

St-Martin, Armelle (éd.). Sade dans tous ses états. Deux cents ans de controverses (2017)

Paul Young

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The author has based his arguments on extensive research undertaken in a considerable number of municipal and national archives across Europe, but a disappointment is the omission of the court of Russia, whose rulers and nobility were so attached to French culture that its influence easily lingered long enough for the first theatrical success of Alfred de Musset to take place in St. Petersburg in 1843. Readers interested more in French literature than in its cultural and political application may prefer to concentrate on the first part of this monograph, and on chapter 3 in particular, where the author discusses the different genres of French plays most frequently performed in various European cities, although this is also presented in summary in the useful series of annexes (tables 3 and 4) at the end of the volume. Informed and rich in detail throughout, at times, alas, also pedantic and diffuse, this provocative study offers a memorably revisionist view of the imposing presence of France on the stages of eighteenth-century Europe.

D.R. Gamble

Memorial University

St-Martin, Armelle (éd.). *Sade dans tous ses états. Deux cents ans de controverses*. Rouen : Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2017. 266 p.

This collection of essays (of uneven merit) examines a writer who, as Armelle St-Martin argues in the introduction: “fait irrémédiablement partie de notre paysage culturel” (10) in part because of his admission into the prestigious Pléiade (since 1989), as well as through the publication of texts in readily-available paperback editions (at least in France), and by the massive body of scholarly articles devoted to this “phénomène”(9). This volume acknowledges “l’intérêt littéraire et l’engouement populaire dont jouit présentement Sade” (10), while also admitting to the “répulsion” (10) Sade and his work provoke. In the Introduction Armelle St-Martin tries to square Sade’s status as a “champ fertile pour les études littéraires et philosophiques” with the notion that he is an “auteur dont la pensée est dangereuse” (11). This tension and an attempt to grapple with the “pensée dangereuse” (and, to a lesser extent, with the notion of repulsion) are the focus of many of the essays in this volume which examines how twentieth- and twenty-first-century writers and critics, in a world increasingly struggling to comprehend the human capacity for evil, reflect on (in the words of Jean-Pierre Dubost): “la légitimité morale d’une œuvre largement structurée par un double registre—le prêche d’immoralité et l’appel à passer à l’acte d’une part et l’exposition circonstanciée de l’acte de l’autre part” (167).

The volume starts with an excellent essay (“Sade et la peinture religieuse”) by Beatrice Didier, who returns to Sade’s texts to examine them through the lens of one of her centers of interest: “les représentations du sacré des Lumières au romantisme” (22). Her essay explores a paradox in Sade’s writings: although the author has a predilection for setting scenes of debauchery in “des couvents, des chapelles, [et] des églises” (22), there are few actual references to religious art in his works. Didier situates Sade’s evocation of religious painting within the context of materialist Enlightenment thought, contrasting Enlightenment writers’ purely aesthetic appreciation of religious art (emptied of its metaphysical content), with a Romantic drive to deploy the aesthetic power of religious art to “redonner au sacré un fondement métaphysique” (36).

Didier turns to “Laurence et Antonio” and “Eugénie de Franval,” from *Les Crimes de l’amour*, as well as Sade’s 1813 novel, *La Marquise de Gange*; turning to a footnote in Sade’s story “Laurence et Antonio,” she examines Sade’s reflections about religious painting, the relationship between the real and representation in painting, and the question of the hierarchy of the arts, which was “en plein bouleversement au XVIII^e siècle” (26). Didier demonstrates the influence of an unlikely source—Chateaubriand’s *Génie du christianisme* (1802)—on *La Marquise de Gange*, a text that borrows from, and may

parody, the *roman noir*. Through a discussion of the figure of the crucified Christ (which found favor in the Romantic imagination), and depictions of the Virgin Mary, Didier suggests that the imprisoned Sade finds an affinity with images of *innocence persécutée*, and argues that Sade's use of religious art transcends the simple aesthetic (rather than metaphysical) appreciation favored by Enlightenment thinkers, while also moving beyond a Romantic rehabilitation of sacred images. She notes that "La peinture religieuse a pu être le refuge de 'L'Éros noir'" (37), seconding Bataille's suggestion that, throughout time "un principe de divinité fascina les hommes et les accabla," and concluding that it is "cette violence du sacré qui expliquerait la place que tiennent les représentations de la peinture religieuse dans l'œuvre de Sade le mécréant" (39).

The essay by Juan Carlos Rodríguez Rendon, "Sade et le roman noir: une obscurité féconde" recalls that, at certain moments in the twentieth century: "Le rapport de l'œuvre de Sade au roman noir [...] est au cœur des débats sur sa valeur littéraire" (60). Rodríguez Rendon traces the development of the study of the *roman noir* in France, and the view, starting in the 1920's, of Sade as a figurehead of this genre. Through an "analyse comparée de certains thèmes propres aux romans de Sade et à certains romans noirs écrits entre 1788 et 1814" (61), Rodríguez Rendon demonstrates how Sade "participe des transformations du goût de son temps," while also suggesting something more important—that Sade "détourne le fantastique français du surnaturel pour l'acheminer principalement sur la voie de l'*inhumain*, avant même la découverte du concept d'inconscient" (61, italics in original). The author suggests a "parenté entre la littérature picaresque et le roman sadien" (65), and examines the sometimes contradictory opinions of twentieth-century scholars (Maurice Heine, Philippe Roger, Maurice Lévy...) about Sade's relationship to the roman noir. Ultimately, Rodríguez Rendon proposes that, in writing *La Marquise de Gange*, Sade moves beyond the roman noir's affiliation with the sentimental novel, creating "un des premiers romans frénétiques" (72).

Michel Delon's essay "Sade, un humanisme impossible" offers a compelling companion piece to Alexandre Dubois' "Le nihilisme intégral." Dubois' essay analyzes the excesses, negations, repetitions, and even transcendence in Sade's writing, suggesting that "L'écriture sadienne, dans toute sa dimension interminable et répétitive, s'évertue à détruire incessamment ce qui existe, à mettre à bas tout ce qui relève d'une autorité tutélaire pour déclamer la seule vérité que représente le *nihilisme*" (91, italics in original). Dubois offers a rich history of the word (and concept) of nihilism, turning to Nietzsche, and the much less well-known Anarchasis Cloot, a revolutionary who, in a text from 1793, introduces the word in French. Turning to Blanchot's idea of the "homme intégral," Dubois suggests that this idea can only find its fruition in a "nihilisme intégral," before concluding: "Le nihilisme chez Sade incarne un mouvement de l'homme pour l'homme, repoussant la désolation ontologique d'une condition humaine aporétique en faisant de cette même aporie une force. Est alors justifiée une imagination libertine sans limites..." (109, all).

Delon's essay examines the thorny problem of reading Sade's texts as "une fiction dont l'effet dépend du point de vue de lecture qu'on adopte" (135), and asks the pertinent question: "peut-on croire encore à une lecture libératrice de Sade?" (146). Delon starts with a curious contradiction: Maurice Heine's discomfort with a description of bullfighting (in Leiris' *Miroir de la tauromachie*), coexisting with Heine's seeming comfort with the "*horreur sanglante...rêvée*" (135, italics in original) present in the Sadean text, and experienced in the imagination of Sade's readers. Delon examines the image of Sade—for certain writers from the first half of the twentieth century—as a voice of liberty, a symbol (in Lely's words) of "l'autonomie de l'homme si abjectement menacée" (137). Are Sade's texts simply the "des reveries inquiétantes," penned by an author "aussi irrécupérable par le fascisme que par le christianisme" (138) that can be enjoyed without consequence by forward-thinking liberals and "défenseurs d'un idéal humain" (139), or does such a reading

deny a darker drive and ethos in these writings? Delon examines the philosophy behind defending the marquis in the months and years that followed the Liberation in France, and even after the widespread understanding of the atrocities and efforts at extermination promulgated by the Nazis. Delon examines Queneau's curious assessment of Sade; on the one hand, Queneau sees the world created by Sade as "une préfiguration hallucinante du monde où règnent le Gestapo, ses supplices, et ses camps," on the other, he nevertheless confirms an undeniable "valeur humaine profonde" in Sade's œuvre (141). Queneau's question of whether Sade is "le fourrier des crimes de masse ou bien la vigie qui met en garde" (141) leads Delon to examine the questions of "la relation entre fiction et réalité, entre imaginaire sadien et nazisme historique, d'une part, [et] le pouvoir de la littérature, de l'autre" (142). Delon underscores the role of the imagination in the Sadean text, and sees a kind of liberation in Sade's exaltation of "le pouvoir d'invention humaine et la force des chimères" (147), which he sees as capable of granting "à l'humanité le pouvoir de se détacher des évidences immédiates" (147). Ultimately, Delon sees Sade as an antidote to "la stupide inertie de ceux qui se contentent de répéter la tradition et qui se limitent à ce qu'ils estiment être la réalité" (147); through Sade, "l'exaltation du désir individuel fonde la révolte contre tout ce qui le bride" (148). In this analysis, Sade seems less "le fourrier des crimes," and more a panacea: for Delon, "raconter le pire peut être un exercice salutaire" (148).

Dominic Marion takes up some of the questions about the effects of reading Sade in his essay "Lire Sade comme symptôme du partage économique de la jouissance," which starts with the somewhat cynical (or perhaps simply realistic) observation that Sade's entry into the Pléiade can be seen as "l'indicateur d'une certaine capacité du marché culturel néolibéral à absorber les représentations de la violence sexuelle" (111). Rather than touting Sade's texts as liberatory or profoundly humanistic, he reminds readers that this is "une œuvre qui s'appuie après tout sur la *légitimation de la domination du corps d'autrui*" (112, italics in original). His conclusion is no less ambiguous, and he affirms: "La portée critique de l'œuvre sadienne ne peut aujourd'hui plus se confondre avec un désir de liberté absolue; elle s'apparente plutôt à la cartographie des systèmes de contrainte qui président aux renouvellements des modes d'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme" (132).

Jean-Pierre Dubost's "Kant avec Sade, encore une fois" returns to "un différend extrême—celui qui oppose sans conciliation possible d'un côté les institutions juridiques d'une société qui se conçoit comme soucieuse de l'humain et qui se doit de donner une réponse de droit à la question du crime et de l'autre la splendide monstruosité de l'œuvre sadienne, que l'on pourrait entendre comme un discours d'apologie inconditionnelle du Mal" (163), which he examines in the context of the "Sade affair" of 1956, which arose from Jean-Jacques Pauvert's efforts to publish Sade's works. Dubost recalls "le lien dialectique entre volonté morale et liberté" present in Kant's philosophy, that is at the base of Lacan's famous essay—about which, he admits, "je ne partage ni les prémisses ni les conclusions" (167). (This becomes rather apparent in Dubost's excellent summary of Lacan's argument, which he qualifies as "à la fois tautologique et bourrée de failles, de recoins et de chausse-trapes comme c'est toujours le cas chez Lacan" [169]). In his reading of Sade with Kant, Dubost ends by comparing Kant's categorical imperative with a kind of "impératif poétique sadien, celui de la cruauté de représentation" (180), an "impératif catégorique, mais d'ordre *poétologique*" (180, italics in original). This imperative rebuffs Aristotle's proscriptions, notably about the representation of a "monstrueux pur" (180), as Sade creates "une poétique rigoureuse de la représentation du Mal" (181). Dubost concludes that Kant's imperative has an inextricable relationship with Sade's, but they are "liés comme deux figures tête-bêche: il y a la Loi et son revers, la cruelle loi de l'écriture du Mal, qui n'est pas son simple contrainte ou son envers mais son revers—son intérieur, interdit et invisible au concept, mais ouvert comme un espace que dégage à l'infini la

puissance de l'imagination quand elle relève le défi de la représentation de la violence en l'Homme, dont le spectacle sublime de la Nature violente n'est que le symbole" (181-182).

Other essays in this collection examine Sade in relation to other eighteenth-century authors (Rétif de la Bretonne and Mirabeau), the depictions of Sade in the 1930's revue *Minotaure*, the influence of Sade's texts on Pasolini's work, as well as on 20th- and 21st-century writers (notably Hervé Guibert), and images of Sade in the 19th and 20th century. There are occasional missteps, and some essays seem less compelling than others. In my opinion, the best essays in this collection shed light on underexamined texts, or grapple with the question addressed by Delon, Dubost and others, about the monstrous poetics of the Sadean text.

In the text's opening pages, the reader encounters Michel Onfray's recent assessment of Sade as a "philosophe féodal, monarchiste, misogyne, phalocrate, antisémite [...] délinquant sexuel multirécidiviste" (10), an opinion that brooks a closer look, and a more serious analysis. One effect (by-product? merit?) of Sade's writing is that, as Annie Le Brun has noted, "[il fait] apparaître l'inconcevable inhumanité qui est en nous" (216); admitting that Sade is our *prochain* is, as Le Brun and others have pointed out, a vertiginous, deeply troubling experience, and one that, for obvious reasons, many readers would refuse. One could imagine that a true understanding of Sade's "monstrous" poetics (detailed here by Dubost, Delon and others), might serve as an antidote to the "engouement populaire pour le marquis" (10). Whether this is the case, it is certainly time for scholars to address more clearly the widely-known and well-documented fact that Sade (the person) was, as Onfray underscores, a "délinquant sexuel multirécidiviste" (10). Dubost, in his reading of Lacan, suggests that "le nom de Sade" has been used as "une sorte de grande boîte de rangement dans laquelle on remise pêle-mêle les objets les plus hétéroclites" (171), and he cautions against confusing "indistinctement les opinions et la vie de l'homme Sade et les discours de son personnel narratif" (169). There is a value to this, yet examining Sade's texts in the context of his life suggests that, in "la vie de l'homme Sade" just as in "les discours de son personnel narratif" this writer believed that assault and sexual assault should be the concession of a privileged group (the rich, the strong, the noble...). It might be facile here to compare Sade's writings to statues erected to Confederacy, and yet, in our current historical and cultural moment marked by critical re-readings, long overdue re-evaluations, and the rejection of stale, harmful ideologies, perhaps we should call into question Sade's status as "incontournable" (149), and give more weight to Delon's pertinent question: "peut-on croire encore à une lecture libératrice de Sade?" (146).

Paul Young

Georgetown University

Bongie, Laurence L. *Sade – Un essai biographique*. Préface de Benoît Melançon. Montréal : Les Presses Universitaires de Montréal, 2017. Traduit de l'anglais par Alan MacDonell en collaboration avec Armelle St-Martin. 410 p.

Dans sa préface à *Sade – Un essai biographique*, Benoît Melançon suggère que l'étude de Laurence Bongie "devrait trouver de nouveaux lecteurs, ni apôtres, ni spécialistes, mais esprits curieux souhaitant se faire une idée par eux-mêmes, documents à l'appui, sur un écrivain aujourd'hui devenu canonique. Ils risquent d'être étonnés" (8). Ce travail fascinant—publié en anglais en 1998, et finalement disponible en français dans une excellente traduction—offre, en effet, de quoi s'étonner, et Bongie admet dans son Avant-Propos que ses "conclusions trouveront probablement peu de faveurs chez les champions dévoués du divin marquis" (11). Cette biographie dévoile des éléments nouveaux sur la parenté de Sade, et examine de plus près son enfance et ses rapports familiaux, tout en affirmant que "tout expliquer et tout comprendre" ne veut pas dire "tout pardonner" (14).