



Allameh Tabataba'i University  
Faculty of Persian Language and Foreign Languages  
Department of English language and Literature

**Masochism**  
**In**  
**Byron's *Don Juan* and Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground***

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For Master of Arts Degree in English Literature

Advisor: Dr. Deedari

Reader: Dr. Ahmadgoli

By: Siavash Dodeir

Tehran, Iran

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## **Abstract**

Gilles Deleuze's views on sexual perversity have been shadowed under his schizoanalysis. Deleuze's theory of masochism has rarely been applied to literary works other than his two main study subjects. This thesis has studied Lord Byron's *Don Juan* and Feodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* from the viewpoint of Deleuzian masochism. It is focused on Deleuzian view of masochism to take a step toward filling the dearth of Deleuzian literary criticism. As both study subjects were highly integrated into their historical moments, the role of history and readers were taken into account in applying psychoanalysis to literature. Three mother figures were identified for each text to fulfill the masochistic constellation that each masochistic fantasy substitutes for its father figure. Instead of determining the psychology of characters, mechanisms, movements, and relations were studied at different levels of text, audience and author/narrator. The thesis concludes with a reading of *Don Juan* as a masochistic contract with masochist readers and a reading of *Notes from Underground* as a masochistic fantasy of transforming the readers into ideal companions. Since *Don Juan* is replete with feminine entities and female characters, the thesis asks for more insight into female masochism as an independent orientation rather than a weakened form of male masochism. *Notes from Underground* was the beginning of a series of masterpieces in Dostoevsky's literary career; therefore this study might be the beginning of a series of Deleuzian readings of an author who has been a source of inspiration for pioneers of psychoanalysis.

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

## 1. Introduction

Masochism, the main focus of this study, is not merely a sexual aberration. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century traces of masochism have been rising in literature; and since late nineteenth century many theorists of psychoanalysis, history, and sociology have tried to define and redefine the phenomenon. Masochism has come to mean a specific attitude toward life or a definite type of relation to society and outer world: of enjoying one's own suffering or one's own helplessness. The word masochism has surpassed its narrower, sexual meaning and has become desexualized. It has come to cover whole life of individuals, societies and countries. However, common to all theories of masochism is the importance of fantasy and suspense in a masochist's behavior. Fantasy and suspense, hand in hand with the etymology of the word "masochism" coming from the Austrian author Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, provide an inherent link between masochism and literature. Gilles Deleuze's theorization of masochism in his 1986 *Coldness and Cruelty* was different from previous efforts. In his version, masochism can be an independent worldview which can ultimately win its battle by seemingly negating its own ego while actually negating the opposing forces. Such a unique treatment of masochism embraces other counter-strategies prevalent in literary discourses such as feminine sublime, parody, and satire.

Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud, and Theodor Reik studied masochism through their pathological experience with patients. Despite their invaluable insights into the question of masochism, Deleuze's work is distinguished by having literature as its starting point. Deleuze's critique of masochistic and sadistic writings of Sacher-Masoch and Sade culminates in division of sadomasochism to two very different entities of masochism and sadism. Masochism, then, is characterized by its use of humor and parody, qualitative suspense,

dialectical-imaginative discourse, fantasy, and aestheticism. Since publication, Deleuze's theory of masochism has rarely been applied to literary works other than his two main study subjects. While literary criticism has made Freudian or Lacanian criticism a commonplace, there has been no similar Deleuzian movements in criticizing literature.

This thesis sets itself to take a step toward filling the dearth of Deleuzian literary criticism. In order to do so, the first half of chapter two is devoted to Theodore Reik's *Masochism in Modern Man* (1941). Reik's book is the only text on masochism after Freud that Deleuze praises and scrutinizes in his book. The main tenants of Reik's theorization of masochism are never dimmed in Deleuze's theory and the subsequent chapters on *Don Juan* and *Notes from Underground*. Since femininity has always had intrinsic links to masochism (maybe after Freud's writings on "Feminine Masochism"), Reik's ideas of these links are discussed, too. By no means does "masochism" is considered to mean only a sexual aberration. This study is no exception from other psychoanalytical studies on masochism and is shaped with an awareness of social and political workings of masochism. Therefore, Reik's theorization of what he calls "social masochism" is a segment for itself.

Deleuze's own theory of masochism in his 1967 *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* is studied in the rest of Chapter Two. As Deleuze writes in his first chapter, the work actually treats Sade and Masoch as symptomatologists. Although his work is mainly within psychological discourses, it draws from literature, law, history, philosophy, and other disciplines, too. This study is not confined to that book, however. The main reason for this task is that Deleuze's text duly emphasizes "humor" while always treating it as vaguely as possible. Therefore, other works of Deleuze are brought into discussion of humor in the chapter. Humor/Irony binary opposition is the object of closer scrutiny in relationship with another binary, namely Feminine



Sublime/Masculine Sublime. At the end of chapter two, a working framework is, hopefully, attained to simplify application of theories of masochism in literary texts and thereby offering new readings of them.

Chapter Three sets itself to trace masochistic constellations in Byron's *Don Juan*. *Don Juan* is a mock-epic written in the last six years of Lord George Gordon Byron (1818-1824), a frail celebrity-poet. The character of Don Juan in most cantos is passive and subject to people and situations surrounding him. Conversely, Byron disturbs, interrupts and controls the flow of his narrative and does not hesitate to emphasize his role as the author of the book and the destiny of his characters. In a cunning turn, readers are also at the mercy of a narrator who disrupts a peaceful reading whenever he deems necessary. Unlike Juan who has a limited freedom and shows traits common with Byron himself, readers have no choice but to continue reading. In *Don Juan*, triangle of author-work-reader has two very passive points and one dominating point. The relationship between different elements of *Don Juan* is not far from a masochistic scheme, in which a long painful process of humiliation gratifies all parties involved. However, the chapter is more inclined to study the overall relationship between dominant women of each canto with the narrator and the readers. The chapter begins with reconsideration of a handful of recent critical views on *Don Juan* to bring them into one Deleuzian masochistic constellation. Then Susan Winnett's recommended alternative paradigm of narrative pleasure will be built upon. Most of the cited texts in the chapter are those of Jerome M. McGann, a distinguished Byron expert of recent years, and Jane Stabler. The new historicist critical work on Byron from 1980s onwards has offered new insights into mechanisms operating between Byron and his audience. The psycho-political study of each canto is, therefore, the overall tone of the rest of Chapter Three.

Chapter Four takes a novella for application of Deleuzian masochism, which has a long history of being called “masochistic”. Theodore Dostoevsky’s works have always been an invaluable resource to psychoanalysis and, specifically, study of masochism. All his novels and most of his short stories can be interpreted as ways of finding freedom by passing (or remaining in) a state of humiliation. The necessity of a painful prelude to success in the world of Dostoevsky is in agreement of masochist’s maxim of pain as a prerequisite for gratification. Given the usual presence of Dostoevsky in discussions of masochism since Freud’s own essay on Dostoevsky, it is surprising that Deleuze’s work on masochism has not been expanded to include Dostoevsky’s characters. A reasonable first step toward filling this gap is scrutinizing the first instance in a series of masochistic characters in Dostoevsky’s oeuvre, which continue to occupy his novels until his death. Another advantage of starting from this first step, *Notes from Underground*, is representativeness of this short novel. *Notes from Underground* is well-suited for such study as it has both theories and practices of a self-acknowledged masochist. Once again, the chapter begins with a general study of Dostoevsky’s life experience in the years preceding the text. This study of personal history is necessitated by the form of the first part of *Notes from Underground* which clearly is a polemical dialogue between the protagonist and his contemporary thinkers. Moreover, it helps to avoid the dangerous assumption that the underground man is Dostoevsky himself. Then Part One of the text will be treated as a speech-contract between a masochist and his candidate for ideal woman. The second part of the book will be treated as masochistic fantasies of underground man. All in all, the whole chapter keeps a point to point adherence to Deleuze’s framework of masochism and his eleven fundamental differences.

The final chapter concludes the studies of the previous chapters and brings those conclusions into comparison. As Dostoevsky's texts were written later in the nineteenth century and Dostoevsky as a Russian intellectual had to observe the European Romanticists, *Notes from Underground* can be seen a conclusion of *Don Juan*. Further studies will be seen highly probable given the failure of both authors to sustain their anti-establishment plans, on the one hand, and their non-conformist ways that transform the very same failure to another kind of success. The socio-political vitality of the two authors and revolutionary potentiality of Juan and underground man go hand in hand to make masochism an important source of change in today's post-modern world of inaction.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Theoretical Background**

## 2.1. Theodore Reik's Masochism

Before the turn of the twentieth century, Krafft-Ebing coined the term masochism (Krafft-Ebing et al. 85) for those perversions that Leopold von Sacher-Masoch wrote on extensively in his novels. Krafft-Ebing described this term as that "sexual anomaly" in which the "individual affected is controlled in his sexual feeling and thought by the idea of being completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex; of being treated by this person as a master, humiliated and abused. This idea is associatively suffused with sensual pleasure; such an individual revels in fantasies, in which he creates situations of this kind and often attempts to realize them." (Krafft-Ebing et al. 94-95) Following Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* numerous scientific, pseudoscientific, and popular publications on masochism appeared. These writings brought masochism into the same territory of its supposed opposite, sadism. The assumption that both phenomena are not only each other's counterpart but are also complementary led, in turn, to another new term, sadomasochism which we find discussed in the works of Freud and others.

According to Freud, masochism appears in three forms: as a certain attitude toward life, as the expression of femininity, and as a peculiarity of the mode of sexual excitation. These three forms of the drive he calls moral, feminine, and erotogenic. Moral masochism is not restricted to isolated individuals, but it is a significant factor in the life of social, national, and religious bodies. Traces of moral masochism can be found in the tendencies and behavior of every one of us. The feature common to all these psychic phenomena is the unconscious trend to seek pain and to enjoy suffering.

After having penetrated disguises, Freud discovered the unconscious core in the masochistic fantasy of the man to be: "I am loved by my father." The fantasy springs from a tender, passive

attitude toward the father. Many features reveal the infantile character of the fantasy. Yet Freud calls it feminine. Freud assumed that the masochistic fantasy hides the desire to be loved by the father like a woman. This desire has been intertwined to another, namely, the desire to be punished by one's father, and the two become an unconscious unit. The desire to be punished or humiliated is just another expression for wanting to adopt a passive feminine attitude toward the father. Thus to be beaten means for the masochist to be loved. He wants to be loved in the form of punishment.

The masochistic behavior must have a prototype in childhood in which not the attitude toward the love object but sexual excitement itself decided on the formation of an emotional situation. This is masochism literally pure, a peculiar sexual excitement independent of the attitude toward the object. There are different conditions favoring such a peculiar form of excitation. Mechanical concussion arouses in many children sexual excitement of this kind. Certain affective processes such as fright and horror can overlap into the field of sexual stimuli. Freud comes to the final conclusion that perhaps every important physical process contributes to the genesis of sexual excitement. Provided that the intensity of pain and discomfort does not exceed a certain limit, sexual synergism could be aroused.

After Freud, Theodor Reik published an influential book called *Masochism in Modern Man* (1941) which expanded on Freud's ideas and utilized Reik's experience from his own patients. Reik argues that patients who engage in self-punishing or provocative behavior do so in order to demonstrate their emotional fortitude, induce guilt in others, and achieve a sense of victory through defeat.

Theodore Reik starts his book by stating that the first impression of masochistic phenomena on an observer is similar to that of facing a paradox. The contradiction of paradox, to Reik, is not

a sign of nonsense, but of a meaningful inconsistency. Reik uses an analogy to emphasize the exceptional status of masochism among other perversions: “Other perversions are comparable to single participants of a hiking group who have strayed from the highway and have erroneously taken a wrong route. The masochist is comparable to a person who "intentionally" goes astray in order to reach his secret aim by a detour” (Reik 24). This intentionality of going astray in masochism will be expanded upon in later chapters through Deleuze.

Reik then starts his main argument by listing the common characteristics he had observed in years of psychoanalytic practice with his patients. Starting from the most prevalent (whether in sexual or desexualized masochism), they are “the special significance of fantasy”, “the suspense factor”, and “the demonstrative feature”. Through observed examples of masochistic patients, it becomes clear that masochistic fantasies are the nucleus of further masochistic traits. Reik goes as far as saying that “individuals with weakly developed imagination show no inclination to become masochists”. (32) Childhood memories shape most of the masochistic fantasy, which is mostly in form of anticipating a final exciting event. The excitement of fantasizing and its rootedness in childhood might bring this main factor to the same territory of normal psychic behavior. But the crucial difference in masochism is that fantasy is an indispensable preliminary stage to satisfaction. Fantasy is so important in masochism that in many cases it includes dialogues, dialects, minute significant details, and many other devices that might easily be called artistic. A masochist might even indulge in manipulating his/her fantasy like a poet who utilizes the poetic license freely. Second significant factor in masochism, suspense, adds more complexity to the route to satisfaction for the masochist. For a masochist, sexual gratification induces a feeling of anxiety that must be shunned at any rate. Thus, the preliminary stages before the final gratification are elongated and this suspense even becomes a desirable feeling. The

suspense factor might even be a defining trait of masochism: “Masochism is not, as has been surmised up till now, characterized by the pleasure in discomfort, but by pleasure in the expectation of discomfort.” (Reik 67)

The last of the three prevailing features is the demonstrative feature. By using the word “demonstrative” Reik clarifies the difference between exhibitionism and masochism. Exhibitionism is putting up an attractive object or trait for display to the other, while masochists mostly brandish their suffering. Furthermore, by using “demonstrative” Reik hints at the hidden meaning of this display. No matter where the demonstration happens, in reality or in fantasy, masochistic person shows his/her suffering to the environment to reach a privilege. Many a time, this privilege is something outside of the grosser aspects of masochism. Thus through this last prevalent feature, “masochism” turns into a more general term, even designating characters of Russian novels of authors like Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (Reik 76). Such characters are “inverted hypocrites” who are even proud of their self-degradation. Here Reik goes further into the realm of literature and after discussing Roseau’s *Confessions* writes some lines about the psychology of witty persons. As this paragraph can be understood in relation to both underground man of Dostoevsky and humor of Byron, it is brought here completely:

I want to emphasize here that investigation of such a psychic development leads to valuable insight into the psychology of witty persons—especially of the type who turn the shaft against the ego—as well as into the genesis of the intentionally comic. It is a kind of masochistic demonstration to confess one's shortcomings before the world so as to make others laugh. It certainly is no contradiction that such intentional demonstration of one's own weakness and foolishness occasionally discloses its masochistic character as in the comical figures of Falstaff or Don Quixote. Even clowns sometimes produce this peculiar mixture of wanting both to show and to hide. "Laugh, Pagliacco, make foolish faces . . ." sings Leoncavallo's hero. But the purpose of such laughter is not only to conceal suffering. It should also betray it. The production of laughter is a special means of masochistic gratification for the comical person. That he makes a fool of himself, does not mean that he is a fool (Reik 80).



After these three regular features, another feature is brought into discussion that is present in one case and absent in another. “The Provocative Factor” is the masochistic use of all possible methods to bring the partner to create the displeasure needed for arriving at pleasure. The masochist forces the other person to force him/her. Possible methods range from insistence on remaining silent to rude remarks that might even be confused with sadistic traits. For such behavior, Reik mentions Thersites of Homer who mocked the Greek hero till he got a thrashing (86).

The next chapters of the book explain the psychic processes in and dynamics of masochism. Reik traces an anxiety in the unconscious of the subject. This anxiety is, firstly, dealt with by anticipation and elongation of arousal. Anticipation of a dreaded event increases the anxiety of a normal person; but masochists anticipate the punishment or dreaded event (satisfaction) in the actual sphere. This actual anticipation gets the form of fantasies revolving around the waiting phase rather than the final resolution. After a long exhausting suspense the tension becomes so fragile that it suddenly snaps like an elastic band previously under tension. After that long suspense, masochist chooses another path that is characterized by “the flight forward”. Now that the dreaded event is pleasurable, the masochist wants to jump to the satisfaction and meets the dangers without fear. The sudden release of tension finds a parallel in more socialized forms of masochism as “the pleasure in wit, the greatest part of which is based on a sudden decrease of psychic tension”. (Reik 103) By exaggerating the delay subject insists on demands of reality so much that it turns on its head. The delay, usually displeasing, is divided and distributed on different points of a time scale and this way turns into pleasure. Finally, masochists fail in their goal of procrastination of the final release but they attain a greater goal: distorting the true

meaning of education (“Don’t do it”) and substituting it with a reversal (“I didn’t do it! It was done to me”).

In later developments of masochism, more into the realm of perversion, the suspense becomes a prerequisite. During this suspense period, masochists are actually masters of their own created world. They devise some masochistic tests to find their own threshold of pleasure. They add self-injury to self-insult until they are permitted the satisfaction. On the other hand, they yearn so much for love that they ask themselves “Do I deserve it?” But again, these tests become ends in themselves. Demonstration of torture under these tests gains idealistic importance. At first it was formulated as: "Look how I am punished, and how I suffer"; but later on it will be like: "Look how I enjoy even this suffering." The demonstration in its beginnings proves the efficiency of educational and moral regulations. It finishes up with the disclosure of their bankruptcy. During the first phase of masochistic development the success of those forces is demonstrated. During the second it is demonstrated how its success is turned into failure.

Here Reik draws some references from literature that will be useful to this study. First he gives descriptions of masochist’s scorn in a demonstrative form of a travesty or parody of grotesque features found in disciplinary education. Masochists do not speak their objections in an ironical tone (like sadists of Sade). They enact a grotesque scene parodying educational methods or later discipline. However, as Reik elaborates more on masochistic obedience, picture of masochists neighbors on a literary writer, not just an actor of scenes. Masochists pay meticulous attention to every petty detail of fantasy and reality. Through this unusual attention s/he tries to defy each and everything during a whole lifetime. Reik finds no better example of this defiance in one’s own way than in “the Titan Prometheus who is chained to the rock by the highest of the gods. The wrath of the fettered hero equals the character of the hidden defiance in masochism.”

(Reik 157) It seems that the masochist fills the text of his/her fantasy with so much detail just to compromise them one by one at later stages. By giving in on small details s/he maintains his/her claim to existence and to this specific kind of pleasure. The derision represents a step beyond defiance. "Having become prouder through humiliation, more courageous through pressure, the masochist becomes a spiteful scoffer". Their resistance consists in not-resisting and their submission becomes rebellion. (164)

In terms of the genesis of masochism, Reik follows Freud's way in tracing masochism back to sadism. Below we will see how and why Deleuze disaggregates sadism and masochism while maintaining a sadism specific to masochism and a masochism specific to sadism. For now I bring a short quotation from Reik to show how Reik changes Freud's formulation:

I start from sadism, which intends to do to the love-object, the mother, what she has done to him:

As you do to me, so do I to you: Sadistic phase.

As I do to you, so do I to me: Intermediate phase, transition to masochism. The external object is substituted for by the ego. Phantasy: concerning what the ego will do to the object and what then the object would do to the ego.

As I do to me, so you do to me: Real masochism. The ego is passive now; a new object has replaced the active one. Unconscious phantasy: What I want to do to you or in anticipation what I will do to you!

Masochism now is recognizable as a secondary instinctual formation. It signifies not only an instinctual turn against the ego, but simultaneously a veiled adherence to the instinctual aim and to the original object in the unconscious phantasy. The fact that another person has taken over the active role only means a temporary resignation under pressure of external and internal necessities. The other one is just a displacement substitute, a substitute-ego. In this sense we can speak of the 'faute-de-mieux' character of masochism. To repeat: It is less sadism turned against the ego than sadism put upside down (Reik 177-8).

### **2.1.1. Theodore Reik's Masochism and Femininity**

In *Masochism and Modern Man*, Reik dedicates a part to discussing the femininity of masochism and masochism of femininity. Through clinical observations, he concludes that tortures that a masochist man injures upon himself through a woman are actually showing how he wants to treat women himself. Additionally, the masochist man thinks: "If I have to be beaten, humiliated, chastised, then at least by a woman". (Reik 208) Presence of any male figure will vanish masochist's enjoyment. Lack of any male figure brings images of a pre-Oedipal stage to mind. In the pre-Oedipal stages gender is still non-present and undefined. The mother actually was the unrestricted ruler in this time of infancy, one who had to instill timekeeping, hygiene, and conformity in the child, and without doubt sometimes threatened the child with punishment. Thus masochism represents a late memorial of difficulties of adjustment to a reality that proved unpleasant. On the other hand, masochist female patients actually use the male figure as a surrogate mother. Man becomes a dummy hiding the mother behind his back. While masochistic women are more cunning in the society -using psychiatrist's room as a torture chamber in which one has to tell everything and hide nothing- their defiance is more of an attenuated character. "It is more of a trespassing of the bourgeois border, of which one nevertheless remains aware, than an invasion into enemy terrain". (Reik 216) Another example of this attenuated character is difference between exaggeration and reversal of natural duties. In masochism, the woman will exaggerate the role which nature and education have assigned to her. The man will reverse his. This difference is the reason that the hidden scorn and defiance which are inherent in the masochistic situation, show up so much more distinctly and embittered, in a man's case than in a woman's. According to Reik, reversal is a much farther reaching and accurate way to derision than exaggeration.