

The Author as Monster

De Sade: A Critical Biography, by Ronald Hayman, *New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1978. xxviii + 253 pp. \$12.95.*

RONALD HAYMAN begins his biography of Sade with Baudelaire's comment that "To explain evil we must always go back to Sade, that is to natural man." He could equally have cited Baudelaire on Laclos, Sade's cell neighbor at Picpus: "The Revolution was made by voluptuous men. Licentious books therefore comment on and explain the Revolution." That is what the French call *exact*.

Sade was an Enlightenment figure. Man was an animal and therefore a machine. Agnostic La Mettrie had said the same and been forced to flee to the court of Frederick II as a result. Sade added the idea that the clockwork with which this man-machine was wound up was sex. Until recently he has been totally misunderstood or feared, even the sympathetic Simone de Beauvoir calling Dolmancé (of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*) "Sade's mouthpiece," when it is far from certain that such fictional characters as Noirceuil, Blangis, and Gernande shared even sexual tastes with their creator; there is no evidence Sade indulged in blood-letting for sexual stimulation, but there is plenty that characters like Gernande languish in our huge State mental hospitals today. Thus in a calmer climate we now see Sade making a *catalogue raisonné* of so-called sexual perversions, rather than endorsing such by a mock-Enlightenment philosophy. Yet, as de Beauvoir also put it, "To sympathize with Sade too readily is to betray him." The philosopher in chains (*pace* Camus) is in danger of becoming the prisoner of the clinics.

Born into the highest strata of French life of his day, Sade made a marriage of convenience in the presence of the King and Queen in 1763, whereafter he behaved with an incautious recklessness that made him easy prey for the Paris Inspector of Police, Marais, looking for a scapegoat for the sexual

excesses of the aristocracy, which the monarch followed closely and knew he had to curb. Mr. Hayman clearly shows how Sade "courted Nemesis" in this manner until he was to spend twenty-eight years of his seventy-four in prisons; however, while reciting the facts of Sade's two rather inefficient "orgies," he does not emphasize that what we know about these absurd sessions (in which the disciple of Holbach and La Mettrie pushed secular determinism into the parodistic proportions of a Masters-and-Johnson sex laboratory) comes from prostitutes' "confessions" to a police inspector out for blood.

Moreover, most men of Sade's class were staging orgies at the time, and many of these were what we would today call sado-masochistic. In the first version of *Justine*, emerging "En Hollande" (*viz.* Paris: Girouard, later guillotined), Sade purloined the sexual excesses of men like Charolais and Richelieu (of the celebrated aphrodisiac candy) for his scenes, only to find them savagely surpassed by fact in the Revolution, when *lettres de cachet* prisoners like himself were amnestied by the Constituent Assembly; Hayman tells us that as many as 40,000 of these documents of committal were issued over the King's signature during the ministry of Fleury alone. Citizen Sade then did guard duty at the Tuileries and was elected Secretary of his Section des Piques or ward district, that of the Place Vendôme. In this capacity he removed from a roll for the guillotine the name of the mother-in-law who had committed him and he wrote in disgust of 10,000 men and women butchered in a day, many of the latter being sexually abused before and after the event—the Princesse de Lamballe's head was shown to the king and queen on a pike with her pubic parts stuck on it in a sort of mustache, a vision before which even Carlyle's imaginary reporter later balked.

For the rest of his life Sade was what we would call institutionalized, under harsh conditions, virtually destroyed by his virago of a mother-in-law. Others, like Pierre Klossowski, have speculated on Sade's strange relationship with this powerful woman, but Hayman is the only critic I know

to have suggested that hers was a thwarted revenge due to her own attraction to her son-in-law. Finally, Sade was immured in the asylum at Charenton, suffering from "sexual dementia." This was a method by which Napoleon stifled dissidents, and the Emperor remained deaf to all pleas. Dreadfully obese and barely able to walk, the world's subversive died on December 2, 1814, just before the Bourbon Restoration. He was placed under a cheap and nameless slab in Saint-Maurice cemetery and, as with Voltaire with whom he had much in common, his tomb was soon vandalized. (Voltaire had intervened in the Girard/Cadière scandal, the basis of the notorious, anti-clerical pornography *Thérèse philosophe*.)

It was an extraordinary life and Hayman's biography is by far the best in English to date. This is partly due to the establishment of a decent text to work on recently. After all, the Bloch-"Dühren" *120 Journées de Sodome*, of which the vast manuscript roll is shown us in the last volume of the Tchou edition, was only published in 1904. It was only in the nineteen-twenties that any close examination of the piracies and restoration of the author's reputation were started by a gentle French scholar called Maurice-Henri Meyer-Heine (usually known as Maurice Heine), who died in 1940 shortly before the bicentenary of Sade's birth and his own probable demise in some concentration camp. Heine's mantle then fell on his friend Gilbert Lély, who issued a two-volume life of Sade with Gallimard in the fifties. Meanwhile, the 1952 Pauvert edition was capsized by the Ministry of the Interior before it could go the distance (*Justine* is to this day disallowed in England). In 1966 a rich Chinese Belgian called Claude Tchou brought out his definitive 16-volume edition (my own set has them bound in eight volumes of appropriately inky niger). For this Lély expanded his previous biography into the first two volumes, running in all to 1352 pages of small type. It is an anthology of documents (with a mini-iconography in volume XVI). Sade's monomania infected his chief biographer and, despite the debt we owe Lély (he identified *Zoloé* as spurious), his

work is unreadable. Hayman writes, "As a study of a man's development it is almost useless." It is.

Hayman's biography digests and organizes all the facts lucidly. It also teems with insights ("he succeeded in making solipsism look like omniscience"). The only criticism I have of it is a certain sexological naïveté, and nit-picking (the lines cited in his last chapter by Baudelaire did not, in fact, close *Les Fleurs du mal*, and Stephen Dedalus is not caned on the hand in *A Portrait*, he is given the pandy-bat); but reading a sentence beginning "According to Krafft-Ebing" today, one tends to yawn. Who cares what these manic Viennese and Berlin investigators said any more? Sade is himself. As Borel put it, he was a "martyr," and not least to Baudelaire's reiterated belief that the imagination was "the queen of the faculties." Hayman has written an important book, one that should be on the shelves of all libraries, and other asylums of sexual frustration.

Reviewed by GEOFFREY WAGNER

The Obvious Alternative

The Quest for Excellence: The Neo-Conservative Critique of Educational Mediocrity, by Norman R. Phillips, *New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1978.* viii + 179 pp. \$8.50.

AMERICAN secondary school education is now at a stage at which it is no longer uncommon to read of a high school graduate bringing suit against his Board of Education for awarding him a diploma without teaching him to read. In turn, those colleges and universities willing to admit semi-literates find that they must devote most of the freshman year to remedial reading and basic grammar. High school students may earn impressive grades in woodworking, sex education, and self-analysis. And too often they find universities