

**THE WICKEDEST WOMAN  
IN THE WORLD**

(and other stories of sexual perversion)

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## A NOTE TO THE READER

The following articles were researched in the British Library in 1990 with a view to publication in *men's magazines*. (1) I did in fact submit one or two of them for publication but was rewarded with the customary rejection slip. As I have been active in the small press for some time I decided that rather than leave the manuscripts to gather dust together with my fifty or so exercise books full of poetry, it might be a good idea to publish them as a sort of Mediaeval psychopaths' omnibus. I make no apologies for the title, which was chosen purely for commercial reasons, but think the reader will agree that there is an extreme element of sexual perversion in all these characters.

Alexander Baron,  
South London,  
27th March 1991.

(1) The introduction is based largely on an in-depth article in the May 1989 issue of *True Detective* magazine. In any case, Ted Bundy is well known on this side of the Atlantic, both his crimes and execution were widely reported in the British media at the time. At a fringe meeting at the 1990 Conservative Party conference in Bournemouth, Mrs Mary Whitehouse played a video of Bundy's last interview recorded hours before his execution, and made a spurious attempt to blame Bundy's crimes on his admission that he had read pornography from an early age.

## MURDER MOST FASCINATING

On 24th January 1989, the American mass murderer Theodore Robert (Ted) Bundy went to the electric chair. Bundy was convicted of the murders of two women and a girl, was known to have murdered at least eighteen others, and suspected of killing another nineteen, possibly a great many more. Ted Bundy was everything a mass murderer is not supposed to be: intelligent, articulate, handsome, charming, charismatic. His appearance belied his foul deeds. Bundy was convicted of the murders of Lisa Levy, 20, and Margaret Bowman, 21, in 1979, and of the murder of 12 year old Kimberly Leach the following year.(1)

After spending ten years on death row, Bundy was finally sent to the electric chair. The day he eventually *fried*, Americans celebrated by holding parties and wearing *Burn Bundy Burn* T-shirts. A local burger bar is said to have served Bundy 'fries,' Bundy 'toast' and to have put up a sign reading "Roast in Peace." The hatred Bundy engendered was quite phenomenal, though, in spite of some of its more bizarre and distasteful manifestations, perfectly understandable. And yet, oddly enough, while he was on trial, women crowded the front seats of the public gallery "tossing him little love notes." This is nothing new; it is not unprecedented for serial sex killers like Bundy to receive love letters or even proposals of marriage from women whose sense of *romance* clearly outweighs their common sense. (2) It bodes ill for the future of the human race that any woman can find a monster like Bundy attractive, and even worse that there have been and continue to be so many Bundys, but then, murder for us in the West, if not for the rest of the world, has become a favourite pastime.

Non-fiction books about murder and serious crime usually sell well, as do Agatha Christie-type *whodunnits*? A significant percentage of films contain violence and murder as essential elements. A number of magazines and other publications are devoted to murder and related subjects. Murder and murderers fascinate people, and none quite so much as the serial sex killer.

It is a widely held misconception that this beast is a relatively new invention; that Jack the Ripper was the first serious candidate for this title, and even that the advent of the enigmatic Victorian night stalker ushered in a new breed of murderer, one who kills not so much for pleasure as for recognition, as though he were using his crimes as a medium of expression. Though undoubtedly the real fascination with Jack the Ripper is the mystery surrounding his identity. Numerous hypotheses and a few serious theories have been advanced to account for this. But whether he was a schizophrenic barrister, a mad Russian doctor, a deranged Jew or even the Queen's physician, it is neither the originality nor the gruesomeness of his crimes which single him out, but the fact that he was never brought to book for them.

The fascination many people have with the Ted Bundys of this world is something quite different. Whether it is some sort of perverted admiration for someone who beats the system by outwitting the police, or something darker and more suspect is difficult to say. Certainly for the women who propose marriage to the likes of Bundy there can be little doubt that the attraction is sexual. Whatever this fascination is, it is perverted and terribly wrong, for there is nothing at all romantic or heroic about the business of murder, and especially not the kinds of murders described here, where the victims, who are totally innocent and mostly unknown to the perpetrator, are killed for no other reason than to satisfy some twisted and as yet unexplained defect of the human psyche.

The four fiends in human form described here all pre-date Jack the Ripper by several centuries. They are none of them, unfortunately, unique, although fortunately, Elizabeth Bathory is one of the very few women to have secured lasting infamy through the mass destruction of her fellow human beings. In this century, probably only the American mass murderess Belle Gunness (3) can be ranked alongside her *blood sister*, and her tally, although impressive (in a purely statistical sense) falls a long way behind the six hundred plus victims attributed to the psychopathic Hungarian Countess.

I make no claims that this short study contributes anything either to literature or to academia; it is neither particularly well written, nor researched from primary sources. It was researched primarily on account of my own fascination with mass murder and man's continued inhumanity to man. Over the past hundred years or so, science and technology have transformed the world in which we live; to take just two examples, the modern office and hospital have changed beyond all recognition. Sadly, the same cannot be said of human nature.

(1) Lisa Levy and Margaret Bowman were murdered on the night of January 15th 1978 at a sorority house. Bundy was convicted of these, (the Chi Omega murders) in Miami, Florida on Thursday 24th July 1979. The trial lasted a month and was "televised live across the nation." The following January he stood trial in Orlando for the murder of Kimberly Leach.

(2) To take just one example, as well as being strangled to death, Lisa Levy was raped, bitten savagely on her right nipple and buttock, and a can of hairspray was jammed up her anus. Many of Bundy's victims were similarly abused.

(3) See *Belle Gunness: The Lady Bluebeard* by Jane L Langlois, (Indiana University Press) 1985.

## THE BLOOD COUNTESS

Everybody has heard of Dracula. The blood-drinking Transylvanian Count made his debut in Bram Stoker's 1897 novel of the same name, and since then has become the star of many films, comic strips and books. Stoker based his vampire character on the real Dracula, Vlad the Impaler (1431-76). Not a lot of people know that! But even fewer people realise that there was a Countess Dracula; she was not a vampire, that is she didn't sleep in a coffin during the day, and, assuming the form of a bat, prey on the terrified peasantry after sunset. But the truth about Countess Dracula is far more horrific than any celluloid fantasy dreamed up by the Hammer House of Horror, because this fiend in female form is thought to have murdered up to seven hundred young girls.

Countess Elizabeth Bathory (1560-1614) was an Hungarian noblewoman and a member of one of the most illustrious Protestant families of the Europe of Early Modern Times. Her family produced a number of war heroes, church officials, and two important princes. The most famous of these was her cousin, Stephan Bathory, Prince of Transylvania, and later King of Poland.(1)

Elizabeth herself grew up in an era when a woman's place was under her husband's thumb; most women of that period (and indeed for a long time after) were considered mere chattels. None of this was for Elizabeth; a precocious child, she was also a bit of a tomboy, wearing boys' clothes and playing boys' games. In 1571 at the age of eleven, she became engaged to Ferenc Nadasdy who was five years her senior. Of course, this was nothing unusual; at that time, marriages were arranged between families of *good breeding* along blood and property lines. The marriage of Elizabeth and Ferenc would unite two prominent Protestant families.

Although Elizabeth was a child of some intelligence, the same could not be said of her future husband, his own mother noted that; but Ferenc did develop into an athlete and excelled as a soldier, campaigning successfully against the Turks and winning the admiration of friend and foe alike.

Elizabeth married Ferenc on May 8th 1575; she was 15, he just 21, but before that she had already borne her first child. In spite of her boyish appearance, Elizabeth soon developed an interest in the opposite sex, becoming pregnant by a local peasant. Her future mother-in-law sent her away on the pretext of an illness. Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter, and the girl was given away to a peasant together with a large sum of money in return for an undertaking never to return as long as Elizabeth was alive. Her mother-in-law's private correspondence reveals that the whole affair was hushed up; perhaps she was worried that she would never find a more suitable match for her slow-witted son.

On her marriage, Elizabeth retained her surname while Ferenc added hers to his. For the first ten years of their marriage they had no issue; he was constantly away on some campaign or other while she nurtured her lifelong passion of torture and murder. Exactly what turned Elizabeth into a sadist and mass murderer will never be known, though she had her first taste of cruelty as a child when she saw a gypsy who'd been accused of selling his children, sewn up in the belly of a horse with only his head protruding. Her husband, although never in her league, was also an habitually cruel man who, when he was on furlough, liked nothing better than to beat and torture their servants.

In Vienna, near St Stephen's Cathedral, there is a small street known as Blood Street, so named because it is widely believed that Die Blütgräfin, (the Blood Countess) from Transylvania stayed there while in Vienna. In spite of this, there is no evidence that Elizabeth ever lived in Blood Street. She did live in Vienna though, in Augustinian Street adjacent to a monastery. And, in the cellar of her Viennese mansion, she had a blacksmith build a cylindrical cage with long iron spikes protruding through the top. The cage could be raised and lowered on a pulley. Elizabeth always chose big bosomed girls as seamstresses; some of these girls ended their lives in this cage. A girl would be stripped and forced into the cage, then Elizabeth's maid, Dorka, (Dorothea Szentes) would stab and prod the girl with a red hot poker. While the girl tried to avoid the poker, Elizabeth would shout sexual obscenities at her. Eventually the girl would be impaled on the spike. It has been claimed that Elizabeth believed that by bathing in the blood of virgins she could preserve her youth. She has also been accused of vampirism, werewolfism and necrophilia. How much truth these claims contain is difficult to say, but she certainly dabbled in the occult, and is known to have bitten human flesh.

As well as being a sadist and a psychopathic killer, Elizabeth was both licentious and bi-sexual. She had a relationship with her Aunt Klara, and when her husband was away she engaged in frequent sexual horseplay with her manservant, Istvan Jerzorlay, a youth of reputedly exceptional sexual prowess.

About 1585 she gave birth to a daughter, Anna. Two more daughters followed: Ursula and Katherina; her youngest child and only son, Paul, was born in 1598.

Elizabeth had several accomplices and procuresses. At her trial it was believed she had only begun her reign of murder around 1604, after her husband died, which means that if the figure of seven hundred murders is correct, she would have had to have killed her servants at the rate of two a week. Later evidence indicates that although this figure could well be accurate, the Blood Countess spread her reign of terror over a much longer period, from her adolescence onwards. Some of the methods of torture and humiliation she subjected her servants to before killing them would draw lurid headlines in the tabloids if they were to happen today.

One method used for disciplining supposedly lazy servants was *star kicking*. The girl would have a piece of paper placed between her toes and set on fire: this would make her kick and "see stars." Servants were disciplined on the slightest pretext; other methods included stripping them, pouring freezing water over them then making them stand outside in the snow. One girl, after being stripped and smeared with honey, was made to stand outside for twenty-four hours while insects bit her. Elizabeth would also beat girls with a heavy cudgel, stuff pins into their lips, upper and lower, and under their fingernails. A girl who failed to iron one of Elizabeth's stiff collars to perfection was hit in the face with the hot iron until it was a bruised and blistering mess. This is reputed to have happened several times. Another girl who was foolish enough to steal a coin, (which had probably been left lying around as a deliberate temptation), had the coin taken from her and heated in the fire. Then she had it pressed into her palm as a warning to others. Elizabeth's seamstresses were often made to work naked and in front of the men. In those days this was regarded as a form of humiliation.

Elizabeth continued her torturing and murdering in both Vienna and in her castle at Sarvar near the market town of Papa. Aided by a small clique of loyal, bloodthirsty servants, she sent her procuresses further and further afield, even into the Jewish quarter. Inevitably, rumours began to spread about the mysterious goings-on at Sarvar. Why did the Countess need so many servants, and why did they never return? Even so, had she not made one fatal mistake, she might never have been brought to trial.

In 17th Century Europe, human life was cheap; as long as Elizabeth was murdering only peasant girls the authorities turned a blind eye, but when she began procuring and murdering girls of noble birth, pressure was exerted in high places. Finally, King Mathias II ordered an investigation. On 29th December 1610, her castle was raided by Count Thurzo and Elizabeth was taken into custody.

When she was brought to trial in January 1611, she refused to appear, but the evidence against her was so overwhelming that this was considered superfluous. Elizabeth's manservant, Ficzko, said he knew of at least thirty-seven girls who had been murdered; Dorka confessed to a similar number; and Katharina Beneczky (2) guessed around fifty. One witness claimed to have found a list in Elizabeth's chest of drawers which put the number of her victims at six hundred and fifty. This last figure seems much more realistic. Besides the confessions of her servant accomplices a number of bodies were found within the grounds. On January 7th, the sixteen judges delivered their verdicts; only Elizabeth and Katharina Beneczky escaped the death sentence. Dorka and another of Elizabeth's servants, Helena Jo, were sentenced to have their fingers torn out by red hot pincers then to be burned alive. Ficzko the youth was decapitated. The Countess herself was ordered to be walled up in her castle. She died in



August 1614, still writing letters proclaiming her innocence and apparently, still one of the most beautiful women in Hungary.

Though she has been dead for over three hundred years, Elizabeth's evil lives on. Several films have been based loosely on her life including an updated (comedy) *Mama Dracula*. The best film though, and one which strays remarkably little from historical truth, is *Countess Dracula*, a Hammer Horror classic released in 1972. Ingrid Pitt starred in the title role.

- (1) Elizabeth also had a brother named Stephan who was a drunkard and a lecher.
- (2) Katherina Benecsky - the spelling of both Christian name and surname vary.

### **Suggested further reading**

*Dracula Was A Woman: In search of the Blood Countess of Transylvania*  
by Raymond T McNally (Hamlyn) 1985.

## THE REAL DRACULA

The name *Dracula* has become a part of Western culture. Since Bram Stoker published his classic novel in 1897, the vampire count has appeared in numerous films, books and comic strips as well as on the stage. And although most people today don't believe in vampires, he can still send a chill running down a movie goer's spine.

But there was a real Dracula, and although he was most definitely not a vampire, his reign of terror in 15th Century Transylvania was far more horrific than the necrophilistic night time jaunts of the black cloaked count in 19th Century England, or indeed in any film of the vampire genre. And Dracula, or Vlad III to give him his correct title, rather than sending chills down his victims' spines, preferred to send stakes up them.

The name *Dracula* means literally *Son of the Devil*; Vlad III was the second son of Vlad II from whom he inherited the name. Vlad II was Prince of Wallachia, which was established as a state in 1290. Vlad III was born in 1431; the exact date and year of his birth is not definite, but it is known that he had two brothers: Mircea and Radu. He received a sound education, studying Italian, humanities, classics and history, and probably learning some French, German and Hungarian as well as his native Romanian.

Dracula lived in turbulent times; the Turks were a dominant force in this part of Europe, and alliances were constantly shifting. During the summer of 1444, Vlad, who was twelve or thirteen years old, and his younger brother, Radu, were held captive by the Turks in the fortress of Egrigöz in Western Anatolia. In 1447, his father, who had been fighting with his eldest son Mircea at his side, was assassinated. Mircea had already been killed. The murders were carried out by the boyars - the Romanian nobility; Mircea was buried alive. When he came to power, Vlad was to exact a terrible revenge on the entire boyar class.

Following their father's assassination, Vlad and Radu were freed by the Sultan, and Vlad, although barely seventeen, was made an officer in the Turkish army. He was made to understand that he was being groomed as his father's successor, in reality a puppet of the Turks. Heading the Turkish cavalry, he invaded Wallachia, and in October 1448, occupied the throne, something which did not go down well with the Hungarian authorities. He was subsequently dethroned and spent some time in exile. He was to reign twice more: from 1456-62 and the last two months of 1476 until his assassination.

Stories of Vlad's inhumanity, sadism and outright bloodlust are legion. In 1462, the Dracula manuscripts were distributed, probably by a Transylvanian refugee. These besmirched his reputation and possibly exaggerated the full ex-

tent of his atrocities. That may be so, but if only a fraction of what has come down to us from folklore is true, he was a very evil man indeed.

One of his first acts of barbarism was the progressive elimination of the hated boyar class, who had been responsible for the murders of his father and elder brother. In a single act he had some five hundred of them impaled outside his palace and beyond the city walls. Then he set about creating his own nobility. Some of his acts of terror, particularly those carried out against individuals, are veiled with a grim humour. His best known atrocity was the looting of the Church of St Bartholomew and the subsequent massacre of the townsfolk of Amlas.

The Night of St Bartholomew is depicted in two famous prints published in Nürnberg (1499) and Strasbourg (1500). More than anything else, these and the associated wood cuttings have earned him a place in the halls of infamy. It is here that Vlad Tepes is said to have dined among the cadavers. *Tepes* pronounced *Tse-pesh* means *impaler* in Romanian. The Romanian word for stake is *teapa*. It is also on this occasion that he had a boyar impaled on an extra long stake, so that he wouldn't be disturbed by the smell of rotting corpses!

How many were slain on the Night of St Bartholomew is a matter of speculation, but it could have been as many as 20,000. In his six year rule from 6th September 1456 until the autumn of 1462, he is thought to have been responsible for between 40,000 and 100,000 deaths, including Turkish war dead. When one considers that Wallachia had a population only of some half million, this figure is awesome indeed.

The following stories have been told about Vlad; the reader will have to decide for himself how much truth if any each contains.

A Florentine merchant who was passing through Vlad's kingdom carrying a great deal of money called on him asking for his protection. Vlad ordered him to leave his carriage and money in the market square and spend the night at his castle assuring him that his possessions would be safe. Having been made an offer he couldn't refuse, the merchant accepted and was probably none too surprised to find on his return that although his carriage and merchandise were intact, his gold pieces, all 160 ducats, were missing.

The merchant reported the theft to Vlad, who told him not to worry, all the gold would be returned. Then he ordered the citizens of Tirgoviste to find the thief and the gold and hand them over to him or face a terrible fate. The gold was returned and the merchant told to count it. He counted it twice and, returning to Vlad, told him that he had lost only 160 ducats but 161 had been returned. Vlad told the merchant that had he not owned up to the extra ducat, he would have had him impaled along with the thief. Not surprisingly, crime

was rare under Vlad's rule. On another occasion, Vlad is said to have had a woman impaled because she was a lazy wife then made her widower a present of a new wife.

A Russian story about Vlad recalls that if a married woman had an affair, he ordered her sexual organs to be cut, she was then skinned alive and displayed in the public square. The same punishment was meted out to unchaste widows and licentious maids. For similar *offences* women were said to have had their nipples cut off and red hot stakes shoved into the vagina and up through the mouth. The victim would then be tied naked to a pole and left to rot.

These were ordinary folk, not the hated boyars. The previous tales are said to illustrate Vlad's Puritanical streak. If this is true then he was not only an extreme sadist but a hypocrite as well. On one occasion he slit open one of his mistresses because she had deceived him, claiming to be pregnant when she wasn't. The fate suffered by three Turkish ambassadors was highly original. When they refused to remove their turbans in his presence as a mark of respect, he ordered them to be nailed to their heads!

Like his father before him, Vlad III was assassinated in the course of battle, probably by one of his own men. He was then decapitated and his head sent to Constantinople and put on show.

Nowadays, when some sex killer, homicidal maniac or terrorist is brought to book it is customary for the press and public to show open revulsion and condemnation. How many times have you heard a judge or a detective say something like: "In my thirty years experience, this is the most horrific case I have ever seen." ?

The grim fact though is that murder, torture and extreme sadism are ingrained deep in the psyche and history of man. Those who claim prostitution is the oldest profession should remember the story of Cain and Abel.

The only reason Vlad Tepes, Elizabeth Bathory and a hundred other such characters are not going about their fiendish work today is because the law is now above everyone. True, there are still terrorists like the IRA; many governments still routinely use torture, and the Khymer Rouge and Tiananmen Square are not just within living memory, they are recent atrocities. In spite of this however, and in spite of the willingness of governments to gather more and more information on their subjects and to impose more and more restrictions on civil liberties, the trend is clearly away from despotism and arbitrary murder. But we should never forget Vlad Tepes. Unlike the mythical vampire, we can see the real Dracula reflected in the mirror, and his reflection is, in many ways, our own.

## GILLES DE RAIS: THE 15TH CENTURY IAN BRADY

Jack the Ripper (whoever he was) has often been fingered as the first serial sex killer. It has been argued that random and seemingly motiveless mass and multiple killings are a relatively new phenomenon. These vary from the *McDonald's Hamburger Massacre* to the activities of John Wayne Gacy, the oddball homosexual divorcee who murdered thirty-three men and boys; and Pedro Lopez, a fiend who may have murdered as many as three hundred girls. (1)

In Britain, one of the most sensational cases of sex related killings has been that of the Moors Murderers, principally because one of them, Myra Hindley, was a woman. On 6th May 1966, Ian Brady was convicted of three murders: those of ten year old Lesley Ann Downey, twelve year old John Kilbride and seventeen year old Edward Evans. Hindley was also convicted of the murders of Lesley Ann Downey and Edward Evans, and with being an accessory to the murder of John Kilbride. Over the years, Brady has hinted at having committed a number of other murders. In 1987, police returned to Saddleworth Moor in Yorkshire, Brady's and Hindley's old stomping ground and, with Brady's assistance, another body was discovered, that of sixteen year old Pauline Reade. They failed to locate a fifth, but there is almost certainly at least one more buried in a shallow grave somewhere on that bleak, windswept moor, and informed people have speculated that Brady's total, if not Hindley's, may run into double figures.

Brady and Hindley's victims were tortured before being killed. This fact, together with their tender ages has led at times to the Moors Murders being dubbed the most foul and most wicked sex crimes in history. Don't you believe a word of it. Compared with Gilles de Rais, a 15th Century French nobleman, Brady and Hindley were rank amateurs. Not only did he murder far more children than Brady and Hindley, but his victims were younger and the manners of their deaths even more horrific.

## HERO

Gilles de Rais was born in 1404 the son of Guy de Laval, one of the richest men in France. Both his parents died in 1415, and it is possible that this may have had some influence on his development which twisted his mind in later life, but up until the age of 28 he apparently showed no signs of depravity. Indeed, if he had died young he would have gone down in history as one of France's greatest heroes, for he fought alongside Joan of Arc and played a significant role in defeating the English at the siege of Orleans.

In 1429, Baron de Rais was tall, handsome and fabulously wealthy. Both a Latin scholar and a connoisseur of the arts, he was at the court of the castle of Chinon when Joan entered, and was chosen to lead the army which accompanied her. Whatever else she may have been, Joan was no military com-

mander; on the afternoon of 4th May 1429, she besieged the English fortifications at St Loup. When she was nearly surrounded, one of the lookouts sounded the church bells. De Rais came to her rescue, put the English to flight, and together they took St Loup, the first victory of the campaign.

From then on he supported her. Two days later, acting against advice, she crossed the Loire to attack the English. Outnumbered, she was bailed out by de Rais for the second time. The following day, Joan was wounded by an arrow as she was trying to scale the walls of the fortress of Les Tourelles; de Rais saved her as she fell off the ladder. They took the fortress and in retreat, most of the English forces were drowned when the French fired a narrow bridge they were crossing.

On Sunday 8th May, the French and English forces came face to face, but for some reason, the English turned and fled. De Rais was promoted to Marshall of France, and with his help, Joan decisively defeated the English at Patay, killing 25,000 of them. On July 17th, the Dauphin was crowned King of France and de Rais's promotion was confirmed.

At the siege of Paris he saved Joan's bacon yet again when she was wounded. Up until now, the story of the dashing Baron de Rais and the virginal Maid of Orleans has all the ingredients of a Mediaeval romance. It could quite properly be turned into a Hollywood epic with de Rais taking her in his arms, swearing his undying love and the two of them living happily ever after. But there was to be no romance between Joan and de Rais. Joan's tale has a sad ending; she was burned as a witch by the English in 1431. And de Rais's tale, while extremely debauched is in many ways even sadder, for shortly, this hero of France would become one of the most, if not the most prolific child murderer in history.

After his grandfather died in 1432, Gilles, already rich beyond the dreams of avarice, became even richer. Yet somehow over the next few years he managed to squander almost his entire fortune which included many castles in the Loire Valley. His huge entourage, including a personal bodyguards of thirty knights, was paid handsomely. Beggars flocked to his door, and he was ripped off by his staff and merchants. Then he turned to murder.

He began his orgy of bloodlust in the same year, 1432, at the castle of Champtocé. Until 1439 he killed for pleasure, but then he fell under the influence of François Prelati, a corrupt priest, and, quickly becoming immersed in alchemy and devil worship, his murders became ritualised.

Gilles had no difficulty finding his victims. In *Bluebeard: The Life And Crimes Of Gilles de Rais*, Leonard Wolf writes: "If Gilles's victims were not given to him or sold by their parents to be pages, he could get them from an endless source closer to hand. There were always beggar children who came daily to

cluster before the gates of his castles for the alms he dispensed with so liberal a hand."

Exactly how many children Gilles murdered has never been established, but it may have been over three hundred. Although only thirty-four murders could be charged directly against him....."Forty bodies alone were recovered from the castle of Machecoul and another forty from Champtocé." The grisliness of de Rais's crimes is illustrated by the following confession made by his servant and accomplice, Etienne Corrillaut, (alias Poitou).

In order to practice his debauches with said children, boys and girls, against the use of nature, first with licentious passion take his rod in his left or right hand, rub it so it became erect and sticking out, then place it between the thighs or legs of the said boys or girls, not bothering with the natural female receptacle, and rub his said rod or virile member on the belly of the said boys and girls with much gratification, heat and libidinous excitement, until he emitted his sperm on their stomachs.

and

after having an orgasm on the stomach of the said children holding their legs between his, he had considerable pleasure in watching the heads of the children separated from the body. Sometimes he made an incision behind the neck to make them die slowly, at which he became greatly excited, and while they were bleeding to death he would sometimes masturbate on them until they were dead, and sometimes he did this after they had died while their bodies were still warm.....

and

In order to stifle the cries of the children when he wished to have relations with them, he would first put a rope round their necks and hang them up three feet off the floor in a corner of the room, and just before they were dead he would cause them to be taken down, telling them they would not utter a word, and then he would excite his member, holding it in his hand, and afterwards have an emission on their stomach. When he had done this, he had their throats cut and their heads separated from their bodies. Sometimes he would ask, when they were dead, which of these children had the most beautiful head.

Gilles got away with his crimes until 1440, but with so many children being procured by his agents, kidnapped off the streets or entering his service never to return, it was inevitable that rumours would spread. This may not have been enough to bring about his downfall, but by this time he was so desperate for money that he repossessed a fortress he had sold, Saint-Etienne-de-Mermorte, and in so doing incurred the wrath of the Church.

He was finally arrested on 15th September 1440 by order of the Bishop of Nantes. A secret enquiry had already been held into his activities, but although de Rais must have been aware of this, either he thought he was above the law or else he didn't care. A total of 110 witnesses were heard; under threat of torture he confessed to committing numerous murders, sodomising his victims and invoking demons.

The evidence against him, including his lengthy confession, was overwhelming. He was declared a heretic, excommunicated and sentenced to death. Because he showed contrition! he was re-admitted to the Church then executed with his servants Henriet and Poiton on 26th October 1440. De Rais was strangled and his body thrown onto the fire. Henriet and Poiton were hanged and buried likewise.

(1) I found a book on Pedro Lopez (the Monster of the Andes) in the British Library: *El Sádico y las niñas* by Doctor Efraín Torres Chaves published around 1980. Unfortunately, there does not appear yet to be an English translation.

### **Suggested further reading**

*Bluebeard: The Life And Crimes Of Gilles de Rais* by Leonard Wolf (Clarkson N. Potter, Inc.) 1980.

*Laughter For The Devil: The trials of Gilles de Rais, companion-in-arms of Joan of Arc (1440)*, introduction and translation from Latin and French by Reginald Hyatte, (Associated University Presses) 1984.

*The Beast Of Jersey* by Joan Paisnel (New English Library) 1975.



## THE LIFE OF THE MARQUIS DE SADE

The name of Louis-Donatien-François-Alphonse, (or Aldonze), better known as the Marquis de Sade, (1740-1814), has become synonymous with extreme cruelty, depravity, corruption, some would say pure evil. The word *sadism* is of course derived from his name; a sadist is the kind of person most of us go out of our way to avoid: someone who enjoys inflicting pain on and torturing others. But what sort of man was the Marquis de Sade? Was he the fiend some people believe, a mass murderer and torturer of children like Gilles de Rais? Or a bloodthirsty quasi-vampire like Elizabeth Bathory, the Hungarian countess who holds the dubious distinction of an entry in *The Guinness Book Of Records* as the world's most prolific murderess? Not at all. Sade was indeed a depraved man, and probably quite wicked in some ways, yet he never actually murdered anyone, and though his sexual practices would be considered debauched and depraved even today, most *Sunday Sport* readers would hardly bat an eyelid at them.

Louis-Donatien-François was born on June 2nd 1740 into an old, aristocratic family of Provence, France, the only child of the Comte de Sade. Raised in privilege, his childhood was uneventful, as was his academic career, though he was reputed to have become a good musician, dancer and fencer, and to have developed a taste for art. He was sent to serve in the army during the Seven Years War, and indeed served with distinction, rising from sub-lieutenant in the royal regiment to become a captain in the cavalry. He spent some time in Germany where he learned the language before returning to France in 1761. Like his schooldays, the next two years appear to have been uneventful, but in 1763 his father decided to marry him off. The bride he chose for his son was the eldest daughter of Monsieur de Montreuil, a wealthy judge. Renéé was 21; Sade nearly 23. The first time he went to visit her she was indisposed and he was entertained by her 16 year old sister, Louise de Launay. It was love at first sight, and the sentiment appears to have been mutual. However, both sets of parents were horrified, and Sade was forced into the proposed match with Renéé, marrying her in an extravagant ceremony on May 17th 1763. His mother-in-law took an instant dislike to him, and over the next thirty years she did everything in her power to make his life a misery.

Sade's marriage started off on the wrong foot; four months later he was he was arrested and imprisoned for the first time for debauchery. He was supposed to have been involved in an orgy or some such scandal, little is known, but he hadn't been at liberty for long before he was off to Paris spending his wife's dowry like water.

He took a mistress, the famous courtesan La Beavoisin; she was considerably older than him and had already ruined several of her lovers. Over the next

three years to 1767 he became known as "the divine marquis," probably due to his extravagance as much as his debauchery. His father died in the same year and he succeeded to the title, becoming the Comte de Sade. The following year an incident happened which was to consolidate his reputation as one of history's most wicked men, yet the accounts we have today are based largely on hearsay, and even if the worst excesses attributed to him here were true, it probably wouldn't even have made the front pages of the tabloids if it had happened today.

According to the most lurid (and improbable) account, on Easter morning in the Place Saint Victoire in Paris he met a virtuous widow named Rose Keller and offered her a job as his housekeeper. She went with him to his house at Arceuil, and once there he forced her to undress, tied her face down on a bed, beat her with whips and sticks, cut her in several places with a knife then poured sealing wax on her wounds.

He is supposed to have threatened to kill her, then brought her a meal before she escaped by climbing through a window. Sade was arrested, and a doctor who examined Rose Keller the following day found evidence to suggest that she had indeed been beaten, but Sade's claim that she went with him willingly and had allowed him to beat her seems closer to the truth. For one thing, she did not appear to have been tied down; for another she did not appear to have been flogged to within an inch of her life; and for a third, Rose Keller was probably not quite the *virtuous widow* she was later made out to be.

After a little bargaining, Sade's old tutor was able to buy off Rose Keller with 2,400 livre, a small fortune in those days. He had been summoned by Sade's mother-in-law to hush up the scandal. And there this sordid affair would have ended if he hadn't been turned into a pawn in the struggle between his father-in-law and his father-in-law's fellow justices. Eventually he had to use aristocratic privilege to get the case dropped. Whatever lifestyle Sade lived, no one could call it dull; no sooner had one scandal been hushed up than he plunged feet first into another. This time he eloped with Louise de Launay, his sister-in-law, and, leaving his pregnant wife on her own, took her off to Italy for 18 months. Later he returned to his wife, who appears not to have batted an eyelid; Louise re-entered the convent where she'd originally been placed to keep her out of her brother-in-law's clutches.

For the next few years he committed no public indiscretions, devoting his time to building a theatre and writing plays. Then in 1772 he caused another scandal.

In Marseilles on business, accompanied by his valet Langlois, he visited a woman named Marguerite Coste. The same day he engaged in a session of beating and buggery with three whores, beating them, being beaten by them, sodomising them and being sodomised by his valet in turn. He also gave the whores and the Coste woman some sweets. One of the whores and Marguerite

Coste became ill, the latter extremely so. The authorities ordered his and his valet's arrest and they were condemned to death in their absence for poisoning and sodomy. This appears to have been a harsh judgement because both women recovered; rather than trying to poison them it is more probable that Sade laced their sweets with aphrodisiac, and in any case, the death penalty was no longer in force for sodomy. Again, Sade seems to have been the victim of dirty politics rather than of blind justice.

Sade's mother-in-law seems to have joined in his persecution at this point; his property had already been seized. He was arrested and imprisoned in Chambery where apparently he led a fairly comfortable lifestyle. His wife quarrelled with her mother and helped her husband to escape; they travelled to Switzerland and Italy before returning to France under assumed names. Madame de Sade appears to have been totally under the spell of her worthless husband, even acting as his procuress.

The stories of Sade's abusing his servants may or may not be true, but undoubtedly he did make a chambermaid pregnant then have her sent to a convent falsely accused of theft. There is also evidence that in addition to his mother-in-law, Madame de Montreuil, Sade had many political enemies: his political ideology was every bit as radical as his sexual one.

In February 1777 he was arrested again and sent to the Bastille. Denied books and writing materials and locked in a cold, damp dungeon, he nearly went mad. With his wife's help he won a retrial, his punishment was reduced and he was banished from Marseilles for 3 years. All the same, he was to spend 27 of the last 37 years of his life locked away, initially under a lettre de cachet granted to his mother-in-law.

In 1784 he was back in the Bastille; during his time in gaol he read voraciously and wrote prolifically. A great deal of his work was either lost or deliberately destroyed, but much survives to this day. He was released again in 1790, both homeless and penniless, a not uncommon predicament for ex-prisoners even today. Later he was imprisoned and released again. Then came *The Terror* in which he played an active part, but he soon fell from grace, was imprisoned yet again and sentenced to death. The date of his execution was fixed, but he managed to escape that. Freed again, he was arrested for the final time (on a trumped up charge) in 1801. In April 1803 he was declared mad and transferred to an asylum. In spite of this, there is little doubt that he was sane.

Little is known of the last years of his life, though it is certain that he continued to write plays, and even had them performed by outside actors and other asylum inmates. After his death, his eldest son burned many of his father's manuscripts. There is no known portrait of the Marquis de Sade. In his will dated 1806 he asked that "the traces of my grave disappear from the face of the Earth, as I flatter myself that my memory will be effaced from the mind of men."

## THE WRITINGS OF SADE

He was certainly wrong on this last point; his name has become, if not a household word, then one which is used daily throughout the world by policemen, crime writers, psychiatrists, film buffs and countless others. Sade's works are still officially banned by the French courts. His major work, considered his masterpiece, is *The 120 Days Of Sodom*, which he completed in 1785. This was first published by a German psychiatrist as late as 1904, but the text contained numerous errors. The definitive and what may be called the original version was published between 1931 and 1935; it runs to nearly 500 pages. His most famous work is the novel *Justine Or The Adversities Of Virtue*. A film: *The Violation Of Justine* was based on this. Also of note is *Philosophy In The Bedroom*.

Sade has been called a great liberator, and indeed he made a great play about liberty, particularly his being denied it. But while there is no doubt that he was persecuted and imprisoned unjustly, there can little doubt either that he brought much of his suffering on himself. Sade's liberty was nothing more than a pretext for riding roughshod over other people, both in the bedroom and out of it, and for inflicting pain on others, and on himself.

Probably nothing reflects this better than his masterpiece, *Sodom*, and *Justine*, but anyone who begins reading Sade with the idea of being sexually titillated will be sadly disappointed.

*The 120 Days Of Sodom* has been rightly described as a "gigantic catalogue of perversions". In it, Sade fantasises over the sexual abuse of children, copulating with various animals including a sheep and a cat!, drinking urine, eating excrement and mutilating people. *Justine* is best characterised by its subtitle, *The Adversities Of Virtue*, in which good is punished and evil rewarded. The somewhat tamer *Philosophy In The Bedroom* is liberally sprinkled with variations of the word *fuck*.

Sade may not have been mad but his outpourings, especially those of *Sodom*, are hardly the works of a healthy mind. It is difficult to see why such puerile rubbish is still banned, certainly it is not fit for children to read, but likewise it is all a bit too unsubtle to be anything more than pure sensationalism such as the public is deluged with today.

The greatest achievement of Sade is undoubtedly to demonstrate that just because an idea is original, revolutionary, outrageous, avant-garde or frowned upon doesn't mean it contains anything of merit.

So there are the life and works of the much vaunted Marquis de Sade. Of course, one cannot accurately capture the quintessence of any man in a couple of thousand words, except perhaps a dullard or an imbecile, and Sade was neither of these. Several books have been written about him, but without wishing to disparage the scholarship of their authors, it is doubtful if any one of them is worth studying.

The Marquis de Sade was an unpleasant man who devoted his life to the pursuit of unpleasant things, in particular to causing pain and misery to others and to himself, and to the worship of corruption and perversion, even to the extent of devoting his entire life to practising and writing about them. True, he was persecuted unjustly, but so have countless others been. And the overwhelming majority of them are infinitely more worthy of study than the so-called "divine marquis."

#### **Suggested further reading**

*The Life And Ideas Of The Marquis De Sade* by Geoffrey Gorer (Peter Owen) 1953.

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