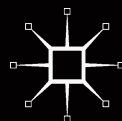




Henry Martyn Lloyd

Sade's
PHILOSOPHICAL
SYSTEM *in its*
ENLIGHTENMENT
CONTEXT



Sade's Philosophical System
in its Enlightenment Context

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To my favourite, my beloved, Jo Boom.

PREFACE

THE MARQUIS DE SADE, TWO HUNDRED (AND FOUR) YEARS LATER

The Marquis de Sade. A name that everyone knows and no one speaks, the hand trembles in writing it, and when we say it, the ears ring at the dismal sound. Enter if you dare in this pool of blood and vices. It takes great courage to address this biography, which will take its place among the most soiled and the filthiest. Let us then take our courage in both hands, you and I.

Le Marquis de Sade. Voilà un nom que tout le monde sait et que personne ne prononce, la main tremble en l'écrivant, et quand on le prononce, les oreilles vous tintent d'un son lugubre. Entrons si vous l'osez dans cette mare de sang et de vices. Il faut un grand courage pour aborder cette biographie, qui pourtant prendra sa place parmi les plus souillées et les plus fangeuses. Prenons donc notre courage à deux mains, vous et moi. (Janin 1834, p. 1)

In 1834 it was possible to begin a short account of Sade's bibliography and criminal trials like this. No longer. Two hundred years after his death uses of Sade's name proliferate. Interest in him continues to grow. Search suggestions from google.fr (France), google.de (Germany), google.co.uk (UK), and google.com.au (Australia) all make as their first suggestion that the "Marquis de" be completed with "Sade." "Lafayette" is generally suggested second, except in the UK, where it

is third, and at google.com (USA), which suggests him first, no doubt reflecting his role in the American Revolutionary War. At least on this rough estimation Sade's name is now very often and easily used; he is the most famous of all marquis.

Following the lead of Xavier de Sade who reclaimed the aristocratic title in the 1940s, Donatien Alphonse François's descendants are no longer ashamed of him but rather openly associate themselves with him and his *oeuvre* (Parry 2016; Perrottet 2016). And why not, when it is even said that "Sade is, in a way, [the French] Shakespeare" (Pierre Guyotat quoted in Lichfield 2016)?

Many of the uses of Sade's name are simple exercises in branding. Hugues, the current Comte de Sade, seems quite content to use his famous name for merely commercial ends. €35,00 can buy you a bottle of Marquis de Sade Brut Champagne. He has a line of brandies and cognacs, including some that are extremely expensive. By contrast, the €18,00 Vallée du Rhône seems a little risky. And I wonder what Justine would think about having a line of sub-premium wines from the Vallée de la Loire named after her: she seems from the novels to be a teetotaler, although I suppose if she were to drink it would be on a budget.¹ Meanwhile the marquisesade.com.au is an Australian-based retailer of leather and fetish wear, corsetry, and burlesque costumes. Predictably, the site describes Sade as the author of the "original 50 Shades of Grey" and as "the father of BDSM."²

Many other uses of his name genuinely refer to the historical person. Sade's notoriety is understandable. His life is certainly among the most extraordinary to have left a mark on the historical record and it is not without justification that it is said that "the best of Sade's novels is still his life" (Pierre Lepape quoted in Delon 2014, p. xvii). It is understandable then that there has been an industry of Sade biographies: without turning to the second-hand market there are at least eight biographies currently available in either French or English. Many of these are written for a curious general reading public attracted by Sade's notoriety and the whiff of sex and scandal. Others are works of high scholarship with Maurice Lever's (1991) carefully researched and written study still the definitive work.

There have been something like twenty films or plays inspired by or about Sade or his writing.³ Many of them are a mixture of biography and soft pornography. Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (1975) which grafts Sade's novel onto fascist Italy is the ultimate incarnation

of the idea that political art may justifiably inflict as much trauma on its audience as possible. It is perhaps the most banned film ever made. Probably the best of the films are Peter Brook's 1967 adaptation of Peter Weiss's play *Marat/Sade*, and *Quills*, a 2000 adaptation by Philip Kaufman of Doug Wright's play starring Oscar-winner Geoffrey Rush with the support of Kate Winslet, Joaquin Phoenix, and Michael Caine. Rush was nominated for an Oscar, a Golden Globe, a BAFTA, and a Screen Actors Guild Award for this film. Doug Write was nominated for a Golden Globe for the best screenplay.

I met Geoffrey Rush several years ago in the foyer of a hotel on Sydney's Oxford Street. When I rather rudely introduced myself and told him I was working on this book he was quick-witted enough to distance himself from the artistic license taken by the film. Sade was, he noted, enormously obese. While no confirmed images of Sade survive we have no reason to think he looked anything like as attractive as Rush. (Although like Rush, Sade could apparently be surprisingly charming when he chose to be.) Rush was right that the film is highly stylized and romanticized. It continues the long-established tradition of seeing Sade as a hero of writing and a martyr to freedom of speech. The film generally emphasizes the (supposedly) naughty, titillating, and funny aspects of the works. Although it stays away from the full horror of Sade's writing it does at least acknowledge the potential dangers latent in them and asks, even if it does not answer, the question of whether Sade's *oeuvre* was really better written than not.

Sade's name then is certainly not one which nobody speaks or which is only written with a trembling hand. Rather the opposite. Donatien Alphonse François de Sade has become one of the most notorious, iconic, and yet, far more often talked about than read, one of the most poorly-understood figures in the history of Western thought.

Interest in Sade takes decidedly different forms depending on the linguistic culture. Of course there are exceptions to these generalisations. But Anglophone interest in him and in his work largely treats Sade as a one-man chamber of grotesques. Sade has often been used by prejudiced Britains and North-Americans to mark the decadence of French intellectual and political culture. Since the nineteenth century Sade has in France often served as a means for variously marking either the decadence of the *ancien régime* or that of the revolutionary Republicans that replaced them (see Delon 1990, p. xxiv). It is easy enough then for Anglo-American readers to adopt both these contradictory meanings

and so take Sade as symbolic of French profligacy in general. In broad Anglophone intellectual culture, Sade is not then taken seriously.

There is at least one important exception to this generalisation: “Continental” philosophy.⁴ The Anglophone who does take Sade seriously is highly likely to have inherited an understanding of Sade from reading, in translation, one of the many French *maîtres à penser* who make him central to aspects of their thought. Indeed, this is the history of my own reading of Sade in whom I initially became interested through my reading of Foucault and particularly Bataille. In my personal experience, this interest in Sade has often served for “Analytic” philosophers as a prime example of French intellectual indulgence and indiscipline, thereby serving to confirm their prejudices against French thought in general and widening Anglophone philosophy’s nasty and unedifying “Analytic-Continental” divide.

Students of “Continental” philosophy rarely read French well so they are limited to the available translations of key works. For a long time, the Anglophone reader could generally only find Sade available in the Grove press edition of his libertine works. The edition is of poor quality, with cheap paper, binding, and printing; they are not books made to sustain serious study and disintegrate with repeated use. Far more significantly, the translations themselves by Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse are now rather dated and the literary merits of Sade’s prose are somewhat obscured by this. Sade’s most significant non-libertine work—*Aline et Valcour*—remains untranslated and is almost completely unknown.⁵

For the convenience of monolingual readers, in this book I have used the page numbers of the Grove press translation: even as new translations of Sade’s work become available it remains the canonical English-language edition. However, the translations themselves are derived from the French original; all translations from Sade are my own.

Little of this Anglophone interest however captures the importance of Sade in Francophone intellectual culture and so in French Studies even as it occurs within Anglophone Universities; poking fun as I have at Hugues de Sade’s attempts to monetise his famous name does nothing to capture the seriousness with which Sade is treated in France. There are two particularly striking markers of this.

First, from October 2014 to January 2015, and with the express intention of marking the bicentenary of Sade’s death, the Musée d’Orsay, France’s second most important art gallery, staged a major exhibition curated by Annie Le Brun which featured Sade’s legacy—*Sade*:

Attacking the Sun (Sade : attaquer le soleil). The exhibition coincided with the public displays elsewhere in Paris of the original hand-written manuscript of *One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* which had been purchased by a French manuscript dealer and museum owner for a reported €7 million (Willsher 2016). The magnificent colour catalogue of the exhibition is accompanied by a series of Le Brun's (2014) essays which make clear the themes that connect the exhibited works to each other and to Sade. An Anglophone visitor could be forgiven for their surprise at finding Sade in such company as Goya, Delacroix, Ingres, Degas, Cézanne, Rodin, or indeed Picasso, let alone his being presented as the source of a single tradition in which they all participated. Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*—often taken to be the single most important work of modern art—had for its original title *Le Bordel philosophique*, a direct allusion, Le Brun assures us, to Sade's *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (Le Brun 2014, p. 141). The visitor's surprise would perhaps be justified insofar as Sade himself did not leave behind any paintings, drawings, or sculptures and the illustrations which were published in his works hardly feature in the collection. And the Anglo visitor may have been surprised to find, despite the warnings that “the violent [not to mention pornographic] nature of some of the works and documents may shock some visitors,” the exhibition visited by teenagers, school groups armed with clipboards and worksheets, giggling and shy one moment, and the next immersed, open mouthed, in the lewd and pornographic images before them.⁶

For Le Brun—and the fact that this exhibition was held at the Musée d'Orsay shows the extent to which this is now a mainstream view in France—Sade completely transformed the history of literature and the plastic arts and it is her aim to demonstrate the effects of this transformation on all forms of aesthetic expression. Within Francophone intellectual culture, Sade has become the name that marks any aesthetics of the body, of transgression, of desire, of sexuality.

To represent the un-representable, to show the un-showable. Sade's project is an absolute that upsets forever the question of the limits of meaning and that necessarily interrogates the history of representation.

Représenter l'irreprésentable, montrer l'inmontrable. Le projet sadien est un absolu qui bouleverse à jamais la question des limites du sens et interroge nécessairement l'histoire de la représentation. (Guy Gogeval in Le Brun 2014, p. 11)

In the French tradition Sade—the *divin marquis*—has become the patron saint of any modernist, even Picasso, who can be said to make a similar attempt.

The second marker I want to invoke is another deliberate celebration of the bicentenary of Sade’s death, the release of a fourth volume of Sade’s works in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Delon 2014, p. xxii). There is no English-language equivalent of the Pléiade. The books are small, octavo rather than folio, but otherwise they resemble the print edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica: case bound in leather, very thin paper with a small elegant font, expensive, they usually come protected by a white slipcase. Intentionally they look like small bibles; they are the kind of books that children inherit from their parents. The Pléiade are also ubiquitous, almost all good French book shops have them, often on display in a locked glass cabinet. They are the sign of any serious shop. They are critical editions with extensive notes, annotations, and scholarly introductions; there is enormous prestige in being the editor of a volume. In the French context, they materially instantiate canonicity, dignity, and intellectual gravitas.

The inclusion of an author in the Pléiade is a highly significant moment. That this particularly applies to Sade is a point made explicit by Michel Delon in his introduction to the first volume where he traces the history of the “freeing” of Sade’s works from censure and clandestine distribution to their being inducted into the Pléiade (Delon 1990). The introduction is in large part a reception history of the *oeuvre* in which Delon traces critical responses to Sade from the earliest attempts to censor him, through to the developing interest that psychologists and criminologists took in his work, to his discovery by the *avant-garde* including writers such as Apollinaire and the Surrealists and also by many of the figures who have been now been turned into “Continental” philosophers (p. xlv–xlvi). Le Brun’s earlier work on Sade, a work which is broadly continuous with the approach she takes in her exhibition catalogue, features in Delon’s history (Le Brun 1986).

It is significant that while Delon acknowledges that it is thanks to the enthusiasts that the *oeuvre* has become available, he also distances himself from their methods of reading Sade (Delon 1990, p. xlvi). There has been, he notes, a division in the critical responses to Sade’s *oeuvre*. Beginning in the 1960s, eighteenth-century literary scholars began to read Sade professionally and in the manner they would read any other author. Delon locates his own work in the Pléiade as being the

culmination of this tradition. And so he marks the distinction between professional readers and the enthusiasts—Le Brun included—for whom the most basic point of the *divin marquis* is that he simply cannot be read as any other author (pp. xvii–xlix).

For all Delon’s work to differentiate his own method of reading Sade from that of Le Brun, it needs to be noted that they both are unified in their fundamental commitment to literature: Le Brun foregrounds the “pleasures of the text” and the affective response of the reader to their provocations; Delon by contrast takes a disinterested scholarly and historicist approach to the texts as works of literature. My study cuts across both these approaches and so across much of the critical literature on Sade. I do this by deploying an impeccably Anglophone mode of intellectual inquiry—contextual intellectual history. And I do so by moving the *oeuvre* from the domain of literature to that of the history of philosophy.

Intellectual history as a mode of intellectual inquiry has been steadily gaining ground in the humanities, particularly in the United States and the UK, but also in Germany and Italy. It has not however been widely taken up in France, certainly not in history departments where social history dominates, and not in philosophy departments, where historical texts are read, although not in such a way as to take the context in which they were written as primary for their contemporary interpretation (Lilti 2014). The one exception to this general tendency has been in literary studies and Michel Delon’s introduction to the Pléiade can serve as evidence of this change: there are now available many high-quality studies which historicise Sade’s *oeuvre* and treat him within the context of eighteenth-century literature.⁷ In such instances that Sade’s philosophy has been taken seriously in a contextual manner such commentaries have generally gestured towards Sade’s specific engagements with particular figures in his philosophical context the effect of this is necessarily unsystematic.⁸

Sade studies has been dominated in France by literary studies and elsewhere by French studies. I will by contrast treat Sade’s *oeuvre* from within the discipline of the history of philosophy. It is well known that Sade aspired to be a *philosophe*. What is remarkable is that, notwithstanding all the attention Sade has received, no one has yet reconstructed in detail Sade’s *actual* philosophical “system.” The approach that I take in this study of course produces significant methodological complexities, in the first instance those pertaining to the difference between literature and philosophy as it existed in the eighteenth-century context. But these

matters are not for discussing in a preface; I will often turn to them in the course of the work proper.

I do not want to give the impression that Sade is taken seriously in all Francophone or Francophile contexts, although contemporary counter-examples are quite hard to come by.⁹ This is Michel Onfray, sounding very much like a conservative Anglo-American Eurosceptic:

I wished to solve a particular enigma that appears to contain a greater enigma still and to reflect on the construction of legends in the world of ideas in general and of philosophy in particular. How, given that the Marquis de Sade who was undoubtedly a feudal philosopher, monarchist, misogynist, chauvinist, and an anti-Semite, whose existence was that of a recidivist sex offender having on his proven record reprehensible acts, was able, and could still present as the emblem of the freethinker libertarian and feminist, emancipationist and republican, a philosopher of the Enlightenment at the same time as an *avant-garde* thinker? This enigma seems to me as staggering as that which would make of a Nazi dignitary an emblematic figure of the liberation of mankind! For the good reputation of Sade undeniably constitutes an *intellectual monstrosity*.

Je souhaiterais résoudre une énigme ponctuelle qui semble contenir une énigme plus grande encore et réfléchir à la construction des légendes dans le monde des idées en général et de la philosophie en particulier. Comment, en effet, le marquis de Sade qui fut incontestablement un philosophe féodal, monarchiste, misogyne, phalocrate, antisémite, dont l'existence fut celle d'un délinquant sexuel multirécidiviste ayant à son actif nombre de faits avérés et répréhensibles, a pu, et peut encore, passer pour l'emblème du libertin libertaire et féministe, émancipateur et républicain, un philosophe des Lumières en même temps qu'un penseur d'avant-garde? Cette énigme me paraît aussi stupéfiante que celle qui ferait d'un dignitaire national-socialiste une figure emblématique de la libération du genre humain! Car la bonne réputation de Sade constitue indéniablement une *monstruosité intellectuelle*. (Onfray 2014, 31–32. Italic in the original.)

It is not a criticism of Onfray to say that he is a polemicist, and an entertainer, rather than a scholar: he is self-consciously what Anglos might call a “pop-philosopher,” a Gallic version of Alain de Botton. And so there is no point looking to his book for an intellectually satisfying solution to this enigma. Suffice it to note that the enigma has two parts. The second part has been responded to in great detail including by Delon and by Marty (2011) in a work simply entitled *Why Did the Twentieth Century*

*take Sade Seriously?*¹⁰ It is the first part of the enigma which has not received sufficient scholarly attention largely because of a failure to treat carefully Sade's philosophical ideas. Without a careful contextual reconstruction of Sade's philosophical "system" it remains impossible for us to know what Sade actually thought.

Referring to *Justine*, Geoffrey Rush, playing Sade, shouts "it's a fiction, not a moral treatise." What I show in this study is that Sade's novels—including *Aline et Valcour*, *Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu*, but particularly *Histoire de Juliette* on which I will often focus—taken in their historical and philosophical context, are both fictions *and* moral treatises. The bulk of the intellectual work of Sade's philosophical "system" is that of moral philosophy. It is only after this "system" has been reconstructed that we will be able to know whether or not Sade's good reputation does constitute an intellectual monstrosity. I will undertake that reconstruction in this book.

Brisbane, Australia

Henry Martyn Lloyd

NOTES

1. <http://www.maison-de-sade.com/en/index.php>. Accessed 24 February 2018.
2. Accessed 24 February 2018.
3. For a serious discussion of these films, which this is not intended to be, and others of the ways Sade has been "canonised" in the twentieth century see Steintrager (2016, pp. 263–98).
4. I do not think it is controversial to understand "Continental" philosophy as being an Anglophone tradition, primarily North American but also Australian and British. See for example Cusset (2008).
5. It is worth mentioning that this is beginning to change, a mark of the extent to which Sade has become mainstream. Oxford World's Classics has begun to issue retranslated editions of some of Sade's major works—although not yet his *chef d'œuvre*, *Histoire de Juliette*. Penguin Books have released a new translation of *The 120 Days of Sodom* and *Philosophy in the Boudoir*. Although still in cheap paperbacks, here Sade's writings occupy a place on the lists next to the greatest of the world's literature and philosophy.
6. <http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/in-the-musee-dor-say/exhibitions-in-the-musee-dorsay/article/sade-41230.html>.
7. At the least, a list of examples must include: Cryle (1994), Meeker (2006), Steintrager (2004, 2016), Vila (1998), and Warman (2002).

8. Very few of the traditions that have taken Sade seriously have extended this to a serious consideration of his relationship with his philosophical context. The major counter-examples to this are the work of Deprun (1990), as well as briefer works by Naville (1962) and Châtelet (1972). Jean Deprun, particularly in his short essay “Sade Philosophe,” however leaves much work left to be done, work which is undertaken in this study. Notwithstanding its considerable merits, Michel Delon has not provided in the *Pléiade* a systematic reconstruction of Sade’s own philosophy or a reconstruction of the detail of Sade’s engagement with the moral philosophy of his period. No major study has reconstructed the specific detail of this engagement or the extent to which this engagement entailed positive philosophical doctrines such that it can be cautiously described as a philosophical “system.” This has accordingly continued the tendency to hold that Sade is either a novelist uninterested in a systematic engagement with the philosophy of his period, or that Sade is an “anti-philosopher” whose response to the philosophy of his period is wholly libidinal not at all philosophical. Of course much turns on what exactly is meant here by philosophical “system”: this issue is discussed in detail in chapter two of this study (Châtelet 1972; Deprun 1990; Delon 1990, 1995, 1998, 2014; Naville 1962).
9. For a brief discussion of some of the tensions that Sade provokes in contemporary French intellectual cultures see Kozul (2014, pp. 102–3).
10. See also Steintrager (2005).

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The true genesis of this project may have been in my becoming aware of the importance of Sade through my study of Foucault and Bataille as an undergraduate in philosophy at the University of Queensland—perhaps it was my reading of James Miller’s *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (1993) as a holidaying backpacker on a camel safari in the Rajasthan desert. There were several who taught me during this formative period and who stimulated in me the desire to pursue further study, but I particularly want to thank Michelle Boulous Walker for being such an inspiration to me then and since.

But the source of a river is not in a drop of rain. And so it is probably better to say that the headwater of this project was my walking into Peter Cryle’s office in the hope he would take on the supervision of my doctorate. Peter convinced me that, rather than doing a Ph.D. on Bataille in relation to the entirety of human thought, it was better to concentrate on the relationship between Sade, Bataille, and Foucault. I may one day finish that project, but it now seems unlikely. Over many years Peter has been an inspiration to me, and a valued and trusted mentor. More than any other individual his influence on my intellectual development is evidenced in the pages of this book. I thank him for this.

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Henry Martyn Lloyd

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CONTENTS

Part I Introduction

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|----|
| 1 | The Problem of Sade | 3 |
| | <i>References</i> | 17 |
| 2 | Sade's Philosophical "System" | 21 |
| | <i>Les Idées reçues</i> | 28 |
| | <i>References</i> | 43 |

Part II The Body of Sensibility: Ontology, Epistemology, Genre

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 3 | Sensibility, Vitalist Medicine,
and Embodied Epistemology | 49 |
| | <i>Medical Vitalism and Embodied Epistemology</i> | 53 |
| | <i>Philosophical Particularism</i> | 61 |
| | <i>The Enlightenment's "Rational" and "Empirical" Subjects</i> | 65 |
| | <i>References</i> | 78 |
| 4 | Sensibility, Genre, and the <i>Roman philosophique</i> | 83 |
| | <i>Imagined Observing</i> | 91 |
| | <i>References</i> | 103 |

**Part III Moral Sense, Pleasant Sensations,
and Libertine Sensibility**

5	Moral Sense Theory in the French Enlightenment	113
	<i>References</i>	129
6	Rousseau's Knowing Heart, Sade's Knowing Body	131
	<i>Sade's Epistemology of Intensity</i>	136
	<i>The Sadean Critique of the Moral Sense Theory</i>	141
	<i>References</i>	148
7	Heart and Head, Love and Libertinage, in <i>Histoire de Juliette</i>	151
	<i>Coda</i>	160
	<i>References</i>	165

**Part IV The Authority of Nature: Sade's Use
and Critique of the Natural Law Tradition**

8	Natural Law, and the Law and Voice of Nature	169
	<i>References</i>	179
9	Living It Up in the State of Nature: Sade <i>Contra</i> Hobbes and Rousseau	181
	<i>On the Irrationality of the Social Contract</i>	182
	<i>Nature's Single Precept; The "Golden Rule"</i>	190
	<i>References</i>	198
10	Sadean Natural Law in <i>Histoire de Juliette</i>	201
	<i>References</i>	226

Part V Ethical Self-Fashioning and the Problem of Libertine Sociability in <i>Histoire de Juliette; or, Histoire de Juliette comme roman d'apprentissage</i>	
11 Sade's Theory of Libertine Askesis	231
<i>References</i>	254
12 Juliette's Ambiguous Apprenticeship	257
<i>"It Is Only You, My Angel, [...] That I Forgive for Loving Me": The Limited Success of Juliette's Affective Self-Cultivation</i>	257
<i>"Even [Libertines] Worship Something Like Virtue in Their Lairs": The Problem of Libertine Sociability</i>	265
<i>References</i>	280
Part VI Conclusion	
13 Against the <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>; or, How Not to Read <i>Kant Avec Sade</i>	283
<i>References</i>	294
Index	297

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

I have derived all translations of Sade's writing that are used in this work from the French original. That I have also used the Grove press page numbers does not alter this. Although they are now quite dated and are slowly being replaced by more contemporary editions, the Grove press translations of Sade by Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse continue to be the canonical English-language edition. For *Histoire de Juliette*, Sade's *chef d'œuvre*, it remains the only English translation. Accordingly, for the convenience of scholars who wish to critically examine the broader context of the quotations that I have relied on in this work but who do not read French fluently, I have included the page numbers to this edition.

All translations from Sade are my own. For the remainder, I have relied on existing translations especially where they are easily available.

PART I

Introduction



CHAPTER 1

The Problem of Sade

The problem posed to historians of the Enlightenment by the work of Donatien Alphonse François de Sade (1740–1814) has yet to be adequately addressed. The Marquis de Sade’s infamy has been firmly established by the excesses of his literary/pornographic imagination. The problem he poses for historians is not grounded in his extremely violent pornography or with his gratuitous hyperbole *per se*, but with the difficulty of giving an account of Sade’s thought given the context within which it was situated. In its most simple form, the problem is this: how are we to reconcile Sade’s philosophy with the broader themes of the period?

The problem is complex but I hope that without excessive reductionism it can be brought into focus by examining the issue of Enlightenment humanism. The association of the Enlightenment with humanism has been a long-lived historiographical theme. Both the importance of the connection and its persistence may be marked by the 1971 collection of essays by Peter Gay which simply took the *philosophes* to be the *Party of Humanity*. For Gay “the Enlightenment” and “humanism” were effectively synonyms. “The word humanism,” Gay wrote,

Is rich in overtones, but the *philosophes* could claim to be humanists in all the senses of that word: they believed in the cultivation of the classics, they were active in humanitarian causes, and in the widest philosophical sense, they placed man in the centre of their moral universe. (Gay 1971, p. 289)

If contemporary historiography is inclined to find Gay's relatively simple equivalence a little hasty, the association of the Enlightenment with "the human," or perhaps more sophisticatedly with talk about "humanity," nevertheless continues to be a persistent feature of historiography on the period (Cook et al. 2013, p. 1). Antony Pagden, to invoke one relatively recent example, has argued that

The key terms of understanding almost every modern conflict over how to define and understand "humanity"—modernism, postmodernism, universalism, imperialism, multiculturalism—ultimately refer back to some understanding of the Enlightenment. (Pagden 2013, 5)

And Pagden too finds contemporary humanitarianism originating in what he understands to be the Enlightenment "project" (see, for example, Pagden 2013, pp. 345, 349).

The word "*humanisme*" was not available in its contemporary meaning in eighteenth-century French. The term "*humaniste*" was: it designated the Renaissance humanists and, correspondingly for the *Encyclopédie* a "young man who follows a course of studies called the humanities" (Morvan 2005a, b; Diderot and D'Alembert 1765). Beyond this meaning, however, Peter Gay invoked the two senses of the term "humanism": the ethical/political sense linked to the contemporary term "humanitarian" and the philosophical/anthropological sense, the science of the human.¹ In both of these senses, Enlightenment humanism may be taken to have been the centralising or privileging of humankind in the order of nature particularly vis-à-vis the supernatural or the transcendent.

But if the Enlightenment was synonymous with humanism then Sade's *œuvre* poses a contextual problem, for if anybody in the period was *prima facie* not a humanist it was Sade. In the words of Dolmancé the philosopher-hero of *La philosophie dans le boudoir*:

Get it into your head once and for all [...] that what fools call humaneness is nothing but a weakness born of fear and egoism; that this chimerical virtue, enslaving only weak men, is unknown to those whose character is formed by stoicism, courage, and philosophy. (Sade 1965a, p. 360)

Retiens donc une fois pour toutes que [...] ce que les sots appellent l'humanité n'est qu'une faiblesse née de la crainte et de l'égoïsme ; que cette chimérique vertu, n'enchaînant que les hommes faibles, est inconnue de ceux dont le stoïcisme, le courage et la philosophie forment le caractère. (Sade 1998, pp. 172)

In the period, the word *humanité*, when it did not refer collectively to “human nature,” meant “kindness, [or] sensibility to the misfortune of others” (Morrissey 1798; Morvan 2005c). It was in this ethical/political sense that *humanité* was prominently ascribed to the *philosophe* in Du Marsais’s highly influential 1743 pamphlet “Le Philosophe” (Du Marsais 1743, p. 194).² Even as Sade was an enthusiastic participant in the period’s philosophical/anthropological project, Sade sought to critique this moral/political project. At least then on this provisional measure, Sade is, and is not, part of the Enlightenment.

Attempts to respond to the problem posed by Sade have generally followed two opposing strategies; to paraphrase Caroline Warman, Sade has tended to mean “either nothing or everything, he has tended to be seen at the extremes of the spectrum” (Warman 2002, p. 13). Both extremes are inadequate. The first strategy effectively dismisses the problem by dismissing Sade as a serious Enlightenment thinker worthy of sustained scholarly consideration. Often this is done by simply ignoring Sade’s *oeuvre*. Peter Gay, in working to substantiate his idea that the Enlightenment is synonymous with humanism, at least recognises the problem posed by Sade. He does not however consider it for long, writing that rather than being part of the Enlightenment, Sade’s thought was a vicious parody of it: “Sade was not an heir but a caricature of the *philosophes*. [...] There is little point in turning a tedious voluptuary into an archetypal thinker” (Gay 1971, p. 285). And thus is the Sadean *oeuvre* briskly excluded from the Enlightenment. The second strategy is the exact opposite of brisk dismissal: Sade has been included in the Enlightenment by historians of the period the better to substantiate critiques of it and locate the crisis of modernity in it. Gay’s dismissal of Sade was a direct response to Lester Crocker, for whom:

Sadism is a dark pool formed by those streams of eighteenth-century philosophy which flow into it. There is nothing in Sade’s nihilism which, in essence or in embryo, is not also found in [the period]. The differences are great; but they are differences in degree, thoroughness, universality, consistency. (Crocker 1963, pp. 398–99)

That is, Crocker over-identifies Sade with the Enlightenment in an attempt to place it on the slippery slope of nihilism, a slope which he found leading inevitably not just to Sade, but to Robespierre, Nietzsche, and of course Hitler: “that Sade foretold the course of the crisis of

Western civilization [was] obvious” for Crocker (1963, p. 420). With Adorno and Horkheimer (and others), he too read *Kant avec Sade*: for Crocker, the positing of man as an end and not a means made possible, perhaps even necessitated, the reversal of this maxim (Horkheimer and Adorno 1996; Crocker 1963, p. 408).³

The problem Sade’s *oeuvre* poses to intellectual historians is exacerbated by the uses it was put to in the twentieth century, particularly by the French *avant-garde*, and following them by much contemporary theory and criticism. A detailed investigation of this use lies outside the scope of this study which will focus on the eighteenth century. And in any event much of this work has already been done by Michel Delon, Caroline Warman, and more recently by Éric Marty who has written the most significant single-volume study of Sade’s twentieth-century reception (Delon 1990; Marty 2011; Warman 2002, pp. 5–20; see too McMorran 2014; Steintrager 2005, 2016, pp. 263–98).

For Marty, Sade’s readers have formed two distinct waves. There were in the nineteenth century some effective readers of Sade—he notes, for example, Stendhal—but the century did not, in Marty’s terms, take Sade “seriously.” All that was available was a profoundly incomplete *oeuvre* and one which had not been republished since the end of the eighteenth century (Marty 2011, pp. 8–10). And so after Sade’s work had effectively been lost to the nineteenth century, the first wave was marked by early twentieth-century readers. Serious critical attention started with Guillaume Apollinaire who held that “[Sade] who may well count for nothing during the nineteenth-century may well come to dominate the twentieth” (Marty 2011, p. 11).⁴ Following Apollinaire and Jean Paulhan, Sade became the “divin marquis.” Sade’s fame further increased following his use by the Surrealists: André Breton, the movement’s most significant theoretician, expressly conceived of Surrealism as a project which sought to subvert the “reign of logic” and give primacy to the critical and imaginative faculties of the unconscious through the practice of automatism, the “dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations” (Breton 1978a, pp. 116, 122). For the Surrealists, the greatest subversive of all times was Sade: anti-religious and anti-bourgeois, they identified with Sade’s atheism and what they took to be his sense of class revolt. Sade was revered as a “heroic god” (Lamarche 2007, p. 59). Robert Desnos claimed that the Surrealists’ “present aspirations were basically formulated by Sade”;

for Maurice Heine “the spirit of Sade is living among us”; and finally and perhaps most simply Breton himself described Sade as “surrealist in sadism” (Rosemont in: Breton 1978b, p. 373). Central to the Surrealist reading of Sade was the idea that he subverted the prevailing rational order through satire and humour. The Surrealists’ Sade was funny and Breton famously included Sade in his anthology of black humour; for his part, Marty notes that “one cannot be a poorer reader of Sade than André Breton is here” (Marty 2011, p. 16). Marty is probably right about this, although we should note that there have been many others who have enthusiastically competed for the title of the poorest reader of Sade.

The second wave of interest in Sade, and that which Marty is himself interested in, began in the 1940s with a series of publications by Klossowski, Bataille, Blanchot, and Adorno and Horkheimer (Marty 2011, p. 12). It was followed by texts written by Beauvoir, Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, Sollers, Barthes, and Levinas. Following the Second World War interest in Sade changed. No longer was he taken to be a thinker of *eros* or of an erotic utopia. The post-holocaust generation wanted to understand extremely, limits, and violence and to this end attention focused on Sade grew intense (Warman 2002, p. 5). What was now foregrounded was the Sadean nightmare, death, torture, and a version of Sade which found in his *oeuvre* the destruction of reason by itself (Marty 2011, p. 19). It was no longer writers, novelists, and poets who led interest in Sade, but philosophers. Or rather “anti-philosophers” as Bataille called them. Sade became the name which designated the troubles of modernity; Marty’s book recounts a history whereby the Sadean text became “absolutely modern” and it is this that for him constitutes taking Sade “seriously” (Marty 2011, pp. 21, 26).

There are three significant points to be made here. First: the Enlightenment has been, and continues to be, a period during which some highly contested ideas came to the fore. Within this broader contestation, Sade has often been taken by those would locate something like the “crisis of modernity” in the period, to be a definitive symptom of that crisis.⁵ And insofar as Marty equates those who “take Sade seriously” with those who take Sade to be “absolutely modern,” he is both reflecting on and continuing this tradition. As I have noted, for those who do not see Sade as nothing, he tends to become everything, particularly he becomes the most significant symptom of “enlightened modernity.”