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The Marquis de Sade: A Life

Neil Schaeffer

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The Marquis de Sade: A Life Neil Schaeffer
A wholly original, compellingly human portrait of the "divine Marquis," the enigmatic legend whose name is synonymous with brutal perversion and desirous cruelty.

Against a magnificently embroidered backdrop of eighteenth-century France, Neil Schaeffer reconstructs the almost incredible adventures of Donatien-Alphonse-Francois de Sade. When he was a young man, married off against his wishes to a middle-class heiress, his insatiable sexual appetites and disdain for all forms of convention drew him into a series of scandals, first with prostitutes and then with his sister-in-law. His enraged, social-climbing mother-in-law conspired with the authorities, and the result was Sade's thirteen-year imprisonment without trial. Later, freed by the Revolution, the brilliantly protean Marquis became a revolutionary leader himself and then narrowly escaped the guillotine. But with the publication of the novels he wrote behind bars, books denounced as lewd and blasphemous, he was again imprisoned. Under Napoleon, Sade spent almost twelve years in an insane asylum, where he died at the age of seventy-four following a final dalliance with a teenage girl.

Schaeffer reveals the surprisingly unsadistic Sade: his capacity for deep romantic love, his passionate adherence to Enlightenment principles, his inexhaustible charm, his delusional paranoia. And through a dazzling reading of his novels, including the notorious masterpiece 120 Days of Sodom, he argues powerfully for Sade as one of the great literary imaginations of the eighteenth century, one who maintained a lifelong, ultimately self-destructive argument against the limitations of authority and morality. Based on a decade of research, **The Marquis de Sade** is a definitive work that shatters nearly two hundred years of myth to reveal an irresistible Promethean figure of astonishing complexity.

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