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Coldness and Cruelty

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Chapter I

The Language of Sade and Masoch

"It is too idealistic . . . and therefore cruel."
Doestoevsky, *The Insulted and Injured*

What are the uses of literature? The names of Sade and Masoch have been used to denote two basic perversions, and as such they are outstanding examples of the efficiency of literature. Illnesses are sometimes named after typical patients, but more often it is the doctor's name that is given to the disease (Roger's disease, Parkinson's disease, etc.). The principles behind this labeling deserve closer analysis. The doctor does not invent the illness, he dissociates symptoms that were previously grouped together, and links up others that were dissociated. In short he builds up a profoundly original clinical picture. The history of medicine can therefore be regarded under at least two aspects. The first is the history of illnesses, which may disappear, become less frequent, reappear or alter their form according to the state of the society and the development of therapeutic methods. Intertwined with this history is the history of symptomatology, which sometimes precedes and sometimes follows changes in therapy or in the nature of diseases: symptoms are named, renamed and regrouped in various ways. Progress from this point of view generally means

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a tendency toward greater specificity, and indicates a refinement of symptomatology. (Thus the plague and leprosy were more common in the past not only for historical and social reasons but because one tended to group under these headings various types of diseases now classified separately.) Great clinicians are the greatest doctors: when a doctor gives his name to an illness this is a major linguistic and semiological step, inasmuch as a proper name is linked to a given group of signs, that is, *a proper name is made to connote signs.*

Should we therefore class Sade and Masoch among the great clinicians? It is difficult to treat sadism and masochism on a level with the plague, leprosy and Parkinson's disease; the word disease is clearly inappropriate. Nevertheless, Sade and Masoch present unparalleled configurations of symptoms and signs. In coining the term masochism, Krafft-Ebing was giving Masoch credit for having redefined a clinical entity not merely in terms of the link between pain and sexual pleasure, but in terms of something more fundamental connected with bondage and humiliation (there are limiting cases of masochism without algolagnia and even algolagnia without masochism).[1] Another question we should ask is whether Masoch does not present a symptomatology that is more refined than Sade's in that it enables us to discriminate between disturbances which were previously regarded as identical. In any case whether Sade and Masoch are "patients" or clinicians or both, they are also great anthropologists, of the type whose work succeeds in embracing a whole conception of man, culture and nature; they are also great artists in that they discovered new forms of expression, new ways of thinking and feeling and an entirely original language.

In principle, violence is something that does not speak, or speaks but little, while sexuality is something that is little spoken about. Sexual modesty cannot be related to biological fear, oth-

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erwise it would not be formulated as it is: "I am less afraid of being touched and even of being seen than of being put into words." What is the meaning of the meeting of violence and sexuality in such excessive and abundant language as that of Sade and Masoch? How are we to account for the violent language linked with eroticism? In a text that ought to invalidate all theories relating Sade to Nazism, Georges Bataille explains that the language of Sade is paradoxical *because it is essentially that of a victim*. Only the victim can describe torture; the torturer necessarily uses the hypocritical language of established order and power. "As a general rule the torturer does not use the language of the violence exerted by him in the name of an established authority; he uses the language of the authority.... The violent man is willing to keep quiet and connives at cheating.... Thus Sade's attitude is diametrically opposed to that of the torturer. When Sade writes he refuses to cheat, but he attributes his own attitude to people who in real life could only have been silent and uses them to make self-contradictory statements to other people."[2]

Ought we to conclude that the language of Masoch is equally paradoxical in this instance because the victim speaks the language of the torturer he is to himself, with all the hypocrisy of the torturer?

What is known as pornographic literature is a literature reduced to a few imperatives (do this, do that) followed by obscene descriptions. Violence and eroticism do meet, but in a rudimentary fashion. Imperatives abound in the work of Sade and Masoch; they are issued by the cruel libertine or by despotic woman. Descriptions also abound (although the function of the descriptions as well as the nature of their obscenity are strikingly different in the two authors). It would appear that both for Sade and for Masoch language reaches its full significance when it acts directly on the senses. Sade's *The One Hundred and Twenty Days of*

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Sodom hinges on tales told to the libertines by "women chroniclers," and in principle the heroes may not take any initiative in anticipation of these tales. Words are at their most powerful when they compel the body to repeat the movements they suggest, and "the sensations communicated by the ear are the most enjoyable and have the keenest impact." In Masoch's life as well as in his fiction, love affairs are always set in motion by anonymous letters, by the use of pseudonyms or by advertisements in newspapers. They must be regulated by contracts that formalize and verbalize the behavior of the partners. Everything must be stated, promised, announced and carefully described before being accomplished. However, the work of Sade and Masoch cannot be regarded as pornography; it merits the more exalted title of "pornology" because its erotic language cannot be reduced to the elementary functions of ordering and describing.

With Sade we witness an astonishing development of the demonstrative use of language. Demonstration as a higher function of language makes its appearance between sequences of description, while the libertines are resting, or in the interval between two commands. One of the libertines will read out a severe pamphlet, or expound inexhaustible theories, or draft a constitution. Alternatively he may agree to hold a conversation or a discussion with his victim. Such moments are frequent, particularly in *Justine*, where each of the heroine's torturers uses her as a listener and confidante. The libertine may put on an act of trying to convince and persuade; he may even proselytize and gain new recruits (as in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*). But the intention to convince is merely apparent, for nothing is in fact more alien to the sadist than the wish to convince, to persuade, in short to educate. He is interested in something quite different, namely to demonstrate that reasoning itself is a form of violence, and that he is on the side of violence, however calm and logical he may

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be. He is not even attempting to prove anything to anyone, but to perform a demonstration related essentially to the solitude and omnipotence of its author. The point of the exercise is to show that the demonstration is identical to violence. It follows that the reasoning does not have to be shared by the person to whom it is addressed any more than pleasure is meant to be shared by the object from which it is derived. The acts of violence inflicted on the victims are a mere reflection of a higher form of violence to which the demonstration testifies. Whether he is among his accomplices or among his victims, each libertine, while engaged in reasoning, is caught in the hermetic circle of his own solitude and uniqueness – even if the argumentation is the same for all the libertines. In every respect, as we shall see, the sadistic "instructor" stands in contrast to the masochistic "educator."

Here, again, Bataille says of Sade: "It is a language which repudiates any relationship between speaker and audience." Now if it is true that this language is the supreme realization of a demonstrative function to be found in the relation between violence and eroticism, then the other aspect, the language of imperatives and descriptions, appears in a new light. It still remains, but in an entirely dependent role, steeped in the demonstrative element, as it were, floating in it. The descriptions, the attitudes of the bodies, are merely living diagrams illustrating the abominable descriptions; similarly the imperatives uttered by the libertines are like the statements of problems referring back to the more fundamental chain of sadistic theorems: "I have demonstrated it theoretically," says Noirceuil, "let us now put it to the test of practice."

We have therefore to distinguish two factors constituting a dual language. The first, the imperative and descriptive factor, represents the *personal* element; it directs and describes the personal violence of the sadist as well as his individual tastes; the second and higher factor represents the *impersonal* element in sad-

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ism and identifies the impersonal violence with an Idea of pure reason, with a terrifying demonstration capable of subordinating the first element. In Sade we discover a surprising affinity with Spinoza – a naturalistic and mechanistic approach imbued with the mathematical spirit. This accounts for the endless repetitions, the reiterated quantitative process of multiplying illustrations and adding victim upon victim, again and again retracing the thousand circles of an irreducibly solitary argument. Krafft-Ebing sensed the essential nature of such a process: "In certain cases the personal element is almost entirely absent. The subject gets sexual enjoyment from beating boys and girls, but the purely impersonal element of his perversion is much more in evidence.... While in most individuals of this type the feelings of power are experienced in relation to specific persons, we are dealing here with a pronounced form of sadism operating to a great extent in geographical and mathematical patterns."[3]

In the work of Masoch there is a similar transcendence of the imperative and the descriptive toward a higher function. But in this case it is all persuasion and education. We are no longer in the presence of a torturer seizing upon a victim and enjoying her all the more because she is unconsenting and unpersuaded. We are dealing instead with a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes. This is why advertisements are part of the language of masochism while they have no place in true sadism, and why the masochist draws up contracts while the sadist abominates and destroys them. The sadist is in need of institutions, the masochist of contractual relations. The middle ages distinguished with considerable insight between two types of commerce with the devil: the first resulted from possession, the second from a pact of alliance. The sadist thinks in terms of institutionalized possession, the masochist in

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terms of contracted alliance. Possession is the sadist's particular form of madness just as the pact is the masochist's. It is essential to the masochist that he should fashion the woman into a despot, that he should persuade her to cooperate and get her to "sign." He is essentially an educator and thus runs the risk inherent in educational undertakings. In all Masoch's novels, the woman, although persuaded, is still basically doubting, as though she were afraid: she is forced to commit herself to a role to which she may prove inadequate, either by overplaying or by falling short of expectations. In *The Divorced Woman*, the heroine complains: "Julian's ideal was a cruel woman, a woman like Catherine the Great, but alas, I was cowardly and weak...." In *Venus*, Wanda says: "I am afraid of not being capable of it, but for you, my beloved, I am willing to try." Or again: "Beware, I might grow to enjoy it."

The educational undertaking of Masoch's heroes, their submission to a woman, the torments they undergo, are so many steps in their climb toward the Ideal. *The Divorced Woman* is subtitled *The Calvary of an Idealist*. Severin, the hero of *Venus*, takes as a motto for his doctrine of "supersensualism" the words of Mephistopheles to Faust: "Thou sensual, supersensual libertine, a little girl can lead thee by the nose." (*Ubersinnlich* in Goethe's text does not mean "supersensitive" but "supersensual," "supercarnal," in conformity with theological tradition, where *Sinnlichkeit* denotes the *flesh*, *sensualitas*). It is therefore not surprising that masochism should seek historical and cultural confirmation in mystical or idealistic initiation rites. The naked body of a woman can only be contemplated in a mystical frame of mind, as is the case in *Venus*. This fact is illustrated more clearly still in *The Divorced Woman*, where the hero, Julian, under the disturbing influence of a friend, desires for the first time to see his mistress naked. He begins by invoking a "need" to "observe," but finds that he is overcome by a religious feeling "without anything

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sensual about it" (we have here the two basic stages of fetishism). The ascent from the human body to the work of art and from the work of art to the Idea must take place under the shadow of the whip. Masoch is animated by a dialectical spirit. In *Venus* the story is set in motion by a dream that occurs during an interrupted reading of Hegel. But the primary influence is that of Plato. While Sade is spinozistic and employs demonstrative reason, Masoch is platonic and proceeds by dialectical imagination. One of Masoch's stories is entitled *The Love of Plato* and was at the origin of his adventure with Ludwig II.[4] Masoch's relation to Plato is evidenced not only by the ascent to the realm of the intelligible, but by the whole technique of dialectical reversal, disguise and reduplication. In the adventure with Ludwig II Masoch does not know at first whether his correspondent is a man or a woman; he is not sure at the end whether he is one or two people, nor does he know during the episode what part his wife will play, but he is prepared for anything, a true dialectician who knows the opportune moment and seizes it. Plato showed that Socrates appeared to be the lover but that fundamentally he was the loved one. Likewise the masochistic hero appears to be educated and fashioned by the authoritarian woman whereas basically it is he who forms her, dresses her for the part and prompts the harsh words she addresses to him. It is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself. Dialectic does not simply mean the free interchange of discourse, but implies transpositions or displacements of this kind, resulting in a scene being enacted simultaneously on several levels with reversals and reduplications in the allocation of roles and discourse.

Pornological literature is aimed above all at confronting language with its own limits, with what is in a sense a "nonlanguage" (violence that does not speak, eroticism that remains unspoken). However this task can only be accomplished by an internal split-

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ting of language: the imperative and descriptive function must transcend itself toward a higher function, the personal element turning by reflection upon itself into the impersonal. When Sade invokes a universal analytical Reason to explain that which is most particular in desire, we must not merely take this as evidence that he is a man of the eighteenth century; particularity and the corresponding delusion must also represent an Idea of pure reason. Similarly when Masoch invokes the dialectical spirit, the spirit of Mephistopheles and that of Plato in one, this must not merely be taken as proof of his romanticism; here too particularity is seen reflectively in the impersonal Ideal of the dialectical spirit. In Sade the imperative and descriptive function of language transcends itself toward a pure demonstrative, instituting function, and in Masoch toward a dialectical, mythical and persuasive function. These two transcendent functions essentially characterize the two perversions, they are twin ways in which the monstrous exhibits itself in reflection.

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Chapter II

The Role of Descriptions

Since the transcendent function in Sade is demonstrative and in Masoch dialectical, the role and the significance of descriptions are very different in each case. Although Sade's descriptions are basically related to the function of demonstration, they are nevertheless relatively independent creations; they are obscene in themselves. Sade cannot do without this provocative element. The same cannot be said of Masoch, for while the greatest obscenity may undoubtedly be present in threats, advertisements or contracts, it is not a necessary condition. Indeed, the work of Masoch is on the whole commendable for its unusual decency. The most vigilant censor could hardly take exception to *Venus*, unless he were to question a certain atmosphere of suffocation and suspense which is a feature of all Masoch's novels. In many of his stories he has no difficulty in presenting masochistic fantasies as though they were instances of national custom and folklore, or the innocent games of children, or the frolics of a loving woman, or even the demands of morality and patriotism. Thus in the excitement of a banquet, the men, following an ancient custom, drink out of the women's shoes (*Sappho's Slipper*); young maidens ask their sweethearts to play at being bears or dogs, and harness them to little carts (*The Fisher of Souls*); a woman in love teasingly pretends

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to use a document signed in blank by her lover (*The Blank Paper*). In a more serious vein, a woman patriot, in order to save her town, asks to be brought before the Turks, surrenders her husband to them as a slave and gives herself to the Pasha (*The Judith of Bialopol*). Undoubtedly in all these cases the man derives from his humiliation a "secondary gain" which is specifically masochistic. Nevertheless, Masoch succeeds in presenting a great part of his work on a "reassuring" note and finds justification for masochistic behavior in the most varied motivations or in the demands of fateful and agonizing situations. (Sade, on the other hand, could fool nobody when he tried this method.) Consequently Masoch was not a condemned author but a fêted and honored one. Even the blatantly masochistic elements in his work gained acceptance as the expression of Slavonic folklore or of the spirit of Little Russia. He was known as the Turgeniev of Little Russia: he could equally well have been compared to the Comtesse de Ségur! Masoch did of course produce a somber counterpart to these works: *Venus, The Mother of God, The Fountain of Youth, The Hyena of the Poussta*, restore the original rigor and purity of the masochistic motivation. But whether the descriptions are rosy or somber, they always bear the stamp of decency. We never see the naked body of the woman torturer; it is always wrapped in furs. The body of the victim remains in a strange state of indeterminacy except where it receives the blows.

How can we account for these two kinds of "displacement" in Masoch's descriptions? We are led back to the question: why does the demonstrative function of language in Sade imply obscene descriptions, while Masoch's dialectical function seems to exclude them or at least not to treat them as essential elements?

Underlying the work of Sade is negation in its broadest and deepest sense. Here we must distinguish between two levels of negation: negation (the negative) as a partial process and pure

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negation as a totalizing Idea. These two levels correspond to Sade's distinction between two *natures*, the importance of which was shown by Klossowski. Secondary nature is bound by its own rules and its own laws; it is pervaded by the negative, but not everything in it is negation. Destruction is merely the reverse of creation and change, disorder is another form of order, and the decomposition of death is equally the composition of life. The negative is all-pervasive, but the process of death and destruction that it represents is only a partial process. Hence the disappointment of the sadistic hero, faced with a nature which seems to prove to him that the perfect crime is impossible: "Yes, I abhor Nature." Even the thought that other people's pain gives him pleasure does not comfort him, for this ego-satisfaction merely means that the negative can be achieved only as the reverse of positivity. Individuation, no less than the preservation of a reign or a species are processes that testify to the narrow limits of secondary nature. In opposition to this we find the notion of primary nature and pure negation that override all reigns and all laws, free even from the necessity to create, preserve or individuate. Pure negation needs no foundation and is beyond all foundation, a primal delirium, an original and timeless chaos solely composed of wild and lacerating molecules. In the words of the Pope: "The criminal capable of overthrowing the three realms at once by annihilating them along with their productive capabilities, is the one who will have served Nature best." But in point of fact this original nature cannot be *given*: secondary nature alone makes up the world of experience, and negation is only ever given in the partial processes of the negative. Therefore original nature is necessarily the object of an Idea, and pure negation is a delusion; but it is a delusion of reason itself. Rationalism is not grafted onto the work of Sade; it is rather by an internal necessity that he evolves the idea of a delusion, an exorbitance specific to reason.

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It is important to note that the distinction between the two natures corresponds to and is the foundation of the distinction between the two elements, the personal element which embodies the power of negativity and represents the way in which the sadistic ego still participates in secondary nature and reproduces its acts of violence, and the impersonal element which relates to primary nature and the delusional idea of negation, and represents the way in which the sadist negates secondary nature *along with his own ego.*

In *The One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* the libertine states that he finds excitement not in "what is here," but in "what is not here," the absent Object, "the idea of evil." The idea of that which is not, the idea of the No or of negation which is not given and cannot be given in experience must necessarily be the object of a demonstration (in the sense that a mathematical truth holds good even when we are asleep and even if it does not exist in nature). Hence the rage and despair of the sadistic hero when he realizes how paltry his own crimes are in relation to the idea which he can only reach through the omnipotence of reasoning. He dreams of a universal, impersonal crime, or as Clairwil puts it, a crime "which is perpetually effective, even when I myself cease to be effective, so that there will not be a single moment of my life, even when I am asleep, when I shall not be the cause of some disturbance." The task of the libertine is to bridge the gulf between the two elements, the element at his actual disposal and the element in his mind, the derivative and the original, the personal and the impersonal. The system expounded by Saint-Fond (where Sade develops most fully the idea of a pure delirium of reason) asks under what conditions "a particular pain, *B*" produced in secondary nature *would necessarily reverberate and reproduce itself ad infinitum* in primary nature. This is the clue to the meaning of repetitiveness in Sade's writing and of the monotony

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of sadism. In practice, however, the libertine is confined to illustrating his total demonstration with partial inductive processes borrowed from secondary nature. He cannot do more than accelerate and condense the motions of partial violence. He achieves the acceleration by multiplying the number of his victims and their sufferings. The condensation on the other hand implies that violence must not be dissipated under the sway of inspiration or impulse, or even be governed by the pleasures it might afford, since those pleasures would still bind him to secondary nature, but it must be exercised in cold blood, and condensed by this very coldness, the coldness of demonstrative reason. Hence the well-known *apathy* of the libertine, the self-control of the pornologist, with which Sade contrasts the deplorable "enthusiasm" of the pornographer. Enthusiasm is precisely what he dislikes in Rétif, and he could rightly say (as he always did when justifying himself publicly) that he at least had not depicted vice as pleasant or gay but as apathetic. This apathy does of course produce intense pleasure, but ultimately it is not the pleasure of an ego participating in secondary nature (even of a criminal ego participating in a criminal nature), but on the contrary the pleasure of negating nature within the ego and outside the ego, and negating the ego itself. It is in short the pleasure of demonstrative reason.

If we consider the means available to the sadist for conducting his demonstration, it appears that the demonstrative function subordinates the descriptive function, accelerates and condenses it in a controlled manner, but cannot by any means dispense with it. The descriptions must be precise both qualitatively and quantitatively and must bear on two areas: cruel actions and disgusting actions, both of which are for the cold-blooded libertine equal sources of pleasure. In the words of the monk Clement in *Justine*: "You have been arrested by two irregularities you have noticed in us: you are astonished that some of our companions should be

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pleasantly stimulated by matters commonly held to be fetid or impure, and you are similarly surprised that our voluptuous faculties can be powerfully excited by actions which, in your view, bear none but the emblem of ferocity. . . ." In both cases it is through the intermediary of description and the accelerating and condensing effect of repetition that the demonstrative function achieves its strongest impact. Hence it would appear that the obscenity of the descriptions in Sade is grounded in his whole conception of the negative and of negation.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud distinguished between the life instincts and the death instincts, Eros and Thanatos. But in order to understand this distinction we must make a further and more profound distinction between the death or destructive instincts and the Death Instinct. The former are actually given or exhibited in the unconscious, but always in combination with the life instincts; this combination of the death instincts with Eros is as it were the precondition of the "presentation" of Thanatos. So that destruction, and the negative at work in destruction, always manifests itself as the other face of construction and unification as governed by the pleasure principle. This is the sense in which Freud is able to state that we do not find a No (pure negation) in the unconscious, since all opposites coincide there. By contrast when we speak of the Death Instinct, we refer to Thanatos, the absolute negation. Thanatos as such cannot be *given* in psychic life, even in the unconscious: it is, as Freud pointed out in his admirable text, essentially silent. And yet we must speak of it for it is a determinable principle, the foundation and even more of psychic life. Everything depends on it, though as Freud points out, we can only speak of it in speculative or mythical terms.

The distinction between the death or destructive instincts and the Death Instinct seems in fact to correspond to Sade's distinc-

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tion between the two natures or the two elements. The sadistic hero appears to have set himself the task of thinking out the Death Instinct (pure negation) in a demonstrative form, and is only able to achieve this by multiplying and condensing the activities of component negative or destructive instincts. But the question now arises whether there is not yet another "method" besides the speculative sadistic one.

Freud has analyzed forms of resistance which in various ways imply a process of disavowal (*Verneinung, Verwerfung, Verleugnung*: Lacan has shown the significance of each of these terms). It might seem that a disavowal is, generally speaking, much more superficial than a negation or even a partial destruction. But this is not so, for it represents an entirely different operation. Disavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists neither in negating nor even destroying, but rather in radically contesting the validity of that which is: it suspends belief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it. The clearest example given by Freud is fetishism: the fetish is the image or substitute of the female phallus, that is the means by which we deny that the woman lacks a penis. The fetishist's choice of a fetish is determined by the last object he saw as a child before becoming aware of the missing penis (a shoe, for example, in the case of a glance directed from the feet upward). The constant return to this object, this point of departure, enables him to validate the existence of the organ that is in dispute. The fetish is therefore not a symbol at all, but as it were a frozen, arrested, two-dimensional image, a photograph to which one returns repeatedly to exorcise the dangerous consequences of movement, the harmful discoveries that result from exploration; it represents the last point at which it was still possible to believe.... Thus it appears that fetishism is first of all a disavowal ("No, the woman does not

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lack a penis"); secondly it is a defensive neutralization (since, contrary to what happens with negation, the knowledge of the situation as it is persists, but in a suspended, neutralized form); in the third place it is a protective and idealizing neutralization (for the belief in a female phallus is itself experienced as a protest of the ideal against the real; it remains suspended or neutralized in the ideal, the better to shield itself against the painful awareness of reality).

Fetishism, as defined by the process of disavowal and suspension of belief belongs essentially to masochism. Whether it also has a place in sadism is a very complex question. There is no doubt that many sadistic murders are accompanied by rituals, as when the victim's clothes are torn without any evidence of a struggle. But it is a mistake to think of the relation of the fetishist to the fetish in terms of sadomasochistic ambivalence; it leads too easily to the creation of a sadomasochistic entity. We should not confuse, as is so often done, two very different types of violence, a potential violence toward the fetish itself, and a violence which arises only in connection with the choice and constitution of the fetish (as in hair despoiling).[5] In our opinion fetishism only occurs in sadism in a secondary and distorted sense. It is divested of its essential relation to disavowal and suspense and passes into the totally different context of negativity and negation, where it becomes an agent in the sadistic process of condensation.

On the other hand there can be no masochism without fetishism in the primary sense. The way in which Masoch defines his idealism or "supersensualism" seems at first sight rather trivial. Why believe in the idea of a perfect world? asks Masoch in *The Divorced Woman*. What we need to do is to "put on wings" and escape into the world of dreams. He does not believe in negating or destroying the world nor in idealizing it: what he does is to disavow and thus to suspend it, in order to secure an ideal

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which is itself suspended in fantasy. He questions the validity of existing reality in order to create a pure ideal reality, an operation which is perfectly in line with the judicial spirit of masochism. It is not surprising that this process should lead straight into fetishism. The main objects of fetishism in Masoch's life and work are furs, shoes, the whip, the strange helmets that he liked to adorn women with, or the various disguises such as we find in *Venus*. The scene mentioned earlier from *The Divorced Woman* illustrates the split that occurs in fetishism and the corresponding double "suspension": on the one hand the subject is aware of reality but suspends this awareness; on the other the subject clings to his ideal. There is a desire for scientific observation, and subsequently a state of mystical contemplation. The masochistic process of disavowal is so extensive that it affects sexual pleasure itself; pleasure is postponed for as long as possible and is thus disavowed. The masochist is therefore able to deny the reality of pleasure at the very point of experiencing it, in order to identify with the "new sexless man."

In Masoch's novels, it is the moments of suspense that are the climactic moments. It is no exaggeration to say that Masoch was the first novelist to make use of suspense as an essential ingredient of romantic fiction. This is partly because the masochistic rites of torture and suffering imply actual physical suspension (the hero is hung up, crucified or suspended), but also because the woman torturer freezes into postures that identify her with a statue, a painting or a photograph. She suspends her gestures in the act of bringing down the whip or removing her furs; her movement is arrested as she turns to look at herself in a mirror. As we shall see, these "photographic" scenes, these reflected and arrested images are of the greatest significance both from the general point of view of masochism and from the particular point of view of the art of Masoch. They are one of his creative contribu-

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tions to the novel. The same scenes are reenacted at various levels in a sort of frozen progression. Thus in *Venus* the key scene of the woman torturer is imagined, staged and enacted in earnest, the roles shifting from one character to another. The aesthetic and dramatic suspense of Masoch contrasts with the mechanical, cumulative repetition of Sade. We should note here that the art of suspense always places us on the side of the victim and forces us to identify with him, whereas the gathering momentum of repetition tends to force us onto the side of the torturer and make us identify with the sadistic hero. Repetition does occur in masochism, but it is totally different from sadistic repetition: in Sade it is a function of acceleration and condensation and in Masoch it is characterized by the "frozen" quality and the suspense.

We are now in a position to account for the absence of obscene descriptions in the work of Masoch. The function of the descriptions subsists, but any potential obscenity is disavowed or suspended, by displacing the descriptions either from the object itself to the fetish, or from one part of the object to another part, or again from one aspect of the subject to another. What remains is a strange and oppressive atmosphere, like a sickly perfume permeating the suspense and resisting all displacements. Of Masoch it can be said, as it cannot be of Sade, that no one has ever been so far with so little offense to decency. This leads us to another aspect of Masoch's art: he is a master of the atmospheric novel and the art of suggestion. The settings in Sade, the castles inhabited by his heroes are subject to the brutal laws of darkness and light that accelerate the gestures of their cruel occupants. The settings in Masoch, with their heavy tapestries, their cluttered intimacy, their boudoirs and closets, create a chiaroscuro where the only things that emerge are suspended gestures and suspended suffering. Both in their art and in their language Masoch and Sade are totally different. Let us try to summarize the differences so

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far: in the work of Sade, imperatives and descriptions transcend themselves toward the higher function of demonstration: the demonstrative function is based on universal negativity as an active process, and on universal negation as an Idea of pure reason; it operates by conserving and accelerating the descriptions, which are overlaid with obscenity. In the work of Masoch, imperatives and descriptions also achieve a transcendent function, but it is of a mythical and dialectical order. It rests on universal disavowal as a reactive process and on universal suspension as an Ideal of pure imagination; the descriptions remain, but they are displaced or frozen, suggestive but free from obscenity. The fundamental distinction between sadism and masochism can be summarized *in the contrasting processes of the negative and negation on the one hand, and of disavowal and suspense on the other*. The first represents a speculative and analytical manner of apprehending the Death Instinct – which, as we have seen, can never be given – while the second pursues the same object in a totally different way, mythically, dialectically and in the imaginary.

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Chapter III

Are Sade and Masoch Complementary?

With Sade and Masoch the function of literature is not to describe the world, since this has already been done, but to define a counterpart of the world capable of containing its violence and excesses. It has been said that an excess of stimulation is in a sense erotic. Thus eroticism is able to act as a mirror to the world by reflecting its excesses, drawing out its violence and even conferring a "spiritual" quality on these phenomena by the very fact that it puts them at the service of the senses. (Sade, in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, distinguishes between two kinds of wickedness, the one dull-witted and commonplace, the other purified, self-conscious and because it is sensualized, "intelligent.") Similarly the words of this literature create a counter-language which has a direct impact on the senses. It is as though Sade were holding up a perverse mirror in which the whole course of nature and history were reflected, from the beginning of time to the Revolution of 1789. In the isolation of their remote chateaux, Sade's heroes claim to reconstruct the world and rewrite the "history of the heart." They muster the forces of nature and tradition, from everywhere – Africa, Asia, the ancient world – to arrive at their tangible reality and the pure sensual principle underlying them. Ironically, they even strive toward a "republicanism" of which the French are not yet capable.

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In Masoch we find the same ambition, to hold up a perverse mirror to all nature and all mankind, from the origins of history to the 1848 revolutions of the Austrian Empire – "The history of cruelty in love." For Masoch, the minorities of the Austrian Empire are an inexhaustible source of stories and customs (hence the Galician, Hungarian, Polish, Jewish and Prussian tales that form the main part of his work). Under the general title *The Heritage of Cain*, Masoch conceived of a "universal" work, the natural history of humanity in a cycle of stories with six main themes: love, property, money, the State, war and death. Each of these forces was to be restored to its cruel physical immediacy; under the sign of Cain, in the mirror of Cain, he was to show how monarchs, generals and diplomats deserved to be thrown in jail and executed along with murderers.[6] Masoch liked to imagine that the Slavs were in need of a beautiful female despot, a terrible Tsarina, to ensure the triumph of the revolutions of 1848 and to strengthen the Panslavic movement. "A further effort, Slavs, if you would become Republicans."

To what extent can we regard Sade and Masoch as accomplices or complementary forces? The sadomasochistic entity was not invented by Freud; we find it in the work of Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Féré. The strange relationship between pleasure in doing and pleasure in suffering evil has always been sensed by doctors and writers who have recorded man's intimate life. The "meeting" of sadism and masochism, the affinity that exists between them, is apparent in the work of both Sade and Masoch. There is a certain masochism in Sade's characters: in *The One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* we are told of the tortures and humiliations which the libertines deliberately undergo. The sadist enjoys being whipped as much as he enjoys whipping others. Saint-Fond in *Juliette* arranges for a gang of men to assail him with whips. La Borghèse cries: "I would wish that my aberrations lead

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me like the lowest of creatures to the fate which befits their wantonness: for me the scaffold would be a throne of exquisite bliss." Conversely, there is a certain sadism in masochism: at the end of his ordeals, Severin, the hero of *Venus in Furs*, declares himself cured and turns to whipping and torturing women. He sees himself no longer as the "anvil" but as the "hammer."

However, it is remarkable that in both instances the reversal should only occur at the end of the enterprise. Severin's sadism is a culmination; it is as though expiation and the satisfaction of the need to expiate were at last to permit the hero what his punishments were previously intended to deny him. Once they have been undergone, punishments and suffering allow the exercise of the evil they once prohibited. Likewise the "masochism" of the sadistic hero makes its appearance at the outcome of his sadistic exercises; it is their climax, the crowning sanction of their glorious infamy. The libertine is not afraid of being treated in the way he treats others. The pain he suffers is an ultimate pleasure, not because it satisfies a need to expiate or a feeling of guilt, but because it confirms him in his inalienable power and gives him a supreme certitude. Through insults and humiliations, in the throes of pain, the libertine is not expiating, but in Sade's words, "he rejoices in his inner heart that he has gone far enough to deserve such treatment." This kind of paroxysm in Sade's heroes is highly significant, for it means, as Maurice Blanchot points out, that "in spite of the similarity of the descriptions, it seems fair to grant the paternity of masochism to Sacher-Masoch and that of sadism to Sade. Pleasure in humiliation never detracts from the mastery of Sade's heroes; debasement exalts them; emotions such as shame, remorse or the desire for punishment are quite unknown to them."[7]

It would therefore be difficult to say that sadism turns into masochism and vice versa; what we have in each case is a para-

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doxical by-product, a kind of sadism being the humorous outcome of masochism, and a kind of masochism the ironic outcome of sadism. But it is very doubtful whether the masochist's sadism is the same as Sade's, or the sadist's masochism the same as Masoch's. The masochist is able to change into a sadist by expiating, the sadist into a masochist on condition that he does not expiate. If its existence is too hastily taken for granted the sadomasochistic entity is liable to become a crude syndrome that fails to satisfy the demands of genuine symptomatology. It rather falls into the category of disturbances mentioned earlier which are coherent in appearance only and which must be broken down into discrete clinical entities. We should not deal with the problem of symptoms too lightly. It is sometimes necessary to start again from scratch and to break up a syndrome that blurs and arbitrarily unites radically dissimilar symptoms. Hence our suggestion that Masoch was perhaps an even greater clinician than Sade, in that he provided various elucidations and intuitions which help to break down the spurious sadomasochistic unity.

The belief in this unity is to a large extent the result of misunderstandings and careless reasoning. It may seem obvious that the sadist and the masochist are destined to meet. The fact that the one enjoys inflicting while the other enjoys suffering pain seems to be such striking proof of their complementarity that it would be disappointing if the encounter did not take place. A popular joke tells of the meeting between a sadist and a masochist; the masochist says: "Hurt me." The sadist replies: "No." This is a particularly stupid joke, not only because it is unrealistic but because it foolishly claims competence to pass judgment on the world of perversions. It is unrealistic because a genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim (one of the monks' victims in *Justine* explains: "They wish to be certain their crimes cost tears; they would send away any girl who was to come here vol-

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untarily.") Neither would the masochist tolerate a truly sadistic torturer. He does of course require a special "nature" in the woman torturer, but he needs to mold this nature, to educate and persuade it in accordance with his secret project, which could never be fulfilled with a sadistic woman. Wanda Sacher-Masoch should not have been surprised that Sacher-Masoch failed to respond to one of their sadistic woman friends; conversely, the critics were wrong in suspecting Wanda of lying because she presented a vaguely innocent image of herself, however cunningly and clumsily. Sadistic characters do of course play a part in the masochistic situation as a whole, and the novels of Masoch, as we shall see, offer many examples of this. But their role is never a direct one, and it becomes significant only in the context of the situation that exists before their appearance. The female torturer regards with suspicion the sadist who proposes to help her, as though she sensed the incompatibility of their respective aims. In *The Fisher of Souls*, the heroine Dragomira expresses this feeling to the cruel count Boguslav Soltyk, who believes she is sadistic and cruel: "You make people suffer out of cruelty, but I castigate and kill in the name of God, without pity, but also without hatred."

We tend to ignore this obvious difference. The woman torturer of masochism cannot be sadistic precisely because she is *in* the masochistic situation, she is an integral part of it, a realization of the masochistic fantasy. She belongs in the masochistic world, not in the sense that she has the same tastes as her victim, but because her "sadism" is of a kind never found in the sadist; it is as it were the double or the reflection of masochism. The same is true of sadism. The victim cannot be masochistic, not merely because the libertine would be irked if she were to experience pleasure, but because the victim of the sadist belongs entirely in the world of sadism and is an integral part of the sadis-

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tic situation. In some strange way she is the counterpart of the sadistic torturer (in Sade's two great novels which are like the reflections of each other, Juliette and Justine, the depraved and the virtuous girl, are sisters). Sadism and masochism are confused when they are treated like abstract entities each in isolation from its specific universe. Once they have been cut off from their *Umwelt* and stripped of their flesh and blood, it seems natural that they should fit in with each other.

This is not to say that the victim of the sadist is herself sadistic, nor that the torturer of masochism is masochistic. But equally unacceptable is Krafft-Ebing's view according to which the torturer of Masoch is either a true sadist or else pretends to be one. In our opinion the woman torturer belongs entirely to masochism; admittedly she is not a masochistic character, but she is a pure element of masochism. By distinguishing in a perversion between the subject (the person) and the element (the essence), we are able to understand how a person can elude his subjective destiny, but only with partial success, by playing the role of an element in the situation of his choice. The torturess escapes from her own masochism by assuming the active role in the masochistic situation. It is a mistake to think that she is sadistic or even pretending to be so. We must not imagine that it is a matter of the masochist encountering a sadist by a stroke of luck. Each subject in the perversion only needs the "element" of the same perversion and not a subject of the other perversion. Whenever the type of the woman torturer is observed in the masochistic setting, it becomes obvious that she is neither a genuine sadist nor a pseudosadist but something quite different. She does indeed belong essentially to masochism, but without realizing it as a subject; she incarnates instead the element of "inflicting pain" in an exclusively masochistic situation. Masoch and his heroes are constantly in search of a peculiar and extremely rare feminine

(continued...)

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