



Sade's Wife: The Woman Behind the Marquis

Margaret Crosland

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Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil, the wife of the infamous French writer Marquis de Sade, is the subject of Margaret Crosland's illuminating biography *Sade's Wife*.

De Montreuil's 1763 betrothal to the marquis was orchestrated by her mother, Madame de Montreuil, who had connections to France's elite. What seemed a suitable arrangement benefiting both pious de Montreuil and the wayward, irreverent marquis soon became the backdrop for a maelstrom of licentious behaviors and the foundation for unbalanced wedlock.

The marquis's first imprisonment occurred mere months after their wedding; the slew of incarcerations that followed lasted for most of the couple's marriage. Through regular epistolary contact, the unwitting marquise assured her husband of her eternal devotion. She also arranged for him to receive the supplies that fueled his notorious collection of explicit, pornographic, and blasphemous works.

The book gives voice and form to de Montreuil, who played an underacknowledged role in supporting and corralling the marquis's extreme disregard for the boundaries of social and sexual norms. Indeed, it declares that "she was the only one who listened to him and tried to understand him." Still, its arguments are built on a relative lack of source material—pieced together from letters between the two, as well letters to lawyers and other family members. It sometimes asks more questions than it answers with regard to the marquise's motivations and the temperament that permeates the tone of her writings. Resilience is the cornerstone of the book's profile of the marquise; her acceptance of her husband, despite his legion faults, colors this fascinating, if often infuriating, study in marital acquiescence.

The compelling biography *Sade's Wife* is about the puzzling fidelity of the wife of a most scandalous French libertine.

RYAN PRADO (May / June 2026)

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