

is as it should be. Genet is a writer of international stature whose work offers a penetrating commentary on the ills of western society. The world he presents is described so vividly and with such an eye for beauty even in the most sordid contexts that he has been called "the poet of evil of our times". He is, rightly, the subject of serious academic study.

An artist of Genet's intelligence and insight has a right to be read in his entirety, for each new work must modify our understanding of his total achievement. Nor do we consider it necessary to establish that a book by such a writer should possess exceptional literary merit; an artist also has the right to fail from time to time and yet be heard. There is in our view no comparison to be drawn between the serious literary work of a man like Genet, whose affinities are with such writers as Lawrence, Joyce, Nabokov, and Baldwin, and the mass of cheap, cynically commercialised periodical and paperback pornography which the Tribunal is properly concerned to keep under strict restraint.

We must concede that *Querelle of Brest* contains incidents and language which, if taken out of context, many might consider indecent. The descriptions of homosexual relationships in particular, the glorifications of murder, and Genet's vivid depiction of the depravity which pervades the naval base of Brest, are undoubtedly shocking. One's initial reaction might well be disgust. Yet such unwelcome knowledge is suppressed at our peril; and, taken as a whole, the book leaves one impressed with the nature of evil which, far from asking to be realised by imitation, must be faced, understood, and overcome. Such tactics have a long and honourable tradition in religious teachings.

In this book Genet writes complexly. Technically it is said to be "Genet's highest achievement in the novel". There is a new acknowledgement of the role of women and subtler characterisation; there is a complex pairing and patterning of characters, deeds, time past and time present, fantasy projections and actual experience. Genet deflates the beauty of his own rhetoric by opposing to it a sordid, miserable, and subhuman reality in which the incidents are horrid and revolting; his own vision embraces both. Little in the book is left simple. The self-awareness of the main character Querelle, together with the intimate meditations of Seblon, are matched by the comprehensive awareness of the author himself in his writing. It is this characteristic of complex qualification that inhibits the intelligent reader from simplifying the book and misapplying its content; it is this elaboration of motive and intricacy of relation that must frustrate the simple-minded reader who might otherwise be tempted to translate fantasy incidents into real-life actions. It is impossible to be absolute about such matters, but the Tribunal believes that this book is unlikely to promote any desire for realisation; rather, on a more abstract level, it leaves one to grapple with the problem of evil. And that is not a problem to be solved by evasion.

The author of *Querelle of Brest* is important, and this is one of his substantial works. It may suffer somewhat in translation but it evinces an uncompromising honesty of intention and artistic integrity. There is no attempt whatever on the publisher's part to force sales by vulgar methods to a wide and possibly immature readership; the present edition is in unadorned hard covers with a sober dust-jacket; its paper and typography are of high quality; and its price, while not dear, keeps it well above the cheap paperback range. Such considerations merely lend support to our view that there is little risk in allowing the book to find its natural readership. Accordingly we declare it to be not indecent.

L. G. H. SINCLAIR, Chairman.

11 November 1968.

Decisions of the Indecent Publications Tribunal

No. 115-119

In the matter of the Indecent Publications Act 1963 and in the matter of an application to the Tribunal by the Comptroller of Customs for decisions in respect of the following books:

Francon Duclos: the Memoirs of a Paris Madame.
Ladies on Call.
Lesbianism and the Single Girl.
Satyricon—Memoirs of a Lusty Roman.
My Secret Life.

DECISIONS OF THE TRIBUNAL

THE following books were submitted to the Tribunal by the Comptroller of Customs for classification. In respect of the first four books, Mr Downey appeared as Counsel for the distributor, Seven Seas Publishing Proprietary Ltd., of Wellington, and made submissions. No submissions were received from the Comptroller of Customs, nor were any submissions received in respect of *My Secret Life*.

Francon Duclos: the Memoirs of a Paris Madame, by the Marquis de Sade. Translation and introduction by Paul J. Gillette. Paperback edition, published by Holloway House Publishing Co., Los Angeles, 1967.

The present book is a free translation of parts of a larger one by de Sade entitled *The 120 Days of Sodom*, written in 1785. The plan of the work provides for four sections, one for each month covered by the action. During this time each of four brothel-keepers, of whom Madame Duclos is one,

is expected to recite 150 perversions, 600 in all, to be enacted by the participants in illustration of the narrative. Most of the victims are killed in the final section and only the 4 psychopaths and 12 other persons survive.

This outline will sufficiently indicate the depraved nature of the full work. In its unrevised, incomplete, and textually crude form, it has no literary interest to redeem it, and it contains none of the philosophic content which may be found in some of de Sade's later writings. The most that can be said is that the recital of perversions might be of interest to those professionally concerned with abnormal psychology, and that the phenomenon of de Sade can only be seriously studied if the necessary raw materials, in the form of fundamental texts, are available.

But we cannot believe that the serious concerns of scholarship in any of its forms are honestly promoted by the present edition. Its physical form—a cheap paperback, the paper and print of which leave much to be desired—place it in a quite different category. The text is part only of de Sade's larger work; the editor's avowed refashioning of the narrative must be taken substantially to alter the form given by de Sade; the normal scholarly apparatus which would permit a check to be made on the authenticity of the text presented is lacking; the introduction is brief and superficial and the commendations of de Sade there cited apply to works other than that printed.

Were the edition under consideration an accurate one like that of Maurice Heine (three volumes, 1931-5), or a faithful translation of it, a restrictive classification might reasonably be applied. Mr Downey, of Counsel for the distributor, said his client did not wish to be heard in support of the book. We can see no redeeming virtue in the present volume and accordingly decide that it is indecent.

Ladies on Call, by Lee Francis, Holloway House Publishing Co., Los Angeles. Paperback for adults, \$1.15.

Ladies on Call is the autobiography of Lee Francis who operated some of the most famous clubs and holiday houses of Hollywood. It is adult reading of a second-rate kind, but avoids the grossness often associated with such stories. There is a good deal of detail in the accounts of sexual practices, many of which are aberrant; and this over-all emphasis makes the book unsuitable for general reading by young people. We judge it to be indecent in the hands of persons under 18 years of age.

Lesbianism and the Single Girl, by Roger Blake, Ph.D., Century Books, K.D.S., Cleveland, Ohio. NZ\$1.15.

This book deals with sex in an extravagant and irresponsible manner which we consider to be injurious to the public good. Although it purports to be a serious study, the paucity of scientific comment leaves it far short of being justifiable on that ground. It is not redeemed on the grounds of literary merit and the Tribunal decides it to be indecent.

Satyricon: Memoirs of a Lusty Roman, by Titus Petronius Arbiter. A reconstruction in modern English by Paul J. Gillette. Paperback edition, published by Holloway House Publishing Co., Los Angeles, 1965. NZ\$1.15.

Like most classical texts, the *Satyricon* of Petronius frankly accepts the physical side of life and readily admits homosexual as well as heterosexual love. Indeed this natural acceptance of the sexual instinct and its need for gratification paradoxically creates the norm which gives the book its moral tone as a satire on the follies and vices of Nero's Rome. But the virtues of the original go beyond such social satire to include literary parody and imitation, and the narrative itself appears to be an original attempt to create the quite new literary form of a realistically based novel of comic incident, verbal wit, and psychological observation. The most recent scholarly study of Petronius (by Professor J. P. Sullivan) speaks of the *Satyricon* as a "highly original work, unparalleled in ancient literature, which seems comparable only to such individually unique productions as *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*".

The text of the book, however, presents formidable problems to the scholar. In the present edition the editor has attempted a reconstruction of the text and offers an interesting prefatory justification of his method. The result is a highly readable narrative which preserves the spirit of the original. Given the classical status of the text, the moral tone inseparable from the satiric purposes of the book, and the degree of responsibility shown in this instance by the editor, the Tribunal decides that the book is not indecent.

My Secret Life, abridged but unexpurgated. Introduction by G. Legman. Grove Press, New York. Paperback at US\$1.75.

This is another edition of the anonymous autobiography of "Walter", a wealthy Victorian who lived entirely for sexual experience. It is 700 pages long (mercifully abridged from the original 11 volumes) and, apart from a most competent introduction by G. Legman, is allowed to stand alone, with no softening of the blunt language. In most cases publication of a text is preferable to publication of extracts that are toned down and commented on, as in the edition by the Kronhausens already submitted to this Tribunal. But here the