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## GOLDBLOCKS SYNDROME

When it comes to issues of gender and sexual orientation, I've always felt so Goldilocks, stumbling upon chairs that were either too big or too small—or that shattered to bits under my fat ass. Too big. Too small. I think back to Dorothy Allison's birthday party—it was 1990, before *Bastard Out of Carolina* was published, so Dorothy wasn't famous yet. She lived in a cramped apartment in the Mission, scrambled for money, and like me, hung out in the San Francisco queer arts scene. When I opened the invitation there were a number of acronyms printed at the bottom, like BYOB, but strange combinations I didn't recognize. The party was being held in South San Francisco, a city I'd driven past on my way to the airport but I never imagined venturing into; it seemed so dreary from the highway. Regardless, I figured it would be an arty crowd and if I brought a bottle of wine and wore something black I'd blend in. Black seemed to predominate at the last artsy party I felt frumpy at. The inside of my closet was pathetic. The only thing black I could come up with was a linen dress—sleeveless, with a loose, straight skirt and boat neckline—totally corporate-looking. Black is black, I said, and wore it anyway.

When I arrived at the South San Francisco ranch house, the front porch was packed with hooting bare-breasted women with nipple rings. Inside was just as packed with large women in bustiers, more bare-breasted women, and a handful of gay guys, some in leather. A woman, naked except for a harness, crawled on all fours across the kitchen floor as another woman spanked her with a wire whisk, the kind that Julia Child used to make her mushroom omelette gratinéed with cream sauce (p. 111, *The French Chef Cookbook*) with. This wasn't just a birthday party, it was an S/M sex party. That's what all those acronyms must have been about, I thought, like maybe one of them read BYOT: Bring Your Own Toys. "Come on, you've got to see the dungeon," someone said as she opened the door to some stairs. There were lots of S/M lesbians in South San Francisco, I learned, because of their excellent basements. DIB, I thought—Dungeon In Basement. In my black sheath and one-inch pumps I looked as edgy as Nancy fucking Reagan. Later in the evening we all crammed into the living room to watch Dorothy open her presents—colorfully-wrapped handcuffs and whips and dildos. Dorothy could handle an enormous amount of pain, a woman said, she could swing huge weights from her nipple clamps. As Dorothy opened my present, an ornate four-inch rhinestone-encrusted sword, I imagined square-shaped bronze bells, "50 lb." chiseled into their sides, hanging from Dorothy's tits. "More pain than anyone else!" the woman exclaimed. Then the guy sitting on the floor next to me said, "I think you're the only straight person here." In an earlier version of this story I launched into the guy—"How dare you!" etc.—but I don't believe it happened that way. Goldlocks would never have such balls. More likely I wallowed in shame for not seeming queer enough. I was a black linen screen that real queers bounced their extravagance against. Somebody unveiled the birthday present de résistance, a set of rough-hewn

wooden stocks. As we oohed and aahed, and Dorothy said she couldn't wait to try them, I thought about the time Dorothy asked me to have sex. It was at a group dinner for something or other. Did Dorothy think I was a straight woman? Would she have asked a straight woman to have sex? I didn't feel like a straight woman—my history was too complex for that. Does anybody really feel like a straight woman?

In the early '70s, when women's lib was all the rage, straight women were supposed to be liberated but who knew what that looked like? Erica Jong's insanely successful 1973 novel *Fear of Flying*, with its zipless fucks and erotic frenzy, filled that niche—it offered straight gals a model on how to be citizens of the libidinous world. When *Fear of Flying* was published I was an undergraduate in a committed lesbian relationship. I studied comparative literature compulsively and smoked grass late at night. I also dabbled with men, which lead to hysterical scenes with my girlfriend. My forays into heterosexuality were awkward and rarely satisfying—very fish out of water-y. I'd swear off men, but then I'd get drunk or stoned and find myself naked and grinding yet another one. I had no clue how promiscuous guy-fucking was supposed to work, so I read *Fear of Flying*—even though I'd been taught to disdain books that weren't literature—with the uncritical absorption with which I scrutinized my textbooks.

*Fear of Flying*: The setting is a psychoanalytic convention in Vienna where protagonist Isadora and strapping Laingian analyst Adrian Goodlove are seducing one another:

Meanwhile, he's got my ass and is cupping it with both hands. He's put my book on the fender of a Volkswagen and he's grabbed my ass instead. Isn't that why I write? To be loved? I don't know anymore. I don't even know my own name.

"I've never met an ass to rival yours," he says. And that remark makes me feel better than if I'd just won the National Book Award. The National Ass Award—that's what I want. The Transatlantic Ass Award of 1971.

The ass fantasy is just the beginning of Isadora playing for the camera:

I had another champagne and made the rounds with Adrian. He was introducing me to all the London analysts and babbling about my unwritten article. Would they consent to be interviewed? Could he interest them in my journalistic endeavor? The whole time he had his arm around my waist and sometimes his hand on my ass. We were nothing if not indiscreet. Everybody saw. His analyst. My ex-analysts. His son's analyst. His daughter's analyst. My husband's ex-analyst. My husband.

Public display—not Adrian—seems to be the real turn on here. The imagined shock of the Isadora's ornate network of analysts—and by extension the shock of the reader—provides an erotic will for Isadora/Jong's transgression to ping pong off of. Isadora's needy exhibitionism is far from the relaxed indecency of Dorothy Allison's birthday revelers. Isadora is more like a transgressive tree in the forest—does her fall from grace exist—does she exist—if there's no one around to glare at her? In *Fear of Flying* sexual liberation is not so much an ontological condition as a desperate projection.

Despite her wallowing in the male—and everyone else's—gaze, when Isadora substitutes book award with ass award, Jong succeeds at evoking those moments when the body takes over and who gives a fuck about writing. All of us have been there and all of us who write—or speak—know it's impossible to

insert the urgencies of the body into the abstraction of language, so why do we keep trying? In 1973 *Fear of Flying* introduced female-centered sexual content to mainstream publishing. A quarter of a century later, we in the margins of the avant-garde are still battling to claim textual sexuality, still trying to get it right. Why do so many women feel the need to get all experimental when they write about sex? Why not stick with Jong's simple narrative arc of bad behavior? Why muck around with syntax and meaning?

Recently Johannes Goransson sent me a draft of his essay, "It's Simply Too Much: Gurlesque Trash and the Poetics of Excess," in which he was kind enough to discuss my writing:

In her book *Cunt-Ups*, Bellamy appropriates gay porn, cutting it up and pasting it back together in order to create a very polymorphous, gothic body with multiple alien holes and protrusions:

You want me to drown inside there. How your belly is like a closed eye, sleeping. Your breasts. Many times do I feel you with my come, you sound so beautiful. Your cock cocooned in me, you know how I love to talk dirty to you, itself, your cock is going to like my mouth all the same. Put your head in my pussy, my refrigerator where all the bees want to go, honey. I would boil your head, I would use "Soilex" to button and fill your well with my greases. I'll purchase a 57 gallon drum, in which I'll put your fingers.

As in [Aase] Berg's book [*Dark Matter*], the cinematic montage rearranges the body and mixes it up with schlocky items. Porn is supposed to reveal the raw energy, the naked body, but instead Bellamy gives us a queered porn, evoking the general notion of

homosexual as unnatural. This is gothic porn, a book that makes a costume drama out of the body.

On August 29, 2009, I tossed back a response to him: "I did have one quick correction about what you wrote about me. *Gunt-Um* is not about gay porn. It's about heterosexual in which the genders of the participants are blurred, and the source texts are all heterosexual writing of heterosexuality, which is sort of the core of my sex writing." "A queering of heterosexuality": it sounded so good, so confident when I wrote it—"sort of the core of my sex writing"—but what the hell did I mean by that? What does it mean to write a fuck montage in which hetero desire is so skewed, so queered, so in trouble that Goransson, a married academic, can't recognize himself in it? Once again Goldlocks flops on the wobbly chair of heterosexuality and smashes it to bits.

I started having sex before I'd heard of an orgasm or knew what fucking was, my body pumping hormones and spasming outside my eleven-year-old conceptual systems, convulsions so pleasurable I couldn't stand them, yet I knew that from then on I'd do anything to repeat that exquisite unbearableness. My partner was another girl, who was also eleven. Janis and I fooled around whenever we could, a least a couple of times a week—for years and years—in a bedroom with pink and white curtains and grainy black and white Beatles pictures cut out from fan magazines taped along the sides of the dresser's mirror. I didn't know what a lesbian was—but I soon found out. Lesbians were bad, disgusting, with slicked-back duckbill haircuts. They taught gym and hung out in seedy bars where they danced together, their breasts pressing unnaturally against one another. They were an affront to nature. And I was one of them.

By the time I was in high school I'd also been indoctrinated with a surplus of heterosexual rhetoric. I knew what to expect from

sex and how I was expected to behave, I knew there were certain steps I was supposed to go through: my first kiss, then a bit of fondling through some bases—first, second, etc.—that I didn't quite understand like the way it took me forever to get down which dejecta was "number one" and which was "number two." I would be a virgin and then there'd be this epic deflowering and I'd forever after be a woman. Irrevocably changed. I never went on a date in high school, never even went to a dance—queerness was a secret so dangerous Janis and I didn't share it even with those few other kids we could smell were in the same boat. Thus as a teen I became transfixed by Gertrude Stein's *Lifting Belly*, her creation of a private language for the lesbian unspeakable, the way she could be blatant and secretive at the same time.

Surprisingly I didn't experience much harassment for being a lesbian; it was more like this sinister covert ostracism. I was, however, constantly ridiculed for being fat and weird. The lesbian thing just added a new patina to my burden of otherness. Despite the daily torment I received from neighborhood boys, "Hey fatso," "Hey Bellamy, you better stop eating so much ice cream," "Hey you with the big tits," followed by snorts of laughter, I didn't hate them. On the contrary, I felt like a failure for not pleasing them. It was I who was the monster, not them. I became fascinated with monsters. Staring at Elsa Lanchester as Bride of Frankenstein on the cover of *Monster* magazine, her huge black-lashed eyes, her cone of lightning-bolt hair I felt yet another thing I could not understand: horror and sexiness are not opposites: they are one. I hated my monstrosity, my otherness. I had the political awareness of a Sandra Dee, embarrassed by my body, by both my lack of a boyfriend and my lack of age-appropriate innocence.

One night, when Janis and I were freshmen in college, sharing the same dorm room, a group of girls on our floor got drunk and

gigglingly dared one another to reveal “how far” they’d gone—this was 1970, some of them still slept with their hair in rollers, though mine hung down my back straight as straws—“first base,” “second base,” they chugged and tee-hee’d—only one of them would admit to having fucked. Janis and I simultaneously rolled our eyes and looked scared. When did I lose my virginity, I wondered—was it at eleven with the surprise of the first time I came—or was it seven years later when I finally fucked a guy, that summer night between high school and college when Janis and I both fucked Ralph, who we’d known since 7th grade and who was gay himself? Were we both virgins until we got drunk with Ralph on sloe gin while blasting the Beatles’ *White Album* and dragged him into Janis’ pink and white bedroom? And even though cock entered vagina(s) when a lesbian couple have sex with (or “ball,” as we would have said back in 1970) a gay man, can one still call this a heterosexual event? “You may be a lover but you ain’t no dancer,” sang the Beatles, as if commenting on our categorical crisis. Most, if not all, of us have encountered these situations where we perform outside our internalized narratives of heterosexual—or homosexual—behavior. When life thrusts us outside our conceptual schematics we have little choice but to start writing outside conventional linear narratives of desire. When writing like Erica Jong “he gripped my ass” just isn’t going to cut it, it’s time to shred some language, time to disjunctify, time to throw away the OCD naming of Adam, and like Eve to seduce the reader into a new state of being.

Whenever I’ve entered heterosexuality, it’s been like visiting a foreign land, with exotic customs like journeying to Vietnam and being fed a bowl of silkworms, or eating barbecued rat in the high mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, or reindeer penis in Lapland. *Cunt-Ups* celebrates that foreignness. There’s a male voice and a female voice, but they’re so processed and distorted

they blend into a hybrid or trans-voice. Genitals roam freely—nobody owns them. The main shredded text in *Cunt-Ups* is distilled from erotic emails this guy poet and I exchanged. As the project progressed, our images became increasingly brutal and weird. He was better than I at writing crazy sex emails, so I tried my damndest to one-up him. Beyond the thrill of talking dirty to someone, there was the thrill of competition. I learned an enormous amount about language and desire in the process—particularly that an image need not be literal to act as an emotional hormone, setting off a chain reaction in the mind/body complex. Our surreal pornographic sparring prodded me to move beyond the literal, to attempt to perform desire in writing rather than report on it, to complicate and confuse the relationship between audience and text, to puncture the screen I’m projecting my transgressions on.

Too straight for queer, too queer for straight—no wonder I think labels are fucked. I remember sitting in CCA’s Timken Hall enduring a poetry reading by a lesbian who’s been antagonistic towards me since the beginning of time. It’s always freezing in that auditorium, so I was all brrrr and fidgety, waiting for her to finish, when suddenly I realized the “she” being spoofed in this one poem was me. Onstage, fully aware I was in the audience, this woman was dissing me. The “she” of the poem whined about not fitting in, about not being straight but not a lesbian either. The poem ended sneeringly with something like “she seems to find it interesting to define herself by her lack.” The implication being that my Goldilocks dilemma was tedious, boring—anything but interesting. In a December, 2009, lecture at Antioch University Los Angeles, Dorothy Allison warned MFA students to be vigilant for vindictiveness disguised as honesty. Dorothy’s example of malicious “honesty” was, “He had a small dick.” Dorothy, if you’re reading this, here’s Exhibit #2: “She

seems to find it interesting to define herself by her lack." If my lesbian nemesis intended to jab me, she scored for it's been years since her reading and I'm still feeling pissy. I agree that the whole issue of gay versus straight can feel rather tired these days—especially in the wake of all the gender-exploding trans queerification that's swept through gay culture in the past couple of decades. But the more I think about it, the more convinced I am that it is, indeed, interesting to define oneself by one's lack. Even Isador's wanton externalizations are interesting; she seems so desperate, so blank. I may roll my eyes, but I can't take my eyes off of her—and that's why the book sold a zillion copies. Rather than identity, we uncover a void, a vacuum, an intrush of sticky desiring others—a non-position where the unbridled power of the libidinal child can be unleashed, the child who can blow up the world with her thoughts, the child whose body gets blown up over and over again, each time reassembling in ways that get stranger and stranger, the child that people back away from, otherness blazing from her, a molten orange and red aura. When this child enters the discourse of heteronormativity language is going to fry.



Untitled Photograph, 2009, 16 x 20" by Two Serious Ladies.



Sacher-Masoch (1835–95) was born in Leimbürg, Galicia, and was of Spanish and Bohemian descent. His family held official positions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire; his father was director of police in Leimbürg. The theme of the police will haunt the work of Masoch. But above all the problem of minorities (Jewish, Little-Russian, etc.) will be one of his principal sources of inspiration. Masoch participates in the grand tradition of German Romanticism. He conceived his work not as perverse, but as generic and encyclopedic: a vast cycle which was to constitute a natural history of humanity, under the general title *The Legacy of Cain*. Of the six envisaged parts (love, property, money, the state, war, death), only the first two were finished. But right from the beginning, love for Masoch could not be separated from a complex with cultural, political, social and ethnological elements; Masoch's tastes in amorous matters are well known. Masoch appeared to him as an essentially feminine substance; he wanted the woman he was in love with to wear furs and carry a whip. This woman is never sadistic by nature; rather, she is slowly persuaded and trained for her role. He wanted to be bound to her by a *contract* with precise clauses; one of these clauses, for instance, required him to dress up as a servant and take a new name. He had a desire for a third party to intervene between him and the woman he loved, and he acted to make this happen. *Fenus in Furs*, his most famous novel, presents a detailed contract. His biographer Schlichtegroll and Krafft-Ebing reproduced other examples of Masoch's contracts (cf. *Psychopathia Sexualis* 238–40).<sup>2</sup> It is Krafft-Ebing who, in 1869, will give the name of masochism to a perversion – to the great displeasure of Masoch himself. Sacher-Masoch was by no means an *auteur manditi*. He was honoured,

*gilles deleuze*  
translated by *christian*  
*kerslake*

## FROM SACHER-MASOCH TO MASOCHISM<sup>1</sup>

féted and decorated. He was celebrated in France, receiving a triumphant reception and the Légion d'honneur, and was féted in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. But he died saddened by the neglect into which his work had fallen.

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When one's name is given, whether one likes it or not, to a disorder or disease, it is not so much that one is supposed to have invented it but that one has "isolated" the disease, distinguished it from cases with which it had up until then been confused, by determining and grouping the symptoms in a new and decisive manner. Aetiology depends first of all on good symptomatology. Symptomatology specificity is primary; the specificity of the causal agent is always sec-

## from sacher-masoch to masochism

ondary and relative. One might therefore regret that in the case of Masoch the specialists on masochism should be so little interested in the contents of his work. In general they are content with a symptomatology which is a lot less precise and a lot more confused than what can be found in Masoch himself. The unity that has been claimed for sadism and masochism has only multiplied the confusion. There as elsewhere, a poor determination of symptoms has led aetiology in unproductive and even inaccurate directions.<sup>3</sup>

Comparing the work of Masoch with that of Sade, one is struck by the impossibility of any encounter between a sadist and a masochist. Their milieus, their rituals are entirely different; *there is nothing complementary about their demands*. Sade's inspiration is first of all mechanistic and instrumentalist. Masoch's is profoundly culturalist and aesthetic. It is when the senses take works of art for their objects that they become masochistic for the first time. It is through Renaissance paintings that the power and musculature of a woman wrapped in furs is revealed to Masoch. It is when a woman resembles a statue that she can be loved. And the masochist gives back to art all that art gives to him: it is through being painted or photographed, through catching his image in a mirror, that he experiences and comes to know himself. It has been said that the senses become "theoreticians" and that the eye becomes a human eye only when its object itself has been transformed into a human object, fashioned by and destined for man. An organ becomes human when it takes a work of art as its object. Masochism is presented as the suffering of such a transmutation. The whole of the animal suffers when its organs cease to be animal. Taking up a phrase from Goethe, Masoch never stops saying: I am a super-sensationalist, I am super-sensamental.<sup>4</sup>

The second characteristic of masochism, even more opposed to sadism, is the taste for the contract, the extraordinary appetite for the contractual. Masochism should be defined by its formal characteristics rather than by its "dolorogenous" [*dolorigène*] content. Now, of all these formal characteristics, none is more important than the contract. There is no masochism without a contract with the woman.

The essential thing, however, is that the contract is drawn up to cover the man's relations with a dominant woman.<sup>5</sup> Usually, the function of the contract is taken to be fundamentally bound up with patriarchal societies: it is made to express and even justify the notion that there is something non-material, spiritual or instituted in the relations of authority and association which are established between men, including between father and son. The material and chthonic tie which unites us to the woman, which unites the child with the mother, seems by nature to rebel against contractual expression. When a woman enters into a contract, it is by "coming amongst" men, acknowledging in the process her situation of dependence at the heart of patriarchal society. Now, in Masoch's contract, everything is reversed: the contract here expresses the material predominance of the woman and the superiority of the maternal principle. It is worth dwelling on the masochist's intention in presiding over this reversal and rearticulation of the contract. All the more so in that the masochist takes up in his own way the movement by which the contract, even when it is taken as the foundation of a masculine society, nevertheless has to take its course in time. For every contract, in the precise sense of the word, implies in principle certain conditions like a limited duration, the non-intervention of any third parties, and the exclusion of certain inalienable rights (for example, life). But on the other hand, no society can conserve itself without postulating its own eternity, without asserting its hold over third parties who have not entered contracts, and without giving itself a right of death over its subjects. In the masochistic contract with the woman, this movement is rediscovered and intensified. Masoch's contracts do, if need be, make provisions for an absolute limit on their duration, but the woman is made responsible for how this time is allotted and according to what measures it is divided up. An accessory and secret clause gives the right to death to her. And the place of the third party will be kept open by means of a handy legal precaution. The woman is like the absolute Prince who retains and multiplies his rights, while the masochist is like her subject who effectively loses all his own. Everything happens as if Masoch's culturalism were even more jurid-

ical than it is aesthetic. *Masochism cannot be separated from the contract, but at the same time as it draws up the contract for the dominant woman, it pushes it to the extreme by dismantling its machinery and exposing it to mockery.*

In the third place, Masoch's contract cannot be comprehended without taking up some strange historical perspectives. Masoch often makes allusions to an epoch of beautiful Nature, to an archaic world presided over by Venus-Aphrodite, where the fleeting relationship between woman and man has pleasure between equal partners as its only law. Masoch's heroines have no sadistic nature; rather, they claim a pagan nature, antique and heroic. But beautiful nature was thrown out of equilibrium by a climatic catastrophe or a glacial upheaval. From

then on the natural law recoils into the maternal breast, as if into the feminine principle which keeps the embers of nature alight. Men became "the children of reflection." In their efforts towards spiritual autonomy, men lost nature or the Soul: "As soon as you try to be natural, you become vulgar."<sup>6</sup> The furs entwined around

Masoch's women have multiple meanings, but the first meaning is that the women are cold in the glacial environment. Masoch's heroines, buried in their furs, are always sneezing. The interpretation of fur as a paternal image is singularly devoid of foundation: fur is first of all a directly maternal symbol, indicating the refolding of the law in the feminine principle, the *mater Natura* threatened by the ambition of her sons. The bear is the animal of Artemis; the furred she-bear is the Mother; fur is the maternal trophy. In any case, in this reorganisation, the law of Nature now becomes terrible: the fur is the fur of the despotic and devouring Mother who establishes the gynocratic order. Masoch dreams that the woman he loves is transformed into a bear which smothers him and mauls him. The feminine divinities, chthonian and lunar, the great hunters, the powerful Amazons, the reigning courtesans, all bear witness to the severity of this law of nature identical to the maternal principle. The elder son in the *Legacy of Cain*, the tiller of the ground, the one preferred by the mother, must be understood as a maternal image

of the Mother herself, who goes to criminal lengths to break the spiritual alliance of the Father with the other son, the keeper of sheep. But the final triumph of the virile or glacial paternal principle signifies the repression of the Anima, the advent of a new law, the institution

of a world where spiritual alliances get the upper hand over the maternal blood tie – the Roman world, then the Christian world, where Venus no longer has a place: "Venus must hide herself in a vast fur lest she catch cold in our abstract northern climate, in the icy realm of Christianity."<sup>7</sup> "Stay in your hyperborean mists and Christian incense and leave our pagan world to rest under the lava and the rubble. Do not dig us up... You do not need the gods – they would freeze to death in your climate!"<sup>8</sup>

One recognises here, impassioned, simplified and romanticised, the famous theses of Bachelofen concerning the three states of humanity: primitive heterism, gynocracy and patriarchy.<sup>9</sup> The influence of Bachelofen is undeniable, and explains Masoch's ambition to write a natural history of humanity. *But what is properly masochist is the regressive fantasy* by means of which Masoch dreams of using patriarchy itself in order to restore gynocracy, and gynocracy in order to restore primitive communism. He who unearths the Anima enters on this regression: all the more terrible for being repressed, the Anima will know how to turn patriarchal structures to its own advantage and rediscover the power of the devouring Mother. In *The Black Czarina*, Masoch recounts a story from the tenth century of a captive loved by the Tsar. She hunts the bear and seizes the trophy, she organises a regiment of Amazons, she kills the boyards and finally gets a Negress to behead the Tsar. To hasten the coming of a man of the commune, a "communist," seems to be the distant goal of her action.<sup>10</sup> In *Sabbath Zueg*, a messiah three times marries a woman who refuses herself to him. The sultan wants the last marriage to be consummated; the woman flagellates her husband, crowns him with thorns, consummates the marriage and says to him: "I have made a man of you, you are not the messiah."<sup>11</sup> "We must be apostates to hasten the coming of the Messiah."<sup>11</sup> Masoch is always writing about how the true

man will emerge from the ordeals of a restored gynocracy, just as the powerful woman and her restoration will emerge from the structures of an overturned patriarchy. In the regressive fantasy, all domestic and conjugal relations, and the contractual relation itself, are turned to the benefit of the terrible Woman or the devouring Mother.

It therefore seems very doubtful that the image of the Father in masochism has the role which Freud gives it. Freudian psychoanalysis in general suffers from an inflation of the father. In the case of masochism in particular, we have to perform some astonishing gymnastics to explain how the image of the Father is first of all interiorised in the superego, and then re-externalised in an image of a woman.<sup>12</sup> It is as if Freudian interpretations are often only able to reach the most superficial and most individualised levels of the unconscious. They do not enter into the profound dimensions where the image of the Mother reigns in its own terms, without owing anything to the influence of the father. It is the same for interpretations based around the supposed unity of sadism and masochism: basing themselves on the role of the father, they disintegrate once one moves beyond the first narrow levels of the unconscious. That there are very different levels of the unconscious, of unequal origin and value, arousing regressions which differ in nature, which have relations of opposition, compensation and reorganisation going on between them: this principle dear to Jung was never recognised by Freud because the latter reduced the unconscious to the simple fact of desiring. So one ends up seeing alliances of consciousness with the superlateral layers of the unconscious, while the deeper unconscious which encircles us in a tie of blood is held in check. In the unconscious, too, there are things which are only appearances. Freud nevertheless had a presentiment of this when he discovered an unconscious of identification beyond the properly "objective" [objektal] unconscious.<sup>13</sup> Now, each image which dominates in the unconscious from the point of view of objective relations can lose all its value or signify something else in the more profound domains. Many neurotics seem to be fixated on

their fathers, but are really perturbed and burdened by an image of the mother that is all the more powerful because it is not invested at the level of the superficial unconscious. As a general rule, the dominant characters change according to the level of analysis on which one is operating: we should be wary when someone's analysis appears to bring to light an image of an inactive, effaced or even deprecatd mother. It is likely that in masochism the figure of the overwhelming father is only apparent, and is a simple means towards a more profound end, a simple step in a more far-reaching regression in which all paternal determinations are turned to the advantage of the Mother.

We asked earlier why the masochist draws up a *contract* in his relation with the dominant woman. The more profound answer is that this is how the application of the paternal *law* is delivered back into the hands of the Woman or the Mother. The masochist holds out for something specific in this transference: *that the pleasure that the law forbids be given to him precisely through the means of the law*. For the pleasure that the paternal law forbids, he will taste through the law, as soon as the law in all its severity is applied to him by the woman. The real character of the masochist is thus brought out into the light, from behind its first appearance: in fact, his extreme submission signifies that he is offering up the father and the paternal law to desision. Reik wrote one of the best books on masochism; he says that in order to determine its essence one must begin from its formal characteristics. He distinguishes four of these: the primordial importance of fantasy as an indispensable preliminary for the masochistic exercise; the factor of suspension, by means of which the final pleasure is held back at the highest point, replaced by a waiting which controls and dissolves the anxiety; the demonstrative trait, an inverted exhibitionism proper to the masochist; the factor of provocation by which the masochist "forces another person to force them."<sup>14</sup> It is strange that Reik did not take account of the contract. But the study of the preceding factors led him to conclude in any case that the masochist does not at all have a weak and submissive personality, he is not dreaming of his



own annihilation: it is rather the traits of defiance, vengeance, sarcasm, sabotage and derision that seem to Reik to be the constitutional traits of masochism.<sup>14</sup> The masochist puts himself at the service of the law of the father precisely in order to obtain the pleasure he forbids. We can think of numerous examples where the law is subverted through a submission that is feigned and even exaggerated. For example, the law that forbids a child to smoke can be got around by finding hidden or disreputable places where the law can be applied only with difficulty; but the child can go one further and take it that the law is *ordering* him to smoke in these places and nowhere else. More generally, there are two ways of interpreting the operation by which the law separates us from a pleasure. Either we think that it repels it and uniformly splits it off, so that we can obtain pleasure only through a destruction of the law (sadism). Or we think that the law has taken the pleasure into itself, is keeping it for itself; it is then by devoting ourselves to the law, by submitting ourselves scrupulously to the law and its consequences, that we will taste the pleasure which it has forbidden us. The masochist goes still further: it is the execution of the punishment which becomes primary and which introduces us to the forbidden pleasure. “The temporal reversal points at a reversal of the contents ... The previous ‘You must not do that’ has been transmuted into a ‘You have to do that’ ... What else but a demonstration of absurdity is aimed at, when the punishment for forbidden pleasure brings about this very same pleasure.”<sup>15</sup> *The some law which forbids me from realising a desire on pain of the consequent punishment is now a law which puts the punishment first and orders me accordingly to satisfy the desire*: here

we have a properly masochistic form of humour. The advantage of Reik’s thesis is that it gives up trying to explain masochism simply by appealing to a desire to be punished. Certainly, the desire to be punished intervenes in the process; but it is impossible to confuse the satisfaction of this desire with the sexual pleasure experienced by the masochist. The masochist, according to Reik, is he who can only experience pleasure *after* punishment: this is not to say that he finds

his pleasure (unless it is a secondary pleasure) *in* punishment itself. It is just to say that punishment is the indispensable condition of primary sexual pleasure. Far from explaining masochism, the desire to be punished presupposes it, and itself only points towards a benefit which will be derived.<sup>16</sup> However, Reik is less convincing when he attempts to explain how and why punishment can come to serve as a condition in this way. He thinks that its dynamic role is to resolve anxiety or to dominate it.<sup>17</sup> This indirect reference to the feeling of guilt does not get us anywhere: whatever its genuine differences with the theory of the desire to be punished, this conception proposes a functional explanation which does not take account of the “topical” features of masochism. We are left with the question of how (in which topical circumstances) punishment fulfils this function of resolving anxiety.

If masochistic punishment becomes a condition of sexual pleasure, it is not because it resolves anxiety but because it gives the mother the task of “chastising” a misdemeanour committed with respect to the father. Or else, if one prefers, it is through this *displacement* that punishment effectively resolves anxiety. It seems to us that Reik goes wrong because he restricts himself to the apparent image of the father; and does not evaluate correctly the importance of the projection onto the mother or the regression back to the mother.<sup>18</sup> From that point onwards, he misrecognises the true nature of masochistic derision. If the father is offered up for derision, if the paternal law is itself overturned, that is due to the drawing up or projection of the contract, in so far as a regression is made towards the mother and the application of the paternal law appears as symbolically delivered into the hands of the woman. However, at first sight, it is hard to see what relief could emerge from such a displacement: there is no reason why one should count in general on a greater indulgence from the devouring Mother. But we must take into consideration the paternal law in so far as it forbids incest with the mother. As Jung demonstrated, incest signifies the second birth, that is to say a heroic birth, a partnemo-gensis (entering a second time into the maternal

breast in order to be born anew or to become a child again).<sup>19</sup> If the father forbids incest, it is not because a woman might be stolen away from him but because the second birth must take place without him. Now it is clear that the Mother does not have the same reasons for forbidding incest or for chastising desire because of it: the maternal law demands that the son abandons all the attributes of the father, *but it demands this as a condition for incest and for its success*. This is why the Mother is not only devouring in so far as her image is repressed, but in and by herself. She imposes terrible ordeals upon the son, so that he is reborn as man through her alone: the castration of Atis or Osiris, being swallowed up by a whale-dragon or a glutinous fish, being bitten by a serpent, being suspended from a maternal tree, all these symbols of return to the Mother signify the necessity of sacrificing the genital sexuality inherited from the father, in order to obtain the rebirth or renaissance which will equip us with a new and independent virility. In this way Hercules is feminised by Omphale, while Osiris copulates with Isis only in the form of a shadow: incest is always conceived as an amorous relation whose efficacy paradoxically presupposes a return to pregenital sexuality. Thus we can see that the maternal and paternal laws present a strange coincidence on one point (castration). But that which from the father’s point of view is a threat in order to prevent incest or a punishment which penalises it, is on the contrary from the mother’s point of view a condition which makes it possible and ensures its success.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore the regression to the Mother which explains how the paternal law is reversed in time as well as in its content.

When the masochist, by virtue of this coincidence, projects the application of the paternal law and the execution of the punishment onto the image of the Mother, two consequences follow: the maternal law is reinforced and as if revived, since it turns all the weapons of the father to its advantage; the paternal law is ridiculed, because it ends up giving us precisely the pleasure that it is supposed to have forbidden us. Freud distinguished three sorts of masochism, each more profound than the other:

moral masochism, corresponding to the desire to be punished; feminine masochism, corresponding to the passive attitude and also to pregenital satisfactions; and an erogenous masochism corresponding to the association of suffering and sexual pleasure.<sup>21</sup> However, the desire to be punished in masochism is inseparable from an attempt to overturn paternal authority; and this mother which delivers to us a pregenital, incestuous pleasure; and this pleasure is itself inseparable from an ordeal or an unhappy sacrifice which serves as the condition of the success of the incest, that is, the rebirth. The masochistic fantasy ascends beyond the image of the father to that of the mother, and from there to “the man of commune”; it also includes the theme of the two Mothers, who symbolise the double birth.<sup>22</sup> It is the image of the Mother, it is the regression to this image, which is constitutive of masochism and forms its unity. On condition that one interprets this original image after the manner of Jung, as an archetype from the depths of the unconscious. The problem of masochism has ended up being so singularly complex because at the outset certain characteristics which belong to the maternal image were withdrawn from the woman, so that it subsequently seemed all the more surprising that she somehow receives these from outside: here as elsewhere, in treating the image as something composite, one suppresses its governing and comprehensive power.

When Freud discovered the existence of a primary masochism he made a great advance in analysis, because he gave up trying to derive masochism from sadism. It is true that the inverse derivation is no more convincing: the masochist and the sadist have no more chance of being united in the same individual than they have of meeting each other in the outside world, contrary to what the droll story suggests. On the other hand, the explanation that Freud gave for primary masochism, on the basis of the death instinct, showed once again that he did not believe in symbols or in Images as such. It is a general tendency of Freudianism to dissolve Images, to make something composite of them, referring them on the one hand back to real

events, and on the other back to desires or irreducible instincts which are never “symbolising” on their own account. Accordingly, for Freud “the sexual is never symbolic”; and with the death instinct, it is a matter of a real death and an instinct which is irreducible, conceived in terms of a return to matter. Nevertheless, Freud did recognise that the nature of instinct consists solely in regression, and that the only difference between the instincts (of life and death for example) lies in the terminus of the regression.<sup>23</sup> It was not left to him to grasp the role of original Images; these are not explained by anything apart from themselves; on the contrary, they are at once the terminus of each regression, the determining principle of the instincts, and the principle of interpretation of events themselves. Symbols do not allow themselves to be reduced or composed, on the contrary, they are the ultimate rule for the composition of desires and their object, they form the only irreducible data of the unconscious. The irreducible datum of the unconscious is the symbol itself, and not an ultimate symbolised. *In truth, all is symbol in the unconscious*, sexuality and death no less than everything else. Death must be understood as symbolic death, and the return to matter as a return to the symbolic mother. Instincts are simply internal perceptions of original Images, apprehended in their own place [*appréhendées là où elles sont*], in the layers of variable depth in the unconscious [*les diverses épaisseurs de l'inconscient*]. Masochism is the perception of the maternal image or of the devouring mother; it takes the detours and path necessary to perceive it in its own place. It is important that this path should not be lost. There always exists a truth of neuroses or disorders when they are taken on their own account. The problem of treatment is not to dissolve symbols in order to substitute for them a proper appreciation of the real, but on the contrary to profit from what is surreal in them in order to give back to the neglected elements of our personality the development that they demand.<sup>24</sup> Each neurosis has two faces. In masochism, regression to the mother is like the pathological protest of a part of ourselves that has been wrecked by the law;

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but regression also conceals and contains possibilities for a compensating or normative progression of this same part, as one can glimpse in the masochistic fantasy of rebirth. It is proper to treatment, here as elsewhere, to “take the side of the sick person,” in compliance with the truth of his disorder, that is, to actualise the possibilities of the neurotic by reintegrating them in the personality as a whole.<sup>25</sup>



## notes

- 1 Originally published as “De Sacher Masoch au masochisme” in *Arguments*, 5e année, no. 21, 1er trimestre (1961): 40–46.
- 2 Reprinted in Gilles Deleuze and Leopold von Sacher Masoch, *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: Zone, 1989) 277–79. Translator’s note. All notes by the translator are hereafter marked “TN.”
- 3 In a forthcoming study, M. Perruchot studies the problem of masochistic symptoms and puts in question their unity with sadism.
- 4 All of these preceding and following themes find their illustration in *Venus in Furs*.
- 5 Deleuze’s French for “to draw up” a contract is “projeter.” This word expands to assume its psychoanalytic connotation below. See n. 18, TN.
- 6 Sacher Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, in Deleuze and Sacher Masoch, *Masochism*, op. cit. 145. TN.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 149. TN.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 145; trans. modified. TN.
- 9 Cf. J.J. Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht*. (Selected pages of Bachofen have been translated by Turell ed. Alcan, 1938.) [For an English selection, cf. *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, trans. R. Manheim (New York: Princeton UP, 1967). TN.] — On analogous themes, Pierre Gordon has recently written a very beautiful book, *L’initiation sexuelle et l’évolution religieuse* (Paris: PUF, 1946) [translated by R. and H. Spodheim as *Sex and Religion* (New York: Social Sciences Publishers, 1949)].
- 10 Cf. Sacher-Masoch, *The Black Czarina in Venus in Furs & The Black Czarina*, trans. H.J. Stenning (New York: Tower, n.d.). On “communism” as seen by Masoch, cf. *Le Paradis du Dniestr* [Das *Paradies am Dniester*].

## from sacher-masoch to masochism

- 11 Sebathai Zweg (or Cewi/Zweig) was one of the most important of the messiahs who caused a stir across Europe in the seventeenth century. Numerous messiahs appeared in Galicia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; cf. Graetz, *Histoire des Juifs*, vol. 5.
- 12 In fact psychoanalysis attempts to avoid the problem which it has itself provoked: that the feminine object would not be such at all, since it is imbued with “virile qualities.” The masochist would be making do with a sort of compromise, through which he will evade making an explicit homosexual object-choice. Cf. Freud, “A Child is Being Beaten” in SE, vol. 17 175–204; Nacht, *Le Masochisme*, ed. Le Francois 40–41; Reik, *Masochism in Sex and Society*, trans. M.H. Beigel and G.M. Kurth (New York: Grove, 1962) 207. — The whole difficulty arises from the fact that psychoanalysis, going against all appearances, had first of all postulated that the devouring Mother, the furs, the whip, etc., were images of the father. Reik: “Whenever we had the opportunity to study a case we found the father or his representative hidden behind the figure of the beating woman” (21). However, in the same book, Reik experiences doubts on several occasions: notably on pp. 209–11. But he does not draw any consequences from this.
- 13 The distinction between “objective” and “subjective” approaches to the unconscious is a frequent theme in Jung. Cf. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1966) 84. The objective unconscious is composed of memories attached to actual events and objects in the subject’s life, while the “subjective” unconscious indicates the presence of symbols and images which are impersonal in origin. TN.
- 14 Reik, op. cit. 143–65.
- 15 Reik, op. cit. 149, 160. “He exhibits the punishment but also its failure” 145.
- 16 Reik: “The punishment or the humiliation precedes the satisfaction ... Because pleasure results from suffering for the masochist, it was assumed as self-evident that discomfort causes pleasure in him” (op. cit. 267–70): “[The masochist] gets pleasure out of the same things we all do, but he cannot get it before he has suffered” (401).

- 17 Reik, op. cit. 132–33. On the role of anxiety in masochism, cf. also Nacht, *Masochism*.
- 18 As noted in n. 5, Deleuze’s French for the “drawing up” of the contract above is “projection.” Now the use of the word “projection” appears in its psychoanalytic significance. TN.
- 19 Jung, *Metamorphoses de l’âme et ses symboles*, part II, chapters 4 and 5. [This book, *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*, was published in two widely different editions, first in 1911–12, and then in 1952. The first edition was translated by B. Hinkle as *Psychology of the Unconscious* (London: Kegan Paul, 1917); the second edition was translated by R.F.C. Hull as *Symbols of Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1956, 2nd ed. 1967). TN.]
- 20 In fact the assurance of success is not quite as great as we are saying. Often the hero will not be reconstituted completely, or even remains swallowed up in the mother: the terrible Mother then gets the upper hand over the Mother of life. Is it necessary to identify this as a stage in the degradation of the myth? It seems rather that the myth, and also neurosis as we are seeing it, presents two aspects according to whether the accent is placed on the dangerous regression or the progression which can emerge from it. The third party in the experience of the masochistic contract seems to be a projection of the happy result or final success, that is, of the new man who emerges from these sufferings and mutilations. But it is precisely in so far as this emergence is not certain and the accent falls on the regression that the third party deforms the final end: he represents in this case a vengeance of the ridiculed father, a reappearance of the father under the form of sadism, who reacts just as much against the mother as against the son.
- 21 Freud, “The Economic Problem of Masochism,” SE, vol. 19 155–72.
- 22 Often the second mother is an animal, a beast with a fur pelt. In the case of Masoch himself, one of his aunts plays this role of second mother: the young Masoch conceals himself in a wardrobe of fur coats to spy on her (*Glosses vévras* (Paris: Revue bleue, 1888)). This episode reappears transposed in *Venus*. In the same way, rituals of suspension play a large role in Masoch and in masochism, a role analogous to the one they

have in the incestuous myths of the second birth. Compare this with Reik on the "factor of suspension."

23 Cf. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

24 Cf. Jung, "The Real and the Surreal" in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, Collected Works*, vol. 8, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1969) 382–84, TN.

25 On Freud and Jung. All these points refer us back generally to the differences between Freud and Jung. In order to understand these essential differences properly, one has to take into account that the two authors did not work on or privilege the same clinical material. The primary Freudian concepts (for example, repression) are marked by the domain of hysteria. They always will be, even though Freud's genius was to sense the necessity of reformulating them in terms of other cases which deepen their meaning (such as obsession and anxiety). It is, moreover, the case that Freudian methodologies are appropriate mainly for young neurotics whose disorders are related to personal reminiscences and whose problems are about reconciling themselves with the real (loving, making oneself lovable, adapting, etc.), without regard for the role of any interior conflicts. But there are neuroses of quite another type which are nearer to psychosis. There are adult neurotics who are burdened by "images" which transcend every experience: their problem is to be reconciled with themselves, that is, to reintegrate in their personality those very parts which they neglected to develop, and which are as if alienated in Images, where they lead a dangerously autonomous life. Freud's analytic method is no use for relating to these primordial Images. They are irreducible and they can be approached only by a synthetic method which searches beyond the experience of the subject for the truth of the neurosis, and looks to this truth for possibilities by means of which the subject might personally assimilate for himself the content of these images. Jung can therefore reproach Freud for having left in the dark both the real dangers present in a neurosis and the treasures it can contain. He said that Freud had a deprecating outlook on neuroses: "it is nothing but ..." On the contrary, according to Jung, "what resides in a neurosis are really the elements of the personality that have not yet been developed, a precious parcel of soul without

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which man is condemned to resignation and bitterness. The psychology of neurosis which never sees anything but the negative side throws out the baby with the bath water"; "in neurosis resides our most relentless enemy or our best friend" (cf. Correspondence with Löy, 1930, in *La Guérison psychologique*. [A correspondence between Jung and R. Löy is translated as "Some Crucial Points in Psychoanalysis: A Correspondence between Dr. Jung and Dr. Löy," in Jung, *Collected Works*, vol. 4: *Freud and Psychoanalysis*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1961) 252–89. Although these specific passages are not to be found in it, see Jung's last letter on pp. 283–89 for similar views. TN]) This is not to rule out that a neurosis might be amenable to a Freudian interpretation up to a certain point, but this interpretation loses its rights as soon as one begins to penetrate into the more profound strata of the unconscious, or equally as the neurotic develops and is transformed or reawakened with age.

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