le 120 Giornate di Sodoma)* (1975). This film was a direct cinematic adaptation of the Marquis de Sade's *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* and would come to be one of the most notorious and banned works of contemporary film-making. Overall, this

decade, as well as the decade to come, would produce a significant amount of works which all exhibited gender and sexuality in manners which prescribed less value to preexisting norms and focused exceedingly on personal liberations. The peak of the second wave of feminism is an instance of this cultural movement as well (Bergeron, 2015). In 1970 the first Women's Liberation Conference took place in London, marking a change in discourse regarding gender and equality. It was also during the 1970's that Angela Carter published *The Sadeian Woman - An Exercise in Cultural History* (1979). Amongst other important works, Germaine Greer published *The Female Eunuch* in 1970 and Robin Morgan published *Sisterhood Is Power - An Anthology of Writing from the Women's Liberation Movement* in 1970 as well. Thus, with this cultural discourse, it was possible to revisit aspects of sexuality and gender which, prior to the 1970's, would have been considered trivial or irrelevant. This chapter will aim to compare Sherman's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* to Pasolini's *Salò*. Firstly because these productions were presented in the same year, and are thereby both influenced by the same societal movements and values; but furthermore, because they both possess vital Sadeian tropes. These films display the Sadeian tropes in vastly different manners, however the importance is to be found in their distinctly different exhibitions of values and morality.

### **Analysis: Pasolini's Display of Equality in *Salò***

Initiating with the work that is directly and unapologetically based on Sade's most infamous manifest of grotesque commentary and gruesome societal critique. The original *Les 120 Journées de Sodome ou l'école du libertinage* takes place prior to the death of Louis XIV of France in 1715, in the castle of Silling in which a banker, an aristocrat, a judge and a bishop have captured 36 victims; most of them boys and girls from the age of twelve to the age of fifteen. Over the course of four months the young boys and girls are subjected to the desires and pleasures of the four authorities and their accomplices. These desires are divided into categories: "les passions simples", "les passions doubles", "les passions criminelles" and "les passions meurturières"<sup>8</sup>. The first set of passions concern that of prostitution and the indulgence of coprophagia: the consumption of feces and urine, during this state the authorities take turn practicing similar acts with the victims and with each other as well. The second set of passions involves flagellation and torture, and most violently: incest. These passions are regarded as especially symbolic and carry strong connotations and religious criticism, blasphemy and sacrilegious activities. The young virgins are "deflowered" during the evening orgies during this time. The next passions are those of criminal nature; anecdotes of child

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<sup>8</sup> "the simple passions", "the double passions", "the criminal passions" and "the murderous passions"

rape and body dismemberment are told by older prostitutes and the authorities exercise extreme torture upon the young victims. The last set of passions have fatal results. The punishment of motherhood becomes the focal point of the desires of the authorities, these passions are manifested through violent executions. The anecdotes told by the prostitutes concern genocide, the disembowelment of pregnant women, and the killing of newborns (Phillips, 2015) The crimes of murderous nature are the most grotesque, however it is also in these paragraphs Carter argues that one will uncover his critique upon the structure of society and the characteristics of his context. The matricide plays a large role in Sade's philosophy, the mother is, in the Sadeian philosophy direct link to the religious foundation of society. Both the creation and the birth of the child is described as holy and sacred Sade's contemporary religious institution, which he was exceedingly critical of; hence Sade's violent imagery. An instance of his tone can be found in this anecdote, describing the murderous passions of three friends, one of whom is an abbot:

“(...) now living abroad and still enjoying each other's company, and this is one of their common passions: they require a woman whose pregnancy is in its eighth or begun its ninth month, they open her belly, snatch out the child, burn it before the mother's eyes, and in its place substitute a package containing Sulphur and quicksilver, which they set afire, then stitch the belly up again, leaving the mother thus to perish in the midst of incredible agonies, while they look on and have themselves frigged by the girl they have with them” (Sade, 2016)

Pasolini's 1975 film adaption has in many aspects stayed close to its original influence, however with a few adjustments that functions as modernizers. The film is set during WWII prior to the fall of Benito Mussolini in the fascist republic of Salò, and functions fully as a display of the choreography of fascism and its exercise of power and violence upon an underserving public. Four wealthy Italian libertines, a duke, a bishop, a magistrate and the president, subject eighteen teenagers to sexual abuse, torture and murder. Although the film is not divided into four passions as the original manuscript, however it is divided into four sections which are inspired by Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (1320). These sections are those of “the Anteinferno”, “the Circle of Manias”, “the Circle of Excrement” and “the Circle of Blood” - all of which form an increasing intensity which is similar to its primary influence. Pasolini's film adaptation is exceedingly concerned with the first two stages, during which the libertines host large feasts with multiple courses, all of which consist of human feces. However, the notion which will prove most vital in this context is Pasolini's depiction and

interpretation of gender and the Sadeian philosophy of desire. In the castle of Silling the values of the body are not dependent upon its gender but increasingly so on its level of experience and willingness to pursue vice. Therefore, the victims, boys and girls alike, are all being married off wearing white bridal gowns to symbolise their virginity. The notions of masculinity and femininity in this Sadeian depiction is much less clear and fixed as it is seen to be in contrasting films, such as the aforementioned romantic comedies of the 1950's during which men and women are prescribed vastly different roles in society. Furthermore, the authorities do not favour the male or the female body over the other, and as such establish advantages to both, depending on the desires which they are pursuing. In instance which displays this function, is seen as the authorities' debate whom amongst the victims have the best behind and to settle their discussion they have all the victims lined up for inspection (1:19:19). The girls and the boys are thus judged from the same criteria. This aspect is not completely unrelated to Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, in which he describes the ancient Greek sexual practices. The ancient Greek philosophy of sexuality was less dependent upon gender, but rather related to the hierarchy of the actors performing the intercourse, the overall exercise of power is thus of vital importance. Thereby, men could both penetrate and be penetrators. It is not entirely unlikely that the notion of gender performativity played an increasingly larger role in Pasolini's film adaptation than incest or matricide did. One may render that the cultural landscape and its contextual topics assisted in shaping his interpretation and depiction of the Sadeian philosophy. Moreover, the cultural landscape which came after the publication of Pasolini's film had an increasing focus on gender and gender performativity; with the publications of Judith Butler's *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988) *Gender Trouble* in 1990, the cultural focus on how society defines gender has not decreased since the 1970, on the contrary. Butler theories: "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (Butler, 1988). Furthermore, one may render that this film displays the notions of sexual power and the exercise of sexual violence even independently of sexual intercourse. Thereby it functions as a critique of sexual dynamics of power and hierarchy, perfectly embodied in the fascist mechanisms.

"Observing with equal passion and apathy, Guido and Vaccari masturbating the two bodies which belong to us, inspires a number of interesting reflections (...) we fascists are the only true anarchists. Naturally, once we've become masters of the state, true anarchy is that of power. However, look at their obscene gestures, like deaf-mute language, with a code none of us can break,

no matter how great our power. There is nothing to be done. We must restrict our impulses to a single gesture” (0:39:05).

The film exhibits a politically choreographed exercise of violence, and although it appears in the context of sexual practices, the circumstances under which they appear provide a commentary upon the notion of the general exercise of power. As Sade’s original manuscript provides the reader with a political critique upon the royal dynasty of Louis XIV, so does Pasolini provide a similar critique upon a rising political interest of fascism. These critiques are exhibited through sexual violence, and exercised upon undeserving children. However, these features can be comprehended as symbols for how such political mechanisms exploit its underserving population. Therefore, one may render that films such as *Salò*, because of their grotesque exhibition of sexual violence, have had some influence in context of bringing the Sadeian tropes of the exercise of sexual freedom and violence, and what these concepts may symbolise, into the cultural landscape of the 21st century.

### **Analysis: The Rocky Horror Gender Depiction Show**

This next section will aim to show how some of the topics which were displayed in Pasolini’s *Salò* where not exclusive to Italian film-making. In a manner that is similar to how the early gothic novel in Britain was influenced by the French moral pornography, so has aspects of the American cultural landscape been influenced by foreign forces. Richard O’Brien’s *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* takes place in the 1970’s Ohio’s town of Denton. However the majority of the story actually takes place in the mansion of Dr. Frank-N-Furter, played by Jim Curry. The film’s main focus is on the characters Janet and Brad who just got engaged, however they are both depicted as rather innocent; Janet mentions that she is saving herself for marriage. As their car breaks down they seek shelter in a mansion, uncovering the strange company of the doctor and his friends and servants. The doctor refers to himself as a “sweet transvestite from Transsexual Transylvania” as he appears in women’s lingerie throughout the film. The contrasting imagery of innocence and experience may be rendered to be one of the focal points of the film; as the residents of the mansion dance and sing Janet says to Brad: “It seems unhealthy here” (0:24:05), thus a contrast between the outside norms of society are pitted against the counter-cultural status quo of the mansion. In the mansion, there is a definite hierarchy between the residents, servants and the master however this hierarchy is neither upheld by masculinity nor by typically masculine figures of authority. Instead, the hierarchy is asserted by experience and sexual expression. The doctor is the most viceful in his company, which grants him respect and fear, as well as admiration. Pasolini exhibits a similar notion

in *Salò* as the authority is distributed in regards to age e.g. sexual experience and thus, the older rules the young and innocent. Furthermore, both films play upon the notion of inherent authority, which was also a focal point of Sade's. Some positions come with inherent power and thus, the license to violence - the bishop in *Salò* or the doctor in *Rocky*. What provides this notion with the characterisation of a Sadeian trope is how these characters utilise their authority and license. Frank slaughters a man in front of the other attendees and the young couple, but no one questions his decision: "Don't be upset, it was a mercy killing. He had a certain naive charm, but no muscle" (0:46:21). Sade's commentary upon social injustices and inherent power often manifests itself through the misuse of power; a doctor committing a murder, a monk raping young women or a father acting as an executioner. Sade breaks the inherent trust that is embedded within these positions, as a social commentary upon their misuse and their lack qualification. The dynamics of power and the display of hierarchies are exhibited through clothing; the servants forcefully remove the clothes of both Janet and Brad until they are only standing in their underwear, as they will continue to do throughout the film. In a similar manner, hierarchy is exhibited in *Salò* as the young captives are forced to be naked throughout the four month long duration of their stay.

The setting of the film is not entirely without importance either. The mansion is remote and unheard of, with little, if any, contact to the outside world (there is mention of a telephone, however it is unclear if the mansion actually has one). The dynamics between the residents inside is what would naturally be described as odd, or at least unconventionally expressive and sexual. Thus, the mansion and its remoteness provides the residents with the ability to pursue their impulses and desires. In a similar notion *Salò*, as well as Sade's original *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*, takes place in a remote and unfamiliar location - that is the castle of Silling. The remote setting enables the character to untie themselves from societal norms and ethics, a notion that is closely related to gender perception. In a similar manner to Pasolini, O'Brien breaks down the practice of sex and gender. As Frank wears lingerie and frocks in *Rocky*, so are the virgin boys married of wearing bridal gowns and veils in *Salò*. It is the perception of Sade's that these dynamics of gender and sex are kept alive in society by religious institutions and thus, by excluding the character from such influences, the boundaries naturally breaks down. In example of this is seen as the young couple Janet and Brad are quickly growing accustomed to the practice in the mansion. During the first night Frank disguises himself as Brad and crawls into bed with Janet, upon discovering that it is indeed not her fiancée, she initially is distressed and remarks that she was saving herself for marriage. However moments after

she invites Frank back into her arms, remarking that Brad must not find out (“0:50:10”) Shortly after, the film skips to a scene showing Frank seducing Brad in a rather similar manner and thereby the film highlights the moral shift in the young couple, which gradually will be become increasingly influenced by the sexual dynamics of the residents.

*The Rocky Horror Picture Show* takes its name after the Frankenstein-like creation of Dr. Frank-N-Furter, Rocky Horror. A man whom is created for the pleasure of his creator. The synthetic man is desired and admired by the visitors and residents of the mansion, however it is clear that unlike most depictions of men from this era, Rocky Horror is not only meant to be desired, but to be used a sexual object. In contrast to aforementioned 1950’s romantic comedies, which clearly depict how men appreciate the desiring eyes of women, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* depicts men in manner that is similar to the Sadeian trope of the passive male. Because this philosophy places the body, not the male or the female body but bodies in general, in the center of its comprehension, anybody can be penetrated or become the penetrator - which is the role of Rocky Horror. Dr. Frank-N-Furter also comments upon the contemporary assumption of powerful masculinity: “What a perfect specimen of manhood, so dominant. You must be very proud of him” (0:31:11). The film, much like *Salò*, or any Sadeian depiction, provides its viewer with a sense of chaos, embodied by the introducing dance number. Carter explained in her work that pornography in general lacked the notion of free expansion because it, more than any other form of media, is dependent upon the similarities of society. The chaos is derived from the absence of institutions and authority, when sexual desires are left to roam freely; such is the free expansion of sexuality. A depiction which will further draw upon the similarities of Sherman’s 1975’s film and the Sadeian philosophy of the 1700’s is created by an anonymous Dutch print artist in 1789, displayed by the World Museum of Erotic Art. These works show the vices of Justine’s sister Juliette, from Sade’s *Juliette Ou Les Prosperites Du Vice*<sup>9</sup>. It is evident that within the world of desire and lust chaos plays a central part, it eliminates all cultural and societal salience of gender and hierarchy and thus, there are only anatomical openings and the imagination of the participants.

Another perspective, which is worthy of mention, is related to ethics and moral. The sexually adventurous subculture within which one could argue that the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* belongs, along with other imaginative innovators like John Waters or Paolo Pier Pasolini. In the film,

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<sup>9</sup> See appendix 3



Janet and Brad are shown and taught that the deeds and behaviors they believe to be good, like saving oneself for marriage, are not measures one must take in order to live a happy life. The sexual dynamics which are displayed in the film utilises morality as focal point. The film effectively paints a picture that divides the pursuit of happiness and pleasure from institutional expectations, like the value of virginity or monogamy. The contrast becomes thoroughly clear when the young couple encounters the people in the mansion, however the theme has already been set from the first scene as Janet and Brad are attending a wedding in a chapel (0:03:20) thus, the societal importance prescribed to the institution of the church is established. The contrast between religious morality and the pursuit of pleasure is far from uncommon in literature. In *The Monk*, the definition of good was determined by the Catholic Church, in which Ambrosio's lust creates a direct opposition to that of his faith. Furthermore, in *Zofloya*, Victoria confronts the notions that are expected of her as a woman and prioritizes her own vice rather than following the dominant culture of her peers. It is not to say that the misdeeds of neither Ambrosio nor Victoria, nor of Janet and Brad are inherently something that must be celebrated simply because they become part of a religious critique; much like Sade's original works they were not created to be good. The portrayal of the good deed was an idea which was so thoroughly mocked by Sade - an author whose purpose was never to be appreciated nor liked by his contemporaries. In the Sadeian narrative what does the individual good and what does society good functions as two complete opposite mechanics, possible best described by an exchange from his original *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*: "She raises a storm, criticizing their behavior toward her and describing it as unjust. "Were it just," says the Duc, wiping his razor, "it would surely fail to give us an erection"" (Sade, 2016). Therefore, much like morality played a considerable part in Sade's own texts, it has also become a major part in the general Sadeian philosophy.

As a result, all Sadeian tropes carry several traits which both utilise and challenge the initial and contemporary idea of morality. As an example, the damsel in distress, Justine and Marilyn Monroe, are both engaged in dilemmas of morality. The 1950's bombshell musical number "*Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend*", from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, communicates rather clearly that Lorelei Lee will take any man as long as he is rich enough, thus also proposing a critique of the holiness of monogamy. It is thus possible to detect the Sadeian philosophy throughout many significantly more contemporary measures of media, it is too intends to position the body as the focal point for the story, as Sade placed the body in the center of his philosophy. Lastly, these notions are included, not to portray them as new perspectives nor to reveal a secretive Sadeian agenda behind

popular works of fiction. The inclusion of Sade is simply to highlight how these features have come to be continuously utilised in modern media and more importantly from which philosophy they originated.

### **Accumulation: Sexual Deviances and Masculine Commentaries**

During the 1900's sexual deviances found an increasingly applicability with a mainstream audience throughout Europe and North America. Research shows that people become increasingly curious about pleasure and power plays; a curiosity which became evident through various publications and film. Furthermore, research found that these power plays, which would be termed sadomasochism, were not based on biological components of gender, but rather activities of leisure. Such a notion contrasted the early comprehensions of sadomasochism, which falsely prescribed sadism as stereotypically a male perversion; an extension of embedded belief that men are the active component, thus the one's that punish. Publications of the 1970's and 1980's provides cultural evidence that both men and women equally was able to enjoy both sadism and masochism. Furthermore, one significant notion of this period was a large clash between a mainstream perception of innocence as a sexual advantage and opposition view that rendered experience an increasing advantage in the sexual landscape.

Pasolini's *Salò* (1975) adapts Sade's original *Les 120 Journées de Sodome ou l'école du libertinage*, which is believed to be his most grotesque narrative, to the setting of Mussolini's regime. Although, there are significant and central element in the original narrative which was not adapted by the Italian director, it still succeeds in exhibiting the sexual landscape of the castle of Silling as a commentary upon the problematic politics of fascism. Thus, the sexual dynamics portrayed by Pasolini supersedes those of the previously mentioned works like the 1950's romantic comedies, as it actively utilise the Sadeian philosophy in order to express a political commentary through a choreographed exercise of violence. Similarly, Richard O'Brien's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) may also be regarded as an adaptation of Sade's most infamous and grotesque work literature. The film portrays the dynamics between submission and domination, however in contrast to the culturally embedded notion of masculine dominance, the hierarchy is not dependent upon gender, but rather upon vice, indulgence and experience. In both films, the authority is distributed in regards to sexual experience and thus, the older rules the young and innocent. Both *Salò* and *Rocky Horror* exhibits the conventional notions of morality as concepts that are manufactured by the structural mechanisms of society, as a result both film have adapted Sade's remote location in order to break

down the pre-existing codes. Thus, what these film exhibit is the free sexual expansion which may be rendered one of Sade's most vital lessons, as well as a core value of sadomasochism which is often forgotten or edited out.

### **3. Possessive Discourse in Mainstream Literature**

Moving once again through time, this next chapter will concern the contemporary context of the beginning of the new millennium. During the last 19 years, the focus on sadomasochism has experienced a paradigm shift during which it has transitioned from a subcultural deviance to a widely represented form of sexual expression. It is the assumption of this dissertation that a mainstream appeal to sadomasochism has altered its philosophy to an extent further than what has already been established. This assumption is directly related to the notion of free sexual expansion and how such a concept does not match well with pre-existing practices of sexuality, as it has been established in the previous chapter as well. In order to discuss contemporary sadomasochism, its alterations and its plausible cultural consequences, this chapter will include an analysis of an exceedingly popular novel of erotic fiction, Sylvia Day's *Bared to You* (2012). Furthermore, what will be uncovered during this chapter, as well as all that has been uncovered throughout the previous two chapters, will be put into a wider discussion of power discourse and violent sexual representation. The critiques and commentaries created by the online Incel community will function as an indicator of an intensified sexual landscape. However, this discussion will also seek to examine what societal mechanisms and structural functions moved this involuntarily celibate community towards an aggressive mode and a discourse of sexual entitlement, but most saliently, towards an active exercise of violence.

#### **Analysis: Contemporary Erotic Fiction and Subtle Power Plays**

During recent years, the popularity of erotic novels has exploded; with the publication of E.L James' first novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* in 2011, the cultural landscape has been vastly occupied with what the press has categorised as "mommy porn". Studies show that the sales of books related to the genre of erotic fiction have increased significantly during the last 15 years, and that the audiences of these books are primarily middle aged women. (Styles, 2012). It is not to say that the literature within this specific genre supersedes the relevance of classic works of fiction, nor is it to say that these publications bear significant traits of quality themselves. However, reports still show

how erotic novels have become increasingly more popular than other genres, independent of their quality regarding language and plot. A trait which often categorises the erotic novel is the simplicity of the language, as well as its structure and its plot. Many erotic novels, like those by E.L. James and Sylvia Day, have not been described as great pieces of literature, on the contrary, they have often received great amounts of scorn from literary critiques. However, their wide audience and vast popularity prove them essential in terms of a cultural analysis of the sexual dynamics and processes in the given context of interest. Thus, the reader of such a novel is not necessarily required to maintain the same levels of attentiveness or interest as *The Monk*, *Zofloya*, or even *Justine*, would require. Rather, these new works of erotic fiction are produced for rapid mass consumption, which is also typical for other types of pornography. Moreover, this genre may prove exceedingly relevant in terms of this context in spite of its simple nature. This chapter will aim to exhibit how the structure and overall composition of Sylvia Day's *Bared to You* shares several traits with that of conventional pornographic contents. Furthermore, this chapter will also explore how these shared traits are manifested within the story. The book received significantly more praise than its predecessor *Fifty Shades*. The Independent wrote that it was "at least healthier than the dysfunctional wreck of *Fifty Shades*" (2012). The characterisations of pornography provided by Carter's exercise in cultural theory will therefore work as a foundation from which it will be possible to discuss a possible connection between tropes portrayed in contemporary erotic novels and the up rise of aggressive online communities.

Sylvia Day's *Bared to You*, the first book in her *Crossfire* series, follows the 24 year old woman Eva Trammel who encounters Gideon Cross, a young billionaire, to whom she finds herself exceedingly attracted. It is uncovered that they both have suffered trauma in their past due to sexual and mental abuse, and with each their baggage as a stepping stone, they have to figure out how to exist in a healthy relationship. The book portrays gender dynamics in a manner which divides the masculine and the feminine and exhibits them as opposite forces. This exhibition is similar to Carter's description of the active and the passive parties during heteronormative intercourse. Furthermore, as Carter has also pointed out, the relationship between genders which is on display in pornography often tends to mirror the landscape of the dominant culture within which the pornography is produced. During the first chapter, Eva's father and stepfather are introduced. The father figures portray two vastly different types of men, and the dynamic between them is quickly summarised as contentious. Eva's father believes that it is his duty to pay off her student loans, whereas her stepfather, who is rather

wealthy, has offered to pay them instead. Through this paragraph, it is established that wealth is a vital, but natural, aspect of Eva's life and that she exists as a passive component in her family; she is not necessarily fine with that status, but she does not actively pursue any change and development either. Eva's first encounter with Gideon Cross makes this dynamic between passive and active increasingly evident. She trips and falls in the lobby of her office building, during her first day at work, and finds Gideon attempting to help her back on her feet. The first contact thus displays a damsel in distress situation, during which the roles are established between the two parties. Her immediate reaction when she looks at him is shock and paralysis due to his handsome physique. The state of her body is described as unable to move, as well as experiencing a type of arousal that is on the verge of physical discomfort. Moreover, the feeling of discomfort will repeat itself many times throughout the book, however, the discomfort is first and foremost prescribed to the female main character and not a general theme which affects all characters. Eva continues to refer to Gideon, after the first encounter, as "a god" and "dark and dangerous" (Day, 2012, p.7). The novel dives into the dynamics between pleasure and pain, and furthermore, it explores the spectrums and physical manifestations of female and male arousal: "it didn't help that his attention was solely on me, his hard body radiating that arresting impression of powerful demand (...) "my body obeying instinctively before my mind caught up and objected" (Day, 2012, p.26). Day's sexual imagery suggests that power reinforces masculinity, and the male sex appeal, and that obedience reinforces femininity. Furthermore, this notion also suggests that Eva's body instinctively obeys as if it was a primal or biological reflex. It is therefore not completely without relevance that one looks towards Carter's characterisation of the human bodies in pornography. When Carter describes previous ideas of female sexuality, it is often focused on the fact that the feminine is depicted weak and immune to reason.

The female form is not only a possession as Foucault argues, but it is likewise corruptible and impressionable and governed by other forces than its own. Sexuality is thus exhibited as a primal instinct which supersedes logic and reason. The same dynamics are portrayed in *The Seven Year Itch* as Sherman fantasises that women keep falling in love with him, because they simply cannot help themselves, once again, displaying the impressionability of the female mind and body. One could argue that female sexuality is often put in relation to instinctive obedience and that male sexuality is placed on the opposite end of the spectrum; thus gaining power rather than giving it up. This may be rendered to be a trope which is prescribed to a masculine perspective on the depiction of sexuality in general. Another aspect which would support such a notion is the fact that most pornographic contents

tend to favour the masculine perspective, as he most often is the active component of the intercourse; again referring to Carter's statement that the woman is only made interesting when: "the male principle fills [her] with something" (Carter, 1979). Although *Bared to You* is clearly produced for a primarily female audience it still maintains the idea that female and male sexuality are manifested in opposite directions. In the novel, Day's characters are never in sync during their interactions. When Eva feels like she is losing control, Gideon gains it. Whenever Eva is fearful or uncomfortable, Gideon is amused and relaxed. As a result, these interactions confirm Carter's theory that sexual dynamics between genders, and the renderings of which, not only affect the subjects in sexual situations, but rather affects the general relationship between the subjects in any given situation. Day's novel takes place in New York City, and therefore it is not entirely unfounded to assume that the dynamics at play, as well as the assumptions regarding gender and sexuality are widely accepted by the main audience of the book (the book sold 50.000 copies within its first week of publication). Furthermore, Day directly addresses the reader by drawing upon notions that are widely accepted, or at least universally known occurrences: "You know how it is - some hot guys don't make your hormones go crazy, while some unattractive guys have massive sex appeal. This guy had it all" (Day, 2012, p. 11).

*Bared to You* exhibits an increasingly nuanced comprehension of sexual encounters compared to its predecessor, *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Although the two novels still revolve around rather similar issues. One of which is wealth, as both Christian Grey and Gideon Cross are exceedingly wealthy businessmen in spite of their young age; a notion which assumingly must spark universal effects of attraction in the consumers of these novels. However, the books still have rather different expressions of sexuality. Firstly, Eva attempts to gain control of the dynamic between Gideon and herself by taking charge of a sexual encounter between them in his limousine. Contrastingly, there are no scenes in *Fifty Shades* which prescribe any sexual power or control to Anastasia Steele, except the choice to stop the intercourse. In that regard, Day's depictions of sex are significantly less related to violence, which is the focal point of *Fifty Shades*. By extension of the previous statement, it only seems appropriate to highlight why Day's novel was chosen for this context, in favour of James'. The popularised comprehension of sadomasochism is not solely based on the subcultural notions of latex and leather. Rather, it is hidden in daily encounters which subtly supports the interchangeable roleplay between submission and domination, as Carter points out. Thus, although Day does not explicitly make use of sadomasochistic mechanisms, the dynamic between pleasure and pain are highly on display. Furthermore, this dynamic is portrayed in a manner which partly suggests that the distribution

of power is a biological reflex. However, Day's depiction of sex and sexual expression contradicts the philosophy of sadomasochism, in a similar manner to *Fifty Shades*. They are both, in the expression of sexual power play, tremendously regressive. In both these books, the spectrum between submission and domination are not tools with which the engaged parties can express and enjoy themselves, they are static functions, which are fixed: "You forget who submits, Eva," he said gruffly. "I've given up control for you. I've bent and adjusted for you. I'll do anything to keep you and make you happy. But I can't be tamed or topped. Don't mistake indulgence for weakness." (Day, 2012, p. 317). Contrastingly, Sade's philosophy enables all participating parties to utilise the spectrum of pleasure and pain, and submission and domination. However, in the new works of erotic fiction, these mechanisms are not for lent. When Eva attempts to take control, she is reminded that she has none. Therefore, Sade's lessons of freedom and his critique of privilege are still applicable to contemporary erotic fiction. By extension, a widespread acceptance of gender roles may also fall under his critique. As Carter argues, only the ones who create the law will inherent its freedom (1979). Since the pornographic genre is so vastly influenced by the male perspective, even when produced for women, it only seems relevant to make a point of the regressive nature of this exhibition. Day's depiction of feminine and masculine sexuality thus portrays how the feminine force may borrow control, however she will never gain power. Inherently, she will lose it. Drawing, yet again, upon the notions of Sade's philosophy, what he so thoroughly critiqued was the restrictive sexual pleasure of women and the instant rejection of freedom which comes with the practice of reproduction. Sade's critique was manifested in grotesque punishment, however the philosophy suggests that the holy family union would seldom be an advantage for a women. Furthermore, he would often compare the female position in a family, to that of his own fate in the prison of the Bastille (Phillips, 2015).

### **Analysis: Effects of Aggressive Sex**

The tendency of rough sex is far from a new phenomenon, however as it is possible to deduct from the continuous interpretation of Sade throughout history, it seems to be a tendency with multiple rebirths. As Carter and Foucault both acknowledges, pleasure and pain have been interconnected for centuries and the notion of aggression and violence has been related to sexual intercourse long before the publication of Sade's infamous works. As a sexual subculture, sadomasochism is utilised as theatre. It is a form of leisure within the expression sexuality that allows for people to indulge in otherwise frowned upon relationships; leather and latex is often associated with such subcultures however the foundation of which is evident within even the most common of

sexual exchanges. As it is highlighted by Carter, as well as Foucault, sexual intercourse is often dependent upon the dynamic of submission and dominance. *Bared to You* exhibits a similar dynamic in which it is evident that a common aspect of female sexuality is the desire to be dominated: “I couldn’t image him not fucking well, and being aggressive about it, taking what he wanted in a way that made a woman wild to give it to him” (Day, 2012, p.27). In order to further support this claim, one can look towards one of the world’s most successful accounts of sexual preferences. Pornhub, one of largest online sources of pornography, releases their yearly statistics regarding searches, visits, demands and demographic; with an average of 81 million daily visits it is possible to deduct what currently impacts the sexual landscape of a given country, or culture. Their 2017 statistic<sup>10</sup> shows how search words such as “rough sex”, “hardcore” “bondage” and “BD/SM” are still rather prevalent features of many visitors’ sexual preferences, some of which with an 88% increase during last year (Pornhub Insights 2015). Furthermore, in order to highlight how these erotic novels act as a component in a large context and sexual leisure, a study conducted by Adult Video News Magazine in 2010, a year before the publication of *Fifty Shades*, show that in up to 88% of the 50 top ranked new publications featured some form of physical or verbal abuse towards the female actor. Furthermore, the study features several producers which point towards an increased demand for hardcore scenes, as the consumers push for increased extremity (Saul, 2016). The demand in popular pornography concerns the notion of submission and domination. As the documentary *Hot Girls Wanted* (2015) uncovered various methods in the pornography industry are utilised in order to produce contents that represents rape, and rape related fantasies. Thus, the cultural context that demands this content is not insignificant, if it can alter a billion dollar industry.

The same display of submission and domination which is prevalent on Pornhub, is visible in Sylvia Day’s *Bared to You*, as well as in E.L James’ *Fifty Shades of Grey*. It paints a picture of a contemporary understanding of sadomasochism. Christian Grey is notoriously known for his affection for bondage and sadism, whereas Day’s Gideon Cross does not engage of direct sexual violence to any degree that is harsher than spanking. The difference between the two male characters should divide the books, however, the degree to which the male characters enjoy fetishism is not the focus of this chapter; it is rather how the characters each engage in a power play that requires the utmost possession of the female form. What is on display is a normalisation of domination which regards the female body as an item of possession; the contemporary interpretation of sadomasochism

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<sup>10</sup> See appendix 4



requires a woman who is willing to let go of her own sexuality in favour of masculine domination. This interpretation of the Sadeian narrative completely neglects the notion that hierarchy is not determined by gender, and therefore it has been altered in order to co-exist in engagement with the prevalent comprehension of feminine and masculine sexuality. This exhibition of gender regards the masculine power as a provider; and in a sense that is similar to the 1950's housewife, the female party is reduced to a tool of his expression. Contemporary sadomasochism is regarded as a leisure activity and the practice of which is theatre. However, it reflects its audience rather than its actors and as a result, the play of power has become a label which supposedly empowers the woman although she has been made unable to speak and is continuously told to leave her own sexuality behind in order to reinforce a masculine archetype. One may render that the genre of pornography should be treated in the same manner as one would any other genre of media, as it is, no matter the degree to which it reflects its context, still a work of fabricated fiction. Thus, one should be careful when assuming that the dynamics on display in pornography has a direct effect on its audience and their own sexual preferences and practices. However, Edward Donnerstein, receiver of the American Psychological Association Award for Distinguished Scientific Contributions to Media Psychology, published in 1980 a study entitled *Aggressive Erotica and Violence against Women*. The study included an experiment which showed the effects of neutral pornography in comparison to aggressive pornography. The effect of aggressive erotica was an increased acceptance of violence and aggression against women in non-pornographic settings, as well as an increased use of aggressive language towards women in general (Donnerstein, 1980). It is therefore not entirely without relevance that one looks towards the increased production of violent pornography, as well as the generally increased interest in rough sex, sadomasochism or the aforementioned display of submission and domination in erotic fiction, when one seeks to understand violent subcultures and sexually frustrated and aggressive communities.

## **Historical Background: The Expansion of the Incel Community**

This chapter will aim to function as an introduction to the to Incel community, how it originated and since then, how it has grown. The introduction will afterwards function as a stepping stone to a discussion, during which all the aforementioned aspects and concepts will be brought into perspective. However, before one is able to put together a comprehensive discussion, it is significant that the community is properly accounted for.

Incel is an abbreviation that stands for “involuntarily celibate”. It was coined in the late 1990’s by a queer Canadian woman who was a stats major from Ottawa. Alana describes in a podcast between herself and a former Incel member that she wished to create a platform where people could support and help one another. Alana herself was a late bloomer and at the age of 24 she had never been on a date. Therefore she created a community in order to give people in similar situations the opportunity to talk to others who were going through the same issue (Pinnamaneni, 2018)<sup>11</sup>. Alana went on her first date at the age of 24, and subsequently to engaging in a romantic relationship, she created the forum. Alana saw that much like the confusion and shame related to realising and accepting one’s sexuality, there were a lot of stigma and confusion related to loneliness derived from the absence of a romantic partner. Thus, *Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project* was created in order to help people out of loneliness:

“I came up with the idea to create the support group online because I recognized that um, you know, there are other people who have this kind of situation and if I can get out of it, if I can start dating after a long period of being single, then maybe other people can too (...) I knew about going through that process of reducing shame was that I’d come out of the closet and that’s the exact process you go through” (*Ibid*).

Alana left her forum in 1997 due to the stress and pressure of leading an online community. She had a mailing list of hundreds of people whom she had tried to help out of loneliness, and as she explained, this job was exceedingly important but not particularly enjoyable. However, the forum and its admins continued for a while as though she was still active online. As this was strictly a support forum, people who were not inclined to better themselves or expressed themselves in violent and misogynistic ways were banned from the platform. The admins on the platform developed *the 7 deadly sins of Incel*: apathy, justification, over-analysis, naiveté, fear, rage and shame. Thereby, the admins aimed to make sure that the forum was productive and constructive. After Alana’s exit, the forum existed for 15 years without being significantly heard of in mainstream media, but its following grew significantly, from approximately 100 people to well above 40,000 during this time. As a result, the admins had no way of enforcing a positive tone on the platform and the ones that were banned from *Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project* created their own communities where a drastically more violent and aggressive discourse started to thrive (Pinnamaneni, 2018).

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<sup>11</sup> See appendix 1

The communities that spawned the following years, after Alana's exist, had a different tone and intention than the original forum. These communities are the ones most people now associate with the Incel discourse. The platforms attracted a large male-dominated audience consisting of men's rights activists and "red pillers"<sup>12</sup> The Incel community experienced a paradigm shift in the sense that it was previously meant as a place where one could seek support and help to overcome loneliness and intimacy issues, and thereby improve the quality of one's life. The newer Incel communities became a self-sustaining source of self-abuse and alienation. Instead of looking internally towards a solution to loneliness and problems with intimacy, the new Incel communities encouraged its users to look externally, towards other people and towards society in order to find the reason for their despair. As a result, the community became hostile, aggressive and violent. (Tolentino, 2018).

The Incel community prescribes to two theories regarding sexuality and sexual dynamics, one being *The Red Pill* which states that dating is a sexual marketplace in which "average looking men" do not stand a chance, because women only date men who are more attractive than they are and not less. It also supposes feminism to be a pretext that allows women to live hyper amorously. The other theory regarding sexual dynamics is *The Black Pill*. This notion is related to genetics, and by extension phrenology as well. A large portion of the Incel community believes that the sexual value of attractiveness is to be found genetically and thus, it describes the impossibility of breaking free from loneliness or despair. *The Black Pill Theory* suggests that some people are genetically wired to be permanent virgins. Furthermore, the Incel community often tends to align sexual validation with quality of life, which means that without a relationship or a sexual partner the odds of finding happiness are minimal (Wynn, 2018). Many members of the Incel community refer to specific categories of people with which they determine their value. "Chads" and "Stacys" refer to attractive men and women, which in the eyes of the Incels are morally corrupt and privileged. Furthermore the sexual attractiveness or success of others are often referred to as directly causing the members of the Incel community harm: "They are the ones who have UNJUSTLY made our lives a living hell... We need to focus more on our hatred of women. Hatred is power." or "Society has become a place for worship of females and it's so fucking wrong, they're not Gods they are just a fucking cum-dumpster" (Tolentino, 2018).

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<sup>12</sup> A theory originated from men's rights activist groups, which is based on the 2000's film *The Matrix*. It teaches that women do not want respect or equality, but dominance and traditional gender roles. However women have been brainwashed by feminist propaganda (Reid, 2015).

Interestingly, the Incel community often refers to prostitutes as the lowest form of female figure, who they generally describe as “femoids” instead of “women”. One would think that as a community that craves intimacy and romance, prostitution would be significantly more welcome. However, that is not the reality of the Incel fora. Furthermore, women are often exposed on the fora for wearing too much makeup, for being queer, for having children out of wedlock or for being polyamorous. Thus, the Incels often refer to previous notions of gender roles, as well as dynamics which render women in a reproductive position rather than one that would encourage her to enjoy sexual intercourse. Moreover, the Incel communities are, in contrast to their origin, not supportive of each other, instead the fora have threads in which members encourage each other to commit suicide, rape or murder. Although, it may just be fantasy and leisure for a large portion of the community, it is not exclusively harmless. In 2014, a decade and after half after Alana left her forum, Elliot Rodger, a 22 year old man, killed six people, before shooting himself in the head, in Isla Vista, California. Prior to the murder he had uploaded a video, his personal manifest, to the internet:

“Hi, Elliot Rodger here. Well, this is my last video. It all has to come to this. Tomorrow is the day of retribution, the day I will have my revenge against humanity, against all of you. For the last eight years of my life, since I hit puberty, I've been forced to endure an existence of loneliness, rejection and unfulfilled desires, all because girls have never been attracted to me. Girls gave their affection and sex and love to other men, never to me. I'm 22 years old and still a virgin, never even kissed a girl. In those years I've had to rot in loneliness. I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me but I will punish all of you for it. [Laughs]” (Pinnamaneni, 2018).

In 2018, Scott Beierle, a 40 year old man, shot six people and then himself at Florida State University. Beierle had openly declared his admiration and support for Elliot Rodger on Facebook, as well as in the Incel community. Furthermore he frequently posted video explaining his views. In his video “American Whore Pt 2” he describes the appropriate forms of punishment for promiscuous women: “I would vote for crucifixion myself,” he said. “The most heinous crime warrants the most heinous punishment” (Vassolo, 2018) Later in 2018, the 25 year old Canadian Incel member Alek Minassian killed ten people in Toronto by driving a van through a crowded street. Shortly before committing the murder, Minassian had posted a status on Facebook stating: “(...) The Incel Rebellion has begun already! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys” All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger”.

## **Discussion: The Possession of the Female Form**

When one looks at Rodger's manifest, there are a few arguments that must be brought into a larger discussion. Firstly, he refers to the affection, sex and love from women as something which they give – not something they do. This speaks to a comprehension of sexuality and sexual engagement which is rooted in a culturally embedded notion that women give something up in order to participate in sex, whereas men gain something. This was also uncovered in the previous chapter. By extension, the power of the woman is momentarily transferred. As with Eva in Gideon's car, she can temporarily take control, but she will have to return to the pre-existing norms once the moment has passed. This idea is so thoroughly embedded within this contemporary sexual landscape that it is even visible in the discourse with which we describe the first sexual intercourse – “losing one's virginity”, thereby giving something away. Although, one could argue that this expression is applicable to both men and women, however, the notion of the female virginity still holds a certain amount of significance, which is seldom applied to its male counterpart; on the contrary, as many members of these communities express, they often feel that a large part of conventional comprehensions of masculinity is connect to sexual active engagement. It is not to say that girls and women in a contemporary Western society are expected to stay virtuous and pure, however, one could argue that there are still various stigmas surrounding the opposite behavior. It is unlikely that the views of Scott Beierle are shared by the dominating culture, however, there are evidence of cultural stigma surrounding traits of promiscuousness in women in general. Expanding further on this though, one could argue that these traits of promiscuousness have increasingly more serious consequences for women, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As men, who pursue a large variation of sexual pleasure, may often be referred to as “eligible bachelors” or “playboys”, words which carry primarily positive connotations. In contrast, women who pursue similar pleasures may be referred to as “loose” or “slutty”, words which arguably have more negative connotations. Furthermore, this argument is supported by a study that was conducted in 2010 regarding young girls and their language regarding displays of female sexual behavior (Ringrose, 2010).

This cultural dynamic is not exclusive to the Incel community, rather it is a cultural discourse which, as we can see through the various items of analysis in this thesis, is a dynamic that has been prevalent throughout literary history in one form or another. When looking at the Incel community, or at the three social media entries provided by the murderers, one will uncover how a

vital part of the Incel criticism of women is related to promiscuousness. Scott Beierle referred to this as a heinous crime. Interestingly, the Incel community have generally focused a large portion of their hatred towards women who do not necessarily apply the notion of virtue. These women are called out in on various Incel fora, accompanied by names such as “whores” or “sluts”. One would assume that a community of people whose only wish is to experience intimacy with another person would be welcoming of women who do not prescribe to a significance of purity, however that is far from the case. The same logic is applied to prostitutes, who falls under the same category of heinous criminals. Although, one could render that prostitution would relieve a large of portion of the Incel members of anguish and frustration, it is possible that this possibility has had the opposite effect. A large portion of the Incel community supports ideas of purity and virtue as mandatory traits for women, to a degree which is inapplicable to contemporary Western society. Generally, what one will come to realise is that the values of the Incel community are far from homogenous and they often do not have a specific codex of how women should and should not behave, rather they have a massive amount of hateful content that is focused in several directions. The reason for this is related to the fact that the community is, first and foremost, a forum and thereby composed various opinions equal to the amount of users on the site. Furthermore, the community is not composed with the purpose of communicating a utopian society of perfect men and women, rather they are a community which simply thrive on the hatred and injustice of their own exclusion. Thus, one will seldom find each opinion assisting in composing a cohesive set of core values, although that was never the intention of the community after all. However, this chapter will still aim to put some of the opinions, which seem to be defining throughout the community, into context with the previously introduced selection of theories and literary works.

One key feature, which seems to be rather continuous thorough the community, is the notion of hierarchy. The users on these fora have an increasingly significant focus on hierarchic discourse. This discourse is utilised as a weapon against themselves, however more exceedingly so against people outside the community<sup>13</sup>. This is connected to the aforementioned notions of virtue and purity, however, one will quickly realise that it is much more extensive than sexual dynamics and practices. One may render that as a result of general isolation, which is the case for many of the Incel members, many have grown to perceive the world and its complexities through a lens of systems and hierarchies. As previously uncovered, a conventional manner with which positions and power have

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<sup>13</sup> See appendix 6

been related to a gender-based hierarchy. As such, the free expansion which was evident in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, as well as *Salò*, displayed an opposition to such systems. It may be argued that these films went as far as suggesting that such gender based hierarchies were functioning as direct violence towards its population. These films applied their criticism by determining a hierarchy that was not based on gender, but rather on passion and experience. Furthermore, the gender-based hierarchy was on full display in Sylvia Day's *Bared to You*, doing which it was made perfectly clear to Eva that she could indeed borrow the power for the sake of a sexual leisure, however she would always have to return it to Gideon. Such systems of power are highly on display within the Incel community as well, however, in a manner that clearly supersedes all notions of contemporary reason. The blog entry attached as appendix 6 visualises the idea that women, in the eyes of this specific Incel member, are not capable of thoughts and ideas that are equal to men. Women are described as beings which are highly self-absorbed, unhappy and completely incapable of any creative thought or innovation. One may render that an extreme blog entry is far from adequate when describing a community consisting of over 40.000 users, however, this blog entry was discovered as it was continuously re-blogged and shared between the members. Therefore, although the date states its publication to be in 2014, it is a continuously well-supported exhibition of values between Incel members, which would explain its continuous distribution. Returning quickly to the notion of promiscuous women, one may render that the reason these Incel members feel so strongly that sexually free women propose such a serious threat is related to the hierarchy in which they position all components of society. The liberty of free sexuality thereby becomes a freedom which they inherently are not entitled to. If one supposes that the Incel member in appendix 6 believes that men are the sources of all creative thought and innovation, it is not entirely implausible to believe that he also prescribes to a certain idea of entitled freedom, as it rests closely to the values his post has already exhibited. One of the notions which Sade so thoroughly criticised was related to finite freedom and how freedom only inherently liberates those who manufacture its laws. Thus, if one is to follow the logic of this entry, because women are incapable of such innovative thoughts, their use of sexual freedom is thus a freedom stolen from its manufactures, by extension, stolen from the men who have been denied sexual liberty.

Expanding on this thought, although it is not entirely certain, one could assume that sexual freedom is not a concept which to this Incel member is regarded infinite. Generally speaking, the anger and frustration, which is evident when these communities discuss sexually liberated women, speaks to a notion of finite freedom. Thus, when someone takes something for themselves, they also

take it from others, as the amount of freedom is finite. What supports such an interpretation is the discourse with which sexual practices are generally discussed; the action of sex is treated as though it was a noun, a physical object which one person gives to another, by default that means that once it has been given, it is no longer yours to give again. This is possibly a comprehension of sex amongst these communities which would explain their contempt towards sexually active and adventurous women.

## **Discussion: Aggressive Media and the Pleasure of Dead Women**

The Sadeian women, as described by Carter, have for the better part of literary history been actively excluded from the comprehension of sexual practices. The aforementioned perception of women is therefore not solely a result of an isolated internet community. Some traits of femininity have continuously been defining factors of Butler's gender performativity and how one does "female". As it was the case with *Zofloya, or the Moor*, the character of Lilla, who was perceived as innocent and generally passive, was far more desired by men than her counterpart Victoria, who by no means could be rendered a passive character. As it was uncovered in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, although women do possess opposing traits, it is more likely that many women will put the features forward that will spawn the most positive reactions from their surroundings. As a result, Carter's theories regarding pornography and gender roles, tend to supersede that of the pornographic spectrum. For decades, it has been favorable to uphold an impression of innocence and passiveness, a notion which is further supported to PornHub's statistics. This is most likely the case in film and literature as well. If not in all media, it is definitely a common trait which is found within the chosen texts of this thesis. In Day's erotic novel, Eva reacts in a passive, yet positive, manner when a complete stranger expresses his desire to fuck her. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Lorelei Lee lets herself become an object of a wealthy man's desire, in exchange for jewelry. In Lewis' rendition of religious commentary, Ambrosio utilised his position of power and thereby exploited his sister, Antonia, to a point which resulted in rape. These objects of media paint women in a light that suggests submission to a degree which in reality is unattainable, or at least, rather unrealistic. This discourse, which Incels most definitely is defined by, is prevalent through many other aspects of contemporary Western society. It is that of the spectrum of the whore and the virgin. Women have to exist on this spectrum, but they also have to navigate it, perhaps more than ever, as a result of increased media exposure of sexual dynamics and assumptions regarding sexual leisure.



Lisa Ann, a popular and now retired porn star, primarily known for her Sarah Palin impressions, states in an article for the Independent regarding the increased violence and abuse in contemporary pornography: “A lot of this new pain comes from these new girls who have to do these abusive scenes, because that does break you down as a woman” (Saul, 2016). Although, this is not exclusively a concept which is visible in pornography, it is rather prevalent in this genre as it is represented in a more honest and crude form. As Carter states, pornography is a mere reflection of its contemporary society, which is also the reason why this chapter looks towards pornographic tendencies, even when discussing the absence of sexual engagement, as it is the case with the Incel community. Therefore, it is not without significance that the porn industry is experiencing an increased demand for extreme sex and abusive language. Moreover, it is not without effect that audiences are subjected to the increased production of extreme sex and abusive language. As Donnerstein’s study showed, aggressive erotica can have a direct effect on the general acceptance of aggression and violence towards women, both in and outside of sexual contexts. One may render that these movements in the cultural sexual landscape have had a significant effect on the Incel community, as they are rendered a group of people who are severely impressionable when it comes to media. This notion is supported by the community’s dedication to *Red Pill* and *Black Pill Theory* as any indication of its online influences. Moreover, the Incel community have experienced an increased number of members and engagement during the same period of time as the porn industry have experienced a newly found interest in extreme sex. However, the pleasure that derives from the abuse of women is not a contemporary practice, nor is it an idea which is rooted in pornography, rather it is a trope which have existed in literary history prior to the gothic period. The member in appendix 6 suggests that a person can either be pretty or useful; as women are only concerned with their own appearance and men are focused on creative innovation, these characteristics of pretty and useful are directly connected to the gender their inhabit. Another entry states: “Every white woman is a disgusting whore who should be executed”<sup>14</sup>, and thus confirms the connection between the female form and the desire to watch this form decay. Bronfen’s theory thus provides a level of overall understanding regarding the mechanisms which are the foundation for such claims, although the death to see women die is not exclusive to the Incel community.

Beautiful women have been dying in literature for a very long time, Bronfen supports the notion that the depiction of the death of a women is more than mere leisure, it is an embedded

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<sup>14</sup> See appendix 5

trope of aesthetic and creation. As Carter points out, Justine embodies this concept; the spectacle of a beautiful dying women. When Justine dies in the end of Sade's notoriously banned novel, she is struck by lightning, as though God is the last man to exercise his violence upon her. This reading is supported by Sade's attitudes towards religion in general, it is thus not entirely unfounded to assume that the notion of lightning has some association to a divine force. When Justine is struck, her clothes are burnt away, revealing her innocent body as it transitions into decay. Carter theorises that the trope of the dying beauty is also the reason why we are continuously fascinated by Marilyn Monroe, as she also became an increasingly greater spectacle due to her passing, as well as the nature of passing. Upon the day of the death of Marilyn Monroe, the New York Times building displayed the news in bold letters on the front of the building, as though they were promoting the actress in a new picture<sup>15</sup> (Scott, 2018). Therefore, the notion of violence and abuse against women, as well as the spectacles of their demise, is not a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon. However, they do appear to take a form which, so far, can be rendered previously unseen. The privilege of beauty comes with the absence of rights, if one looks at the values of the Incel community. However, it is also possible that the weapons which these Incels are pointing towards women, are also shields with which they protect themselves.

### **Discussion: Incels and Phrenology**

The reactions of the Incel community are both external and internal at once. Although the community initially was created in order to maintain a safe space in which one could seek support among peers, it has quickly become a platform which primarily thrives on self-hatred. As it is the case with both the *Red Pill* and the *Black Pill Theory*, they communicate certain unalterable systems which prescribe value to certain traits and characteristics, all of which cannot be changed. Thus, if you are conventionally perceived as unattractive there is no amount of self-improvement that will change that fact. The aforementioned systems which categorise women as either virgins or whores, are also systems which communicate the value of each Incel member. Some of these systems are based on more than gender and will often include notions of ethnicity as well. The Incel community often turn to phrenology to explain their social exclusion<sup>16</sup>.

So far, the context of this thesis has been primarily focused on the notions of how women are displayed in popular media, as well as throughout literary history. The portrayal of women is significant because it automatically reveals assumptions and dynamics which affect women in a

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<sup>15</sup> See appendix 8.

<sup>16</sup> See appendix 7

very real context. Thus, the portrayal of women is directly linked to experiences women endure in reality. Supported by Donnerstein, whenever we expose ourselves, or each other, to certain modes of discourse or certain codes of morality, these influences will become our reality. It is because of this, Donnerstein's study showed an increased acceptance of aggression and violence towards women whenever the test subjects had been exposed to aggressive erotica. Furthermore, as Carter clarifies, media, and especially media of the pornographic character, reflects notions of its context, because audiences have an inherent need to see themselves in the products they consume. Expanding on this, the objects of media are not exclusively influenced by its consumers' context, but rather the demand these consumers express. Although, these demands may have roots in reality, or parts of reality, some of these demands may have roots in fiction. Original sadomasochism, for instance, draws upon commonly known notions of gender roles and sexual dynamics, however it also applies a level of theatrics. Sadomasochism is a sexual leisure activity that does not necessarily solely seek a perfect reflection of its participants, it is also expected to deliver a fantasy. The concept of fantasy is rather significant, because audiences continuously reflect themselves in products of media, regardless of the degree to which the products are labeled fictional or factual. It is possible that there is a danger in seeking a familiarity in products that first and foremost are categorised as fantasy, because by default, these products will involve various notions of exaggerations or stereotyping. In context of the internal judgements of the Incel members, such exaggerations and stereotyping could be related to women's assumptions regarding their sex partner, their appearances and capabilities.

It is not only women who fall victims to the portrayal of gender assumptions and sexual dynamics. As products of media puts forward various notions of what constitutes "the female", so does it deliver a similar notion of that constitutes "the male". Sylvia Day's *Bared to You* is an example, which is rendered similar to a rather wide category of erotic novels produced for women, and thus, they have a significantly characteristic manner of depicting the male form. Day's novel depicts a man, Gideon Cross, whose character is centered on his incredible physique. As the novel progresses the reader realises that there indeed is something more underneath its sturdy exterior, however, the appearance is a continuous focal point throughout the story. He is described as an incredibly tall, muscular, dark haired, brown mystical eyes and on top of that he dresses exceedingly well. Furthermore, another rather prevalent feature of Gideon Cross is the notion of wealth. He is vastly successful and thereby, a young millionaire. He demands control and power and acts on his sexual impulses, thus, he is an archetypical depiction of the active component of any intercourse, because he makes women his property. Day has, as many other writers and producers, created a

character which they believe reflects the general ideal of a man. He is created to reflect the man of women's dreams, otherwise the purpose of the erotica would fall flat. Thus, products such as *Bared to You* become an indicator of what women find attractive. The character of Gideon Cross perfectly reflects what the Incels would call "a Chad", a nickname given to the types of men who can be romantically successful and who have conventionally beautiful physique. The Incel community often refers to phrenology in order to explain the cultural perception of "the Chad", and by extension, why he is so vastly more successful in obtaining sexual experiences than the average Incel member. It is salient to include, that just as a cultural landscape prescribes certain traits to women, as passiveness and innocence, so does it prescribe opposite traits to men, such as activeness and determination. It is not impossible to theorise, that some of the members of the Incel community do not necessarily find themselves in the shape of this description of "the man". As a result, some of these members look towards the natural world in order to obtain an explanation for the misplacement in a contemporary sexual landscape. Appendix 7 displays a blog entry on an Incel forum which states that an Incel will never experience the beautiful connection with a women, or have intercourse with her. More importantly, it states that the reason the Incel will never experience such pleasures is determined by a few millimeters of bone.

One may render that looking towards phrenology for an explanation of one's romantic shortcomings is less than a rational or logical school of thought, however it perfectly aligns with the general mode of discourse which surrounds the Incel community. It is, once again, a system which determines the likelihood of one's happiness. The measures of phrenology is thus completely dependent upon its systematic application. One may wonder how this community came to apply such a self-destructive discourse, however this notion can be explained when looking at the overall premise for the community. When Alana initially created the forum, back in the 1990's, it was done with the purpose of helping others. However, those members who gradually found romantic relationships, and thus succeeded in helping themselves, automatically left. The forum was no longer relevant for those who were no longer involuntarily celibate, and that left the ones who did not succeed. As the forum continued to grow, the oldest members automatically became the least successful ones. A result of which is the mode of discourse which now thrives in these communities, and is so heavily influenced by the inability to produce any relationship with women. A logical course of action, these members, has thus been to look towards the natural world in order to seek answers for their own misfortunes and as such, the importance of phrenology confirms perfectly that they did not stand a change in society to begin with; it is a curse casted at birth and there is nothing one can do to change it. This

mode of discourse, combined with a cultural landscape continuously focused on physical appearances has thus created a place of hatred and frustration for those who feel misrepresented in the media, and in culture in general.

### **Accumulation: Erotica's Effect on Contemporary Audiences**

Sylvia Day's *Bared to You* portrays gender dynamics in a manner which divides the masculine and the feminine and exhibits them as opposite forces; contrastingly, previous renditions of sexual expression, such as Pasolini's *Salò*, O'Brien's *Rocky Horror*, or even Sade himself, fuse the two genders together in free sexual expansion. Day's portrayal of arousal is similar to Carter's description of the active and the passive parties during heteronormative intercourse. The novel's sexual imagery thus suggests that power reinforces masculinity, and the male sex appeal, and that obedience reinforces femininity. Although, *Bared to You* is clearly produced for a primarily female audience it still maintains the restrictive male perspective on female sexuality, one which is also visible in *The Seven Year Itch*. And thus, the novel furthers the lack of free sexual expansion; it maintains the roles of power as fixed and unalterable. Therefore, Sade's lessons of freedom and his critique of privilege are still applicable to contemporary erotic fiction. Day's depiction of feminine and masculine sexuality portrays how women may borrow control, however they will never gain power. Inherently, they will lose it. Exactly this dynamic was a notion which Sade's philosophy thoroughly critiqued. Evidence shows that there is an increased global interest in exceedingly extreme porn. This demand results in a normalisation of domination over the female body. Thus, a visible regressive nature of the Western sexual heteronormative practices suggests a primary focus on the masculine expressions, even in pornographic novels produced for, and by, women. A possible effect of this tendency is an increased acceptance of violence and aggression against women in non-pornographic settings. The instance of this analysis exhibits the relevance of pornographic contents and its effects upon its audiences, therefore, this analysis lead to a comprehensive discussion of the sexually frustrated and aggressive activities within the Incel movement.

Traits and characteristics of domination and submission are evident throughout the Western cultural spectrum, however they are amplified through the lens of the Incel movement. Especially, the notions of promiscuousness and sexual engagement renders the Incel member increasingly more radical than the contemporary conventions. The Incel community tends to favour a world-view which is strongly dependent upon hierarchy and systems; these systems prescribe a

certain salience to sexual freedom as a finite substance, and thus, many of these community members often feel that their opportunities to participate in sexual activities has been revoked by ill-suspecting majorities. Although the vast majority of Western culture does not align well with the values exhibited by the Incels, the embedded dynamics which are utilised when navigating sexual, and non-sexual, interactions suggest a mode of discourse which does not contradict some of the Incels aggressions. The Incel community have generally focused a large portion of their hatred towards women who do not necessarily apply the notion of virtue, and studies show that the dominating Western attitude towards these women have negative connotations. As such, the core values of these dynamics are reflected in the society from which the Incel movement has grown. Moreover, the assumptions regarding female submission, which the Incel's hierarchic systems are dependent upon, suggest that the liberty of free sexuality is a freedom which women inherently are not entitled to. Generally speaking, the anger and frustration speaks to a notion of finite freedom.

The more it is possible to detect the core values of the Incel community in the dominant Western culture the more likely it is that one can trace and comprehend the dynamics which drive these members to pursue such direct and active violence. Studies suggest that although pornographic contents exist as a form of leisure, and degrees of sadomasochism is to be understood as possessing several theatric characteristics, they still manage to spawn assumptions and anticipations in their target audience. Interestingly, the period of time which saw an increasing interest in extreme pornography and sadomasochistic tendencies, also saw an increasing number of Incels communities appearing throughout the Internet, as the founder's account suggests. Bronfen's theory regarding beautiful women and death is exceedingly applicable to the core values of the Incel movement, as it confirms the connection between the female form and the desire to watch this form decay. Although, the notion of violence and abuse against women, as well as the spectacles of their demise, is not exclusively a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon. However, it does appear to take a form which, previously, can be rendered unseen.

Lastly, the Incel belabour the salience of phrenology in order to explain their lack of sexual and romantic success, thus the core values of the community is not solely responsible for the aggressive and violent tone as the community primarily thrives on self-hatred. Once again, the unalterable systems, prescribed to *Red*–and *Black Pill Theory* render the victims of the bottom of the sexual spectrum to be definite outcasts, and thereby the community promote their own isolation and exclusion. As a result many Incel members do not reflect themselves in the depictions of masculinity put forward by the dominant Western culture. The depiction of gender is rather salient in this context,

as this thesis primarily offers a comprehensive overview of the depiction of certain gender-based assumptions. By extension, sadomasochism is often utilised as a sexual leisure activity that does not necessarily solely seek to portray a perfect reflection of its participants, but rather an element of excitement which seeks to deliver a fantasy. It is possible that there is a danger in seeking a familiarity in products that first and foremost is categorised as fantasy, because these products will involve various notions of exaggerations or stereotyping. Connecting this to the Incel community, Day's novel depicts Gideon Cross as every woman's fantasy; a character who is centered on his incredible physique. He is created to reflect a man of women's dreams, otherwise the purpose of the erotica would fall flat. Thus, products such as *Bared to You* become a cultural representation of the optimal male physique and behavior.

Objects of popular media prescribe certain assumptions about women, as passiveness and innocence, however, they do also prescribe opposite traits to men, such as activeness and determination. Many of the Incel members are actively excluding themselves from conventional masculine stereotypes as they find themselves incapable of a romantic and sexual engagement equivalent to what they perceive as conventional men. As a result, some of these members look towards the natural world in order to obtain an explanation of the misplacement in a contemporary sexual landscape. The measures of phrenology is thus completely dependent upon its systematic application. This mode of phrenology, combined with a cultural landscape continuously focused on physical appearances has thus created a place of hatred and frustration for those who feel misrepresented in the media, and in culture in general. Depictions of gender and popular cultural objects have created a world where fucking is the *raison d'être*. Sex is a defining feature of contemporary Western society. The dynamics on display in pornography has seeped into most every day aspects and thus, it has become a vital feature of how the dominant culture comprehends the world. Furthermore, these features have affected a vast amount of social interactions between individuals, both in –and out of a sexual context. Therefore, being in lack of sex would potentially make an individual feel less of a person in general. The sexual dynamics on display in pornography might reflect the society of its production, but by default, the world will undoubtedly also take the shape of pornography in the process. As a result, people that are less inclined to feel sexual emotions, or obtain a sexual partner, will thus feel excluded from several vital parts of society.

## Conclusion: The Dynamic between Pleasure and Pain

**How has sadomasochism been expressed and interpreted in various periodic contexts? Furthermore, how does the expression of the dynamics between pleasure and pain affect our relationship with gender and sexuality?**

It comes as no surprise that a materialistic philosophy which was created inside the walls of a Parisian prison during the late 1700's has since its creation, been the subject of interpretation. Therefore, the theatrically orchestrated depiction of structural evil and societal injustice, which would later be known as sadomasochism, shares few, if any, characteristics with its contemporary interpretations. Although the Marquis de Sade may be rendered one of the most grotesque writers in Western literary history, his critiques, in spite of their horrific nature, bore an essential complexity, which did not fully survive in later translations. During the gothic period, which in part is to be thanked for the common distribution of Sade, the materialistic point of view which renders the body the focal point of all carnal impulses, and thus rejects the notion of the sacred body, became a primary focus of the Sadeian philosophy. Matthew Gregory Lewis, the author of *The Monk*, found himself exceedingly inspired by Sade's dissective analysis regarding religion and thus, Lewis' interpretation of Sade became centered on the corruptible pervasions of man, and his rejection of the holy divinity. Sade's critique upon gender-based hierarchies was less represented during the gothic period, and would not play a salient role until its reintroduction in the 1970's. However, there is the exception of Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya, or the Moor*, although it was significantly less known during its time, it is now rendered an increasingly better representation of the Sadeian tropes.

Sadomasochism thus only represents a fraction of Sade's initial philosophy, as Carter thoroughly explores, his literary tropes and characteristics have, since his first publication, affected Western story-telling and narratives. Such is the case with the blonde bomb shell from the 1950's, Marilyn Monroe. Monroe portrayed notions of Sadeian tropes regarding desire and innocence on the big screen, but more interestingly her death, and the attention which it was given, resembled that of Sade's infamous Justine. Sade's exhibition of the natural relationship between pleasure and pain have thus continued to impact many narratives and their depiction of gender. One feature which was uncovered was the interchangeability which affects the concepts of pleasure and pain, and submission and domination. A contemporary comprehension of sadomasochism suggests that submission and



domination are prescribed to the self-same gender-based hierarchy which Sade critiqued. O'Brien's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* confirms such a dynamic as it actively attempts to dissect it in a manner that renders it similar to Sade's original manuscript, *Les Cent Vingt Journées du Sodome*. By extension, O'Brien examines the effects of the destruction of the gender-based hierarchy. Sade's philosophy attacks concepts which are so deeply embedded in his surroundings, for instance women's natural role of reproduction, a concept he aimed to criticize as well. Sadomasochism may therefore be regarded as a leisure activity which disconnects the body from its societal and moral obligations, however in several newer interpretations of power plays, these obligations are still expected to apply.

Through the subcultural texts from the LGBTQ communities in the 1970's and 1980's, it is possible to detect how sadomasochism can be utilised as a leisure activity, during which the illusion of chaos and force mirrors a subtle need for domination and submission; although such desires transpire in a controlled environment between consenting partners. However, this thesis has primarily focused on submission and domination as a common dynamic in heteronormative relationships. This thesis therefore suggests that characteristics of sadomasochism frequently appear in heteronormative sexual practices, simply by the application of submissive and dominative behavior.

As such, contents of popular erotic fiction and pornography communicates embedded cultural notions about gender application and gender assumption. These texts of pornographic nature that an audience consumes have an impactful effect on how sexual practices are generally perceived by said audience. The contemporary sexual relationship between pleasure and pain is depicted as being unalterably connected to biology. It was evident in Sylvia Day's *Bared to You* that large Western audiences perceive men as distributors of pain and power, and that power is generally associated with certain traits of masculinity. On the opposite end of the sexual spectrum, women inherently lose power when they engage in sexual activities. Furthermore, the reproductive mechanisms, which Sade so thoroughly critiqued, are continuously assumed features of the female sexual practice. Thus, the notion of contemporary power plays are utilised as leisure in a controlled environment which renders women biologically submissive and power a finite form which is naturally distributed to men.

Doing the beginning of the millennia, a large Western audience experienced a peaking cultural interest in hardcore sex and sexually violent power plays, genres of pornography which are closely related to sadomasochism. Doing the same years as this demand for extreme sex increased, the subscriptions to the radicalized and extreme Incel communities saw an increased activity as well.

These communities thus function as an indicator of a cultural landscape and its discourse regarding sex and violence, although many of the values and opinions shared on these fora do not necessarily reflect the mainstream beliefs. However, the common discourse regarding sex and violence have nonetheless paved the way for such extreme opinions to form in secure environments. An increased exposure to aggressive language and behavior towards women in various forms of media have therefore resulted in an increased acceptance of aggressive behavior and violence to towards women in daily life. The analysis of the Incel discourse, and the values related to these communities, uncovered how several of their beliefs are not rooted in extremity, but rather in notions which may be rendered prevalent throughout literary history. The extremities of these communities are therefore not to be found in the individual opinions of these members but rather in the actions they take to manifest their beliefs. It is not to say that the values and beliefs which are exhibited in these fora are not of extreme nature; it is simply to point towards the fact that the foundation for these beliefs have roots in common sexual and non-sexual dynamics between men and women. These dynamics, as Carter points out, are essential components when one seeks to understand of societal structures, some of which have survived for centuries.

Perhaps, if one is to understand the hatred and frustration of the Incel community, one should attempt to dissect the discourse of any given sexual exchange in film, television, music, or literature. The pleasure of watching women suffer and die is by no means an exclusive feature of the Incel community, and neither is the perception of finite freedom and inherent privilege. When uncovering the violence and aggression of the Incels next to the violence and aggression performed by the authorities in *Salò*, it becomes clear that although the acts resemble one another the intent and commentaries which follow these acts cannot exist on the same sexual, or cultural, spectrum. Ultimately, the materialistic features of sadomasochism are solely dependent upon free sexual expansion, and no one has depicted such free expansion more thoroughly than the Marquis de Sade. By default, most interpretations of his philosophies fall short as they fail to exhibit his critiques in their complete form. Many applicators of the Sadeian philosophy prefer to borrow the pieces that they personally find to be in alignment with their pre-existing world view. Sade's depictions of sex were horrifying and grotesque, however it was never their nature to pleasure or arouse; Sade's moral pornography should therefore be described as sexual activism doing which bodies and actions become symbols and metaphors. Contrastingly, most contemporary practices of sadomasochisms does not seek to function as sexual activism, but oppositely, to pleasure and arouse.

As a result of the contemporary interpretations of power play, traits of masculinity and femininity have become unalterable and fixed – which inherently makes free sexual expansion, a notion that Sade’s philosophy is dependent upon, impossible. As long as one prescribes to certain ideas of biological submissive and dominative natural characteristics, it will be impossible to depict, or practice, sadomasochism without subscribing to regressive notions of sexuality. As it is evident in several contemporary interpretations of pleasure and pain, whenever the conventional assumptions of how men and women each should apply and perform their sexual identity is dictated by a larger constitution it becomes structural violence. As a concluding statement, the Sadeian philosophy, which was later interpreted as sadomasochism, utilised direct and performative evil to disconnect its actors from institutional violence. However, in many contemporary instances the violence performed during sexual acts are not applied as moral activism, that liberates the body of its obligations, rather it expects its actors to transcribe their structural obligations into their sexual dynamic. As a result of pornography’s reflective effect of its contemporary cultural landscape, it is possible to visualise indicators of increased aggressive sexual behavior in Western societies. Therefore, an increased acceptance of the aggressive sexual landscape has inherently paved the way for extreme and regressive attitudes towards sex.

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