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# Visions of Phantasm:
# *Madame de Sade* in the Excess of Language and Imagination

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*Madame de Sade*, a celebrated play by Mishima Yukio (1925-1970), premiered on 14 November 1965 at Kinokuniya Hall in Tokyo, in a production by Theatrical Company NLT (Neo Littérature Théâtre).[1] Five years before the Japanese writer committed his infamous public suicide, the play expounded on a quasi-geometrical constellation of characters whose personalities embodied abstract ideological forms. *Madame de Sade* builds on the Japanese modernist genealogy of New Drama (*shingeki*) rooted in the late 1930s,[2] as well as European theatrical schemes built on realism and expressionism;[3] however, in terms of theme and semantics, the play also inherits Wildean fin-de-siècle decadence. With these artistic approaches, the play reflects Mishima's interest in recuperating the initial objectives of New Drama, especially the artistic modernization of Japanese theatrical plays and the promotion of the autonomy of art.

Due to a dissatisfaction with New Drama's political alignment with the rise of left-wing politics in 1960s Japan, Mishima branched out to form NLT.[4] Like Mishima's other plays, such as *Rokumei-kan* [*The Deer-Cry Hall*] (1957) and *Suzaku-ke no metsubō* [*The Decline and Fall of the Suzaku*] (1967), *Madame de Sade* is a historical costume play that wields the power of elocution and a lucid development of each act in response to the colliding worldviews held by each character. Set in the age of the French Revolution, the play explores the Marquis de Sade's libertinism, his notorious vice – symbolized in the physical violence he inflicted upon others – and the dwindling of his aristocratic privileges. As the consequence of his repeated transgressions, Sade faced numerous imprisonments before finally regaining his freedom in 1790. Assigning lucidly defined roles to each character, the play dissects the different ways in which Sade's revolutionary presence was perceived when the aristocracy's *Ancien Régime* and the age of Rococo were in decline. Centring on Sade's

wife Renée, Mishima conceived the play as a metaphysical response to why she ultimately rejected her husband in the post-Revolution phase.

*Madame de Sade* occupies a unique position in the context of modern Japanese decadent literature, as it inherits and partly defies the aesthetic traits of New Drama. New Drama strove to elevate the artistic quality of Japanese theatrical production while at the same time departing from trivial and mundane motifs associated with tear-jerking melodrama. In so doing, New Drama rejected the commercial priorities pursued by Kabuki and *Shinpa* [the New School], exploring instead a stylistic highbrow thanks to the leading exponents' familiarity with modern European theatres and naturalist realism (as exemplified in Osanai Kaoru's (1881-1928) introduction of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), and Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) to Japan's theatrical scene).[5] Mishima built on these aspects of New Drama by bringing it into dialogue with the artistic temperament of fin-de-siècle decadence. In this regard, the most influential figure for his aesthetic acculturation was Oscar Wilde, who, according to Mishima, possessed the mastery of shocking the mediocre middle classes.[6] His fascination with Wilde's oeuvre led Mishima to direct a theatrical production of Wilde's *Salomé* (1891) in 1960. However, in 1968 Mishima left the theatre company NLT and formed *Rōman Gekijyō* [Romantic Theatre], together with Matsu'ura Takeo. The manifesto of the new company denounced New Drama's 'inclination to (leftist) politics and playwrights' hypocrisy', which they believed deformed the literariness of plays. Instead, Mishima intended to design Romantic Theatre as a company capable of demonstrating the importance of language 'not only as a literary form', but also as 'an encounter of acting and words' on the living stage.[7]

The transition to Romantic Theatre took place two years before Mishima's death and lacked sufficient time to implement the full scope of his artistic vision. Even so, the 1965 NLT production of *Madame de Sade* significantly attests to Mishima's artistic ambitions. In the brief essay titled 'N•L•T no mirai-zu' [The Future Picture of NLT], he notes that the company's foremost objective lies in the maximal demonstration of 'engeki ni okeru serifu no jyūyō-sei' [elocution in

theatrical play]. The language in a play, according to Mishima, should eschew displays of its own literariness, manifesting instead at the intersection of '現場の演劇、現場の舞台の光彩陸離たる瞬間' [actual acting, stage, and dazzling moment].[8] With such a deliberate use of language, to borrow from Wilde, Mishima envisions that the theatrical play is fundamentally 'a supreme vanity […] [and] ultimate deception […] at the peak of artificiality'.[9] In stark contrast, he regarded New Drama in the 1960s as a pandemonium of '阿呆らしい先入主' [ridiculous preconceptions] degraded by '心理主義 […]トリヴィアルなリアリズム […] [と]空疎な様式主義' [psychologism, […] trivial realism, […] [and] empty mannerism].[10] Overthrowing these factors, the NLT, by the time that *Madame de Sade* was staged, at least, aspired toward attaining '俳優が美神として現前する劇場の最高の瞬間' [the supreme moment when actors emerge as an incarnation of beauty].[11] Hence, in a mode I choose to frame as distinctly 'Wildean', the company came to pursue and celebrate 'order and beauty, extravagance, serenity, or pleasure', and in so doing devoted their labour to the 'voryupute no engeki' [theatrical play of *volupté*].[12]

The critically acclaimed play *Madame de Sade* condenses these aesthetic ideals, while departing from the New Drama. However, the play has not received anything like the same degree of critical attention as Mishima's novels, particularly with regard to its decadence.[13] Given his unwavering fascination with fin-de-siècle decadence, this article attempts to track down some salient characteristics embedded in *Madame de Sade* that resonate with the literary and cultural temperament of what Mishima conceived as decadence.[14] While exploring these characteristics, this article hopes to configure the ways in which Mishima amalgamates the mutually exclusive components of the play, including the motif of psychic entropy prevalent in the protagonist Madame de Sade (Renée), and the structurally cogent script. In the first instance, Mishima acquired a knowledge of the life of the Marquis de Sade through Shibusawa Tatsuhiko's historiographical non-fiction, *Sado kōshaku no shōgai* [*The Life of Marquis de Sade*] (1964). While the life of Sade, whose name led to the coining of the term 'sadism' by German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, fascinated Mishima, what intrigued him the most was the fact that Renée rejected her husband

after spending so long advocating for his freedom. Mishima made this the focal point for the entire play, portraying Renée as a faithful Christian wife who dedicates herself to her husband. I consider that the excessive degree of her faith in the Marquis de Sade constitutes a central motif that is highly commensurate with the fin-de-siècle notion of decadence.

As his close friend and artistic accomplice Shibusawa notes, Mishima's understanding of decadence encompassed a vast historical period, far beyond the limit of the fin de siècle, spanning the age of the Old Testament through to his contemporary postwar decades in Japan.[15] Within such a wide spatiotemporal stretch, various versions of 'decadence' discursively coexisted in Mishima's imagination. Decadence intertwined with his fetish for words like 'sensuality', 'pleasure', 'profanation', and 'ennui'. [16] Whereas his infatuation with decadence and related concepts occasionally overrides the canonical European notion, the aesthetic premise of decadence he embraced was consistent throughout his literary career:

> デカダンス[は]どんな時代とどんな国家にも、交替的に衰亡を欲求する文学的傾向[として]あらはれる。[…] その欲求に、破壊精神の旺盛な活力はなく、衰滅する主体の豊潤な感覚的生活と、知的な誇りとによる、衰滅の自己肯定だけが在るときに、デカダンス芸術と呼ぶに値ひするのである。
>
> [D]ecadence that periodically desires a deterioration emerges in literary trends, regardless of historical ages and national [contexts]. […] Such a desire deserves to be called decadent art only if it has lost destructive energies, affirming deterioration through the decaying subject's opulence, sensual life and intelligent dignity.[17]

As this perspective suggests, Mishima was consciously building artifices that fall into the thematic category of decadence, which prompts me to put forward the hypothesis in this article that *Madame de Sade* was a theatrical and dramatic variant of his decadent literature. Mishima's perspective affords an interpretation of the play as an artistic affirmation of the deteriorating old world where the decaying subject faces, to borrow Matei Calinescu's framing, 'a need [for] self-examination'.[18] Such a sense of restlessness underpins *Madame de Sade*. Ultimately, the foremost dramaturgy of the play is an eschatological consciousness of history that transforms the protagonist Renée into a decadent subject befitting the agonistic decay of an epoch.

**Overview**

At first glance, adorned with rhetorical opulence and flowery costume, *Madame de Sade* echoes Mishima's earlier costume play, *The Rokumeikan* (premiered in 1957), set in the Meiji Restoration phase of Japan that faced radical Westernization. Nevertheless, in terms of subtextual theme, *Madame de Sade* portrays the twilight of a cultural epoch built on aristocratic extravagance, as implied by Sade's debauchery and decline. Set in the pre- and post-French Revolution periods, the three acts encapsulate the gradually declining power of the aristocracy that had been backed by the absolute monarchism inherited from Louis XIV. The presence of Sade is highly emblematic, with the moribund condition of the aristocracy paralleling the arrest and imprisonment of the marquis, and his miserable physique upon release. Rejected by his wife, Renée, Sade poignantly signifies an epochal threshold and the end of the *Ancien Régime*.

The play begins in the autumn of 1772. Countess de Montreuil invites Baroness de Simiane and Countess de Saint-Font to her mansion, requesting their support in rescuing her son-in-law, the Marquis de Sade, from the Fortress of Miolans in French Savoy. Saint-Font recounts Sade's abuse of aphrodisiacs and notorious debauchery with young prostitutes, including their flagellation, in Marseille. Both Simiane and Saint-Font are Mishima's fictional characters whose respective roles represent two mutually exclusive worldviews. Simiane embodies a conscientious Christian morality, and firmly believes that Sade's violent debauchery mirrors his paradoxical desire to give in to God. In turn, Saint-Font extols Sade's 'extraordinary passion for certainty',[19] which is directed toward the carnal senses. Confronted with these two contrasting perspectives, at this point in the play, Renée chooses to vindicate the man on sentimental grounds. Toward the end of the act, Renée's younger sister, Anne-Prospère de Launay, daringly reveals her sojourn to Venice with Sade, making a sly sexual innuendo. Baffled by Anne, Montreuil explodes with indignation towards the familial disgrace caused by Sade, gesturing to save him and to eradicate the familial infamy.[20]

Act Two focuses on ever-increasing mother-daughter conflicts in 1778, six years after Act One. Uplifting news arrives at the onset – the High Court at Aix-en-Provence have approved

Sade's release from the Fortress of Vincennes, and his criminal charge for sodomy and corruption of morals is expunged from the record. While celebrating his release, Anne, Saint-Font, and Montreuil share their memories of Sade's debauchery. Anne describes their intimacy as highly intuitive and instinctive, challenging Renée's naiveté and inability to grasp her husband's true nature. Saint-Font reveals her radical partisanship with Sade, confessing her participation in the profanation ritual where she offered her body as an altar. In turn, Montreuil accuses Renée by condemning her participation in an orgy at the Château de La Coste at Christmas time. The rest of Act Two shifts to an intensified struggle between mother and daughter. Montreuil defends her sense of societal propriety through a staunch rejection of Sade. In response, Renée denounces Montreuil's piousness, and ultimately declares, borrowing from Saint-Font's words, that 'Alphonse is myself!' (p. 76).

Set in April 1790, nine months after the outbreak of the French Revolution, Act Three takes the form of a kind of postscript. Saint-Font, we are told, has died in Marseille – trampled by a mob of revolutionaries – while Simiane took her religious oath and became a nun. Unable to observe Sade's release, Renée wishes to retire from the mundane world, while Montreuil now wearily disregards her son-in-law's deeds as trivial matters. In such ways, the play portrays the collapse of the *Ancien Régime* as a cause of their enervation. An irony lies in the chiasmic condition that reverses the stances of Sade and the other women in the play. As a survivor of the revolution, Sade achieves an overturning of *morale larmoyante* [sentimental moralism] that was exalted in late-eighteenth-century France,[21] a theme that Sade made the focal point of *Justine* (1791). Sade wrote *Justine* while he was in prison, and toward the end of Act Three we find Renée directly referencing it as the first story of Sade's that she ever turned to. The story juxtaposes orphaned sisters – the older Juliette, and the younger Justine – with the former's vice affording a range of privileges, while the latter's virtue and purity results in misery, humiliation, torture, and the threat of execution for a crime she did not commit. Even after escaping that threat, she is killed by a lightning strike. Renée realizes that, by authoring the book in prison, Sade intended to confine her to the persona

of Justine. Accordingly, she realizes that her devotion and pleas for rescuing him have been meaninglessly wasted. In the closing moments of the play, the servant Charlotte announces the return of Sade. He remains invisible to the audience, but is described by her as being physically wretched, old, and dirty. Renée unequivocally conveys her final dictum, the last line of the play: 'The marquise will never see him again' (p. 106).

### *Madame de Sade* as a variant of a decadent play

For Mishima, whose knowledge of French was quite limited, Shibusawa Tatsuhiko's book *Sado kōshaku no shōgai* [*The Life of the Marquis de Sade*] (1965) was the major source of inspiration for *Madame de Sade*.[22] In response to Renée's rejection of her husband when he finally returns to her after nearly twenty years of imprisonment, Mishima designed the play as a kaleidoscopic set of perceptions of and counterpoints to Sade's character. For instance,

> Madame de Sade stands for wifely devotion; her mother Madame de Montreuil, for law, society, and morality; Madame de Simiane for religion; Madame de Saint-Font for carnal desires; Anne, the younger sister of Madame de Sade, for feminine guilelessness and lack of principles; and the servant Charlotte for the common people.[23]

Among them, Saint-Font embodies the decadent psyche due to her boredom and radical deviance from aristocratic norms and values. Her audacity is likened to 'Madame de Montespan in the days of the Sun King' (p. 48), echoing also fin-de-siècle *femmes fatales*. In search of a psychosomatic stimulant, she comes to see the act of flagellation and other bodily rituals as resembling a perverse form of holy communion predicated on sensual awakening (p. 50). At their sacrilegious ceremony, a silver crucifix 'placed in the cleft between [Saint-Font's] breasts', as well as the cold sensation of 'the silver chalice poised between [her] thighs', make her tremble with 'the joy of profanation' (p. 51). The climax of the mass further intoxicates her:

> [T]he blood of lamb, hotter than sweat poured over me by any man, more abundant than any man's sweat, flooded over my breasts, my belly, and into the chalice between my thighs…. I had been impassive, half-amused and half-intrigued, but at that moment a joy flamed up in my heart. As the flickering candles dropped hot wax on my spread-out arms, obscenely imitating the cross, I knew for a certainty the secret meaning, that the fire in my hands stood for the nails of the Crucifixion. (pp. 51–52)

Saint-Font's pleasure encapsulates the empirical nature of Sade's violence, which reflects the age of the Enlightenment marked by Voltaire and Diderot.[24] The eroticism provoked by the profane ritual is not trivial; like many other forms of violence Sade experimented with, it delves into a primal mechanism of pleasure as the most powerful human drive.[25] Similarly, the notion of sadism cannot be separated from Catholicism because its fundamental essence lies in 'a practice of profanation, rebellion against morality, spiritual dissipation, and ideologically Christian derangement'.[26] Saint-Font's decisive dictum – 'Alphonse was myself' – thus creates a sense of catharsis as it vindicates Sade's violence towards an innocent other (p. 52). In this regard, *Madame de Sade* dramatizes the decline of the aristocracy and its inherited sense of social superiority and entitlement – especially with regard to the liberty and welfare of others – which used to be 'the exclusive prerogative of the nobility' (p. 10). Therefore, Saint-Font's death is inevitable as it metaphorically announces the fading of noble privileges, now unleashed upon the wider public through the Jacobins' more radical terrorism and violence by guillotine. When Saint-Font dies in Marseille, she is in the guise of a prostitute, singing the revolutionary lyric, 'Hang the nobles from the lampposts!' at 'the top of her lungs' together with a mob (pp. 81–82). Her corpse displays the tricolore – 'red blood, white flesh, blue bruises', suggestive of, liberty, equality, and fraternity, the motto of the French Revolution – as though ironically yielding to the new republic governed by commoners. Upon her death, as if alluding to the defeat of the nobility, her ugly wrinkled body is revealed (p. 82). In essence, the fictional presence of Saint-Font accentuates the decline of an age of unfathomable passion and reason.

In stark contrast to the clear-cut affirmation of Sade by Saint-Font, Renée's staunch devotion to him displays three stages of semantic shift. A notable instance includes when Saint-Font questions Renée's awareness about Sade's imprisonment. Renée seems aware of the conspiracy of Montreuil, who shrewdly petitioned a Royal Warrant of arrest for him (p. 55). Renée self-consciously plays the role of a damsel in distress who helplessly waits for her husband,

although she also expresses determination not to leave Sade. Whereas Montreuil vehemently tries to expel Sade from the family through fear of reputational damage, Renée insistently vindicates him.

The mother-daughter confrontation becomes the focal point of Act Two, expanding the unbridgeable gulf between their standpoints. Montreuil increasingly speaks of the bifurcation between propriety and corruption, accusing both Sade and Saint-Font of an inconceivable deviation from her moral standard. In this act, Renée's commentary grows increasingly analytical, dwelling on the rationale behind Sade's deeds: He 'laid his plan' for proving 'the absolute limits of evil' (p. 60). Without listening to her daughter, Montreuil throws a tantrum, refusing to acknowledge his humanity. In response, Renée maintains her devotion and faith in Sade. Unlike her naiveté and passivity in Act One, here she emphasizes her sacrificial disposition, claiming that she has 'never counted on his love' (p. 61). The mother-daughter conflict turns out to be a stalemate. As Montreuil makes clear to Renée, despite her protests to the contrary, and in a way that foreshadows the play's conclusion: 'you are grateful to me. You and I have remarkably similar interests in keeping him locked up in perpetuity' (p. 63). From that point on, Act Two sets out a series of repetitive quarrels that go nowhere. For instance, Montreuil keeps reproaching Renée (rather than Sade) for her immorality, while Renée defends his violence and profanation as a scientific experiment. Regardless of her arguments, what truly vexes Montreuil is Renée's excessively poetic language, which she believes cannot legitimate Sade's vices. Her frequent use of similes comparing Sade with 'a dove' and 'a small, white, golden-haired flower' agitates Montreuil, who finds such language exasperating (p 69). In these ways, Act Two exhibits a clash between two incommensurable worldviews, and the language that underpins those worldviews.

The course of the Revolution plays an important role in Act Three. The Legislative Assembly announces that the Royal Warrants of arrest are invalid, leading to Sade's freedom. Nonetheless, this final segment of the play is essentially a postscript to the pre-Revolution phase when his radical empiricism was part and parcel of the age of the Enlightenment. Therefore,

Renée's rejection of Sade upon his return obliquely reflects the demise of the *Ancien Regime*. A well known line, in which she likens her memory to 'insects [trapped] in amber' (p. 83), affirms her alliance with Sade and the psychic world of a nobility in search of 'something […] frightening, something indescribable, […] something never [seen] even in nightmares' (p. 84). In contrast, Montreuil lacks such a sense of wonder, belonging instead to a realm of pragmatism capable of antagonizing Sade as 'an unmitigated scoundrel' (p. 95). By Act Three, Renée embodies epochal resignation and lassitude, metaphorically confined – perhaps a little tenuously – in the misery-laden image of Justine:

> Our whole lives and all our suffering have ended in wasted effort. We have lived, worked, sorrowed, shouted, merely to help him complete this horrifying book. […] My long endurance, my struggles to help him escape, my efforts to secure a pardon, the bribes I gave the prison guards, my tearful pleas to the wardens – they were all meaningless wastes of time. (p. 102)

Hence, the denouement of the play occurs with the epiphanic realization that such misery and wastefulness must be compensated with a logic that 'belongs to some different order' because

> [t]his man, who has abandoned all human feelings, has shut the world of men behind iron bars, and goes walking around it, jingling the keys. He is the keeper of the keys, he alone. My hands can no longer reach him. I have no longer even the strength left to thrust my hands through the bars and beg in vain for his mercy. (p. 104)

Despite the unbridgeable distance that she feels from Sade, she nevertheless comes to glorify his transcendental sovereignty of a kind that remains incommensurate with 'liberty, equality, and fraternity':

> Alphonse, the strangest man I have known in this world, has spun a thread of light from evil, created holiness from filth he has gathered. […] His armor glows faintly with the violet light he sheds on the world. […] Human anguish, human suffering, human shrieks rise like the lofty silver horns of his helmet. He presses a sword sated with blood to his lips, and heroically intones the words of his oath. […] His icy-cold sword makes lilies wet with blood white again, and his white horse, dabbled with blood, swells forth its chest like the prow of a boat, and advances toward a sky streaked with intermittent flashes of morning lightening. The sky breaks at the moment, and a flood of light, a holy light blinding the eyes of the beholders, showers down. Alphonse, perhaps, is the essence of that light. (pp. 104-05)

Rhetorical opulence marks the climax of the play. Adorned with the image of a warrior in armour, this portrait of Sade celebrates Renée's excessive imagination and her tendency to luxuriate in

language. The passage reifies her ode to Sade, historically concatenating his reputation as an exponent of vice and sodomy. In other words, Sade's 'cathedral of vice' (p. 103) finds a match, of sorts, in Renée's poetic hyperbole.

Despite the differences in outward personality, Renée belongs genealogically to the obsessive psyche of fin-de-siècle decadents such as the titular protagonist in Wilde's *Salomé*, who wagers her life for the sake of her aesthetic obsession with Jokanaan. On the surface, Renée plays the docile wife, as though endorsing Catholic convention and patriarchy. But despite the guise, she controls her world, and allows Sade to be at the disposal of her imagination. It is her excessively logocentric worldview that affords *Madame de Sade* the right to be called a decadent play. Here, in a rather reductive sense, Max Nordau's typology of degenerates set out in *Entartung* [*Degeneration*] (1892) holds relevance, especially his commentary on the 'ego-maniac'.[27] Egomaniacs are, as Nordau borrows from criminologist Cesare Lombroso's phrasing, 'all delirious geniuses' who are 'captivated by and preoccupied with their own selves'.[28] Renée's narrative reaches a point of radical catachresis, much embellished and exhausted with an excess of imagination.[29] In the end, she negates the pragmatic ends of language altogether. Moreover, the thematic core of *Madame de Sade* engages with the impossibility of equating discursive human realities to a categorical mould. Therefore, unlike others in the play who represent more defined notions of morality, pious religious devotion, and political pragmatism, Renée, like Sade, cannot be likened to a single archetype. It is due to her egomaniac nature that she puts up with Sade's betrayal, finding a perverse form of solace in the imaginative lines of flight that he inspires.

**Decadence at play**

Mishima implicitly employs indigenous Japanese methods of dramatic narrative in *Madame de Sade*.[30] Whereas the outlook of the play aims at the post-*shingeki* aesthetics based on logical lucidity, the narrative scheme specifically inherits the theoretical framework of Noh drama employed by Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443), with which Mishima was familiar. While I acknowledge that

Kabuki's 'aesthetics of evil' and its baroque qualities may well be seen to be more in line with Mishima's own aesthetic outlook, as well as the eighteenth-century social context of this play, I contend that the narrative development across the play's three acts is more comparable with the three stages of dramatic development known as '*jo*' [beginning], '*ha*' [middle development], and '*kyū*' [quick ending]. Respectively, each narrative stage bears significance: *jo* establishes a spatial order, while *ha* expands temporality in dramatic tension.[31] The final act of *kyū* destroys the orders, as seen in the resolution of conflicts established in the previous two segments. Following this triadic mutation, Act One of *Madam de Sade* establishes a metaphysical space set in the pre-Revolution age where moral, religious, and social standpoints collide but coexist; Act Two sets forth the temporal shift from the previous act, dramatizing the mother-daughter conflict over Sade; and Act Three overthrows the established conflict through the protagonist's quick decision to refuse to meet Sade. As typically observed in medieval Noh repertoires, *Madame de Sade* also omits extraneous accounts, designing the play as an extra-diegetic drama that presumes the historical conditions and Sade's reputation as a radical maverick.

In terms of dramaturgy, Mishima employs a form of *henshintan* [story of metamorphosis] that has existed in Japan since its antiquity. In Noh drama, a protagonist's metamorphosis occurs at the levels of visual transformation and invisible psychological resolution. The latter case is metaphorical and metaphysical, usually represented by a certain physical posture or dance. Akin to this, Renée and Sade complete metaphysical transformations exclusively through language and elliptical narrative.[32]

Alongside an indigenous narrative pattern linked to Noh, the complexity of *Madame de Sade* also lies in the logical lucidity with which Mishima tried to emulate Greek tragedy.[33] The dramatic ethos stems from his belief in Sade's commitment to an untamable and apparently instinctual disposition toward violence.[34] Being also familiar with *Justine*, *Juliette* (1797), and *The 120 Days of Sodom* (1785), translated by Shibusawa, Mishima articulates the extra-textual presence of Sade in *Madame de Sade*:

> サドは理性の信者であるが、同時に理性の兇暴な追及力を知っていた。彼はラクロなどの暗黒小説のひとしく、仮借ない理性の自然認識が、目の前のまさに地獄を開顕するのを眺めた。[…] サドの理性は、かくて十八世紀の啓蒙家の粗い網目をつき抜け、中世以来、永きにわたつて辱められてゐた自然の憤怒と復讐を理解したのである。サドが自然の衝動として理解する残虐性が、中世紀の反自然的なドグマが演じた拷問や刑罰の残虐と、いちいち符節を合してゐるやうに見えるのはこのためである。
>
> Whereas Sade was a believer in rationality, simultaneously, he knew its fierce power of pursuing [objectives]. Like other artists of darkness such as de Laclos, he observed, in front of his eyes, the hellish ruthlessness of reason's understanding of Nature. […] Sade's rationality evaded the rough grids of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers, and understood the indignation and revenge of Nature that had been devalued for a long time since the Middle Ages. This is why Sade considered human cruelty as the impulse of Nature corresponding to the brutality of tortures or punishments employed by the anti-natural dogma of the Middle Ages.[35]

Nonetheless, the focal point of the play is not Sade but Renée's excessive subjectivity. Within the span of nearly two decades, she invests all her resources including youth, confidence, and social reputation. She admits in the end that these efforts are wasted, and instead comes to terms with her inability to reach Sade's transcendental prodigy. Here, the most relevant theoretical strand Mishima engages with is Georges Bataille's theory of entropy. Renée attains her own sovereign realm, wilfully escaping instrumentalized labour and the productive consumption of resources. In this regard, sovereignty denotes a subjectivity that remains indifferent to rationality and utility.[36] According to this perspective, unlike a mode of consumption geared toward a concrete purpose or goal, a sovereign subject expounds on subjective volition, and comes to understand the world phenomenologically, rather than as a 'thing' with a 'utility'.[37]

This is not arbitrary rhetoric; it resonates with fin-de-siècle decadence. As Nicoletta Pireddu observes,

> the decadent pleasure of the ephemeral and the transformation of beauty as expenditure and gratuitousness are founded upon the principle of unconditional loss informing those primitive or archaic practices that inspire the nascent discourse on symbolic economy to reject instrumentality in life and in representation.[38]

Long before he composed *Madame de Sade*, Mishima was already familiar with Bataille's work, and had been placing the notion of entropic consumption at the very heart of his aesthetics.[39] Renée's final resolution in rejecting Sade belongs to the same symbolic economy, precisely because of her

wasteful expenditure of resources in having defended and supported Sade for so long. Waste, then, constitutes *Madame de Sade*'s most significant thematic focus as a decadent play, just as it underpins the play's dramaturgy. As Tanaka Miyoko observes, the play dramatizes the process of Renée's self-discovery, up to the point at which she identifies herself with Sade despite the obloquy she needs to endure.[40] This plays into *Madame de Sade*'s cultivation of a new terrain of decadence by means of the titular protagonist's vigorous subjectivity, journeying from unceasing devotion to its wastage. Moreover, the emotive dimension that the audience witnesses in Renée's restlessness produces an uneasy, devastating revelation; to borrow from Mishima, Sade ultimately emerges as one whose acceptance of humanity is both total and unconditional, traversing all human institutions – including art.[41] What Renée receives in return, by virtue of his excessive individualism and the didactic violence inflicted on her body and mind, is an ecstatic realization of the unattainability of Sade.

On the one hand, underscored by her unconditional faithfulness to her husband, Renée can be seen to embody the role of a docile wife moulded in accordance with patriarchal convention. Her traits correspond strongly with the ideal profile of women propagated by the Meiji Restoration as well as modern Japan.[42] However, on the other hand, her role in *Madame de Sade* departs from the social expectations of the time, and implicitly corresponds with the fin-de-siécle *femme fatale* akin to Wilde's *Salomé*. The difference is that in 1960 and 1971 (posthumously with the support of Wakuta Shigeo), Mishima and NLT consciously avoided a production of mass spectacle, unlike the first performance of *Salomé* directed by *Geijyutsuza*'s (Art Theatre) Shimamura Hōgetsu in 1913[43] that sensationally featured the quasi-bare body of actress Matsui Sumako, which played to the audience's voyeuristic gaze.[44] This valence of visual femininity and literary objectiveness becomes irrelevant in *Madame de Sade*. Renée's persona and beliefs rely on the articulation and metaphysical construction of her subjectivity.[45] Although the stage production employed opulent eighteenth-century dresses that consist of a low-necked gown worn over a petticoat and head ornaments, visual splendour played a secondary role. The stage sets were also kept minimal in

order to place extra emphasis on 'the collisions of ideas [that] constitute the drama as if they form a mathematical scheme in precision'.[46]

Given all of these theatrical stratagems, *Madame de Sade* was surely an attempt to advance the avant-garde when it premiered in 1965. As explored over the course of this article, Mishima's alliance with fin-de-siècle decadence plays a vital role in the play at a nuanced, semantic level. Rendered mainly in the script, imaginative excess and passion unravels in the abstract. Also, through the structural logic of his narrative, Mishima looks to furnish his audiences with the play's central concern – why Renée decides to leave Sade after nearly two decades of forced separation. As I have argued throughout this article, although *Madame de Sade* might be read as little more than a spectacular costume play displaying Mishima's theatrical palate for visual splendour, there is much more at stake in this decadent work once it is read in light of its European forebears, as well as Sade's own work – newly translated by Shibusawa Tatsuhiko's at the time[47] – and indeed Mishima's own creative and political trajectory in Japan as the course and fate of the NLT evolved. All of these elements contribute to multiple aspects of the play's decadence, then, and not just with regard to its thematic concern with aristocratic decline and epochal change; what makes *Madame de Sade* so compelling as a decadent play is the unattainability of the Marquis' vices for Renée, which are displaced in favour of an imaginative decadent hinterland all of her own: a devotee turned *femme fatale*, whose poetic excesses and 'wasting' of her own subservient devotion underpin both her final act of refusal, and the conditions for her own sovereignty.

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[1] The theatrical company Gekidan NLT was launched in 1964 by writers, playwrights, actors, and producers including Mishima Yukio, Yashiro Seiichi, Kahara Natsuko, and Tan'ami Yatsuko. Later the company was split into two streams that focused on Mishima's work and comedy. As a result, Mishima left NLT and established *Rōman Gekijyō* [the Romantic Theatre], which took over the production of his *Madame de Sade*, *My Friend Hitler*, *The Decline and Fall of Suzaku*, and so forth. In 1971, after Mishima's suicide the previous year, the Romantic Theatre presented Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* as an homage to Mishima.

[2] New Drama thematically tended to cultivate proletarian interests, and later developed an offshoot of existentialist surrealism as represented by novelist/playwright Abe Kōbō (1924-1993). However, Mishima departed from the New Drama of the 1960s due to its increasing political inclination to leftism.

[3] Mikolaj Melanowicz, 'The Power of Illusion: Mishima Yukio and *Madame de Sade*', *Japan Review*, 3 (1992), 1–13 (pp. 3–4).

[4] Muramatsu Takeshi, *Mishima Yukio no sekai* [*The World of Mishima Yukio*] (Tokyo: Shinchō, 1990), pp. 411–17.

[5] Matsumoto Shinko, 'Osanai Kaoru's Views on Russian Theatre', in *A Hidden Fire: Russian and Japanese Cultural Encounters, 1868-1926*, ed. by Thomas J. Rimer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 68–83 (p. 69).
[6] Mishima Yukio, 'On Oscar Wilde', *The Wildean*, 43 (2015), 38–48 (p. 52).
[7] Cited by Ōkubo Norio, 'Hen'nentai: Hyōden Mishima Yukio' ['The Chronicle of Critical Biography of Mishima Yukio'], in *Bessatsu Kokubungaku: Mishima Yukio Hikkei*, ed. by Miyoshi Yukio (Tokyo: Gakutō, 1983), pp. 183–211 (p. 210).
[8] Mishima Yukio, 'N•L•T no mirai-zu' ['The Future Picture of NLT'], in *Mishima Yuko zenshū*, 34 vols (Tokyo: Shinchō, 2000), XXXIV, p. 242.
[9] Mishima, 'On Oscar Wilde', p. 55.
[10] Mishima, 'The Future Picture of NLT', p. 242.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., p. 243. Mishima spells out the French word '*volupté*' in Japanese katakana.
[13] See, for instance, Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, 'Mishima Yukio to dekadansu' ['Mishima Yukio and Decadence'], in *Mishima Yukio oboegaki* [*Memoirs of Mishima Yukio*] (Tokyo: Chūkō, 1986), p. 59.
[14] The decadent temperament has stirred academic debates and views regarding various historical ages. Here, I borrow a Judeo-Christian view of decadence as noted by Matei Calinescu, as it coheres with an eschatological worldview underlying Mishima's *Madame de Sade*. According to Calinescu, its decadent temperament manifests itself in 'restlessness and a need for self-examination, for agonizing commitments and momentous renunciations'. See Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism Avant-Garde Decadence Kitsch Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 154.
[15] Ibid., pp. 59–61.
[16] Ibid., p. 61.
[17] Ibid., p. 60. Cited by Shibusawa, Mishima Yukio. My translation.
[18] Calinescu, p. 154.
[19] Mishima Yukio, *Madame de Sade*, trans. by Donald Keene (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 5. All other references to this text are cited inline.
[20] The representation of Montreuil is fictionally modified and designed for the dramatic tension. In reality, she conspired to imprison her son-in-law Sade to mitigate the disgrace he caused for the family. According to Ronald Hayman, she was 'like a Machiavellian politician' who shrewdly manoeuvred to take control over and take advantage of the demeaned family affairs. See Ronald Hayman, *Marquis de Sade: The Genius of Passion* (London: Tauris Parke, 2003), p. 40.
[21] Marco Menin, 'Sade's Ethics of Emotional Restraint: Aline et Valcour Midway between Sentimentality and Apathy', *Philosophy and Literature*, 40.2 (2016), 366–82 (p. 366).
[22] Mishima, 'Author's Postface', in *Madame de Sade*, p. 107.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Shibusawa, *Memoirs of Mishima Yukio*, p. 119.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Shibusawa, *Biblioteca Shibusawa Tatsuhiko*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Hakusui, 1979), p. 272. Joris-Karl Huysmans cited by Shibusawa. The source is not mentioned.
[27] Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. by George L. Mosse (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 243–45.
[28] Ibid., p. 244.
[29] Hashimoto Osamu, *'Mishima Yukio' towa nanimono dattanoka* [*Who was 'Mishima Yukio'?*] (Tokyo: Shinchō, 2002), p. 292.
[30] Mishima's modernized form of Noh Drama in *Kindai nōgaku shū* (1956) includes eight plays including 'Kantan' ['The Town of Kantan'], 'Aya no tsuzumi' ['The Damask Drum'], and 'Sotoba komachi' ['Komachi at the Stupa']. (Donald Keen's translated edition includes only five plays). All the plays in the collection are set in contemporary Japan and shaped in satiric pastiche of the original medieval Noh scripts. The overriding tone of Mishima's modern Noh drama is ludic, mundane, and even vulgar to some extent. In contrast, *Madame de Sade* emulates the structural convention and narrative efficacy prevalent in medieval Noh plays.
[31] Konparu Kunio, *Nō e no sasoi: jo-ha-kyū to ma no saiensu* [*An Invitation to Noh: The Science of jo-ha-kyū and Pause*] (Kyoto: Tankō, 1980), p. 36.
[32] Shibusawa, *Memoirs of Mishima Yukio*, p. 118. Shibusawa points out that the logic running through *Madame de Sade* is a dialectic that begins with '*innocence*', goes through '*monstruosité*', and arrives at '*sainteté*'. While these three stages concern the images of Sade in the other characters' perception, my discussion sheds light on Renée's transformation. According to Shibusawa, her realization that she is Justine created by Sade triggers her 'transcendence' as shown in her rejection of him after nearly two decades of separation.
[33] Saeki Shōichi, *Monogatari geijyutsu ron* [*On Art of Narrative*] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1979), pp. 88–89.
[34] Sadoya Shigenobu, *Mishima Yukio ni okeru seiyō* [*The West in Mishima Yukio*] (Tokyo: Tokyō Shoseki, 1981), p. 157.
[35] Mishima Yukio, cited by Sadoya, p. 157. My translation.
[36] Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vols 1 and 2, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1993), p. 199.
[37] Ibid., p. 233. Bataille contends that eroticism is also fundamentally an inner experience of human beings. See *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. by Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986), p. 29.

[38] Nicoletta Pireddu, 'Handing Out Beauty: Gabriele D'Annunzio's Ritual Squanderers', *Forum Italicum*, 51.2 (2017), 413–31 (p. 415).
[39] Mishima's numerous novels, novellas, and plays endorse the notion of symbolic economy. In particular, his decadent literary works such as *Forbidden Colors* (1951) and the tetralogy *The Sea of Fertility* (1965-1970) engage with the thematic treatment of narrative. It is known that Mishima had access to Bataille's *Eroticism* in Muro Junsuke's translation, which he severely criticized for the quality. Later Shibusawa Tatsuhiko and Sakai Ken also translated the book.
[40] Tanaka Miyoko, *Mishima Yukio: Kami no kage bōshi* [*Mishima Yukio: the Shadow of God*] (Tokyo: Shinchō, 2006), pp. 236–37.
[41] Mishima Yukio, 'Junan no Sado' ['Sado's Passion'], in *Mishima Yukio zenshū*, vol. 33, p. 417.
[42] Ayako Kano, *Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 55. The Meiji ideal of 'good wife, wise mother' did not reflect the majority of Japanese women's social status. The ideal was institutionalized in the 1890s not to reduce women into a gendered role but to recognize the importance of women whose social position used to be considered by Confucianism as 'borrowed wombs'.
[43] Imura Kimie, *Sarome no henyō* [*The Transformation of Salomé*] (Tokyo: Shinshokan, 1990), p. 94.
[44] Kano, pp. 224–25.
[45] In reality, Renée-Pélagie was deeply concerned about the effect of Sade's imprisonment on their children. See Hayman, p. 110.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Shibusawa Tatsuhiko's publications on Sade include the books *Sado fukkatsu: Jiyū to hankō seishin no senkusha* [*Sade Resurrects: The Pioneer of Liberty and Spiritual Rebel*] (Tokyo: Kūbundō, 1959) and *Sado kōshaku no shōgai: rōgoku bungakusha wa ikanishite tanjyō shitaka* [*The Life of Marquis de Sade: How the Imprisoned Literatus Was Born*] (Saitama: Tōgen, 1965).