

“Poem” of The Grand Inquisitor, Revisited

Prologue: This short story is a reimagination—really, a creative riff on—a famous scene in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel “The Brothers Karamozov”, which Freud called “the most magnificent novel ever written”. It is a story told by one character—Ivan Karamozov—to his brother Alyosha, by way of explaining his views on the nature of life, and particularly theodicy, or divine justice.

Put bluntly, Ivan is an atheist who rejects the possibility that human freedom is sustainable, or desirable. He views the entirety of human progress to derive from the provision of material wants, and that the task of the “good” man is to do so. In the name of this sacred calling—the only one he will recognize—all manner of terror and oppression are justified. Quite obviously, his ideology is that of a Bolshevik.

The scene of the “poem”, as he calls it, is a long monologue—really, a harangue—in a prison cell by the Grand Inquisitor (the scene is the Spanish Inquisition, in which heretics are being burnt daily at the stake), directed at Christ, who has returned to Earth, and been arrested. The substance of it is that men cannot live by the intangible alone, and thus don’t need it; rather, bread is for the average man as equivalent to freedom as is possible on Earth, and Satan is the more useful force for providing it.

He releases Christ, and tells him never to come back. Christ is portrayed not as a virile man, but as a sort of ghost, whose only real role in the story was to serve as foil for Ivan's vicious attack on organized religion.

On a superficial level, my retelling of "The Grand Inquisitor" only resembles it in that you have an interrogator, and a prisoner. However, my intent is to make explicit what was latent in Dostoevsky's work, which was perhaps the clearest mythic exposition of the reasons for totalitarianism ever written, and which was no doubt influential for many for that reason. Specifically, I want to fill in the holes in the narrative, offering two sides, and making the ugly underbelly of the Inquisitors' rage clear, where Dostoevsky, through Ivan, glossed over it.

More importantly, I want to create an interchange between Good and Evil. My protagonist is a Christ-like figure, but not Christ. That is not needed. My antagonist is the Marquis de Sade, from whose name we get sadism. He is the clearest expositor and apologist for evil of whom I am aware. He was in fact in the French Revolutionary Assembly, albeit for a relatively short period of time.

His "virtues", though, have been extolled by many intellectuals, up to this very day. Simone de Beauvoir—a very important voice throughout the middle of the Twentieth Century—called him a "moralist". Picasso's friend, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, called him "the freest man who ever lived."

This may be difficult at times to read, but it is important to remember—in the isolation from history our system has won us—that the human record is filled to overflowing with scenes very like this one. Something similar is likely being enacted at this very moment in North Korea, Syria, Iran, China, or a hidden dungeon in a home anywhere in the world. Evil simply is a fact in human life, and apparently always has been. Scenes like this feature prominently in many contemporary American movies. Just go to the Horror section of your local movie store and look at what is on display. Scenes like this were common in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, even though we shudder to think about it.

We need to face the Beast, directly, which is our own worse impulses, hardened into habit, then rationalization, then complete acceptance. There is no other way than understanding, and no path to lasting, deep fulfillment without understanding.

The setting is Revolutionary France. For symbolic clarity, the scene is a prison cell in the Bastille.

A young man is seated in a small, dark cell, with a very small window at the top of the wall, which is filthy. He is about 20. He has dark brown hair, matted, and long. He is dirty, and smells of the street.

A Revolutionary gendarme enters the room.

“Myth always preceded philosophy”, the shabbily dressed young man said calmly, even cheerily, considering the circumstances.

“Never mind all that”, said the gendarme, “you stand accused of stealing bread from the Assembly: what is your plea?”

“Guilty as charged.”

“You do understand the penalty for a crime against the People is death?”

“I do.”

“D’accord. One of our esteemed members of the Assembly would like to speak with you. Rise now!!!”

Donatien Alphonse Francois, Marquis de Sade enters. He unrolls a document and reads the proclamation with a serious and somber voice: “The Citoyen is hereby accused of a capital crime against the people and the Revolution, that of stealing bread from the Revolutionary Assembly. On his own admission, he pleads guilty, for which the punishment is execution by the guillotine in the morning.”

He pauses, then laughs, tears it up, and kicks the boy in the groin, dropping him.

“THAT’s a nice use of the law, don’t you think?”

‘Guard, strap him to the wall. This young man needs a lesson. Or two.’”

The guard takes off the young man’s shirt, revealing a tanned torso, emaciated, but still vital and strong, and anchors his hands on the walls with manacles mounted there.

“You were a common laborer, were you not?”

“Yes, I was a carpenter.”

“Well, this revolution was for you. Why are you here? You can’t be hungry. That’s against the law.” He laughs cruelly.

“It has fed you and yours far better than it has fed me and mine. We are waiting for the merits of your weighty words to trickle down into something we can use to ease hunger.”

Sade pretends anger, and yells “I will flog you are hundred times for that!!!” He hits him three times, each time eliciting a cry of pain.

Then he abruptly stops. “Guard, release him”.

“Sir?”

“Release him, then tie me to the wall in his place. DO IT!!”

Confused, the guard follows his orders, releasing the young man, and strapping Sade to the wall.

“There, now beat me. Do it. You know you want to. Hit me.”

“No.”

“Why on Earth not? Are you a coward? A Womanish cretin? HIT ME.”

“No. You enjoy it, or you would not be so eager to volunteer.”

“Listen, you little shit: yes, I do like being hit. You are doing me a favor. Think of it as your good deed for the day.”

“No. I won’t hurt you. Hitting you accomplishes nothing. There is nothing to teach you, and nothing to learn from you except what to avoid.”

“But I can teach you. There is only power and submission. These are the primal human realities of old. You see: it makes no difference if you hit me or I hit you. The universe is in balance.”

“You hate everyone. Perhaps even more, you hate the possibility of love.”

“Guard, release me.” Sade is released. “Now, place the boy back in chains. Kick him in the shins while you’re at it”. This is done.

Sade moves a stool next to the boy, and sits down, looking at him closely. “You’re an interesting one. I have some time to kill, and I’m not sure I can’t make some progress with you yet.”

“Now, where were we?”, he continued. “Love: that is a sickness. A game for fools. Power is what is real. Nothing else. My uncle taught me that when I was a boy, held down screaming, then crying, then quiet as they did what they did. I had blood in my shit for a week. He taught me, and I have remembered. He was a humanitarian.”

“You were changed by the pain, but you can, even now, choose to begin to feel again, and take your part with humanity”, the boy replied.

“NO!!!” Sade yells violently, standing in a rage. “Not until all the halls of this earth crumble in ruins, and the last innocent children are crushed under rocks, and boiled will I rest. I will feed them living to wild dogs. I will beat them mercilessly and blame them for their crimes. To be is to hate. To hate is to be.”

Circling around the boy, he said:

“You ARE an interesting one. The last one beat me severely.” He raises his shirt, showing recent scars. “That was fun. How then, shall I break you? Merely separating your head from your body, and watching your life spurt out, and watching the crowd reach a fever of bloodlust and evil: that is not enough.” He clicked his fingers. “Your family!!! They can die with you.”

“Dead. All dead, including my 12 year old brother. Killed by a street mob of sans-culotte for daring suggest the Assembly bore more of a resemblance to Versailles than a banquet table where all were welcome. We were hungry. We used bad judgment. I barely escaped.”

Wincing with the memory, in some distress, he added dully, “they killed them, then the beasts stripped them, sat on them and ate lunch¹. These murders—and the many others that happened that day and the next--were noted briefly by a public notice indicating that Revolutionary justice was ‘swift and decisive’, and that ‘other cockroaches’ like us who dared scurry out in the street would meet a similar fate.”

“How then can I steal from you some exquisite torment, something useful?”

Sade was perplexed. He was a clever man, but his passions sometimes caused him to tell the truth, in spite of his deep convictions to the contrary.

¹ The Septembriseurs actually did this, according to numerous eyewitness accounts. And much worse.

“How can you exist, that is the question you must ask.”, the boy replied. “You are a rien, a nothing. You plus me equals one. You think a soul, a voice, is a quantity. You think it can be stolen like the lives of others. I say to you it is a beautiful hidden structure, which when the light of God hits it shines like a newborn angel.”

“You lie. There is no such thing as God. We have destroyed Him. The King used him. The Nobles used Him. He had his value for a time, but he is dead now. I kill Him daily and piss on his grave. Have you not been to the Place de la Revolution? Surely a God worth a damn would stop this Revolution?”

“God encompasses the whole of creation. Are you so vain as to think either of us warrant His slightest thought?”

Smugly, Sade said “And what of your Christ, then? He was your Savior, so called. What good was he? What good was he to anyone? Most children I know will give up on their fathers coming back after five years. Yet, you Christians have been waiting nearly 1,800. What sort of shithead waits that long? He’s not coming, you know that, right?”

“What we needed to know, he has already taught us.”

“And what was that? Not to piss off the authorities? To keep your people well paid?”

“No, that the conquest of self pity is the most important task we have. His lesson was taught on the cross, when He said “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He was able to see clearly, do you see? He was able to see the value of not feeling sorry for himself, and not resenting those who hurt him, and mocked him, and betrayed him. Even God himself, in the end, abandoned him. Yet he never quit. He never lost faith. Never. That is who I aim to be. If you can resist resentment, keep going, and never forget to look for the light and love in this world, however dim, however small, then you have won. That is victory.”

“Bah!!!”, Sade ejaculated: “He died a crappy death, nailed to two pieces of wood he had to drag up there, next to two common thieves.”

“He died as he lived: with purpose, and with dignity. He made us wealthy.”

“Wealthy, you call this wealth? The King was wealthy. YOU were and are nothing—‘rien’, as you say.”

“I have been happy”, the boy countered. “I had a woman and family who loved me. This was wealth, and power, and even now I am far wealthier than you. That is the power he taught us: to feel pain, yet not feel resentment. To look to one another with love and kindness, and not fall off track when evil men like you overtook and consumed us. In the end that is the only power that matters. Why would I choose to rule the world, and be separated from what makes it worthwhile?”

“Pain, that is the only reality.” Sade strikes the boy.

“You know what pain does for me?” said Sade, smiling coldly. “Do you know? It makes me feel your God.” He hits his own head against the wall, drawing blood. “There, that was a fucking epiphany right there. It was REAL, as real as real can get.² The blood that falls from your back, that is real. Jesus walking on water was a fairy tale, told by children for the weak minded, and those destined to live under the feet of me and mine.”

“You know what I want?”, he said, wiping his brow. “You know what I dream? To make everyone curse the name of God under the sun. I want to give them freedom and more freedom and more freedom. I want to eliminate all ideas of good and evil, then I want to DEMAND only good from them. I want to torture them with freedom until they come begging to me to make it stop, to stop the pain of uncertainty and doubt.

“Then I want to enlist them in my cause—the only proper cause worth fighting for: to march out and conquer the world for pain. Pain omnipresent; pain omnipotent. Oceans and mountains full of skulls, and still we march.

“I want them to feel unrelenting satisfaction in killing love and joy and contentment. I want them to torture people, and blame their victims for their own sufferings. You think we care about the people? We talk about the people, because it gives us what we want:

² Consider this lyric, from a song played often on the radio: Pain, without love; pain, can't get enough; pain, I like it rough; cause I'd rather feel pain than nothing at all". From "3 Days Grace", a name which obviously intends something as well.

fresh blood. Dank prisons where we can destroy virtue, hope, and goodness, all while preaching the virtues of compassion to the heavens.

“The only thing more perfect than causing pain is doing it while claiming it is for the benefit of my victim. The deliciousness of intentional hypocrisy is an aphrodisiac, as I have often noticed.

“Some day, people will hurt themselves to feel alive. They will tie one another up in wonderful and contorted ways so they can feel the joy of power. It does not matter who gives it and who receives. Powers’ blessings flow to all evenly. What matters is that everyone understands they have a role to play. We will all wear masks, that we can change as the mood suits us, or as one of us falls to the others. One must eat to live, after all.

“These revolutionaries, they will need me. They still act and feel as if they had a purpose other than generalizing pain. They think all should be equal. Show me two trees or flowers that are exactly equal. God, a curse be upon Him, did not make us equal. He made us similar. But this is not good enough for them. So they will lop off a branch here, trim a stem there, over and over again, in a pile of death that will cause the Mongols themselves to appear models of sanctity and restraint, until all are equal or dead. Perhaps we can burn the corpses and add chemicals to them until they are all exactly equal on the scales. Until the ashes balance exactly. When humankind is dead, but equal, in very precisely ordered and weighed rows of ashes and bones, those of us left to pronounce on

this can put on our robes, smile beneficently, and say “The Lord’s work is done. God be praised”.

“For the living, what does their equality look like? What does their virtue look like? It looks like a man with his foot on the throat of another man, laughing. I am in this Revolution for a reason. I don’t believe their lies any more than I believed the Kings lies. What I see is opportunity. I will NEVER kill anyone in the name of virtue—that would be hypocritical. There can only be power and death. But I will kill many because I CAN. I am an empathetic man. When they beg me for death, I will, when my pleasure is through, kill them. Consider me generous that way.

“You know, those fools actually came to me and asked: Master, the People will not listen to us. They don’t know what they want. We want justice, and they only want bread. They don’t know what is good for them? What shall we do?

“Ram the Revolution down their throats: kill them”, I said. “Torture them. Deprive them of everything they love: their homes, their work, their families. Persecute them until they learn the ways of compassion and virtue. When they left, I got a good belly laugh out of that one.

“We have a good thing going. In the old days, we just did what we wanted, and called it God’s Will. You rape some bitch out in the country, who are common folk to question

aristocrats annointed by God? They keep it up, they are heretics. It was a wonderful time to be alive.

“Still, we have to adapt. Now, we have to blame the victims for something. We got to kill a lot of people by calling them aristocrats, or church members, or bourgeoisie, or whatever else we could come up with. Many, of course, we just killed, then figured out their crime later. Those who understood this were good men.

“In the old days, obedience was required. This created a lot of space for us. Now we have to be more creative, since people are trying to think for themselves. What we have to prevent at all costs is logical clarity. When we commit crimes, they must ALWAYS be justified. We have to have a reason. Our victims, then, have to be victimizers. They are necessarily victimizers if we kill them, n'est ce pas? We would obviously not kill INNOCENT people right? Therefore, their deaths make them guilty. We can preach virtue while openly practicing vice.

“But we have a problem. This ‘age of reason’, so-called, is skeptical. It calls into question the relations of the past. More: it demands a correspondence between fact and thought and action. We are in great danger of being understood. The only way out of this that I can see is to eliminate in principle the correspondence of word and reality. We have to make people believe that all words are empty. That words like Justice, and Freedom, and Tyranny, and Oppression are empty. They mean nothing. Once they

believe that, then we can fill them back up with whatever we want. We can kill in the name of compassion; we can tyrannize in the name of liberty.

“I tell you: there is no thought system we can’t bend to our aims. There is no evil that cannot be rationalized. We used the Church when we needed to: now we use ‘revolution’. Perhaps someday we will use ‘tolerance’ to facilitate our hate. To reject reason itself is simply to make our job easier, since you have no means of contradicting our ridiculous claims.”

“I have seen that”, the boy replied, chafing at his manacles. “The only way to fight evil is with perception. Not with thought alone, but with an eye to understanding. The point of love is joy, and we can FEEL that which feeds deep, rich joy, and that which aims away from it. From our hearts we can discern the truth, and you cannot hide it, any more than you can move your body without moving your collarbone.”

“Yes, I aim to kill all poetry, at least that that is not filled with corpses.”

“Moreover, I see in you a need to repeat, a ritualized compulsion to enact the same emotive sequence over and over and over. To live, to breathe, to feel joy is to create. Every moment of every day of your life can be unlike any other, filled with a new, fresh happiness, IF you create. If you let fall the chains of the past, and open your heart to what is. Christ taught us this.”

Genuinely puzzled, Sade asked “Where was that? I know the Bible like the back of my hand. I have often found that knowledge useful in inflicting pain on the weak minded.”

“Do you really think Christ needed to die to buy our forgiveness? Do you really think God thought of him as livestock whose throat needed to be cut?”

“No, but it’s a great story, isn’t it?”

“The culture of sacrifice is the culture of death. It is your world. When people are vicious and lacking in understanding, the Law must be absolute. Violence is needed to compel adherence. Adulterers are to be stoned, and liars branded. And the primordial renunciation of freedom must be reenacted, over and over. There must be exact compliance—at least publicly—with every last detail of the Law. What is a ritual but a repetition? Do they ever change? Is it not precisely the point that they are EXACTLY the same every time? And what is a sacrifice—an “act of the sacred”—but ritually sanctioned murder? Do they not lead bleating sheep up, innocent by definition, to a block where priests take a knife and ceremonially slit their throats, leaving behind death where there was life?”

Smiling, Sade said “I would have been a good priest. Maybe I am one now.”

”What, though, did Christ say? ‘I have come to bring you new Life, and life abundant.’

‘This is my blood, drink this in remembrance of me. This is my body, eat it in remembrance of me.’”

Continuing, he said “Was his own sacrifice anything but an act of creation? As such, did it not place a stone at the door of the Old Law, bringing in its stead a mutable Law based on Love? What brings joy and peace for the average person more than eating and drinking? Can he have meant anything other than ‘when you feel joy eating, I am with you. When you feel happiness drinking, I am with you. When you feel happy LIVING, know that I am there smiling by your side. My spirit endures in you, who share my memory, and the peace I have taught you, beyond the evil you knew before.’

“Christ did not plan this Church. His Word was corrupted, even as you now are corrupting the ideals of those in your movement who genuinely desired Good.

Christ wanted us to follow him. The highest revelation is that there can BE no final revelation. Any set of words, any set of practices and rituals, any church, any government, can be corrupted. Likewise, any religion, any State, any community can be IMPROVED. Reform is always possible. From what is evil can be built good. From pain, pleasure; from despair, hope; from hatred, forgiveness.”

“You are, then, my opposite? Well, I guess we both have what we want: I am going to beat you to death, and you can choose not to resent it.”

“I see your destiny now, revealed to me.”

“Do tell.”

“You will fall afoul of the Revolution. You cannot do otherwise. You hate all order and even the pretence of virtue. You will offend them. It is not hard to do, and you cannot control ANY of your impulses. You MUST enact crimes, you must: it is a perennial falling into darkness, but you think as long as you keep committing fresh crimes, you will never land.

“They will put you in jail, if they don’t kill you. And how will you commit crimes in jail? How will you shelter yourself from madness? How? How often and in how many ways can you hurt yourself?

“You can only commit them in imagination, so you must put quill to paper. You must write. And you are uncreative in your heart. You reject poetry. You reject spirit. You reject the fineness of a ripe field of wheat, ears rustling in a gentle breeze, lit by a rising sun, with your arm around a woman or child you love.”

“You really are a little turd.”

“So how do you create? You must commit crimes. You must hide from yourself the repetitiveness of your crimes, so logically you must commit new crimes. You must list

ALL the crimes you can imagine. All of them. All of the ways in which human beings can interact with one another as matter, not spirit. All of the quantitative couplings. All of the ways a power relationship can be created between one beast and a thing. So you will write, and write and write. And you will write not just to still the screams in your soul, but to torture others. You see: demons like you are hidden from the sight of most humans, who like to believe that evil is something that you read about, not something that is real. You want to SHOW them all the viciousness and cruelty the human mind is capable of. You want to corrupt them, to turn them to the servitude of Hate.

“And you will never be fully satisfied with your work. It will be forever incomplete, because new ideas will continue occurring to you for the duration of your life. There are a limitless number of atrocities that can be imagined and committed.

“What I will reveal to you now, though, is that THEY ARE ALL THE SAME. Let us say you commit a fraction of the crimes you imagine, the quality of your experience will never vary. You are hardened into a stone, a machine, which only looks externally like a living being. For you, the point of living is EXPERIENCE. The more you have, the better. So many people live solely for feelings, for sensations which are unique and unusual. They consume experience like they consume chocolates. But the wealthiest, most powerful man on Earth cannot buy freedom. He cannot buy innocence. He cannot buy genuine joy.

“I have lived my whole life within 3 miles of where I was born. I have worked at the same job since I was 7. And I have experienced MORE of what matters than you will, if you live to be 100, and travel the world around, and see and feel a fraction of the things you imagine.

“No matter what you do, no matter how many millions of words you write, no matter how many ideas you have, it is all the same. They all move in the same direction. What matters is whether you are choosing good or evil—joy or power--not the speed you are moving, or the distance traveled.

“This is the secret of God’s forgiveness, too: He does not remember what you have done, or where you have gone. He only cares about what you are choosing, now. It is ridiculously simple. You can be forgiven or cursed moment to moment, and you control it. I believe this even continues after death. It is never too late: you remain in motion eternally. The Damned can be saved.

“A cousin of mine possessed, I believe, the power to talk with spirits. He would often tell people things he could not have known about people who passed over. And I myself once saw my beloved wife—who died in great pain giving birth to our first child—looking at me over my shoulder in the mirror. I know it was her.”

“Lunatics believe they hear voices too. My favorite one had a voice that told him to gouge his eyes out. My God, I laughed a long time at that one.”

“How could a just God construct this universe? Surely this is a question not just for faith and ‘mystery’? Can we not speculate? For example, what if we lived not once but many times, as the Asians and even some Greeks believe? What if we chose the lives we were to live, before we were born? What if we chose, knowingly, pain for ourselves, knowing it was the only path to spiritual growth and accompanying joy? Is pain, after all, real? Physical and emotional pain end. What endures is your qualitative reaction to it. How does it affect your soul, your spirit? Do you become stronger or weaker? Do you choose to accept it and grow, or reject it and fall into self pity, resentment, anger and hate? Surely Christ chose his own death, did he not? What if I knew I would one day stand here? What if, in making that choice, I knew in dying I would be reunited with my loved ones? More: that I was serving the cause of Goodness.”

Sade chuckled: “you never give up, do you? I’m going to enjoy watching the life leave your eyes, and the panic that will ensue when you realize it is all over, and there is no hope.”

“A stranger passing through once told me an old Hindu story about a man who was working in a field, reaping wheat. He fell asleep, and when he awoke he was the child of an Emperor in India. He grew up in a beautiful palace, surrounded by attendants. When the time came, he became Emperor himself. He married a ravishing princess, and lived a long life. He fought wars, blocked court intrigues, and had many laughing children, in whose company he took great pleasure. At long last, as an old man, he ceded his

kingdom to his oldest son, and enjoined him to rule wisely. He retreated to a hermitage in the forest, and at long last died. The man then woke up, again, and realized he was still in the field.

“Which life was real? Can we not suppose both were unreal, and that none of us can perceive reality? Many times, I myself have awoken from a dream, only to realize I was still dreaming. Who is to say this life itself is not a dream?”

“Regardless, I will admit I don’t know. What I can see now, and feel now, tell me how to live, no matter what my death means. If I am merely clay, then I shall never know. Either way, I feel no fear because I have lived as I have chosen. Surely even now there are many, even in your Revolution, who feel this way.”

Bitterly, Sade admitted “yes, there are those who care about the consequences of their actions, and are trying to help others. Not enough is ‘rotten in Denmark’, as the English bard would put it.” He laughed at his own cleverness.

“We will kill those people, of course, for now—most of them are already dead or silenced in fear--but in the future, perhaps, those same sorts of people could create a society where people were without much worry, where they were usefully employed, where they were protected from birth to death, and would face no great difficulty. Life would be sweet and pleasant, and free from unpleasant beasts like me. Love and buttercups all around.

“We—you do know I have many accomplices?--have a plan for them, though. We will convince them that good and evil do not exist. We will convince them that nothing is sacred and worth fighting for except for pleasure. Pleasure alone is paramount, and sacrifice is NEVER necessary.”

“How will that hurt them?”

“Ah, you are catching on. And I thought I was so subtle. Look around you, idiot. Do you see peace and joy and love? Look at me: do I disappear in such a world? Do I go away, transfigured by their silly little songs into some sweet angel? Of course not. But in their fairy tales, I do. They make their little dancing circles, and build their little community fires, confident that evil is a thing of the past. That was the deal, remember? No good and no evil; just misunderstandings that can be cleared up by talking. And sooner, or later, we get the great pleasure of reintroducing them to the human race. I would like to be there, but one can only live so long, and have so much fun.”

“You do know, that there is no such thing as evil.”

“Look bitch, you talk when I tell you to. I’m in charge here.” He hits him again, ritually.

It is the connection of the cat with a trapped mouse.

“Anyway, you intrigue me just a little, you little shit. Do go on.”

“Evil is not something that IS; it is a direction of movement, based on the decisions you make every day. If you choose to inflict pain, then you are choosing evil. If you choose to help others create themselves in such a way that they can fight resentment and self pity, then you are choosing Goodness. You are helping them create themselves. What you are becoming approximates what you are, your essence.”

“Where, then, is this love you fools like to talk about?”

“To exist as a person is the goal of us all. To exist is to control our own movement, and escape from the qualitative pain of self pity and failure. Self pity prevents the emergence of organic, crystalline structures within us, through which to conduct light. Therefore, love is that which enables others to create themselves. More than anything, it is understanding: seeing them as they are and as they want to be, and reinforcing them by doing this. The lover provides a mirror for the loved to grow in. This is different than feeling what they feel. You must exist yourself as a person, before you can truly love. Everything else is disguised selfishness, mere animal passions and emotional neediness. Compassion is what connects us, but it does not create us. On the contrary, it often leads to viciousness. Your own Rousseau talked about it constantly.”

“Hah!!! He, too, was a fool. He actually believed that bullshit. Still, I liked him because he was able to live off the generosity of others most of his life, yet he never showed gratitude. It was always all about the audience. He wore a mask. He was a man after my

own heart. His dream was a world where he could do whatever he wanted, and be taken care of. That was what he really meant by Compassion. It's the dream of many of our Revolutionaries even now, although of course they can't say that."

There were a few moments of silence, while each assessed the other.

"Many years ago, I had a dream."

"A dream? Last night I had a dream. I was beating a young girl to death. It was wonderful. I awoke just as she died, with an erection."

"I saw Christ, dimly. He motioned me to pick up and shoulder a heavy log, and begin walking with it. The knots on it tore into my shoulder, creating great pain, but he was walking, and I walked. We went on and on. He told me I had to walk a thousand miles with it. I didn't know how I was going to do it, but I decided I would complete the journey. When He decided I wasn't going to quit, the ground opened up and I fell into Hell."

"NOW you are getting interesting. The bastard betrayed you, didn't he?"

"I fell into a shadow filled cave. Satan was there, but he was hiding. He could not reveal his face, because he has no face. He is the Lie. Only the Lie. And he has no power—

none—over anyone who can see this. He feared me. He knew he had no grip on me, and never would, if I remained vigilant.”

Sade strikes him with his lash: “that, was that a lie? Or that, was that a lie? An illusion?”

This goes on for 15 or 20 strokes.

Crying silently, the boy remains silent.

“Why won’t you hate me? Hate is the most natural feeling in the world.”

Ignoring him, with pain, knowing that he was strengthening himself by speaking, and surprised by his continuing clarity, he continued: “This world is hollow.” He taps the wall to which he is chained. “It is an illusion. I can feel it. They will never break this world down into some small pieces, and cry out Eureka, it IS all a machine set in motion by a primordial billiard ball. We exist in a web, related to one another in ways none of us can fully grasp in this world.

“I do not fear death. It comes to all men. Some go out crying; some take their own lives. Me, I accept what is. Far better the pain of death, than the pain of dying to life. You yourself committed moral suicide a long time ago. You are a walking corpse, do you understand that? You are dead, yet you still move. You feed on the life of others, having rejected your own existence. And you are surrounded by like-minded men: moving, grasping, crawling at one another, like insects swarming across a dead log. None of it

means anything, since you are no longer human. The grandest science of the next five hundred years cannot bring you back to life as long as you choose the death of mind and spirit.”

“Corpses having sex with corpses: I like it. Maybe someday someone will make it happen³. My dream is for men and women to have sex all the time and HATE each other for it. The men, to use their women as objects, as things for THEIR pleasure, then to discard them. The women, to ALLOW themselves to be reduced to the sum of their orifices, to welcome being made into things. I want everyone to look at everyone around them as a flower pot, to be possessed, then discarded the moment something else catches their eye. Money and power buy sex. It is a thing, no different than a house or a fine meal. Everything and everyone has their price.”

“But who COULD you be? It may be that in this life the best we can hope for is the peaceful acceptance of confusion. To exist in a moment is to live forever. And we can do that, without possession of any single Truth which we must compel on others. All of us can stand, side by side, holding hands, appreciating beauty, and our own special confusions, together. We can EXIST without any power other than that of unbidden joy. To truly see a sunrise, or a flower, is a gift beyond measuring. To look in the eyes of a loved one and see them looking back, creating you as you create them, in a loop of endless desire for the other to live, to exist, to conquer pain, is something so magnificent the grandest mountains and the highest stars fade into insignificance.”

³ This was recently done in Germany, as “art”.

“Crap.”

“More, I love you too. The sun cannot choose where to shine, and I cannot falter from the hope that one day you may choose again to breathe as a free man, although of course I do not expect it. I can wish that for you, without forgetting the evil you have done and will do. I would kill you if I could, because you are as close to a force of pure evil as can exist on this planet. But I would not inflict pain on you, simply for the sake of slaking my anger.

“You yourself know you can’t be negotiated with. You enjoy lying. Yet, simply because you choose to lie does not mean I need to do so. I see life as it is. You are not the evil you do. You are what you continue to choose. You can always choose differently. There is no hard object we can touch, to be called evil. You can always use freedom to feel the joy of the sun on your face, and the beauty of the moon shining down among the vineyards and hills. Clouds and rain have their profound pleasures, and peaceful breezes flowing through our wild hair can bring smiles to our faces, all the days of our all too short lives. You can feel the peace and excitement of innocence.”

“I feel the excitement of stealing innocence. That much you have right.”

“I don’t mean to suggest there is not much viciousness, suffering, hatred, and pain here on Earth. Of course there is. Our task is not to play the part of insolent children and demand the problems we create be solved by God, or simply whine that these things

cannot be solved at all and that God is a cruel being, who created a world we obviously control. We don't know how things work in the rest of Creation, but here we create our own hell."

"Hell? I like it here. You're chained to the wall, and I have a whip."

"How different our own revolution has been than the one in America. They sought to create a place where men were free to follow their own path to virtue. They protected that right in law, so that no one's freedom of conscience or worship could be taken away."

"Yet they kept their slaves. Hardly consistent. Lying bastards all."

"Not everyone there accepts the institution of slavery. Their founding principles will yet drive them to free them, no matter the cost. They can do nothing else. And then, their path up the mountain will continue. Despite their limitations, there is much good in them. They will save our world yet. What matter are ideals. Anyone who knows history knows that all men follow their own ideals imperfectly. That does not mean we should reject them. It means we need to examine where we are off course, then recommit ourselves to our cause.

"Here", the boy continued, shaking his head slightly, "virtue is conformity. It is doing what the crowd does. We stay whole in body by becoming separated in mind. You,

yourself, no longer feel sentiments that still flow through you. They float past your consciousness, invisible as ghosts. Yet, you ARE broken and split, even if you can't see it."

"You think you're a fucking poet, don't you? You're an imbecile."

"No longer do we care about what we do, so much as how it fits into the group mind that evolves daily into steadily more dangerous and uncontrolled directions, as guided by power hungry monsters like you."

"Group mind? Men are weaklings, who listen most intently to the man with the gun."

"Many men ARE weaklings. This is true. But when they are compelled to accept the dictates of others without any recourse, they shrink back from their natural form, which is that of the wild beast, walking where it will in trackless wilds, taking what it needs and no more, and enjoying each day as it dawns. Freedom is the place where virtue is cultivated. Freedom is necessary for virtue to flourish, and for happiness."

"Virtue? I'll show you virtue." He strikes the boy several times, eliciting cries of pain from him.

"Your uncle must have really hurt you", the boy says quietly.

“Ah”, Sade says, with a broad grin, “now we are getting somewhere. Yes, he did ‘hurt’ me as you say. Do you want to take me back to that time? Help me remember how horrible it was? Do you want to hurt me? Have you finally acquired a scrap of common sense?”

With a sharp inhalation and exhalation, tears filled the boys eyes. His courage was faltering. “Yes, I do want to hurt you. People like you killed my family, and you are going to kill me. I will not forgive you, but I see now that I must forget you, even now. You want to cloud my eyes with dust. You want me to fill them with anger and hatred and pain. Yes, pain. I hurt: I won’t deny it. I am scared: I won’t deny it. Yet, who am I if I give in now? I want to quit. I want to die. I want to see my family again. But it is not time yet. And as tempting as it is for me to give in, I see where it leads me. It is a short trip in the light, where I get the pleasure of hurting you, then a steep, trackless fall into darkness, far more horrible than any conceivable crime you could commit against me. You are fallen. You live in darkness. You are tortured far more by what you can’t be, by knowledge on some level of the light of love and pleasantries you have walled off, than by anything I could do.”

“Yes, yes, my life is horrible.” Sade said mockingly. “Can’t you tell? Oh maybe I should cry. Boo hoo hoo.”

Sade asks the boy again: “what fucking good is your God?”

Slowly, almost as a religious confession, the boy replied with renewed strength: “You know, there is no ‘mystery’, and no need for one. I have a choice right now between dying to everything I love--living a cursed life as a deal soul in a living body--and meeting an end we all meet a little early. All men die. Surely you know this. What is the point of living if not to live? And if I can’t live, then why not prefer death? I do not believe it is the end, although of course I do not know.”

“Boy, you are about to die. Now is the time for your God to show his Power and grace. You are a good person, and you are about to die an unjust death. SHOW ME: what fucking good is your God?”

Standing erect, the boy said “He has shown his power, for I do not hate you, and I am not afraid.”

“That’s no answer you little shit. Answer me correctly: there is no God and He hates you!!!!”

The boy merely smiles peacefully. He is ready. It is time.

Sade takes up his whip, snarling, and in cries of rage strikes the boy again and again and again, opening up gaping, bloody wounds in his back. When the boys screams of pain fall silent, he places his face close to the boys. He is barely conscious.

“What say you now? You have lost everything.”

“No. . . it is you who have lost. We have won. Again.” A quiet light seems to shine from the boy, who again falls quiet as his face acquires a tranquil cast. Then a look of recognition appears on his face, and he smiles quietly as he dies.

Sade screams violently. It is as if multiple voices suddenly burst into the room--an unholy chorus arising from the Lake of the Damned--then leaves the room swiftly, pushing the guard, and yelling over his shoulder “throw this shit in the trash.”

Epilogue: After a suitable amount of time, the guard picks up the boy carefully, hides him in his cart, takes him to his cottage on the outskirts of Paris and buries him, saying a prayer over his grave. He tells his wife to pack what they can, and prepare to go to America.

“They may be criminals too. I’m sure many of them are. But without a dream we are nothing, and dreams can come into being one day and one step at a time. If we lose our way, we can find it again, with God’s help. The key is to never forget, and never stop trying.”

Exhausted, he prepares for bed. Considering for a moment, he leaves one candle burning. His dreams that night, despite the events of the day, are for once peaceful and serene.

