



Maldoror and Poems

Comte de Lautréamont , Paul Knight (Translator and Introduction)

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Alternate version of this book.

‘It is not right that everyone should read the pages which follow; only a few will be able to savour this bitter fruit with impunity.’

So wrote the self-styled Comte de Lautréamont (1846–70) at the beginning of this sensational *Chants de Maldoror*.

One of the earliest and most astonishing examples of surrealist writing, Lautréamont’s fantasy unveils a world – half-vision, half-nightmare – of angels and gravediggers, hermaphrodites and pederasts, lunatics and strange children. The writing is drenched with an unrestrained savagery and menace, and the startling imagery – delirious, erotic, blasphemous and grandiose by turns – possesses a remarkable hallucinatory quality.

The writer’s mysterious life and death, no less than the book itself, captured the imagination of surrealists. Jarry, Modigliani, Verlaine and others hailed it as a work of genius. André Gide wrote, ‘Here is something that excites me to the point of delirium,’ and André Breton described the book as ‘the expression of a total revelation which seems to surpass human capacities’.

This volume also contains a translation of the epigrammatic *Poésies*.

Maldoror and Poems Details

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From Reader Review Maldoror and Poems for online ebook

Todd Myers says

If I could give a 1/2 star I would, really giving it a 4 star only due to Poems. Maldoror was the true part of the book to read, very good story and disturbing at times. One of the books on the David Bowie reading list, and I can see why Mr Bowie enjoyed this one, worth the time to read it.

Kristopher says

Ingredients: Victorian obsession with cataloging flora and fowl using proper names that nobody knows or cares about, overuse of the exclamation point on a level that rivals the text messages of a 12-year-old girl, the forced use of strong verbs that are barely strong enough to support bloated sentences festooned with superfluous adjectives and illogical metaphors stretched so beyond any real relationship they seem foolish, a complete lack of narratorial voice that makes the text a disengaging mess of shifting viewpoint, and finally a hodgepodge monster frankensteined together using every gothic trope along with a childish attempt at shocking gore and sensationalism that comes across uninspired and false.

I do not generally write reviews, but the money and time I lost reading this book inspired me to try and save others the same fate. This is the work of a fabricating novice mimicking the works of others and peppering it with just enough disingenuous vulgarity to try and make a name for himself. I am certain the longevity of this book is owed to the early death of the author and ample opportunity for hack scholars to make crude guesses at some tenuous meaning. There is nothing new here. It has a message as deep as middle school poetry or three inches of muddy water.

Ascoyne says

To paraphrase the British Film Censors review of the surrealist film 'The Seashell and the Clergyman'. This book is apparently meaningless. If there is a meaning it is doubtless objectionable.

Personally I love surrealism but mainly in visual art whether it be in films such as those of Dali and Bunuel or artists such as Manet, Man Ray, Dali, Duchamp, Magritte etc.

This book is incredibly tedious with a few (one?) good line(s);

'as the chance juxtaposition of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table'

Attempts to shock with murder, pederasty and bestiality with a shark come over as childish attempts to shock which wouldn't be so bad but the vignettes lack coherence and there is no attempt at a serious narrative except towards the end where a story is attempted but soon breaks down into chaos.

Kamil Kopacewicz says

Największe zbrodnie Maldorora jest bycie bohaterem książki tak fatalnie stylistycznie napisanej. Największy antytalent literacki w historii?

Howard says

This is a surreal, gothic, poetic, brutal, imaginative, unreadable non-story of a book written in 1868 by 22 year old Isidore Ducasse who died 2 years later.

It is based around the narrator's real life and imagined alter ego Maldoror. He describes what he sees and produces a darkly, sinister, interaction from them whilst at the same time the narrator tells us what Maldoror sees and does. Maldoror loathes himself, God, life, everyone else's life and his situation. The book is actually six mini-books of 10 sections. Though a lot deeper than the list will suggest this is a summary of the first few books main ideas or initial trains of thought:

Pederast, oceans, murder, gravedigger, toad, blood, bus passengers, small girl, hermaphrodite, soprano, louse, maths, lamp, Almighty, shipwreck, suicide, shark, conscience, horse rider, child rape/body mutilation, madwoman, dragon, sleeping god, brothel, a hair, hanged, body, shadow, dreamy hog, aqua man, teenager, dung beetle, funeral, vampire spider.

Maldoror kills, hates, imagines, thinks, torments, asks the reader, and engages you with the situation he's conjured up. The depth comes because it's not real but is believable. But is clever and thought provoking. Teenagers get their throats cut, a hair starts talking, mathematics is exalted and God denied. Maldoror himself says he's trying to "invent a poetry completely outside the laws of nature" and the text is just that. There is about 10% story particularly the last book but don't expect to understand or have any resolution.

Maldoror's a sort of average teenager goth armed with a pen, virginal hang-ups, demonic ideas, handbook of world religions and writes what he sees.

Here are some more quotes but even these don't really do the work justice:

"whenever he kissed a little pink-faced child, he felt like tearing open its cheeks with a razor"

"I use my genius to depict the delights of cruelty"

"show me a man who is good...for at the sight of such a monster, I may die of astonishment: men have died of less"

"drink, drink confidently the blood and tears of the adolescent. Blindfold him, while you rend his palpitating flesh"

"It is not enough that the army of physical and moral afflictions which surrounds us should have been created: the secret of our shabby destiny is not revealed to us"

"he prepares, without blenching, to dig his knife courageously into the unfortunate child's vagina. From the widen hole he pulls out, one after one, the inner organs.

"While the cold wind whistled through the firs, the Creator opened his doors in the darkness and showed a pederast in"

Ultimately you'll enjoy reading this as it's so different but don't expect a happy or even an ending at all. I like a story and because ultimately it's difficult to recall much (because it's so dense) by thened, I'll drop a star.

Andy says

WOW! Where in the hell has THIS book been all my life? This is incredible. I've read nothing like it.

The book essentially follows the exploits of an evil supernatural creature (?) called Maldoror. Most chapters are self-contained vignettes. There are wild scenes of violence, confusing philosophical rants, followed up with symbolic, dream-like chapters.

It's cruel, poetic, bitter, melodramatic, sadistic, misanthropic in the extreme, and at times utterly baffling. It's full of tangents, often in mid-sentence (with some very LONG sentences.) Much of it is written in a stream of consciousness, symbolically or allegorically. Above all, to me at least, it's darkly beautiful, thought provoking and always surprising.

This is nihilism like I've never seen in print. Nihilism toward God, society, decency, and yes, even the readers' patience at times. It feels like anything can happen, a totally unhindered (unhinged?) imagination.

Possible spoilers in this paragraph:

There's human/shark copulations, a sad monologue by a hair left in a filthy brothel by a murderer, apocalyptic lice breeding and a drunk God getting shat upon. Oh that's nothing, in one scene Maldoror gets so worked up talking about his own intoxicating semen, he insists armies of men will one day slaughter each other en masse just to smell it. Yes. Really.

The unpredictability of it kept me fascinated, it's impossible to tell where this author will go next. One thing is guaranteed -- it will be somewhere in the darker recesses of the human psyche.

But it's not the shocking nature of it I really loved. I've read plenty of shocking tripe. What sticks is the beautiful, evocative prose and the haunting mood it generates. This really feels like something forbidden, and the author seems like he really means it.

I find myself in a mood for surreal and decadent works these days, and this fits the bill, many times over on both counts. This book was so disturbing, it's hard to believe such a thing was published a century and a half ago.

Here's some samples, showing examples of the style.

An image of God:

"Not finding what I was seeking, I lifted my eyes higher, and higher still, until I saw a throne made of human excrement and gold, on which was sitting--with idiotic pride, his body draped in a shroud of unwashed hospital linen--he who calls himself the Creator! He was holding in his hand the rotten body of a dead man, carrying it in turn from his eyes to his nose and from his nose to his mouth; and once it reached his mouth, one can guess what he did with it."

While watching a ship sink he decides to take this upon himself:

"They could not escape! To make assurance doubly sure, I had gone to fetch my double-barreled rifle so that if some survivor was tempted to approach the rocks of the shore to escape imminent death, a bullet in the shoulder would shatter his arm and prevent him from carrying out his plan."

More raging against God:

"The Eternal One has created the world as it is: He would have been very wise if, in the time strictly necessary to break a woman's skull with hammer-blows, He had forgotten his sidereal majesty for a moment to reveal to us the mysteries amid which our existence stifles like a fish flailing on the ship's deck."

He despises the human voice:

"Oh! when you hear the avalanche of snow falling from the high mountain; the lioness in the barren desert lamenting the disappearance of its cubs; the tempest accomplishing its destined purpose; the condemned man groaning in prison on the eve of his execution; and the savage octopus telling the waves of the sea of his victory over swimmers and the shipwrecked, then you have to acknowledge it: are not these majestic voices finer than the sniggering of men?"

This is something that could only have been written with the anger, testosterone and enthusiasm of youth. He revels in it, letting his imagination go unhindered. There's a few things I wouldn't even quote here they're so shocking. The prose has a poetry to it that is beautiful regardless what he is speaking of. The other thing is, despite it's age, like Beethoven's dissonant "Grosse Fuge", this feels very modern, it's so strange it will likely feel fresh for a long time to come.

There are certainly parts of the book which outshine others. The philosophical rambles can be baffling and feel rather aimless. The first "book" (of six) isn't quite as good as the later ones, although it has it's moments. And finally, I have no doubt this isn't to everyone's taste, but I loved it. As he starts off, "It is not right that everyone should read the pages which follow; only a few will be able to savour this bitter fruit with impunity."

Teresa Proença says

"Para construir mecanicamente o miolo de um conto sonífero, não basta dissecar parvoíces e embrutecer intensamente, com doses repetidas, a inteligência do leitor, de maneira a tornar paralíticas para o resto da vida as suas faculdades, através da lei infalível da fadiga; é preciso, além disso, com um bom fluido magnético, pô-lo engenhosamente na impossibilidade sonâmbula de se mover, forçando-o, contra a sua natureza, a obscurecer os olhos devido à fixidez dos vossos."

Enquanto lia este livro, lembrei-me muitas vezes de umas expressões da avó de Amos Oz:

"Aquele sábio tornou-se tão inteligente que já não percebe quase nada."

"Dói tanto, tanto, tanto que começa a dar-me vontade de rir."

É que estava a detestá-lo tanto que não conseguia parar de lê-lo.

Abominei as cenas asquerosas relatadas e enfastiei-me com a escrita que me pareceu básica e um pouco infantil. No entanto, entendo a valorização que se lhe deu, e dá, pois nunca li nada que se lhe comparasse.

Os Cantos de Maldoror é um poema em prosa, do género (mais ou menos) Fantástico, constituído por seis partes (os cantos) que relata as selvajarias cometidas por Maldoror, um anjo maligno, que luta contra Deus e os homens.

Quem o quiser conhecer, prepare-se para a bicharada (tarântulas, escaravelhos, aranhas,...) e cenas horríveis que vão da bestialidade ao canibalismo.

Poesia I

Sinceramente, não sei o que é.

Poesia II

Acho que são aforismos, não tenho a certeza.

"Não se pode julgar a beleza da vida senão pela da morte."

"O amor não se confunde com a poesia."

"A mulher está aos meus pés!"

~~eu não, cruces/credo!~~

André Breton considerava Isidore Ducasse uma "revelação total que parece exceder as possibilidades humanas" e o precursor do Surrealismo. Léon Bloy achava que era um louco, "uma ruína humana completa". (Estou com Bloy...)

=====

"O melhor meio de persuadir consiste em não persuadir."

— **Isidore Ducasse - Conde de Lautréamont**

Isidore Ducasse nasceu em Montevideu, **Uruguai**, no dia 4 de Abril de 1846 e morreu em Paris, França, no dia 24 de Novembro de 1870.

Filho de franceses, aos treze anos foi para um colégio interno em França. Publicou os Cantos em 1869, com o pseudónimo

Conde de Lautréamont. Morreu aos 24 anos, no seu quarto de hotel, não se sabe de quê. A informação sobre a sua vida é escassa; mesmo sobre a única foto que existe não há certeza de que seja efectivamente de Ducasse.

Chienyn Chi says

Obsessed.

Cath says

What... the fuck... did I... just read....

The story about the shark was beautiful ?

Zadignose says

Our author, whether writing as Comte de Lautréamont or Isidore Ducasse, is a master of negation, contradiction, and contrast.

Maldoror (and Poems) is a great work. It's audacious, original, startling, heartfelt, insincere, sincere, brutal, funny, outrageous, paradoxical, inspirational. It is the opposite of itself. It's one (or two) of a kind.

Some will be attracted to the book because it is sensational. Some will be repelled for the exact same reason. I've commented earlier and elsewhere that--though I could be regarded as a jaded reader--I found some of the passages in Maldoror remarkably difficult and painful. Though I don't think I am any kind of sadistic thrill-seeker, I'd say that the preceding sentence is actually evidence of the strength (and peculiar nature) of the book. That's because the author does not merely hammer upon us with a barrage of violent absurdities (though some *will* perceive it that way). On the contrary, he knows how to enlist our sympathy without seeming to do so. Or perhaps he simply exploits our humanity.

In a previous pre-review, I objected to the association of this text with surrealism. The surrealists were inspired by it, and the text has some relationship to the later developments of surrealism, but I think it would give a very distorted picture to suppose there is a strong relationship here. I also objected to the cover art, which is a petty gripe, but seriously... this is not Dracula. One more objection I raised was against the main description attached to our Goodreads record. Yeah, well, this is a tough book to categorize or accurately portray in a capsule, and I suspect that readers will be highly divided on just how this book could be fairly described.

Which brings me to another point. I think if you assemble twelve fans of this book, they will all eye one another very suspiciously. None will trust the others' motives or rationale for liking--or loving--this book. Then, one may also feel a bit uncomfortable looking in the mirror after reading this. You may suspect your own reflection, or may recoil in shame at the piercing and accusatory glance which confronts you.

Thus, of course, we must have a very suspicious and uncomfortable relationship with the author too--or with the author as we imagine him to be.

I referred, a few times above, to contradictions. It appears to me that the author employed an interesting strategy with remarkable results. It appears that he wrote, then returned and revised his sentences by arbitrarily inverting them, throwing in a "not," or other negation just when its appearance would be least intuitive, may be quite irrational at first glance, but which also invites a new perspective. This appears to happen in Maldoror (I perceived it as happening more frequently starting with "Book 3" of Maldoror) and it is developed to its extreme when we come to the anti-book "Poems."

I think Maldoror will always be the main focus of readers' attention. It's the only "complete" work. But let's not neglect "poems." I was looking forward to seeing how the author would go about writing a sort of counterpoint to his own work, which is what I expected "poems" to be, and I do like the idea of deliberately pursuing a literary goal which may be counter to one's nature. However, it turned out quite different from my expectation, because "poems" is a 95% facetious work. First of all, I keep putting quotes around "poems," because, as far I can tell this could be a title for the work, but it is not a collection of poems... if anything, it is a tirade against poetry. But anyway, if readers were prone to misconstrue Maldoror, I think they're doubly likely to be deceived by "poems." Here, it appears that our author has successfully defended Maldoror by anticipating the objections of his harshest (imagined) critics, and then presenting their arguments in such extreme and absurd style as to render the criticism ridiculous. When reading something of this sort, coming from this particular author, knowing what we know of the work he has previously produced, knowing his age and literary leanings, this should be an obvious caution: If you read something which seems patently absurd in "poems," you should take it as a sure sign that the author was aware of the absurdity--and it was intentional.

But this does not preclude the 5% sincerity which may be buried in here. The author's approach, and the nature of his topic, ensure that his writing will always remain somewhat mysterious and paradoxical. What exactly were his most sincere thoughts cannot be easily or certainly deduced... there is a permanent air of doubt, which highlights the irony of the fact that "poems", more than anything else, is an argument AGAINST doubt.

Which leaves the strongest impression? The terror of sin which is communicated in-between the lines of Maldoror, or the savoring of sin and the sadistic joy of annihilating mankind and oneself in the process? Which is stronger, the advocacy of passionate and anarchic literature which peeks through the cracks of "poems," or the surface moralizing and overt condemnation of all expressions of sorrow and negative passion... well, positive passion too. In the end, is Maldoror truly "poems" in disguise, while "poems" is a concealed Maldoror? They both affirm one another covertly, while expressly repudiating one another.

In my pre-review I also wrote a few things of which I will preserve a snippet or two. (Later, I may revise again to introduce a few quotes from the work into the section above):

"The author, in fact, may have been strongly interested in teaching good, by causing us to be revolted by evil. His evil protagonist is a sensitive soul too, and at times has a noble desire to see evidence of the goodness of man, but he's also so terribly cynical, on a scale we rarely see in any form of literature, and the author is such an effective devil's advocate, that he makes the reader experience both the thrill and the shame of his devilishness."

"He's also infinitely self-contradictory and hypocritical, thus plunging the reader into an ethical and experiential morass. Who knows what will come out in the end?"

Mel says

I read this book awhile ago for bibliogoth as recommended by sahra_patroness, I had to read it in English because even if I can read easy novels based in Imperial China there's no way I'd be able to cope with one of the heroes of the Surrealist movement! I have to say I found it rather perplexing. I did want to enjoy it as it's also one of beluosus's favourite books but found it rather strange. There were some startlingly beautiful and

horrible moments and passages within it; there were some great descriptions and some great ideas. What I felt were the weaknesses of the book was its inconsistency, I felt that some points went on for too long and some points just were lost completely. I have to say I also found the use of language, and the swapping back and forth between the narrator being Maldoror or an outside observer rather confusing. When we got to bibliogoth most people hadn't finished it. I said that I thought they should even if they did get lost from time to time, it was worth it to find the really beautiful bits tucked away in the madness. For me I really enjoyed the bits with the Shark, and the hermaphrodite, and the story of God in the whorehouse. I enjoyed the tales of people's lives and how Maldoror would then show up and destroy it all. The book was more philosophy than fiction and I'm sure I missed a lot of what the author was trying to say, but I am glad to have read it, even if it wasn't the type of thing I would normally read.

Josh says

This book is incredible but the translation is really piss poor. A lot of the conjugation got mixed up so first, second and third person points of view can all end up in one paragraph. This makes the novel much harder to read especially considering the hallucinatory nature of the text. It is worth it to track down the Exact Change version translated by Alexis Lykiard.

Rachel says

I don't know what the F*** I just read.

The most cohesive part of the book was the last Cantos, but that's not saying much.

Think of the most obscene, nonsensical and/or violent scenario in your mind and it's probably in this book. Make your crazy ass scenario include a shark to have sex with, or a beetle pushing a giant ball of shit up a hill, or a gigantic crab ready to fight you in the name of God. Throw in some murder, lots of shit talking about the Creator, vivid descriptions of vaginas, every immoral act you can think of and that's this book. It has basically everything (is that a good thing? honestly I don't know), and it's at times written quite evocatively, and other times it was... something else.

I've wanted to read this book for a few years now, and now that I read it, I just feel like... well, that was interesting. I'm not sure who I would recommend this book to - probably only people who like transgressive art.

I will give props to the author, whoever the hell he is, because he has one vibrant imagination. I can't imagine this book went over too well when it was printed. I'm honestly surprised he wasn't killed for the blasphemy alone. He died before he was 25 years old, I have no idea what happened to him and as far as we know this was the only thing he wrote.

PS: I don't think it's fair to give a rating on this edition of the book because I did not read this edition. I started to, and then the library copy had to be returned and either the library got rid of the copy or someone

stole it. So I found another version of the book -- of which only 1000 copies were made! -- and started over.

Cphe says

Had I had an inkling early on of how much "Brain Pain" this would cause I very much doubt that I would have started this. However the challenge to the reader was thrown down within the first few pages. What reader can resist such a challenge? I won't comment on the overall literary aspect of it because I don't feel as if I have those "credentials".

The imagery is strong, powerful, visceral, it's also repugnant, blasphemous, shocking, confusing, elusive but at the same time strangely compelling and thought provoking. The imagery is so powerful that I at times felt drowned by it. Parts of the text I wanted to morally shy away from.....

It's written with a "feverish" intensity that at times I had to break away from. It's not a work that can easily be assimilated.

Amazed that the author was twenty four when he wrote this but on reflection I shouldn't be surprised because I felt that only youth would have had the audacity and verve to write this, and carry it off.

Some of the imagery evoked within these Chants will haunt me for a long time to come. I'm unsure what rating to give here, I may have to return when I'm not so "numb."

Patrick.G.P says

Complete and utter beautiful madness. Let your logic and reason soar high and fly away like cranes in the late summer skies. The diary, accounts, thoughts, feelings, and rantings of evil incarnate, of the enemy of man and god. Maldoror reads like nothing before or since, vivid descriptions of vile, baseless acts of depravity and violence, inconceivable logic and strange desires to get closer to human thought and feeling at the same time as one is deeply revulsed by them.

Lautrèmont's prose is searing, contradictory and alluring, it invokes the grandeur of nature and the darkest malevolence of humanity in such a way that leaves me breathless. This is what it feels like to be taken hostage by a piece of fiction.

"Not finding what I was seeking, I lifted my eyes higher, and higher still, until I saw a throne made of human excrement and gold, on which was sitting – with idiotic pride, his body draped in a shroud of unwashed hospital linen – he who calls himself the Creator."

Maldoror, liar, prophet, turns his gaze towards true reason and philosophy and rips it to shreds. Majestic, ghastly, envious, and gracious, the envy of nature burns brightly within Maldoror as he sees himself as the embodiment of man's sin against itself, and the harbinger of enlightenment.

Malicious and subversive, beautiful and haunting the work of Lautrèmont is complete and utter beautiful madness. Man, savor these somber and poison-filled pages, and never look back.

Aloha says

Cool!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raqMfN...>

Tim Pendry says

This is a very peculiar book for review because one can approach it from two perspectives - its 'importance' in literature and whether it is actually worth reading. It is like the Bible in that respect - the sort of blasphemous implication that Isidore Ducasse (the actual author) might have appeared to revel in.

Let us start with a first proposition - that it is 'important'. Yes, Maldoror is important if you are a specialist or interested in French literature and at two levels. It is both a stepping stone from the Gothick (with Maldoror containing many of Gothick's traditional tropes) over the stream of decadence to surrealism with its famous phrase in the seminal Book Six referring to the "chance juxtaposition of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table!" and a first step to the self-knowing French literary meme of literature as a thing that refers to itself.

The addition of the so-called Poems to this edition is important because they change our reception to Maldoror simply by being read alongside them. Maldoror *might* be read as a sincere rage against God and Man filled with brutality and evil if we did not see the author in the Poems assert in a series of cynical platitudes the exact opposite point of view in the Poems.

This tricksiness continues with the titling and style - the Poems are just sets of often pompous rhetorical aphorisms, often contradictory, while Maldoror, ostensibly presented as a novel (though only the Sixth Book comes close to being a coherent narrative) is really a large number of prose poems but connected only through the Mathurin-like character of Maldoror (though even this is never clear).

Ducasse is undoubtedly a possible literary genius but since he died at the age of 24 (his life is almost incredibly obscure to the extent that one is suspicious of his very existence though it is indeed evidenced) we cannot confirm any claim to this effect. My own interpretation is that we have a very intelligent and possibly obsessive young man playing with the literature of his time in order to expose its and our absurdities through exposing the rhetorical positions it and we take.

Without the cynico-beneficent platitudes of the associated Poems, left to take Maldoror at face value, we might fall into the trap of taking his essay in evil so seriously as to dismiss him as a very clever, possibly insane, adolescent but the whole is too well crafted for that, including the very clever pastiche of the pompous declamatory styles of the era and of late romanticism as a whole.

The litanisation of literary figures of the first two thirds of the French (and European) nineteenth century in the Poems, many of whom are now forgotten, makes them of their time and place. It tells us one of the few things we 'know' about this body of work - it is literary work about literature that tells us nothing of life and

is conscious of that position.

Those who have just read Maldoror and taken it as another 'set text' of 'evil, be thou my good' are missing the point that they are the subjects of the satire themselves - for satire it is.

But what of our second proposition - is it worth reading? Well, unless you are a student of European literary culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, probably not.

The Poems certainly are only interesting in that context and as counterpoint to Maldoror but they are what they are designed to be - two long sets of platitudes being declaimed by a pompous fool (not, of course, Ducasse as Ducasse but Ducasse as player of pompous fools).

Maldoror has its moments where a page or passage grips but its incoherence and self-referencing as well as its internal debate with a late romanticism that is no longer an 'issue' for us today is mostly rather dull while the type of evil it offers is no longer persuasive to a world of scientific precision in our understanding of the inadequacy of serial and child killers.

The book is set in a specific mental milieu - that of the problem of God and evil in a believing age where many intellectuals were not believers or were forced into believing positions by politics or the market. This question is now only of interest to theologians and historians and not to the intelligent general observer in an advanced Western culture which can more safely take this God-thing out of the political equation and just consider how banal the evil that men do is when looked at more closely. This age needs no rhetoric, pomposity, complex sentences and epic similes. Milton did this definitively and better and everything else is just a foot-note to his Satan.

If you want to avoid being bogged down in the grand scheme (some 200 pages in this edition) and are prepared to miss out on the one or two real gems in the flow of rhetorical mud, you can just jump to the 'novel' itself in Book Six and kill two birds with one stone - get a sense of the cruel wit of Ducasse at the expense of his contemporaries and some understanding of his influence on the surrealists where the section cries out for Max Ernst's collages to illustrate it.

So, all in all, an important book in its context but a rather dull one not because Ducasse is a dull or bad writer (he is not) but because he is contesting things and ideas with an almost brutal intensity that are not really going to be of much interest to us or our age.

Michael Troncale says

The experience of reading Maldoror by Lautreamont is like having your head split open to have a skewed, demented reality directly attached to your synapses and neurons. I would call the writing "electric" if that was not such a paltry cliché for this work. The fire underneath almost every sentence of Maldoror has the force of Hell brought to life, captured in human language.

Maldoror is broken up into loosely related chapters that are sublime prose poems describing the thoughts, feelings, and actions (sometimes horrifying) of a character named Maldoror. The writing reflects the usual French hatred and mockery of anything resembling conventional life or domesticity. One of the most notable moments in the book is the chapter where Maldoror is turned into a hog by God and he praises God for

removing him from the stink of humanity. Alas, Maldoror's pleasure is short lived, as God cruelly changes him back to his original human form: "Reverting to my original form was such a great grief for me that I still weep at nights."

Perhaps this is God's revenge for an early passage from the book: "I received life as a wound, and I have forbidden suicide to heal the scar. I want the Creator to contemplate the gaping crevasse for every hour of his eternity. That is the punishment I inflict on him."

Despite Maldoror's hatred of humanity, the infinite fire of the prose is so evocative that at times you want to jump out of your skin. As the book says at the end, "go and see for yourself, if you do not believe me."

Eadweard says

Maldoror

Read again: Sept 25-28

1st Book

page 33: "Show me a man who is good..."

Section 9: Ocean Invocation.

page 57: "remember this: we are on this mastless vessel to suffer..."

page 62: "Sad as the universe, as beautiful as suicide."

2nd Book

section 4: author attacks God: "You will do me the favor, O Creator..."

page 73: "He is struggling in vain in the century into which he has been thrown..."

Section 7: The Hermaphrodite.

page 87: "Only when you hear..."

Section 9: Hymn of Glorification to Lice.

Section 13: Sinking ship, Maldoror mates with a shark.

3rd Book

page 125: "I received life as a wound..."

Section 5: God leaves behind a single strand of hair after visiting a brothel.

4th Book

Section 4: "I am filthy, I am riddled with lice..."

page 167: "I dreamt I had entered the body of a hog..."

5th Book

Section 1: "The most soothing potion..."

page 189: "My subjectivity and the Creator..."

page 195: "Oh!, if instead of being a hell..."

6th Book

page 216: "He is as handsome as the chance encounter..."

page 227: "Whenever I think of you..."

page 278: "It is a horrible thing to feel..."

Crazy book, crazy Maldoror, he wanders around encountering bizarre characters, committing crimes and spouting nonsense. I.. like the wordplay? Maldoror... 'mal dolor'?

"As one of the poètes maudits (accursed poets), he was elevated to the Surrealist Panthéon beside Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud, and acknowledged as a direct precursor to Surrealism. André Gide regarded him — even more than Rimbaud — as the most significant figure, as the "gate-master of tomorrow's literature", meriting Breton and Soupault "to have recognized and announced the literary and ultra-literary importance of the amazing Lautréamont"."

Yeah, no kidding.

Some bits I liked:

"I am filthy. I am riddled with lice. Hogs, when they look at me, vomit. My skin is encrusted with the scabs and scales of leprosy, and covered with yellowish pus. I know neither the water of rivers nor the dew of clouds. An enormous, mushroom with umbelliferous stalks is growing on my nape, as on a dunghill. Sitting on a shapeless piece of furniture, I have not moved my limbs now for four centuries. My feet have taken root in the ground; up to my belly, they form a sort of tenacious vegetation, full of filthy parasites; this vegetation no longer has anything in common with other plants, nor is it flesh. And yet my heart beats. How could it

beat, if the rottenness and miasmata of my corpse (I dare not say body), did not nourish it abundantly? A family of toads has taken up residence in my left armpit and, when one of them moves, it tickles. Mind one of them does not escape and come and scratch the inside of your ear with its mouth; for it would then be able to enter your brain. In my right armpit there is a chameleon which is perpetually chasing them, to avoid starving to death: everyone must live. But when one party has completely foiled the cunning tricks of the other, they like nothing better than to leave one another in peace and suck the delicate fat which covers my sides: I am used to it. An evil snake has eaten my verge and taken its place; the filthy creature has made me a eunuch. Oh if only I could have defended myself with my paralysed hands; but I rather think they have changed into logs. However that may be, it is important to state that my red blood no longer flows there. Two little hedgehogs, which have stopped growing, threw the inside of my testicles to a dog, who did not turn up his nose at it: and they lodged inside the carefully washed epidermis. My anus has been penetrated by a crab; encouraged by my sluggishness, he guards the entrance with his pincers, and causes me a lot of pain! Two medusae crossed the seas, immediately enticed by a hope which was not disappointed. They looked attentively at the two fleshy parts which form the human backside, and, clinging on to their convex curve, they so crushed them by constant pressure that the two lumps of flesh have disappeared, while two monsters from the realm of viscosity remain, equal in colour, shape, and ferocity. Do not speak of my spinal column, as it is a sword...Yes, yes...I was not paying attention...your request is a fair one. You wished to know, did you not, how it came to be implanted vertically in my back. I cannot remember very clearly; however, if I decide to take for a memory what was perhaps only a dream, I can tell you that man, when he found out that I had vowed to live disease-ridden and motionless until I had conquered the Creator, crept up behind me on tiptoe, but not so quietly that I did not hear him. For a short moment, I felt nothing. This sword was buried up to the hilt between the shoulder-blades of the festive bull, and his bones shuddered like an earthquake. Athletes, mechanical experts, philosophers and doctors have tried, in turn, all kinds of methods. They did not know that the evil man does cannot be undone! I forgave them for the depth of their native ignorance, and acknowledged them with a slow movement of my eyelids. Traveller, when you pass near by me, do not address the least word of consolation to me, I implore you. You will weaken my courage. Leave me to kindle my tenacity at the flame of voluntary martyrdom. Go away...let me not inspire in you any act of piety. Hatred is stranger than you think; its action is inexplicable, like the broken appearance of a stick in water. Such as you see me, I can still make sorties as far as the walls of heaven at the head of a legion of murderers, and then come back and, resuming this posture, meditate again on noble projects of vengeance. Adieu, I shall delay you no longer; and, so that you may learn a lesson and keep out of harm's way, reflect on the fatal destiny which led me to revolt, when I was perhaps born good!"

"O Ocean, you remind me somewhat of the bluish marks one sees on the battered backs of cabin boys."

"Farewell until eternity, where you and I shall not find ourselves together."

"He was... as beautiful as the chance encounter between a sewing machine and an umbrella on the dissecting table!"

Dan says

This book contains some of the longest sentences I have ever read and make it worthwhile to wander through their intricate pathways to discover what oddments Isidore Ducasse has hidden at the end -- or maybe the time spent lost in tangents, those wonderful and malignant (yet always compelling, like a distant scent of maple on the air that shouldn't be there, but impossible, strangely *is*, and admits of no rational explanation ready at hand) glimpses into the hidden rooms of creativity that are open to the eyes of anyone who is willing to stop for a moment and let themselves go inside, is what makes the long excursion to the end of the sentences seem somehow, in a kind of teenage-crush way, important.
