

The  
REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS

of the  
MARQUIS DE SADE

GEOFFREY GORER

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### FOREWORD

EITHER of two courses is openj^hej^^  
jo preservFTus^self-respect. He may dismiss this book  
unread as aiiotKeFa^npt by a L high-brow^ to Whitewash  
a mongterT Or ^Kelmaj.j:eaal t".\_ He will then discover  
that if 3e~Sade^ on several occasions indulged in  
abnormal  
pleasures, he also risked his life to save that of a  
woman

who had caused him to be imprisoned for thirteen years  
;  
that if a psychologist has attached his name to a form  
of  
cruelty, he was actually an inveterate opponent of  
capital  
punishment.

When the monster legend is dissipated, it becomes  
clear that de Sade was a very remarkable and original  
thinker. To-day we find the philosophical fathers of  
the  
French Revolution slightly ridiculous because they  
generally assumed that with the abolition of a  
particular  
set of abuses the golden age would return. De Sade saw  
a great deal further. He had no illusions about the  
natural goodness of man, but he believed that with com-  
plete economic and sexual equality human conditions  
could be greatly bettered. He anticipated the views of  
Malthus on population, and the tolerance of the Danish  
penal code as regards sexual behaviour.

In certain other respects he went far beyond even the  
most 'advanced' social thinkers of the present day.  
Whether the attempt will ever be made to put his ideas  
on sexual morality into practice is doubtful.  
Nevertheless  
they are interesting because they are logical less of a  
compromise with our existing morality than those of  
Plato or More. If de Sade had not passed twelve years  
in almost solitary confinement in the Bastille his  
political

#### FOREWORD

system might have been more practical and have stood  
a greater chance of adoption. But it would have been  
less intellectually coherent, and therefore less  
interesting  
to the student of political ideas.

It is unlikely that the original documents on which  
Mr. Gorer's work is based will be made available to the  
public within our own time. For this reason his book  
will be absolutely indispensable to the student of  
political

thought who wishes to trace the genesis of many ideas which are now accepted, and others which are still violently controversial. It will furnish intellectual ammunition to both sides. The conservatives will be able to say that sexual and economic equality are part of the same system of ideas as the tolerance of murder and rape. The radicals will find in de Sade a political thinker who foresaw with considerable accuracy the failure of the French Revolution to achieve liberty, equality and fraternity, and pointed to the causes of this failure.

Mr. Gorier has not attempted to disguise his sympathies, and it is probable that his book would have been less valuable had he done so. It would have been beyond the powers of one who did not share many of de Sade's opinions to reconstruct them, as he has done, from the fragmentary remains of his works. His bias is at least undisguised and can therefore\* be allowed for without difficulty.

As a biologist I cannot conclude without a few words on de Sade's outlook on sex. It was based on actual observation, and forms a contribution to the natural history of man. Unfortunately our knowledge of human biology is still so fragmentary that a comprehensive study of human erotics lacks an adequate background, and stands out as an obscenity. A man or woman who has studied the anatomy of the rest of the body can approach that of the reproductive system without undue excitement, and in the same way, when human physiology is

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#### FOREWORD

part of common knowledge, the physiology of sex will find its natural place in our intellectual equipment. And a study of its abnormalities will throw considerable light on the normal process, as it has already done in the hands

of Freud.

The time will then have come when de Sade's novels will be appropriate for the educated public, and it may well be that he will be regarded not as a purveyor of filth, but as a man who was greatly in advance of his age in the range of his interests. It may be remarked that in no other form but fiction could his observations on human behaviour have been published 140 years ago. Meanwhile, Mr. Gorer has done a service to students of psychology in pointing out that de Sade must be regarded as a pioneer in their study, even though his work might have been of greater value had he been born a century later.

I do not wish to suggest that de Sade was a man of perfectly balanced mind, whose works are to be taken as a guide either to thought or morality. He would perhaps have been unhappy in any age. But he was doubly unfortunate, not only in incurring imprisonment under the ancien regime but in surviving the period of the French Revolution during which some at least of his ideas were put into practice. If Mr. Gorer's book had no other justification, it would deserve an audience because it renders a posthumous justice to a very remarkable writer who was the victim both of himself and of his fellow men.

J. B. S. HALDANE.

#### PREFACE

Two excuses are usually demanded for a book about the Marquis de Sade; firstly a justification for writing at all about such a monster, and alternatively the reason for adding yet another book to the existing quantity concerning him. My excuse for both actions is that I have found the unfolding of his ideas extremely interesting, and hope others will do the same; and that without

exception all the books already published deal exclusively with his life and legend, and with the mechanics of the plots of his novels, occasionally with a faint and distorted summary of his ideas concerning sex, but never with any development of his theories either on that or any other subject.

I claim, therefore, that this is the only book in any language which has presented the ideas of this extraordinary man in any way; and the only one which allows the general public to judge him through his own words. To as great an extent as possible I have quoted him verbatim: and to avoid making a bilingual book I have translated him into English, paying more attention to the accuracy than to the elegance of the translation. The quotations have involved me in an awkward code of dots ; de Sade himself frequently employs . . . three dots for his own effects; so I have been driven to use four dots . . . . to indicate the omission of some words in a

sentence and five dots to indicate the omission of complete sentences.

I imagine the chief reason why there has been no book on the ideas of de Sade during the hundred and twenty years since his death is due to the difficulty of obtaining

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## PREFACE

copies of his works and to the astounding obscenity of many of these works once obtained. (Throughout this book I distinguish 'obscenity' and \* pornography' in the same way as D. H. Lawrence did obscenity referring to the subjects discussed and language used, pornography to the titillating intentions of the writer.) From most booksellers a demand for his works will produce an ignorant stare, violent indignation, or the leering offer

of the kind of pornographic works of which de Sade said " these miserable little volumes composed in caffs or brothels demonstrate simultaneously two voids in their authors their heads and their stomachs are equally empty." 1 \*

By chance I happened to find copies of Aline et Vakour and of Juliette on the open shelves of booksellers in Cambridge and London respectively and bought them out of curiosity. As they were respectable shops the books were not outrageously dear. In Juliette at first reading I only found that boring and nauseous perversity

I had been led to expect, but Aline et Vakour^ which on account of its lack of obscenity has been almost completely

neglected by people writing about de Sade, appeared to me so full of pregnant ideas that I returned to Juliette

with new eyes. I then found that if the obscenity can be, if not overlooked, taken in one's stride, there was presented a Weltanschauung of curious originality and force. I thereupon set about trying to collect the rest of his works with indifferent success ; and had it not been

for the energies of one man and the great kindness of another I should probably still be searching. Monsieur Maurice Heine has since the war been collecting and editing de Sade's books and manuscripts in limited editions and various magazines, which has placed at our disposal a great deal of hitherto unknown material ; and

Mr. C. R. Dawes, whose book on de Sade is within its

\* For the sake of tidiness I have placed all references to sources at the end of the book.

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## PREFACE

self-imposed limits the best yet written on the subject, responded to a plea for assistance from a complete stranger with a kindness for which I can find no adequate

thanks.

This summer, in a discouraged rest from the vain efforts to get a hearing as a playwright, I decided to try to systematise de Sade's ideas with the double object of trying to clear my own head by measuring my own ideas against those of an original and extreme thinker, and to gain some understanding of the events around us, both at home and abroad, which seemed to correspond so closely with the circumstances depicted by de Sade.

This book is the outcome, I have found that it has given for myself pretty well the results I wanted; if it succeeds in doing so for anyone else I shall be gratified.

Before the discussion of de Sade's ideas I have placed a short biography and an attempted criticism of his writings. The biography was necessary to situate him historically the development of his thought is bound up with the history of his times and to attempt to dispel the bluebeard legend surrounding him. As far as I have been able I have given the main sure facts about him and nothing else ; I have not kept any of the legends and in only one case have I gone into any detail. That is the story of the scandal of Marseilles, of which the true facts were first brought to light by M. Maurice Heine this summer; and I thought it was advisable to try to dispel the false versions which have to now perforce been given of this incident. I have not mentioned the other details of his sexual life which are now known as they do not seem to me to have any importance or interest except for impertinent and rather morbid curiosity. The chief originality of this chapter lies in the autobiographical quotations which, with one exception, have not (as far as I know) been collected together or noted before.

In trying to give an account of de Sade's intentions and

their result in his works I have done a thing which has

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## PREFACE

never been attempted to my knowledge so far. The plots of the main works have been given several times, but, as my analysis of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* shows, this can better than any other way disguise the spirit and the bearing of a book. The rest of the book is simply exposition.

Many of his ideas are still so novel and so revolutionary that they must inevitably offend some people. I have tried my utmost to reduce this offence to the minimum without distorting his real thought. I may enter a caveat that I am presenting the ideas of de Sade, not my own ; I have been as objective as I can and cannot accept responsibility for his theories, some of which shock my sensibilities as much as they can shock any reader's.

The chief pitfall of which I have been conscious is the danger of picking out phrases and sentences which suit my purpose and distorting them away from their context. To guard against doing this, or the suspicion of having done it, I have given some long and uninterrupted quotations, of which perhaps the whole is not apposite to the matter discussed but which illustrate the tendencies of the passage. When I have wished to give my own opinion I have done so in the first person, thinking it dishonourable to hide behind the impersonal or editorial attitude and undignified to squirm behind the Chinese fan of 'the present miserable author.'

When I first contemplated this book I thought in my ignorance of history that it would be possible to say definitely whether de Sade was original or not in advancing his ideas, such as the theory of the optimum

population,  
or of equal rights for men and women ; but I soon abandoned this attempt and have contented myself with stating his ideas and leaving to those who are more learned in such matters than I am the question of priority.

The priority of statement of some political ideas which I claim for him is justified by Guido de Ruggiero's History

H

#### PREFACE

of European Liberalism \ his originality on the subjects of psychology and sex is unquestioned, for such subjects were only discussed in the century after his death.

This book is open to attack from two different sources ; from those who consider such a monster better buried in oblivion and who will find in the ideas I have attempted to assemble but further proofs of his monstrosity; and from that smaller group, with its nucleus in the Surrealists, who will consider that any attempt to rationalise and explain the arch-criminal and arch-rebel is blasphemy. To both such possible detractors I will reply in the words de Sade used in the preface to Aline et Valcour\

" Nevertheless we will have critics, contradictors and enemies without a doubt:

It is a danger to love men,  
A crime to enlighten them.

So much the worse for those who will condemn this work, and will not feel in what spirit it has been made: slaves of prejudice and habit, they show that they are swayed solely by opinion, and the torch of philosophy will

never  
shine for them." 2

August October ', 1933.

SOME PRELIMINARY JUDGMENTS

SOME PRELIMINARY JUDGMENTS

. . . . Le MONSTRE-AUTEUR . . . .

Restif de la Bretonne. 1 797.

Readers acquainted with the Justine and Juliette of the Marquis de Sade will comprehend my horror and indignation at the style of amusement these dens afforded. The volumes referred to (the most blasphemous and obscene ever painted and which came hot from hell soon after the date of this letter) are filled with the records of experiments tried for the purpose of exciting by every species of torture the most unheard of debaucheries.

W. Beckford. Note added to a letter written in 1784. (// may be noted that de Sade had published nothing at this date.)

Get atroce et sanglant blasphemateur, cet obscene historien des plus formidables reveries qui aient jamais agite la fievre des dimons y le

Marquis de Sade Croyez-moi y qui que vous soyex, ne touches pas a ces livres, ce serait tuer de vos mains le sommeil, le doux sommeil . . . J. Janin. 1834.

Ce frntttique et abominable assemblage de tous les

crimes et de toutes  
les saletts. F. Soulie. 1837.

De Sade une des gloires de la France un martyr.

P. Borel. 1839.

y'oserais affirmer, sans crainte d'Stre dtmenti, que  
Byron et de Sade  
(je demande pardon du rapprochement) ont peut-etre ttt  
les deux plus  
grands inspireurs de nos modernes, l'un afficht et  
visible^ Vautre  
clandestin pas trop clandestin. Saint-Beuve. 1 843.

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#### SOME PRELIMINARY JUDGMENTS

That Illustrious and ill-requited benefactor of  
humanity.

Usually the work is either a stimulant for an old beast  
or an emetic  
for a young man> instead of a valuable study to  
rational curiosity.

I only regret that in justly attacking my Charentonjw\*  
have wilfully  
misrepresented the source. I should have bowed to the  
judicial sen-  
tence if instead of "Byron with a difference" you had  
said "De Sade  
with a difference." The poet, thinker, and man of the  
world from  
whom the theology of my poem is derived was a greater  
than Byron.  
He indeed \ fatalist or not, saw to the bottom of gods  
and men.

Did he lie? did he laugh? does he know it?

Now he lies out of reach, out of breath,  
Thy prophet, thy preacher, thy poet? . . .

A. C. Swinburne (between  
1 860 and 1880).

Il faut toujours en revenir à de Sade, c'est-à-dire à  
l'homme nature/  
pour expliquer le mal. C. Baudelaire.

Journal Intimes.

Flaubert, une intelligence hantée par de Sade

Causerie sur de Sade, auquel il revient toujours.

Journal des Goncourts.

The Marquis de Sade is perhaps one of the most  
extraordinary men who  
ever lived and a very interesting subject for a  
psychological study; Nature  
has produced some strange abortions, both physical and  
mental, but  
probably never a greater mental monstrosity than de  
Sade.

Pisanus Fraxi (H. S. Ashbee).  
1880.

Le Marquis de Sade fut l'homme indiqué pour synthétiser  
et pousser  
jusqu'à ses dernières limites l'art de la spermocratie  
anormale et  
monstrueuse. Il dépassa dans ce genre toute l'antiquité,  
il fixa dans un  
monde d'horreurs les colonnes d'Hercule des déviations  
priées.  
Jamais heureusement on n'ira désormais aussi loin, de  
Sade aura  
borné l'horizon du champ érotique. Octave Uzanne. 1901.

C'est le 2 juin 1740 qui vit naître un des hommes  
les plus remarquables du dix-huitième siècle, disons même de l'humanité  
en général.

. . . Les Œuvres du Marquis de Sade constituent un  
objet de

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SOME PRELIMINARY JUDGMENTS

Il y a histoire et de la civilisation autant que de la science médicale. . . .  
Il y a encore un autre point de vue qui fait des ouvrages du Marquis de Sade pour l'historien qui s'occupe de la civilisation et pour le médecin, le juriste, l'économiste et le moraliste un véritable puits de science et de notions nouvelles.

Eugene Dillen (Ivan Bloch), 1904.

Cet homme qui parut ne compter pour rien durant tout le dix-neuvième siècle, pourrait bien dominer le vingtième . . . Le Marquis de Sade, l'esprit le plus libre qui ait encore existé . . . Le lecteur qui aborde ces romans ne remarque souvent que la lettre, qui est dégoûtante, et l'analyse ci-dessous n'en peut malheureusement pas livrer l'esprit.

G. Apollinaire. 1909.

Sade, D. A. F. French licentious writer . . .

Encyclopedia Britannica. 13th Edition.

De Sade wrote according to his lights and though his ideas were extravagant he was at least sincere. It is just that, perhaps, which makes him such a sinister figure. Mere obscenity is always disgusting and nearly always dull; but there was much more than that here and he was savagely in earnest.

C. R. Dawes. 1927-

Il n'arrive pas à le prendre au sérieux.

P. Bourdin. 1929-

Un écrivain qu'il faut placer sans doute parmi les plus grands.

J. Paulhan. \*93 0 -

Il y a donc lieu de croire que Sade> après avoir  
inquitte tout un siècle  
qui ne pouvait le lire, sera de plus en plus lu pour  
remédier à  
l'inquiétude du suivant. M. Heine. J 93-

Del/o scrittore non diciamo poi dello scrittore di  
genio mancato al  
Sade le qualità più elementari. Poligrafo e pornografo  
a maggior  
titolo d'un Aretino, tutto il suo merito sta nell'aver  
lasciato dei  
documenti che rappresentano la fase mitologica infantile  
del/a psicopatologia:  
informafabesca egli da laprima sistematologia  
delle perversioni.

M. Praz. J 93-

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#### SOME PRELIMINARY JUDGMENTS

Hier also, wenn irgendwo, ist Sade unnormal, defekt.  
Statt der  
Spannung liegt Spaltung vor und zwar eine Spaltung die  
nicht mit  
Dämmerzuständen und Störungen des Bewusstseins  
verbunden ist.  
Er weicht dem Konflikt aus, verantwortet sich nicht vor  
sich selbst

und empfindet nie die Notwendigkeit, sich zu ordnen Wie  
man mit dieter doppelter Buchführung ein genialer  
Mensch wird  
%eigt Kierkegaard: wie ein negativer von armer  
nutzloser Tragik:  
Sade. O. Flake. 1930.

Rien en saurait plus tenir à Fecart de cette voix  
inoüie ceux qui sont  
capables de I\* entendre et ne mtconnaitront jamais le  
sens profond de sa  
révélation. M. Heine. I 93 1 '

That frenzied pornographer .... Sade was born in Paris  
in 1740  
and in 1772 was condemned to death for the sexual  
practices to which  
he has left his name. He made his escape and he was  
afterwards  
imprisoned at Vincennes and in the Bastille, where he  
wrote several  
phantastic romances in which his imagination dwelt upon  
those objects  
and scenes which excited and satisfied his peculiar  
sex-mania. He  
died insane in 1814.

Desmond Macarthy. 1933-

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I care not whether a man is Good ^r Evil ? all that T  
Is whether he is a Wise man or a Fool.

W. BLAKE,

Jerusalem.

CHAPTER I  
LIFE, 1740-1814

Si les hommes, en entrant dans la vie, savaient les  
peines qui les  
attendent: qu'il ne dependit que d'eux de rentrer dans  
le n&mt, en  
serait-il un seul qui voulut remplir la carridre!

DE SADE,

Aline et Valcour.

The Bastille trembles . . .

And the den named Horror held a man  
Chained hand and foot: round his neck an iron band,

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