



The Marquis De Sade: A New Biography

Donald Thomas

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Donatien-Alphonse-Francois, Marquis de Sade 1740-1814, remains a man whose name is instantly recognized but whose life is obscure. Born close to royalty in the age of aristocratic decadence, he precipitated sexual scandals in the grand manner. Alleged poisoning and unnatural practices with a group of girls in Marseilles earned him a death sentence. While hunted by the law he contrived a winter of pleasures that led to further accusations of sexual crimes.

Imprisoned on six separate occasions, De Sade spent twenty seven years under detention, escaping the guillotine while within sight of it. and spending his last years in the dubious comfort of the asylum of Charenton. For a brief period after the revolution De Sade also became a judge, opposed the death penalty, and saved some of his sworn enemies from prison or execution. He was loved to the end by women who knew the worst of him, and he was fearless in his defiance of injustice.

What manner of paradox was this man? Was he a monster or was he a man of his time, driven to excess and persecuted by his contemporaries? De Sade, an aristocrat, lived through the waning days of Louis XVI, the Revolution, the Terror and the early years of Napoleon's reign. His literary. output fills a library shelf, and even now a English-language edition of his complete writings is in the planning stages.

In this illuminating and dramatic biography, Donald Thomas puts De Sade in perspective, unraveling his complex life and thought against the turbulent background of revolutionary France and considers his legacy in the context of our own time. What manner of man could have written Juliet, Justine and 120 Days of Sodom? This book offers a key.

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