The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian (Mantegna)
Masochism and Male Subjectivity
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Perversion: Turning aside from truth or right; diversion to an improper use. . .
(Oxford English Dictionary)

What is the “truth” or “right” from which perversion turns aside, and what does it improperly use? The OED goes some way toward answering these questions when it quotes, by way of illustration, part of a line from Francis Bacon: “Women to govern men . . . slaves free-men . . . being total violations and perversions of the laws of nature and nations.” According to this grammatically “deviant” citation, perversion turns aside from both biology and the social order, and it does so through the improper deployment or negation of the binarisms upon which each regime depends—binarisms that reinforce each other in the case of gender, if not that of class. The “truth” or “right” that is thus subverted is the principle of hierarchy.

Freud’s account of perversion also stresses its diversionary and decentering character. “Perversions,” he writes in Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, “are sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (b) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim.” Here, in utter disregard for Western metaphysics, the “true” or “right” is heterosexual penetration. All other sexual activities belong either to the category of “foreplay,” in which case they are strictly subordinated to “endpleasure,” or to that of perversion.

Coitus is “ideally” a reprise in miniature of the history of infantile sexuality, a history that begins with oral gratification and culminates with genital desire for an object of the opposite gender. Here, too, the subject is exhorted to keep his or her eyes on the finish line, and to move as expeditiously as possible through the preliminary stages. But in both cases perversion intrudes as the temptation to engage in a different kind of erotic narrative, one whose organization is aleatory and paratactic rather than direct and hypotactic, preferring forepleasures to endpleasures, and browsing to discharge. Since every external and internal organ is capable of becoming an erotogenic zone, sexuality need not even be limited to the three stages Freud decreed for boys, or the four he or-
dained for girls. Infantile sexuality is polymorphously perverse, and even in the erotic activities of the most "normal" adult there are "rudiments which, if they had developed, would have led to the deviations described as 'perversions.' "

I do not mean to suggest that polymorphous sexuality is more "natural" than genital sexuality. There is no form of human sexuality that does not marginalize need or substitute a fantasmatic object for the original and nutritive object. As Laplanche explains, "Sexuality is ... a localized, autoerotic pleasure, a pleasure of the organ 'in place,' in opposition to a functional pleasure with all which that term implies of an opening towards the object. ... Thus a natural, functional rhythm (that of rutting) disappears, while elsewhere there emerges a different kind of sequence, which is incomprehensible without calling into play such categories as repression, reminiscence, work of elaboration, 'deferred action.' "

The notion of a deferred action has a particular relevance within the present discussion, since infantile sexuality assumes the narrative coherence of "stages" only after the fact, from the vantage point of the Oedipus complex. The concept of perversion is equally unthinkable apart from the Oedipus complex, since it derives all its meaning and force from its relation to that structuring moment and the premium it places upon genital sexuality. It is in fact something of a misnomer to characterize infantile sexuality as "polymorphously perverse," since sexuality only becomes perverse at the point where it constitutes either a retreat from Oedipal structuration or a transgressive acting out of its dictates. Perversion always contains the trace of Oedipus within it—it is always organized to some degree by what it subverts.

Those writers who have engaged theoretically with the topic of perversion tend to emphasize one of these aspects at the expense of the other. For Foucault, who stands at one extreme, perversion has no subversive edge; it merely serves to extend the surface upon which power is exercised. He insists in The History of Sexuality that "polymorphous conducts [are] actually extracted from people's bodies and from their pleasures" by what might be called "the society of the panopticon"—that perversion is "drawn out, revealed, isolated, intensified, incorporated, by multifarious power devices." At the other extreme there is a volume like the polysexuality issue of Semiotext(e), which heaps perversion upon perversion with wild abandon in the vain hope of burying Oedipus altogether. Neither position is adequate to the complexities of the issues involved.

Ironically, it is a rather hateful book by Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel—a book that consistently comes down on the side of the father, "mature" sexuality, and a well-fortified ego—that seems best to intuit the
challenge that perversion poses to the symbolic order. Its author cau­tions that "the pervert is trying to free himself from the paternal uni­verse and the constraints of the law. He wants to create a new kind of reality and to dethrone God the Father." Chasseguet-Smirgel's reading of perversion suggests that its significance extends far beyond the do­main of the strictly sexual (if, indeed, such a domain ever existed)—suggests, that is, that it turns aside not only from hierarchy and genital sexuality, but from the paternal signifier, the ultimate "truth" or "right." As I will attempt to demonstrate later in this chapter with re­spect to masochism, at certain moments perversion may pose such a radical challenge to sexual difference as to enact precisely the scenario condemned by Bacon.

The theoretical interest of perversion extends even beyond the dis­ruptive force it brings to bear upon gender. It strips sexuality of all functionality, whether biological or social; in an even more extreme fashion than "normal" sexuality, it puts the body and the world of objects to uses that have nothing whatever to do with any kind of "imma­nent" design or purpose. Perversion also subverts many of the binary oppositions upon which the social order rests: it crosses the boundary separating food from excrement (coprophilia), human from animal (bestiality), life from death (necrophilia), adult from child (pederasty), and pleasure from pain (masochism).

Of course not all perversions are equally subversive, or even equally interesting. It is unfortunate, but not surprising, that the perversion that has commandeered most of the literary and theoretical attention —sadism—is also the one that is most compatible with conventional heterosexuality. (The first thing Freud says about sadism in Three Es­says is that "the sexuality of most male human beings contains an ele­ment of aggressiveness—a desire to subjugate." He adds that the "bio­logical significance" of this combination "seems to lie in the need for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than the process of wooing. Thus sadism would correspond to an aggressive component of the sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated and, by displacement, has usurped the leading position" [157–58]. The Ego and the Id describes sadism's combination of cru­elty and eroticism as a "serviceable instinctual fusion.") The work of Sade commands enormous intellectual prestige—something inconceiv­able with the novels of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, rescued from oblivion by Deleuze. One thinks in this respect not only of Batail­le, but also of the massive double issue of Ob­liques dedicated to Sade, which includes materials from Benoit, Klos­sowski, Blanchot, Robbe-Grillet, Sollers, Paulhan, Breton, Mandiar­gues, Masson, and Labisse, to name only a few of its contributors.
The focus of this essay is the perversion that is most commonly linked with sadism, sometimes as its complement and at other times as its instinctual opposite. I refer of course to masochism, variously described by Freud as an unusually dangerous libidinal infraction, and as one of the “kindliest.”

Three Kinds of Masochism

In his last work to deal extensively with masochism, Freud distinguishes between three forms of that perversion: “erotogenic,” “feminine,” and “moral.” However, no sooner are these distinctions enumerated than they begin to erode. Erotogenic masochism, which Freud defines as “pleasure in pain,” provides the corporeal basis for both feminine and moral masochism. The tripartite division thus gives way rather quickly to one of those dualisms of which Freud is so fond, with both feminine and moral masochism “bleeding” into each other at the point where each abuts onto erotogenic masochism.

The adjective “erotogenic” is one that Freud habitually links with “zone,” and with which he designates a part of the body at which sexual excitation concentrates. Implicit, then, in the notion of masochism, whether feminine or moral, would seem to be the experience of corporeal pleasure, or—to be more precise—corporeal pleasure-in-pain. This stipulation poses no real conceptual difficulties with respect to the first of those categories; erotogenic masochism would seem to be literally “at the bottom” of feminine masochism, which Freud associates with fantasies of being bound and beaten, and with the desire to be “treated like . . . a naughty child.” It is far less clear how moral masochism could be said to have a necessary corporeal substratum, until we recall that the ego is for Freud “first and foremost a bodily ego”—or, as Strachey explains in an authorized gloss, “derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body.” If, as “The Economic Problem of Masochism” suggests, the “true” masochist “always turns his cheek whenever he has a chance of receiving a blow” (165), the moral masochist’s cheek is the ego. That is the erotogenic zone of choice, the site where he or she seeks to be beaten.

Curiously, after characterizing feminine masochism as “the one that is the most accessible to our observation,” Freud announces that owing to the “material at [his] command,” he will limit his discussion of that libidinal economy entirely to male patients. The inference is obvious: feminine masochism is a specifically male pathology, so named because it positions its sufferer as a woman. Freud in fact says as much:
If one has an opportunity of studying cases in which the masochistic phantasies have been especially richly elaborated, one quickly discovers that they place the subject in a characteristically feminine situation; they signify, that is, being castrated, or copulated with, or giving birth to a baby. For this reason I have called this form of masochism, *a potiori*, as it were . . . the feminine form, although so many of its features point to infantile life.\(^{21}\)

The reader is likely to object at this point that only five years earlier Freud had clearly identified the beating fantasy primarily with women. (Of the six patients upon whom he bases "'A Child Is Being Beaten,'" four are female, and only two male.\(^{22}\) And from *Three Essays* until *New Introductory Lectures*, Freud was to maintain, albeit with certain crucial qualifications, the connection between femininity and masochism.\(^{23}\) Yet "The Economic Problem of Masochism" is not the only major work on masochism to focus primarily upon male patients. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who gave masochism its name and its first definition, cites thirty-three cases of male masochism, and only four of female.\(^{24}\) (He also names masochism after a male masochist, Sacher-Masoch.) Theodor Reik’s research had similar results, leading him to conclude that "the male sex is more masochistic than the female."\(^{25}\) In his study of cruelty, Deleuze not only focuses exclusively on the novels of Sacher-Masoch, but elaborates a theoretical model of masochism in which the suffering position is almost necessarily male. What is to be made of this anomaly, whereby Freud designates as "feminine" a psychic disorder whose victims are primarily men?

While I would certainly dispute Reik’s notion that men are more masochistic than women, it does seem to me that it is only in the case of men that feminine masochism can be seen to assume pathological proportions. Although that psychic phenomenon often provides a centrally structuring element of both male and female subjectivity, it is only in the latter that it can be safely acknowledged. It is an accepted—indeed, a requisite—element of "normal" female subjectivity, providing a crucial mechanism for eroticizing lack and subordination. The male subject, on the contrary, cannot avow feminine masochism without calling into question his identification with the masculine position. All of this is another way of suggesting that what is acceptable for the female subject is pathological for the male. Freud indicates as much when he tells us that whereas the beating fantasy can be effortlessly accommodated within the little girl’s *positive* Oedipus complex, it can only be contained within the little boy’s *negative* Oedipus complex.\(^{26}\)

Feminine masochism, in other words, always implies desire for the fa-
ther and identification with the mother, a state of affairs that is normative for the female subject, but "deviant" for her male counterpart.

The disruptive consequences of male masochism are also underscored by an extraordinary passage from Reik, in which he distinguishes the masochistic fantasies of women from those of men:

Compared with the masculine masochism that of women shows a somewhat attenuated, one could almost say anemic character. It is more of a trespassing of the bourgeois border, of which one nevertheless remains aware, than an invasion into enemy terrain. The woman's masochistic phantasy very seldom reaches the pitch of savage lust, of ecstasy, as does that of the man. Even the orgy in the phantasy does not ascend in so steep a curve. There is nothing in it of the wildness of the chained Prometheus, rather something of Ganymede's submission. One does not feel anything of the cyclonelike character that is so often associated with masculine masochism, that blind unrestricted lust of self-destruction. The masochistic phantasy of woman has the character of yielding and surrender rather than that of the rush ahead, of the orgiastic culmination, of the self-abandonment of man. (216)

Reik suggests here that even the clinically masochistic woman does not really exceed her subjective limits; she merely stretches them a bit. The male masochist, on the other hand, leaves his social identity completely behind—actually abandons his "self"—and passes over into the "enemy terrain" of femininity. I will have more to say later about the "shattering" qualities of male masochism, but suffice it to note here that the sexual fantasies cited by Reik fully bear out these characterizations, as do those included by Krafft-Ebing.

Not only does it turn out that feminine masochism does not have very much to do with women, but that moral masochism does not have very much to do with virtue. Although the moral masochist seems to be under the domination of a hyperdeveloped conscience, his or her desire for punishment is so great as to pose a constant temptation to perform "sinful" actions, which must then be "expiated." Freud warns that moral masochism is in fact capable of swallowing up conscience altogether, of perverting it from within. This invisible sabotage occurs through the complete reversal of the process whereby the Oedipus complex was earlier "dissolved," i.e., of the operation whereby the paternal voice and imago were internalized as the superego. By deriving erotic gratification from the superego's censorship and punishment, the morally masochistic ego not only assumes an analogous position to that adopted by his or her more flamboyantly "feminine" counterpart in fantasy or actual sexual practice, but reactivates the Oedipus complex.

Significantly, what flares up with renewed intensity is that form of
the Oedipus complex that is positive for the female subject, but negative for the male—the form, that is, that turns upon desire for the father and identification with the mother. Freud is quite explicit about this:

We were able to translate the expression “unconscious sense of guilt” as meaning a need for punishment at the hands of a parental power. We know that the wish, which so frequently appears in phantasies, to be beaten by the father stands very close to the other wish, to have a passive (feminine) sexual relation to him and is only a regressive distortion of it. If we insert this explanation into the content of moral masochism, its hidden meaning becomes clear to us. (169)

Thus through moral masochism the ego is beaten/loved by the father, a situation that—once again—is “normal” for the female subject but “abnormal” for the male.

It would consequently seem that moral and feminine masochism develop out of the same “phantasmatic,” to borrow a word from Laplanche and Pontalis30—out of the same unconsciously structuring scenario or action. However, the moral masochist remains oblivious to the passion for self-destruction that burns ferociously within; Freud observes that whereas the sadism of the superego “becomes for the most part glaringly conscious,” the masochism of the ego “remains as a rule concealed from the subject and has to be inferred from his behaviour.”31 With the feminine masochist, on the other hand, the beating fantasy assumes a shape that is available to consciousness, albeit not necessarily to rational scrutiny.

Let us look rather more closely at these two categories of masochism, and at the forms they assume in both conscious and unconscious life.

Moral Masochism

With a frankness that is more alarming than engaging, Freud acknowledges in The Ego and the Id that under certain circumstances the superego promotes a “pure culture of the death [drive]” (53). The stronger that psychic entity—i.e., the more thoroughly the subject has been subordinated to prohibition and denial—the greater the possibility that the ego will be driven to the last extremity. In moral masochism the superego assumes titanic proportions, but even under much more auspicious conditions its authority and severity are so considerable as to call fundamentally into question the notion of a “healthy” subject, let alone one who might be said to be in a position of mastery or control. Since conventional subjectivity so closely adjoins moral maso-
chism, I want to examine it briefly through the grid of Freud's late topography before turning once again to its pathological correlate.

We recall that the superego is the agency whereby the Oedipus complex is neutralized but its effects indefinitely prolonged. It is formed through the fantasmatization and introjection of what cannot be possessed in reality, and must consequently be renounced—the parents. This process of introjection is a complex one, more hinted at than specified in *The Ego and the Id*, but clarified somewhat in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. It develops out of two sets of relationships, one of which is synonymous with the positive Oedipus complex, and the other of which is equivalent to the negative Oedipus complex, a point to which I will return in a moment. The superego would also seem to involve two different kinds of introjection, one of which I will characterize as "imaginary" and the other as "symbolic." What I mean by imaginary introjection is the psychic process whereby once-loved figures are taken into the self as subjective models or exempla, i.e., with the formation of that image or cluster of images in which the ego sees itself as it would like to be seen. Symbolic introjection, on the other hand, designates the psychic process whereby the subject is subordinated to the Law and the Name-of-the-Father. Although the category of the superego subsumes both kinds of introjection in Freud, it more specifically designates the product of symbolic introjection. Imaginary introjection, on the other hand, results in what is strictly speaking the ego ideal.

Because the subject usually goes through a negative as well as a positive Oedipus complex, he or she enters into two sets of identifications at the end of that complex: one with the imago of the mother, the other with the imago of the father. One of these identifications is generally much stronger, and so tends to eclipse the other. If all goes according to cultural plan, the stronger identification conforms to the positive Oedipus complex. Nevertheless, both have a part to play in the agency that they form within the ego, an agency Freud describes as the "ego ideal or super-ego," but which is more usefully designated by the first of those appellations.

The ego ideal, I would maintain, represents one area or function of the superego but not its entirety, that "face" of each parent that is loved rather than feared. It articulates the ideal identity to which the ego aspires, and by which it constantly measures itself, but in relation to which it is always found wanting. It is the mirror in which the subject would like to see itself reflected, the repository of everything it admires.

Freud argues in *The Ego and the Id* that the introjection of these parental images desexualizes them, with the positive Oedipus complex canceling out the object-choice of the negative complex, and the nega-
tive Oedipus complex canceling out the object-choice of the positive complex. Desire for the father, in other words, gives way to identification with him, and desire for the mother to identification with her:

The father-identification will preserve the object-relation to the mother which belonged to the positive complex and will at the same time replace the object-relation to the father which belonged to the inverted complex: and the same will be true, mutatis mutandis, of the mother-identification. (34)

This desexualization has grave consequences for the ego, since it results in an instinctual defusion; when object-libido changes to narcissistic libido (i.e., when love changes to identification), the aggression that was earlier commingled with that libido also loses its purchase, and turns around upon the subject's own self. No longer in the protective custody of eros, that aggression falls under the jurisdiction of the superego, which directs it against the ego (54–55).

Freud says some very inconsistent things about the gender of the superego. At some points in The Ego and the Id he associates it with both parents, as we have seen, but at other points he connects it exclusively with the father. In one particularly important passage, in which he places great emphasis upon the paternal identity of the superego, he refers to the "double aspect" of that psychic entity, an aspect he equates with two mutually exclusive imperatives: "You ought to be like this (like your father)"; and "You may not be like this (like your father)—that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative" (34). The first of these commands clearly issues from the ego ideal, whose function is to promote similitude between itself and the ego, but where does the second command come from?

It comes, as Freud's reference to a "double aspect" would suggest, from another component of the superego, and one whose gender is much more delimited than that of the ego ideal. This other component is formed through the introjection of the symbolic father rather than his imaginary counterpart—through the internalization of the father as Law, gaze, voice-on-high. This element of the superego has no necessary relation to any historical figure, but its gender is irreducibly masculine, at least within the present social order. It is, quite simply, the paternal function, and the ego is always already guilty in relation to it—guilty by virtue of Oedipal desire.

Curiously, in light of the double parental complex, with the expectation it creates that both parents would have a part to play in the constitution of the superego, Freud asserts in The Ego and the Id that this entity is always "a substitute for a longing for the father" (37). The context in which he makes this observation indicates that he is speaking
not about the ego ideal, but about what, in the strictest sense of the word, is the superego. Freud adds that the psychic entity that replaces desire for the father "contains the germ from which all religions have evolved," and produces "the self-judgment which declares that the ego falls short of its ideal." This passage from *The Ego and the Id* consequently has staggering implications. It suggests that what is really at issue in the dissolution of the male Oedipus complex—what really motivates Freud to insist so strenuously upon its definitive terminus—is the male subject’s *homosexual attachment to the father*. The relationship of the male ego to the superego would seem to grow out of, and "ideally" undo, the romance between father and son—or, to be more precise, the romance between the father in his symbolic guise and the son whose subordination is a substitute for love.34

The situation is even more explosive than I have so far shown it to be. There is a fundamental impossibility about the position in which the male subject is held, an impossibility that has to do with the self-canceling structure of the Oedipal imperative. The only mechanism by which the son can overcome his desire for the father is to transform object libido into narcissistic libido, and in so doing to attempt to become the (symbolic) father. However, this metamorphosis is precisely what the superego prohibits by decreeing: "You may not be like [your father]... you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative." The paternal law thus promotes the very thing its severity is calculated to prevent, a contradiction that must function as a constant inducement to reconstitute the negative Oedipus complex.

It is hardly surprising, in view of all this, that the relationship of the ego to the superego should be susceptible to sexualization; eros is in fact never far away. But what form does this "sexuality" take? Freud leaves us in no doubt on this particular point. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* he describes a situation where the ego comes to take pleasure in the pain inflicted upon it by the superego—where fear of punishment gives way to the wish for it, and where cruelty and discipline come to stand for love:

The sense of guilt, the harshness of the super-ego is... the same thing as the severity of the conscience. It is the perception which the ego has of being watched over in this way, the assessment of the tension between its own strivings and the demands of the super-ego. The fear of this critical agency (a fear which is at the bottom of the whole relationship), the need for punishment, is an instinctual manifestation on the part of the ego, which has become masochistic under the influence of a sadistic super-ego; it is a portion... of the instinct towards internal destruction present in the ego, employed for forming an erotic attachment to the super-ego. (136)
This description conforms precisely to what Freud was somewhat later to name “moral masochism.” However, the condition it describes differs from “normalcy” only in degree and erotic intent. The prototypical male subject oscillates endlessly between the mutually exclusive commands of the (male) ego ideal and the superego, wanting both to love the father and to be the father, but prevented from doing either. The morally masochistic male subject has given up on the desire to be the father, and may in fact have turned away from the paternal ego ideal to the maternal one, and from identification with the father to identification with the mother. However, he burns with an exalted ardor for the rigors of the superego. The feminine masochist, to whom I shall return later in this chapter, literalizes the beating fantasy and brings this cruel drama back to the body.

Christian Masochism

Theodor Reik's exhaustive study of masochism warrants some attention at this point, both because it has been so extensively mined by Deleuze and others and because it manifests such extreme a sensitivity to the formal features of that pathology. Although it begins with a discussion of masochism as a sexual perversion—a discussion studded with some quite compelling fantasies, one of which we will circle back to later—its chief focus is moral (or what Reik calls “social”) masochism. *Masochism in Sex and Society* characterizes that psychic economy as closed and self-referential, and associates it with exhibitionism or “demonstrativeness,” revolutionary fervor, and “suspense”—a surprising catalogue at first glance. As I will attempt to demonstrate, certain parts of this definition clearly pertain to that model of moral masochism that Freud associates with the ego/superego dynamic, but other parts point toward a rather different paradigm.

Like Freud, Reik stresses that in moral or social masochism the subject functions both as the victim and as the victimizer, dispensing with the need for an external object. Even when punishment seems to derive from the external world, it is in fact the result of a skillful unconscious manipulation of “adverse incidents” (304). The psychic economy of moral masochism is therefore strikingly self-contained:

Social masochism springs from the intermediate phase of the development of phantasy, during which the pain-inflicting and the pain-enduring person are identical, *impersonating* simultaneously object and subject. Also in the masochistic attitude toward life there is generally no object discernible that imposes the suffering and is independent of the ego. It is certainly extant in phantasy, but it does not appear in reality
and remains in the twilight where it merges into the ego. This type of masochistic character behaves almost autoerotically. (333, my emphasis)

Reik does not, however, foreground the role of the superego in moral masochism; the internal agency of punishment remains curiously unspecified in his text. He also gives fantasy a more privileged position within moral masochism than does Freud; indeed, he maintains that it plays as centrally structuring a role there as it does in what he calls "perverse" masochism. Here, again, the emphasis falls exclusively on the ego; even when other figures appear in these fantasies, they are in effect stories with a single character (314). Finally, Reik claims that the fantasies at the heart of masochism remain strictly unconscious, and that they always express the same desire—the desire to be rewarded for good behavior. Consequently, although they invariably dramatize the sufferings and defeats of the fantasizing subject, that is "only to make the final victory appear all the more glorious and triumphant" (315).

Both in its exclusive focus upon the ego, and in its apparent impulsion toward the "enhancement" of that psychic entity, Reik's moral masochism would seem to differ significantly from Freud's. We will, however, discover more substantive differences between the two forms of moral masochism than those I have already noted. The latter will also evaporate upon closer scrutiny. Ultimately, the moral masochism identified by Reik occupies a theoretical position somewhere between Freud's version of that pathology and feminine masochism, manifesting aspects of both.

The second of the qualities enumerated earlier—exhibitionism or "demonstrativeness"—is one that Reik claims to be an indispensable feature, not only of moral or social masochism but of all masochism:

> In no case of masochism can the fact be overlooked that the suffering, discomfort, humiliation and disgrace are being shown and so to speak put on display. . . .

> In the practices of masochists, denudation and parading with all their psychic concomitant phenomena play such a major part that one feels induced to assume a constant connection between masochism and exhibitionism. (72)

As we will see later in this chapter, the demonstrative feature occupies a prominent place within Reik's account of feminine or "perverse" masochism. However, many of the most striking examples of exhibitionism that he cites are drawn from moral or social masochism. Once again, this places him in opposition to Freud, who claims that whereas the superego's desire to inflict injury is usually "glaringly" obvious in
moral masochism, the ego’s desire for punishment generally escapes the attention both of others and of the subject itself. What are we to make of this discrepancy?

A quick survey of Reik’s examples suggests that his attention may be focused upon a different variety of moral masochism than that spotlighted by Freud—that his concern may ultimately be with Christian masochism, even when he is discussing more secular instances. Not only does he devote a whole chapter to “the paradoxes of Christ,” but most of the other cases of moral masochism that he cites are drawn from the lives of saints and martyrs. As in Freud’s account of moral masochism, Reik’s typical subject seems ardently given over to self-mortification of one kind or another (one particularly commodious sentence functions as a kind of display window, disclosing “Benedict rolling himself in thorn hedges, Macarius sitting naked on an ant-hill, [and] Anthony flagellating himself incessantly” [351]), but the psychic dynamics are otherwise quite different. To begin with, an external audience is a structural necessity, although it may be either earthly or heavenly. Second, the body is centrally on display, whether it is being consumed by ants or roasting over a fire. Finally, behind all these “scenes” or “exhibits” is the master tableau or group fantasy—Christ nailed to the cross, head wreathed in thorns and blood dripping from his pierced side. What is being beaten here is not so much the body as the “flesh,” and beyond that sin itself and the whole fallen world.

This last target pits the Christian masochist against the society in which he or she lives, makes of that figure a rebel or even a revolutionary of sorts. In this particular subspecies of moral masochism there would thus seem to be a strong heterocosmic impulse—the desire to remake the world in another image altogether, to forge a different cultural order. The exemplary Christian masochist also seeks to remake him- or herself according to the model of the suffering Christ, the very picture of earthly divestiture and loss. Insofar as such an identification implies the complete and utter negation of all phallic values, Christian masochism has radically emasculating implications, and is in its purest forms intrinsically incompatible with the pretensions of masculinity. And since its primary exemplar is a male rather than a female subject, those implications would seem impossible to ignore. Remarkably, Christianity also redefines the paternal legacy; it is after all through the assumption of his place within the divine family that Christ comes to be installed in a suffering and castrated position.

The demonstrative feature, as I have been implicitly arguing, works very much against Reik’s premise that the driving force behind moral masochism is the victory and reward of the ego. Reik suggests at one point that the moral masochist seeks to be “raised on an invisible pedes-
tal" (315), but the passage I quoted earlier thoroughly belies this formulation. In that passage, Reik not only associates all forms of masochism with exhibitionism or self-display, but he acknowledges that what is thus rendered visible is the subject's "suffering," "discomfort," "humiliation," and "disgrace" rather than its grandeur or its triumph. The demonstrative feature also runs counter to the notion that moral masochism is an entirely self-contained system, since at least within Reik's Christian examples the gaze comes dramatically into play, either in a heavenly or an earthly guise. There are also other ways in which moral masochism opens onto the world on which it ostensibly forecloses, whether it assumes the form described by Freud or that theorized by Reik. The superego is produced through the introjection of the paternal function, and the ego through the subject's identification both with its own corporeal imago and with a whole range of other external images. The interior drama is thus the refraction of a familial structure, which itself interlocks with the whole social order. Christian masochism, as we have seen, involves a similar identificatory system. 

The last of the qualities associated by Reik with moral masochism—suspense—would seem to be at the center of all forms of masochism, in addition to being one of the conditions out of which conventional subjectivity develops. Reik rings some complex changes on this word, which he connects with uncertainty, dilatoriness, pleasurable and unpleasurable anticipation, apparent interminability, and—above all—excitation. Masochism exploits all these themes in one way or another because it always seeks to prolong preparatory detail and ritual at the expense of climax or consummation. Since in moral masochism this implies the endless postponement of the moment at which suffering yields to reward, and victory to defeat, suspense clearly works to elevate pain over pleasure, and so to further undermine the ego.

The larger thesis that Reik pursues over the length of his study is that the masochist is apprehensive about end pleasure because it is so fully associated with punishment and therefore seeks to delay it as long as possible ("The . . . characteristic of the masochistic tension-curve is the tendency to prolong the tension, while we meet with the opposite intention, of resolving the tension, in normal sexual life" [60]). However, Reik also maintains elsewhere in Masochism in Sex and Society that the masochist rushes toward the punishment he or she fears in order to get it over with as quickly as possible. Through this "flight forward" the normal sequence of pleasure and pain is reversed, and the latter is experienced before the former. This is how Reik accounts for the suffering in masochism, to which he claims the subject would never submit except as the "price" of what is always fundamentally a sexual gratification.
There is a basic contradiction here: if the masochist rushes to experience the necessary punishment before indulging in a pleasure so as to thereby assure an untroubled enjoyment of it, why should he or she then delay the moment of gratification for as long as possible out of fear of the consequences? This contradiction is part and parcel of Reik's refusal to admit that the masochist in fact seeks out punishment, of his inability to entertain the possibility that for some individuals pleasure might actually inhere in pain and in the psychic destabilization to which it leads.

Such an eventuality would represent the radical perversion of the pleasure principle, which "endeavors to keep the quantity of excitation present in [the mental apparatus] as low as possible or at least to keep it constant." It would indicate, that is, that pleasure (and specifically sexual pleasure) can accompany an excruciating increase in such tension. Freud himself has, of course, prepared us for such a development. He remarks on more than one occasion that pain "trenches" into pleasure, a verb the OED glosses as "to 'cut' into, to enter into so as to affect intimately." Three Essays includes the observation that "nothing of considerable importance can occur in the organism without contributing some component to the excitation of the sexual instinct" (205); and "The Economic Problem of Masochism" adds that "the excitation of pain and unpleasure would be bound to have the same result too" (163). Freud's theory of pleasure is closely imbricated, however, with his account of the way in which identity is formed, i.e., with what he has to say about the secondary process and the maintenance of a quiescently cathected ego. As Leo Bersani points out in The Freudian Body, the introduction of large quantities of excitation into the psychic economy can only have a "shattering" effect upon this coherence, pitting the pathology of masochism (which for him means sexuality tout court) against identity itself:

The pleasurable unpleasurable tension of sexual excitement occurs when the body's "normal" range of sensation is exceeded, and when the organization of the self is momentarily disturbed by sensations or affective processes somehow "beyond" those compatible with psychic organization. . . . Sexuality [i.e., masochism] would be that which is intolerable to the structured self. . . . Sexuality . . . may depend on the décalage or gap, in human life between the quantities of stimuli to which we are exposed and the development of ego structures capable of resisting or . . . binding those stimuli. The mystery of sexuality is that we seek not only to get rid of this shattering tension but also to repeat, even to increase it. (38-39)

What masochism really "suspends," then, is not just the pleasure principle, but the libidinal and psychic constancy that principle supports.
But what are the forms this suspense takes in moral masochism? The Christian, of course, lives his or her life in perpetual anticipation of the second coming. The figural meaning this anticipation implants in present sufferings makes it possible for them to be savored as future pleasures, with time folding over itself in such a way as to permit that retroactivity to be already experienced now, in a moment prior to its effectivity. Such is the fundamentally perverse nature of Christian suspense and the pain it sanctifies and irradiates, a suspense that works against anything approximating psychic coherence.

Freud's moral masochist also lives in suspense, but without the promise of a redemptive endpleasure. Here suspense has a double face. It signifies both the endless postponement of libidinal gratification and the perpetual state of anxiety and apprehension, which is the result of that renunciation and of the superego's relentless surveillance. Of course these forms of suspense are not limited to the moral masochist; they are also part of the cultural legacy of even the most conventionally structured of subjects. All that distinguishes the former from the latter is that his or her ego seeks to increase rather than decrease that tension, whether through the commission of misdeeds that will then elicit punishment, or—more classically—through the punctiliousness of its obedience. Freud warns us that the more perfectly the ego conforms to the superego's mandates, the more ferocious and exacting that censoring mechanism becomes. It would thus seem that the ego's "goodness" can actually become a request to be beaten. The moral masochist, in short, seeks to intensify both forms of the suspense that is so (seemingly) intolerable to the "ordinary" subject. Freud is quite explicit about the challenge this poses to the stability and robustness of the ego, remarking in "The Economic Problem of Masochism" that "in order to provoke punishment from [the superego], the masochist must do what is inexpedient, must act against his own interests, must ruin the prospects which open out to him in the real world and must, perhaps, destroy his own real existence" (169-70).

Feminine Masochism
Let us now turn to feminine masochism through an examination of "A Child Is Being Beaten," which is without doubt the most crucial text for understanding that perversion. Significantly, although Freud focuses primarily upon female patients there, he manages to articulate the masochistic desire he attributes to them only through recourse to one of his male patients, who gives voice to what they cannot—the second phase of the beating fantasy. Let us effect a reverse displacement and
approach the male version of the beating fantasy through its female counterpart. Doing so will permit us to see how fully that fantasy subverts sexual difference.

The female fantasy consists of three phases, the first and third of which are available to analysis, but the second of which remains unconscious. Here is the complete sequence, after it has been "doctored" by Freud (the phrases within square brackets represent either his interpolations or additions made by the patient at his prompting):

Phase 1: "My father is beating the child [whom I hate]."
Phase 2: "I am being beaten by my father."
Phase 3: "Some boys are being beaten. [I am probably looking on.]"

Freud says of the first phase that it is neither sexual nor sadistic, but "the stuff from which both will later come" (187). He adds that it may not even constitute part of the fantasy proper, but may simply be a memory out of which the fantasy subsequently develops. It is savored for the erotic value it retroactively assumes, a value Freud translates with the phrase: "My father does not love this other child, he loves only me."

Oedipal desire and its prohibition intervene between phases 1 and 2 of the fantasy. By inserting herself into the imaginary scene in the position earlier occupied by the other child, the girl submits herself to punishment at the hands of the father, and so atones for her incestuous guilt. This new fantasy evokes intensely pleasurable feelings, however, pointing to an erotic as well as a punitive content. Phase 2—"I am being beaten by my father"—thus functions as a mechanism for bringing about a regression to an earlier stage of sexuality; the desire that is blocked at the genitals, in other words, finds expression instead at the anus.

On account of its prohibited content, phase 2 undergoes repression. It is replaced at the level of consciousness by the third variant, which disguises the identity both of the person being beaten and of the one administering the punishment. A group of boys now replaces the little girl, and a paternal representative supplants the father. The fantasizing subject is inscribed into this scenario as an ambiguous spectator. Phases 1 and 3 are ostensibly sadistic. Only phase 2 is unequivocally masochistic.

In a move equivalent in daring to Monsieur D's open concealment of the purloined letter in Poe's short story, Freud disarms his critic by acknowledging what might otherwise have been discovered about phase 2; he admits, that is, to having fabricated that sequence in the fantasy upon which he bases his entire interpretation:
This second phase is the most important and the most momentous of all. But we may say of it in a certain sense that it has never had a real existence. It is never remembered, it has never succeeded in becoming conscious. It is a construction of analysis, but it is no less of a necessity on that account. (185)

Every time I read this passage, I find myself momentarily paralyzed both by the audacity of the confession and by the realization that to challenge Freud's right to speak in this way for his female patients would be to place my rhetorical weight on the side of the "real" as against the "constructed," the "authentic" against the "inauthentic."

Yet, struggle as I inevitably do against this paralysis, I can find nothing to dispute in Freud's account of phase 2, apart from the fact that he finds what he is looking for in one of his male patient's case histories. The change from the active to the passive form of the verb "to beat"—from phase 1 to phase 3—can only have been effected through the mediation of the instinctual vicissitude indicated in phase 2. In other words, the transition from phase 1 to phase 3 moves the subject from heteroaggression to what appears to be sadism, and hence from the dimension of simple self-preservation to that of sexuality. As Laplanche has compellingly argued, that movement necessitates not only the propping of sexuality upon aggression (i.e., upon the death drive), but the turning around of that sexualized aggression upon the fantasizing subject's own self (85–102). It is only in a second movement that the now eroticized aggression can be redirected outward once again, this time in the form of sadism. I would therefore agree with Freud that what he identifies as phase 2 is behind phase 3, and that implicit in the later moment is a masochistic identification with the beaten children.

At the same time, I do not think that phases 2 and 3 can be completely collapsed, or that the wish for pleasurable pain exhausts the latter's meaning. Greater attention should be paid here to the manifest content of the conscious fantasy, and to its substitution of boys for a girl. The final phase attests to three transgressive desires, not one of which Freud remarks upon, but which clamor loudly for my attention: to the desire that it be boys rather than girls who are loved/disciplined in this way; to the desire to be a boy while being so treated by the father; and, finally, to the desire to occupy a male subject position in some more general sense, but one under the sign of femininity rather than that of masculinity.

These three desires clearly converge on one thing: a narcissistic investment in a subject position that it would be transgressive for a man to occupy but that is almost unthinkable for a woman, since it implies
an identification with male homosexuality. Why should this identification fall so far outside the social pale? Because even what generally passes for “deviance” is held to a recognizable and “manageable” paradigm, i.e., to one that reinforces the binary logic of sexual difference, despite inverting its logic. Thus when a woman does not identify with a classically female position, she is expected to identify with a classically male one, and vice versa in the case of a man. The female version of the beating fantasy, then, attests to the desire for imaginary variations that fall outside the scope of the psychoanalytic paradigm.

Freud comes close on two occasions to commenting upon the last of the wishes enumerated, but both times he pulls back from what he is on the verge of discovering. At the end of Section IV he observes that

when [girls] turn away from their incestuous love for their father, with its genital significance, they easily abandon their feminine role. They spur their “masculinity complex” . . . into activity, and from that point forward only want to be boys. For that reason the whipping-boys who represent them are boys too. (191)

Here the contradiction between having a “masculinity complex” and representing oneself as a group of “whipping-boys” goes unnoted by Freud. In a subsequent passage, however, he points out that the girl’s identification with the male position does not imply an identification with activity: “[the girl] turns herself in phantasy into a man, without herself becoming active in the masculine way” (199).

In Section VI of “‘A Child Is Being Beaten,”’ Freud suggests that the female subject occupies not one but two unconventionally masculine positions in phase 3 of the beating fantasy. In the course of describing the various shifts that occur over the history of the beating fantasy, he explicitly states that in phase 3 the girl turns herself into the group of boys (196). A few pages later, however, he indicates that in her capacity as onlooker of the beating scene, the girl occupies another position indicative of a masculinity under erasure. After observing that the girl “turns herself in phantasy into a man without herself becoming active in the masculine way,” he adds that she is “no longer anything but a spectator of the event which takes the place of a sexual act” (199).

The first of these masculine positions—that of (passive) male homosexuality—is the position into which the male subject inserts himself in the masculine version of the beating fantasy, and there it has an emphatically maternal significance; Freud maintains that it is “derived from a feminine attitude toward his father” (198), i.e., from the negative Oedipus complex. The male subject thus secures access to femininity through identification with the mother. By turning herself in fantasy into the “whipping-boys,” the female subject is in turn given imaginary
access to this "borrowed" femininity through the image of the male body. Femininity is thus both radically denatured and posited as the privileged reference point by means of the curious relay that is set up between these two versions of the beating fantasy. But there is also an ineluctable difference at work here, since it is clearly not the same thing, socially or even psychically, for the girl to be loved/beaten by the father as it is for the boy. Through her identification with the "whipping-boys" in phase 3, the girl establishes an imaginary connection not only with a feminized masculinity but also with that difference. Is not this the beginning of a sexual relation?

It is perhaps less evident how the girl's spectatorial position in phase 3 also aligns her with an "unmanly" masculinity. Voyeurism has been heavily coded within Western culture as a male activity, and associated with aggression and sadism. Here, however, masculinity, aggression, and sadism are definitively elsewhere in the scene, concentrated in the figure of the punishing father surrogate. Like the child in the primal scene, the shadowy onlooker is more mastered than masquerading. The tentativeness with which Freud's female patients insert themselves into this position ("I am probably looking on") points to the irresolute character of the position itself, which is less the site of a controlling gaze than a vantage point from which to identify with the group of boys.

Before leaving the female beating fantasy, I want to note that the pronoun "I" is conspicuously missing from those parts of the fantasy that are available to consciousness, except in the adumbrative qualification about spectatorship, and in fact figures prominently only in that phrase that is "a construction of psychoanalysis"—a detail that can be attributed to heteropathic identification. Heteropathic identification is the obverse of idiopathic identification; whereas the latter conforms to an incorporative model, constituting the self at the expense of the other who is in effect "swallowed," the former subscribes to an exteriorizing logic and locates the self at the site of the other. In heteropathic identification one lives, suffers, and experiences pleasure through the other. In phase 3 of the female beating fantasy, that other is, of course, the male subject.

Within the male sequence, all three phases, including the conscious one, begin with the assertion of pronominal possession. The subject position that each phase maps out, however, bends that "I" in a "feminine" direction:

Phase 1: "I am being loved by my father."
Phase 2: "I am being beaten by my father."
Phase 3: "I am being beaten by my mother."
The beating fantasies confided to Freud by his male patients have also been subjected to far less censorship and distortion than those recorded by his female patients. The only significant difference between the conscious scenario (phase 3) and the unconscious scenario (phase 2) bears upon the identity of the person administering the punishment; the conscious fantasy translates into the verbal formula “I am being beaten by my mother,” whereas the unconscious one reads “I am being beaten by my father” (198). Even this disguise is lightly worn, since the beating woman manifests such aggressively masculine qualities as to unmistakably resemble the paternal figure she replaces. (Phase 1, which is presumed to lie concealed behind phase 2, is not available to consciousness.)

Finally, although some effort is made to conceal the homosexual content of the conscious fantasy, no corresponding attempt is made to hide its masochistic content; the two male patients discussed by Freud, like those cited by Krafft-Ebing, Reik, and Deleuze, openly “flaunt” their desire for punishment and degradation both within their conscious fantasies and within their sexual practices. We clearly have an extreme instance here of what Reik calls the “demonstrative feature.” In the conscious fantasies of the four female patients, on the other hand, masochism is concealed behind sadism, even though it is more compatible with their cultural position.

What is it precisely that the male masochist displays, and what are the consequences of this self-exposure? To begin with, he acts out in an insistent and exaggerated way the basic conditions of cultural subjectivity, conditions that are normally disavowed; he loudly proclaims that his meaning comes to him from the Other, prostrates himself before the gaze even as he solicits it, exhibits his castration for all to see, and revels in the sacrificial basis of the social contract. The male masochist magnifies the losses and divisions upon which cultural identity is based, refusing to be sutured or recompensed. In short, he radiates a negativity inimical to the social order.

All of this is spectacularly visible in one of the more highly elaborated of the male fantasies included in *Masochism in Sex and Society*. The fantasy in question was told to Reik by a thirty-seven-year-old (married) man, who depended upon it for his sexual potency:

To an ancient barbaric idol, somewhat like the Phoenician Moloch, a number of vigorous young men are to be sacrificed at certain not too frequent intervals. They are undressed and laid on the altar one by one. The rumble of drums is joined by the songs of the approaching temple choirs. The high priest followed by his suite approaches the altar and scrutinizes each of the victims with a critical eye. They must satisfy certain requirements of beauty and athletic appearance. The high priest takes the geni-
tal of each prospective victim in his hand and carefully tests its weight and form. If he does not approve of the genital, the young man will be rejected as obnoxious to the god and unworthy of being sacrificed. The high priest gives the order for the execution and the ceremony continues. With a sharp cut the young men’s genitals and the surrounding parts are cut away. (41)

Unlike the male masochists Freud discusses in “‘A Child Is Being Beaten,’” the author of this fantasy is not its overt “star.” He is, however, bound to the scenario through a complex imaginary network. His immediate point of insertion occurs through the young man who will be next to fall victim to the priest’s knife, but that figure himself identifies closely with the victim at present suffering that mutilation. Reik writes that “the patient shares every intensive affect of this victim, feels his terror and anxiety with all the physical sensations since he imagines that he himself will experience the same fate in a few moments” (42). This peculiar identificatory transfer, which is once again indicative of the heteropathic impulse implicit in feminine masochism, compounds the specularity of the scene, making it possible for the prospective victim (and so for the fantasizing subject himself) to see how he will be seen when the weapon falls on his genitals. It speaks not only to the demonstrative feature of masochism—to the premium it places upon self-display—but also to the “I saw myself seeing myself” of classic femininity,44 and to the mirror staging that underpins all subjectivity.

What is, of course, most immediately striking about what Reik designates the “Moloch phantasy” is the literalness with which it enacts the “theme” of castration, the way it grounds what is normally a symbolic event at the level of the body. Once again the reader is reminded both of the terms under which the female subject enters representation, marked by the stigmata of a corporeal lack and of the “pound of flesh” that is the price each of us must pay for our access to language.45 But even more is “at stake” in this sacrificial drama; the stipulation that each victim must conform to a phallic ideal means that what is really being defaced or disfigured in this fantasy is the paternal imago, and that what is cut off and thrown away is the male subject’s symbolic legacy.

So far I have mentioned only one part of the Moloch fantasy. Later in Masochism in Sex and Society, Reik describes the dramatic sequel to the dismemberment: the castrated victims are placed on a red-hot grate until they are thoroughly singed, and then dropped into the fire beneath (61–63). In this fantasy nothing is salvaged, and nothing is redeemed. It is a narrative of the darkest pain, negativity, and loss.

The Moloch fantasy also dramatizes some of the other features Reik
associates with masochism. It plays with suspense, for instance, in a number of complex ways. First, there is the thrillingly terrifying anticipation built into a situation where the subject imagines himself the second person in line to suffer various atrocities, and must first watch what will later happen to himself. Then there is a narrative structure that works to defeat the apparent climax of castration by making that event only the prologue to even more profound sufferings. Suspense is literalized through the grate mechanism, which dangles the victims over the engulfing fire, and further incorporated as a dramatic device through the mandate that they be adequately singed before being dropped into the flames. The key question at this juncture—a question that pushes the suspense to an almost unbearable level of intensity—is whether the victims will be able to withstand the pain and remain on the grate until they are ceremonially ejected, or whether they will instead fling themselves onto the fire so as to achieve a quick death. A variation that is sometimes built into the middle of the fantasy further compounds the fearful tension: two of the prisoners are obliged to tend the fire that will subsequently consume them.

The “author” of the Moloch fantasy coordinates it with coitus; provided that the “synchronization” works, ejaculation occurs at the precise moment that the suspense becomes unbearable, and the victim with whom he identifies finally surrenders himself or is subjected to death. Like the other, feminine, masochists discussed by Reik, this patient seems to increase the psychic tension until there is a veritable physiological explosion. This dramatic escalation of anxiety and apprehension violates Freud’s notion of the pleasure principle fully as much as does the actual implementation of sexual or religious torture, suggesting once again the shortcoming of any theoretical account of pleasure that stresses constancy over rupture and coherence over “shattering.” It is no wonder that the patients whom Reik actually managed to “cure” complained to him afterward that life had lost all its color and intensity (378).

The elaborate preparations that make up the early stages of the Moloch fantasy and the seemingly interminable delay in reaching a conclusion produce an erotic narrative that conforms closely to Freud’s definition of perversion; here as there, libidinal interest extends far beyond “the regions of the body which are designated for sexual union,” and the “path” leading toward “the final sexual aim” is traversed far from quickly. Moreover, although ejaculation does occur, there is no representation of it within the fantasy, which always ends immediately prior to that event. (This is regularly the case with the masochistic fantasies Reik describes, as well as the masochistic practices Krafft-Ebing enumerates; there seems to be no place within either script for the os-
tensible goal of all forepleasure.) The male genitals do figure prominently here, but not at the grand finale; that part of the fantasy that is given over to their inspection and excision occurs around the middle, and constitutes at most a “false climax.” Thus the Moloch narrative does more than linger over “the intermediate relations to the sexual object”; it actually relegates castration to the status of foreplay.

The propensity for impersonation is even more marked in feminine masochism than it is in moral (or at least Christian) masochism, which is not surprising given that it is centrally concerned with subject positioning and gender “roles.” We have already looked closely at one quite flamboyant mental masquerade, a masquerade that changes its “author’s” age, his historical moment, and his national identity, as well as the circumstances of his life (and death). The creator of the Moloch fantasy generates other identities for himself as well, including one where he is a Portuguese prisoner of the Aztecs who is first forced to watch a number of other men be skinned alive and is then subjected to the same fate. Krafft-Ebing recounts numerous cases of male masochists who act out the part of a slave or a page, and others where the preferred role is that of a dog, a horse, a slaughter animal, a count, a surface (such as a floor) on which women walk, and a receptacle for urine, excrement, and menstrual blood. The “hero” of Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs* assumes the disguise of a servant for much of that novel, and—near the end—that of a bull.

The sexual practitioners of feminine masochism generally extend the masquerade to include the person inflicting the pain or humiliation as well, and indeed the entire “scene” of the erotic adventure, in effect remaking the world. This heterocosmic impulse is particularly pronounced in the Moloch and Aztec scenarios, which relocate the fantasizing subject in another time and place altogether. It is also strikingly evident in *Venus in Furs*, where Séverin and Wanda actually leave the country in which they are living for one in which they will be better able to pass as mistress and slave. The crucial question to ask here is whether the heterocosmic impulse exhausts itself altogether in the boudoir, or whether the “play” spills over into social intercourse as well, contaminating the proprieties of gender, class, and race.

Freud maintains that it is not only at the level of his sexual life, but at that of his fantasmatic and his *moi* that the male masochist occupies a female position. In “‘A Child Is Being Beaten,’” he writes that femininity assumes the status of a “subjective conviction” for the male masochist (197); he suggests, that is, that the male masochist believes himself to be a woman at the deepest level of his desire and his identity. Near the end of “‘A Child Is Being Beaten,’” he also notes that the fantasy of corporal punishment manifests itself only in “unmanly boys”
and "unwomanly girls," and that it is "a trait of femininity in the boy and of masculinity in the girl which must be made responsible" for the construction of the fantasy (202). The degree to which this femininity manifests itself in the conscious existence of the male masochist depends, of course, upon the strength of the "masculine protest" that he brings to bear against it—upon whether or not he fortifies himself against the "woman" within. It is, however, a significant fact that phase 3 of the male version of the beating fantasy makes no attempt to disguise the masochistic position of the fantasizing subject, although it is somewhat more reticent about the latter's homosexuality. Ironically, moreover, the transformation of the agent of punishment from the father to the mother actually functions to accentuate the male masochist's femininity, since it effects so dramatic a reversal of traditional gender roles.

Freud makes the astonishing observation in "A Child Is Being Beaten" that there is no trace within the masochistic unconscious, whether male or female, of the wish to be loved by the father—of the taboo desire from which the entire condition of masochism ostensibly derives. In regressing back to the anal stage of sexuality, the masochist apparently manages to erase all record of that variant of Oedipal genitality that is generally held to be positive for the girl and negative for the boy:

Whatever is repressed from consciousness or replaced in it by something else remains intact and potentially operative in the unconscious. The effect of regression to an earlier stage of the sexual organization is quite another matter. As regards this we are led to believe that the state of things changes in the unconscious as well. Thus in both sexes the masochistic phantasy of being beaten by the father, though not the passive phantasy of being loved by him, lives on in the unconscious after repression has taken place. (199–200)

If Freud is to be believed on this point, male masochism constitutes a veritable hermeneutic scandal. The passage I have just quoted suggests that the first phase of the male beating fantasy ("I am being loved by my father") is entirely a construction of psychoanalysis, and in a much more extreme sense than the second stage of the female sequence can be said to be. It also suggests that the unconscious significance of the fantasy is completely exhausted by phase 2, which as I have already noted differs from phase 3 only with respect to the gender of the person administering the punishment. Here there is no radical division of manifest from latent content. The door to the unconscious need not be picked; it is already slightly ajar and ready to yield at the slightest pressure.

There are other implications as well. If no record can be found with-
in his unconscious of the desire to be genitally loved by the father, the male masochist cannot be domesticated by substituting the penis for the whip. His (barely) repressed desire runs directly counter to any reconciliation of father and son, attesting irrefutably to the violence of the familial and cultural contract. His sexuality, moreover, must be seen to be entirely under the sway of the death drive, devoid of any possible productivity or use value. It is no wonder that Freud pulls back from promising a psychoanalytic "cure" in the case of the feminine masochist (197).

The Mother in Male Masochism

The moment has come to do more than refer in passing to Deleuze's extremely interesting study of masochism, with which this essay has a good deal of sympathy. Deleuze argues that masochism is entirely an affair between son and mother, or to be more precise, between the male masochist and a cold, maternal, and severe woman whom he designates the "oral mother." Through the dispassionate and highly ritualized transaction that takes place between these two figures, the former is stripped of all virility and reborn as a "new, sexless man," and the latter is invested with the phallus. (Although the mother assumes a dominant position within this scenario, Deleuze stresses that she is "formed" by the son [21].) What is beaten in masochism is consequently not so much the male subject as the father, or the father in the male subject. Masochism works insistently to negate paternal power and privilege:

A contract is established between the hero and the woman, whereby at a precise point in time and for a determinate period she is given every right over him. By this means the masochist tries to exorcise the danger of the father and to ensure that the temporal order of reality and experience will be in conformity with the symbolic order, in which the father has been abolished for all time. Through the contract . . . the masochist reaches towards the most mythical and most timeless realms, where [the mother] dwells. Finally, he ensures that he will be beaten. . . . what is beaten, humiliated and ridiculed in him is the image and likeness of the father, and the possibility of the father's aggressive return. . . . The masochist thus liberates himself in preparation for a rebirth in which the father will have no part. (58)

This argument offers a "utopian" rereading of masochism.49 There is an obvious danger that it be taken literally, as designating the standard form of that perversion, rather than its visionary reconfiguration.
It is crucial to grasp that although Deleuze does in fact claim that masochism has nothing to do with the father, he obviously knows full well that this is not the case. His account of that libidinal infraction cannot be understood apart from the mechanism of disavowal, which he not only places at the center of its organization, but *himself deploys* throughout his study whenever he refuses to acknowledge the place of the father within masochism. In a key passage, Deleuze asserts that masochism “proceeds from a twofold disavowal, a positive, idealizing disavowal of the mother (who is identified with the law), and an invalidating disavowal of the father (who is expelled from the symbolic order)” (60). He thereby clearly indicates that within the masochism about which he speaks, paternal power and the law are present only negatively, through their repudiation—that the masochism he celebrates is a pact between mother and son to write the father out of his dominant position within both culture and masochism, and to install the mother in his place.

The contract between Wanda and Séverin is one dramatization of that erasing *écriture*, but *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty* is itself another. The fact that both Deleuze and his male masochist are so busy disavowing the father’s phallus and the mother’s lack clearly indicates that both inhabit an Oedipal universe that only the force of a radically heterocosmic imagination can unmake, and not—as one recent writer suggests—a pre-Oedipal realm from which all masochism derives. Deleuze himself tells us all this in a brilliant account of disavowal and fetishism:

> 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. . . . fetishism is first of all a disavowal (“No, the woman does not 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 phallic 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). (28–29)

Deleuze thus makes it possible for us to see that the mother not only stands in for the father in phase 3 of the male version of the beating fantasy, but usurps his prerogatives. In inviting the mother to beat and/or dominate him, the feminine masochist transfers power and
authority from the father to her, remakes the symbolic order, and "ruins" his own paternal legacy. And that is not all. As Freud remarks of those two patients in "A Child Is Being Beaten," the conscious fantasy of being disciplined by the mother "has for its content a feminine attitude without a homosexual object-choice" (199). It thereby effects another revolution of sorts, and one whose consequences may be even more transformative than the male subject's fantasy of being beaten by the father—it constitutes a feminine yet heterosexual male subject. As with phase 3 of the female beating fantasy, phase 3 of the male beating fantasy wreaks havoc with sexual difference.

While it is true that the father is left holding the whip at the level of the unconscious fantasmatism, it is also the case that the son does not there manifest any desire to fill his boots. The mother functions as the crucial site of identification in all of the variants of the male beating fantasy. The male masochist as he is presented by Freud in "A Child Is Being Beaten" thus not only prefers the masquerade of womanliness to the parade of virility, he also articulates both his conscious and his unconscious desires from a feminine position. And although he seems to subordinate himself to the law of the father, that is only because he knows how to transform punishment into pleasure and severity into bliss. This male masochist deploys the diversionary tactics of demonstration, suspense, and impersonation against the phallic "truth" or "right," substituting perversion for the père-version of exemplary male subjectivity.

Although I have stressed the heterocosmic tendencies of feminine masochism, I do not mean to erect it as the model for a radically reconstructed male subjectivity. As I have already remarked more than once, masochism in all of its guises is as much a product of the existing symbolic order as a reaction against it. This essay is, however, less concerned with articulating new forms of male subjectivity than with complicating our understanding of the forms it takes at present. Male subjectivity is far more heterogeneous and divided than our theoretical models would suggest; it cannot be adequately summarized by invoking either the phallic or the more flexible concept of bisexuality. Even normative masculinity is constituted through a complex interaction of the negative and positive Oedipus complexes, and the conventions sustaining "normalcy" may exercise much less force than is generally assumed. Since libidinal deviations always represent a "politics" of sorts, it seems to me that any feminism that is devoted to the interrogation of sexual difference cannot afford to ignore those that are charted across the male body or psyche.
NOTES


23. The most crucial of Freud’s qualifications on this point is, of course, central to the present discussion—the qualification that whereas “femininity” may indeed imply passivity, and in many cases masochism, there is no necessary connection between “woman” and “femininity.” See *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Standard Edition*, vol. 21, 105f., for an extremely interesting discussion of the slippage between these last two categories.
30. In *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis suggest that “the subject’s life as a whole . . . is seen to be shaped and ordered by what might be called, in order to stress this structuring action, a ‘phantasmatic.’ This should not be conceived of merely as a thematic—not even as one characterized by distinctly specific traits for each subject—for it has its own dynamic, in that the phantasy structures seek to express themselves, to find a way out into consciousness and action, and they are constantly drawing in new material” (317). For a fuller discussion of the fantasmatik, see Chapters 4, 7, and 8 of my *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
34. For an extended discussion of the female version of the negative Oedipus

35. There are striking similarities between the degradations Reik associates with Christian masochism and those Krafft-Ebing links with the sexual perversion of masochism. See, for instance, Cases 80, 81, 82, and 83 in *Psychopathia Sexualis*.

36. Of course Christian masochism rarely exists in the form I have described here. It is more often used as the vehicle for worldly or heavenly advancement, i.e., put to extrinsic uses. Observing the expedient uses to which such suffering can be put, Reik mistakenly assumes self-advancement to be an inherent part of Christian masochism.

37. Here, too, there is an implied familial prototype, that provided by the relation of God to Christ. The Christian models himself on the latter, and directs against himself what is in effect a “divine” punishment.


40. Freud constructs phase 2 of the girl’s beating fantasy by inverting phase 3 of the boy’s fantasy, a discursive action that points to the asymmetrical symmetry of the two sequences.


42. I discuss the primal scene and its implications for male subjectivity in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Chapter 4.


45. Jacques Lacan metaphorizes that which is lost to the subject with the entry into language as a “pound of flesh.”


48. In “‘A Child Is Being Beaten,’” Freud writes that “it seems to be only with the girl that the masculine protest is attended with complete success. . . . With the boy the result is not entirely satisfactory; the feminine line is not given up, and the boy is certainly not ‘on top’ in his conscious masochistic phantasy” (203). In an essay critiquing the article from which this chapter derives, Paul Smith argues that masochism is never more than a passing moment within male subjectivity (“Action Movie Hysteria, or Eastwood Bound,” Differences, vol. 1, no. 3 [1989]: 106). While I am clearly in disagreement with Smith’s formulation, I do concur with his claim that masochism is generally narratively contained within Hollywood cinema. This, however, tells us less about the place of masochism within male subjectivity than about the normalizing operations of the dominant fiction.


50. Gaylyn Studlar conflates Deleuze’s oral mother with the pre-Oedipal mother of object relations psychoanalysis, and extrapolates from that conflation a highly dubious argument about the origin of masochism. According to Studlar, that perversion has its basis in the (male) child’s relationship with the actual mother prior to the advent of the father, a relationship predicated upon his helpless subordination to her and the insatiability of his desire for her. Masochistic suffering consequently derives from the pain of separation from the mother and the impossible desire to fuse with her again, rather than from the categorical imperatives of the Oedipus complex and symbolic law. This is a determinedly apolitical reading of masochism, which comes close to grounding that perversion in biology. (See “Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema,” in Movies and Methods, vol. 2, ed. Bill Nichols [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985] 602–21.)