

**Finding the Beast in Yourself –**

**Seeking for Addiction in Doug Wright's *Quills***

“*Those things that repel us most violently are part of our nature...*” (Bataille 196)

The sentence I quoted above, originating from Georges Bataille’s work *Death and Sensuality*, gives a proper basis in formulating the aims and endeavours of my paper. I would like to elaborate on how the motif of addiction appears in Doug Wright’s 1995 play, *Quills*, moreover, it does not only appear but permeates it to the tiniest detail. In my essay I will analyse the act of writing and reading as primarily addictive behaviours, symbiotically connecting the figure of the writer with that of the reader. I also would like to argue how de Sade’s writing functions as a substitutive material for both the creator and the receiver. With the help of examining the texts of thinkers such as Foucault, Barthes, or Derrida, I also would like to analyse the way Sade relates to the act of transgression (and through this to “normality”) in Wright’s text. Finally, I will touch upon how perversion and “sadism” is related to the universal human soul and how this phenomenon, with the help of writing, leads finally to a particularly peculiar type of addiction.

The central figure of Wright’s drama, Marquis de Sade is a complete exile. Turning the order upside down, he is an absolute outcast as “normal” society is unable to incorporate him; people “no longer hide their eyes and indignantly refuse to try to understand him but they classify him as pathological”. (Bataille 183) He is physically unable to accommodate to the norms and expectations of the society around him. However, his existence (and this way his artistic, creative activity) at the same time is dependent on the system he condemns. If the system were inexistent, he would not be able to divert from it; he needs the social and religious institutional norms as a base of deviation. And, of course, “normal” society also needs him as a point of self-reflection to define themselves as “sane” and one yielding to the order as opposed to the “insane” diverging from it. Practically, the situation of the addict can be defined in the same manner, along the same line of thought. First, we need the definition of the “normal” in order to assign the definition of the “addict”, as being different. The “abnormal” is unable to create their own system but only to use and parasitically exploit the already existing one. As Derrida says: “an opposition that is deconstructed is not destroyed or abandoned but reinscribed.” (qtd. in Culler 133) Probably this is the reason why “the normal” find the divergent entities so threatening as the basis of the “other’s” system is their own. The fundament of Sade’s abominable system is exactly the same that they possess, by which they define themselves; he feeds on the same vocabulary and lexis as does the sacred text of the

Bible or the law. Actually, “Sade accepts this logical structure and maintains it without discussion; what is more, he develops it, systematises it, even to the point of outrage.” (Allison, Roberts, and Weiss 59) Indeed, he does not make the ruling system cease to exist; he does not destruct anything (as it is absolutely not his intention), he simply uses the tools of the system that produced him to point out the unnaturalness of its “naturalness”.

We may claim that Sade embodies the essence of deconstruction, as he, with his very being (which, of course, is dependent on artistic creativity) subverts and transgresses the boundaries of the extant system by undermining it with its own tools. Derrida claims: “the practitioner of deconstruction works within the terms of the system but in order to breach it.” (qtd. in Culler 86) His parasitic exploitation of the system makes him indeed a true deconstructionist in every single field he comes into contact with. Not only does he deconstruct (and at the same time re-constructs) literature as such but also the system of society and all the institutes connected to it. Deconstructing the system, of course, goes together with infecting it as well. While it massively fights Sade, it also incorporates and embraces him. As Foucault writes in *The History of Sexuality*: “The power which took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatising troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace. ... it drew out those peculiarities over which it kept watch. Pleasure spread the power it harried it; power anchored the pleasure it uncovered.” (Foucault 44-45)

The argumentation that I rely on in the elaboration on the “normal” and the “abnormal” might grasp the opposition of normality and abnormality from a somewhat narrow, binary aspect but I find it necessary to follow a strict binary opposition that follows from the Foucauldian line of reasoning which he presents in *The History of Sexuality*. Paradigms and norms are socially constructed at a certain, determinable historical period, and they always need to be pre-established in order to be able to divert from them, as the absence of these norms would annihilate the act of transgression as such. “Transgression presupposes the existing order, the apparent maintenance of norms, under which energy accumulates, thereby making the transgression necessary.” (Allison, Roberts, and Weiss 39) This is true for the inmates of the mental institute, for the addict, and also for Marquise de Sade. This is a mutually dependent relationship as they can only be defined by being correlated to the other.

The way Foucault defines the “homosexual” i.e. “the other” in *The History of Sexuality* is crucial in understanding the personality – or rather the “phenomenon” – of the

Marquis. Using Foucault's words, analogously, as does Eve Sedgwick as well in her book *Tendencies* in order to define the addict, Sade is the archetype of the addict. His mode of living "became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood". (Sedgwick 129) His whole person is permeated with his addiction to expression; he is defined, determined, re-created, and kept alive by his "behaviour" of writing. His thoughts, his actions, his language are characterised by this addictive behaviour in an absolute way; he is only able to express himself in sexually loaded allegories and metaphors. However, as Bataille also claims, "man is the same thing as language" (Bataille 186), and this may lead us to the observation that it is not only *his* language that is loaded but the whole text of the drama, including that of other characters as well. As the play progresses, the innuendos become more and more explicit and obvious, however, not only concerning Sade's language but all the others'. Take for instance Monsieur Prioux's comment on Madame Royer-Collard's reaction on his work: "She was in the throes of delight..." (Wright 31) The fact that each and every character's speech is permeated by sexually loaded content and form also underpin the universality of the human soul.

It is important that not only the content but the form of writing applied by de Sade also transgresses boundaries in a way. What he achieves is "a combination of clarity and obscurity, and this alliance is what troubles us, complicating our reading and making it inwardly violent. This violence is much stronger than that of the characters' cruel adventures, which serve as much to divert us from it as to represent it." (Blanchot, 218) This feature grabs and disturbs the mind of the reader; the duality that lies in Sade's writing simultaneously irritates and seizes the sense with the greatest vehemence. This phenomenon also reflects the human mind: the parallel enjoyment of the text and the constant irritation deriving from the fear of discovery.

The key to understanding this phenomenon is "Sade's firm belief in the essential role of evil in the order of things". (Philips 22) When being interrogated by Coulmier, de Sade asks him: "Did you read every word? Or did you run straight away to the dog-eared pages?" (Wright 24) With this question he does not only point to Coulmier's or Royer-Collard's concealed interest but also directly addresses the reader of the play. As if he (with his writing) tried to build a meta-addictive system reaching out, stretching beyond his own medium, pointing to the reader of it. As Bataille points out, "vice is the deep truth at the heart of man" (Bataille 184) and this is a *fact* which Sade desperately tries to attract attention to. "Modern society is perverse, not in spite of its puritanism or as if from a backlash provoked by its

hypocrisy; it is in actual fact, and directly, perverse.” (Foucault 47) In fiction (and with fiction) Sade points to the readers’ soul and nature thereby also highlighting the universal similarity of human beings as such (whether fictitious or alive). However, he does this in such a natural way, so univocally that he at the same time points to the “naturalness” of the existence of addiction and, in parallel, to the repressive ruling system’s hypocrisy. If we consider for instance the behaviour and reaction of people who witness to the outburst in Charenton: “*Your riot, sir, was the most scrupulously attended social affair since Madame Rougemont’s summer cotillion!*” (Wright 48) In this scene the scopophilic, perverted natures of “good citizens” appear who are hungry for monstrosity. They are depicted as hungry animals crawling for drops of excitement. However, with this “Sade in no way seeks to justify his conduct in his books – a conduct that always seemed to him quite ordinary.” (Blanchot 219) The naturalness is emphasised by de Sade and that, after all, what appeared to be “God given” and natural, turns out to be merely a social construction which is stripped off when the proper stimulus is given.

As we see, addiction brings humans’ “real” self to the surface, and this is, paradoxically, liberating and at the same time shackling. Characters in the play as Coulmier or Royer-Collard become addicts involuntarily and unawares. It is a peculiar type of addiction that de Sade manages to point out – if you *decide to yield* to your own nature and you are willing to face your own self then you become addicted to it. Anyone who gets in touch with de Sade’s art or himself (which are basically one and the same) is doomed. We also see this in the scene when Coulmier and Royer-Collard examine the last piece of art created by the Marquise. While they are meticulously destroying him, they themselves become creators. They unwillingly become inheritors and vehicles of de Sade’s addictive substance; they become tainted. So, basically, what we witness is a peculiar kind of self-addiction. What the Marquis does is nothing more than giving a hand in facing our inner self, our own perverse, filthy soul being held under control by social conventions and institutions. The cause of his monstrosity, the cause because of which de Sade is so much to be dreaded is his honesty; his ability to point at our own animalistic, cruel nature and, of course, and at the weakness and vulnerability deriving from this feature; pointing at our *addiction*, the need to face it again and again. This is also the very reason of the methodical obliteration of de Sade. They *have to* destroy him. They are so much repelled by their own self that they cannot bear the sheer existence of a mimed human wreck, they finally also must destroy his mind.

Returning to the line of thought on “naturalness”, we may observe that the play is thoroughly quilted with references to “nature” and “natural behaviour”. When Coulmier exclaims in the third scene “Nature herself was never more abused!” (Wright 17) he also refers to the fossilised set of rules which, according to them, is an elemental characteristic feature of society. It is not only the Abbe, however, who adduces to Nature as being the preliminary standard to conform to. Renée Pelagie, de Sade’s wife also refers to it when she desperately asks: “Will my maligned character, stretched so long upon the rack of ignominy, ever regain its natural shape?” (Wright 14) A given set of norms is what we encounter in these desperate exclamations, though, the definition of the term seems rather vague and ungraspable. The very term “natural” is put into question here, as we face the difficulty of assigning the meaning and the interpretation of this word: is “natural” indeed something originating from Nature or are these laws also assessed and implanted by society?

We may draw the conclusion that in the mind of these characters society and civilisation is equated with nature or natural behaviour. However, the natural “remedy” Royer-Collard offers to counter the Marquise’s addiction reveals a different attitude. At the end of Scene III he says: “The sight of the shackles, waiting for him. ... in them, he sees the architecture of all civilisation.” (Wright 20) This remark leads to self-contradiction. If we assume that civilisation is equated with something “natural” from his speech it is clear that it is nothing else but a common burden: civilised society appears from the words of one of the members of it as a common punishment. In his speech civilisation is represented by the shackles, so this way the term is reversed: freedom and natural society appear as encumbrance.

Probably the institution (or system of values) that is most prominently emphasised and also most “profanised” in the play is that of religion. De Sade is many times brought in the same context with God and Christ, the text of the play is densely woven with religious, Christian references in which the Marquise is in some way identified or put in parallel with its sacred figures which is also illustrated by the quote: “Stab my flesh. Which one of us will bleed?” (Wright 56)

Furthermore, we also may bring Jacques Derrida as an example who also points out in *The Rhetoric of Drugs*: “... when the sky of transcendence comes to be emptied, and not just of Gods, but of any Other, a sort of fated rhetoric fills the void, and this is the fetishism of drug addiction. Not religion as the opiate of people, but drugs as the religion of the atheist

poets – and of some others, more or less atheists, more or less poets.” (“Points” 240) Writing takes over the place of religion. In general, fetishism refers to the practice of worshipping; this way in this context it receives a connotation which refers to the religion of the self, to self-consciousness, and the knowledge of the utmost inside of the human soul; the human – through writing and addiction – takes command.

Derrida’s line of thought on drug appearing as a fetish and fetishism in general certainly needs further elaboration. Louise J. Kaplan in her book *Cultures of Fetishism* also characterises this phenomenon in a similar way to addiction. She writes: “If we persist in exploring the varied associations to the word fetishism, we discover that anything excessive activity or heightened devotion could be referred to as a fetish. ... Any false belief that is widely held by a group of people could be called a fetish... Any activity or practice that is engaged in with a sense of urgency and necessity might be regarded as fetishistic.” (Kaplan 4) Clearly this quotation shows much resemblance with the typical discourse on addiction, which has the characteristic of pointing out the excessive, contagious nature of this phenomenon. Moreover, it also echoes the distinctively peculiar behaviour of de Sade (on which I will elaborate on later, mainly with the help of the argumentation of Georges Bataille) which is also characterised by extremity and excessiveness.

De Sade’s body appears as the source of the drug this way the Marquise becomes the fetish itself. Coulmier focuses his sadistic tendencies on the body of the Marquise – he becomes dependent on de Sade’s elimination: Coulmier both worships de Sade and is dependent on his elimination. In this paradox situation Coulmier needs him and at the same time, in a maniac way, wishes the Marquise’s perdition. There is another person in the play whose body becomes a fetish, and this character is Madeleine. Her body becomes in a way similar to the Marquise’s as both of them are cruelly tortured. Moreover, Madeleine’s body is an object of a post-mortem rape, a necrophilic act which has a peculiar place on the palette of perversions. Coulmier’s necrophilic act, if we follow Kaplan’s line of reasoning, may be interpreted as a sign of fetishistic tendencies, as “the fantasy is evoked that living, animate beings are unpredictable and potentially dangerous. They can only be contained by extinguishing their life energies or by transforming them into something dead or inanimate. When the full identity of the sexual object is alive, with all manner of threateningly, dangerously unpredictable vitalities, the desire that he or she arouses must be invested in an object that is knowable and predictable.” (Kaplan 157) What Coulmier strives to achieve in

the scene of violation is his second desperate attempt to cure himself. Fetishising the dead body of the girl, however, does not give him relief but pushes him into an even deeper abyss.

Nevertheless, we also must make mention of the deeds that happen to Madeleine, even before Coulmier violates her dead body. The circumstances of her death, basically, her execution by the lunatic Bouchon is also worth elaboration. I would say that his demented man longs to imitate de Sade; his violent torture is supposed to be an artistic “attempt” to follow his master. Since “the human skin could be written on as if the cuts into the body were a text” (Kaplan 73) this interpretation is highly probable, as what Bouchon actually does is the artistic repetition of de Sade’s literary achievement.

Following the previous line, the mythic character of the Sade-phenomenon also must be enhanced and that “Sade’s name is never purely a proper noun: it is always pronounced in inverted commas. We thus hint at a larger-than-life human being: ‘the Marquis de Sade’. Or we turn the name into adjectives or common nouns and thereby marking a signifying praxis.” (Allison, Roberts, and Weiss 228) Even Renée says in the play: “I cannot bring myself to say it, Doctor.” (Wright 10) The superstitious fear of the wife also emphasises the unearthly, mythical nature of the Marquise, as if in the mere utterance of his name the phenomenon would be evoked. Only the most dreaded entities and phenomena are not called by their names, and de Sade, as being the creator and source of this type of addiction, is indeed an ungraspable phenomenon who cannot be properly addressed. As if he were (as he is) the objectification of something ungraspable, as Kaplan also enhances: “fetishism transforms ambiguity and uncertainty into something knowable and certain... The material object, the fetish, is employed to still and silence, bind and dominate... The unknowable and the ambiguous are experienced as dangerous. The fetish reassures.” (Kaplan 6) In this relationship the Marquise seems to embody everything they dread (and at the same time they turn to with a kind of religious awe) and it is only the destruction of his physical body through which Coulmier may have a feeling of victory and satisfaction. They cannot ever reach the ungraspable, only the tangible, de Sade; as if he was the embodiment of all their perversity, as if he was the manifestation of these feelings which they can grab and symbolically execute their perverted inner self.

It must be emphatically stated that this phenomenon is a human construction. The Marquise is objectified. In this strange synecdochic relationship (in which a phenomenon is symbolised with an objectified, tangible subject), the human does the transformation; to quote

Louise J. Kaplan again: “fetishism is a mental strategy or defence that enables a human being to transform something or someone with its own enigmatic energy and immaterial essence into something or someone that is material and tangibly real, a form of being that makes the something or someone controllable.” (Kaplan 5) She also highlights the human intervention, human framing of the character of de Sade. In this respect the Marquise (and his unmerciful destruction) also might have functioned as a self-healing process, a cure, however, he turns out to be rather the ambiguous *pharmakon*. Using Derrida’s *Rhetoric of Drugs* (and through him Plato’s *Phaedrus*) analogously, it is clear that Coulmier simply cannot grasp the ambiguity of this phenomenon: that “the bad *pharmakon* can always parasitize the good *pharmakon*... and the *pharmakon* will always be apprehended as both antidote *and* poison.” (“Points” 234)

The sacrilege becomes complete at the end of the drama, in Scene VIII, where the Marquise himself appears as the Figure of Christ and shortly after he re-appears as Satan. In this short process of transformation he deconstructs the system of religion with being identified both with Christ and the anti-Christ. “This was no God, but His Inverse. (*The Figure of Christ swivels his mask; now he is Satan*).” (Wright 69) With this notion he points out that in the new system it is absolutely of no interest which one of the masks one puts on; in a very cynical way he shows that neither has a sacred meaning anymore. A new era has begun, an era in which the written text takes over the position that religion has been holding for two thousand years. In this scene he not only deconstructs but also ridicules, annuls and de-secrates; de Sade emphatically claims that he has no communion with the previous system anymore, it is not his “paradigm”. In the act of deconstruction (and transgression) he practically sweeps it away while, at the same time, still, parasitically preying on its visual symbolic system, as “pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another.” (Foucault 48)

De Sade is not the new ruler but only a mediator, as was Christ as well. He embodies the new “religion” and oozes the new “word”. He says “I didn’t forge the mind of man. ... Don’t hate me just because I turn the key, and let them loose.” (Wright 56) As it seems from the quotation, he is not the main creator but only an executor (as is Coulmier, by the way). He does no miracles or prodigious capabilities; what de Sade does is simply directing humans to themselves and then let them do the rest: he lets loose human nature on humans themselves. He brings terrible realisations but also, paradoxically, liberates the human soul through

addiction. De Sade dies to redeem us; through him, we get from the burden of society and religion to self-knowledge and acceptance.

This discovery, however, not only depends on him. As de Sade declares in the play: “The experience of art is a collaborative affair. The author provides the stimuli; the reader his response.” (Wright 53) With this he presents how both the writer and the reader parasitically depend on each other: De Sade is the unstoppable source of material and the reader the insatiable consumer. “*I desire the author: I need his figure as he needs mine.*” (Barthes 27) says Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*, and indeed Wright’s play is a perfect example for the illustration of this symbiotic relationship. They mutually sustain the existence of each other, as in any kind of addictive behaviour.

The reader not only consumes but becomes also the creator of the text in the process of reading. As Derrida says: “... while any text demands a faithful reading, it also demands an individual response.” (qtd. in Bennett, Royle 237) And in the drama, this is the process by which the addiction seems to spread infectiously. The reader is indeed a vital creator, especially in case of de Sade’s plays, as he never describes actions in his works directly. He constantly uses a very refined, sophisticated system of metaphors (or rather allegories) throughout his writings; the person of the reader (his originally perverted soul) is needed to interpret it. The co-operation of the writer and the reader is observable in the scene in which Coulmier and Royer-Collard read, ironically, the most “innocent”, most direct piece of writing which he (most probably mockingly) prepares as a test to prove the efficiency of his work: “It’s all there, Abbe! Lurking beneath his seemingly flaccid prose!” (Wright 62) In this scene the readers become the real creators of the meaning of the text, projecting the net of allegories behind the words. “The reader makes the text and the text makes the reader” (qtd. in Bennett, Royle 15) says Derrida and in this respect de Sade’s question is a rightful response to Coulmier’s calling him to account: “Am I to be hold responsible for the actions of every half-wit here?” (Wright 53) De Sade needs the reader, this is obvious. Hence he does not need the young Madeleine as a lover either, but what he sees (and sizes) in her is the hungry reader. He needs a readership, his existence depends on them, as without their active presence, his endeavour to point to the addictive soul of the human being becomes void of meaning.

Theatricality and an enhanced stylisation are explicit directorial instructions and are also features with the help of which de Sade succeeds in reaching and convincing the readership; Wright at the very beginning of the play presents an explicit request for

artificiality. In the directions, as a part of the extra-textual element, he writes: “The play is written, I hope, with all the fervour and self-consciousness of a true melodrama.” (Wright 5) In this short instruction he does not only emphasise the stylised tone of the play but at the same time formulates a highly self-reflective comment on the process of writing. Furthermore, to strengthen his conception, he continues: “Events in the play are not *cruel*; they are *diabolical*. ... Similarly, the play should be acted in a heightened, even archaic style. As grotesquerie mounts on grotesquerie, the play’s passage should acquire an almost absurdist tone.” (Wright 5) To return to the fetishistic nature of drug addiction again, Kaplan says that “a crucial aspect of the fetishism strategy is masquerade” (Kaplan 14) so we see that the fake and artificial masque of the Marquise is an essential component of his nature; the essence of his existence is threatened without it.

This artificial, highly self-ironic style is, indeed, interwoven in the fabric of the text. When Coulmier first describes the acts – and effects – of the Marquise he says: “My brethren found him too taxing a patient. A few of the priests were so dispirited, they left the order. Father Lely now slaughters pigs in Provence. Father Couvrat is a chimney sweep...” (Wright 14) This is a perfect example of the stylised, hyperbolic effect which is assigned to the Marquise. Here, the impact ascribed to him is so fierce that it already at the beginning arouses suspicion concerning the truthfulness of the “narrator” (in this scene he, indeed, is represented as the Antichrist). The scene, in which de Sade appears as Christ and Coulmier abuses Madeline’s body is a further example for the strongly stylised, melodramatic atmosphere, especially in the description of the girl’s body: “*Her body is bathed in a celestial glow. The trills of an angelic chorus waft through the air.*” (Wright, 68) In this ironic, profound scene her pure, intact body recalls in Coulmier the inviolate body of society and represents the “natural” state visualizing the ideal one. Derrida also enhances the constructed naturalness of the body in which the effects of drugs obviously is present as a polluting, threatening factor which must be eliminated in order to safeguard (or restore) the originary state of the human body, and, analogously, the social body. This analogy is visible when he says in the *Rhetoric of Drugs*: “in the name of this organic and originary naturalness of the body we declare and wage the war on drugs, the war against these artificial, pathogenic, and foreign aggressions. Again we find a desire to reconstitute the “ideal body”, the “perfect body”. (“Points” 244)

Barthes says that “the Sadian group is often a pictorial or sculptural object: the discourse captures the figures of debauchery not only as arranged, architecture, but above all as frozen, framed, lighted; it treats them as *tableaux vivants*.” (“Sade, Fourier, Loyola” 154)

This also enhances the strongly stylised, markedly theatrical, fictional style of the pictures created by the Marquis. The act of creation itself is highly stylised and abstracted in the scenes where de Sade is mutilated as well, pointing at the essence of the creative process, as in these instances the absolutes and extremes of the devotion of the creating mind is presented. He parallel questions and reinforces the act of creation, with highlighting how far the will to create may stretch.

However, there are two occasions when the consciously created and sustained mask of the Marquis seems to fragment and even drop for a couple of moments. The first such case occurs right after the death of Madeleine: "The face of the Marquise contorts in pain. A sudden lurch, and he collapses on the floor, his body wracked by sobs." (Wright 47) The self-disgust de Sade shows makes this scene a highly self-reflective one. After ear-witnessing the murder of Madeleine even the creator of the text (who obstinately) refuses to take any kind of responsibility for the reaction that his writings awake in his readership is terrified by his own power; even he is astonished by the wickedness of the human soul. The second "fall" of de Sade already occurs in the presence of Coulmier, when he manages to touch the weak point of the Marquise: "You are a man, after all." (Wright 55)

This is also the place where an interesting transformation begins, namely that of Coulmier. Here he starts his alteration to finally become his most dreaded and fiercely hated enemy: de Sade. He says: "Blood has been spilled, and regrettably, I must spill more to stem its ruby tide." (Wright 55) The transformation starts here and is completed at the end of the play. While he methodically destroys de Sade's body he himself becomes an incarnation of the "master". Coulmier fights the addiction and his craving strongly; for a long time he does not even dare to admit it to himself. The final painful break eventuates when he utters the sentence: "*He has yet to conquer me!*" (Wright 63). After this we already witness how he gains sadistic pleasure and emotional satisfaction from the physical annihilation of de Sade. When he narrates the mutilation of the Marquis from his words it is obvious that he was (and is still) sexually aroused; not only the content but the form of his language displays his scopophilic pleasures felt by watching the sadistic actions: "Though repulsed, I was fuelled by the necessity of my actions. And my horror hardened into resolve. Steel purpose. I felt a growing ... interest ... in the proceedings." (Wright 66) His recitation is obviously heavily loaded with sexual innuendoes and his mode of telling (fragmented sentences and the use of punctuation) also shows that he re-lives the actions, and through this mental repetition and visualization he irrevocably falls into the addictive circle beyond recovery which is

characterised by repetition. When he continues: “A certain ... satisfaction ... knowing with each chop ... I was taking a step closer to God.” (Wright 66) He is indeed closer to God but he is not yet conscious of which one he is approaching.

With this, finally, he starts his identification with his most feared enemy, the Marquise. As his body deteriorates, Coulmier’s substance is transformed, the Marquis is reborn in him; his soul and essence finds his inheritor. Until scene VIII, Act II he gratifies his newly discovered sadistic, scopophilic tendencies, however, at this point (when he violates the dead body of Madeleine) he practically transforms into the Marquis (in his actions, his speech, even his style becomes identical to de Sade’s). “Interred too long with the beast, you’ve now become one” (Wright 75) says Royer-Collard. And indeed, through the character of Coulmier we witness the whole process of addiction from the initial state to the very end of it. Through his eyes we witness the aestheticisation of perversity, filth and torture: “But when I came for his head...”; “I have stared into the face of evil ... I have never seen such a terrible beauty.” (Wright 76) Through his (body of) writing the Marquis creates something that survives him; he re-creates himself in Coulmier. In the last act in scene XII his identification with de Sade is complete, despite all his resistance and hatred, he becomes the same as de Sade was, with his creation-compulsion; practically, he takes the place of him, both physically and spiritually. This is the proof of the cyclicity of the phenomenon, its survival and ability to adapt: the Marquise is re-created in an even more aggressive inheritor: Coulmier realises and executes the “instructions” of de Sade.

Coulmier’s addiction can be explained by what Derrida says in *The Rhetoric of Drugs* when elaborating on the phenomenon of writing as *pharmakon*. In this he describes a notion of parasitic feeding and claims: “with this schema of food we are very close to what, in the usual sense of the word, we call drugs, which are usually to be “consumed”. (“Points” 234) Indeed, there is a reference by the Marquise himself for the oral consumption of the stories by Coulmier when he says: “By candlelight you licked the words off the paper, and rolled them around in your mouth. You swallowed. You succumbed.” (Wright 24)

In Scene XII the transformation is complete: Coulmier already inhabits the place that de Sade had before. At the very end of the drama he has the final couple of articulate words: “A quill, my good man! A QUILL! A QUILL!” (Wright 80) Through the process of reincarnation, as de Sade evaporates, Coulmier gradually takes his place, showing more and more of the traits of the Marquise. Royer-Collard would never go through such a

transformation, as he has not been in touch with de Sade all along, he did not even see him; but Coulmier is constantly near. Their relationship becomes perversely symbiotic: the Marquise is thrilled by Coulmier's striving while Coulmier's one and only aim in his life becomes "taming" de Sade. He becomes obsessed with his destruction; he is so busy annihilating de Sade that he forgets to follow the changes appearing in him.

The final scene of the play also presents the cyclicity, the "iterability" of de Sade's texts. Destroying the physical manifestation of the Marquise is hardly enough to stop him; his writings remain repeatable. As Derrida also says: "a text is original insofar as it is a thing, not to be confused with an organic or a physical body, but a thing, let us say, of the mind, meant to survive the death of the author or the signatory, and to be above or beyond the physical corpus of the text, and so on. The structure of the original text is survival." (qtd. in Royle 64) Even after destroying him, his legacy survives: in form of his writings and also in an heir. The written word is primary, existing above all, even after the death of the author because "for a writing to be a writing it must continue to 'act' and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written." ("Limited Inc." 8)

An important feature of repetition we have to elaborate on is its being a characteristic of addictive behaviour too, as "reiteration is at first the condition required for the monster to remain on the level of monstrosity". (Allison, Roberts, and Weiss 49) The addict venerates his craving again and again, as Gerda Reith writes in *The Age of Gambling*: "repetition is the essence of the play" (Reith 132). In *Death and Sensuality* Bataille also describes this phenomenon as a ritual, a repetitive force of craving, claiming that "this violent and deleterious aspect of divinity was generally manifested in sacrificial rites. ... The divine will only protect us once its basic need to consume and to ruin has been satisfied". (Bataille 181)

The craving for repetition and the re-living of the fictional event are exemplified with Madeleine's mother's eager wish to hear the juiciest bits: "Read that part again!" (Wright 21) she commands her daughter. This phenomenon, however, is reflected upon by the Marquise himself as well. We witness a strongly self-reflective remark in his debate with Coulmier when he claims: "What unites us, my precious? Common language? A universal God? ... Fads and habits, nothing more!" (Wright 27) With these words he comments on his own behaviour, reflecting on one of the most characteristic element of addiction.

Derrida's theory of "iterability" may be connected to the text in on another level as well. "There is a machine-like repetition or repeatability that is nevertheless marked by

singularity: the context is forever altering even if in some sense the text remains the same. ... That is to say, it must carry with it a capacity to be repeated in principle again and again in all sorts of contexts, at the same time as being in some way singular every time. “Iterability” thus entails both ‘repetition’ (sameness) and ‘alterity’ (difference).” (qtd. in Royle 68) It appears that this is not different from what Wright presents with his drama: he evokes (repeats) de Sade’s character and his character is elementarily interwoven with his writing. So, he also shows the symptoms and characteristics of addiction while parallel producing it. Besides “repetition” in the character of Coulmier “alterity” also seems to come to the surface. Derrida also enhances in *Signature, Event, Context*, that “iterability is the logic that ties repetition to alterity” (“Limited Inc.” 7) this way the modification of the “heritage” is indispensable. In Wright’s play the “alterity” is represented by the Abbe’s actual behaviour of torturing and killing, those of which de Sade only writes are acted out by him.

“Iterability” also may be discovered in the extra-textual elements, more specifically, in the authorial instructions. If we consider what Wright says at the beginning: “Before appealing to the audience’s hearts or minds, the play endeavours to appeal to forces far more primal” (Wright, 5); from Wright’s comment it clearly seems that he wants to convince and impinge on the audience as does his main character. With this metatextual effect, with presenting the story of de Sade, we become the readers of the Marquise through his lens. He proves that “... a ‘text’ is no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something than itself, to other differential traces.” (qtd. in Royle 64) As the Marquis wants to grab the innermost, hidden reality of human beings, Wright strives to reach the same goal. With evoking his character, Wright becomes something of a similar kind, he aims for a self-imposed communion with his hero. While he resurrects the text of the former artist (and through this, in a way, the artist himself) Wright also manages to spread the addiction further, becoming also a reincarnation of the Marquise. Moreover, the final effect in the play, which is a strong auditory one (the collective laugh of de Sade and the lunatics), also enhances the cyclicity. This sound effect (combined with Coulmier’s desperate craving) is probably more suggestive than anything else could be: sinister, terrible foreshadowing of the future, pointing forward: with the Marquise’s death nothing stops. The addiction cannot be controlled – human beings cannot be forbidden from themselves by oppressing it with social and moral burdens, human nature cannot be obliterated.

De Sade's miming begins even before physical "intervention". His being is dependent on using language in the act of artistic creation, the denial of writing is a threat of the complete loss of identity for de Sade. Coulmier says: "YOU WILL NOT EVEN WRITE YOUR OWN IGNOMINIOUS NAME!" (Wright 41) and with this he is deprived of an elemental condition of his being; oozing the addictive substance is his organic need, his whole existence depends on this act, showing another form of self-addiction. We see, that the source of the addictive "material" is desperately addicted to something as well, more precisely, to his own art, to his own body.

To illustrate this, in Scene IX we follow how he turns his wardrobe into text. With this motion the internalisation of the process of writing begins. From outer tools he gradually turns to incorporate the texts, its production becomes closer and closer to his body; finally oozing it from his very figure. At first he only uses his clothes but later he follows with his hand and with substances emanating from his body: his blood and eventually, his excrement. Even Coulmier drops a hint on this process when he says, identifying de Sade with his story: "It's necessary to know *his* end, to gauge the full measure of the Marquise depravity." (Wright 18) By the way, in this scene we also see how Wright's play makes a reference even to Shakespeare's work: Hamlet's dialogue with Polonius. In a grotesque mode he invokes and echoes the scene from *Hamlet* with Coulmier's and Dr. Royer-Collard's dialogue: "Words! ... Words? ... Everywhere words!" (Wright 59)

A further interesting element referring to this phenomenon is that in the drama the "authors" exclusively read their own texts aloud when reciting. As if the act of writing (and the production of the written text) would inextricably be bound up with the person who produced it. In this sense writing is identified with the creator, not only in the case of de Sade but also others (e.g. when Royer-Collard reads the letter sent by Monsieur Prouix). That is why Renée Pelagie's exclamation cannot be interpreted in this system because when she claims: "I bade you kill the author – not the man!" (Wright 72) she wants to separate the inseparable; de Sade's physical being is completely joined with his "profession", and his addictive behaviour.

What we might have discovered so far, when examining the discourse on de Sade, is that the way critics tend to characterise him and his legacy, the vocabulary and the line of argumentation they use is very much similar to discourses characterising the phenomenon of addiction. For instance, the way Georges Bataille presents his argumentation in *Death and*

*Sensuality* is a proper example to underpin this observation. He says: “there are two extremes. At one end, existence is basically orderly and decent. Work, concern for the children, kindness, and honesty rule men’s dealing with their fellows. At the other, violence rages pitilessly. ... Excess contrasts with reason.” (Bataille 186) This extraction is obviously very similar to the discourse on addiction, not only in its terminology but also in its system of reasoning, as he deploys the exact same type of argumentation as does for instance Foucault. This becomes clear from the line of reasoning of Eve Sedgwick in her book *Tendencies* when she says: “so long as a ‘free will’ has been hypostatized and charged with ethical value, for just so long has an equally hypostatized ‘compulsion’ had to be available as a counterstructure always internal to it, always requiring to be ejected from it” (Sedgwick 132) Returning to Bataille, we sense a strong distancing and branding gesture also when he says: “not only does ‘civilised’ usually mean ‘us’, and barbarous ‘them’”. (Bataille 186) Not only Bataille, but Derrida as well uses similar terminology; moreover, also critics commenting on his works are obsessed with the application of medical terminology and analogies. However, we must add that this is not simply medical discourse but especially that of concerning contagious illnesses.

It is important to emphasise how the phenomenon of addiction and the “habit” of the Marquis coincide as far as the contagious aspect of discourse in addiction is concerned. Many texts discussing the nature of addiction consider the phenomenon as infectious and miasmatic. “This animation was thought to be contagious, and passing from one object to another it brought with it a miasma of death.” (Bataille 180) Berridge and Edwards, among many, also emphasise this in *Opium and the People*, and so does Coulmier in Wright’s play, using the exact same medical terminology: “*you are a baneful miasma...*” (Wright 36) The other person talking about de Sade with medicinal terminology in the play is his own wife, Renée, who describes de Sade’s behaviour as a “pathological mania”. Furthermore, already in the first scene, she has two references to the contagiousness of de Sade when she says: “I don’t know which has plagued me more ....” (Wright 11) and “Oh, Doctor, forgive my hysteria, but I am a woman plagued!” (Wright 11)

Not only Renée Pelagie is plagued but the whole body of society is threatened by de Sade. When Royer-Collard asks: “To admonish the individual, when his habits impinge upon the safety of the whole?” (Wright 51-52) he refers to the Marquise’s harmfulness for the healthy, intact body of society, and as the addict, de Sade carries a potential threat. The whole

drama overflows with representations of the human body as mutilated, raped and reviled; this is a clear reference to the infected, wounded body of society which is caused by de Sade.

As it is closely related to the spreading of the infection, I find it very important to elaborate on the effect of the circumscribed and harassed state in which the Marquise produces his addictive fiction: the institute of Charenton, more precisely, the cell he spends his days secluded. “The more I forbid, the more you are provoked” (Wright 39) says Coulmier to him which is a concrete reference to the impact of the “subtractive” methods applied by them. However, already in the “motto” of the drama – so in a highlighted position – we encounter an emphatic reference to the circumstances of his confinement and his reaction to it: “Fanaticism in me is the product of the persecutions I have endured from my tyrants. The longer they continue their vexations, the deeper they root my principles in my heart.” (Wright 6) Right at the beginning with a quote from de Sade himself Wright initiates that he fends off responsibility to his custodians and accuses them with being the catalysts of his behaviour; practically the diffusing of the addiction is shifted off to them. This is also reinforced by Maurice Blanchot in *The Infinite Conversation* where he writes: “writing is the madness proper to de Sade. Liberation from prison does not free him from this madness that was acquired in prison, or at least came in prison to be what it is, an always clandestine and subterranean force.” (Blanchot 221) The enclosed state and the methodical annihilation not only reinforces but intensifies his artistic production, and with this the spread of the infectious behaviour. It is actually Charenton which ensures him the proper substratum to effuse his creativity, these very walls created the contagious phenomenon. “For this buried solitude that horrified him, and from this horror turned into attraction, there originated and grew the irrepressible necessity of writing; a terrifying force of speech that could never be calmed. Everything must be said. The first liberty is the liberty to say anything.” (Blanchot 220) De Sade himself refers to this circumstance when speaking to Madeleine: “I have just the manuscript, inspired by these very surroundings.” (Wright 21) But it is also mentioned when talking to Coulmier: “And it was in such a milieu that you first wielded your pen?” (Wright 28) It is testified that the enclosure of de Sade’s body leads to the intensified working of his mind.

This way we see that the Marquise’s character (the bestial, contagious being) is helped in forming by Coulmier and Royer-Collard. As part of the “system” they also contribute to the exfoliation of the phenomenon. In fact, the environment of de Sade, its claustrophobic atmosphere totally devoid of stimulation or external influence inspires him to multiply his

creative activity. As Philips notes, “we note how de Sade must have increasing recourse to his imagination in search of sexual satisfaction; how his sexual frustration in prison provides an important impetus for the composition of those libertine fictions.” (Philips 28) He needs the act of writing and creativity as a kind of self-stimulation; he is just as addicted to his own texts and production as are the ones he shares them with.

Under these circumstances, the more his environment tries to silence him, the more aggressively he bursts out, spreading the “epidemic”. Finally, when the equipments are denied to him, he uses his own body to spread the phenomenon. The constant mentioning of his penis as a tool of creation and the final auto-vampiristic act of writing with his own blood on his shirt also exemplify the absolute fusion of the addictive behaviour of creation and his body, as I have already referred to it earlier. The fact that he highlights these body members permanently may also refer to an act of fetishisation: through these acts de Sade performs a kind of self-fetishisation. In him we see the desperate, craving addict, who is capable of doing anything to get the satisfactory simulation, especially when he says: “A maniac is matchless for invention.” (Wright 30) In this sentence even de Sade, probably consciously, refers to himself in pathological terminology with a certain hint of addiction.

Now I would like to turn to the effect that the addictive substance impinges on the users and the function it fills in in their lives. Madelaine says to Royer-Collard: “What we’ve seen in life, it takes a lot to hold our interest.” (Wright 34) In this respect this phenomenon is quite similar to what Reith writes about in the *Experience of Play*, claiming that “the problem of boredom is intrinsic to modernity, and has its roots in the 19th century when the breakdown of a sense of metaphysical order gave birth to the distinctive feature of the modern age – the syndrome of intensity.” (Reith 130) The tedium of their lives only becomes conspicuous when they emerge in the works of de Sade. This is what they expect from the addictive substance: new experience, new impulses, and new stimuli. “The desire to experience intense sensation replaced the pursuit of meaningful activity and had as its converse the existence of apathy and boredom.” (Reith 130-131)

Here some questions seem to arise. What lack need to be filled in in the lives of these people? How do they use these pieces of fiction to stimulate their lives? In what way is it capable of this? The solution lies in *substitution*. “We put ourselves in his stories, sir.” (Wright, 34) says Madeleine referring to fiction as a resort, a shelter into which they immerse. Fictionality of the stories is the key, as being substitutes to real actions. “For the reader there

remains only the reiteration and the wholly exterior aspect of the ecstasy, the orgasm described which is counterfeit ecstasy". (Allison, Roberts, and Weiss 58) Madeleine places fiction above reality, and appoints a curious relationship between the two saying that "If we weren't such bad women on the page, Doctor, I'll hazard we couldn't be such good women in life" (Wright 34) By this, she reinforces fiction as a tool, a supplement, for gratifying one's passions. However, she is still able to make a difference. She is a perfect partner in the process of reading (creating) the text, as her mind longs only for a thrilling stimulation: "Some things belong on paper, others in life. It's a blessed fool who can't tell the difference." (Wright 22)

Here making mention about Derrida's theory on the role of writing as "supplement" is indispensable. This can be examined in the scene where Madeleine talks about her mother's reading habits and attitude to fiction: "for a while, I smuggled home old newspapers from the scullery, and read their accounts of the Terror. She found those too barbaric, and pined for your stories instead." (Wright 43) As Derrida says in *Of Grammatology* it "is not that there is nothing outside the empirical texts, but that what lies outside are more supplements, chains of supplements, thus putting in question the distinction between inside and outside." (qtd. in Culler 105) In this respect de Sade's writing can be regarded as a kind of literary masturbation, one which has no actual realisation or "real" consummation. However, in taking Derrida's claims into account, differentiation (or establishing a hierarchy) does not even really matter because if "one wishes to go back *from the supplement to the source*: one must recognise that there is *a supplement at the source*" ("Of Grammatology" 305) The infectious character of writing is also enhanced by Derrida as well by saying explicitly: "supplement is like a virus." (qtd. in Royle 50)

So, the characters are not addicted to the embodiment or the realisation of these works and actions but what thrills them is exactly their impossibility. De Sade's works are not read because of a wish for materialisation but only for the stimulation of the imagination. Even the Marquis himself denies the fulfilment of his creation, claiming that "Yes, I am a libertine, I admit it: I have conceived all that can be conceived along that line, but I have certainly not done everything I have conceived and I shall certainly never do it. I am a libertine, but I am neither a criminal nor a murderer." ("Sade, Fourier, Loyola" 137) So, as long as the actions described remain in the realm of fiction and they do not become effectuated they cause addiction; however, the realms mentioned above seem to be difficult to be kept apart any longer. Reality and fiction coincides in this multileveled metafictional chaos where human

mind cannot differentiate anymore. Realisation of the acts (as in the case of Coulmier) seems to break the intoxication, and this way the addict is able to take the first step into the direction of recovery. However, there are no further steps in *this* process; man cannot be cured out of themselves. The only thing remaining after the self-realisation is acceptance; acceptance of the originary state of human beings, the dictatorial supremacy of artistic creativity and the absolute regnum of the written word.

The examples for this are numerous, however, I only would like to analyse one: Coulmier's disgracing Madeleine's dead body. This time the supplement seems more real than reality and Coulmier is so much disgusted and terrified by his own act of transgression that even after the actual occurrence of the violation of the boundary, he is not capable of acknowledgement. "HE HAS SO LONG POLLUTED ME... WHOSE FANTASY WAS THIS?" (Wright 70) he exclaims. From this seems that he so massively refuses to discover the universal human feature in himself that he snaps under the weight of his own self. The thing he has to face is that "this foreign or dangerous supplement is "originarily" at work and in place in the supposedly ideal interiority of the 'body and soul'. It is indeed at the heart of the heart." ("Points" 244-45) But for him all this is so much the reverse of the paradigm he existed in until now that probably he is not even capable of understanding it properly.

Finally, to conclude my examinations I would like to point out again that the motif of addiction, however it is a primarily modern phenomenon (as its theoretical background and pathological classification occurred only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) the characters in Wright's play are abound in its features. Marquise de Sade is a perfect figure to present the addictive behaviour, as his phenomenon, his environment, his relation to the system that surrounds him, and, not negligibly, the discourses on his character are analogous to those of concerning addiction. Certainly, de Sade was a fascinating figure of the 18<sup>th</sup> century but his character is not a little less interesting today. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Doug Wright proves with his drama how wrong we to claim to have seen and experienced everything (as Madeleine also articulates in the drama). However, the Marquise's figure is still provoking and lets itself be rediscovered and also redefined again and again.

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