Wanda's Endings: Transforming the Discourse of Masochism

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Abstract:

I want to show that the scenario of male masochism as displayed in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novella has less to do with the actual pleasure that is felt during physical punishment than with the prescriptive construction of a position for the female subject that is inspired by the iconographic tradition of Venus paintings. The scenes in the novella which include the African servants provide a metonymical tie to the iconography of the cruel woman prescribed by the masochistic fantasy. In my reading of the text, however, the scenes that include the African servants mark, at the same time, the exit of the cruel woman from the masochistic scenario and the entrance into the psychic economy of sadism which follows a completely different dynamics and which disempowers the male masochist and his control over Venus in Furs. When Rümelin as Wanda von Sacher-Masoch begins to write novellas herself, her cruel women no longer subject themselves to the space and location afforded to them within the male fantasy.

1 There are at least three endings to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novella *Venus in Furs* (1869), the classical tale about a male protagonist, Severin, and his masochistic fantasies that are projected onto his female lover Wanda: first of all the masochistic scenario described in the internal narrative ends when the male masochist receives his last brutal beating by Wanda's new lover and companion, Alexis; exit Wanda and "the Greek." Second, the I-narrator's pleasurable reading of this internal narrative which takes up most of the space of the novella and in which Severin recorded his experiences and in the end pronounced his cure from masochism breaks off — i.e., we have an ending simply by pronunciation; and thirdly, the novella itself ends by returning to the conversation between Severin and the I-narrator in the narrative frame reaffirming the impossibility for a relation between the two sexes based on equality at this moment in our time and in our culture: In this context Severin lectures "[t]hat the woman as nature has created her and as men have trained her these days is his enemy and [that she] can only be his slave or his despot, *but never his partner*. She will only become his partner when she has equal rights, [and] when she is his equal in education and in work" (138). This perspective, however, remains utopian within the novella. In the historical and cultural situation the protagonists of this story find themselves in one still has to choose whether to be the hammer or the anvil. As far as I can tell there is no compelling reason within the psycho-dynamics of the masochistic scenario why the entrance of another player would necessitate the destruction of the scenario itself. All of these endings seem rather abrupt and upon closer scrutiny forced. Why wouldn't Severin and Wanda be able to continue their master-slave relationship after the entrance of a third player? What kind of "cure" is that

that is pronounced by Severin and which John Noyes has characterized as a simple shift in Severin's relationship vis-à-vis the structure of his drives, more like "a secondary reversal of masochism" ("Der Blick des Begehrens" 27). As a matter of fact, one could easily argue that the essence of literary masochism as established by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch in his *Venus in Furs* can be characterized as a discourse of suspended endings where pleasure is derived from the control of the cruel woman (Wanda) by male masochist fantasies (Severin/Gregor).

2 Let me explain this idea further. I am claiming that the functioning of the male masochist pleasure in this story rests upon the suspension of the woman's desire. Traditionally, masochism has been understood in the wake of Freud as a problem of psychic economy where the pleasure principle (*Lustprinzip*) is suspended by the affliction of pain and where the experience of pain is redirected into an experience of pleasure. Masochism is thus localized "beyond the pleasure principle" which is the reason why Freud had problems with explaining the phenomenon of masochism in the first place. In his treatise on "The economic problem of masochism" from 1924 Freud posits an erotogenous masochism (*erogener Masochismus*) which undergoes all of libido's developmental phases, the primitive oral phase (i.e., the wish to be eaten by the totem animal), the sadistic-anal phase (i.e., the wish to be physically punished by the father), and the phallic phase (i.e., the fantasy of castration) (see 348). Masochism is thus a form of regression, i.e., a form of behavior which provokes regressive fantasies of physical punishment. Freud's masochist, therefore, partners up with the needs of the sadist in the need for receiving and/or administering punishment.[1]

3 Several interpreters have compared the plot of Sacher-Masoch's novella with the articulation of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's clinical findings in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Freud's later theories of masochism and concluded that the literary work anticipates later psychoanalytical findings. Gertrud Lenzer, for example, claims that

> what Sacher-Masoch could not say was left to later psychoanalytic discovery and analysis, which affirmed the fetish as penis substitute and emphasized its significance for fantasizing the female or maternal phallus. Fetishistic representations such as foot, hair, eye, and fur — to name the most common in Sacher-Masoch's works — because they are not generally recognized as sexual symbols, are therefore not subject to social censorship. (Lenzer 299)

Gilles Deleuze, in his afterword to *Venus in Furs*, has tried to rescue the concept of masochism from its merger with sadism: "Deleuze contends that the term sadomasochism assumes the existence of a pleasure-pain substance that is in fact an abstraction from the concrete formal conditions in which the coincidence of pleasure and pain arise" (Derwin 473).

[1] See the emergence of a theory of masochism as it relates to fetishism in Freud's essays "Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie," "Trauer und Melancholie," and "Zur Einführung des Narzißmus."

In other words, even though the sadist and the masochist both enjoy the affliction of pain, this may be a very different form of pleasure. Inflicting pain is not identical with suspending pleasure while being beaten; it may be structurally analogous but the economic processes involved in each case are entirely different. In short, "the aesthetic economy of sadism sexualizes reason, that of masochism sexualizes resistance to reason" (Derwin 474). The point is that we cannot look at Severin in the internal narrative of *Venus in Furs* as a masochist who teams up with Wanda, the sadist, and whose pleasures converge in the same activity. That interpretation would be tantamount to declaring the sadomasochistic scenario as open-ended and feeding internally from each other. I want to show instead that the scenario of male masochism as displayed in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novella has less to do with the actual pleasure that is felt during physical punishment than with the prescriptive construction of a position for the female subject that is inspired by the iconographic tradition of Venus paintings. And it is the location for this position that ends the masochistic scenario as will be argued later.

4 I don't think there is a single passage in the text at which pleasure as derived through pain is explicitly articulated. Severin experiences pleasure only in two scenarios: when in actual or imagined embrace with Wanda and when Wanda performs in her prescribed role as cruel Venus in Furs: "I want to be your slave, serve you, endure everything from you, only do not push me away from you" — that is his condition for the role play (von Sacher-Masoch 37). The primary condition of the masochistic scenario is therefore the understanding that the cruel woman only functions according to a prescribed role and that she may never step outside of that role. It is "her noble nature" that guarantees her restriction to this position (49). And this male masochist fantasy is defined by the parameters of the iconography of the cruel woman in art history as will become clear in a moment.

5 Wanda, when confronted with the parameters of her role reacts with the incredulous remark: "A woman wearing furs is, therefore, nothing other than a big cat, a reinforced electric battery" (44). Once Wanda accepts the restrictions of the construction of the cruel woman — i.e., when she acts out her role and starts drafting the masochistic contract — she begins to articulate the sadistic pleasure that informs that construction thereby walking a very fine line between performing her role according to the prescriptions of Severin's fantasy of the cruel woman and articulating an actual female desire. Her statements in which she is beginning to articulate the pleasure that she feels in her role as dominatrix are nearly always coupled with words of reason that suspend the role as such: "now I fulfilled your crazy fantasy, let's be reasonable, happy, and let's love each other and within a year I'll be your

wife" is her closing argument to Severin and his insatiable appetite for cruelty and the whip (54). She sees herself as his goddess who will occasionally sneak down from her Olympus to visit him (see 61).

6 The entrance of a female girlfriend and later a Russian prince and the German painter do not threaten the masochistic equilibrium. Severin continues to enjoy pleasurable thoughts at his fantasy of slavedom and Wanda acts within her role as cruel woman and leaves that role sporadically to reassert her love for him. This arrangement continues even through Severin's signature of the masochistic contract that strips him of his name, his passport, his money, and turns him into the slave Gregor. It even continues throughout their move to Florence where Wanda rents a villa at the outskirts of town, takes on three female African servants, and starts mingling with society. Severin/Gregor's second deliberations on her powers for abuse are quickly brushed aside by his reassertion of Wanda's noble character: "Sometimes it is a little bit uncanny to give myself over to a woman so unconditionally. What if she misuses my passion, her power? [...] It is a curious game she plays with me, not more. She loves me, and she is so good, a noble nature, incapable of disloyalty" (64).

7 The topic of the colonial servant shows up for the first time in the context of the Russian nobleman's entourage who is seen walking through the Polish spa that serves as the location for the first part of the text with his two servants, an African man dressed all in red atlas silk and a man from one of the East Asian nations dressed in full armor, a figure that is quite possibly a model for the tartarian outfit and oriental features of Franz Kafka's doorkeeper in the parable of the same name (see 65). As this interesting detail is mentioned explicitly but not developed further in the novella, at least not on the plot level, I will argue that it has a metonymic function by providing a link to the colonial context of the events, specifically Wanda's African servants and their treatment of Gregor later on in the novella. Upon their arrival in Florence, Wanda draws up the masochistic contract and the suicide note. Right after signing both documents and delivering his passport and money to her, Wanda has her three African servants put Gregor in bondage: "She suddenly kicks me away with her foot, jumps up and rings the bell, upon the sound of which three young and slender Africans step in, as if carved from ebony and all dressed in red atlas silk, each carrying a rope in their hands" (von Sacher-Masoch 89). The African servants proceed to tie up his legs and hands with his arms in the back and Wanda gives him a serious whipping after which he is sent outside to work in the garden and await further commands. But even after this unexpected turn of events Wanda and Severin continue to play their roles in which he fantasizes her as the cruel woman and where she acts out that role ever more persuasively, on occasion stepping

out of it to tell him that she is only doing all of this to satisfy his fantasies and that she truly loves him (see 97). When Severin receives his next treatment it is again the African servants who are tying him up in order to torture him with their golden hair pins and then putting him in front of a plow like an ox: "Then the black devils pushed me into the field, one was leading the plow, the other was leading me with the rope, the third was driving me with the whip, and Venus in Furs was standing next to it and looking on" (99). In order to complicate the situation further, Severin does not fail to notice the beauty and attractiveness of one of the servants and is severely punished for that forbidden gaze by a jealous Wanda.

8 What is the meaning of these scenes? Why did Sacher-Masoch add these references to European colonialism to his novella, elements which seemingly have no plot function at all? Deleuze has suggested that we need to look at the dynamics of action and suspense if we want to understand how the masochistic scenario works. In fact, on the example of this scene we can see the significance of actual bodily confinement (to the plow) for the role of the male masochist and the freeze to a pose for the cruel woman which resembles an image at a standstill, a photo perhaps (see 188). As indicated earlier, I believe that the iconographic source for this "photographic" scene stems from the art historical tradition of Venus paintings which is also referred to in the novella, primarily Tician, Rubens, and Monet.[2] And this tradition also includes the black servant clothed in red Atlas silk. In other words, the scenes in the novella which include the African servants provide a metonymical tie to the iconography of the cruel woman prescribed by the masochistic fantasy. In my reading of the text, however, the scenes that include the African servants mark, at the same time, the exit of the cruel woman from the masochistic scenario and the entrance into the psychic economy of sadism which follows a completely different dynamics and which disempowers the male masochist and his control over Venus in Furs. This is the real ending of *Venus in Furs*. The masochistic scenario only comes to an end when Wanda leaves the prescribed position of the cruel woman constructed for her and takes control over her own desires; and she accomplishes this by stepping into a differently organized economy. Venus's mirror image steps out of the painting in these scenes of photographic standstill and takes on a life of its own. In her incarnation as the Venus in Furs which functions for the male masochist, the cruel woman did not have a subject position; in fact, she did not even have a gaze. She only existed as the object of the male desiring gaze. As Suzanne R. Stewart has shown, it is the space between Tician's allegory of the art historical transformation of love into a sublime object and the German

[2] I have argued this in detail in the essay on Kafka and Sacher-Masoch entitled "Der Ellbogen ruhte auf der Ottomane: Über die sadomasochistischen Wurzeln von Kafkas *Der Proceß*." *Journal of the Kafka Society* 21 (1999): 67-78.

painter's painting of Severin and Wanda in which she is nothing but a representation of the masochistic subject that Wanda is allowed to move (70): "As long as the painter cannot paint, he can direct his masochistic gaze of desire at Wanda; as soon as he paints and thus stops the mirroring, he must in some fundamental sense relinquish his desire. He must sublimate" (85).

9 In fact, Krafft-Ebings's definition of masochism modeled after the plot in *Venus in Furs* includes this important reference to the situation of the male masochist as painter (utilizing the literal meaning of the German word "ausmalen") in his description of masochism as sexual perversion whose victims were

> dominated in the realm of their sexual feelings and ideas by the idea of being completely and unconditionally subjected to a person of the opposite sex, of being treated by this person in a domineering manner, of being humiliated and even abused. This idea affords the pleasure; the person thus seized revels in fantasies in which he paints to himself such pictures; he often attempts to realize then and is often, due to his perversion of his sexual drive, increasingly unable to respond to the normal attractions of the other sex; he becomes incapable of a normal vita sexualis — that is, he becomes psychically impotent. (Krafft-Ebing 104-5; cited in Stewart 60).

Just like the male masochist has the control of the gaze, he is the one that paints in his mind. And it is this capacity of looking at himself in the masochistic theatrical scenario that is lost in the scene where he is beaten by Alexis, the Greek. As John Noyes has argued,

> if in the end it becomes clear that the contract makes possible the arbitrary exchange of the position of the perpetrator, then Severin's capacity to look at himself while being beaten as if from a transcendental position seizes at the same time. Being beaten always means being beaten *by a certain person*. If, however, this person looks like the father, the masochistic spell is broken. ("Der Blick des Begehrens" 27)

Deleuze has explained this need of proceeding from the masochistic contract — which excludes the father and gives all rights (of punishment) to the mother — to the archaic ritual which is performed by the African servants in the following way: according to Deleuze, the rite of plowing the field and cultivating the soil calls up a buried sensitivity and protected fertility, but also a strict archaic order of working the land (Leopold von Sacher-Masoch 243). He suggests further that the plow may symbolize the unification with the mother, that the golden needles and the whip have a parthogenic function, and that the pulling by the rope may be an image for the son's rebirth (see Leopold von Sacher-Masoch 244). While the psychoanalytic details of this scene are revealing in and of themselves, I would like to come back to the interpretation of the masochistic fantasy in a cultural-critical context. It is important, I believe, that Sacher-Masoch inserts the colonial context into these crucial scenes thus giving us a glimpse into the anxieties of the male European masochistic psyche from the last turn-of-the-century which is fed by the seemingly innocent and sublimated iconography

of Venus paintings. Reread from a colonial perspective the European male masochist is libidinally investing the figure of the African slave in a fantasy of matriarchal regression that becomes the ultimate test for the masochistic scenario, a test that it does not pass. To come back to where we left off in the beginning of this essay, the masochistic scenario does not end where the novella ends or where the reading of the internal narrative ends, it self-destructs by reading the colonial context back into the masochistic scenario and redefining the prescribed role for the cruel woman.

10 It is important that we dwell on the connection between sexuality and power if we read masochism into colonialism and vice versa. As Suzanne Stewart has observed,

> [m]asochism as a theoretical construct has become a favorite object of analysis in gender and cultural studies and an object of consumption in both popular culture and so-called subcultural practices. What these different articulations share is a perception of masochism's critical power, its subversive position vis-à-vis mass culture and consumer capitalism. Paradoxically, however, such a critique is achieved precisely through a staging of those same commercial relationships, on the one hand, and the mass consumption of masochistic scenarios, on the other. The masochistic contract between slave and dominatrix is the most capitalist of all relations because the masochist insists on the right to sell himself. (2)

The practice of masochism, therefore, reaffirms the structure of violence that it presupposes. The connection between masochism and modernity thus has to be rethought as one of ambiguous and constant renegotiation since the masochistic scenario, "whether in literature, music, the visual arts, or deicalized diagnoses of the fin-de-siècle *malaise*, staged the male shriveled body as a body that submits to an aestheticized and eroticized gaze and voice, thus conceiving of man as deeply penetrated by relations of political and sexual power" (Stewart 13-14). Masochism is, therefore, a response to the crisis of liberalism, but a response that intends to reintroduce the male gaze as controlling. It is thus a political phenomenon and, if you read the colonial context back into it, one that has to do with the anxieties of the European male vis-à-vis the new woman and the strong and independent white woman in the colonial situation. According to Rita Felski, the "parodic subversion of gender norms reinscribes more insistently the divisions that the text ostensibly calls into question, revealing deep-seated anxieties about both gender and class in the strenuous repudiation of a vulgar and sentimental aesthetic" (1094). And these anxieties are frequently projected onto women, "so that the female body functions as a primary symbolic site for confronting and controlling the threat of an unruly nature" (1102). And this gender role reversal, as I have argued, denies the female body the location of a subject position; it denies her a gaze. This projective mechanism is also at place in the context of masochism and colonialism where the African colonial subject, although in a position of powerlessness, is nevertheless eroticized. The female

African servants in Sacher-Masoch are remnants of the strong proto-masochistic undercurrent which, according to John Noyes, characterizes colonial fiction as evident in the excessive display of the sufferings involved in the act of colonialism (see "Civilizing Woman and Male Masochism" 50). The sexualization of the colonial subject and scenes of colonial regression, therefore, display the European's fantasies of sexuality and violence as criticized by Frantz Fanon and others. The colonial context also informs the European male's anxiety about the newly independent role for white women in the colonies. Peter Horn has shown on the example of Hans Grimm's novellas that the white women who were sent to marry the colonial farmers in Africa frequently turned out to behave as cruel women: "Precisely because in the wilderness she is (or could be) a 'master' she corresponds to that unapproachable idol of virgin-mother that, surrounded by ice-cold frigidity, demands adoration without permitting a single human or animal-like movement" (321). As "master," the white woman in the colonial context belonged to the public realm of European mastery over Africa and it is the irony of the male settler that he has to denounce that which he came to find in the colonies: freedom, sexual liberation, and fantasies of primitivism in order to rule and dominate as master.

11 What I wish to focus on next is the transition between Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's model of masochism introduced in *Venus in Furs* and the beginning of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's authorship (a pseudonym for Aurora Rümelin, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's companion and later wife). What happens to the structure of the masochistic scenario when retold by a woman? When Rümelin as Wanda von Sacher-Masoch begins to write novellas herself — many of them collected in the volume *Damen mit Pelz und Peitsche* (1881/82) — she envisions different endings for her stories, i.e., endings that transform the discourse of masochism and leave the prescriptive role for the idealized cruel woman — the Venus of art history — behind. Although Wanda von Sacher-Masoch adopts some of the basic parameters of masochism on the plot level (the idea that the two genders are enemies, the pre-industrial settings and winter landscapes of Eastern Europe which have the effect of "naturalizing" societal hierarchies, the fetishistic representation of the fur coat as symbol of female power and mastery, etc.), she makes some crucial changes in the constitution of her main characters and how they relate to each other. Her cruel women no longer subject themselves to the space and location afforded to them within the male fantasy, they no longer write up masochistic contracts, and there is no space in her novellas for regressive fantasies that feed of colonial anxieties. Instead, Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's cruel women claim subjecthood and mastery over their fate. The novella endings, in other words, project the utopia of an emancipated relationship between men and women based on a relation of equality that was not conceivable

for the characters in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's model of male masochism.

12 In her essay on Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's autobiographical confessions (*Meine Lebensbeichte* 1906), Katharina Gerstenberger has argued that the existence of female autobiography constitutes a threat to the male literary work "by obscuring the truth about female sexuality while putting into words those aspects of male sexuality better left unspoken" (83). This threat may also explain the negative reception of this text which was received as a correction to the male literary text by the scholarly establishment at the time. According to Gerstenberger, Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's confessions challenge the master text "with an act of subversive intertextuality" (88) by revising the lines and the role of the cruel woman while preserving the basic structure of masochism. In the confessions, the most audacious change to the masochistic scenario is the construction of a space in which the cruel woman is the object of lesbian desire thus offering a radically different interpretation of the female role. Ironically, however, this erotic relationship between women "restores the narrator to the traditional female position denied her in the masochistic relationship with her husband" (Gerstenberger 93). Wanda von Sacher-Masoch thus "reinstates the possibility of traditional gender roles within nontraditional constellations" (Gerstenberger 93) as condition for a female subject position that is not prescripted by the male masochist scenario, thus envisioning very different kinds of endings. I will argue that in her literary texts Wanda von Sacher-Masoch leaves the confines of male masochism behind — a move that she was not prepared to make in her life and in her confessions.

13 In Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* we have seen that the masochistic scenario constructs a scripted role for the cruel woman as the all-powerful punishing mother of regressive sexual fantasies that are fueled by colonial images indicating the level of anxieties experienced by the European male at the time vis-à-vis sexualized projections of colonial primitive female sexuality and white women as cruel women. Wanda von Sacher-Masoch envisions instead strong aristocratic women that are equal, if not superior, to men in their coldness of heart (see 8). Similar to Leopold's text, these women are frequently compared to animals, especially cats (or lions), or they are likened with historical figures such as Russia's Catherine II; they wear furs, and they are cruel punishers. But, as opposed to Leopold's text, these stories are not told from that perspective. Although they reinscribe a polar construction of the two genders as warriors as I have pointed to above, Wanda's cruel women primarily seek the fulfillment of their own sexual desires and will not let the masochistic male paint them into a corner from which they do not have a voice. Here are a few examples of how this works: In the story "Die Begin," the title character is a beautiful

aristocratic widow who buys beautiful male slaves, uses them for sexual gratification until she becomes tired of them, and then kills them. When the husband of a young country girl gets infatuated by this widow and serves as her slave and lover for a while, the battered wife collaborates with the widow to take him back in order to have him punished and, in the end, killed. The widow has him whipped on his feet a hundred times and during that scene rolls around naked in orgiastic fashion on her fur-covered pillows. The young wife has successfully ridden herself of an unloving and brutal husband and received a ransom on top. The novella thus ends with the articulation of both women's satisfaction. This ending departs significantly from the plot of the male masochist scenario, which stuck to the masochist perspective. Once Wanda leaves the masochistic scenario we do not really know anything about her except for what she cares to tell Severin in her letter to him several years later and we certainly never encounter passages which articulate her sexual gratification — precisely because masochism builds on the suspense of female desire as I have argued above. But in Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's stories, the unfolding of female desire drives the plot as well as the narrative perspective and therefore leads to very different endings.

14 In "Das Todeslos," for example, a young German nobleman, Georg Rainau, meets his neighbor, the young and beautiful widow Karola von Hammerstein, who lives a quiet and independent existence. When their relationship becomes one of friendship, she dictates the terms by telling him when he has permission to see her. Rainau falls the more in love with her the more she assumes the role of Venus in Furs. When the cruel third person, the military officer Steinau, arrives on the scene, the masochistic scenario is revitalized with the rivalry of both men's courtship for the baroness. They decide to let fate decide over the ownership of the woman and meet in the woods for a duel. But the cruel woman shows up on the scene determined not to have them dictate the terms: "And you believe that I will chose the one who is left over? — You believe that I will let you gamble for myself in such a dubious manner? I will belong to the one that I love, and I do love one of you. The other one should accept that and leave" (Wanda von Sacher-Masoch 70). She then proceeds to load one of the pistols and return the other one unloaded and after one shot the military officer is struck down on the ground. As opposed to Wanda in *Venus in Furs*, Karola von Hammerstein does not fall for the brutality of the cruel male, neither does Rainau, but we get to watch how she pursues her own sexual wishes on her own terms.

15 Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's women in furs also pursue their fantasies of male-female relations in a destructive sense as we have seen in the above example by killing unloving husbands and suitors, revenging treason, or simply getting rid of their lovers after one night.

But as opposed to the masochistic scenario which ended with the exit of the cruel woman as conceived by the male masochist and her reentrance into the differently defined psychic economy of sadism, Wanda's cruel women are the products of male brutality. Their cruelty is the result of years of emotional neglect and/or beating by their husbands, and they have hardened under these circumstances. "The modern form of marriage, with its false appearance of happiness to the outside and its internal wasteland, has hardened the pure, gentle constitution of Hanna, she became hard and cold" (Wanda von Sacher-Masoch 124) is the typical explanation for the particular condition Wanda's cruel women find themselves in. And on the basis of this life experience they decide to take their fate into their own hands and pursue their desires without getting too caught up in the game. The stories seem to be pleading for a different kind of relationship between the sexes, one that is not based on the masochistic suspense of gratification and projection of sexual fantasies onto a constructed image of the female but on a reaffirmation of a need for mutual respect as condition for love among equals. Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's texts are, therefore, no doublings of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's literary productions but counter narratives, as Christa Gürtler has argued in her afterword to the new edition of a collection of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's stories. Gürtler claims that although Wanda von Sacher-Masoch reaffirms her husband's perspective on the nature of the two sexes as warriors under present social conditions, societal critique remains a non-thought in his works whereas it is articulated in her texts at least as a project: "In her stories the fur becomes a symbol of female power and mastery. [...] These cruel women no longer want to submit to others, not even to masochistic contracts" (Gürtler 160-61). And the most obvious difference between these two models for sexual relations are the differences in endings. Wanda's endings include sexual gratification and punishment where the moral law was violated. About the story entitled "Die Tierbändigerin" Gürtler writes: "The promiscuous male is killed by the monogamous (?) woman: While within the masochistic ritual punishment replaces the sexual union and triggers the ritual over and over again, here the death sentence is executed in form of a circus event in the rink" (163). These cruel women are virtuous and they punish promiscuous transgression if need be. But both scenarios, the fulfilled union with the sexual partner as well as the death sentence of the amoral transgressor, rest on the possibility of an egalitarian relationship between men and women.

16 As opposed to Wanda von Sacher-Masoch who introduced important changes into the literary conception of male and female sexual relations, the contemporary German filmmaker and critic Monika Treut fleshes out Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's image of the cruel woman after she left the masochistic scenario. In Sacher-Masoch, we do not hear from her again until

Severin receives a letter and painting in the mail several years after the events. Treut emphasizes the subversive nature of masochism when she claims that "[m]asochistic obedience violates the rules of disciplined sexual behavior" and by violating the code of normalization that undermines our understanding of normal sexual relations. Against Fanon and Zizek she claims that "even when S/M practices possess moments of actual violence (the masochist is beaten, he experiences pain and exposes himself to a 'cruel' scenario of unconditional obedience), it is in fact fantasy that is the determining factor" ("Female Misbehavior" 107). While that is true, Treut, in my estimate, underestimates the powers of play and the structural similarities with capitalist economies of exchange. Even playing with the idea of dependency recreates an essential connection between sexuality and violence and it is not readily apparent to me why that form of "destructive obedience is the sign of self-conscious fantasy placing into question every form of actual violence and dependency" (Treut, "Female Misbehavior" 110). As a matter of fact, it seems to me that the structures of violence and dependency are de-historicized with this move. I do not understand how the practice of sado-masochism and its fetishized use of black leather can escape the association with violence and remain unblemished. It might be true in some limited way that "sadomasochistic mise-en-scènes liberate sex from the deep entanglements that have tyrannized it for hundreds of years" (Treut, "Female Misbehavior" 112), but Treut's claim that the destructive obedience in masochism negates actual violence, that it does not reproduce violence and instead nullifies it does not take the impact of the structural — and non-ironic, I might claim — recreation of sexual violence into account.

17 Treut first articulated her theory of the subversive elements of sadomasochism in her 1984 dissertation on the image of woman in Sade and Sacher-Masoch in which she claims that the sadistic female in Sade is liberated from all traditional values, especially in a moral, religious, and aesthetic sense (see *Die grausame Frau* 11). In Treut's reconstruction, a radically free form of authorial reason such as Sade's produces the idea of sovereignty, which leads to the positive utopia of a liberated and libertine human being that transgresses all operative rules in its radical search for sexual gratification. Sade's cruel women are libertine thinkers; they have androgynous features, they foster an anti-motherly ressentiment, and they are equipped with enormous dildos which not only makes them into active members in the sexual role play but also transforms them into man's toughest rival so to speak. And in Treut's scenario, Sade's parodistic rendition of normal and perverse sexuality destroys the societal yoke under which woman was trained in her second nature (see *Die grausame Frau* 71). Treut resorts to the same explanation as Wanda von Sacher-Masoch in that she shows that in Sade

these cruel women are libertine, because they were brutally enslaved before and now they outdo their male colleagues in excessive violence and passion.

18 Treut has struggled with the artistic expression for this position in her film *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* of the same year where she has her main character, Wanda, lecture to the audience about the pride of the masochistic slave and the roots of that pride in fetishism "with an ironic grin" as she claims: "The slave deifies these substances that count in our culture as the most disgusting ones imaginable. This has to do with the most extreme form of fetishism known to us. To manage it properly is not easy. Neither for the submissive nor for the dominant partner. It is a reciprocal process of education" ("Female Misbehavior" 108). Unfortunately, I believe, the ironic rendition of this position is lost in the structural translation into cinematic images as I have argued elsewhere (see "The Sexual Woman and her Struggle for Subjectivity" 255-56). The film, in my opinion, simply shows a female tyrant in control of her "gallery" in which sexual perversions are staged and how she loses that control. What happens in Treut's recasting of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's masochistic fantasy of the cruel woman is the eradication of the historical context of colonialism and the reinsertion of a de-historicized context of queerness. And this move has certain consequences that I wish to outline in what is left.

19 The film *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* indeed shows Wanda as the agent in heterosexual as well as in homosexual love relations which has caused critics to claim that the film makes a productive contribution to current discourses on perverse desire and that it "creates a space to investigate, rearrange, and reverse sexual and gender configurations" (Mennel 154). Barbara Mennel further argues that while the film portrays lesbian desire and fetishism, it does not do so from the perspective of a lesbian etiology: "The political and aesthetic significance of Treut's film lies in its resistance to the representation of a lesbian etiology and to its simultaneous insistence on the political and sexual transgressiveness that results from recasting traditionally gendered and heterosexual spectatorial and psychological models" (154). To that respect it can be compared to Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's recasting of the masochistic scenario in her confessions which include the author/narrator as object of lesbian desire that is ironically restored to her traditional sexual role. But Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's articulation of her relationship with another woman did not necessarily translate into a transgressive recasting of the masochist scenario; in fact, masochism was thrown out the window entirely in the literary renditions that featured cruel women in pursuit of their sexual gratification by the simple fact that the narrative perspective shifted over to the women. They were the agents of their (hi)stories. Treut's cruel woman, however many

lectures she gives about the consciousness of the slave, is still inherently tied to the idea of staging. Mennel claims that "[m]asochism's inherent staging of domination and submission allows for a reading of subversion: performativity foregrounds and appropriates domination and submission in the existing system and therefore subverts it: Yet it also allows for a reading of conservatism: reenactment reproduces and reinscribes the status quo" (155). And this conservatism is connected with the paradigm of theatricality and the reenactment of the masochist scenario even though it is significantly altered. Mennel sees a potential for transgression in this portrayal of perverse desire and in the invitation to create multiple identificatory and disidentificatory moments and spectator positions: through the deployment of masochism, an autonomous female desire is represented and the woman is constituted as speaking subject (see 160).

20 I do not want to engage in a detailed analysis of the film at this point since that is really not my focus in this essay, which deals more with shifts in the discourse of masochism through a comparison of its endings. To bring the argument back to the function of endings and the question of the colonial context, I wish to dwell a little bit on a fact that Marcia Klotz has pointed out in her analysis of Treut's radical queer political program. Klotz has argued that although straight relationships are queered in Treut's films, lesbianism is also queered at the same time (see 69). In fact, the queer haven portrayed in Treut's films is curiously devoid of issues of race and class. On the example of *My Father is Coming* Klotz writes: "The fact that most of the people on that street corner are black leads one to wonder just what the relation might be between race and class here — or why the sad, coerced kind of sex is at home in a black neighborhood while the world of the erotic dance club is all white" (72). This observation leads Klotz to wonder about the transgressive nature of Treut's sexual representations: "Although we see a number of instances in Treut's films of how straightness threatens to violate the boundaries of the queer haven and how these threats are repelled, neutralized, or destroyed, inequalities based on class or race never seem to threaten the queer space at all" (Klotz 75). This essentializing tendency in Treut's conception of queerness mirrors Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's utopian project of gender relations based on equality.

21 Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's stories were also devoid of colonial subjects and placed in a non-specific time somewhere in Galicia. While Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novella afforded us a superb glimpse into the inner workings of the male European masochist's psyche during the later half of the nineteenth century when the major European players (including the neighbor Russia) were engaged in the conquest of Africa and other regions of the world, the female authored texts by necessity lack that historical framework and instead

focus on the essence of gender relations from a feminist and a queer perspective. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's narrative ends with the self-destruction of the masochist scenario. After that, there is nothing more to say. The colonial context provides the historical specificity for the masochistic plot. Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's tales only begin after the reentry of the cruel woman into a psychic economy of sadism which is devoid of ethnic diversity and colonial power relations. They end with the establishment of a gender equilibrium either in life or in death in a non-specified time. Wanda's endings sketch the outlines of this utopian project that is located beyond the pleasure principle of the male European masochist. It rests, however, on the strategy of decontextualization, thereby failing to acknowledge the significance of the colonial subtext.

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