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**Review of Michèle Vallentini, "Sade dans l'histoire: Du temps de la fiction à la fiction du temps," *The French Review*, 93, 4, May 2020, 216.**

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VAlLENTHINI, MICHÈLE. *Sade dans l'histoire: du temps de la fiction à la fiction du temps*. Garnier, 2019. ISBN 978-2-406-06901-0. Pp. 512.

Vallenthini offers an in-depth study of three historical novels written by the Marquis de Sade towards the end of his life while he was confined at the Charenton mental asylum. Sade started drafting *La marquise de Gange* in 1806 and published it in 1812, around the same time when he began work on *Adélaïde de Brunswick* and *Histoire secrète d'Isabelle de Bavière*, two works that only became available in print in the twentieth century. These novels have generally received limited critical attention. Scholars have considered them tame in comparison to earlier works and have argued that Sade might have given in to the pressures of censorship in the Napoleonic era in an attempt to be recognized as a true *homme de lettres*. Perhaps because of that, Vallenthini takes great pain to situate Sade's historical novels within the context of his life, of his rich literary production, and of the historical transformations that took place at the turn of the nineteenth century. This is a successful strategy: *Sade dans l'histoire* is also an engaging *histoire de Sade*, highly accessible to non-specialists, and structured in such a way that it is easy to focus on specific aspects of Sade's articulation of history and time. In her detailed analysis of his major works (*Les 120 journées de Sodome*, *Aline et Valcour*, and the Justine and Juliette series), Vallenthini argues that Sade has always been deeply interested in depicting the violence of history. Controlling and managing time are defining characteristics of the libertine's experience. This translates into both highly structured sexual scenes and characters who are able to adapt easily to shifting temporalities. Vallenthini offers a narratological reading of Sade's three historical novels that in turn focuses on plot, characters, time, space, and style. While the analysis can feel formulaic and repetitive at times, the rich close readings give a clear sense of the originality of each work and show what they have in common. The Sadean historical novel provides a disillusioned assessment of the Enlightenment at the same time as it introduces new intellectual concepts in a style that corresponds to the literary culture of the period. The aesthetic heterogeneity of the three works (with elements of the *roman noir*, *roman sensible*, *roman troubadour*, and *roman picaresque*) can be explained by the fact that fiction had to adapt to successive political regimes in a short period of time. Like Chateaubriand, Constant, and Staël, Sade uses first-person narration to depict his characters as prisoners of time. At the same time, his novels clearly betray "la peur obsessionnelle de l'aliénation" and "le malaise existentiel qui est celui de sa génération" (311). Sade's last three novels are asking universal questions but also expressing personal distress. They belong to a larger literary movement that seeks to digest the French Revolution and its aftermath and that precedes the new types of historical novels heralded by Walter Scott and the rise of history as an autonomous, scientific discipline in the nineteenth century.