

**ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF MASOCHISM: LITERARY TEXTS,  
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

Michael C. Finke, Carl Niekerk (eds.)

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(by Maite Escudero Alías. University of Zaragoza)

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Since the publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis* by the sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in 1890, the study of masochism has solely been considered as an inherent branch of psychoanalysis. However, its increasing application in the last decade to a wide range of different theoretical discourses like literature, history, cinema and culture, highlight masochism as a theoretical discipline of its own. Thus, the present contributions are meant to analyze the many working models of masochism within specific cultural, historical and social contexts. In this sense, masochism can be said to work as a deconstructive tool that challenges traditional psychoanalytic perspectives on stigmatized categories of identity. Given the complexity of this essay collection in terms of approaches and time periods—the volume consists of 11 essays arranged chronologically—this review will not be able to examine each essay in an in-depth manner. Rather, the reviewer will consider the collection as a whole, pointing out some of its most outstanding and innovative analyses.

Most contributors have explicitly considered and interrogated the opinions of earlier authors on the topic that they are discussing; that is to say, this collection is, primarily, a re-interpretation of the term masochism as approached by authors such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud. Take, for instance, the discussion in Otto F. Kernberg's "Clinical Dimensions of Masochism", in which he provides a detailed classification of masochistic pathologies according to the severity of the psychopathology. Kernberg's

contention that some syndromes of masochistic behaviours overlap with other psychological dimensions, deprives masochism of its generalized definition in terms of suffering, self-destructiveness, sexual perversions and narcissism. Furthermore, in an attempt to rewrite Freud's postulates on the different types of masochism and in understanding preoedipal development, Kernberg argues how the tendency to universalize masochistic conflicts overlooks more specific cases that may find their causes within social contexts and that still remain unexplored. In this sense, Kernberg's study reveals that "a paternalistic culture reinforces characterological masochism in women and sadistic components of sexuality in men, thus reinforcing the sexualization of masochism in men while strengthening its transformation into characterological patterns in women" (p. 10).

The depiction of women as being masochistic by nature coined Freud's "feminine masochism" as pertaining exclusively to males. Accordingly, the term defined men who accepted the "natural" passive position of women. This link between masochism and the process of identity-building, is further developed by Robert Tobin in "Masochism and Identity". In it, Tobin critically examines Krafft-Ebing's and Freud's statements on feminine masochism as a perversion between men. From the late nineteenth century, and in the psychoanalytical realm, women's subjection and subordination to men—and by the same token, women's suffering and enjoyment—have relied on biology. In this context, Foucault's discourse on the medicalization of sexuality is a useful remainder of the importance of power and medicine in the formation of sexual identities. In this respect, Tobin's paper covers a wide range of cases of inverted people, and interestingly, points to a double-edged reading of masochism: namely, the masochistic body as a potential site for resistance.

Following Foucault, Deleuze and Judith Butler among others, Tobin remarks that, since medicine was aware of its role in creating an inverted identity, "the inverts, instead of searching for a cure, were masochistically using the powerful resistance of medicine to create their own identity" (p. 46). While female masochism remained unquestioned due to its naturalness, the term "invert" explicitly referred to homosexual males. Paradoxically, however, the latter also became naturalized by psychoanalysis in an attempt to control their lifestyles. In addition to gaining identity through a masochistic submission to medicine, inverts were empowered to challenge the social order and power relations via parody. It is precisely at this particular point that Robert Tobin is careful to consider possible biases held by sexologists and psychoanalysts alike, since both still tend to define the categories of masochism and homosexuality as "aesthetic" and "formal".

Such a theatrical and fictional view of (sado)masochism has been already described by Laplanche, Deleuze, Studlar, Bersani or Pat Califa. Thus, to assess whether

masochism can be, in Butlerian terms, a performative identity, opens up an interesting space for re-interpreting the nature of the "perversion". And so, Tobin will claim that despite the fact that both terms, masochism and homosexuality, were coined late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by psychoanalytical and sexological discourses, there has indeed been a significant shift of paradigms and contexts. In other words, while homosexuality has revealed itself as an identity, masochism is by no means considered as a visible (and non-pathological) identity. Furthermore, when compared not only to homosexuality but also to sadomasochism (which is nowadays considered a common sexual variation),<sup>1</sup> masochism is still a long way from becoming a sign of identity. Rather, masochism continues to be tainted by pathological features, as if it would endorse an immortal privilege within psychoanalysis.

As mentioned above, most papers in this collection take postmodern approaches of masochism as their point of departure. Such is the case of "Contracting Masochism: Pain, Pleasure, and the Language of Power" by Victor E. Taylor, in which he deals with the nature of masochism in unstable patterns. The inability to maintain a static and coherent position when defining the dominant and submissive relationship, turns masochism into a discursive and visual narrative that challenges universalizing language-scenes. Power relations appear fragile, multiple and overlapping; ultimately, they will depend on the different contexts in which they are enacted. Among other examples, Taylor refers to the diverse and far-ranging depictions of S&M in popular culture and songs, web sites and psychoanalytical therapies. This Deleuzian insight of masochism as a phenomenon of art and culture is widely discussed in various chapters that bring several writers and literary texts together, such as medieval romances, Goethe's *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, Turgenev, and Tolstoy. The association of masochism with specific national psychologies already found its expression in Freud's writing on Dostoevsky. Along with Russians, male Jews have been daringly described by Sacher-Masoch as feminized, and therefore, masochistic subjects.

And yet, the convergence of masochism and minority cultures finds its threshold in the last two chapters of this collection. Though different in analysis, both take issue with race and gender; masochism is here employed as a term for conceptualizing them. Carl H. Niekerk's "Race and Gender in Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* and *Love Letters*" shows us the perception proposed by Sander Gilman, in which masochism is used "to describe the cultural condition of intellectuals who place themselves, whether intentionally or not, on the faultlines between minority and majority culture" (p. 182). By exploring Multatuli's books, Niekerk suggests that masochism can be read as a way of coping with identity conflicts on the one hand, and as an invitation to share the author's masochistic fantasies on the other. Interestingly enough, a further claim for identification with the victim is also recalled in the sense that it articulates a mythical interracial relationship.

Barbara Mennel's "Masochistic Fantasy and Racialized Fetish in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats The Soul*" critically discusses how masochism is racialized in the orientalizing of Ali's character. The representation of the "mysterious exotic Oriental" as Mennel puts it, allows the film a masochistic aesthetics that foregrounds liberalism and the disavowal of racism. However, when closely scrutinized, the film repeatedly positions Ali as the fetishization of the racialized Other. Although postmodern, post-colonial and queer discussions of masochism have offered empowering readings of the film, Mennel argues that they privilege either gender or gay sexuality, and therefore read marginalization as feminization and subversive hypermasculinity respectively. For this author, the phallic masculinity is defined within the film as white and Western, since Ali's suffering body "offers a spectatorial masochistic fantasy situated in post-colonial and post-Holocaust West Germany, which reworks the colonial fantasy". Thus, whether deconstructing or reaffirming the stereotyped racial fetish, the film's masochistic aesthetics still lends itself to controversy.

Overall, this is a well laid out and thought-provoking collection which, not only details past and current views on masochism, but also raises many questions with its fruitful references to sexual politics and culture.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>. It should be pointed out that although representations and images of S&M are gradually being accepted within (popular) culture as signs of identity, stigmatization and abomination are also the most common responses to them. For further information on

this subject, see "Sodomy is a Crime" and the "Voice Of America Head: Homosexuality 'Morally Disordered'", both published in the year 2001 at the website <<http://www.sodomylaws.org>>.

## THE SOUTHERN INHERITORS OF DON QUIXOTE

Montserrat Ginés

Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000.

(by Marita Nadal, University of Zaragoza)

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At first sight, the title of this volume may seem far-fetched. Are we to infer that Southern writers are the progeny of Don Quixote? Ginés is cautious enough to answer this question on the first page of her preface: "The presence of the spirit of Don Quixote in southern literature is a phenomenon not of influence but of confluence" (xiii). After this clarification, things start to fit. As is well known, Southern writing has come to epitomize the spirit of the American South, which is the expression of a peculiar history and culture openly divergent from that of the North. Southern writing evokes notions of honour, chivalry, pride in lineage, grandeur and a patriarchal ethic, all of which is compounded by the sense of nostalgia, frustration and loss after the defeat of the Civil War.

As Ginés points out, these elements, which reflect the clash between the real and the ideal, can be traced back to Cervantes' novel. It is true that the echoes of Don Quixote are universal, as the author admits—and she mentions writers such as Dostoevski, Melville and Flaubert—but her contention is that the traces of that literary archetype are more visible in the literature of the American South. Her study, which also describes the peculiar relationship of each author to his/her ancestors and the South, covers approximately one hundred years, starting with Mark Twain and continuing with James Branch Cabell, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Walter Percy. These are the authors chosen, though, as the author explains, others could have been included. Although these remarks may appear