

works of art, particularly music. In Berlin's case, an English reasonableness allowed a rich, emotional interiority to flower.

Ignatieff adds little to the evaluation of Berlin's philosophical achievement set forth in John Gray's fine intellectual biography, *Isaiah Berlin* (1995), but he provides the human context and drama behind the writing of Berlin's brilliant discourses on the making, meaning, and makers of ideas—and counterideas—that have shaped the modern world since the Enlightenment. We are given an intimate view of Berlin's involvement not only in academic politics but in real politics, not only the reporting he did for the British Foreign Office from Washington during World War II but also his shrewd efforts to support moderate Zionists in the achievement of a Jewish state. Berlin's engagement with the extra-academic world, his contact with politicians, statesmen, and doers of all stripes, gave his political reflections a realism and an appreciation of the role of personality and character in history. Both qualities will extend the life of Berlin's work.

This is an almost Boswellian blend of memoir and biography, and one wishes there were even more of the former: more anecdotal accounts of the conversational brilliance, more words from the man himself. A certain thinness in the treatment of Berlin's later years might have been remedied by more reportage. After all, Ignatieff had the high privilege of interviewing his subject for 10 years, and he is a superb and

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reliable evoker of characters and scenes. If it seems churlish to complain of too few words in an age of disastrously overlong biographies, for once less might not necessarily have been more.

—Jay Tolson

## *Arts & Letters*

**AT HOME WITH THE MARQUIS DE SADE:**  
*A Life.*

By Francine du Plessix Gray.  
 Simon & Schuster. 491 pp. \$27.50

**SADE:**  
*A Biographical Essay.*

By Laurence L. Bongie. Univ. of Chicago Press. 336 pp. \$29

With so many fine minds bent upon the monster these days, you can choose your Marquis. Was he the compelling, nearly lovable son and husband of Gray's biogra-

phy? Or the "obnoxiously adolescent, opportunistic, tantrum-prone," mother-hating reptile of Bongie's academic screed? Was he, as Gray believes, the "father of modernism" and "prophet of Queer Theory"—academe's latest contribution to sexual politics? Or, as Professor Bongie would have it, a false prophet of the First Amendment, "author of the most monotonously egregious . . . pornographic novels imaginable, all richly interlarded with a preachy secondhand ideology . . . pilfered from thinkers far more original and coherent than he"?

Donatien Alphonse Francois de Sade (1740–1814) came from a cash-poor but landed family of debauched aristocrats (Sade’s father picked up boys on the street). Sade attended a Jesuit school in Paris, where he learned, firsthand, the joys of corporal punishment. Through family machinations, he served in the prestigious Carabiniers de Monsieur despite being too short to qualify. He strutted in his gleaming blue uniform with crimson lining, cuffs, and collar, cultivating his notorious sexual tastes off hours.

Sade’s father married him off to the plain daughter of a wealthy, *haute bourgeoisie* family. To everyone’s surprise, the marriage took. During the next decades Renée-Pélagie Cordier de Montreuil would bear Sade’s children, endure his absences, defy her mother, and procure young victims for Sade’s bloody orgies of whipping, masturbation, and sodomy. After his arrest and imprisonment, she sent him dildos and *petits gâteaux*. Sade called Pélagie “my puppy dog,” “celestial kitten,” “fresh pork of my thoughts.”

Sade wrote his scabrous novels—*Justine* (1791), *Juliette* (1799), and their ilk—from jail. Briefly freed during the Revolution, he died at Charenton, the fancy mental hospital where he had staged theatrical productions. Two decades later, he resurfaced as a dictionary entry: “Sadism: The perversion of deriving sexual satisfaction from the infliction of pain on others.”

Gray, the novelist and feminist, became interested in Sade after reading his prison correspondence with his wife. She argues that “few lives provide a more eloquent allegory on women’s ability to tame men’s nomadic sexual energies.” She reminds readers that “the writer’s task is to probe the mystery of personality,” giving “equal time to . . . demons and to saints.” Neither justification persuades. Few married men remain so untamed as Sade, who got more than his share of equal time before Gray

came along.

But no matter. What makes her biography worth reading is the writing, the novelist’s gift for richly realized character, for pacing and plot. Gray tells a riveting story of Sade and his family, of the aristocracy’s fall, of Regency fashions and prejudices and the insanity of life in Paris during and after the Revolution.

Bongie, a professor of French at the University of British Columbia, has written 18th-century studies before; what he lacks in readability he makes up for in erudition. But his determination to revise the standard thinking on Sade’s oedipal psychology, based on two newly discovered letters from Sade’s mother, may tire all but the most dogged Sadeans. And some readers may wonder whether, in making such a lengthy case against postmodern literary criticism (the work, not the life, is what matters), the scholar doth protest too much.

—A. J. Hewat

**THE UNKNOWN MATISSE:  
*A Life of Henri Matisse—The Early  
Years, 1869–1908.***

By Hilary Spurling. Knopf. 480 pp.  
\$40.

When Henri Matisse died in Nice in 1954 at the age of 84, he was an honored figure whose work had affected the course of art in the 20th century as surely as had the entirely different achievement of his sometime rival,



Vase of Flowers (1924), by Henri Matisse