

# **The Bedroom Philosophers Study Guide**

## **The Bedroom Philosophers by Marquis de Sade**

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# Plot Summary

The *Bedroom Philosophers* by Marquis de Sade is a simple narrative told over the course of seven dialogues. It tells the story of a group of libertines living in the wake of the French Revolution. Over the course of a day, they completely corrupt a young girl and abuse her prudish mother.

The narrative of the book begins in the anteroom of Madame de Saint-Ange, a proudly lascivious woman. She sits with her brother and lover Chevalier de Mirvel. He has invited notorious libertine and sodomite Dolmance over for the day. Madame is excited by this prospect since her seventeen-year-old ward Eugenie is coming over. Eugenie's libertine father wants her trained in sexual perversion for his own incestuous purposes.

Over the next several dialogues, Madame de Saint-Ange and Dolmance instruct the young Eugenie in the tenets of libertinage. These include such simple points as anal sex being invariably preferable to vaginal and avoiding conception at all costs. The instruction also skews to the philosophical. Dolmance assures Eugenie that sexual gratification is the only reasonable pursuit for a modern woman, that virtue and vice do not exist, and the any means are permissible in the search of greater pleasure. He extols her to emulate nature, which creates and destroys in equal measure without ever questioning the ethics of this destruction.

Chevalier and the massively endowed servant Augustin proceed to deflower Eugenie under the careful instruction of Dolmance. The boudoir becomes the setting of large orgy with the players coupling and re-coupling and Dolmance routinely whipping the participants.

Over the course of this orgy, Dolmance give the Chevalier de Mirvel a pamphlet to read to the assembled group. This pamphlet, written by an unnamed revolutionary, concerns the moral position of the French Republic. It decries the Christian god as a tool of oppressors and calls for the abolition of laws that hamper individual liberties. These include laws regarding slander, theft, incest, rape, murder, and suicide.

At the end of *The Bedroom Philosophers*, Eugenie's prudish mother, Madame de Mistival, interrupts the orgy and demands her daughters return home. Dolmance responds by whipping the woman and having her gang-raped. Lastly, he has his syphilitic servant Lapierre infect her with his semen and sews shut her vagina and anus with a needle and thread.

*The Bedroom Philosophers*, a pornographic text, can be viewed as Sade's personal indictment of a puritanical post-Revolutionary France. It can also be read as satire, alternately lampooning the excesses of the deposed aristocracy and the bourgeois stuffiness of the Revolutionary class.



# To the Libertines, First Dialogue, Second Dialogue Synopsis

## To the Libertines, First Dialogue, Second Dialogue Synopsis Summary and Analysis

The Bedroom Philosophers is a pornographic work written by the Marquis de Sade in 1795, during the Reign of Terror in revolutionary France. A work intended primarily to titillate, the piece also offers a compelling view into the fiercely individualist mind of the French aristocrat in the midst of social reorganization.

In To the Libertines - an introduction - the author extols his readers to emulate the characters of The Bedroom Philosophers. He tells all experienced women should be like Madame de Saint-Ange, all girls should learn like Eugenie, and all profligate lovers should be as ravenous as Dolmance.

The First Dialogue is between the libertine Madame de Saint-Ange and her incestuous brother Chevalier de Mirvel. They await the arrival of Dolmance, a notorious libertine and sodomite. Dolmance is famous for his extravagant personality, fierce atheism, and preference for anal intercourse. He is clearly a stand-in for the Marquis de Sade. Whereas Madame de Saint-Ange and the Chevalier are active libertines, Dolmance is a philosopher. Throughout the work, he elucidates the central virtues of the libertine lifestyle, with the assistance of the other two: individualism, cruelty, extravagance, and sacrilege. Chevalier frames Dolmance's entrance by relating a story in which he engaged in anal sex with Dolmance and another unnamed Marquis. The reader has a taste of what to expect.

In the Second Dialogue, the reader is introduced to his surrogate, Eugenie. Largely an innocent, she has come to Madame de Saint-Ange's boudoir to learn the ways of physical pleasure. The inclusion of the vicious Dolmance and the unusually well-endowed Chevalier is meant to give her—and us—a full immersion into the perversions of the libertine lifestyle.



# Third Dialogue, Part One

## Third Dialogue, Part One Summary and Analysis

The Third Dialogue is the first extended session of debauchery in the *Bedroom Philosophers*. Madame de Saint-Ange and Eugenie enter the boudoir and discover Dolmance waiting for them. Eugenie is livid, accusing Madame of arranging this outrage. Dolmance convinces the young girl to forgo her affectations of modesty and begins to kiss her.

What follows sets up the pattern of the rest of the book. The libertines arrange themselves into various positions of copulation. After their orgasmic revelry subsides, Dolmance, with the assistance of Madame de Saint, expound on the philosophy underlying the libertine lifestyle.

The sex in this section of entirely is the masturbatory, fellatio, and cunnilingus variety, and establishes some hallmarks of the de Sade aesthetic—primarily that anal sex is invariably preferable to vaginal intercourse. This is the opinion of both genders in the book. The *Bedroom Philosophers*, unsparingly vivid in its sexual details, becomes downright goofy in the moments of orgasm, when characters explode into oddly worded phrases such as, "God damn it! Oh, how I love to be a whore when my sperm ejaculates like that! It's over! I can't anymore!..." (22).

After Eugenie orgasms, Madame de Saint-Ange and Dolmance explain to her the mechanics of conception. This explanation reflects a certain amount of imperfect science (a woman's vaginal secretions are mentioned as the operative feminine component to conception) and a significant amount of misogyny. Dolmance and Madame indicate that the importance of semen in conception means that children inherently love their fathers more.

Madame de Saint-Ange explains to Eugenie the importance of being a "whore," concerned exclusively with personal pleasure. Eugenie wonders aloud if this is more important than virtue. Dolmance scoffs, saying that no person owes fidelity to any other person on earth. He states that God is a human creation, invented to calm the confused masses. Dolmance explains that a God that created all existence has no logical reason to care for its survival. Indeed, much of the biblical god's work is sinister and vile, leading to death and destruction. Dolmance dissects the life of Christ and concludes that the man's biography is absurd and unlikely, that the development of the Christian cult was simply a continuation of earlier pagan cults under a new name. Eugenie is convinced and forswears religion.

Eugenie then asks Dolmance if religion might have a practical purpose as a means of engendering good will in humanity. He responds that charity and good will are useless gestures. It makes the poor complacent and lazy. If they were to face starvation, they would learn to work or perish, reducing the population. This Scrooge-like proclamation



gives certain credence to the notion that *The Bedroom Philosophers* is intended as satire. As the narrative continues, Dolmance will advocate a variety of absurdly destructive means for experiencing pleasure. could clearly be a reflection of aristocratic crimes in the days before the Revolution, which after all, freed the Marquis de Sade from the Bastille.



# Third Dialogue, Part Two

## Third Dialogue, Part Two Summary and Analysis

After excoriating the idea of charity, Dolmance turn his focus to the idea of virtue in general. What follows is an argument regarding moral relativism. Dolmance claims that since one culture's vice is another's virtue, and vice versa, the pursuit of so-called virtue in any culture is a fool's errand. He narrows his criticism to parental to parental autocracy over young women, scoffing at the notion that a girl need be protected from an amorous lifestyle. On the contrary, the pursuit of sexual pleasure is the most vital pursuit a young woman can undertake. Dolmance recommends Eugenie find a female friend who can be her conspirator in prostituting herself.

At this point, Madame de Saint-Ange takes over the lesson. She numerates for Eugenie the means by which a woman can enjoy thousands of lovers. The most basic precaution, she says, is for said woman to regularly have sex with her husband. Thus, if one of her lovers impregnates her, the husband can believe the child is his. Madame offers the sad caveat that some husbands are impotent, and in such cases the wife must ask his consent that she take lovers and deceive him if he denies her. She describes her own elderly libertine husband, whose proclivities run to the fecal and encourages her to take many lovers.

Madame goes on to advocate for prostitution saying that quick anonymous sex is the safest option for a married woman. She also recommends that adulteresses engage in anal sex, which has no risk of pregnancy. She also mentions employing the hand, mouth, armpit, and breasts in order to avoid conception. She enumerates options of contraception, from sponges to condoms. This dialogue paints a portrait of the sort of free-love empowerment extolled in the sixties: women reacting resolutely against the caged-bird status of their age. Whether they are also objectified and degraded by these sexual forays is a concern for the critical reader.

At the end of this section, Dolmance offers a defense of incest. He argues that Noah and Adam relied on it for the propagation of the species, but he proceeds to describe libertine friends who have engendered their own grandchildren and proceeded to seduce them. He invokes nature, that inherently destructive force, as a guiding influence. Nature kills and maims without a second thought. The libertine, as an acolyte of nature, must never concern himself with the laws decrying sodomy, incest, rape, even murder.

This invocation of nature is core to Dolmance's, and thus Sade's, philosophy. Religion and the vast majority of human laws are pathetic attempts to constrain the natural impulse to copulate and derive pleasure. To follow these false tenets is a mistake.



# Third Dialogue, Part Three

## Third Dialogue, Part Three Summary and Analysis

At the beginning of this section, Dolmance admits to having murdered someone in order to achieve personal pleasure. He and Madame de Saint-Ange ask Eugenie if she has ever desired the murder of another person. She readily admits she wanted to murder her mother, and the two libertine instructors promise to help her in this enterprise.

Next, Dolmance arranges a sexual arrangement in which he performs cunnilingus on Eugenie and anal intercourse on Madame de Saint-Ange. This passage is typical of all copulation passages in the text, which invariably begin with a character, usually Dolmance, issuing detailed instructions for a tableaux followed by general shouts of revelry from the group as the tableaux is enacted. Also, customarily Eugenie begins the process with shouts of pain that transition into encouragements and orgasmic squeals.

After the revelry subsides, Eugenie immediately returns to the plan of murdering her mother. Madame de Saint-Ange is shocked by her sudden ruthlessness, but Dolmance interjects that no child owes fidelity to her mother. He suggests she become particularly close to her mother in the coming days to make the murder easier to carry out, which leads him to expound on the necessity of fraud in society. Deceit invariably leads to success ahead of virtue, though the appearance of virtue is helpful. In this regard, false virtue is a finer asset than actual virtue.

Dolmance then counsels Eugenie on the best practices of sodomy, covering ground from positions to diet to hygiene. For Sade and Dolmance, anal intercourse is something akin to a spiritual rite. If the argument of *The Bedroom Philosophers* is that personal sexual gratification is the highest calling of any thinking individual, then sodomy - characterized as it is as the most fulfilling of sexual acts - is the most profound expression of this goal.

Madame de Saint-Ange counsels Eugenie on how to deal with unwanted pregnancies. She argues that in addition to abortion infanticide is also permissible. She has twice killed her own children.

Dolmance concludes this philosophical discussion by broaching two subjects that invariably delight the libertine: blasphemy and cruelty. For the libertine, defaming religion is a means destroying the false idols of a complacent society. This reflects the essential philosophy of the Marquis de Sade, which is one iconoclasm. Only with this as a driving tenet can he like sodomy, casual murder, heresy, and the social upheaval of the Revolution. Sade is neither a conservative nor a progressive, but rather contrarian. He longs for the destruction of social conventions.

As concerns cruelty, Dolmance cites numerous historical figures from Tiberius to Zigua of Angola to Madame Voisin, all of whom committed murder for the simple pleasure of





doing it. He argues that women have a far greater capacity for cruelty than men, in part because of their allure and power over men. As the Third Dialogue ends, Eugenie performs fellatio on Dolmance while Madame de Saint-Ange plays with his anus. As they finish, the Chevalier de Mirvel knocks on the boudoir door.



# Fourth Dialogue

## Fourth Dialogue Summary and Analysis

The Chevalier de Mirvel enters at the beginning of the Fourth Dialogue. Eugenie is shocked that Dolmance and Madame de Saint-Ange want to include him in her education. Dolmance uses the Chevalier to demonstrate ejaculation to Eugenie. Masturbating the Chevalier, he explains the process to Eugenie, who is terrified by the enormity of the penis. Dolmance assures her that she can withstand its immensity. To Madam's mind, a woman must begin her sexual exploits with the largest penis possible and work her way up to as many simultaneous penises as possible. She has a standing wager to reward any person who can engage her in a perversion she has not known before.

After the Chevalier orgasms, he proceeds to have sex with his sister while Eugenie penetrates Dolmance with a dildo. At the end of the Fourth Dialogue, Dolmance demands that Madame de Saint-Ange call her servant Augustin into the boudoir. Augustin is endowed with a gargantuan penis. As Madame calls her servant, Dolmance and the Chevalier argue whether vaginal or anal intercourse is more pleasurable.



# Fifth Dialogue, Part One

## Fifth Dialogue, Part One Summary and Analysis

With the introduction of Augustin at the beginning of the Fifth Dialogue, *The Bedroom Philosophers* takes on a similar cadence to the beginning of the Third Dialogue, with copulation intermingling with libertine dogma. Augustin is initially hesitant to ravish a high-born girl, but Dolmance convinces him that humanity was placed on earth to copulate. Augustin is clearly less educated than the others and seems utterly adrift as he is commanded by Dolmance.

A series of couplings culminates in a complete inundation of Madame de Saint-Ange involving Dolmance, Augustin, and the Chevalier. Triumphant, she proclaims, "See everything I perpetrate at once: scandal, seduction, bad role model, incest, adultery, sodomy!" (82). This reflects the overall development of *The Bedroom Philosophers*. Like the actions that comprise the narrative, the writing is a long series of one-upping. The central and collective objective of these figures is to defile all that is considered mainstream.

Dolmance expounds on the notion of vice, which he declares to be a false construct. He declares that nature, the sole arbiter of the world, is not concerned with judging its own machinations. It creates and it destroys: this is equilibrium. If a person chooses to copulate and not procreate, this is in keeping with nature's ultimate ends.

In this tirade Dolmance is expressing an essential tenet in the Sade canon: humanity is not the pinnacle of nature. Sade asked in his will that he be buried in an unmarked grave so that his memory might pass into nothing. Just the same, he believes life and death was utterly meaningless. The world, Dolmance states, would continue as it is if humanity dies out entirely. If procreation is meaningless, then sperm is not some holy commodity in the eye of nature; so, sodomy cannot be immoral. This, it turns out, is Dolmance's essential argument. Responding, Eugenie insists that some man at last sodomize her, and the task falls to the Chevalier.

As is often the case in Sade, there is a transition from sexual fluid to blood in the coital escalation. In this section of the Fifth Dialogue, Dolmance proceeds to whip Eugenie's buttocks until he draws blood. Though she is in agony, Dolmance proceeds to insert the Chevalier's penis into her bowels. Her shrieks of pain eventually subside to groans of pleasure, another common Sade device that intermingles acute pain and profound enjoyment.



# Fifth Dialogue, Part Two

## Fifth Dialogue, Part Two Summary and Analysis

Following her first foray into anal sex, Eugenie declares that she no longer believes such a thing as a crime exists. Dolmance concurs with her, stating that anything that has a purpose cannot be a crime. This connection of usefulness to permissibility will be expounded in great detail in the pamphlet soon to be read by Chevalier.

Dolmance, at this point, argues that the true crime of humanity is the false sense of brotherhood that causes people to make ridiculous choices. He demolishes these forms of fidelity, one at a time. Firstly, he decries the institution of marriage on libertarian grounds. In his mind, marriage is merely a form of bondage for those involved, denying them pleasures they rightly should pursue. The only useful union of two people, he believes, is that momentary union of coitus. The bond of love - even love without marriage - pointlessly muddles this advantageous arrangement. Lovers sigh and lament their love; libertines rejoice. Lastly, Dolmance addresses friendship, which he declares only to be permissible when useful.

Eugenie marvels that laws that constrain happiness even exist, and Dolmance declares what he - and Sade through him - views as the essential failing of laws. Laws are written for the collective populace, and true individuals like libertines live in a world that hates any constraint. In the end, laws are actually a crime against the individual. Eugenie, hearing this, once again states her desire to murder someone, preferably her mother.

In the final pages of this section, Chevalier and Augustin, alternating, finally break Eugenie's hymen. Dolmance, having forsworn the vagina, has Madame de Saint-Ange penetrate him with a dildo. After this is finished, everyone is so exhausted that they settle down for some stimulating conversation. Prompted on the topic of laws and morality by Eugenie, Dolmance produces a pamphlet he recently procured: "Frenchmen, Some More Effort if You Wish to Become Republicans." Chevalier begins to read it aloud.



# Fifth Dialogue, Part Three

## Fifth Dialogue, Part Three Summary and Analysis

"Frenchmen, Some More Effort if You Wish to Become Republicans" begins with a simple proposal under the subheading Religion. The unnamed author proposes that a new religion, based upon the Olympic gods of Greece, be established for the new French Republic. His reasoning is simple. The simple Christian god that monarchical France had before the Revolution required only one thing of its followers: obedience. To the author's mind, this Christian god is a construct of oppressors who choose its edicts as a way of subjugating the people. The Olympians, on the other hand, have human traits and yearnings. Romans and Greeks that honored them did so with acts of valor, cunning, and seduction, not mere prostration. At the close of the Religion section of the pamphlet, the author warns Frenchmen everywhere that the loss of their newly-won rights will come with the reintroduction of the Christian god.

The second and markedly longer section of the pamphlet is entitled Morals, and it deals with the purpose of moral regulation in the French Republic. The author intends to determine what social legislation is needed to ensure the common good. As such, he divides his examination into laws to ensure duty to God, Fellow Man, and Self.

Clearly, based upon the Religion section of the pamphlet, the author does not believe the state should have laws that legislate duty to God. He moves on immediately to the thorny exploration of Fellow Man. Surely laws primarily exist to ensure the common safety of all, but the author proceeds, crime by crime, to explain that virtually no act is truly detrimental to society. For example, slander forces individuals to prove their ethical rectitude in the public sphere. Theft promotes vigilance and reassigns wealth so that each man has enough.

The Author speaks at length about rape, incest, and sodomy, which he determines are merely a form of egalitarian expression. He recommends the opening of public brothels where men and women can force themselves upon each other. He determines that the only true crime surrounding sexuality is marriage. Marriage, he states, is a form of slavery in which individuals become commodities for trade. He advocates to dissolution of marriage, so that all children born in France become the children of the Republic, to which they owe their only fidelity.

Lastly in exploring laws that regulate man's duty to fellow man, the Author explores murder. He argues that murder has, in fact, been instrumental in the creation of the French republic and is an essential political tool. If there is no god, it cannot, then, be an inherently evil act. Nature promotes it as a means for controlling the population, and in the author's mind murder is a naturally regulated phenomenon. Human beings only murder each other in extreme circumstances because they understand the ramifications of the choice. A man who commits murder understands that likelihood of being

murdered himself. This is justification enough for the author to say that the death penalty is a redundant punishment for the murderer.

This exploration of murder marks the conclusion of the Author's critique of laws governing man's duty to fellow man. He finally explores man's duty to self, which he argues is an individual right. If one wants rid of life, one should be allowed to commit suicide. The Author cites historical precedent for the State's advocating of suicide as a useful public institution.

The author concludes his pamphlet by rallying the reader to enact these measures abandoning religion and needless laws as soon as possible, warning that the end of the Republican experiment is fast approaching if this is not done. France is at war and cannot win unless it prove itself a beacon of new Reason, a light in the midst of vile peoples.



# Fifth Dialogue, Part Four

## Fifth Dialogue, Part Four Summary and Analysis

After the Chevalier finishes reading the pamphlet, Eugenie and Dolmance comment on how truly sound the arguments are. Dolmance once again states that charity and kindness are idiotic weaknesses, eliciting a surprising response from the Chevalier. The Chevalier, in a fit of righteous indignation, proclaims that Dolmance's hatred of charity is the product of his exorbitant wealth. If Dolmance had ever worked in his life, he would not speak so ill of the poor. Dolmance fires back, stating that Chevalier is young and naïve, and Eugenie contends that Chevalier's only use is his enormous penis. This interchange reflects something uncommon in Sade's writing: character development. Surely, Eugenie's transition from sweet maid of shameless libertine is a central transition, but the Chevalier de Mirvel's sudden advocating of charity in the face of virulent individualist philosophy is an unexpected revelation. Momentarily, Sade's raunchy fantasia takes on the aura of a genuine civic debate.

Following his rebuke of the Chevalier, Dolmance explains how the libertine aesthetic demands that man be as vulgar as possible in his sexual conquest, for any man with the will to take pleasure for himself must do so boldly and without reservation.

The Dialogue ends with Augustin - who was sent from the room while the pamphlet was read - being called back in for Dolmance's benefit. As Dolmance has anal sex with Augustin, Madame de Saint-Ange farts in his face. Clearly, the activities of these libertines' activities are reaching an apex of stomach-churning detail. After they finish, Dolmance takes Augustin into the next room for an activity that is so detestable that even he, Dolmance, won't describe it aloud. This demure moment is oddly glib coming from one of Sade's creations.



# Sixth Dialogue, Seventh and Final Dialogue

## Sixth Dialogue, Seventh and Final Dialogue Summary and Analysis

The final two dialogues of *The Bedroom Philosophers* deal with the arrival and abuse of Eugenie's mother, Madame de Mistival. In Dolmance's absence in the Sixth Dialogue a furious knocking is heard on the boudoir door. Madame de Saint-Ange discovers a missive from Eugenie's father warning the libertines of Madame de Mistival's imminent arrival. He gives them permission to punish her as they see fit and comments that he intends to enjoy the fruits of Eugenie's education. As Dolmance returns to the boudoir with Augustin, the stage seems to be set for Madame de Mistival's death.

When at last Madame de Mistival enters in the Seventh and Final Dialogue, she is shocked by what she sees and demands that Eugenie return home. Eugenie curses her in disgusting terms. She has clearly transformed into a formidable libertine, free of speech and unflinching in her self-serving intentions.

Dolmance spearheads the abuse that follows. He orders Augustin to strip Madame de Mistival and whips her buttocks, already bruised from an earlier beating by her husband. As he beats her, he lectures on the folly of her attempts to control her daughter. Next, Madame de Mistival is sodomized by Augustin, the Chevalier de Mirvel, Dolmance, and even Eugenie with a dildo. She passes out, and Dolmance reviles her by beating her with a thorny switch.

After Madame de Mistival awakes, the libertines hold an impromptu tribunal. Despite so lax protest by the ineffectual Chavalier, Dolmance concocts a sentence for her. She is raped by Lapierre, Dolmance's syphilitic manservant. Having been infected by syphilis, Madame de Mistival's vagina and anal sphincter are sewed shut by Dolmance and Eugenie. Utterly destroyed, she is then taken back to her husband by the Chevalier. Following this horrific spectacle, Dolmance cheerfully suggests to the women that they have dinner and get some sleep. The downright domestic denouement is borderline hilarious when juxtaposed with the terror that preceded it.

As a whole, *The Bedroom Philosophers* can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly - and with either the benefit or detriment of historical distance - one can understand it as satire, lampooning the excesses of the deposed aristocracy and the alternating morals and orgiastic fervor of the bourgeois revolution. In this interpretation, the text takes on the kind of Juvenilian air of Voltaire's *Candide*, pulling no punches in the endeavor or social commentary. This is perhaps a more comforting view for the modern reader, expunging the text of much of its horrific qualities, like its advocacy for incest, rape, and murder.



Still, the Marquis de Sade was an aristocrat turned citizen. He was a survivor, though he spend much of his life in prisons and asylums for his writings and various sodomy convictions. This would begrudgingly lead the reader to the alternate interpretation: that the author meant what he wrote. In all likelihood, Sade never sewed up a woman's vagina or murdered someone for a sexual thrill, but he viewed the society that persecuted him as hopelessly puritanical. His flippant, disgusting, pornographic text is a shout against this persecution.



# Characters

## Dolmance

Dolmance is the renowned libertine and sodomite who serves as a surrogate for the Marquis de Sade. He has the longest passages of philosophical expostulation throughout the book. Moreover, he is the ringmaster of the sexual acrobatics that comprise the action of *The Bedroom Philosopher*.

The Chevalier de Mirvel describes Dolmance as a brilliant, attractive, effeminate man. Dolmance rarely has sex with women and never has vaginal intercourse, but makes an exception in the case of Madame de Saint-Ange and Eugenie. Over the course of their adventures in the boudoir, Dolmance holds forth on a variety of subjects connected with libertinage. On the subject of sex, he contends that reception of anal intercourse is the best sexual experience a human can enjoy.

Philosophically, Dolmance detests religion and lionizes nature, which he contends requires equal parts creation and destruction. As such, he tells Eugenie that she is under no obligation to have a child. The world is overpopulated, and this issue means additionally that charity is not a virtue but a vice that keeps lazy creatures on the earth past any reasonable point. Above all, Dolmance contends that the greatest goal of any true philosopher is personal gratification. He states that one drop of philosophical sperm is worth a hundred lives. In this respect - and with an eye to nature and history - he advocates cruelty, incest, rape, and even murder. A misogynist, Dolmance explains why men will always be dominant over women. Even so, he encourages women to extricate themselves from the chains of marriage and live freely.

Functionally, Dolmance busies himself throughout *The Bedroom Philosophers* with the arranging of complex sexual arrangements intended to orientate Eugenie to the ways of sexual pleasure. He employs Madame de Saint-Ange, her brother the Chevalier, and her servant Augustin in these tableaux. At the end of the narrative, Dolmance masterminds Eugenie's revenge on her mother, directing her gang-rape, calling his syphilitic servant Lapierre to infect her, and assisting in the sewing up of her vagina and anus.

## Eugenie

Eugenie is the pupil of the philosophical discourses and sexual intermingling of *The Bedroom Philosophers*. A seventeen-year-old virgin at the beginning of the narrative, she is sent to Madame de Saint-Ange's boudoir by her libertine father over the objections of her mother. The most dynamic character of the story, Eugenie begins her sexual odyssey as an innocent surrogate for the reader and becomes the most cruel and lascivious of the libertines.



Eugenie is initially shocked to discover that her main tutor will be the notorious Dolmance, but she soon submits the oral and manual stimulation before later enjoying anal and vaginal intercourse with Augustin and the Chevalier de Mirvel. In the early passages of *The Bedroom Philosophers*, Eugenie is completely ignorant of the physical mechanics and social conventions of sex, which are described and demonstrated for her in excruciating detail. She holds a tenuous attachment to Christianity and charity, which Dolmance easily destroys with his libertine philosophy.

Eugenie loves her father - who intends an incestuous relationship with her - but detests her mother. Over the course of the narrative she resolves to murder her. When in the final dialogue Madame de Mistival arrives to drag Eugenie home, Eugenie spearheads her revenge with Dolmance. She beats her mother, sodomizes her with a dildo, and sews up her vagina and anus.

## Madame de Saint-Ange

Madame de Saint-Ange is the only character who is present for the entirety of *The Bedroom Philosophers*. The boudoir in question is hers, and she has taken the innocent Eugenie under her libertine wing at the request of Eugenie's father, one of Madame's lovers.

Madame de Saint-Ange is married to an older gentleman who allows her to take lovers as often as she likes so long as she regularly satisfies his fecal-sexual proclivities. She also regularly engages in sexual congress with her brother the Chevalier de Mirvel. It is the Chevalier who arranges for Dolmance's involvement in Eugenie's education.

Over the course of this education, Madame de Saint-Ange functions as a more pragmatic voice to Dolmance's high-minded philosophy. Whereas Dolmance cites historical precedent to justify the libertine lifestyle, Madame provides her young ward with a top-to-bottom primer in the mechanics of taking lovers. She explains the basics of the sexual act, explains the value of a husband in a libertine life, and goes through the rudiments of contraception. Madame de Saint-Ange gleefully admits to murdering her infant children and working at a brothel. Later, she brings her brother the Chevalier and her servant Augustin into the boudoir to assist in taking Eugenie's virginity.

## Chevalier de Mirvel

The Chevalier de Mirvel is the brother of Madame de Saint-Ange and one of Dolmance's lovers. He regularly has sex with his own sister, and it is Chevalier who convinces Dolmance to make an exception to his renunciation of women and come to Madame de Saint-Ange's boudoir. He is renowned for his unusually large penis.

The Chevalier enters into Eugenie's education midway through the process. Dolmance determines that the Chevalier's member is perfect for the breaking of Eugenie's hymen. Later, he uses his lilting speaking voice to give an extended reading of the pamphlet "Frenchmen, Some More Effort if You Wish to Become Republicans."



Near the end of *The Bedroom Philosophers*, Chevalier becomes a more dynamic character when he challenges the Dolmance's position on charity. The Chevalier argues that Dolmance's distaste for the poor is not a reflection of any high ideal but rather a reflection of the libertine's exorbitant wealth. Chevalier's opinion is uniformly shouted down by the other libertines. Later, he sues for Madame de Mistival's life but is again rebuffed by his compatriots. At the end of *The Bedroom Philosophers*, Dolmance orders the Chevalier to return the battered and syphilitic Madame de Mistival to her husband.

## Augustin

Augustin is Madame de Saint-Ange's servant and sometime lover. Unlike the Chevalier or Eugenie's father, however, Augustin is regarded by the other libertines less as a kindred soul than as a work-animal. Indeed, his main virtue for them is his thirteen-inch penis. Augustin services every other character in the book except the Chevalier. He is clearly dull and sent out of the room when the revolutionary pamphlet is read, lest he get ideas. At the end of the Fifth Dialogue, Dolmance leads Augustin out of the room for a sexual act so shocking it is only whispered in Madame de Saint-Ange's ear.

## Madame de Mistival

Madame de Mistival is Eugenie's mother. She tries desperately to shield her daughter from the seedier aspects of life despite her husband's efforts to the contrary. She only allows her daughter to visit Madame de Saint-Ange because her husband beats her into submission. Over the course of *The Bedroom Philosophers*, Eugenie resolves to murder her. In the Seventh and Final Dialogue, Madame de Mistival enters the scene to retrieve her daughter. Under the direction of Dolmance, the libertines beat and gang-rape Madame de Mistival. At the end of the book, Dolmance's syphilitic servant Lapierre rapes Madame de Mistival, and Dolmance and Eugenie sew closed her vagina and anus. Then, the Chevalier de Mirvel returns her to her husband.

## Lapierre

Lapierre is Dolmance's servant, who has syphilis. He enters briefly at the end of the Seventh and Final Dialogue to rape Madame de Mistival and infect her with syphilis.

## Eugenie's Father

Eugenie's father is often referenced in the text but never seen. He is a renowned libertine and one of Madame de Saint-Ange's lovers. He frequently beats his more prudish wife Madame de Mistival, and such a beating is the way he ensured Eugenie's arrival at the titular boudoir. Eugenie's father wants her daughter educated in the carnal art so that he can carry on an incestuous relationship with her. He sends a letter to Madame de Saint-Ange later, warning her that his wife is coming to pick up Eugenie and giving Madame and Dolmance permission to abuse her upon arrival.

## Unnamed Author of the Pamphlet

In the Fifth Dialogue, Dolmance produces a pamphlet entitled "Frenchmen, Some More Effort if You Wish to Become Republicans," which the Chevalier de Mirvel reads. The unnamed author of this pamphlet advocates the abolition of the Christian god and the institution of marriage. He argues that the Republican has no duty either to God, his fellow man, or himself. As such, blasphemy, rape, murder, incest, theft, and suicide are all permissible in the eyes of Republican Law. The unnamed author never appears in person in the boudoir.

### V.

V. is an anonymous aristocrat who engages in a homosexual threesome with the Chevalier de Mirvel and Dolmance on the day the latter two meet for the first time. V. never appears in person in the boudoir.



# Objects/Places

## The Boudoir

The boudoir is the setting for five of the seven dialogues in *The Bedroom Philosophers*. It belongs to Madame de Saint-Ange and serves as a staging area for the many sexual couplings and libertine lessons of the narrative. When Madame de Saint-Ange enters the boudoir with Eugenie, Dolmance is waiting there for them. Later, the Chevalier de Mirvel and the servant Augustin join them. At the end of the book, Madame de Mistival barges into the boudoir, where she is abused by the libertines.

## The Anteroom

The first two dialogues of *The Bedroom Philosophers* take place in the anteroom outside the boudoir. When the reader first meets Madame de Saint-Ange and Chevalier de Mirvel, they are discussing libertinage and Dolmance in particular. In the anteroom, Madame reveals her plans for Eugenie and receives the young girl.

## The Pamphlet

Dolmance's pamphlet, "Frenchmen, Some More Effort if You Wish to Become Republicans," is written by an unnamed Republican. It advocates the abolition of Christianity in favor of gods modeled after the Olympians. He also proves - on a point by point basis - that theft, slander, incest, rape, suicide and even murder are not immoral acts.

## Dildos

Madame de Saint-Ange has a large selection of dildos in her boudoir. These largely serve as devices used on Dolmance when the other men are otherwise occupied. At the end of *The Bedroom Philosophers*, however, Eugenie uses a dildo to sodomize her mother.

## Whips

Midway through *The Bedroom Philosophers*, Dolmance produces a series of whips with which he strikes Eugenie's buttocks, drawing blood. From then on, the libertines whip each other during their coital acts. When Madame de Mistival enters, Dolmance whips her as she is gang-raped to the point that she passes out.



## Thorns

After Madame de Mistival passes out in the midst of the libertine abuse of the Seventh and Final Dialogue, Dolmance tries to wake her with whips. When she does not awake, he sends Augustin out to collect thorns, which he uses to whip her, eventually rousing her into consciousness.

## Needle and Thread

The needle and thread is used by Dolmance and Eugenie to finish their punishment of Madame de Mistival. After having beaten, gang-raped, and infected her with syphilis, the two libertines go about sewing up her vagina and anus.

## Nature

Nature is the constant inspiration and justification for the libertine lifestyle. According to Dolmance, nature is a dispassionate force that both destroys and creates. Nature comprises all of creation and would not necessarily care if humanity were completely obliterated. Nature's utter indifference to humanity justifies the cruelty and selfishness of lifestyle.

## The Republic

The French Republic is regularly referenced throughout *The Bedroom Philosophers*. The year is 1795 and the French Revolution's Reign of Terror is drawing to a close. The old gods of the monarchy have been swept away by a wave of mass-murder. Napoleon has yet to seize power. The air is alive with the madness fueled by philosophy written in the Age of Reason.

## Religion

The libertines of the *The Bedroom Philosophers* detest religion, particularly Christianity. For them, it is a false construct created by the powerful to pacify the masses. Blasphemy is one of the great joys of libertinage.



# Themes

## Sexual Pleasure is the Most Profound of Human Endeavors

Eugenie comes to Madame de Saint-Ange's boudoir to be educated in the ways of the flesh, but she receives a more philosophical primer from Dolmance than she could have expected. The renowned rake advises her not only on the mechanics of sex and sado-masochism, but also on the tenets that guide the libertine aesthetic.

Libertinage is a fiercely libertarian doctrine, individualism taken to its most extreme conclusion. The goal is self-actualization through bold and defiant acts. Dolmance explains over the course of several dialogues that the most profound human endeavor one can undertake is sexual gratification. He eschews any notion that love, charity, or friendship can provide similar fulfillment.

Citing historical precedent, Dolmance illustrates that any action that increases stimulation is permissible. This includes rape, abuse, incest, and even murder. Eugenie takes to these lessons like a duck to water, and Sade creates an eerie portrait of teacher and student. As Dolmance expounds on the importance of individual fulfillment and the foolishness of compassion, he becomes erect and Eugenie begins to masturbate. Selfishness and arousal become intermingled in these interchanges.

Indeed, this theme is likely a reflection of the bourgeois Revolution that had only a few years earlier deposed the aristocracy and executed the king. These middle-class dictators declared an end to social slavery and yet lionized the idea of private property. Sade's libertines are the children of the Revolution, newly liberated from subjugation and utterly, ravenously selfish.

## Nature is the Mother of Liberty

Dolmance, as he expounds upon the philosophy of libertinage, regularly cites nature as his eternal muse. Nature, he claims, is the only true arbiter of liberty. It has a singular will that both creates and destroys.

The defining characteristic of nature, according to Dolmance, is equilibrium. For every living being created, another dies and adds to the grand compost heap of the world. Nature does not judge itself for this murder; it is necessary for the continuation of the world. From the libertine's point-of-view, religion is the more deeply unnatural force. Religion attempts to throw off this equilibrium by declaring that human beings must act unnaturally (i.e., compassionately) in order to attain salvation.

This lionizing of nature justifies the extravagances of the libertine lifestyle and belies the laws of man that would seek to impede these extravagances. For example, using





equilibrium in nature as a guide, Dolmance demonstrates that there is no special providence to semen. It is not a divine secretion to be used only for the continuation of the human race. As such, sodomy laws that reason that anal sex is an unnatural phenomenon are profoundly wrongheaded. To force humanity to propagate is unnatural. Anal sex, oral sex, contraception, and the like are important precisely because they prevent the unnatural overpopulation of the human race.

This leads into the wider argument of both Dolmance and Sade by extension: nature does not care a fig for humanity. The world will continue most happily after the human race is swept from it. With this in mind, Sade's libertines accept that there is no significance to human life. Murder and suicide are not great crimes. Indeed, they take on the quality of virtues, particularly if they are means to sexual gratification.

## **Religion is a False and Vile Construct**

This theme is connected to that regarding nature. If nature is portrayed as a perfectly balanced model for humanity, religion is seen as a false and vile construct. At best it is foolish and ineffectual; at its worst, it is a tool of oppression.

Dolmance first addresses the subject of religion in the Third Dialogue in response to Eugenie's questions regarding its value in society. Dolmance proceeds with a tirade in which he defames Jesus Christ as a fraud and God as a ridiculous concept. When Eugenie - at this point still largely innocent - questions whether religion has some value as an institution that encourages charity and kindness, he responds that such inclinations do nothing to mitigate suffering and only succeed in making human beings lazy and ungrateful. As a result, Dolmance declares, blasphemy is, to a libertine, a sensual pleasure in and of itself.

The critique of Christianity is more analytical in the pamphlet within the narrative. The unnamed Republican who wrote it states that the single Christian god is a creation and puppet of monarchs and tyrants. This god - unlike the pagan Olympian gods - requires only one thing of his subjects: obedience. Consequently, he is a perfect tool of an oppressive government.

In essence, Sade argues that - like so-called moral laws - religion is one more institutional tool invented by legislators to stifle the freedom of individuals. Without religion, anti-sodomy regulations and the general impetus to procreate would not exist. Religion places the human animal on an unnatural pedestal and creates the illusion that human life has value beyond its pragmatic usefulness. The sole achievements of religion, to Sade's mind, are foolishness and oppression.

# Style

## Perspective

The perspective underpinning the works of the Marquis de Sade in general - and the *Bedroom Philosophers* in particular - is problematic for the modern reader. His work invariably deal in sexual perversions, some innocuous, most criminally vile. His words are lilting and playful, but his characters seem to act without any sense of irony; there is no wink behind these hideous actions.

Sade was an aristocrat. His tastes were always patrician, but he found himself a prominent citizen of the Republic. This is in part because of his public praise for such Revolutionary figures as Jean-Paul Marat and in part because of well-publicized persecution he suffered under Louis XV, including his imprisonment in the Bastille on sodomy charges. Sade detested the false piety of the pre-Revolutionary aristocracy, but he also detested to Christian radicalism of Robespierre and the blind militarism of Dumouriez. In short, the Marquis de Sade was never a man of his time.

The overthrow of the first and second estates in French society did nothing to improve Sade's place in the world. He was perpetually imprisoned in jails or asylums for his writing and sodomy convictions. With this in mind, the modern reader cannot help but see *The Bedroom Philosophers* as a grand raspberry. Sade is thumbing his nose at those who would claim to speak for the people even as they persecute the individual.

Sade's distaste for state and church is apparent, but what is not is his attitude toward the detestable actions of his libertine characters. Is he merely creating a hyperbolic representation of the ultimate libertarian iconoclast - not unlike the work of Swift or Voltaire - or is he genuinely advocating incest and sexual servitude? His life only exacerbates this uncertainty. Sade and a snob and contrarian from birth until death, and his support for the Revolution was likely a calculated survival tactic. To take him at his characters' words, though, Sade believes all laws affecting individual freedom - including freedom to rape and murder each other - should be abolished and charitable institutions are destroying the fabric of French society.

## Tone

The tone of *The Bedroom Philosophers* could be best described as flippant. Marquis de Sade uses juxtaposition of verbal cadence to undercut the horrific and incendiary subjects of his narrative. If Sade's true purpose with this book is to skewer the Republic that has treated him no better than the monarchy that preceded it, he does so with aplomb that indicates his intention to entertain as well.

The juxtaposition of verbal cadence in *The Bedroom Philosophers* manifests itself in two ways: the juxtaposition of philosophical and orgasmic speech, and the juxtaposition of savagery and manners. The first form is most prevalent, with Dolmance and Madame



de Saint-Ange alternately expounding on the philosophy of the libertine lifestyle and engaging in the acts that typify it. As such, they will speak in elegantly constructed treatises followed by acts of oral and anal sex. These acts, often arranged in equally elegant and precise orders delivered by Dolmance, are characterized by incomplete sentences, shouted expletives, and graphically described acts.

The second form of juxtaposition - between savagery and manners - becomes more potent as the libertines' activities stray well beyond mere kinkiness. This dichotomy manifests itself in moments like Dolmance delicately and precisely explaining to Eugenie that her bowels must always be full of feces when she engages in anal sex. His point is so carefully stated that the reader nearly misses the subject. This contrast of savage and mannered reaches its apex, though, in the Seventh and Final Dialogue, when Dolmance infects Madame de Mistival with syphilis and sews up her vagina and anus. After this despicable act, he turns to Madame de Saint-Ange and Eugenie and suggests in his patrician cadence that they take supper and get a good night's sleep.

The net tone created by Sade's specific narrative choices is alternately horrifying and hilarious. The reader cannot take these libertines entirely seriously, and so their despicable acts, while shocking, are never vivid in a realistic way. In the end, perhaps the entire narrative is a lark after all.

## Structure

The *Bedroom Philosophers* is divided into a brief introduction - *To the Libertines* - and seven dialogues. These dialogues vary in length from three to 50 pages and involve a different succession.

The structure of the body dialogues of *The Bedroom Philosophers* is essentially that of a play, with character names indicating who is speaking at any given time and occasional stage directions informing the reader the specifics of a given sexual arrangement. By and large, the dialogue carries the action, though, with Dolmance declaring his intended tableaux for each sexual arrangement and all characters seemingly narrating their own orgasms. On occasion, in fact, the author himself interjects with a stage direction halting a character's digression if the topic will be covered in greater detail later.

The dialogues are arranged in the traditional French theatrical style, with one ending and another beginning whenever a new character enters. Indeed, even in modern American theatre, when directors organize scripts by marking them every time a new character enters, they call these divisions "French scenes."

The longer dialogues - the Third and Fifth - are divided between long didactic passages, mostly spoken by Dolmance, explaining libertine philosophy and complex orgiastic passages in which the assembled libertines practice this philosophy. These passages follow the traditional Sadean route from the kinky to the fecal to the bloody, culminating in the arrival of Madame de Mistival. This climax of gang-rape, forced sodomy, venereal

diseases and genital mutilation is Sade at his most uninhibited, a demonstration of the libertine aesthetic so elegantly described in the preceding pages.

Taken together, *The Bedroom Philosophers* reads like a primer. Indeed, it is the primer of one young woman, Eugenie, who transforms with the instruction. How the reader responds is another matter all together.



## Quotes

"Passions ... are simply the means used by nature to help human beings attain nature's goals. Listen solely to those delicious passions; their source is the only one that will lead you to happiness."

To the Libertines, p. 1

"[Dolmance] is tall, with a beautiful face and very lively and vivacious eyes. Nevertheless, his features are slightly hard and wicked ... his bearing and posture are slightly effeminate - no doubt because of his habit of frequently acting like a woman."

First Dialogue, p. 4

"It's quite certain that I will spare nothing to pervert her, to degrade her, to overthrow all the false moral principles that have benumbed her mind."

First Dialogue, p. 8

"We will skip everything connected with the lowbrow mechanism of reproduction, and we will chiefly and uniquely align ourselves with the libertine delights, whose spirit never cares about breeding."

Third Dialogue, p. 16

"A single drop of come ejaculated from this member, Eugenie, is more precious to me than the sublimest acts of virtue that I despise."

Third Dialogue, p. 23

"There is no action, however bizarre you may picture it, that is truly criminal; or one that can really be called virtuous."

Third Dialogue, p. 31

"I abhor [Madame de Mistival], I detest her - a thousand reasons legitimize my hatred. I have to take her life no matter what the price!"

Third Dialogue, p. 57

"In women, the effects of pleasure are always deceptive ... We must therefore choose pain, because its effects cannot mislead, and its sensations are keener."

Third Dialogue, pp. 64-65

"We have felt that this chimerical god, prudently invented by the earliest legislators, simply constituted, in their hands, one more way of enchaining us."

Fifth Dialogue, p. 108

"Let nobody doubt that religions are the cradles of despotism."

Fifth Dialogue, p. 114

"Let us, on the contrary, dare to avow that murder is, alas, one of the greatest political incentives. Was it not through a number of murders that Rome became the mistress of



the world? Is France not free today because of murders?"  
Fifth Dialogue, p. 141

"I've got a servant down there with one of the most gorgeous members to be found in nature. Unfortunately, it distills a poisonous virus and it is devoured by the most horrible syphilis ever seen on earth. I'll bring him up, and he'll spurt his venom into both channels of the body of this dear and delightful lady."  
Seventh and Final Dialogue, p. 170



## Topics for Discussion

The pamphlet Dolmance produces comprises a quarter of *The Bedroom Philosophers*. As a class, discuss the two essential proposals of this pamphlet, regarding Religion and Morality. What relics of the past does the unnamed author want to overthrow and why?

As a class, discuss the philosophical purpose behind the deviant sexual acts of *The Bedroom Philosophers*. What acts do the libertines of these dialogues hold as particularly sacred? What is their reasoning?

The Marquis de Sade was the ultimate enfant terrible of his time. As a class, discuss modern figures who are notorious for their art? Think of various figures from film, music, political. Why are their positions so inflammatory?

Discuss the state of France in 1795, the year that *The Bedroom Philosophers* was written. How was French society, static for centuries, being reshaped? How does the libertine philosophy reflect these changes?

How can *The Bedroom Philosophers* be viewed as a satirical text, similar to Swift's *A Modest Proposal*? Analyze as a group what Sade might be lampooning in his dialogues.

Discuss the notion of corruption. How is Eugenie in particular corrupted over the course of *The Bedroom Philosophers*? Moreover, how does the discussion of this corruption differ from the ways in which corruption is often portrayed in art?

Most of the characters in *The Bedroom Philosophers* are aristocrats by birth, with the notable exception of Augustin. As a class, discuss this character. How is his speech different from the others? How do the much wealthier libertines treat him? What does this say about his place in French society?