

Here follows an essay: **DE SADE AND HIS PRESENT DAY FOLLOWERS**— by the narrator Patrice Léon of *The Book That Kills*.

Like so many people today Sade believed that to the integral man who is at his fullest, there is no possible evil. Virtue pleases him, he likes it, because virtue is weak and he enjoys crushing it. As an absolute egoist he is able to turn everything disagreeable into something he likes. So, as we can deduce from this, it follows that the concept of God, and of loving one's fellow men are indispensable to the libertine consciousness. De Sade needed it there to abuse it, just as most atheists and God-bashers do today. 'The notion of God is the one fault I cannot forgive man. The belief in a powerful and omnipotent God only grants to man the reality of a wisp of straw, an atom of nothingness.'

So we see, God had to be there for Sade, if only to have his power snatched from him. Flouting God's laws with extreme deeds gave Sade and his model brutes their omnipotence, their sense of power. Where would his unbounded egotism and self-gratification be without God? Who does this remind you of but the author of *The God Delusion*?

In his *Société des Amis du Crime* Sade devises a secret society governed by strict convention, the purpose of which is to curb excesses. He can cite as precedents numerous secret societies in vogue in revolutionary France freemasons of libertinage, and freemasonry itself led to the emergence, in the midst of a society in ruins, of a great number of secret societies, clandestine 'colleges' founded in the complicity of passions and on a mutual respect for dangerous ideas.

The real problem he poses is the relationship of the powerful among themselves. The Statutes of the *Société*, studied and analysed at great length, forbids its members from indulging in any displays of ferocious passion among themselves, stipulating that those passions can only be satisfied in two seraglios, which have to be peopled by members of the virtuous classes.

My own particular theory which I am at present working on, and which I hope will one day earn a place in the Académie, is that Sade feigned madness. He did all he could to have himself put away. How else can we explain the absolute sanity and comprehensibility of the millions of words which made him not only the most prolific French writer of his generation, but also one whose influence far exceeds of almost all other writers in France and abroad? By comparison who has heard of Proust, or Hugo, or Racine. De Sade, yes, for now in a main street in every city in the world there is a sex shop, a massage parlour, a strip or lap-dancing club. S & M now has universal currency, like a Big Mac.

Prison and the lunatic asylum were Sade's natural habitats. He thrived in these, and they gave him the means and where he could afford, with his wealth in land and his aristocratic family connections, to live in the best possible and most cosseted environment to produce the work he did. He had no distractions.

Ten years in the Bastille; a month in the Conciergerie; two years in the Temple— a year in Madellonnettes. Then, upon publishing *Justine* and *Juliette* confinement for fourteen years at Charenton asylum, three in Bicêtre and one in Sainte-Pelage. That's well over twenty-five years, a sentence today that would seem harsh for a serial killer, or a multiple rapist and sex-abuser. Yet condemned to death several times, he was lucky to escape the ultimate penalty. We have the impression that any or every excuse was enough for a whole string of governments over decades to clap him behind bars, while he so patently colluded with it.

Why should he do this? He had to protect his great talent. Success would have destroyed it, so would instant gratification of his desires. Sade's enemies in life, like his persecuting mother-in-law, Madame de Montreuil, and his own wife, and all those abused young women and men who stepped forward so bravely to accuse him—they were his saviours.

If he had not been so intent on saving his skin to keep him out of prison or the asylum, would he have not taken steps to silence the victims of his crimes, or make the law operate in his corrupt favour, easy for a man of his rank and wealth. In fact it was the guardians of morality, in that age as in others such as today, uniting in backing up each other as they did and making sure the condemned Sade to solitary confinement, who made themselves the most successful accomplices of his immortality. He acquiesced in his punishment and kept on writing. Madame de Montreuil not only turned his life into that of a prisoner for life, but made it a masterpiece of infamy and debauchery for future generations, but especially our own, to draw on for their immorality. The secrecy and hushed sense of shock—the forbidden aura surrounding his work—was what made it sure that it was never forgotten. The ferocious indecency which secured its everlasting damnation, also secured its lasting fame. The de Sade danger has lived on.

But I was not in any prepared for an encounter with its most recent enthusiastic acolyte.

For my *thèse* on the depraved fantasies of men—and lesser number, though increasing, of women—I endeavoured too, to find out determine what reality there ever existed behind these flights of sordid endeavour. The answer was—very little. It seemed the authors wrote and propagated this sordid bestiality including, sometimes very funny and even great flights of literature in inverse ratio to any direct experience they had had to the dark practices. Like inventors of magical tales they had no skill in magic, or like masters of fictional detectives they had no record in ever solving a murder. John Cleland, author of *Fanny Hill*, an adventurous tale of a woman's uninhibited sexuality, had never undergone engagement in sex as a woman, but had even, it seemed, died a virgin, with no experience at all of sex itself. As for that string of anonymous French women who wrote *Histoire d'O*, *Emmanuelle* and the rest, all the experiences they had of what they describe, much of it diluted and sentimentalised, and made more palatable to middle-class readers came from having the collected works of the Marquis open on their desks while they wrote. The academic author of *Lolita*, the blueprint for

thousands of cases of middle-aged men launching themselves upon underage nymphets, was respectable and happily married. He specialized in the study of butterflies and most likely never stroked amorously the flank of a fifteen year old girl all his life. As for Sade himself. Whoever wishes to inform themselves of the horrifying sexual incidents that triggered his lifelong persecution by his in-laws and the public prosecutors, may consult my *thèse* as yet unpublished which resides in the Biblioteque Nationale, Room CC49, reference and catalogue marks 2924, H.T. IZ.

In sum they did no more than what happens a hundred times over everyday in a tree-lined suburb of Los Angeles, or Villard sur Seine. ‘The imagination is boundless, but the act a slave to limit,’ as Shakespeare summed it up.

So wherefore and why this worldwide early 21st century complete obsession with sex?

The answer is only too patently easy to find. Mankind’s boredom with itself, and with the civilisation it currently has developed and pursues. Sex (and violence, which is part of Sade’s sex philosophy and has of course given the words ‘sado-masochistic or S&M sex’ world-wide currency. Given how little or less wide scope there is for it in the mass consumerist, conformist world of today, most of all it provides for what quite a large minority and the wide prurient audience crave to have either actually or vicariously: danger and excitement. There are moreover armies of pseudo artists and con people wanting to exploit that danger and excitement for commercial profit.

I read so much about de Sade and ploughed mainly uncomfortably, but sometimes with flashes of admiration through his elephantine repetitive output, that I reckoned I could sit down with him and ask him a few questions. They would be along the following lines.

Patrice Léon: Tell me, Monsieur le Marquis, what has driven you to write so many millions of words, much of it indescribably tedious, and three quarters of it lost, burnt or destroyed by the censors of all shades of political allegiance from Monarchist to Jacobin to Bonapartist—centred round one thing, and one thing only, namely the pleasure to be gained from what we call perverted, abnormal sexual activity?

Sade [he would probably reply thus]: Well it is the ultimate ecstasy—the little death of orgasm, *le petit mort* the poets call it, and if you merge it with the other death, the ultimate ecstasy of life, then you have a perfect commingling.

Patrice Léon: Wait a minute, wait a minute—You believe the moment of death is, well to put it bluntly, like orgasm, like the man ejaculating. Woman have no place in this. Their pleasure, such as it is, is relegated to enjoying their torments—mainly masochistic.

Sade: It is an obliteration, a freedom, a release from the self.

Patrice Léon: So you are saying you don’t like ordinary life—I notice there is no family life in any of your books. Women invariably abort or murder their child—a child, male or female, is

only there to be abused—it's like but in words the proliferation of obscene images and websites devoted to abuse on the Internet today.

Sade: The what? The Internet? Sounds like one of my machines for sexual entrapment.

Patrice Léon: Never mind. But you are not telling me that you have none of the ordinary feelings of love to your family? Look, for instance, when your son died in battle fighting for France. You wrote in person to Napoleon Bonaparte demanding that his heroic behaviour should be rewarded. Your yourself began with a career o distinction in the cavalry. Your were capable, too, I have read, of quite ordinary acts of kindness to companions...

Sade: Oh you mean to my fellow lunatics...Yes. I felt compassion towards them. Yet I was never mad, you know. You know, don't you, that madhouses are prisons constructed for those out of step with the society of the day. Is this your Internet? The moral majority would have it so—to keep me safely locked up.

Patrice Léon: Well that is debatable.

Sade: Perverse, maybe, but I harmed no one. I expected after my death to be completely forgotten.

Patrice Léon: Yet what you prescribed, what example you gave to be followed, ruthless egoists exploiting young men and woman, or boys and girls, a father bringing up his daughter to pander to his depraved desires, a husband feeding his wife with the best food in order to let her blood and drink it, intercourse and buggery over and over again in every possible permutation and combination, the main and only beneficiaries being the perpetrators of these abominations—generally highborn aristocrats of unlimited wealth and erudite clerics soaked in atheistic debate...

Sade (doesn't let him go on): My dear fellow, it was all a metaphor. Can't you see? A symbolic representation of what life should be, a book of psalms for a better, more natural world where people would all be equal and kind to one another. It was never to be taken literally. It is God who has brought all the trouble into the world, God and those who believe in him and have constructed a religion around him which has fettered the spirit of mankind. Men and women need freeing from the stifling confines—in order to gain for themselves the only real purpose and satisfaction that life can ever provide, namely pleasure, unlimited pleasure. Find and provide that, and no one will come to harm.

Patrice Léon: And have you found that pleasure in your life? Was it worth it, year after year of incarceration?

Sade: Well I was alive—as I wished to be alive. I was provided for at the expense largely of the state— my own estates were seized...

Patrice Léon: Wait a minute. Didn't your wife provide for you. Didn't she bring you food, visit you, petition on your behalf, find you medicines when you were ill, lobby the King and later the revolutionary authorities, as well as your doctors, for better treatment?

Sade: She did it to protect her children and the family name.

Patrice Léon: But you turned your name, her name into an infamous noun, sadism, now current in every country of the world.

Sade is silent.

Patrice Léon: And what if everyone followed your example. What your characters do in your pornographic stories? Not just a few privileged well educated aristocrats into who mouths you put tens of thousands of words of justification—but the mass of ordinary people.

Sade: In their hearts that is what they would all like to do. Gratify themselves as my characters do— and of course generally come to sticky ends. As my characters do. Most people would never have the guts to enjoy such freedom without conscience. Ah conscience—it makes me sick! Here you have the madhouse prison. My characters are without scruples, without conscience, they dare to do the most unspeakable thing in life, to break all the taboos not with guilt, but with joy and exultation...And you know, there will be few if any criminal actions in a society whose foundations are liberty and equality.

Patrice Léon: But then cruelty will become the overriding culture or habit of everyone.

Sade: Life is the survival of the fittest. In our French Revolution millions died for no reason except that they failed to survive. It is absurd to maintain that cruelty is a consequence of depravity. Cruelty is natural. All of us are born with a dose of cruelty which education later modifies...Education has nothing to do with Nature, and is as deforming to Nature's sacred efforts as arboriculture is to trees—

Patrice Léon: You means nature is organic—as we try these days to make our vegetables and meat?

Sade: Nature is always superior. Cruelty is simply the energy in everyone that civilisation has not altogether corrupted. It is a virtue, not a vice...

And more of this stuff. *Ad nauseum*. For de Sade would never stop. The one great truth about erotic or pornographic writing and visual expression is that it never stops. The perfect example of this is *50 Shades of Grey* and its sequels. There are similar outpourings today everywhere, although more euphemistically with titles like *The God Delusion* or expounded by chubby TV celebrities like Stephen Fry, or in the *lingua franca* of stand-up comedians. Our culture breathes with sexual sado-masochism in watered down form (*50 Shades of Grey* It is suffocated with it, yet we believe it is somehow healthy and safe— and good for us. We proclaim it's a virtue, we moralise on its behalf (look at Esther Rantzen extolling *Shades of Grey* in the *Daily Mail*. We even believe that virtue combats it, and rises above it, as did Sade, who identified as

much with his abused and ravaged victim women, as with the sadistic agents of the torture which they enjoyed. So was Sade himself a sadist or a masochist? A moot point.

Sade wrote most of his first draft of *Justine*, his most famous work, dedicated to Marie-Constance Quesnet, in just two weeks from 23 June to 8 July 1787 in that section of the Bastille aptly known as ‘Second Liberty’. As he spent most of his adult life in prison or mental institutions his huge productivity of incontinent and repetitive sexual sagas may be said to be masochistic. Did he take savage delight on the aristocrats and clerics who pleased themselves at Justine’s expense, or did he enjoy the suffering inflicted on Justine, her generous hopes of goodness raised then cruelly dashed, as some kind of penance of flagellations for his poor and inadequate sense of self-esteem? Whatever triggered these extremes there is little doubt that the religion he hated played an important part in his life, while the constant cruel curtailment of his liberty found escape and compensation in the astonishingly well-ordered and cleverly structured excesses of his sexual imagination. As such he is our greatest prophet of sex-in-the-head worship (how many ‘Adult’ channels are there on television, how many porno websites?)

Sade revised *Justine* over the following year or two, while his publisher Girouard (later murdered during the Reign of Terror) printed its first edition in the summer of 1791, during which time the Royal family of France tried to run away to Austria, and the Massacre of the Champs de Mars happened.

‘I needed money’ Sade wrote to a lawyer friend. While Girouard had told him to make it ‘well-spiced’ *Justine* went through six printings in the next decade, but Sade disclaimed authorship. Later copies of it were seized and burnt by the authorities. Sade and his next publisher Massé were arrested, the latter denouncing Sade, who, having enjoyed a brief spell of liberty thanks to his pro-revolutionary sympathies, was once again put behind bars.

‘Will it not be felt,’ wrote Sade in his dedication to *Justine*, which was subtitled ‘Good conduct well chastised’, ‘that Virtue, however beautiful, becomes the worst of all possible attitudes when it is found too feeble to contend with Vice, and that, in an entirely corrupted age, the safest course is to follow the others?’ But if this be the case, Sade goes on, his work was meant to combat these dangerous sophistries and turn thoroughly depraved and corrupt spirits back toward the path of righteousness.

Did he worship and further vice because he saw it always emerging as the victor in the survival of the fittest path of evolution. All you believers in Darwinian Natural Selection, the survival of the fittest, beware: isn’t this what we see happening at every turn? It is this determinism that makes him so close to modern atheistic scientific thought. This is why Patrice Léon thought it important to compile and write *The Book That Kills*: to warn.