

# ***Masochism and Decadent Literature***

***Jean Lorrain and Joséphin Péladan***

**by**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

This study explores the masochistic aspects of Decadent literature, which to date have been relatively neglected, or have received only sporadic attention as merely the passive forms of sadism, or sadomasochism (Mario Praz). As Jennifer Birkett suggests, Decadent sensibility and sexuality have arguably less affinity with Sade than Sacher-Masoch. Following Birkett, and utilising Gilles Deleuze's idea of the independence of masochism from sadism and description of the distinctive aesthetic features of masochistic texts, I investigate masochistic formations in French Decadent texts; the work of Jean Lorrain and of Joséphin Péladan. This study also involves a review of relevant writings by Freud and post-Freudian psychoanalysts (Leo Bersani and Kaja Silverman); an engagement with current literary-critical scholarship in Decadence (Emily Apter, Charles Bernheimer, Bram Dijkstra and Rita Felski), and in Sacher-Masoch (Nick Mansfield, John K. Noyes, and Anita Phillips), and his influence on Decadent writers.

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## *INTRODUCTION*

Popular criticism has assumed that Decadent sexuality is sadistic or sadomasochistic ever since Mario Praz's early 20<sup>th</sup> century description of it in *The Romantic Agony*, when he called the Marquis de Sade 'the Divine Marquis' and emphasized Sade's influence on the art of the West in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> However, it should be noted that what Sade's admirers created one hundred years later was in some respects different from the original eighteenth century fantasy. In *The Sins of the Fathers: Decadence in France 1870–1914* (1986), Jennifer Birkett draws attention to this point and proposes that 'the complexity of the Sadean tradition is much reduced by the Decadents, in search of vivid images of the pleasure of pain, suffering and self-denial. Sacher-Masoch, at least as much as de Sade, is the representative figure of Decadent sensibility'.<sup>2</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1836–1895), from whose name the term 'masochism' derived, was an acclaimed contemporary writer among the French Decadents. Yet he has been comparatively ignored or mentioned only occasionally as the passive partner of the Sadean imagination, in the literary criticism of the Decadents as well as today's critical discourses in general. Birkett compares the Decadent preoccupation with aestheticism and the pleasure found in suffering to the masochistic proclivity, referring to Gilles Deleuze's analysis of the work of Sacher-Masoch in his *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch* in 1967. Here, Deleuze

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. by Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers: Decadence in France 1870–1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1986), p. 31.

proposes the independence of masochism from sadism and emphasises the originality of masochism and the distinctive aesthetic features of Sacher-Masoch's literary texts in comparison to Sade's.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, following Birkett's argument, the central focus of the present thesis is on identifying masochistic formations in the works of Decadence, with particular focus on the works of Jean Lorrain (1855–1906) and Joséphin Péladan (1859–1918). This will include special consideration of the historical fact that Sacher-Masoch was considered an honoured celebrity among the European artists of his time.

Decadence is generally considered a cultural and literary fashion which was born in France toward the end of the nineteenth century. It was prevalent in Western Europe, notably England and Germany and it eventually became an international phenomenon which has endured until our own day. Its literary aspect is usually specified by the period from 1884, the year when Joris-Karl Huysmans's *A rebours* was published to the year before the outbreak of the First World War, 1913. It is characterised by Schopenhauerian pessimism, mysticism, aestheticism, dandyism and the cult of androgyny, giving prominence to the couple composed of a submissive man and a hysterical dominatrix (*femme fatale*). The term *fin-de-siècle* is also often used synonymously with this phenomenon of Decadence, as Patrick McGuinness notes:

‘Many centuries have ended, but there was only one *fin de siècle*. It is identified with France, like other untranslatables such as *ennui*, *savoir faire* and *je ne sais quoi*, but

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<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch, le froid et le cruel, avec le texte intégral de La Vénus à la fourrure* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967).



its applications, and the associations it conjures up, have no cultural or national boundaries. [...] It stops being a date and becomes a mood'.<sup>4</sup>

Premised on this periodisation and conceptualisation of Decadence, this thesis will narrow down its focus to Birkett's perspective that 'Decadence is an attempt [...] to substitute fiction for history', which is characterised as a masochistic fantasy.<sup>5</sup> I aim to explore her thesis and further examine how Decadent fiction, reflecting the social and cultural atmosphere and conventions of the epoch, is 'masochistic'.

The two authors chosen for this thesis, Lorrain and Péladan, were French authors whom critics seldom hesitate to label Decadents.<sup>6</sup> They lived in the midst of this period and actively engaged in this cultural phenomenon. Lorrain enjoyed his divisive persona as an alleged homosexual, a dandy-aesthete or the 'fanfaron du vice'.<sup>7</sup> Péladan, was a megalomaniac occultist, calling himself Sîr Merodack, 'le grand dieu de Babylone', who had created the universe and human beings and maintains the order of the world.<sup>8</sup> The two men may appear completely different from one another (in fact, they never became friends, although they frequented the same literary circles).<sup>9</sup> The former flaunted his sexuality in a

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<sup>4</sup> Patrick McGuinness, 'Introduction', *Symbolism, Decadence and the Fin de Siècle: French and European Perspectives*, ed. by McGuinness (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Whether Péladan was a Decadent or Symbolist is debatable. For details, see Chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup> The question of Lorrain's gay writing, which never 'comes out', see Michael du Plessis, 'Unspeakable Writing: Jean Lorrain's Monsieur de Phocas', *French Forum*, 27:2 (2002), 65–98, and see also Chapter 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Mythes et Mythologie*, ed. by Félix Guirand and Goël Schmidt (Paris: Larousse-Bordas, 1996), p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> They occasionally met at the Chat Noir or at the salons held by Charles Buet, or Barbey d'Aurevilly. It can be assumed that they did not like each other because some of their friends were people whom each of them wished unavailingly to be friends with. For example, Péladan was a close friend of Judith Gautier, with whom Lorrain was infatuated, but in vain. Lorrain became a friend of Gustave Moreau, from whom Péladan could receive only polite but distant replies to his passionate adoration.

cynical tone, while the latter exhibited his solemn commitment to occult-Catholic convictions with heterosexist prejudice, but equal eccentricity. Yet both scandalised their contemporary society with their production of sensational stories, which obsessively dealt with similar Decadent clichés. Their favourite imaginary world was the scenario where atrocious *femmes fatales* inflict torture and humiliation on artistic male intellectuals, who search for exquisite sensations and passions, evoking similar mythic settings and characters (Orpheus, Prometheus, Lucifer, Salome, Circe, Adonis/Tammuz, Istar/Astarte, or Mélusine).

Lorrain made his debut in 1882 with *Le Sang des Dieux*, a collection of poems and subsequently *La Forêt bleue* (1883), which was heavily influenced by Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, poems telling of the legend of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table and fairies. Then, in 1885, with *Les Lépillier*, a prose work, Lorrain embarked on his rigorous literary and journalistic career, which was abruptly terminated by his premature death in 1906. In 1901 he completed his masterpiece *Monsieur de Phocas*, a variant story of a neurotic 'Des Esseintes' or another portrait of a tormented 'Dorian Gray', with a strong indication of Greek love (see also the discussion in Chapter 5 below).

Péladan was another enthusiastic young writer of the period. His first book *Le Vice suprême* (the first volume of his grand saga, *La Décadence latine*) was published in the same year as *A rebours*. While working on his saga, which was completed in 21 volumes

posthumously in 1925, he organised Rosicrucian fellowships and art exhibitions with his associates, hoping to recreate the Knights of King Arthur's Round Table and steadily continued with much labour to write many other works as time went on.<sup>10</sup> Yet, like Lorrain's, his works have a tendency to appear repetitive and fanatical as they often rework his obsession with perversity in human nature and his abiding occultist-Catholic convictions.

Relegated to the position of minor influences and a second-rate status, due to their unchanging fixation on sexual and sensual passions and torments, they are labelled 'Decadent', which implies 'degenerate'. With regard to this common identification of Decadence with inferiority and perversity, Asti Hustvedt in *The Decadent Reader* points out a general sense of discrimination against the concept of Decadence and complains that the 'decadent works that have survived are usually not called decadent'; rather, they are referred to as 'romantic' (Barbey d'Aurevilly), 'naturalist or realist' (Maupassant) or 'Symbolist' (Moréas, Remy de Gourmont and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam).<sup>11</sup> Lorrain's and Péladan's works are, in contrast, little remembered due to their intensified 'Decadent' style, yet it is this

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<sup>10</sup> See Christophe Beaufils's scholarly biographical work on Péladan which includes many pages under the bibliography: *Joséphin Péladan (1858–1918): Essai sur une maladie du lyrisme* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1993), pp. 467–495. Péladan's work and activities are appreciated in the revival of Rosicrucianism in France in Christopher McIntosh's *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology, and Rituals of an Esoteric Order*, 3rd edn (Boston: Weiser Books, 1998[1997]), pp. 93–96.

<sup>11</sup> Asti Hustvedt, 'The Art of Death: French Fiction at the Fin de Siècle', in *The Decadent Reader: Fiction, Fantasy, and Perversion from Fin-de-siècle France*, ed. by Hustvedt (New York: Zone Books, 1998), p. 12. For the proposal to re-evaluate undervalued Decadent literature among the academics, see Liz Constable, Matthew Potolsky and Dennis Denisoff, 'Introduction', in *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, ed. by themselves (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). With regard to the controversial nature of the term decadence, see three essays in the section 'Defining Decadence' from the same collection; see also Matthew Potolsky, 'Introduction (Decadence: Ancient and modern conference, at the University of Bristol, United Kingdom, on July 12–15, 2003)', *New Literary History*, 35 (2004), v–xi.

prejudice which justifies the basis on which I chose these two authors as the representatives of Decadence. Nonetheless, I agree with Hustvedt that Decadence does not refer to a few distinctive works of art created during the period, but was a common fashion shared by other contemporaries, despite their different labels. By examining the Decadent works of Lorrain and Péladan against the background of their age (in particular the vogue of dandyism and that of hysteria), I attempt to establish similarities between the French Decadent works written by Lorrain and Péladan and the ‘masochistic’ tales of Sacher-Masoch.

This thesis adopts the definitions of masochism proposed by Deleuze in his analysis of the works of Sacher-Masoch. His definition of masochism is primarily based on the comparison with the essential workings of sadism and the works of Sade first put forward by in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.<sup>12</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer did not disregard the Marquis de Sade as a pornographic writer, but took him seriously as a transcendental philosopher of Pure Reason (in Kant’s sense). They argue that the works of Sade is ‘reasonable’ in a sense that ‘Reason is the organ of calculation, of planning; it is neutral with regard to ends; its element is coordination’.<sup>13</sup> The cruelty of Sade’s discourses is equal to the impersonal and apathetic techniques of science and its aim to the ultimate goal of Reason: the establishment of a

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<sup>12</sup> It is also engaged with Freudian psychoanalytical references to masochism. See below, in particular Chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by G. S. Noerr, trans. by E. Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002 [1947]), p. 69.

totalitarian system which should work autonomously and effectively without laws. In this system human existences are important as long as they work as part of the system and represent social classes (aristocrat, priest, capitalist, or slave). Sade's characters are either sadists (libertines) or their victims, who can be replaced by anyone else in each social category, because the quality does not matter, whereas the quantity does and so does the maintenance of order. Sade's works are dominated by numerous sexual perversions and murderous acts in pathological accumulation, which is understood as an attempt to mechanically and efficiently establish a systematic catalogue and order in the domain of human nature and sexuality.

Deleuze defines masochism in contrast to the 'cruelty' of Sade, and closely analyses Sacher-Masoch's texts, in particular, *La Vénus à la fourrure*, the work traditionally understood as the exemplary manifestation of masochism.<sup>14</sup> While Sade's world is based on Pure Reason, Sacher-Masoch's is based on imagination, which invokes a mythical and aesthetic setting: the dominatrix is a Venus with a whip and wearing furs. Sadism values efficiency and lucidity, but masochism appreciates suspense and ambiguity. In masochism the creation and prolongation of an undetermined swinging between two opposite things lie in their pleasure and pain. Moreover, while sadism is about the system of society and institutions, masochism

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<sup>14</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *La Vénus à la fourrure*, included in Deleuze's *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*. Hereafter referred to as *Vénus*. Because my interests lie in Sacher-Masoch and French Decadence, I have mostly used the French translations of his texts in this study.

is a love story, of a tragically conflicting kind. In Sacher-Masoch's texts, the centre lies in an exchange between a male masochist and a specific female individual, the dominatrix, who is more important than everyone else and is idealised and fetishised as such. Suffering is caused not only because of the painful experiences inflicted on the masochist by the dominatrix, but also because of her appearing to him to be irreplaceable. The masochist persistently clings to her, even at his death which she herself inflicts. Masochism is a fantasy that male submission can become the means of possessing and controlling the domineering woman.

These are the understandings of masochism proposed by Deleuze which this thesis follows. I do not discuss masochism in terms of the 'pathological' sexual tendencies and activities practised by specific types of individual in real life. Instead I study masochism from the perspective of the culture and literature of the period of Decadence. I identify masochism as an element in the general cultural sensibility of late nineteenth century Europe, whose capitalist imperialism with its imperative for improvement in men's physical and economic aggressiveness oppressed artistic and intellectual men. Western men in this period also felt threatened by women's emancipation, and, I argue, these elements in the cultural climate are reflected in the sense of suffocation, anxiety and failure dominating the art and literature of the period. I also study closely the masochistic literary formulations which explore the conflicts caused by the relations between man and woman, utilise the techniques of suspense,

tension and ambiguity and are exemplified in the works of Sacher-Masoch and detected in contemporary works by Lorrain and Péladan.

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part I introduces the link between masochism and Decadence. Chapter 1 outlines the manner in which the issue of masochism has been neglected in the critical discourses on Decadence. I emphasise that the masochistic representations in Decadent literature have been uncritically reduced to merely passive elements of the Sadean tradition. Chapter 2 presents the historical fact that Sacher-Masoch was an acclaimed naturalist/realist author whose influence was undeniable in France, in contrast to today's neglect. In the light of Deleuze's approaches to masochism, I detail some of the characteristics composing Sacher-Masoch's imaginary world, whose themes will be compared to the works of Lorrain and Péladan in the following chapters (in particular the replacement of history by a personal 'masochistic' fantasy, in which a perpetual battle rages for superiority between men and women; the use of suspense to generate anticipation; and the exploration of the ambiguity of gender roles in the form of the disavowal of the likeness to the father and in the threefold image of the mother). Chapter 3 further examines the ambiguity in the masochist's identity, which is both destroyed and reborn, in comparison to the perpetual oscillation between degeneration and regeneration, found in the idea of Decadence expressed by Sacher-Masoch's French contemporaries.

The key to the argument presented in this thesis is ambiguity. Part II deals with the ambiguous gender identity of men, by examining the idea of the Decadent dandy and the ways in which the male protagonists in Lorrain's and Péladan's fictions are described. Referring to current debates in the domain of gender studies which problematises masculinity, Chapter 4 proposes that dandyism, a Decadent taste for extreme artifice, can be associated with masochism in terms of its gender-neutrality and its aspiration that the new androgynous man will appear; it is an anxious reaction to an epoch during which masculinity and femininity were sharply differentiated and a repressive culture saw the identification of whole sequences of new 'perversions'. Chapter 5 analyses Lorrain's *Monsieur de Phocas* by proposing that Lorrain's neurotic obsession with the shifting image of the mask and blue-green things suggests his idea of identity as an enigma: the idea is an implicit revolt against contemporary social codes and norms, simultaneously causing anxiety and masochistic pleasure. Chapter 6 connects Decadent dandyism to Péladan's idea of occult palingenesis (regeneration). Péladan recurrently imagines the birth of the artist-Magus, a superior androgyne, who will resolve the disorder of the world and establish a new hierarchy in which his intelligence and asexuality will conquer all men and women. Through this thesis, I attempt to show that despite his apparent masculinist conviction, Péladan's narratives concentrate on exhibiting the masochistic martyrdom of the Magus. Further, I seek to show



that his cult of the androgyne is a manifestation of his desire to become a superior being, whose ambiguous gender identity is, just like the dandy, a hollow signifier.

Part III examines the ambiguous representations of the woman proliferated in Decadence which oscillate between the active and the passive, an executioner and a saint. The same contradictory images are recurrent in Sacher-Masoch's novels, as he writes that men's ideal form of femininity is divided into 'deux divinités: une noire et une blanche'.<sup>15</sup> I explore the significance of the opposing images of women in the construction of the Decadent fantasies which I identify as masochistic, drawing close attention to the fact that the Decadent heroines are often portrayed as hysterical. Chapter 7 proposes to see that the vogue of hysteria in late nineteenth century France was a masochistic theatre of pain and suffering performed in public by female patients and male physicians, highlighting two aspects of masochism: the use of fantasised pain and an element of power game. The hysterics exhibited pain and suffering in which medical doctors were unable to find any organically substantiating causes but determined to be only imagined by the patients. Nonetheless, the doctors encouraged the patients to exhibit the pain and suffering, and exaggerated its enigma and attesting its authenticity by means of medical explanations added to each manifestation, whereby they established themselves as the healer of the troubled women. The suffering female patients vulnerable to the medical diagnosis of hysteria may appear differ from the imperious Decadent

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<sup>15</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *La femme séparée* (Paris: Léo Scheer, 2004[1881]), p. 92.

heroines enjoying inflicting pain on men, but Chapter 8 highlights the way Lorrain and Péladan utilise the popularised knowledge of hysteria to create their fictional characters of *femme fatale*. Lorrain and Péladan both represent the hysterical heroines as a symbol of sexual power, an instrument of torture, by ascribing the threat of women manifested in the form of their morbid sexual fantasies, obsession with suffering and death, and insatiable carnal drives, to hysteria. Yet at the same time, the role of the hysterical heroines includes a helper for the artists: compared to certain representations of art and literature, their hystericised bodies are fixed in a suspended moment as fetish, and help to eternally generate a sense of horror and anticipation in the text. Further, in Péladan's case in particular, the hysterical heroines' perpetual refusal to comply with the Magus heroes' project of making the *fée*, the ideal partner, helps to create and intensify the element of suspense in their masochistic stories. Lastly, I propose that the usual ending of the failure to handle the woman's revolt is the reason why Lorrain and Péladan dream of constructing the male self as a work of art at the end of their masochistic scenarios.

Underlining the assumption that Decadent literature is more masochistic than sadistic, I hope in this thesis to show the importance of identifying the role of masochism in the reception of Decadence.

## **PART I: Sacher-Masoch, Masochism and Decadence**

### ***CHAPTER 1. THE PLACE OF MASOCHISM IN THE CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE FRENCH DECADENCE***

This chapter provides an overview of previous critical interest in aspects of masochism. While Sade and sadism were received with enthusiasm during the first and middle parts of the twentieth century, masochism remained relatively neglected. I then refer to some of the main criticisms which, since Deleuze's analysis of Sacher-Masoch (1967), show a recent gradual development in the evaluation of the role of Sacher-Masoch and his imaginative formations in comparison to contemporaneous artists in Europe.

#### ***– Masochism: The Neglected Theme –***

Stressing Flaubert's affinity with Sade, Mario Praz claimed, 'with Flaubert we have entered the dominion of the Fatal Woman, and sadism appears under the passive aspect which is usually called masochism (as though the active and passive aspects were not usually both present in sadism, and a mere change of proportions really justified a change of name)'.<sup>1</sup> The comment in parenthesis betrays Praz's conviction that masochism is a secondary aspect of

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<sup>1</sup> Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, pp. 153–154.

sadism—as well as his complete lack of interest in Sacher-Masoch’s distinctive literary characteristics. Indeed, he incisively distinguished between the Byronic Fatal Man, who proliferated in the early Romantic turn of the eighteenth century, and the Fatal Woman, who dominated in what he called the period of late Romanticism, at the end of the nineteenth century (the Decadent period). Yet Praz’s prejudice against masochism led him to argue as though nineteenth century literature was simply a Sadean aberration, produced from the perspective of female sadists and their male victims. According to Praz, Sade’s ethos overshadows late nineteenth-century Europe. My thesis does not intend to deny Sade’s influence, but suggests that Sade, becoming a neutralised symbol of human aggression and nonstandard sexuality, was exploited by nineteenth century artists as they pleased, in order to create their own ‘masochistic’ literature.<sup>2</sup>

Praz’s fascination with sadism became the dominant attitude in critiques of Decadence and subsequent critics have assimilated Decadent literature within the Sadean tradition. A. E. Carter’s *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature 1830–1900* (1958), considered to be one of the classic critiques of Decadence, confirmed Praz’s thesis and also gave its own analysis of the role of Sade’s philosophy—in particular, his endorsement of depravity—as an extreme form of artificiality, which, Carter argued, was at the core of Decadent sensibility and

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<sup>2</sup> Late nineteenth century France was obsessed with Sade, despite the fact that reading Sade’s works was privileged in an age of strong censorship. Sade, together with the ancient Roman Emperor Nero, was symbolically demonised by journalists and artists for upsetting the bourgeois morality concerning human nature; see a recent critique of Sade in the late nineteenth century by Geoffrey Wall, ‘Thinking with Demons: Flaubert and de Sade’, *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 36: 2 (2007), 101–128.

sexuality. Characterising the *fin-de-siècle* period as producing the ‘monstrous characters of late Romanticism’, he touched upon the figure of Fréneuse in Lorrain’s *Monsieur de Phocas*, a man caught ‘between dandy and sadist’ and described the character of Clara, the heroine in Octave Mirbeau’s *Jardin des supplices*, as a ‘sado-masochist’. He also judged as ‘masochistic’ the tragic concern of contemporary critics such as Paul Bourget and Hippolyte Taine with the degeneracy of contemporary society.<sup>3</sup>

It is disappointing that Carter used the terms ‘sadism’, ‘sado-masochism’ and ‘masochism’ indiscriminately to imply any kind of cruelty or unconventional form of eroticism described in either Sade’s texts or Decadent texts. But I would insist on the importance of underlining certain masochistic representations, in particular, the aspect of prolonged fear, confusion and torment regarding sex and cruelty which are dramatically exaggerated in Decadent texts, but not in Sade’s. As Chapter 5 below notes, the most evident characteristic of Lorrain’s protagonist Fréneuse in *Monsieur de Phocas* is his perpetual exhibition, throughout the story, of suffering and frenzy at the sight or thought of something terrifying, sadistic and immoral; the attitudes typically belong to the masochistic personality and apathetic Sadean libertines refuse to show them. It is true that in becoming Phocas at the end of the story, the protagonist becomes a confident and cold dandy and also a murderer. But

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<sup>3</sup> A. E. Carter, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature 1830–1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), p. 27, p. 116, p. 120, and p. 148.

more attention should be paid to this transformation, because it can be understood in the context of the masochistic theme of rebirth into a superior man through suffering, which Deleuze pointed out in his analysis of Sacher-Masoch's works.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the issue of the female 'sadist', which is discussed by Carter in the image of Mirbeau's heroine Clara in *Jardin des supplices*, will be found in the domineering and self-destructive (masochistic) heroines in Sacher-Masoch, Lorrain and Péladan, a theme which Part III of this thesis explores. I will argue that the relationship between aggressive women and submissive men is not a simple master-slave one, but that the women play an essential role in masochism as mediator and epitome of the rebirth of the masochist.

It became commonplace to indiscriminately associate the masochistic anxiety and frenzy deriving from imagining human cruelty and sexual perversion described in Decadent literature with the encyclopaedic accounts of human sexuality in Sade's texts. Koenraad W. Swart in *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth Century France* (1964) deals with the strange and contradictory view of life in Decadent literature, which he characterises as both pessimistic despair and a fanatical belief in progress, stressing the anxiety and fear experienced by the French intellectuals of the time. In line with Praz and Carter, Swart considers Sade to be one of the most important figures of this period and argues that Sade's pleasure in perversion and his revolt against the moralism of the eighteenth century was the

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 3 below.

model for the Decadent cult of evil and, indeed, Satanism. He views Sade and sadism as the pivot on which the innocent Romanticism turned into the ‘perverted’ Decadence. His criticism was useful because it insisted that the role of the critics of Decadence was to differentiate the nineteenth-century Decadent artists from the eighteenth-century Romantics and contrasted the naïve despair and idealistic hope of the Romantics with the acceptance by the Decadents (Charles Baudelaire, in particular) of the degeneration of their age with ‘a sense of equanimity, or even delight’.<sup>5</sup> In Swart’s account, sadism was the key to explaining Decadent pessimism and it was even suggested that Sade was the precursor of the Decadents because of his introducing a way to turn anguish and a sense of guilt into delight in suffering and degeneration and of his finding beauty in what was normally considered morbid and repulsive. However, a profound sense of guilt and suffering, which results in an aesthetic inversion of values, is an essential process in Sacher-Masoch’s texts and is alien to Sade. Deleuze quotes Maurice Blanchot’s interpretation of Sade’s texts (‘tous ces sentiments qui s’appellent honte, remords, gout du châtement leur demeurent étrangers’) and criticises conventional confusion of the sort which automatically equates the unaffected world of Sade with the enthusiastic world of Sacher-Masoch, filled with agony, remorse and fear.<sup>6</sup> It is important to see that the two in fact differ significantly.

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<sup>5</sup> Koenraad W. Swart, *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth Century France* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *Lautréamont et Sade* (Paris: Édition de Minuit, 1963), p.30, cit. in Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 35.

Jean Pierrot's *The Decadent Imagination 1880–1900* (1977) still simply follows Praz and Carter's thesis and accepts the primacy of sadism in Decadence. Pierrot sets out to revisit the Decadent motifs already pursued by the two predecessors, with an emphasis on the aspect of 'homosexuality, sadism or sado-masochism, and incest'.<sup>7</sup> Conventional in his approach, however, he brings in no innovative ideas on the issue of sadism and masochism. He focuses on the image of the *femme fatale* in the Decadent texts, particularly in Lorrain's stories, but again, the *femme fatale* is merely stressed as a characterisation of feminine sadism. He makes no attempt to raise questions of her distinctive quality and role in Decadent fantasy. It is useful, though, that Pierrot defines Decadent literature as a dreamy, intoxicating narrative, aided by drugs and using mythical and legendary settings, whose imaginative power is derived from a desire of the artist to escape from painful reality. A similar emphasis occurs in this thesis when it examines Sacher-Masoch's narrative, which justifies the inclusion of his work in contemporaneous Decadent works of art. Masochism relies on fantasising unreality and enjoying being on the cusp between the real and the fantastic, while Sade concentrates on speculative and analytical rationalism.<sup>8</sup>

R. K. R Thornton's study of the Decadence in England, *The Decadent Dilemma* (1983), also remains within the conventional understanding of sado-masochism.<sup>9</sup> Thornton

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<sup>7</sup> Jean Pierrot's *The Decadent Imagination 1880–1900*, trans. by Derek Coltman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981 [1977]), p. 142.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> R. K. R Thornton, *The Decadent Dilemma* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983).



declares that he is in agreement with Carter in associating Sade's revolt against the Romantic worship of nature with the Decadents' obsession with artificiality. Although he has conventional ideas of the role of sadism in Decadence, it should be mentioned that he argues that Decadent literature is a self-conscious kind, which fails to reconcile the real with the ideal and shows this failure in the particular form of tensions, which he termed 'the Decadent dilemma'. The 'dilemma' is found in Ernest Dowson's attraction to the opposing images of women (chaste lady and cheap whore); Arthur Symonds's aspiration to become a 'wanderer', fighting against evil and instinctual Nature; and both Lionel Johnson's and W. B. Yeats's texts, which show the struggle and conflict between the corruption of reality and ascetic idealism. These examples of the 'Decadent dilemma' are recalled in the following chapters, as they analyse the various layers of ambiguity which contribute to create compelling suspense in Sacher-Masoch's works and in the Decadent fictions of Lorrain and Péladan.

The tension generated by ambiguity is an essential mechanism in masochism, while in sadism it does not exist. In *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971), Roland Barthes points out that the characteristic of Sade's writing is the lack of tantalising hints, suggestive gestures and ambiguity, which produce, he says, the tension which is the source of modern eroticism: 'Sade n'est pas érotique: on l'a dit, il n'y a jamais chez lui de "strip-tease" d'aucune sorte, cet

apologue essentiel de l'érotisme moderne'.<sup>10</sup> Barthes posits an opposition between eroticism and Sade's writing, because the latter is a philosophy which aims to explicitly articulate sexual crimes in order to arrive at a new rule or a code. In contrast, Sacher-Masoch's writing will be found erotic, because it explores the ambiguous world of suspense where enigmatic protagonists are placed in atmospheric settings.

Although French Decadent writers would be better compared with their contemporary, Sacher-Masoch, than with Sade, it is evident that the Sadean lines of criticism have been popular and are after all still dominant. This can be observed in Peter M. Cryle's recent book, *The Telling of the Act: Sexuality as Narrative in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century France* (2001), which holds in esteem the Sadean eroticism which dominated nineteenth-century sexuality. One chapter in the book is devoted to demonstrating that 'it is in fact the nineteenth century that retrieves Messalina and her sisters for the purpose of erotic representation'.<sup>11</sup> Sadly the argument is not new, except in contrasting the active image of Messalina in the nineteenth century with the helpless female victims favoured by eighteenth-century literature; this merely echoes Praz's assertion that Decadent *femmes fatales* are merely feminine versions of sadism. Needless to say, a critique of the role of Sacher-Masoch and masochism is not found in the book's wide-ranging catalogue of erotic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth

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<sup>10</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> Peter M. Cryle, *The Telling of the Act: Sexuality as Narrative in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), p. 281.

centuries in France. As the next chapter details, Sacher-Masoch was a writer from Galicia (now in Ukraine), who had a high reputation in nineteenth century France which should not be forgotten, now that an increasing number of recent critiques of Decadence have begun to pay greater attention to the role of Sacher-Masoch in the period.

To conclude this account of the neglect of masochism by literary critics, I should add that not only neglect but also hostility has been extended to Sacher-Masoch. This is vividly manifested in Philippe Sollers' article 'Sade dans le temps'. He passionately applauds Sade's subversive philosophy and imagination in transcending the frameworks of existing knowledge. Sollers exemplifies the mainstream Sadean criticism, based on the thesis about Sade proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast, he is plainly contemptuous of Sacher-Masoch: 'le marquis de Sade se retrouve marié malgré lui avec un médiocre écrivain du dix-neuvième siècle qu'il aurait, s'il avait pu le lire, profondément méprisé'.<sup>12</sup> I would suggest that this sheer dismissal of Sacher-Masoch and the concept of masochism is an instance of a sense of unease experienced by men who confront the potential danger of masochism which destabilises patriarchal authority. Kaja Silverman refers to this kind of anxiety over masochism in her studies of masochistic representations in cinema. As one of the recent critics who appreciate Deleuze's unique definitions of masochism, she points out that critiques of Sade and sadism are abundant and they praise Sade as a literary legacy because,

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<sup>12</sup> Philippe Sollers, *Sade contre l'Être Suprême: Précédé de Sade dans le Temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 12.

among all the ‘perversions’—which by nature destabilise social and heterosexual standards—sadism is ‘the one which is most compatible with conventional heterosexuality’.<sup>13</sup>

Silverman states that sadism acknowledges male dominance and aggressiveness as man’s nature, making it into a topic which is safer and more comfortable than masochism for male intellectuals to justify. Assigning any value to masochism, in contrast, may provoke disquiet because it involves a question of their own identity as men. Sigmund Freud, for example, certifies without reservation that sadism is normal in men, since the ‘sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of aggressiveness’, while simply expressing his bewilderment and uneasiness about masochism, calling it ‘mysterious’ and ‘incomprehensible’,<sup>14</sup> implying feminine subservience in men. Chapter 4 looks more closely at this social norm imposed on men in relation to the masochistic fantasy: masculinity should be aligned to the power of control, which is echoed even in the formation of Decadent dandyism. Dandyism is related to the ideal masculine image, while masochism is apparently borne on the degraded masculine image, but I want to argue that these two concepts share the anxious manipulation of the masculine identity and their aspiration to become a new superior man—the androgyne, who dominates both male and female desire.

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<sup>13</sup> Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 187.

<sup>14</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’, in *On Sexuality*, trans. by James Strachey (Penguin Books, 1991), p. 71. Sigmund Freud, ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’, in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by James Strachey (Penguin Books, 1991), p. 413 and p. 415.

– *The Critical Recuperation of Masochism* –

The affinity between Sacher-Masoch and his contemporary artists has come to be gradually recognised since Deleuze's *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*. Deleuze defies the conventional idea that sadism and masochism are compatible and identical like a coin with two faces and insists that Sade and Sacher-Masoch's texts differ completely in their aesthetic, philosophical and erotic configurations. On the one hand, he argues that Sade's writing, a product of the Enlightenment, is characterised by apathy and pure reason and its pleasure lies in the mathematical and institutionalised accumulation of victims and perversions. On the other, influenced by German Romanticism, the characteristics of Sacher-Masoch's writing are enthusiasm, aestheticism and Platonism and its pleasure is generated by mythological settings and a suspended atmosphere. Unlike the clear executioner/victim hierarchal system in sadism, both the active and the passive participants in masochism are bound together to form a private relationship by persuasion and mutual consent. Critics of Decadence have begun to note that some of these features are also found in the literature of the late nineteenth century and, indeed, that the masochistic ethos is an integral part of the Decadent imagination. Before proceeding to the next chapter, which among other things details some characteristics of Sacher-Masoch's work, I conclude this chapter with a brief overview of the increasing attention now being paid to the close affinity between masochism and Decadent literature.

One critic as early as the late nineteenth century had already created a proper frame for including Sacher-Masoch among the ‘Decadents’: Max Nordau’s *Entartung* [*Degeneration*] (1892). This was a classical critical attack on the nineteenth-century literature whose authors were condemned as ‘degenerate’ for indulging in the depiction of morbid and sensational pleasures. Nordau maintained that the source of the degeneracy of the *fin-de-siècle* writers could be traced to their fantasies, which were heavily tainted by ‘perverted’ inclinations. By these, Nordau means Schopenhauerian pessimism, ego-mania and a neurotic indulgence in morbid private dreams which were filled with triumphant hysterical women and submissive weak men. Among the artists criticised by Nordau is Henrik Ibsen, one of the internationally renowned ‘realist’ writers of the period. According to Nordau, the real nature of Ibsen’s so-called realism was in fact ‘a technique of fireworks’, which condensed ‘all the effects of the course of the world and of social institutions’ into a short dramatic time and space and lured readers into his imaginary world of intense feelings.<sup>15</sup> Nordau commented that this intensity was never truthful to reality, but was even harmful by reinforcing the fanatic anarchism which was contaminating modern European society. He was particularly dissatisfied by Ibsen’s dramas, in that they showed ‘the wife [as] victorious, and the man flattened out like a pancake’, displaying disrespect for the traditional institution of marriage

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<sup>15</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, based on the 2nd edition (1892) (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 339.

and ‘the inversion of the healthy and natural relation between the sexes’.<sup>16</sup> To Nordau, Ibsen’s heroines functioned as a vent for his impulses towards violence and destruction, while the weakness of the male characters was an expression of his self-reproach for his degenerate heredity and his desire for punishment. To conclude, Ibsen suffered from the same perversion as Sacher-Masoch—masochism. Although Nordau’s hyperbolic, quasi-scientific authoritarian tones are disturbing, he correctly covered some of the essential points characteristic of masochistic representations, such as an antagonistic domestic relationship between man and woman in the name of ‘realism’, the denial of conventional heterosexuality and marriage and the use of female figures as both the symbol of power and the medium of punishment. In his work masochism was neither underestimated as a passive counterpart of sadism nor simply regarded as a form of personal deviancy, but was seen as current at the time and a mirror of the representations of cruelty, fear, eroticism and violence at the turn of the century.

Since Deleuze rescued the singularity of Sacher-Masoch from oblivion in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a few other critics have slowly started to investigate the extent of the similarity between Sacher-Masoch’s and his artist contemporaries. Bram Dijkstra’s *Idols of Perversity* (1986) is one of such texts, signalling the beginning of a departure from Praz’s influence. Dijkstra makes an immense catalogue of major and minor visual and literary works of art in *fin-de-siècle* Europe, focusing on their ‘perversity’, by which he implies their masochistic

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 412 and p. 414.

obsession. Dijkstra's approach differs from that of Praz, because he does not adhere to the critical convention that Decadent art and literature is an offshoot of the Sadean imagination. Instead, it is Sacher-Masoch's *La Vénus à la fourrure* which is suggestively used to exemplify the sensibilities and sexuality of the period. The study concludes by evoking Sacher-Masoch's three protagonists, Wanda, Séverin and 'the Greek' in *La Vénus à la fourrure*: a dominatrix, a masochist and his androgynous superior rival.

The images of the viraginous woman [Wanda] and the effeminate Jew [Séverin] — both equally eager to depredate the gold, the pure seed of the Aryan male—began to merge. The deadly racist and sexist evolutionary dreams of turn-of-the-century culture fed the masochistic middle-class fantasy in which the godlike Greek [...] leader of men, symbol of masculine power [...] would kill the vampire, set his trusty servant [Séverin] free, and bring on the millennium of pure blood, evolving genes, and men who were men.<sup>17</sup>

This is an incisive comment on the link between Sacher-Masoch's work and the Decadent construction of seductive and destructive images of the *femme fatale*, stressing that the masochistic imagination in *fin-de-siècle* art is the means of giving birth to a superior image of new masculinity: 'the Greek'.<sup>18</sup>

In the same year as Dijkstra's work was published, in the UK, Jennifer Birkett published her first critique, *The Sins of the Fathers: Decadence in France 1870–1914*, to offer

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<sup>17</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 401.

<sup>18</sup> In *Evil Sisters* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), Dijkstra develops the idea that male masochism and its artistic representations are the manifestations of the inverted sadism of modern European male intellectuals, whose sexist and racist ideologies sowed the seed of Nazi ethnic cleansing at the beginning of the twentieth century.



even clearer critical insights into the issue of the imbalance between the role of sadism and that of masochism in the study of Decadence. By drawing attention to the fact that Sacher-Masoch was a renowned writer in the Decadent period and employing Deleuze's analysis of masochism, Birkett proposes the importance of clarifying the literary and ideological affinities between Sacher-Masoch's works and those of the French Decadents: male narcissism, the aesthetic presentation of suffering and the exploitation of the image of the female castrator as the instrument of crucifixion and redemption in the Decadent revival of Catholicism.

The maso-criticism set off by Birkett and Dijkstra has been developed by other critics. Charles Bernheimer in *Decadent Subjects* (2002) pays more attention to the analogy between masochism and Decadent texts by Mirbeau, Huysmans, Lorrain and Oscar Wilde and characterises a Decadent theme as a spectacle of castrated male subjectivity.<sup>19</sup> The Decadent *femme fatale* is no longer a simplistic blood-thirsty sadist, but, as Rita Felski argues in *The Gender of Modernity* (1995), 'an unblemished icon (a fetish)', reflecting the feminised male artists' fear and desire.<sup>20</sup> Part III of this thesis offers a similar examination of the way in which the heroines of male masochistic fantasy are created as masked objects of desire, fetishes, which are the embodiment of superiority and totality. Although my thesis deals only

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe*, ed. by T. Jefferson Kline and Naomi Schor (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 109.

with masochism in the texts by male Decadent artists, I should add that Felski's feminist perspective includes an examination of the distinctiveness of the female Decadent, Rachilde, in comparison to the two male artists, Sade and Sacher-Masoch. She writes, 'Rachilde's texts do not simply repeat the ideas and formal motifs of de Sade, nor can they be read as merely the mirror image of the text of male masochism'.<sup>21</sup> Felski suggests that Rachilde's heroines are important in terms of gender politics, because they manifest women's empowerment in their powers of seduction as a self-conscious masquerade, which is dominated by male desires and at the same time, dominates them.

In this chapter, I surveyed the long neglect of the masochistic theme in the study of Decadence; the recent researchers who have slowly become aware of the close similarity between masochism and Decadence since Deleuze's thesis concerning the specificity of Sacher-Masoch's work and masochism; and a few more who have explicitly stated that the Decadent imagination is masochistic rather than sadistic. In the next chapter, I examine Sacher-Masoch's texts and show that not only his infamous 'masochistic' *La Vénus à la fourrure* but also his entire imaginary world contain a similar stylistic, rhetorical and ideological dynamism, which can also be found in the Decadent texts of Lorrain and Péladan.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 188–189.

## CHAPTER 2. SACHER-MASOCH AND THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE IN FRANCE

This chapter aims to situate Sacher-Masoch's 'masochistic' imagination in more detail as part of the Decadent *Zeitgeist*. I focus on Deleuze's contention that Sacher-Masoch's work intends 'à la fois de "désexualiser" l'amour, et de sexualiser toute l'histoire de l'humanité',<sup>1</sup> examining how Sacher-Masoch's work 'sexualises' history by viewing all human problems within his private fantasy of 'la guerre des sexes',<sup>2</sup> and how it 'de-sexualises' passion by rejecting the ordinary form of sex and marriage, advocating instead a fetishistic exchange in which man, the artist, worships the power and beauty of woman. I start with a brief contextualising account of Sacher-Masoch's fame as a member of the dominant Naturalist and Realist schools. It was because of Sacher-Masoch's reputation there that Krafft-Ebing, the German physician who invented the term 'masochism' to characterise a particular sexual perversion, was for a long time careful not to refer directly to his work. Next, I examine the literary strategies used in Sacher-Masoch's texts. Despite his claim as a realist to tell true stories drawn from harsh reality, Sacher-Masoch's stories share stylistic and thematic affinities with such Decadent texts as those of Lorrain and Péladan. These include the use of suspense to evoke an atmosphere of mystery, the fascination with disguise and masquerade,

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, 'L'Errant', in Sacher-Masoch, *Le Legs de Caïn: Contes galiciens*, trans. by Bentzon (Paris: Hachette, 1874), p. xi.

Platonic idealism, anti-militarism and an emphasis on particular gender roles: the humiliated father, a new kind of masculine hero and the pairing of the *femme fatale* and the submissive male. The rest of this chapter is devoted to a study of these strategies.<sup>3</sup>

– *Sacher-Masoch's Literary Reputation in 1870s and 1880s* –

Krafft-Ebing coined the term 'masochism' from the name of Sacher-Masoch. It should be noted that it was not, as is generally believed, in the first edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886, but in the edition published in 1890 under the title *Neue Forschungen auf dem Gebiet der Psychopathia sexualis: Eine medicinisch-psychologische Studie* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke).<sup>4</sup> This delay is important, since it was because of Sacher-Masoch's international fame as a writer at the turn of the century that Krafft-Ebing hesitated to bring the issue of masochism into the public domain. By the time Krafft-Ebing referred to Sacher-Masoch as a source of his concept of masochism, Sacher-Masoch's fame had diminished, particularly in Germany, for a number of reasons: his criticism of Bismarck and Prussian militarism, his

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<sup>3</sup> For useful discussions on stylistic similarities between Realists/Naturalists and Idealists/Symbolists, see e.g. Roger Pearson's 'Zola by Mallarmé' and Blandine Chambost's 'Sous le Signe de Vénus: Erotic Mythopoeia In La Curée and Contemporary Painting', in *New Approaches to Zola: Selected Papers from the 2002 Cambridge Centenary Colloquium*, ed. by Hannah Thompson (London: The Émile Zola Society, 2003), pp. 79–99, and Jennifer Birkett's 'Fetishizing Writing: The Politics of Fictional Form in the Work of Remy de Gourmont and Joséphin Péladan', in *Perennial Decay*, pp. 268–288, and also her other article comparing Jean Lorrain and Remy de Gourmont, 'Disinterested Narcissus: The Play of Politics in Decadent Form', in *Symbolism, Decadence, and the Fin de Siècle: French and European Perspectives*, pp. 29–45. For affinities between D. H. Lawrence and Sacher-Masoch, see E. Delavenay, 'D. H. Lawrence et Sacher-Masoch: contribution à l'étude d'une sensibilité "moderne"', in *Le Romantisme anglo-américain* (Paris: Didier, 1971), pp. 345–370.

<sup>4</sup> See Bernard Michel, *Sacher-Masoch (1836–1895)* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989), p. 294 and p. 328 n. 60. Also see Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 49.

sympathy for the Jews and the Slavs, his Francophilia and increasing public awareness of his obsession with domineering women and submissive men.<sup>5</sup>

In France, in contrast, his fame was sustained longer for exactly these reasons. Moreover, the first French translation of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia sexualis*, which was based on the 8th German edition, did not appear until the year of Sacher-Masoch's death (1895). In this translation, Krafft-Ebing's manner of referring to Sacher-Masoch is markedly discreet. The link between the term 'masochism' and the name Sacher-Masoch is merely suggested in a footnote: 'Ainsi nommé d'après Sacher-Masoch, dont les romans et les contes traitent de préférence de ce genre de perversion'.<sup>6</sup> And the few references to Sacher-Masoch's *La Vénus à la fourrure* are scattered in case-histories or footnotes.

Much later, in 1931, the second French translation was published and the French public finally became aware of Krafft-Ebing's analysis of the case of Sacher-Masoch's life and work as the model for masochism. Krafft-Ebing confessed to having had reservations

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<sup>5</sup> See Carl Spitteler, 'Sacher-Masoch Remembered' (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 3 March 1895), in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *A Light for Others and Other Jewish Tales from Galicia*, trans. by Michael T. O'Pecko (CA: Ariadne Press, 1994), pp. iii–vii, and also see the translator's 'Afterword'. The premature declaration of his death and its immediate denial, which repeatedly appeared in the press before he died, also indicate his growing obscurity. See a letter of complaint written to an editor by his second wife, Hulda de Sacher-Masoch, in *L'Echo de Paris* (5 May 1894).

<sup>6</sup> Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia sexualis: Avec recherche spéciales sur l'inversion sexuelle* (Paris: Georges Carré, 1895), p. 121 n. 2. He also writes, 'Zola a, dans sa Nana, une scène masochiste, de même que dans Eugène Rougon. Le décadentisme littéraire, plus moderne, en France et en Allemagne, s'occupe beaucoup de masochisme et de sadisme', in a footnote (p. 161). In the English translations, curiously enough, they are put in the main text: See *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct, A Medico-legal Study: Authorized Translation of the Seventh Enlarged and Revised German Edition by C. G. Chaddock* (Philadelphia; London: F. A. Davis Co., 1892), p. 123, and *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-forensic Study. Only Authorized English Adaptation of the Last German Edition [12th] Revised by Krafft-Ebing, with Introduction and Supplement by Victor Robinson* (New York: Pioneer, 1947), p. 171.

about bringing up Sacher-Masoch's name, although he had obtained information about Sacher-Masoch's perversions long before his death: 'Quand il [Sacher-Masoch] vivait encore, des détails pleins d'enseignement me furent, à son sujet, communiqués à titre privé. Je n'ai fait alors aucun usage public de ces communications'.<sup>7</sup> In his English translation, published in 1947, Krafft-Ebing's tone was still apologetic, trying to justify his action as a defence of Sacher-Masoch's honour: 'As a man Sacher-Masoch cannot lose anything in the estimation of his cultured fellow-beings simply because he was afflicted with an anomaly of his sexual feelings'.<sup>8</sup>

Krafft-Ebing's tentative formulation reflects the considerable reputation Sacher-Masoch still enjoyed at that time. In France, he was awarded the *Légion d'honneur* in 1883. In 1886, when he arrived in Paris for the first time, the front page of *Le Figaro* gave him an enthusiastic welcome, '[ce] vertueux poète qui a toujours mis son génie au service du Beau et du Vrai'.<sup>9</sup> The January 1883 volume of the international journal *Auf der Höhe*, edited and published by Sacher-Masoch, reported that an incredible number of famous French intellectuals had sent him autograph messages or telegrams celebrating his 25-year career as a writer, including the most celebrated Naturalists, Realists, Decadents and Positivists, such as François Coppée, Alphonse Daudet, Alexander Dumas fils, Edmond de Goncourt, Ernest

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<sup>7</sup> Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia sexualis: Étude médico-légale à l'usage des médecins et des juristes*, prefaced by Pierre Janet, based on the 16th and 17th German editions revised by Albert Moll (Paris: Payot, 1931), pp. 236–237.

<sup>8</sup> In his English translation (1947), p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> *Le Figaro* (19 December 1886).

Renan, Guy de Maupassant, Catulle Mendès, Jules Simon, Hippolyte Taine and Emile Zola.

The list even included the great master of Romanticism, Victor Hugo and the internationally famous Henrik Ibsen.<sup>10</sup>

Their applause came from the recognition that Sacher-Masoch's works, like their own, probed into the problems of contemporary society, in the name of truth and progress. Jules Simon praised Sacher-Masoch because, in his view, his talent was 'the blessed tool of all forms of progress'. Although it may sound ironic today, Emile Zola predicted the lasting honour of his name: 'If one is a genius and tells his age the truth, immortality will remain alive'. Ernest Renan stressed that Sacher-Masoch's periodicals (*Auf der Höhe*) were important because their presentation of truth and goodness could 'contribute to the most important tasks of our age'. Victor Hugo saw a true artist in him, offering: 'My congratulations on the jubilee, my blessings to the poet!'<sup>11</sup>

Sacher-Masoch was introduced to France as 'l'un des chefs de l'école réaliste moderne'.<sup>12</sup> He was also described as 'le chef de l'école naturaliste en Allemagne'.<sup>13</sup> His reputation had been firmly established in France since 1872, when the translation of his short

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<sup>10</sup> Other admirers whom we find in the journal are : Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Albert de Broglie, Camille Flammarion, Charles-François Gounod, Ernest Legouvé, Alfred Mézières, Frédéric Mistral, le duc d'Aumale, Henri d'Orléans, Louis Pasteur, Sully-Prudhomme, Henry de Rochefort, Camille Saint-Saëns. See *Auf der Höhe* (January, 1883), ed. by Sacher-Masoch, pp. 315–317.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 309, p. 315 and p. 317. Translations of the quotations from this journal are mine, with the generous assistance of Vasuki Shanmuganathan and Jun Fukumoto. See also the Appendix.

<sup>12</sup> Th. Bentzon, 'Sacher-Masoch, sa vie et ses œuvres', in Sacher-Masoch, *Le Legs de Caïn: Nouveaux récits galiciens*, trans. by Bentzon (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1876), p. 4. The article first appeared as 'Un romancier galicien: Sacher-Masoch', *Revue des deux Mondes* (15 December 1875), pp. 816–837.

<sup>13</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Juifs et russes. Idylles*, trans. by Auguste Lavallé (Verviers: Bibliothèque Gilon, ca. 1880), p. 7.

story *Don Juan de Kolomea* appeared in the *Revue des deux mondes*.<sup>14</sup> By 1892, various journals, such as the *Revue des deux mondes*, the *Revue bleue* and *Le Gaulois*, had begun regularly to translate his texts, from fictions to memoirs. Most of them were immediately collected and printed and reprinted, in book form.<sup>15</sup> In the process, there seemed to be a kind of tacit agreement not to disgrace the foreign writer who had acquired a reputation in France as a respectable member of the prominent positivist camp. The first volume of his well-received, incomplete, epic cycle *Le legs de Cain* was published by Hachette in 1874, including *Don Juan de Kolomea*. In this epic, Sacher-Masoch planned to present ‘des chapitres d’une histoire naturelle de l’homme, traitée à un point de vue empirique et réaliste’, grouped under six themes: ‘l’amour, la propriété, l’état, la guerre, le travail, [et] la mort’.<sup>16</sup>

The French translation, however, excluded two stories from the original: the masochistic tale of *La Vénus à la fourrure* and *L’Amour de Platon*, the story of an idealistic spiritual bond between men. It is plausible that these stories were deliberately omitted because of their

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<sup>14</sup> *Revue des deux Mondes* (1 October, 1872), pp. 709–740.

<sup>15</sup> For more details regarding Sacher-Masoch’s French translations, see the Bibliography written by Jean-Paul Corsetti in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *La Pêcheuse d’âme* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1991), pp. 369–376, and for information on his original German texts, see the Bibliography in Michael Farin’s *Leopold von Sacher-Masoch: Materialien zu Leben und Werk* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1987), pp. 370–409. In France, Sacher-Masoch’s texts are fairly well liked even today; a new collection of his works has recently been published—Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Écrits autobiographiques et autres textes*, trans. by Michel-François Demet (Paris: Léo Scheer, 2004). This collection includes retranslated autobiographical articles, originally published in *Le Gaulois* in 1887, as well as other short stories and unpublished archives. In addition, from 9th to 13th October 2006, there was a series of radio programmes on sado-masochism in French Culture, with a reference to Sacher-Masoch. See Pierre Chevalier, ‘Sur les docks: Le corps poussé à bout’ ([http://www.radiofrance.fr/chaines/france-culture2/emissions/sur\\_docks/fiche.php?diffusion\\_id=45543](http://www.radiofrance.fr/chaines/france-culture2/emissions/sur_docks/fiche.php?diffusion_id=45543) [accessed 10/10/2006]).

<sup>16</sup> An anonymous introductory note attached to Sacher-Masoch, ‘Don Juan de Kolomea’, *Revue des deux Mondes* (1 October 1872), 707–708.



problematic representations of sexuality. It was only in 1902 that *La Vénus à la fourrure* was translated into French (and English) for the first time, with *L'Amour de Platon* being translated as recently as 1991.<sup>17</sup>

The distinguishing feature of Sacher-Masoch's narratives was considered to be his realistic and sympathetic depictions of oppressed minorities—the Jews and the Slavs—at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This was one of the reasons for his appeal to French intellectuals such as Henry de Rochefort, who praised the altruism manifested in Sacher-Masoch's texts: 'the primary obligation of him, who strives for the freedom of others, is to renounce himself for others'.<sup>18</sup> According to Adam J. Freudenheim, Sacher-Masoch's uniqueness among contemporary writers about the Jews lies in his depictions of the Jewish people and their lives, which are both realistic and idealistic: 'Sacher-Masoch was most interested in the position of individual Jews within their own community, not with Jews in a larger gentile society'; and 'his Jewish figures emerge as true-to-life, if somewhat idealized, people'.<sup>19</sup> The historical and political context is there in his tales, though briefly sketched; but the outcome of his 'realist' perspective is the reduction of the human history of violence and suffering to the private sphere of conflict between couples of submissive men and

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<sup>17</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *La vénus à la fourrure. Roman sur la flagellation*, trans. by Ledos de Beaufort (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1902) ; *L'Amour de Platon: Roman*, trans. by Jean-François Boutout (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1991). The latter has never been translated into English.

<sup>18</sup> *Auf der Höhe* (January, 1883), p. 316.

<sup>19</sup> Adam J. Freudenheim, 'Sympathetic Portrayals of Jews in Nineteenth-Century German Literature: The Cases of Wilhelm Raabe, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch', in *Harvard Judaica Collection Student Research Papers; no.1* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard College Library, 1996), p. 26 and p. 36.

domineering women. So a critic such as Aleksandr Etkind contends that ‘Masoch needed the context of Russian sectarianism for a literary justification of his own perversion’.<sup>20</sup> Whatever he wrote, the forms of masochistic fantasy were always present; and much before the French translation of *La Vénus à la fourrure* published in 1902, Sacher-Masoch’s fascination with the dominatrix was already well-known in France. In 1875, in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, it was acknowledged that his heroine was always ‘la même Dalila impérieuse et triomphante, ce vampire aux cheveux d’or qui suce le sang des cœurs et qui pose le pied sur un homme désarmé par la magie de son baiser’.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, the stories collected in the epic cycle *Le legs de Cain* (including *La Vénus à la fourrure*) are masochistic romances set against the contemporary backdrop of Kolomyia, in Galicia: ‘Ce théâtre étroit suffit au déploiement de toutes les passions humaines’.<sup>22</sup> For instance, *La Hasara Raba*, included in the second volume of *Le legs de Cain*, is one of the most celebrated stories with a Jewish setting in the ‘realist’ mode. One of the highlights is a masochistic episode between Pennina, a tyrannical rich Jewish merchant and her submissive husband Jehuda, a sickly scholar of the Kabbalah and Talmud. Pennina asks Kalinoski, a cruel Polish aristocrat who terrorises the Jews, to whip Jehuda in order to ‘cure’ him of his

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<sup>20</sup> Cit. in Michael C. Finke, ‘Sacher-Masoch, Turgenev, and Other Russians’, in *One Hundred Years of Masochism: Literary Texts, Social and Cultural Contexts*, ed. by Finke and C. Niekerk (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), p. 121.

<sup>21</sup> Bentzon, ‘Sacher-Masoch, sa vie et ses œuvres’, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

effeminacy and his daydreaming: ‘La houssine de Kalinoski fit merveilles’.<sup>23</sup> The pale husband is reborn as a new man, capable of providing her with both wealth and a baby: the motif of the eternal triangle and rebirth, which, as noted below, is a recurrent feature of Sacher Masoch’s imagination, best exemplified in the three protagonists (the masochist, the dominatrix and ‘the Greek’) in *La Vénus à la fourrure*.

Historical fact is another excuse for the author to explore his masochism. Sacher-Masoch’s first scholarly book as an historian, *L’Insurrection de Gand sous l’empereur Charles Quint* (1856), deals with the figure of Charles V. Yet according to Georges-Paul Villa, its academic argument is often hindered by Sacher-Masoch’s self-indulgent illustrations of the cruelty of Charles V’s sister, Maria of Austria.<sup>24</sup> When Sacher-Masoch writes about the eighteenth century philosopher of the Enlightenment, Diderot, in *Diderot à Saint-Pétersbourg*, his aim is to portray Diderot as a masochistic character, in a parody of the well-known relationship between the philosopher and his patroness, Catherine the Great of Russia.<sup>25</sup> Sacher-Masoch’s story tells that Diderot was so infatuated with her despotic beauty that he disguised himself as a monkey to amuse her, at the risk of losing his life to his rival, a Russian scientist armed with whip and knife, who attempted to stuff the animal.

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<sup>23</sup> Sacher-Masoch, ‘La Hasara Raba’, in Sacher-Masoch, *Le Legs de Caïn: Nouveaux récits galiciens*, p. 256.

<sup>24</sup> See Georges-Paul Villa, ‘Biographie’, in *Sacher-Masoch, Contes et romans*, ed. by Georges-Paul Villa, 3 vols (Paris: Tchou, 1967), I, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *L’Esthétique de la laideur: Diderot à Pétersbourg*, trans. by G.-P. Villa (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967); *Écrits autobiographiques et autres textes* (including *L’Amour de Platon* and *Diderot à Saint-Pétersbourg*).

Another imperious female figure in history used for Sacher-Masoch's (and equally Tolstoy's) artistic inspiration is one of the Doukhobor leaders, Luker'ia (or Lukeria, reigning from 1864 to 1886).<sup>26</sup> Doukhobor was the name of an active pacifist sect of Russian Christians who settled in Ukraine and parts of Russia (the Crimea) in the late nineteenth century. The group was characterised by their rejection of the contemporary patriarchal Church and the government, their setting up of a person as a living incarnation of God, their nomadic and autonomous ways of life and their nature worship, which included forms of sexual behaviour and a rejection of marriage which conservative Christians would call promiscuous. They became widely known in Europe thanks to their distinctive female leader Luker'ia, who imposed the hand of justice and took harsh measures against wife-beaters in particular, but still displayed tender maternal care. Her picture shows her as a stout Slavic woman with a stern expression.<sup>27</sup> Besides embodying the Doukhobors' defiant attitudes to contemporary authorities, Luker'ia is seen as the model of the heroines in Sacher-Masoch's novels, such as Mardona in *La Mère de Dieu* and Dragomira in *La Pêcheuse d'âmes*, who both act as priestess in a murderous cult.<sup>28</sup> Thus the appearance of realism offers Sacher-Masoch a justification for depicting people who masochistically declare their total

<sup>26</sup> See Daniel Rancour-Laferrrière, 'Lev Tolstoy's Moral Masochism in the Late 1880s', in *One Hundred Years of Masochism*, pp. 155–170.

<sup>27</sup> See Koozma J. Tarasoff, *A Pictorial History of the Doukhobors* (Saskatoon: Prairie Books Department, Western Producer, 1969), p. 45. See also George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: Carleton University, 1977), and regarding Luker'ia, see in particular pp. 69–81; Joseph Elkinton, *The Doukhobors: Their History in Russia. Their Migration to Canada* (Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1903).

<sup>28</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *La Mère de Dieu* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1991[1886]), and *La Pêcheuse d'âmes* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1991[1889]).

submission to the absolute authority of woman.

Mixing into his fantasies historical accounts of oppression, tyranny, misery and sacrifice, Sacher-Masoch's narrative certainly enjoys illustrating scenes of the masochistic glorification of pain and the pleasure of being reborn through suffering and humiliation. This drawing together of apparently opposed categories (in essence, a rather superficial 'realist' mode and a quaint Gothic tone) is an important factor in his constructions of masochism. In masochism, desire and death—two elements which are not supposed to meet—unite to create a pleasurable sense of vertigo. Deleuze observes that the pleasure and danger of this union is amplified in Sacher-Masoch's writing by techniques such as disavowal, suspense and fetishism. In the following sections, I refer to the sensations of pain and pleasure in the pathological cases of masochism examined by Freud and other theorists in the psychological domain, to compare them with the imagination and anticipation of pain and pleasure expressed in Sacher-Masoch's fictions.

***–A World of Ambiguity: the Real and the Fantastic –***

Psychologists agree that, in masochism, the reality of pain is not the masochist's primary aim: pain can produce pleasure only when it exists as a source of anticipation and suspense in a fantasy. In fact, Krafft-Ebing already discovered in his case histories that real physical pain

caused his masochistic patients only disappointment or disgust: 'For the masochist the principal thing is subjection to the woman; the punishment is only the expression of this relation [...] for him the act has only a symbolic value'.<sup>29</sup>

A Freudian psychologist, Theodor Reik, makes a comparable observation in his book *Masochism in Modern Man*. Postulating that 'man is a masochistic animal', Reik's study focuses on the symbolic aspect of masochism ('moral masochism' in Freud's terminology) and the distinctive attitudes of the masochist towards reality.<sup>30</sup> He stresses the crucial role of fantasy and suspense in the masochistic form of pleasure and pain and concludes that the gratification of pleasure through a painful event is less important for the masochist than the experience of suspense and that the real aim of masochism is 'to prolong the suspense' between expectation and outcome for as long as possible.<sup>31</sup>

Masochism was born as a male sexual perversion, because women were traditionally considered to be born submissive, i.e. masochistic. In 'The Economic Problem of Masochism (1924)', Freud simply confirms that the passivity and femininity of the masochist are 'most accessible to our observation and least problematical', because, he assumes, man is naturally the dominant sex and woman the subordinated, while the (male) masochist's perversity lies in

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<sup>29</sup> Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct, A Medico-legal Study. Authorized Translation of the Seventh Enlarged and Revised German Edition by C. G. Chaddock*, p. 99.

<sup>30</sup> Theodor Reik, 'Masochism in Modern Man', in *Of Love and Lust: On the Psychoanalysis of Romantic and Sexual Emotions* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 176. See Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', where Freud categorises masochism into three types (erotogenic, feminine and moral).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

his identification with passive feminine qualities and this causes him a sense of guilt.<sup>32</sup> My thesis concerns male masochism, but, it is interesting to note, this Freudian prejudice about the link between female personality and masochism has been challenged and it is no longer the gender of the afflicted, but the faculty of imagining a certain type of suspense story that is found at the heart of masochism. Maria Marcus in *A Taste for Pain: On Masochism and Female Sexuality* and Anita Phillips in *A Defence of Masochism* both write about masochism from their own masochistic inclinations and experiences, in order to seek a new theoretical explanation, unlike the prevalent psychological accounts of female masochism as a ‘natural’ part of female identity. As a feminist scholar, Marcus refuses to admit that women are born masochistic, claiming that they have been invited to define themselves as the subordinate sex to prevent them from engaging in society as the equals of men. Caught between her own active role as a feminist scholar in society and her preference for passivity in the private sphere, she finds in her own masochistic pleasures something that, interestingly enough, lessens the difference between female and male masochism. She insists that the source of her masochism exists only in imagination: ‘I cannot use reality until it is sufficiently distant from

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<sup>32</sup> Freud, ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’, p. 416. On the classic Freudian argument on female masochism, see for example, Janet Sayers, *Mothering Psychoanalysis: Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991); Nancy J. Holland, ‘What Gilles Deleuze Has to Say to Battered Women’, *Philosophy and Literature*, 17 (1993), 16–25; and Susanne Heine, ‘Female Masochism and the Theology of the Cross’, *Word and World*, XV: 3 (1995). Holland questions an idea based on the sadomasochist view that battered women consent to be victims and argues that Deleuze’s separation of masochism from sadism would help to reassess the phenomena of battered women.

me no longer to appear as reality, and I can persuade myself that it is fantasy'.<sup>33</sup> Neither the fact of being a woman nor even having an inclination to passivity is responsible for her masochistic pleasure; it is based on the creation of a fantasy in which the elements of role play, a controlled degree of pain and a slow, tense tempo 'in spaces in between, in pauses, in waiting times during foreplay' are the determining factors.<sup>34</sup> Thus she separates the ontological nature of femininity from masochism and identifies some of the technical forms responsible for generating masochistic sensations. Similarly, Phillips's book attacks Freudian psychoanalytical arguments on masochism as an expression of females' sexual and mental nature as a passive victim, seeing it instead 'as a force in cultural life'.<sup>35</sup> She contends that masochism is a certain form of playful fantasy, in which the masochist in the fantasised scenario takes active control in the handling of suffering.

Although the conventional Freudian psychoanalytical understanding of masochism was based on a sexist prejudice towards gender identities, Freud in fact implies that human sexuality and mentality presuppose masochism, in its active power to alter reality into a fantasy of pain and pleasure. It is evident that, for Freud, masochism remains a compelling mystery in human nature and, explicitly and implicitly, he returns to the issue throughout his work. His first work, *Studies on Hysteria* (1893–1895), examines the puzzle of hysterical

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<sup>33</sup> Maria Marcus, *A Taste for Pain: On Masochism and Female Sexuality*, trans. by Joan Tate (London: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150. Part III of this thesis deals with theatricality in masochism, in relation to the representation of the suffering of hysterical women in fin-de-siècle literature.

<sup>35</sup> Anita Phillips, *A Defence of Masochism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 135.



patients' relentless desire to recall their troubled memories and create a private theatre of suffering and agitation by and for themselves (the masochistic aspect innate in the issue of hysteria will be discussed in Chapter 7, below).<sup>36</sup>

Then, in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)', Freud extends his investigation of the masochistic tendency to the whole human psychology, asking whether the human mind is after all governed by the pleasure principle—whether or not we always seek pleasure. Taking a child's *fort-da* game, a repetition of unpleasant experiences in the form of losing and recovering something dear, Freud observes that the pleasure principle dominates even this apparently painful activity, because by repeating the experience of loss (pain) and gain, the child's predominant instinct for mastery (sadism) is secretly gratified. Due to his simplistic reduction of sadism to being active and masochism to being passive, Freud, in mentioning the alteration of a painful reality into a pleasant illusion of gaining power, fails to see that it belongs to masochistic passive aggressiveness, rather than sadism.

Moreover, in this text, Freud implies that the neurotic compulsion to repeat painful experiences is not really an exceptional pathological case, but an example of the human psyche seen from the perspective of pleasure and pain. He eventually proposes, though with reluctance, that it is not the sadistic impulse of mastery but the masochistic instinct of self-destruction that lies deep beneath human psychology. The hypothesis which Freud

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<sup>36</sup> Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. by James Strachey (Basic Books, 2000).

unwillingly reaches is that the compulsion stems from the fact that all existence is governed by the death instinct, which he deems the fundamental function in organisms.<sup>37</sup> The aim of the death instinct is to recover the initial inorganic and serene state of an organism, i.e. death, which alters the pleasure principle from something fundamental into probably a mere ‘tendency’.<sup>38</sup> The compulsion to repeat is this ‘vacillating rhythm’ between the dominant death instinct and the sexual (or life) instinct, whose function is now reduced to the one that disturbs an organism’s serenity, hinders its innate destructive force and prolongs its journey.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, when the release of this tension occurs, we feel pleasure. The same theme is again dealt with in ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’, in which Freud insists more clearly that masochism is a pure manifestation of the domination of the death instinct, although he carefully avoids reminding the reader of his previous argument regarding the correlation between the tension and the feelings of pain and pleasure which ordinary people experience in ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’.

Leo Bersani’s re-reading of Freud in *The Freudian Body* highlights the role of the tension created by the two opposing forces in Freud’s thought and argues that it displays Freud’s own dilemma between fantasy and reality: what his theory takes him to and what his ambition wants to establish as a respectable scientist whose study is supposed to serve the

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<sup>37</sup> He calls death instincts ‘some demoniac force’ (p. 307) and reiterates that the idea is a mere scientific speculation which he hesitates to believe in. See Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, in *On Metapsychology*, pp. 332–333.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 336.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 313.

good of society as well as normalising sexual desires. Bersani shows that Freud's creativity itself looks masochistic, since Freud repeatedly revised his 'scientific' texts to add further speculations which increasingly revealed the uncertainty, confusions and hesitations of the author. This frustrating ambiguity created by Freud in his texts proves not only his analytical theory of sexuality but also the fact that his own literary inspiration lies in 'the pleasurable unpleasurable tension' and suggests that human sexuality and creativity are 'ontologically grounded in masochism'.<sup>40</sup> Yet Bersani argues, Freud could not allow himself to admit the 'unnoticed, and certainly unwanted, conclusion' that the perversity of masochism is the source of our existence.<sup>41</sup>

By inverting Freud's formulas concerning the pleasure principle and emphasising the essential role of the compulsion to repeat, Deleuze also argues that Freud's idea of the pleasure principle includes masochism, contrary to Freud's own feelings of resistance and hesitation. Deleuze states that Freud's confusion lies in his mistaking pain as the aim of masochism, when pain is a mere '*effet*'.<sup>42</sup> Deleuze first claims the superiority of repetition

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<sup>40</sup> Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 34 and p. 39.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 37. Bersani extends the thesis to associate masochistic, intensive repetition with the creative process of art, where the argument, to me, appears less conclusive due to his failure to differentiate the aesthetics of sadism and of masochism and his neglect of the singularities of Sacher-Masoch's art. For instance, it can be argued that he fails to distinguish the sadistic encyclopaedic repetition in Pasolini's film *Salô* from the masochistic use of violence as a tableau, 'an arresting movement' (p. 73) in Assyrian art. It seems a pure coincidence that Deleuze and Bersani reach similar conclusions in the same period, as Bersani does not mention Deleuze's analysis of the pleasure principle and masochism. Bersani expresses elsewhere his general disagreement with Deleuze's analysis of masochism, considering that it 'politically sentimentalizes masochism'. Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 195, n. 25.

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 105.

over the pleasure principle, pointing out that Freud has indeed already suggested it in the idea of 'binding'.<sup>43</sup> This means that feelings can be acutely felt as pleasurable or unpleasant only through the act of repetition (binding); otherwise, they are usually scattered and remain too vague to be felt. Hence, Deleuze states, 'C'est la liaison qui rend possible le plaisir, comme principe, ou qui fonde le principe de plaisir'.<sup>44</sup> Then, explaining the mechanism of repetition, Deleuze asserts that the domination of the sexual instinct (Eros), whose aim lies in accumulating excitations, initiates repetition and makes pleasure possible in the form of discharge. While Freud, in his speculation about the compulsion to repeat, came to the conclusion that the death instinct (Thanatos) was dominant, Deleuze reduces Thanatos to the power that accompanies Eros. Conflicting tension can occur only when Eros is confronted with an opposing force, that is, Thanatos. Thus, Thanatos inevitably and regressively accompanies Eros and works to eliminate the binding function of Eros. Further, Deleuze maintains that the aim of the masochist, like anyone else, is not pain but pleasure; however, the nature of masochistic repetition inevitably induces pain at the moment of gratification. Just as Freud speculates that the tension of repetition is not 'an increase or decrease of a quantity' but 'a qualitative one',<sup>45</sup> so Deleuze states that the quality of repetition in masochism is 'suspens et figeage qualificatifs', in which the masochist experiences both

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<sup>43</sup> See Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p. 276 and pp. 306–307.

<sup>44</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 98.

<sup>45</sup> Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', p. 414.

pleasure and pain in the form of waiting.<sup>46</sup> Considering the pathological condition of masochism from the pessimistic but definite perspective that an unpleasant event ultimately awaits a masochist, Deleuze argues that masochism is the state of waiting in suspense between pleasure, which the masochist wants, and pain, which he anticipates: 'L'angoisse masochiste prend ici la double détermination d'attendre infiniment le plaisir, mais en s'attendant intensément à la douleur'.<sup>47</sup> For this reason, the masochist experiences pleasure as something which is anticipated but postponed and pain as something which is both anticipated and necessary for the advent of pleasure. At the time of discharge, pain is left as the residual effect.

The aspect of suspense and fantasy in masochism is certainly important in Deleuze's analysis of masochism, as he re-emphasises by discussing what Freud calls the process of desexualisation and resexualisation. Freud mentions this idea in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' with respect to the conflicting roles of the super-ego and the ego in moral masochism. He says that ordinary people desexualise the Oedipus complex in order to transform it into something socially acceptable, in this case, the form of conscience and a sense of morality, which Freud calls the super-ego. Yet the pathology of the masochist (male) is such, Freud contends, that his ego regressively resexualises the Oedipus complex and this

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<sup>46</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 103.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

causes a conflict between the super-ego and the ego and consequently gives him masochistic pleasure and pain.<sup>48</sup> Against this hypothesis, Deleuze shifts the focus of the peculiarity of masochism to something else: its automated repetition. The important key in masochism is the fact that the aim of repetition is no longer pleasure, but the act of repeating in itself. And the characteristic of this masochistic repetition is to desexualise Eros, which takes the new form of idealisation, i.e. the abhorrence of sexual intercourse and fetishism, making the repetition autonomous, automatic and independent of the initial purpose of obtaining pleasure. This automation is perceived as unpleasure and it simultaneously resexualises all other human passions, 'l'argent, la propriété, l'État', the themes pursued in Sacher-Masoch's texts.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, this process is perceived to be as pleasurable as if it had proceeded from unpleasure. In this way, Deleuze explains the nature of masochistic erotic fantasy and, to conclude, repeats that pain in masochism is merely an effect and that what causes masochistic pleasure (and pain) is the mechanism of creating a perpetual oscillation between two opposing states in a fantasising situation.

To sum up, in pathological conditions of masochism, from the theoretical perspective, it has been stressed that masochism is not so much about a real experience of pain as about a psychological one, whose importance lies in the creation of repetition and its intensification in

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<sup>48</sup> Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', p. 424.

<sup>49</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 102.

imagination. Since reality is disavowed by imagination, the masochist seeks a dreamlike condition and this is what is found by Deleuze in Sacher-Masoch's literary works. It is the atmosphere 'd'étouffement et de suspens' that forms the essential framework of his art of imagination.<sup>50</sup> Such atmospheric narrative is fundamentally based on setting up the oscillation between reality and fantasy, which works to evoke feelings of anxiety intensified in the text.

As pain is a symbolic prerequisite of masochistic pleasure, Sacher-Masoch's stories wait, as 'occult (hidden)' stories—'tout est déjà fait'—for a promised tragedy to be disclosed.<sup>51</sup> Often, the centre of his novels is a manuscript or a story which will reveal something sinister and painful, from which the masochist experiences pleasure in the form of waiting for the hidden truth. This technique is not, however, Sacher-Masoch's peculiarity, but common in the literary practice of the time. According to Jack Zipes, in his study of the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales, the enchanted forest is one of the characteristic images of German Romanticism which initiates the protagonists, with the reader, to their unreal worlds: 'The forest *allows* for enchantment and disenchantment, for it is the place where society's conventions no longer hold true'.<sup>52</sup> In his uneasy journey through the forest, the Romantic hero encounters the essential German heritage; from it he finds something new and he comes

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>52</sup> Jack Zipes, 'The Enchanted Forest of the Brothers Grimm: New Modes of Approaching the Grimm's Fairy Tales', *Germanic Review*, 62:2 (1987), 66–74 (p. 67).

out of the forest a man re-born.

Despite his reputation as a realist, Sacher-Masoch owes much of his artistic gift to the German Romantic tradition, not to mention his passion for Goethe. He likes to use the image of the natural environment, a forest or a meadow, as an idyllic place where social order and conventions are reversed and a hero confronts ordeals inflicted on him by the dominant woman of his fantasies. In *La Vénus à la fourrure*, Wanda first appears before Séverin in ‘le jardin, ce petit parc sauvage’ (*Vénus*, p. 128), like a ghostly apparition and he flees from the place in delirium, but seized by ‘une peur sans nom’ (p. 129). The garden’s wildness and Séverin’s hesitation and fascination imply that it is the moment of initiation into a masochistic imaginary world of horror and desire.

Likewise, in ‘Frinko Balaban’, in the first volume of Sacher-Masoch’s *Le Legs de Caïn*, the storm in the field signals the transition to a mysterious world. The narrative begins with a relatively objective description of the snowy silent fields of Galicia, but subtle misgivings arise about what may befall, such as a comparison of the field with a mysteriously calm sea, ‘la mer calme et sereine’ and of its silence with the silent approach of death: ‘La couleur aussi de la plaine sans bornes est plus sombre, et son langage plus morne, plus menaçant; c’est la nature implacable qui s’y montre sans voiles, et la mort y semble plus près



de vous'.<sup>53</sup> The story slowly moves from a realistic world into an unknown realm idealised in a masochistic form. In this fantastic realm, coldness, nature and femininity are identified, and the narrative is dominated by the fascination and suffering they hold for men. The union of the three elements is eventually crystallised at the end of the story in the cold, silent and cruel figure of the heroine, Catherine. The narrator, both fascinated and anxious in this setting, ventures by sleigh into this 'solitude absolue, la mort, le silence', to find himself and his companion at the mercy of a fierce storm.<sup>54</sup> All, including themselves, are frozen and suspended in the ice, as he says, 'Tout se gèle. Les pensées se suspendent en glaçons sous le crâne, l'âme se fige' and invokes the mythic image of 'des mammouths monstrueux y gisent intacts depuis des millions d'années'.<sup>55</sup> This is the moment when they enter into a space where time and space are held in suspension; there the narrator meets the protagonist Balaban and his tragic love Catherine.

The contrast between reality and fantasy is further heightened by the ambiguous characters. Balaban is respected in the village as a brave and honourable ex-soldier, but in his confession, whose revelation forms the central part of the story, it is gradually revealed that the dignified mask in society hides the face of a humiliated and tormented martyr, whose sole wish is to 'renoncer, souffrir, se taire', languishing in an unrequited love for Catherine.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Sacher-Masoch, 'Frinko Balaban', in *Le Legs de Caïn: Contes galiciens*, p. 61.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 67–68.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

Catherine is also a contradictory character: pretending to be a noble aristocrat, she was born a peasant and, as Balaban says, is a selfish and heartless woman who deserted him to marry an aristocrat and then used her husband's power to send him to far-off battlefields because she wished him dead. The gradual process of disclosing these secrets behind their respectable social masks composes a compelling literary device, which provokes and intensifies the feelings of shock and excitement in the text. The reader eventually learns that the image of the frozen mammoths evoked in the beginning of the story allude to Balaban's secret self-sacrificial wish to be frozen to death in Catherine's coldness.

The hero's hidden masochism behind the respectable mask is similarly found in Sacher-Masoch's contemporary French Decadent texts; and an example of these which should be mentioned here is the dandy Brassard created by Barbey d'Aurevilly in 'Le Rideau cramoisi', in the collection of stories entitled *Les Diaboliques*. This one is about the contrast between the impassive mask of an ex-soldier dandy which Brassard wears in public and his true colours, his timidity, anxiety and distress revealed in the narrative, as the story ends: 'ce brillant vicomte de Brassard, la fleur non *des pois*, mais des plus fiers pavots rouges du dandysme, le buveur grandiose de *claret*, à la manière anglaise, fût comme un autre, un homme plus profond qu'il ne paraissait'.<sup>57</sup> The cause of his suffering is his consuming

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<sup>57</sup> Jules-Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly, 'Le Rideau cramoisi', in *Les Diaboliques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1967 [1874]), p. 95.

passion for the domineering heroine, Alberte, who also exhibits contradictory characteristics. She appears well-educated and decent, but she secretly seduces Brassard while they are dining together with emotive and voluptuous movements of her hand under the table, unseen by her parents. The torments and desires, deriving from the extended period of waiting are constantly evident in Brassard's account: 'je l'attendais! Tels étaient les misérables exercices auxquels elle m'avait condamné! Certes, je sais bien que les femmes nous font tous plus ou moins valeter, mais dans ces proportions-là!!'.<sup>58</sup> Even after their sexual consummation, his suffering in the form of waiting does not cease, but rather is enhanced through the fear of their risky secret affair being revealed. As promised, the catastrophe comes with her sudden death in his bed, leaving Brassard in sheer horror, confusion and panic.

What happens between Brassard and Alberte lies in their sense of secret conspiracy, a contrast to their social relationship in reality, and Barbey uses the red curtain in Alberte's house to indicate the subtle boundary between the real and the fantastic. Moreover, a dreamlike setting, similar to Sacher-Masoch's, is also employed at first to introduce the fantasy in the text. Brassard's narrative is given in the middle of an autumn night whose darkness, drowsiness and dream-filled atmosphere is generated by these words: 'mystère de ces villes endormies', 'dans une ville de province endormie [...]. L'hôtel sommeillait, comme

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

nous. Rien n'y trahissait la vie. [...] l'air de dormir' and so on.<sup>59</sup> Through the enchanted night, the listener to the story, with the reader, is invited to share and fantasise a masochistic scenario experienced and now recounted by Brassard. This is exactly the literary technique that Sacher-Masoch also liked to use in his stories.

I have detailed Barbey's story, because Deleuze treats the stories included in *Les Diaboliques* from the perspective of suspense in his later book, co-written with Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980). In this book, Deleuze and Guattari collect examples, which they call 'plateaus', which show the dynamic processes of 'becoming' beyond a fixed identification or categorisation.<sup>60</sup> They insist that the world is not divided into things simply opposed to other things but is instead constructed of active, potential and complex 'plateaus' which are 'always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end'.<sup>61</sup> They pick up the masochist's experience of pleasure and pain as one of these 'plateaus', because the masochist does not aim to end pleasure by being punished, but to continuously suspend the situation of waiting for an end, whereby he gains suffering and pleasure at once. Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari speak of suspense novels as other examples of 'plateaus' and mention *Les Diaboliques*. They say, 'Barbey has an evident fondness for body posture, in other words, states of the body when it is surprised by something that just

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 54 and p. 55.

<sup>60</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 21.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

happened'.<sup>62</sup> This means that Barbey's text is characterised by moments of being suspended, in a posture, where everything is potential but nothing is finished. They say that the sense of suspense in *Les Diaboliques* can be found in the mystery or secret which each story includes. Each story promises readers that it is going to tell the truth but ends in mystery, so that readers are suspended between a secret and its discovery, an unknown and a known. Deleuze and Guattari say that *Les Diaboliques* is related neither to the past (secrecy) nor the future (discovery), but to a sense of suspense without fixed ending which leaves the reader of *Les Diaboliques* hanging between a craving to know the truth and the impossibility of knowing it. This means that *Les Diaboliques*, which deals with masochistic relationships between characters, enhances an atmosphere propitious for the masochistic fantasy which is characterised as suspense. Thereby, as Deleuze says elsewhere, 'l'art du suspens nous met toujours du côté de la victime, nous force à nous identifier à la victime'.<sup>63</sup> The text induces readers to experience a mixture of contradictory feelings, of pleasure and pain together, as the masochist feels through a sense of suspense.

Ill-fated events which take place later in the stories cast their shadows on the descriptions of the natural landscape in masochistic fantastic stories, accumulating a sense of anxiety, anticipation and longing. Passing with the protagonists through the passageway

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>63</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 31.

between reality and fantasy, the reader is taken into the phantasmagorical world of suspense, where the nature of the participants oscillates ambiguously between two extremes, which the next section explores further.

**– *Ambiguity and the Humiliated Father* –**

In Sacher-Masoch's stories, there is the characteristically ambiguous oscillation between two opposites, which is further intensified in the destabilisation of the gender roles of the participants: men appear effeminate and passive; women, powerful and aggressive. Deleuze elaborates this ambiguity as a strategy of the masochist who wishes to exclude patriarchal authority from his fantasy and identify himself with the phantasmagorical image of the emancipated mother (the fetish) to be reborn as an androgynous new man.

The manipulation of a gender identity suspended between masculinity and femininity is one of the stimulants to intense excitement and anxiety in Sacher-Masoch's imagination. This is most explicitly illustrated in *L'Amour de Platon*. The hero Henryk is a self-styled Platonist, who devotes himself to chastity and repels women, but in the name of the quest of the Ideal, he is involved in a delirious affair with the mysterious androgyne, Anatole. He pretends to be ignorant of the fact that Anatole is actually Countess Nadeshda in disguise and chooses to succumb to 'cette pénombre féérique' in order to increase his acute perplexity over the apparent ambiguity of Anatole's identity, which sways between dream and reality,

masculinity and femininity and eroticism and spirituality.<sup>64</sup> The tension ends with painful disappointment and despair when Anatole is revealed as an ordinary woman, demanding marriage. As Chapter 6 below observes, the same type of quest for Love by a 'Platonist' is present in Péladan's fictions, in particular in the figure of Nébo, his project to create a spiritual bond with the androgynous heroine, Paule, and his eventual disillusion.

Sacher-Masoch's taste for mystery, suspense and disguise is not merely a literary device, but a personal predilection. He was known for his passion for the theatre and for his reckless involvement with anonymous correspondents. One of them was his first wife (Aurora Rümelin), who approached him calling herself Wanda, after the heroine of *La Vénus à la fourrure*. His alleged affair with Ludwig II of Bavaria also indicates his taste for fantasy and suspense in the form of disguise. In *Le Figaro*, in December 1886, he confessed this was an 'incroyable aventure'.<sup>65</sup> In this account, Sacher-Masoch spoke of his involvement with an unknown person who called him/herself 'Anatole', after the androgyne in *L'Amour de Platon*. He continued to meet Anatole in designated hotel rooms for a year, always blindfolded at Anatole's command and refusing to admit that Anatole was unequivocally a man. Sacher-Masoch's response to this titillating game of hiding and disclosing is a feeling of intense pleasure, as is obvious from the sensual language he uses to describe it. He told his

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<sup>64</sup> Sacher-Masoch, *L'Amour de Platon*, p. 60.

<sup>65</sup> *Le Figaro*, 19 December 1886. The details of this incident told by Wanda (Aurora Rümelin) in her autobiography are often different from those by Sacher-Masoch in *Le Figaro*. See Wanda de Sacher-Masoch, *Confession de ma vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989 [1907]), pp. 141–159.

editor that he felt ‘captive et hypnotisé’ and Anatole’s voice was ‘admirablement timbrée et particulièrement mélodieuse [...] la voix d’or’. However, this account has never been verified and the details differ from that told by his first wife, Wanda, in her biography of Sacher-Masoch.

The identity of the masochist himself is also ambiguous, suspended between the active and the passive. Reik calls this ambiguity in masochism the ‘demonstrative’ element, which both conceals and discloses a sense of power. Reik observes that the masochist wears the mask of a passive victim, to hide his real expression ‘of revenge, of rebellion and of triumph’.<sup>66</sup> Behind his cry of agony, the masochist is ‘laughing’ because he is secretly proud of his power to disturb others with his exhibition of suffering and gratified by it.<sup>67</sup>

Reik’s observation is important because it marks a shift in the way in which Freudian psychologists have traditionally viewed masochism as simply passive, therefore feminine. Freud claims in ‘A Child is Being Beaten’ (1919) that the (male) masochist’s effeminacy derives from his identification with passive feminine qualities and this arouses in him a sense of guilt. Freud observes this mechanism in a symptomatic masochistic vision of being beaten by the father, reported by hysterics and neurotics. The image of the father is usually hidden behind the cruel mother in the fantasy, in order to avoid an explicit homosexual connotation,

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<sup>66</sup> Reik, ‘Masochism in Modern Man’, p. 269.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 268.



but, as Freud contends, the truth of the fantasy lies ‘*in an incestuous attachment to the father*’.<sup>68</sup>

Deleuze contests Freud’s interpretation and says that it is important to know ‘*sous quelle forme la culpabilité est vécue*’ and also that ‘*Ce n’est pas “un enfant”, c’est un père qui est battu*’.<sup>69</sup> Deleuze insists that guilt is experienced by the masochist, not because of his failure to identify himself with the father, but because of his very likeness to the father, ‘*la ressemblance du père, [...] la sexualité génitale héritée du père*’.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, the masochist feminises himself, which explains why in Sacher-Masoch’s imagination it is important for men to appear to be passive and effeminate. The masochist’s wish is not, as Freud thought, to annihilate himself, but rather to humiliate the symbolic father, who is innate in the masochist and signifies the aggressive power of control and the law of the real world. Thus, Deleuze says, masochism intends to ‘*neutraliser le réel et à suspendre l’idéal dans l’intériorité pure du fantasme lui-même*’.<sup>71</sup> In this respect, the femininity and passivity of the masochist become a subversive mask to shield his real self—the critical and provocative self—from the very power to which he pretends to have subjugated. So the masochist cannot be reduced to a merely passive victim; he is a provocateur who seeks in his fantasy to flout patriarchal authority and aggressive humanity by his effeminate pose.

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<sup>68</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘A Child is Being Beaten (A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions)’ (1919), in *On Psychopathology* (Penguin Books, 1993), p. 186.

<sup>69</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 59.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

John K. Noyes further develops this thesis from a socio-historical perspective, in his study of Sacher-Masoch and the colonial writings of his contemporaries. On the basis that in masochism ‘identity is [...] a mask and nothing else’, Noyes proposes that masochism in nineteenth-and twentieth-century Western society was a cultural and political defence strategy employed by white intellectual men who were caught painfully ‘in unstable cultural identities’.<sup>72</sup> Noyes argues that in modern imperialism, the ideal of masculinity was inseparable from an aggressive power of control, but liberal and humanitarian men felt tormented by a sense of guilt for their own violent instincts and their difficulty in complying with the masculine norm. The masochistic men perpetuated in nineteenth-century European literature can be explained as a defensive choice preferred by guilt-ridden, intellectual men in their fantasies; therefore, Noyes writes, ‘Social systems promoting inequality compel the liberal male to make a choice. Either he recognizes inequality and chooses exploitation and the exercise of power, or he seeks the willful subversion of law in the name of pleasure’.<sup>73</sup> By creating an imaginary world in which a man becomes subjugated to a female dominatrix, the man wishes to free himself from a sense of guilt, besides implicitly challenging the society which causes him torment and suffering.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> John K. Noyes, *The Mastery of Submission: Inventions of Masochism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 205 and p. 215.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>74</sup> On the artist’s reaction to fin-de-siècle imperialism, see Denis Judd, ‘Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee of 1897: unashamed triumphalism or whistling in the dark?’, in *Decadence and Danger: Writing, History and the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by T. Hill (Bath, UK: Sulis Press, 1997), pp. 27–45.

Birkett in *The Sins of the Fathers* explores the ambiguous feelings expressed by the son who has lost faith in his father's power to symbolise tradition and strict social order, yet ambivalently longs for him. This ambiguous swinging is the core of the neurotic anxiety and ambition exhibited by the Western European intelligentsia at the turn of the century. She questions 'who are the Fathers capable of their [the Decadent generation's] destruction, figures to whom they feel they owe allegiance, and against whom they can only fantasize rebellion'.<sup>75</sup> Surveying the historical and social background of the period, she demonstrates that the Decadents were the artists who felt painfully caught in a conflict between the old heritage and the new movements. On the one hand, they blamed the Fathers for their degenerate and perverted inheritance; this obsession with moral and physical decay was acknowledged in the proliferating scientific discourses by worried psychologists and sexologists. On the other hand, the Decadents felt threatened by the rise of socialism and feminism, 'the mob and Medusa', whose egalitarianism appeared to them not to reinvigorate society but to increase its disorder.<sup>76</sup> They dreamed of engaging in the heroic task of establishing a new value, order and hierarchy of their own, as disinherited sons. So Birkett writes, 'Decadence is not just Herod and Salome. It is the ageing Emperor Hadrian and his favourite, Antinoüs'.<sup>77</sup> This feminised Antinoüs, who was accused of being responsible for

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<sup>75</sup> Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers*, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

corruption and paid his debt with his sacrificial death, was someone with whom the Decadents in their fantasies narcissistically identified themselves, refusing to belong to either the disappearing age of the Fathers or the coming age of the masses and woman's emancipation.<sup>78</sup>

This type of Decadent conflict between father and son is evident in Sacher-Masoch's texts. Fathers are often neglected in his works, but when portrayed, they appear as old, powerless and humiliated characters. Severin's father appears insignificant, being 'âgé et malade' and soon dies (*Vénus*, p. 246). *Don Juan de Kolomea*, a realistic folktale with masochistic episodes, contains the image of the humiliated father portrayed by the hero known as Don Juan in his village. Contrary to his reputation, he is miserable, being neglected as a husband and father in his family.

In *Les Prussiens d'aujourd'hui*, a journalistic portrait of contemporary German society, which is filled with male masochists and *femmes fatales*, Sacher-Masoch provokes a confrontation between a humiliated father, Count Riva, and three young men—the idealistic scholar Andor, the sarcastic cleric Plant and the upstart sculptor Wolfgang. While the three men call the Count 'un vieux fou' for his idealism, they are in return criticised by the Count for being small and crass, 'ces petits hommes d'aujourd'hui' and 'pauvres gens pratiques'.<sup>79</sup> The

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<sup>78</sup> For an account of the conflict between the son and the father and masochism, see Peter Schwenger, 'Barthelme, Freud, and the Killing of Kafka's Father', in *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities*, ed. by Peter F. Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 1994), pp. 57–73.

<sup>79</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Les Prussiens d'aujourd'hui*, 2 vols (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1877), I, 15 and 16.

grand ideals, such as love, truth and beauty, upheld by old men such as the Count are countered by the modern imperatives of pleasure, wealth and luxury, pursued by these young men. There is a sense of nostalgia for a lost golden age when men were still important and dignified, but it gives way to a sense of despair, clinging to past glories, as Andor, called 'le don Quichotte du principe', attempts to uphold old values and later in society becomes a target of caricature, just like the Count, while Plant and Wolfgang, quickly adapting themselves to the needs of the practical world, attain some success in their careers.<sup>80</sup> Through the figure of the Count, Sacher-Masoch describes the dying image of the father, who is banished by the rising social power, the materialistic bourgeoisie.

The dishonoured image of the Count is also used to contrast its aristocratic sophistication and intellectualism to the new ideal image of men as 'soldats-machines'.<sup>81</sup> In the conversation between Count Riva and the three youths, the Count says that, since their victory in the Franco-Prussian War, Germans have undergone a fundamental change and that the militaristic strength on which Germany relies should be held responsible for the serious contradiction between the German civilisation, purporting to be shared by moral and intellectual people and the homicidal, greedy monarchy which cherishes brutal and immoral soldiers. This suggests that the contemporary social atmosphere, which is imperialistic and

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., I, 289.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., I, 223.

militaristic, is responsible for the suffering and humiliation caused to conscientious intellectuals and artists. A similar theme is found in Péladan's dramatisation of a tragic fate led by the grand male characters, the Magi, as Chapter 6 shows.

There was another threatening social change which materialised in the Decadent era: the emergence of emancipated women. This touches the centre of Sacher-Masoch's obsession. The sons have only aging, damaged or dying fathers and yet their mothers are the ones with power who claim to be the rightful heirs of their fathers. Considering the particular image of women in the stories, I want in the next section to examine how Sacher-Masoch creates his heroines.

### *– Ambiguity and the Oral Mother –*

In the feminist critical view, it is a commonplace to regard the representations of women in nineteenth and twentieth century art and literature as an enhancement of patriarchy's victimisation of women, because women are treated only as an object of desire.<sup>82</sup> In Sacher-Masoch's reasoning, however, to become an object of male desire does not mean passiveness, but rather the gaining of a right to reign over other people, for it is in this form that masochism exists. This is expressed in the voice of Wanda, 'j'avoue que je suis cruelle...

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<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

mais n'ai-je pas le droit de l'être? L'homme est celui qui désire, la femme l'objet désiré' (*Vénus*, p. 122). The dominant attitudes shown by Sacher-Masoch's heroines derive from this logic and in this respect Deleuze sees masochism as fetishistic and the dominatrix as the fetish. This chapter concludes by looking at the nature of the fetishised woman in masochism, which ambiguously oscillates between two opposites: between masculinity and femininity, sensuality and spirituality, the original and imitation, and killer and saviour. These layers of ambivalence generate contradictory feelings of excitement and anxiety in the stories of pain and pleasure, love and death.

Deleuze associates the masochistic element of suspense with fetishism and proposes that the ambivalent images of the cruel, powerful and tender heroines embody a fetish, constituting the three images of the mother in Sacher-Masoch's novels (as Deleuze names them, the uterine, the oral and the oedipal mother). He derives the idea from Freud's conceptualisation of fetishism. According to Freud, the fetishist disavows the horrifying perception that his mother does not have a penis because she has been castrated by his father. Anticipating his own potential castration, he creates a phantasmagorical object, a fetish: '[A] substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in'. So fetishism is interpreted by Freud as a suspended moment which crystallises 'the last moment

in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic'.<sup>83</sup> Adapting this idea, Deleuze claims that 'le fétichisme, ainsi défini par le processus de la dénévation et du suspens, appartient essentiellement au masochisme'.<sup>84</sup>

Deleuze proposes that the dominatrix is the fetish, because she represents the frozen image through which a man disavows his perception of reality that the woman is inferior (castrated); he suspends this image in a fantasy where the woman still holds the same dominant power as the man does in the real world. Deleuze terms this fetishised woman in masochism 'la mère orale—l'idéal de froideur, de sollicitude et de mort, entre la mère utérine et la mère œdipienne'.<sup>85</sup> The uterine mother is defined as 'la femme païenne, la Grecque, l'hétaïre ou l'Aphrodite, génératrice de désordre' and the oedipal mother as 'la sadique', who likes to torture others in alliance with a sadistic man and who, in turn, risks becoming victimised.<sup>86</sup> In between is the oral mother, Sacher-Masoch's ideal woman, the 'mère des steppes et grande nourrice, porteuse de mort'.<sup>87</sup> This means that she is a suspended character, simultaneously cold, maternal and severe, holding the perpetually contradictory qualities of the two mothers without entirely becoming either of them. This ambiguity, 'le mouvement pendulaire', is the nature of the oral mother in masochism and responsible for generating a

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<sup>83</sup> Freud, 'Fetishism', in *On Sexuality*, pp. 354–355.

<sup>84</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 29.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42 and p. 43.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.



sense of vertigo: fright and a suicidal attraction at the point when he collapses.<sup>88</sup>

Mardona in *La Mère de Dieu* is one of such examples of the oral mother. She is simultaneously ‘simple, naturelle, froide et majestueuse’, because she is a peasant girl who likes to walk in the woods and also a high priestess who maintains law and order in her village and inflicts brutal punishments on her people, as the story gradually unfolds.<sup>89</sup> To introduce the ambivalent world where traditional gender roles and social hierarchy are inverted, the forest is, again, used as a gateway through which the hero Sabadil and the reader are invited to enter. The mounting expectation and unreasonable anxiety expressed in the description of the wood is orchestrated by the funereal cries of a bird and the foreseen tragedy is eventually brought about by Sabadil’s suicidal death on the cross, from a stab to the heart by Mardona, who is outraged by his sacrilegious desire for her, the fetish.

Similarly, in *La Pêcheuse d’âmes*, there is another oral mother playing the ‘Mère de Dieu’: the heroine Dragomira. She equally displays ambivalent traits, characterised as ‘un ange, un démon, une tigresse, une coquette’.<sup>90</sup> And again, the dread story of murders and passions begins with a desperate cry from the wood; this turns out to have come from one of the victims of Dragomira, who is a noble aristocrat in society but also a religious leader and murderer in a cult which surreptitiously kills people under the name of divine retribution. As

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>89</sup> Sacher-Masoch, *La Mère de Dieu*, p. 38.

<sup>90</sup> Sacher-Masoch, *La Pêcheuse d’âmes*, p. 218.

with Mardona, Dragomira's intention to kill her beloved man, the masochistic hero Zésim, holds an ambiguous layer from the standpoint of morality, because her motive is to save his soul from earthly existence. The episodes of Mardona and Dragomira tell that the characteristic of the fetish, the oral mother in Deleuze's terms, lies in its layers of ambiguity: a decent public appearance concealing a terrifying truth, innocence covering criminality and religious sincerity only one remove from pathological violence.

The authoritative image of the oral mother indicates that her gender role as a woman is ambiguous and, according to Deleuze, this derives from her alliance with a superior paternal figure: 'Le détriement de la mère a déjà pour effet de transférer symboliquement toutes les fonctions paternelles sur des images de femme'.<sup>91</sup> In masochism the masochist looks submissive and effeminate, because he refuses the patriarchal power inherited from his father. Instead, power is put in the hands of a woman, playing the role of severe mother for the masochist. She is given the title of the rightful heir of the father and receives both his sadistic human nature and the legitimacy of maintaining social order; Wanda in *La Vénus à la fourrure*, for example, insists that she owes her philosophy entirely to the education given by her father and her elderly husband, who are both long dead. It is only through this neutralised form of power that the masochist reclaims the patriarchal tradition of being to be reborn as a new form of man.

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<sup>91</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 54.

The suggestion to the strong union between father and daughter often recurs in Sacher-Masoch's texts. In *La Pêcheuse d'âmes*, Dragomira's strength and cruelty stem from her pact with the Apostle, who has 'la tête d'un lion, d'un dominateur, d'un despote'.<sup>92</sup> To him Dragomira is entirely subordinate, as she habitually kneels before him to be whipped. Further, behind the Apostle's commanding figure, there is the merciless god who impels Dragomira to commit murders in his name, promising salvation and purification. An episode where she enters a cage of lions all alone clearly supports this strong sense of connection to the god. She claims that the reckless attempt is not intended to challenge the divinity. On the contrary, she seeks confirmation of his approval to work as an executioner for his sake: 'Dieu me donnera un signe'.<sup>93</sup> She comes out of the cage convinced that her sacrificial deeds will be rewarded by her bloodthirsty deity.

In *Prussiens d'aujourd'hui*, too, there is a long episode concerning the close relationship between a dominant father and his faithful daughter. Andor, an idealistic and masochistic character in the story, is raised by a mother who recognises herself as a daughter of her revered father, ignoring the existence of her mother, who 'était morte, moi à peine au monde'.<sup>94</sup> While there is an intimate relationship between Andor and his mother, the existence of his father in the family is ignored, his role being reduced merely to that of the

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<sup>92</sup> Sacher-Masoch, *La Pêcheuse d'âmes*, p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>94</sup> Sacher-Masoch, *Les Prussiens d'aujourd'hui*, II, 49.

male who provides the woman with a son, according to her. This obviously implies a close linking line between the grandfather, who is glorified yet already deceased, his daughter, who becomes an imperious and affectionate mother, and her son, the masochist. A patriarchal tradition is transmitted only through this line of genealogy in the family, with no place for the father of the masochist.

The dependence of the domineering woman on a fatherly figure betrays the conventional idea of male supremacy which is embedded in masochism, although masochism may appear subversive to gender politics. The sympathetic portrayals of oppressed peoples and despotic women may typically define Sacher-Masoch's work, but at bottom he was a misogynist and anti-egalitarian. In one of his acclaimed novels, *La Femme séparée*, first translated into French in 1881, Sacher-Masoch's negative opinions of feminism and women's emancipation are implicitly expressed through the voice of a female character. The aristocratic woman is asked whether she acquiesces in the spread of the suffragettes' efforts in Britain and the United States and whether women should take on social responsibilities equal to those assumed by men. Her reply is not straightforwardly affirmative about other women's endeavours to gain equality, but fundamentally elitist and misogynist. She says that, given the fact that women are normally less talented and educated than men, they are still entitled to be considered the equals of men because men, most of whom are not equally wise, are

unconditionally treated as equals. She even compares pregnancy to a sickness and opposes the system of marriage because it deprives cultivated women of independence. She insists that some women, like herself, who are more intellectual, sophisticated and powerful than other men and women, should not merely be considered socially equal to men but should be entitled to dominate other ordinary people.<sup>95</sup> Her position reflects the gender and class- biased prejudice of the age, as well as Sacher-Masoch's desire for power and his fascination with and anxiety about women's emancipation.

Sacher-Masoch's snobbish and anti-feminist stance is observed in his imperious heroines' position as a fetish and in these fetishised heroines' usual claim to a singularity which distinguishes them from other women. Women who have the power to dominate men no longer belong to the category of women but have that of a superior being, an object of worship. Wanda in *La Vénus à la fourrure* is 'La déesse de l'amour en personne' (*Vénus*, p. 133). As such, she claims that she is different from her fellow women who are 'pauvres femmes hystériques qui poursuivent en somnambules un idéal masculine rêvé et ne savent apprécier le meilleur des hommes' (p. 136). The story shows that by the best kind of men she means masochistic dilettantes such as Séverin, who knows how to aesthetically appreciate women, or a superior, domineering man such as 'the Greek', who is an androgynous idol himself and reigns over other men's and women's desires with his beauty and cruel

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<sup>95</sup> Sacher-Masoch, *La Femme séparée*, p. 19.

temperament.

The difference of the oral mother, which is the ideal form of femininity for masochists, when viewed alongside ordinary women, lies in her capacity to vary between extremes. Séverin explains this distinction: ‘Si je ne peux trouver une femme noble et enjouée qui, fidèle et bienveillante, sache partager mon destin, alors pas de demi-mesure, pas de tiédeur! Je préfère être livré à une femme sans vertu aucune, infidèle et sans pitié. Dans son égoïste grandeur, une telle femme peut aussi être un idéal’ (p. 147). Ordinary women cannot be sufficiently noble nor sufficiently demonic to inspire a man to create a goddess in fantasy; instead, they settle on a middle ground, appreciating the common values and norms of contemporary bourgeois society. For this reason, Wanda ceases to be ‘the Venus in furs’ and grows banal when she starts to wish she were his wife and Séverin criticises her: ‘vous êtes en train de devenir vulgaire’ (p. 232). In the same way, as we noted above, Countess Nadeshda *en travestie*, calling herself Anatole in *L’Amour de Platon*, is eventually discarded by the masochistic hero Henryk, with the reproach, ‘Vous m’avez volé mes idéaux’, when she demands him in marriage, an average value appreciated by ordinary bourgeois women.<sup>96</sup>

The contrast between the oral mother and other women is brought out by a difference between the genuine and the imposter. In *Les Prussiens d’aujourd’hui* the writer says that the world of average women is barren: ‘Le monde et ... [le] demi-monde. Entre ces deux mondes,

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<sup>96</sup> Sacher-Masoch, *L’Amour de Platon*, p. 101.

il y a le désert de la bourgeoisie'.<sup>97</sup> In this novel, Marie represents one of the vulgar bourgeois women, because her dressing-up as a princess in second-hand clothes from her father's shop and her becoming the actress Valéria imply her identity as a false goddess of the modern consumer world. Marie is initially pursued and worshipped by Andor, the masochistic hero of the novel, but eventually abandoned by him, as she represents someone who proves herself capable of becoming neither a wholly noble lady nor a grand prostitute; she settles for the life of a common bourgeoisie craving money and fame.

In *La Mère de Dieu*, the oral mother contrasts vividly with an imposter, in a scene which depicts details of a brutal scene of punishment conducted by Mardona. This is an episode about a girl from the village, named Wewa, who challenges the authority of Mardona and claims her own right to be the 'Mère de Dieu' in their community. Wewa's authority is based on bourgeois values: on her own affluence and her alliance with the sham priest Sukalou, who plausibly preaches the virtues of life but whose true nature is, merely, greed. The couple of imposters are brutally punished by Mardona as a public penance for worshipping a false god.

In *La Pêcheuse d'âmes*, Dragomira is surrounded by imposters who wish to identify themselves with her in her role of executioner. She appreciates that her own act of murder is sacred, without any feelings—of joy or remorse—except a sense of duty. Whenever she finds

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<sup>97</sup> Sacher-Masoch, *Les Prussiens d'aujourd'hui*, I, 14.

her followers attracted to her out of bloodlust, she takes harsh measures towards them. Count Soltyk is eventually killed by Dragomira, because his brutality is driven by his personal desires, ‘tandis que moi [Dragomira] je châtie et je tue au nom de Dieu, sans pitié, mais sans haine’.<sup>98</sup> She castigates one of her willing slaves, the aristocratic lady Henryka, for her desire to gain ‘une joie fébrile’, ‘une joie de bourreau’, or ‘un plaisir diabolique’, from serving Dragomira in her mission.<sup>99</sup> The imposters are used to accentuate the intrinsic difference between the oral mother and other, inferior, women: the oral mother is *not* like this imposter or that imposter in such and such a way, because she is extraordinary.

In this novel, however, Dragomira proves herself to be an imposter in the end, at least in comparison to her rival, another image of the oral mother, Anitta. According to Deleuze, Anitta comes closest to the ideal form of the oral mother of anyone in Sacher-Masoch’s fantasy world. Sacher-Masoch creates a mirror image between the two embodiments of the oral mother in this novel to demonstrate what is the decisive aspect of the oral mother: the oral mother’s ambiguity must stay ambiguous, without ever truly identifying with either object of masochism, neither the uterine or the oedipal mother. Anitta and Dragomira are similar in terms of their capacities to swing between the two images of the mother: they share the quality of the uterine mother, having irresistible charms to seduce and lure men, and also

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<sup>98</sup> Sacher-Masoch, *La Pêcheuse d’âmes*, p. 300.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 281 and p. 293.



have the potential to become the oedipal mother, killing people (Anitta shoots and kills Dragomira). The accounts of the two women suggest that they also contrast with each other. On the one hand, the representation of Anitta is often embellished with bright, healthy and pure images, such as the innocence of childhood, the warmth of spring, a clear blue sky and pretty domestic animals. On the other hand, Dragomira is often has a terrorizing presence, presaging sinister events and a threatening passion accompanied by its madness and violence, whilst the animals with which she is compared are fierce beasts.

Their difference becomes crucial when Dragomira eventually violates both limits of masochism, by giving the gratification of her own desires, as well as that of other men, precedence over the masochist's. But Anitta's identity remains utterly balanced between the limits, staying faithful to the masochist, Zésim. Near the end Dragomira is quickly dismissed by Zésim, because she becomes the uterine mother by betraying Zésim to succumb to an affair with Count Soltyk, 'the Greek' in this story. At the same time, she embodies the oedipal mother as she attempts, in alliance with the Apostle, another figure of 'the Greek' to kill Zésim. Dragomira's ambiguity is thus diminished; so is the story of masochism, with Anitta accordingly reappearing as the truly ideal one to whom Zésim is married. Anitta refuses to become either the uterine mother or the oedipal mother to end the story with Zésim. She rejects Count Soltyk's courtship to remain devoted to Zésim. Her act of killing Dragomira is

another way of showing her devotion to Zésim, because it helps Zésim break off his masochistic relationship with the dominatrix. Dragomira goes beyond the fantasy of masochism, but Anitta stays to represent an ambiguous image of a killer and a saviour for the masochist. In this way, Anitta is shown to stand out in Sacher-Masoch's imagination and the comparison between Dragomira and Anitta shows that masochism no longer exists when there is no suspense and ambiguity.

The rupture between Wanda and Séverin in *La Vénus à la fourrure* is derived from a similar cause: their masochistic relationship is broken at the moment of the dominatrix's final identification with the uterine and the oedipal mother, as Wanda is allied with 'the Greek' and whips Séverin as she leaves him and his world of masochism. Wanda's betrayal was demanded, but her escape was prohibited, because it was Séverin's own repeated request that she should take a lover so as to burn him up with jealousy, yet only on condition that she should never leave him. This contradictory idea was exactly the author Sacher-Masoch's own obsession, because he often made the same demand of his first wife, Wanda, in real life. Sacher-Masoch persuaded his wife to prostitute herself to gratify his desire for pleasure and pain, by saying: 'C'est une merveilleuse chose de trouver chez sa propre, honnête et brave femme, des voluptés qu'il faut généralement aller chercher chez des libertines'.<sup>100</sup> Wanda, Sacher-Masoch's first wife, expresses in her autobiography *Confession de ma vie* that she was

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<sup>100</sup> Cit. in Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 55.

unwilling to play the role of dominatrix for him, which earlier critics used to regard as a hypocritical veneer over her sadistic temperament, until Deleuze pronounced her hesitation genuine and in fact vital. Deleuze contends that because of her hesitation and unwillingness, she was indeed Sacher-Masoch's 'Venus in furs'. The same reason is applied to Wanda, Sacher-Masoch's fictional heroine in *La Vénus à la fourrure*. From the beginning of the story, Wanda never stops expressing uncertainty and reluctance but always ends up by responding to Séverin's unremitting request and inflicting pain on him, ill-treating him or flirting with other men, with the excuse that she does so only because he has asked it and she loves him: 'Je crois que je ne le pourrais pas, mais je vais essayer, pour te faire plaisir, car je t'aime' (*Vénus*, p. 158). This shows that masochism lives by ambiguity, so the dominatrix has to seesaw, perpetually, ambiguously between adultery and chastity. When she settles for either side, the story of masochism has to end; Wanda, both Sacher-Masoch's first wife in reality and his fictional character, ran off with another man to give up her role for the masochist.

Finally, another distinctive yet ambiguous role is expected of the dominatrix in a masochistic fantasy: she must act as both the killer and the saviour of the masochist. She inflicts pain and suffering on him, in order to give birth to a new man out of the union between her, him and his rival, 'the Greek'. The whip of 'the Greek', in alliance with the dominatrix, signals the end of masochism, because the masochist ceases to be masochistic,

and becomes a 'man', a domineering kind like 'the Greek'. As mentioned above, the weak husband Jehuda is reborn a capable and strong man thanks to the whip of his rival Kalinoski in *La Hasara Raba*. It was Jehuda's domineering wife Pennina who asked Kalinoski to make her incompetent husband a man. Anitta's killing Dragomira puts an end to Zésim's masochistic attitudes and he becomes a good husband to her. And Séverin, the model masochist, is reborn a woman-beater, a 'hammer' in his own word, after the whip of 'the Greek', as desired by Wanda, in *La Vénus à la fourrure*. Deleuze calls this recurrent theme of rebirth, 'une parthénogenèse', a birth without the father.<sup>101</sup> In the next chapter the motifs of death and rebirth in *Decadence* are discussed further.

I have argued that masochism is essentially a creation of a fantasy which comprises various layers of ambiguity and in which every component of the fantasy serves this purpose. Realist modes justify the depictions of conflicts between people, in which Sacher-Masoch indulges in the details of feelings and sensations related to pain and suffering. The criticisms concerning his contemporaneous society provide legitimate sites to illustrate the masterful figures of men and women tyrannising and humiliating idealistic and conscientious men through their suffering. It was also mentioned that the passive mask of the masochist hides a controlling and challenging will because a masochistic story is *his* fantasy, from which he wants to re-emerge as a newly born man, free from any thralldom to sexual love. The figure of

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

the dominatrix, together with that of 'the Greek', exists as a channel from which this new form of man emerges. The next chapter considers this recurrent theme of birth in masochism and examines it as part of the contradictory Decadent theme of degeneration and regeneration.

### ***CHAPTER 3. DEGENERATION / REGENERATION***

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that Freud considered masochism to be the pure manifestation of the destructive power of the death instinct. Deleuze, in contrast, contends that it is the positive and productive force of Eros that is at work in masochism, making the repetition of pleasure and pain possible. The idea of the constructive force in masochism leads Deleuze to propose that there is in masochism a profound desire for creation—the rebirth of the new androgynous man through the pain and suffering of masochistic nightmare.

In the French literature of Decadence, a similar phenomenon can be observed. The literary artists labelled as Decadents claimed to have prepared the world for their own positive values, opposing the general assumption that Decadence was a path to decay and degeneration. In this chapter, I examine the positive values of Decadence promoted by some French contemporaries of Sacher-Masoch, in order to make clear their desire to establish new aesthetic values as the antithesis to modernity and progress, the ideas set forth by the dominant naturalist/positivist ambit. Building on Deleuze's proposition concerning the regenerative theme in masochism, I argue that a similar longing for renewal is a hidden agenda in Sacher-Masoch's masochistic imaginary world of suffering and pain. This is observable in the way that Sacher-Masoch characterises 'the Greek' and the 'Wanderer' (the

protagonist in ‘L’Errant’—the prologue to Sacher-Masoch’s epic cycle *Le Legs de Caïn*), in relation to the figure of the dominatrix and that of the masochist. Hence, this chapter serves as a bridge between this introductory part and the next, which deals with the *fin-de-siècle* style of dandyism (the creation of an ideal of masculinity), followed by an examination of some male characters in the works of Lorrain and Péladan.

– *The Birth of the Androgynous Man* –

Although the term ‘masochism’ was invented as a sexual perversion, Sacher-Masoch’s world is rather asexual, rejecting ordinary conjugal sexual relations such as exist between a masterful husband and a submissive wife. The discrepancy between masochistic discourse and the common sense view of relationships is clear in the meaning of the term ‘possession’ as used in dialogues between Wanda and Séverin in *La Vénus à la fourrure*. To Séverin, who obsessively begs Wanda to remain in his possession, Wanda plainly replies, ‘mais vous ne me possédez même pas’ (*Vénus*, p. 145). Their conversation lacks a common ground on which to argue about relationships because Wanda refers to a sexual union of the usual kind, whereas Séverin is talking in the masochistic sense that a man considers a woman a possession of his to worship. As an alternative to ordinary relationships, the power relations typical of masochism are proposed. So it is crucial that the characters of the dominatrix embody forms

of legitimate authority: political leaders from history (Catherine the Great of Russia, Maria of Austria or Luker'ia) or fictional religious leaders (Mardona or Dragomira). Masochistic gestures such as begging, kneeling and worshipping are excused if disguised as admiration, spiritual longing and devotion before such higher beings as a queen or goddess. These authoritative women are the agents of harsh punishments for (the ordinary) sexual desires of men shown toward them and their punishment is meant to give birth to a man beyond carnality, i.e. an androgyne.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the fetish is a substitute for the mother's lost phallus. In the Deleuzian analysis of masochism, the dominatrix as the fetish is a catalyst through which the masochist receives double pleasure: the forbidden incestuous pleasure of relations with his mother to the exclusion of his father and the pleasure of being reborn from her asexual phallus alone. Since castration serves this very purpose, it is not something he wishes to evade; rather, it is 'la condition qui rend possible une union incestueuse avec la mère'.<sup>1</sup> The uniqueness of Deleuze's analysis lies in his emphasis that the reborn man does not resemble the father, who is the ancestor symbolising aggressive humanity and human sexuality, in his position as the dominant authority in society. On the contrary, becoming a man in masochism implies becoming the idealised and feminised man who is perceived by the masochist as superior to ordinary men, beyond societal values and rules and to be identified with the fetishised mother.

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 87.



The masochist reinforces his anxiety and sense of guilt by inventing his own emasculation, that is, his own death as a 'man', in order to achieve this ultimate goal. Deleuze says that the process can be observed in Sacher-Masoch's adaptation of the images of Cain and Christ. Sacher-Masoch symbolically uses Cain's murder to deal with the burden of sinful humanity and uses the crucified Christ to signify the virtue of vicarious suffering and resurrection as an asexual icon: 'l'Homme sur la croix, sans amour sexuel, sans propriété, sans partie, sans querelle, sans travail'.<sup>2</sup> According to Deleuze, the figures of Cain and Christ appeal to Sacher-Masoch because of their suffering and their close relationship to their mothers and variance with their fathers. As his mother's favourite, Cain murdered his brother Abel, who was their father's favourite. Christ's crucifixion is shadowed by his mother, the Virgin Mary, who accompanied him through his Passion and Resurrection, her second virgin birth. Men's suffering and their crucifixions are highlights in *La Pêcheuse d'âmes*. Dragomira murders men on a cross to save their souls from terrestrial suffering as penitents and her victims include even the two 'Greek' figures of the story, Soltyk and the Apostle. Deleuze views the hero of *La Mère de Dieu*, Sabadil, as the best example of this Cain-Christ figure. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Sabadil suffers from being human, which in his case refers to his carnal desire for Mardona and he consents to be crucified by her in order to become asexual and spiritual. This bloody scene of death mimics the Passion of Christ. At the time of

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<sup>2</sup> Sacher-Masoch, cit. in Deleuze, *ibid.*

his death, she tells him, 'Et maintenant tu es homme'.<sup>3</sup> Deleuze insists that being 'man' here means being one, devoid of the genital sexuality inherited from his father.<sup>4</sup> Cain's guilt and torments, Christ's expiation on the cross and their mothers' contribution to the infliction of pain on their sons and their second birth as iconic men, are all crystallised in the novels of Sacher-Masoch.

The iconic male figure appears in the aftermath of the 'death' of a masochistic existence. The figure of the Wanderer in 'L'Errant' shows the transformation in the form of identification with the cruel mother. Becoming like this man is a goal of masochism, since Sacher-Masoch presents the story as 'la complète solution harmonique des dissonances de la vie humaine'.<sup>5</sup> The story repeats Sacher-Masoch's characteristic narrative, opening with an oppressive and mysterious atmosphere in a wild wood, generated by the lines: 'la forêt vierge qui étale ses masses noires', which is compared to an 'océan sans rivages de pins durs et serrés', filled with 'un lourd parfum de pourriture végétale'.<sup>6</sup> This mystically charged setting introduces the majestic man, the Wanderer, who first confesses his masochistic past and then describes the process of his rebirth. The Wanderer is honoured and worshipped as 'un saint

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<sup>3</sup> Sacher-Masoch, *La Mère de Dieu*, p. 200.

<sup>4</sup> The image of Christ and the exhibition of the male body in relation to ambiguous homoeroticism is discussed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 140. Rhonda K. Garelick points out that after his imprisonment, Oscar Wilde acquired the understanding of Christ as the ultimate Decadent dandy, 'a figure of liberation whose life was a sublime work of art'. See Rhonda K. Garelick, *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 151. Also see Chapter 4, below, on Decadent dandyism.

<sup>5</sup> Cit. in Michel, *Sacher-Masoch*, p. 182.

<sup>6</sup> Sacher-Masoch, 'L'Errant', p. v.

homme', who condemns entire humanity as an offspring of the fratricidal Cain, but whose spiritual preaching sounds simultaneously heroic and masochistic: 'répudie le legs de Caïn; cherche la vérité, apprend à renoncer, à mépriser la vie, à aimer la mort'.<sup>7</sup> His confession has strong masochistic overtones, as he details how miserable and helpless he used to be, a man who was 'bafoué, foulé aux pieds' and enslaved by a woman.<sup>8</sup> What he insists is that every man is doomed to suffer just as he did, but he can be reborn a new man, the Wanderer, in the same way, once he has defied social norms (patriarchy) and acquiesced only in the merciless and all-embracing authority of Mother Nature, who is described as 'la déesse sombre et taciturne, qui sans cesse enfante et engloutit'.<sup>9</sup> The image of a man abandoning himself in front of a domineering woman is glorified in the form of a cultish enthusiasm for the feminised Nature. It is also suggested that the new man is born by becoming identical to the domineering figure of woman which has the power to nurture and devour men.

In the vision of parthenogenesis, the masochistic man is transformed into someone identical to the female figure which has caused him pain and suffering. In other words, he becomes a fetish himself, an object of awe and desire for both men and women. The identification of this reborn man with the dominatrix is suggested in the Wanderer's identification with Nature as a merciless goddess. 'The Greek' and Wanda are described as

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. vii and p. viii.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. xv.

identical in *La Vénus à la fourrure*, for example, in their first encounter: ‘la lionne regarde le lion’ (*Vénus*, p. 223). ‘The Greek’ is a beautiful man holding immense power of seduction vis-à-vis both men and women. He disguises himself as an aristocratic lady to enjoy seducing and humiliating other men and even Séverin is attracted to him, calling him ‘Alcibiades’. His masculinity is simultaneously stressed, in the claims that he is a brave soldier respected by other men. When Séverin’s masochism is ‘cured’ by the Greek’s whip, he grows to resemble the Greek: a torturer of women, whose brutality towards them is interpreted as proof of his virile will to master. And this new man is also similar to Wanda, who is described as an incarnation of a stone statue of Venus, because the new Séverin’s aloofness is compared to the coldness of a statue, ‘sans bouger, respirant à peine’ (p. 123).

Nick Mansfield’s *Masochism: The Art of Power* analyses the mirror image of the ideal man and the dominatrix in masochism.<sup>10</sup> He discusses masochism as a form of literary and aesthetic expression, and proposes that similar accounts of the formation of new kind of male subjectivity through masochism can be found in other texts, literary and critical, by male authors such as Proust, Joyce, Lyotard, Bataille, Barthes and Foucault. Mansfield argues that masochism foretells the advent of modernism and post-modernism, in the sense that it simultaneously enhances and disavows binarism: the binaries of masculinity and femininity, pleasure and pain, powerful and powerless, reality and fantasy, truth and falsehood and the

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<sup>10</sup> Nick Mansfield, *Masochism: The Art of Power* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), pp. 6–10 and pp. 72–89.

self and the other. From the perspective of gender identity, the pleasure of fantasising a masochistic dream lies in blurring and complicating the boundary between femininity and masculinity. The masochist's apparent effeminacy masks his will to gain mastery and is a prerequisite for his culmination as a superior androgyne at the end of the fantasy.

According to Mansfield, this implicit masculinist theme in masochism is seen in the manner in which the two protagonists, Wanda and 'the Greek', appear as mirrors of Séverin's multiple identities. Mansfield argues that the dominatrix, Wanda, is in fact a mere mirror which serves to reflect Séverin's desire and fear of power and violence. The androgynous figure of 'the Greek' is also a reflection of Séverin's ultimate desire to absorb Wanda into his own identity, to be simultaneously masculine and feminine, dominant and submissive. Mansfield argues that these mirror images become clear in two scenes. In one, Séverin wears Wanda's furs before a mirror and believes that he resembles a proud and noble king. This likening of Séverin to a king matches perfectly with Wanda's proud beauty. In another scene, at the end of the story when the Greek whips Séverin, he does it in Wanda's place and in her furs. This threesome strikes Séverin as simultaneously appalling and appealing, 'une sorte de plaisir fantastique et suprasensuel' (*Vénus*, p. 244). Mansfield argues that this is the moment when Séverin's desire is fulfilled: to consume Wanda's femininity, cruelty and seductiveness while maintaining his own triumphant masculinity in the form of his feminisation and

becoming himself ‘the Greek’, the androgyne.

The image of mirroring to suggest the identification between the masochist and the dominatrix appears in other stories such as *La Mère de Dieu*. Sabadil’s first encounter with Mardona occurs when he contemplates his own reflection in a green pond surrounded by narcissus. She emerges as if from the reflection in the water at which he had been looking. As the visual imagery—flowers, the placid water and the mirror—suggests, their attraction to each other is immediate and fatal, ending up with one killing the other under the name of rebirth. The initial mirroring image is a manifestation of Sabadil’s self-destructive desire to relinquish his old identity, as well as a sort of palingenesis, the sterile reproduction of the self by multiplying the surfaces of images.

The submissive alliance with powerful female figures to become a new dominator is found in the masochistic process in Sacher-Masoch’s fiction, but this is not peculiar to his imagination. Elliot L. Gilbert examines *The Idylls of the King*, by Alfred Lord Tennyson, the Victorian poet, and posits that Tennyson’s King Arthur is a ‘female king’ because he is feminised and domesticated. He ‘has received authorization from no father and conveyed it to no son’.<sup>11</sup> Separating himself at a distance from patriarchal tradition, he has authorised himself instead in alliance with authoritative feminine figures (the Lady of the Lake and three

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<sup>11</sup> Elliot L. Gilbert, ‘The Female King: Tennyson’s Arthurian Apocalypse’, in *Speaking of Gender*, ed. by E. Showalter (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 180.

other fairy queens). Gilbert also points out that the court of Tennyson's King Arthur consists of 'woman worshippers' and their chaste and cold women. As the following chapters indicate, Decadent texts exhibit similar plots: Phocas, the character created by Jean Lorrain, is another 'female king', who identifies himself with the bloodthirsty goddess Astarté, while the Magus figures dreamed by Péladan claim to be the new model of man, by persuading women to become the 'fées', helpers in their quest for the Ideal. I want to show in the next chapter that the vogue of dandyism at the time was another project for creating a new feminised form of masculinity. But before moving on to Decadent dandyism, which concludes the first part of this thesis, I need to highlight the association of rebirth and the process of dying, which are central both to Sacher-Masoch's particular literary project and the Decadent movement as a whole.

***– Decadent Degeneration is Regeneration –***

French society in the Decadent period was redolent with hierarchy and prejudice: the superiority of men was set against the inferiority of women, the ideal of progress, against the reality of degeneration and the lost glory of aristocratic elitism and idealism, against the growing power of women and the masses. The characteristic of the Decadent artists was to destabilise dichotomies such as these, because the Decadent principle is not only an obsession

with death and sexuality, but also a revolt against society, which often manifests itself in rather passive feelings of discontent (*ennui*), or a desire to evade reality. In opposition to such accredited social ideals as scientific and industrial progress, imperialist adventure, democracy and capitalism, all of which acknowledge the pursuit of prosperity, the Decadents determined to vindicate nonmaterial values such as sensationalism, intellectualism and aestheticism. Insisting that their alleged degeneration was in fact a sign of regeneration, the Decadents constructed an ambiguous tragedy in which negatives are turned into the reason for their superiority.

In *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet*, Richard Gilman chronicles the evolution of the ambiguous term ‘Decadence’:

Not exactly “world-weary” or “self-indulgent” or “ultrarefined” or “overcivilized”; not “debauchery,” “effeteness,” “depravity,” “hedonism,” or “luxuriousness”; certainly not simply “decay” or “degeneration” or “retrogression,” “decadence” seems to gather in all these meanings and implications and to exist precariously and almost cabalistically beyond them’.<sup>12</sup>

He concludes that, while the significance of this term is extremely ambiguous, one thing is clear: the term has been presented as an opposition to an illusory idea of progress. Gilman argues that although nineteenth-century intellectuals were obsessed with the fear of the decline of civilisation—exemplified by Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*—in reality,

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Gilman, *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979 [1975]), p. 24.



‘every decline is also a rise’.<sup>13</sup> The label ‘Decadent’ was often applied to the new values and styles as they came into being alongside once flourishing social and cultural forms which had begun to wane.

The Decadents’ twisted attitude towards progress and their pleasure in flouting social imperatives is unmistakable. A. E. Carter states that, unlike the Romantics, who only lamented the corruptions of civilisation, the Decadents accepted the evils of civilisation in order to celebrate the darkness of the world and human nature. Carter regards this sort of attitude as perverted and concludes that Decadence was the self-conscious creation of a gloomy period; this implies, however, that the sense of a downfall expressed in Decadence is a manifestation of the fear and pain of delivery, even of a new form of art and sensitivity.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar vein, in *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, David Weir focuses on the uneasy concept of Decadence in relation to a sense of progress; he then argues that the ambiguity of Decadent literature essentially lies in its chronological positioning.<sup>15</sup> While sharply reflecting the atmosphere of the transition between nineteenth-century Romanticism and twentieth Modernism, Decadence was suspended between the two periods. Weir defends the ambiguity of Decadence as the destruction of old aesthetic values and the superimposition of new ones. From his discussion, it can be said that the period of Decadence praised

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<sup>13</sup> R. W. Collingwood, cit. in Gilman, *ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>14</sup> See Carter, *The Idea of Decadence*, in particular his last chapter, ‘Summary’.

<sup>15</sup> David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

Sacher-Masoch and his suspense stories, because it was a period suspended between the death of one period and the rise of another, whose ambivalent atmosphere was an inspiration to the artists of the time.

In 1895, Alfred Edmont Hake wrote *Regeneration* in response to Nordau's *Degeneration*, with the aim of reversing the negative connotations of the concept of Decadence. Hake upheld the theory that Decadent art was the art of regeneration and argued that Nordau was blind to the significance of the Decadents, whose truth lay in a craving for change and a dissatisfaction with conventional dogmas and forms. For Hake, this could not be regarded as a symptom of weakness. Instead, it was an indication of 'renewing vitality'.<sup>16</sup> Hake defended the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—who had occasionally been mocked as effete mystics but whom the French Decadents admired—as great artists with a true sense of mission. According to him, they were eager to recover the authentic value of religious feelings, free from the corruptions of established contemporary sects: 'the fact that a man throws himself heart and soul into his mission is no sign of degeneration'.<sup>17</sup> Hake's vehement attack on Nordau's blind belief in authorities—which he characterised as typical of the German love for discipline, regulation and repression—makes his own book appear as prejudiced, authoritarian and astringent as Nordau's does. Despite this, his book highlights the

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<sup>16</sup> Alfred Edmont Hake, *Regeneration: A Reply to Max Nordau* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1895), p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Decadent attitude that celebrates the arrival of a new power, order and aesthetics, in opposition to the dominant authorities in art and literature.

In France, it was Paul Bourget's *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883) and *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1885) that set up an empathetic and enthusiastic critical defence of the literature of his time. Bourget finds aspirations of renewal and healing in the major literary and critical texts of the late nineteenth century, in which an exuberant celebration of melancholic temperament and mystic erotic rituals is apparently dominant. In the preface, written in 1899, he states, 'la longue enquête sur les maladies morales de la France actuelle, dont ces *Essais* furent le début, m'a contraint de reconnaître à mon tour la vérité proclamée par des maîtres d'une autorité bien supérieure à la mienne'.<sup>18</sup> Highlighting what he saw as the three key aspects of degenerate contemporary society (pessimism, cosmopolitanism, by which he means the cult of the Orient and the cult of the self), his analysis shows an upward movement to a cure through the Fall and perseverance in suffering. Baudelaire's guilt and debauchery, Flaubert's desperate romanticism, Stendhal's tragic passions or Amiel's egoistic intellectualism—all of these, Bourget argues, lead them to the pessimistic sense of resignation that their efforts will culminate in nothingness while they, heroically and desperately, never stop pursuing their end.

Significantly, Baudelaire's 'sadism' in the form of male masochism is mentioned here:

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, 2 vols (Paris: Plon, 1920), I, xii.

‘Il est libertin, et des visions dépravées jusqu'au sadisme troublent ce même homme qui vient d'adorer le doigt lève de sa Madone’.<sup>19</sup> This libertinism, by which Bourget means a masochistic intoxication with a bloody, dark Venus, is one of the three aspects which Bourget sees as Baudelaire’s modernity. The other two are his mysticism, which is an aspiration for pure and saintly women and his scientism, which is found in the acute lucidity of his evocation of passion and suffering, deriving both from libertinism and mysticism, i.e. his obsession with the two opposing images of women, the pure and the devilish. This analysis suggests that Bourget calls Baudelaire’s Decadent texts new and modern, because they are masochistic representations in which a sense of fear and unease is intensified in catastrophic love stories where male characters detail their anxiety and fascination for the contradictory female figures.

In the second volume of his *Essais*, the other three features, which are pessimism, naturalism or realism and the study of female nature, are what Bourget stresses to show the genius of the contemporary Russian writer Ivan Turgenev; this explains why Sacher-Masoch was called the ‘Tourguéniev de la Petite-Russie’ at the time.<sup>20</sup> Bourget says that the distinctive nature of Turgenev’s realism/naturalism, so much praised by the French contemporaries, lies in his suggestive descriptions, which succeed in intensifying the vivid

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 24.

sensations in his narrative. As for Turgenev's pessimism, Bourget states that it is evident in the descriptions of the misery and misfortune of his characters, but at the same time it clearly manifests 'une puissance intact [qui] demeure en eux [perdants] qui leur permet de sentir leur souffrance avec une étrange intensité'.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that in the texts of Turgenev, despite his being reputed a 'realist/naturalist', there is clear indication of the masochistic pride that makes suffering virtuous, and martyrdom glorious. Further, it could even be assumed that Bourget's analysis of Turgenev had inspired Deleuze's analysis of Sacher-Masoch, because Bourget proposes that the study of female nature in Turgenev's imagination consists of three distinctively different types of woman: 'la femme perverse, de la Diabolique [...] des coquettes, [...] et] les saintes et les martyres'.<sup>22</sup> Bourget argues that the contradictory images of women, the angel, the devil and the bourgeois woman, are the necessary sites which allow the artist to express 'le frémissement tragique et douloureux'.<sup>23</sup> Apparently, for Bourget, the obsession with suffering and tragedy is not something to be condemned but a distinguishing mark of the literature of the late nineteenth century. Lastly, it should be added that Bourget stresses that Turgenev's way of life as a wanderer in fact contributes to these characteristics in his fictional world. It is understood that wandering is 'un trait marquant de sa figure intellectuelle', which makes Turgenev's work significant in terms of the refined and

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<sup>21</sup> Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, II, 217–218.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 232–234. Lorrain uses the word Diabolique as a type of woman who compounds Decadent beauty, danger and passion, See 'La villa des Cyprès', in Jean Lorrain, *Le crime des riches, suivi de Paris Forain*, édition présentée, ed. by Pascal Noir and Michel Peifer (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996 [1905]), p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

calculated literary techniques gained from his association with contemporary French artists and of the driving spirit and perseverance innate in his Slav soul.<sup>24</sup>

It was not only the critics of Decadence but also the Decadent artists themselves who used the term ‘Decadence’ as a fashionable banner for a new generation. Patrick McGuinness observes: ‘Many literary “décadents” were opposed to the idea of “Décadence”, thus pitting adjective against noun, and saw their project quite explicitly as regenerative’.<sup>25</sup> He points out that Decadence, or *décadent*, signified the struggle to find a new possibility for art in a corrupt world. Indeed, in 1886, Anatole Baju started to edit and publish a periodical called *Le Décadent: littéraire et artistique* to which Decadent artists, including Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rachilde and Lorrain, contributed. Its first issue started with the following manifesto of their beliefs: ‘Nous serons les vedettes d’une littérature idéale, les précurseurs du transformisme latent qui affouille les strates superposées du classicisme, du romantisme et du naturalisme’.<sup>26</sup> According to the defence provided by Baju and his followers, the dark and perverse aspects of Decadent literature were necessary to express the nuances of complicated and corrupt modern existence. For them, it was not their art and literature but society itself that was truly ‘decadent’. Elsewhere, Baju described the Decadents’ position as that of a son who refuses to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 201. See the interaction between French Decadents and German and Russian artists (the popularity of Wagnerism, Russian novels such as Turgenev’s and Ibsen), F. W. Hemmings, *Culture and Society in France 1848–1898: Dissidents and Philistines* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), pp. 221–234.

<sup>25</sup> McGuinness, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Vareilles, ‘Aux Lecteurs!’, *Le Décadent: littéraire et artistique* (10 April 1886). The title became simply *Le Décadent*, from the issue of December 1887 to 1889.

be his father's heir and writes about the pleasure in being reproached by the paternalistic contemporary press:

Notre mérite consiste à n'être pas compris de ces gens-là; s'ils pouvaient nous louer, nous nous serions trompés, nous marcherions sur leurs traces, nous leur ressemblerions. A l'accueil paternel qu'ils font aux médiocrités, ne se sent-on pas fier d'être l'objet de leur haine, n'est-ce point une consécration?<sup>27</sup>

In this way, the term Decadence is self-consciously adopted by the artists who wish to disinherit themselves from the established cultural ambit.

For the self-proclaimed Decadents, the main target of criticism was Naturalism, because it held a paternalistic authority in art discipline. Baju contrasted the Naturalist artists, whom he disparaged as a mere instrument of the corrupted modern mind, to his fellow Decadents, who served the needs of propagating and recovering the Ideal. In *L'École décadente*, Baju explained why he had published the journal and asserted that Naturalism 'ne représentait pas la civilisation; ses excès et ses tendances pornographiques avaient rendu inévitable la réaction qui s'opère aujourd'hui. C'est à l'École décadente qu'était réservé l'honneur de broyer le Naturalisme et de créer un goût meilleur qui ne fut plus en contradiction directe avec le progrès moderne'.<sup>28</sup> Here, the negative connotation of the term 'Decadence' is reversed: Decadence is Modernity, the rising movement. This was intended to

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<sup>27</sup> Anatole Baju, 'Caractéristique des Décadents', in *ibid.*, (1–15 October 1888).

<sup>28</sup> Anatole Baju, *L'École Décadente* (Paris: Léon Vannier, 1887), p. 5.

echo Baudelaire's idea of modernity and the supreme role of art. Bajou considered Baudelaire a precursor of Decadence, in particular appreciating his idea that modern art should be sensitive to 'la valeur et les privilèges fournis par la circonstances; car presque toute notre originalité vient de l'estampille que le *temps* imprime à nos sensations'.<sup>29</sup> Bajou used this idea to define Decadence as the art of 'la conséquence d'un changement de mœurs ou d'une transformation sociale'.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that, to the Decadents themselves, Decadence meant a regenerated movement, rather than degeneration.

Bajou's ideal future was an elitist aristocracy in which artists such as the Decadents would posit themselves as leaders. This reactionary idea is motivated by his opposition to the bourgeois mass society and its appointed publicists, namely naturalists and positivists. The aspiration to be re-created gradually became explicit as his political consciousness and sense of mission widened. The shift increasingly echoed Péladan's idealism, in particular his sense of mission and use of art for the sake of his occultist beliefs, although Bajou clearly expresses his depreciation of Péladan's contemptuous remarks about his Decadent circle: Péladan did not need to claim that he was not a Decadent, because his Catholic moralism and his romanticist or naturalist sensibility, obsessed with the dramatic conflicts between man and woman, disqualify him as a Decadent in the first place.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'Modernité', in *L'Art Romantique* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1917), p. 69.

<sup>30</sup> Bajou, loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup> 'M. Joséphin Péladan annonce quelque part qu'il n'est pas décadent. C'était bien inutile. ...Quiconque traîne le boulet d'une croyance n'a pas le droit de se dire Décadent. M. Péladan croit au pape, à la morale, en Dieu et à



At first, the journal adhered to its position of indifference to current politics, ‘La décadence politique nous laisse frigides’; however, in the penultimate issue, Baju stated that a work of art was a means of healing society and that the primal aim of Decadent art is ‘l’Education de l’Homme’.<sup>32</sup> Then, in the last issue, declaring their intention to remove the term ‘Decadence’ from the journal’s title in future issues (it was subsequently to be published under the title *La France Littéraire*), Baju and his associates re-emphasised their aim of establishing ‘un organe littéraire et politique’, because ‘nous exigeons que l’Art ait une fin, c’est-à-dire qu’il serve à la propagation de l’Idée’.<sup>33</sup> Since Baju always aimed to make Decadent art into a model for French literature, this change was in fact anticipated from the beginning.

Although Lorrain’s attitude towards society is more journalistic, detached and reflective, lacking any sense of being educative, Baju was happy to include him as one of his fellow-artists. Lorrain was a self-acknowledged ‘decadent’, i.e. degenerate, sardonically complaining, ‘je ne suis qu’un miroir et l’on me veut pervers’.<sup>34</sup> He treats the decadence of his society as an object of flirtation and sarcasm, playing with the degenerate signs of Decadence. In the collection of poetry *Modernité*, Lorrain portrays modern society as a pandemonium filled

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d’autres balivernes de ce genre. Il porte d’ailleurs en lui la caractéristique du bourgeois romantique ou naturaliste : l’amour et la haine’, Baju, ‘M. Joséphin Péladan’, *Le Décadent* (1–15 December 1888). Also see Baju, ‘Psychologie Naturaliste’ in *Le Décadent* (1–15 January 1889).

<sup>32</sup> Vareilles, ‘Aux Lecteurs!’, and Baju, ‘L’Esthétique des Décadents’, in *ibid.* (1–15 March 1889).

<sup>33</sup> Direction, ‘A la jeunesse socialiste’, in *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Cit. as epigraph to Thibaut d’Anthonay’s *Jean Lorrain: Miroir de la Belle Époque* (Paris: Fayard, 2005).

with degenerates, such as hysterics, prostitutes, drunkards, beggars, adulterers and adulteresses, effeminate, lesbians and ‘les copailles [the third sex]’.<sup>35</sup> Lorrain’s favourite image of the *femme fatale*, Salomé, is also included in the collection, but she no longer belongs to legend, but merely to a commercial group of dancers:

Un louis... et sous son fin maillot taché de boue  
de sang, Salomé, fille et soeur de la Mort  
Rit à l’humanité, que ce louis d’or bafoue (*Modernités*, p. 59).

Lorrain also uses the image of Salomé’s mother, Hérodiade, in an inverted and rather grotesque way:

Le duc Hérodiade, atroce coryphée  
Sous de faux cheveux roux, de rubis constellés  
Il danse en tutu rose un pas troublant de fée (p. 62).

As Carter says, ‘Lorrain’s work sums up this ultimate period’ of Decadence. Lorrain takes Decadence literally as something degenerate.<sup>36</sup> However, as I want to show in Chapter 5, some of his works also hint at an aspiration towards the birth of something new from the Fall.

Péladan and Lorrain both gained notoriety as self-styled Decadents and frequented Le Chat Noir, whose entrance gate reads, ‘Passant, sois moderne’.<sup>37</sup> Péladan, dilating in his art

<sup>35</sup> First published in *Le Chat-Noir* (10 Nov. 1883), then republished in Jean Lorrain, *Modernités* (Paris: Giraud, 1885), pp. 9–12. The poem includes this reference to transvestites is considered to be an exemplary manifestation of homosexuality. See Leslie Choquette, ‘Degenerate or Degendered? Images of Prostitution and Homosexuality in the Third French Republic’, *Historical Reflections*, 23 (1997), 205–228 (p. 224).

<sup>36</sup> Carter, *The Idea of Decadence*, p. 116.

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Walter Benjamin, ‘The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire’, in *Selected Writings: 1938–1940*, 4 vols, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and others (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), IV, 48.

upon the heroism and martyrdom of his Magus heroes, can be seen to approach modernity and its decadence with a more explicit engagement in the creation of something new. Owing to his serious sense of mission, critics have disputed whether Péladan was a Decadent or a Symbolist. Patrick Besnier, for example, attempts to re-evaluate Péladan's artistic genius in his pursuit of an ideal world. Rising to Péladan's defence, Besnier claims that the former's sketch of society's decadence does not stem from his affinity with Decadence but from his condemnation of mediocre bourgeois society. He adds that even Péladan's disreputable version of the cult of androgyny does not represent an adherence to Decadent depravity but is 'le moyen esthétique et philosophique de dépasser les contradictions d'un âge decadent', with the aim of creating 'l'être future [et] promesse'.<sup>38</sup>

For Péladan, Decadence meant contemporary society and art, which is in his own words, 'les épidémies du goût: réalisme, japonisme, impressionisme'.<sup>39</sup> By organising exhibitions for the Symbolist painters in France, it was Péladan who contributed towards their popularisation; hence, at least as far as he was concerned, he had stronger affinities with the symbolists than the Decadents.<sup>40</sup> His favourite artists were Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, Félicien Rops, Odilon Redon, Fernand Khnopff, Jan Toorop and Alexandre Séon,

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<sup>38</sup> Patrick Besnier, 'Péladan: Un Décadent Contre La Décadence', in *L'esprit De Décadence* (Paris: Minard, 1980), p. 84.

<sup>39</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *Amphithéâtre des sciences mortes, III: Comment on devient artiste, esthétique* (Paris: Chamuel et Cie, 1894), p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> See Jean-Pierre Guillermin, 'De l'Artiste à l'Ariste: Joseph Péladan contre les décadences', *romantisme*, 67 (1990), 59–75.

most of who are now known as Symbolist painters. He constantly helped them to exhibit some of their paintings as part of his series *Salons de la Rose † Croix* (1892–1897), besides using some of the paintings as frontispieces for his novels.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, his grand novel cycle *La Décadente Latine*, subtitled ‘éthopée (description des mœurs et des passions humaines)’, was clearly constructed from an artistic intention to depict the corruption of the era and the people from whom he strove to detach himself.<sup>42</sup> He collated extracts from the first 11 volumes of his saga in a book he called *La quête du Graal: proses lyriques de l'éthopée. La décadence latine* (Paris: Chamuel, 1894), in order to indicate that the objective of his cycle was to bear witness to his quest for the Holy Grail. However, it is also incontestable that his narrative is permeated with erotic torments and suffering, revealing a greater similarity with Decadent frenzy and passion than with Symbolist serenity and purity.

Patrick McGuinness deals with the controversial boundaries between Symbolism and Decadence in *fin-de-siècle* France. He refers the similarities between Decadents and Symbolists in terms of their rejection of the bourgeois values of materialism, democracy and scientific progress and their love for mysticism and artistic elitism, despite their commercial success. He concludes that the uniqueness of Decadent artists lies in finding heroic aspects in decay and degeneration, such as Gautier’s praise of ‘un soleil de décadence’, namely, the

<sup>41</sup> See, Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose-Croix* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976), in particular, pp. 45–46, p. 57, pp. 94–96, pp. 106–108, pp. 113–114 and pp. 217–223.

<sup>42</sup> *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 6th edn, 2 vols (Paris: France-Expansion, 1973 ; repr. Paris: Firmin-Didot frères, 1835), I, 689.

setting sun shining at the height of its decline.<sup>43</sup> However, he adds, ‘Péladan has already moved beyond decline into putrefaction’, arguing that the artist was more obsessed with the end of a Decadent society than the beginning of a new epoch.<sup>44</sup>

Marcel Schneider does not hesitate, either, to categorise Péladan as the best example of a Decadent artist, while providing a schematic contrast between the Decadents and the Symbolists. He sums up Decadent art as based on magic and eroticism, with an emphasis on dark morbidity, while Symbolist art is based on idealistic mysticism and emphasises purity and serenity.<sup>45</sup> Schneider admits that this clear distinction is not always useful, because there are some artists or some works whose sensibilities oscillate between the two. But he maintains that Péladan’s narrative is not ambiguous but limited to the common forms of Decadent eroticism, while his occult-Catholic conviction should be regarded as fanaticism, which even raises the doubt as to his sanity. Péladan’s ‘intention sermonnaire et édifiante, le prêchi-prêcha perpétuel’, through which he intends to prove himself a serious prophet, works negatively to make the reader weary of his text and hinder the artistic perfection he aims at.<sup>46</sup>

Péladan’s ambiguity was not unique; in fact, it was common among the self-styled Decadents. As I have mentioned, Baju shifted his position from Decadent aestheticism to a socialist activist to create a national literature. Maurice Barrès’ transformation from an

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<sup>43</sup> Cit. in McGuinness, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 12–13.

<sup>45</sup> Marcel Schneider, *Histoire de la Littérature Fantastique en France* (Paris: Fayard, 1985). p. 286.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

aesthete-dandy to a nationalist is considered to be merely superficial, because the idea of a national identity of France, which he conceived later in life, was nothing but the magnified version of his mystified and elitist cult of the self.<sup>47</sup> J.-K. Huysmans's conversion from the black mass of Decadence to the white one of Catholicism has been long in doubt.<sup>48</sup> Baudelaire was 'a tormented soul torn into different directions'; this exemplifies the Decadent artist's ambiguous attraction to and repulsion from Decadence.<sup>49</sup>

In the following chapters, I argue that the ambiguity between degeneration and regeneration in Decadent fictions is crucial and should be seen from the perspective of masochism. Chapter 5 proposes that behind Lorrain's obsession with Decadent cliché, unorthodox desires, pain and degradation, there is a theme of regeneration in the downward movement. It is true that Péladan's imaginary world is supersaturated with images of degeneration, perversion and suffering. But, as will be seen in Chapter 6, this element of degradation is necessary to instigate the act of giving birth to a higher form man—the Magus—in his imagination. Before the detailed analysis of their literary texts, Chapter 4 in an overview maintains that there was a similar vision of rebirth in the Decadent vogue of dandyism. At the time, artists invented a new form of masculinity, the dandy, whose mixture

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<sup>47</sup> See Jonathan Fishbane, 'From Decadence to Nationalism in the Early Writings of Maurice Barrès', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 13: 2/3 (1985), 266–278.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g., Christopher Lloyd, *J.-K. Huysmans and the Fin-De-Siècle Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the University of Durham, 1990); Marc Smeets, *Huysmans l'inchangé. Histoire d'une conversion* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Swart, *The Sense of Decadence*, pp. 113–115.

of feminine and masculine attributes was meant to become the centre of attention and power, the means of seduction and domination.

## **PART II: Ambiguous Male Subjectivity in Decadent Fantasies**

Part II focuses on the narrowing of male subjectivity in Decadent texts in the context of masochistic parthenogenesis: the process of giving birth to a new androgynous man out of masochistic experiences. Chapter 4 discusses the relationship of the vogue of dandyism to masochistic sensibility and proposes that the conceptualisation of dandyism shares with masochism a common obsessive anxiety about the conflicting social polarities of power and gender identity. Chapters 5 and 6 involve a similar appreciation of ambiguous identity arising from anxiety and repulsion against society in the works of Lorrain and Péladan. Lorrain's neurotic anxiety over his masculine identity is reflected in the shifting images of masks and blue-green things in his texts and Péladan is obsessed with the idea that the suffering and humiliation inflicted by society is necessary to attain occultist enlightenment. I further examine their common hope for the rebirth of a new man out of suffering, in particular, in the ambiguous figure of Fréneuse/Phocas in Lorrain's *Monsieur de Phocas* and Péladan's dream of the androgynous superior being, the Magus.



#### ***CHAPTER 4. DECADENT DANDYISM: THE BIRTH OF THE ANDROGYNE***

The previous chapter examined the recurrent theme of the birth of the iconic man, characterised in Sacher-Masoch's imagination by the Wanderer and 'the Greek'. The submissive mask of the masochist conceals this androgynous superior man, who frees himself from the social constraints and vulgarities of contemporary society. Sacher-Masoch's conception of this distinguished male ideal was not unique; contemporary artists and intellectuals also dreamed of a similar type of new man, in the form of the dandy.

Walter Benjamin has already associated the dandy with the 'wanderer' or what he refers to as the 'flâneur'. In his analysis of Baudelaire's dandyism in relation to the society of his time, Benjamin argues that the 'flâneur' is a provocateur because he loves destruction and revolt; he is 'Cain, the ancestor of the disinherited' because he possesses no property but his own existence and is a fetish commodity because he 'roams through the labyrinth of commodities', only to abandon himself in the crowd (the buyer).<sup>1</sup> Benjamin also insists that the type of the flâneur's sensibility is suicidal, a modern 'heroic passion,' deriving from his desire born out of ennui to find refuge only in death. It is true that the ambivalence of the Baudelairean dandy relates to luxury and the life of the city. In this respect, he may resemble Sacher-Masoch's 'Greek', who is a man of high society, more than the 'Wanderer', who is a

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', p. 9 and p. 31.

saint wandering through nature. But the dandy and the Wanderer also share essential characteristics, such as a sense of superiority and social isolation, an affinity with destruction and downfall, a disgust for ordinary life and an identification with feminine principles.

In this chapter, I propose that the dandy, in his capacity as the self-authorised androgyne, is the new genderless man born from a masochistic self. For this purpose, I regard dandyism as a domination-submission game of seduction and highlight the discrepancy between the dandy's pose of aloofness and his concealed anxiety and suicidal desire for self-annihilation, with the aim of becoming an attractive work of art. I first consider the dandy's manipulation of illusion, mystery and femininity to satisfy his desire for control over his own life, his audience and women. Then, I examine how the principles of dandyism are developed through an uneasy game of domination-submission with masochistic reverberations.

***– A Lust for Domination: Becoming an Objet d'art –***

The legendary exponent of dandyism is the Englishman known as Beau Brummell (1778–1840), who was the most favoured friend of the Prince Regent and whose impeccable taste in clothes allowed him, though born a commoner, to gain social power as the guru of fashion in high society. Dandyism became a huge vogue in the late nineteenth century, in

particular in France and England. It was championed as the theory of the ideal masculine self by writers such as Baudelaire, Barbey d'Aurevilly and Oscar Wilde. They sympathised with Brummell's ambition to dominate society from the periphery by moulding himself into a work of art, namely, 'la statuette d'un homme', as Barbey d'Aurevilly calls it.<sup>2</sup>

The most obvious characteristic of the dandy is his exaggerated concern with external appearance; the effect of his appearance on others satisfies his desire for domination. In his short essay 'Le dandy', Baudelaire emphasises that the superiority of the dandy is well manifested in his style and appearance, because '[il] n'a pas d'autre profession que l'élégance'.<sup>3</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, in his analysis of the dandyism of Brummell, writes that Brummell was 'un homme qui tira sa célébrité de son élégance'.<sup>4</sup> This means that dandyism is not a simple matter of clothing, etiquette and mannerism; rather, it is an autonomous means of gaining social recognition. The dandy exhibits extraordinary elegance in appearance and a cruel taste for provoking and astonishing others, to the point of inspiring 'l'épouvante'. Through such behaviour, just like a magician he casts his spell ('le philtre magique') on both men and women.<sup>5</sup> The dandy is the supreme image, but, unlike political or economic power, the dominance which the dandy seeks to obtain is illusory. As Jules Lemaître puts it, 'le dandy *fait croire* à ce qui n'existe pas. Il règne "par les airs", comme d'autres par les talents, par la

<sup>2</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, 'Dédicace de l'édition de 1845' in *Du dandysme et de George Brummell* (Paris: Rivages poche, 1997[1845]), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Baudelaire, 'Le dandy', in *L'Art Romantique*, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> Barbey, *Du dandysme*, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

force, par la richesse'.<sup>6</sup> This is the self-conscious manipulation of an illusory power, as observed in an episode from Oscar Wilde's account of his own dandyism. When Gilbert and Sullivan's satirical opera *Patience* ridiculed the contemporary aesthetes' obsession with costumes, including Wilde's 'walk down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily in [his] medieval hand', Wilde responded, 'Anyone could have done that. The difficult thing to achieve was to make people think that I had done it'.<sup>7</sup>

Because dandyism is the creation of a magical illusion, its conceptualisation refuses to clarify who the dandy is, but simply increases the uncertainty of his identity. In *Gender on the Divide: the Dandy in Modernist Literature*, Jessica R. Feldman demonstrates that Barbey's book on dandyism is not intended to clarify dandyism thematically and textually; rather, it is meant to obscure it. Such a conclusion is not based solely on the fact that Barbey repeatedly edited the book in order to lend it a 'perpetual self-contradiction' (for example, he states that dandyism is a universal phenomenon, while elsewhere he claims that it is an idiosyncratic taste).<sup>8</sup> It also relies on Barbey's central idea that the dandy is an enigma, that is, a man who wears an impassive mask which conceals an impassioned femininity.

The implication that the dandy's femininity is related to the mysteries of his identity persists in Barbey's narrative. He highlights that the dandy is a creature of vanity—vain to the

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<sup>6</sup> Cit. in Preface by Frédéric Schiffter, *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Cit. in Gilman, *Decadence*, p. 121.

<sup>8</sup> Jessica R. Feldman, *Gender on the Divide: the Dandy in Modernist Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 55.

extent of suffering from a narcissistic intoxication with his own existence (*la fatuité*). Further, he states that the dandy's vanity and its social influences are 'difficiles à comprendre et à pénétrer'.<sup>9</sup> He does not precisely describe the kind of vanity shown by the dandy; instead, he merely states that it is 'la vanité anglaise', which implies that it is too foreign to understand.<sup>10</sup> Hence, dandyism is something unfamiliar and possesses 'l'air de sphinx qui préoccupe comme un mystère'. Further, as added in the footnote, '*être labyrinthe*' is being a dandy.<sup>11</sup>

Barbey's association of the identity of the dandy with femininity is also explicit in his presentations of women as dandies. For instance, in the novels collected in his *Les Diaboliques*, both the heroes and heroines are dandies. The dandy-heroines are not only the female versions of the dandy-heroes but also the models or initiators of dandyism. This is because it is the women who display vanity, conceit and coldness and set a model of the true dandy who can manipulate others' desires and enslave them. The Countess in 'Le dessous de cartes d'une partie de Whist' is called 'une espèce de *femme-dandy*' because her complete elegance and impersonal pose perfectly match the Scottish male dandy Karkoël.<sup>12</sup> The two of them appear identical in terms of their power to attract and seduce which resembles 'un ensorcellement'.<sup>13</sup> However, it is clear that in their relationship the woman takes the initiative and the man follows her submissively. She is an extrovert with a spiteful tongue who

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<sup>9</sup> Barbey, *Du dandysme*, pp. 30–31.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>12</sup> Barbey, *Les Diaboliques*, p. 194.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

tyrannises others, while he remains passive and silent, with delicate white hands: ‘lui et elle, étaient deux abîmes placés en face l’un de l’autre; seulement, l’un Karkoël, était noir et ténébreux comme la nuit; et l’autre, cette femme pâle, était claire et inscrutable comme l’espace’.<sup>14</sup> In this inverted gender play, in secret complicity, they murder the Countess’ daughter—who loved Karkoël—and a baby (whose parents are unidentified), in order to satisfy their secret infatuation and the Countess’ jealousy of her own daughter.

In ‘Le bonheur dans le crime’, from the same collection, there is a similar symmetry and complicity between a dandy-couple, Hauteclair and Serlon. After first confirming that the hero Serlon is a perfect dandy, Barbey then tells the reader that Hauteclair is in fact more active and dominant in their criminal relationship: ‘c’était la femme qui avait les muscles, et l’homme qui avait les nerfs’.<sup>15</sup> Following Hauteclair’s scheme, they stage an intrigue to deceive and poison Serlon’s wife so that they can marry each other. Davina L. Eisenberg focuses on the ambiguous gender identity of the dandy figures in this story and argues that Hauteclair’s appearing in a fencing costume and beating men, including Serlon, with her sword symbolises an image of ‘a woman-phallus’.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Eisenberg associates the androgyny of the dandy with power. Further, she considers that the dandy’s androgyny is asexual and self-contained, opposing the immediate association of a narcissistic indulgence in

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>16</sup> Davina L. Eisenberg, *The Figure of the Dandy in Barbey d’Aurevilly’s “Le bonheur dans le crime”* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 48.

appearance and a desire to attract attention, which are both often considered to be feminine attributes, to narcissism or latent homosexuality. Instead, she emphasises that the dandy does not love ‘anyone—man, woman, and least of all, himself’.<sup>17</sup>

Androgyny is a central issue in dandyism; Barbey concludes his analysis of dandyism with images of the androgyne and Alcibiades. Feldman, unlike Eisenberg, considers that it is not simply aesthetically significant, but also politically so. She examines the idea of dandyism expressed in texts by Gautier, Barbey, Baudelaire, Cather, Stevens and Nabokov and proposes its subversive influence on the gender politics of modern Western society. She argues that the dandy should be considered a pioneer of feminism and post-structuralism, who challenges ‘patriarchal thought’ or ‘phallogocentrism’, because the dandy’s androgyny deconstructs binarism and presents a synthesis in gender equity.<sup>18</sup>

Although Feldman mentions that ‘the dandy is *he*’, suggesting the implicit superiority of the male principle in the concept of the dandy, she understands the relationship of the vogue of dandyism to feminism.<sup>19</sup> However, the feminist potential of the cult of the androgyne is challenged in Kari Weil’s study, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*. Weil argues that this state is not a harmonious and equal synthesis of man and woman but an enhancement of the indomitable power of patriarchy. By examining the images of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>18</sup> Feldman, *Gender on the Divide*, p. 86.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

androgyny from Plato and Ovid to Balzac, Gautier and Woolf, Weil demonstrates that the androgynous being is essentially a man. Solid masculinity is retained as its essence and femininity is added only as mere appearance, decoration or make-up.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Weil opposes the idea that androgyny subverts the conventional sexual hierarchy. Instead, she states, it intends to reinforce patriarchal authority and implicitly reiterate that woman merely complements man.

Dandyism was proposed by male artists as a masculine ideal, despite the fact that the dandy's identity destabilises conventional gender roles, ambiguously oscillating between masculinity and femininity. As a result of the textual manipulation by male authors, the feminine becomes a subservient element working to complete the dandy's androgyny and gratify his desire for mastery. In her book *Rising Star*, Rhonda K. Garelick focuses on the exploitation of femininity in dandyism by studying the cultural implications of the dandy's and the female performer's theatrical gender in the plays of *fin-de-siècle* France. In the context of consumerism and the rise of the mass media, she proposes that these two public figures created 'something beyond androgyny, giving birth to the concept of the 'star' as we know it today'.<sup>21</sup> She argues that the style of dandyism and stage performances by actresses are similar feminised spectacles, since they involve the transformation of the body into a

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<sup>20</sup> Kari Weil, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Garelick, *Rising Star*, p. 3.



machine. This produces a symbolic power: a commodity fetish which attracts the crowd's desire for consumption. Femininity exists as an essential mediator in this process; as an example Garelick takes Lorrain's *Une Femme par jour*, which deals with fashionable women. Garelick states that the image of woman in Lorrain's text is both seductive and monstrous, because it is the dandy's 'strange female doppelgangers'.<sup>22</sup> Further, they symbolise the morbidity of the commodity, which pre-empts the possibility of criticism, to which the dandy's own masquerade is equally subject. Hence, by textualising feminine charms in his narrative, Lorrain seeks to control women in the same manner as he masters himself as a dandy. At the same time, by exposing women's elaborate theatricality to harsh criticism and condemnation, he safeguards his own dandyism from the same attack. Thus, this double operation is dominated by the dandy's neurotic longing for mastery and discipline; however, it also suggests his own fear of castigation and his sense of rivalry towards his identical sibling, the woman.

The rivalry with women is expressed in the dandy's strong sense of self-discipline; the dandy and women are equally seductive in appearance, but at the same time, they possess different levels of self-awareness and self-discipline. Barbey links the superiority of the dandy and women's mysterious powers of seduction as follows: '*Paraître, c'est être pour les dandys,*

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

comme pour les femmes'; 'un dandy est femme par certains côtes'.<sup>23</sup> However, when he emphasises the dandy's intellectual faculty and dominating will-power, he distinguishes the dandy from women: 'On l'a considéré [Brummell] comme un être purement physique, et il était au contraire intellectuel jusque dans le genre de beauté qu'il possédait'.<sup>24</sup> This echoes Baudelaire's contradictory idea that the dandy's elegance resembles women's coquetry but dandyism is at the same time different from femininity in terms of its spiritualism, aestheticism and stoicism: 'Le dandysme n'est même pas [...] un gout immodéré de la toilette et de l'élégance matérielle. [...] C'est avant tout le besoin ardent de se faire une originalité [...]. C'est une espèce de culte de soi-même [...] le dandysme confine au spiritualisme et au stoïcisme'.<sup>25</sup> This makes it clear that Dandyism is not only a means of appearance, but also a self-conscious masquerade to master.

The rest of this chapter examines the hidden implications of dandyism in an attempt to suggest that this self-conscious objectification of the self is motivated by a masochistic sense of inferiority and anxiety over the male identity. According to Barbey, dandyism is the 'élégante froideur qu'il portait sur lui comme une armure et qui le rendait invulnérable'.<sup>26</sup> I think this is a defensive armour donned in a quest for impenetrability, a security device desired by the masochistic man who feels perpetually threatened and humiliated.

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<sup>23</sup> Barbey, *Du dandysme*, p. 92. n, and p. 104. n.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>25</sup> Baudelaire, 'Le dandy', p. 89.

<sup>26</sup> Barbey, *Du dandysme*, p. 92.

– *A Game of Domination-Submission* –

Dandyism is said to involve a lust for domination and mastery, but it hides something contradictory: submissiveness and the fear of being perceived as inferior and being victimised. The passive aspect of the dandy's personality, which is hidden behind the mask of the dominant, is pointed out, as when Eisenberg says that the dandy constantly needs 'to provoke but at the same time to protect and hide his anxious "moi"'.<sup>27</sup> Armand B. Chartier also posits that in the work of Barbey d'Aurevilly the dandy appears to be emotionless and indifferent, but only on the surface. This is because Barbey's dandyism is essentially a disguise in the struggle to 'conceal his sorrows', as described in the image of the dandy Brassard in 'Le Rideau cramoisi'.<sup>28</sup> I want to suggest that at the heart of his dandyism, the dandy conceals the pleasure and pain provoked by the ambiguous game of domination-submission. I do so by examining how the significance of the key concepts of dandyism (self-discipline, vanity, elegance and the creation of an artificial androgynous self) implies the dandy's anxious need for the approval of others.

The dandy is perceived as an heroic figure; hence, Barbey states that Thomas Carlyle should have included the dandy in his category of heroes.<sup>29</sup> However, the dandy's heroism is strongly tinted with a masochistic sensibility. Baudelaire declares that the dandy's heroism

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<sup>27</sup> Eisenberg, *The Figure of the Dandy*, p. 81.

<sup>28</sup> Armand B. Chartier, *Barbey d'Aurevilly* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> 'Thomas Carlyle, qui a écrit un autre livre intitulé les Héros [...] aurait pu nous donner le Héros de l'élégance oisive—l'Héro Dandy', Barbey, *Du dandysme*, p.46. n.

manifests itself in his perseverance in the face of suffering: the dandy is ‘un home souffrant; mais, [...] il sourira’.<sup>30</sup> Barbey also emphasises the dandy’s audacity through an example of masochism. He poetically describes that the dandy belongs among the reckless people who would like to walk in the clouds, ‘marcher dans leur nuée’, comparing their few tatters of clothing, which barely cover them, to wisps of cloud. He adds that enjoying the perilous game requires a highly delicate operation and ‘un morceau de verre aiguisé’.<sup>31</sup> This vision suggests the pleasurable thrill caused by imagining the risk of public embarrassment and humiliation. Feldman focuses on this example in order to show the ‘hints of sadism with reverberations of masochism’ in Barbey’s dandyism.<sup>32</sup> Although her use of the terms sadism and masochism follows Praz’s understanding of sadomasochism, Feldman draws attention further to Barbey’s favourite image of St. Sebastian, as depicted by Van Dyck. In Barbey’s narrative, the saint has to suffer ‘elegantly’; thus, he becomes a dandy, who wears a mask to transform the ugly and bloody torment and suffering inflicted by others into pride, elegance and beauty.<sup>33</sup> Feldman says that the humiliation and submission of St. Sebastian are glorified in this manner because Barbey is obsessed with ‘a never-ending circle of domination and subservience’.<sup>34</sup>

The ambivalence between domination and submission can be observed in the most marked features of dandyism, namely, vanity and elegance. They are signs of the dandy’s

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<sup>30</sup> Baudelaire, ‘Le dandy’, p. 89.

<sup>31</sup> Barbey, *Du dandysme*, p. 45. n.

<sup>32</sup> Feldman, *Gender on the Divide*, p. 56.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 59–64.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

superiority, but they imply a passive attitude, which must have other people's approval. Barbey writes that vanity, which he claims to be the only sentiment surviving in the impassive dandy, is a 'recherche inquiète de l'approbation des autres'.<sup>35</sup> The dandy's principle of elegance also implies his fundamental obedience to social conventions and public whims. In the same manner that a masochist needs the strict rules of the contract with which he plays in order to gain the pleasure of submission and control, the dandy plays with social norms and public tastes in fashion and mannerisms. For Barbey, dandyism 'se joue de la règle et pourtant la respecte encore. Il en souffre et s'en venge tout en la subissant ; il s'en réclame quand il y échappe ; il la domine et en est dominé tour à tour'.<sup>36</sup> As the image of the half-naked dandy already suggests, the dandy's elegance is a risky oscillation between 'l'originalité et l'excentricité', which relies on his audience for judgment.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, because of his impeccable taste and elegance, the dandy could become a target of jealousy: 'Les femmes ne lui pardonneront jamais d'avoir eu de la grâce comme elles; les hommes, de n'en pas avoir comme lui'.<sup>38</sup> On account of his singularity, the dandy faces the risk of alienation.

The dandy's masochistic sensibility can be further seen in his self-destructive wish to make himself an object of desire, an inanimate object. Baudelaire emphasises the impassivity and coldness in dandyism: 'Le caractère de beauté du dandy consiste surtout dans l'air froid

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<sup>35</sup> Barbey, *Du dandysme*, pp. 37–38.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

qui vient de l'inébranlable résolution de ne pas être ému'.<sup>39</sup> The reason that the dandy strives to dehumanise himself in order to imitate the cold calmness of an object forms the subject of James Eli Adams's study, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood*.<sup>40</sup> Adams reviews the significance of dandyism as a model of manhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and proposes the thesis that the creation of charismatic images of man at the time was motivated by men's profound anxiety and fear of their own masculinity. He argues that in the conceptualisation of dandyism, it is possible to observe the fragility of the masculine identity under social repression. Adams questions the common assumption that patriarchal power was dominant and firmly secured in the Victorian era and maintains that masculinity was not at all a secured issue. Instead, it was always uneasily on display as an object subject to surveillance and scrutiny, under suspicious and hostile public gaze and men had to be perpetually anxious not to attract the label of effeminacy. Out of this burden of being 'the man', Victorian men wished to fashion an image of man as an untouchable icon, namely, the dandy, whose chief characteristic was a strict self-discipline and whose principle was to master or repress the emotions and passions which were conventionally associated with women's inferiority. So Adams argues that it was not coincidence that dandyism appeared and thrived in the imperialist era, because it was the time when physical strength

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<sup>39</sup> Baudelaire, 'Le dandy', p. 92.

<sup>40</sup> James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

was regarded as proof of manliness and intellectual and artistic men were obsessed with justifying their intellectual labour and aesthetic tastes.<sup>41</sup> Dandyism can be seen as a defensive operation which aims to resolve the sense of inferiority and victimisation experienced by male writers and artists.

I have sought to show that the dandy contains and transcends both genders and dandyism is motivated by a masochistic heroism and self-destructiveness. Just as the masochist uses the powerful woman in order to be reborn as an androgyne, the dandy adopts femininity, along with its cultural implication that femininity seduces men to subdue their supremacy. However, the dandy carefully distinguishes himself from women by claiming the powers of intellect and self-discipline, because dandyism was born in a misogynist era in which femininity immediately implied inferiority and women were believed to be blindly driven by emotions and instincts. Next, I consider literary texts written by Lorrain and Péladan, in order to examine a similar process, by which male subjectivity is ambiguously constructed in relation to masochism.

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<sup>41</sup> For a description of similar anxiety felt by men concerning their masculine identity under the social repression of our own age from the perspective of social science, see Emmanuel Reynaud, *La Sainte Virilité* (Paris: Edition Syros, 1981).

**CHAPTER 5. MASOCHISTIC MASQUERADE: LORRAIN'S OBSESSION WITH  
MASKS AND BLUE-GREEN OBJECTS**

In this chapter, I highlight the ambiguous presentation of the self reflected in shifting images of masks and blue-green objects in Lorrain's texts and identify it as the masochistic desire for annihilation of the self deriving from a sense of guilt, as well as the masochistic hope for rebirth as a higher form of man. Lorrain's excessive preference for ambiguity and mystery cannot escape the reader's notice and they have often been discussed by critics. José Santos explores Lorrain's literary art of instability and says that Lorrain's preference for the changing colours of the sea or absinth is one of the characteristics of the Decadents, who liked to describe these elusive shades as 'malades', colours of degeneration and decomposition.<sup>1</sup> Santos says that Lorrain's writing is haunted by the dark side of humanity, sickness and vice, because he was acutely aware of those aspects of human nature inside himself and wanted to free himself from them: 'son besoin de sortir de lui-même, d'*ex-sister*'.<sup>2</sup> Robert Ziegler also pays attention to the ambiguity in Lorrain's narrative and discusses its recurrent motif of nothingness. He writes, 'in order fully to understand Lorrain's fantastic fiction, it is necessary to return to the empty centre of his oeuvre, to recall its forgotten origin and define the goal it never reaches'.<sup>3</sup> Focusing on the unresolved mystery in *Un démoniaque*, Ziegler sees the

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<sup>1</sup> José Santos, *L'art du récit court chez Jean Lorrain* (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1995), p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Ziegler, 'The Mother of the Fantastic in Jean Lorrain', *MLN*, 109:5 (1994), 897–912 (p. 899).



ambivalence as an echo of Lorrain's own intense and contradictory feelings for his mother: the love of a devoted son who wishes to return to her as a child and the repulsion felt by an independent man who hates her repressive power of manipulation over his whole life. Ziegler elsewhere focuses again on Lorrain's intimate relationship with his loving, domineering mother and shows that Lorrain thought that his mother gave him a second birth as the writer named Jean Lorrain.<sup>4</sup> As Chapter 2 saw, Sacher-Masoch's 'masochistic' fantasy is principally based on the ambiguous coalition between the son and the mother. Playing a game of disguise to confuse the idea of gender identity, the masochist and his mother establish an intensified relationship of love and fear, which results in the death or cure of the son. Lorrain's work, *Monsieur de Phocas*, displays a similar masochistic story: the cruel goddess Astarté tortures and nurtures the protagonist Fréneuse to make him a reborn man named Phocas.

Thibaut d'Anthonay writes that *Monsieur de Phocas* is a 'confession d'un dandy pervers et esthète tourmenté'.<sup>5</sup> *Monsieur de Phocas* is a disturbing story about a tormented dandy, whose identity is kept enigmatic, as he mysteriously has two names: le duc de Fréneuse and Monsieur de Phocas. He exhibits a desire to destroy the stability of gender-sexual identity and appreciate ambiguity, which is reflected in his obsession with shifting objects of masks and 'une chose bleue et verte'.<sup>6</sup> He is an obsessive neurotic. He is

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Ziegler, 'The Dynamics of Decadent Narrative in Lorrain, Sonyeuse', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 31:1 (1994), 99–107.

<sup>5</sup> Thibaut d'Anthonay, *Jean Lorrain : Barbare et Esthète* (Paris: Plon, 1991), p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Lorrain, *Monsieur de Phocas*, Intro., by Thibaut d'Anthonay (Paris: Édition de La Table Ronde, 1992 [1901]), p. 18. Hereafter referred as *Phocas*.

also a murderer, to which Lorrain adds an implication of homosexual traits. Yet his identity as a homosexual is never clearly articulated. Despite the fact that he is obsessed throughout the story with the idea of killing and eventually commits murder, it is difficult to regard him as simply sadistic, because the characteristic of his subjectivity is elusiveness, a perpetual oscillation between two opposite poles: sadistic impulses and masochistic ones. The reader of this mysterious story might want to ask these questions: What do the blue-green eyes mean to him? How does he identify his desires with them? What denotes his changes of name from le duc de Fréneuse to Monsieur de Phocas? Why does the novel consist almost entirely of the story of le duc de Fréneuse, though its title is *Monsieur de Phocas*? Who is Monsieur de Phocas? This chapter aims to answer these questions, by linking the ambiguities accumulated in Lorrain's writing to the masochistic representation of the elusive nature of subjectivity. Referring to his other stories, too, I first examine Lorrain's recurrent motifs of masks and blue-green objects, in order to show that these ambiguous objects are representations of a destructive desire to annihilate the self. Through an examination of Fréneuse's obsession with the masks and blue-green eyes possessed by both victims and executioners, I explore the perpetual oscillation of the protagonist, who is a murderer and yet a masochist. Beneath this is the ambiguity in sexual desires, which suggests that there is a close link between masochism and homosexuality in Lorrain's writings. Lastly, I will propose that the metamorphosis of

Fréneuse to Phocas is another example of the recurrent theme in masochism: a hope for rebirth into a new, superior form of man.

– *Masks and the Ambiguous Self* –

In *The Changing Face of Horror*, Cary Cummiskey examines the immense popularity in nineteenth-century France of fantastic short stories and compares the earlier period and the later one known as Decadence. Cummiskey emphasises that, influenced by Poe, Decadent fantastic stories are characterised by psychological horror and terror and their dark and menacing tones are elaborately developed in the narrative.<sup>7</sup> Lorrain's texts are composed of such highly controlled stories in order to create the same masochistic effect in all cases: the pleasure found in fear and anxiety.

Lorrain uses masks to indicate that human identity is elusive. He likes to focus on one particular aspect of the elusiveness, that is, something dreadful and never revealed, or that is revealed as nothing or a mere illusion generated by an artificial catalyst, such as ether. Lorrain's characters compulsively force themselves to confront the mask, to constantly exhibit both fear and fascination for the unknown identity of the disguised person. *Histoires de masques* is his collection of stories all about the masochistic thrill and torment deriving from

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<sup>7</sup> Cary Cummiskey, *The Changing Face of Horror: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century French Fantastic Short Story* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

disguise. 'Les Trous du masque', for example, consists only of an exhibitionistic narrative of anxiety about the identity of a masked man who claims that he is a friend of the narrator and invites him to a masked ball. The climax of the anxiety is achieved with an hysterical cry of horror at the end, when in a mirror at the masked ball the narrator finds only a void behind the others' masks and his own: 'je poussai un grand cri, car il n'y avait rien sous le masque'.<sup>8</sup>

The uncertainty of the story is doubled again at the end, when it turns out that everything was only a nightmare caused by his drinking ether. The mystery is accompanied by an excessively neurotic tone of anxiety and tormented excitement, caused by several layers of ambiguity: the ambiguity of the identity of the masked people, of the identity of the narrator himself and of his recognition of reality.

The mask is fascinating and terrifying for Lorrain because it eliminates the idea that identity is stable. The narrator in 'L'un d'eux' in the same collection states that the purpose of the mask is 'de se grimer, de se déguiser, de changer leur identité, de cesser d'être ce qu'ils sont ; en un mot, de s'évader d'eux-mêmes' (*Histoires de masques*, p. 18). Annihilating the original identity, the mask creates an illusion in accordance with a latent desire which the masked person and/or the observer want to fulfil. For Lorrain, the desire which the mask suggests and conceals is always a shameful sexual desire; the narrator says that the charm of

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<sup>8</sup> Jean Lorrain, *Histoires de masques, suivi de Contes d'un buveur d'éther et de textes inédits*, with Preface and notes by Michel Desbruères (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Pirot, 1987 [1900]), p. 75.

the mask is 'la luxure pimentée de la peur' (p. 19). Another short story included in the collection, 'Chez l'une d'elles', also demonstrates the charm of the mask in relation to hidden, disgraceful desire. It is about a mysterious encounter with a masked prostitute. The narrator chases an attractive prostitute, only to discover with a cry of horror that the person is a boy in drag. He blames himself, making the excuse that his telling the story of this encounter is 'bien ignoble, qui donne la chair de poule et en même temps mal au cœur' (p. 24). This remark implies his fear of the possibility of homosexual desire, which the story ambiguously exposes and conceals.

'L'un d'eux' repeats the same motif of the mysterious gender identity of the mask. The narrator wonders if the androgynous masked person is 'Homme ou femme, moine ou sorcière'. This masked androgynous person wears 'une énorme grenouille de soie verte' on the chest (p. 21). For Lorrain the frog provokes as same 'affreuse impression' as the mask, as he writes in 'Le masque', a story included in the same collection (p. 33). The similarity between the mask and the frog lies in their elusiveness. The frog is an intermediate creature, whose skin is coloured glistening blue and green and which lives amphibiously in two different worlds (earth and water). Lorrain suggests in another story collected in the same book, 'Le crapaud', that the toad is a traumatic symbol for his neurotic anxiety, due to its ambiguous presence which blurs boundaries between beauty and ugliness, or purity and morbidity. It is a story

about a horrifying experience in his childhood, when his pure and innocent pleasure in drinking clear water in a beautiful park is abruptly transformed into the revolting experience of drinking polluted, dirty mud in which lives a grotesque toad: ‘je sentais dans ma bouche, dans mon gosier, dans tout mon être, comme un goût de chair morte, une odeur d’eau pourrie’ (p. 235). Like the masks, the amphibians in Lorrain’s texts are the sign of a terrifying awareness that the distinction between two opposites, innocent pleasure and sickness, is not so definite.

There is also a short story, ‘Récit de l’étudiant’, which deals with the same horrified fascination with the mask. It concerns an intriguing story about the charm of the masked ball, told by a mysterious woman from high society. She insists that masks liberate her: ‘Oh ! errer, toute une nuit, libre sous le masque, coudoyer, frôler, avec la certitude de n’être jamais reconnue, toutes les luxures, tous les vices qu’on soupçonne et tous ceux qu’on ne soupçonne pas’ (p. 30). In her case, the mask is a means to sexual debauchery, since it enables her to commit disgraceful deeds which she desperately desires but cannot enjoy if her name is at risk.

A rampant female sexuality hidden behind the noble facade is Lorrain’s favourite theme. Lorrain pushes this game of disguise to the point of loss of identity as a punishment, as is shown in two almost identical short stories, ‘La Princesse au Sabbat’ and ‘La Princesse aux

Miroirs', collected in *Princesses d'ivoire et d'ivresse*. The two stories both show how the tyrannical princesses narcissistically love their own power and beauty but in their erotic curiosity are led to the Sabbat. Lorrain's image of the Sabbat is an explicitly masochistic erotic delirium; the same state is repeated in many other stories.<sup>9</sup> The princess Ilsée in 'La Princesse au Sabbat' takes pleasure and pain from imagining herself brutally violated by monsters: she is 'tenaillée par des griffes, baisée, mordue, léchée et chevauchée par mille bêtes invisibles'.<sup>10</sup> The sensual vision is depicted in the explicit language of physical movements related to sex. Similarly, the princess Illys in 'La Princesse aux Miroirs' dreams of herself falling prey to the violent lust of beasts: '[elle] s'enfonce dans la mollesse effroyable et mouvante d'une foule satanique et bestiale' (*Princesses d'ivoire*, p. 49). Her imagining includes a picture of becoming a prisoner under restraint taken to a torture chamber: 'Illys est aveugle; un bandeau meurtrit ses paupières, un bâillon emplit sa bouche et, rudement secouée par deux compagnons invisibles, Illys est conduite, inerte d'épouvante, vers elle ne sait quel lieu d'horreur ou de supplice' (p. 50). Graphic accounts of the process of abuse and torture, accompanied by repetitive expressions of horrified exclamations of disgust suggest that their dreams are masochistic. The process of degradation in a fantasy, a princess of high degree becoming a victim of sexual abuse and violence by beasts, is also masochistic. The stories

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<sup>9</sup> The most lengthy one appears in Fréneuse's opium dream in *Monsieur de Phocas*, of which details are discussed below.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Lorrain, *Princesses d'ivoire et d'ivresse* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002 [1902]), p. 35.

dramatically end with a horrified cry uttered by the princesses confronting the final punishment, the loss of their reflections in the mirror. This implies a complete annihilation of the integrity of their selves, because these narcissistic women who used to live by auto-erotic infatuation with their own image in the mirror have lost their *raison d'être* of exerting power over others.

The sexual and sensual experience represented in the Sabbat and the accompanying loss of identity are recurrent motifs in Lorrain's texts. Santos has already drawn attention to this, pointing out that the place of loss is often the 'banlieue'. According to Santos, in Lorrain's texts the 'banlieue' is the emblematic place of the Sabbat, infested with modern vices, crimes and sexual debauchery. Referring to 'Les Trous du masque' in *Histoires de masques*, Santos explains that the narrator's geographical move from the city to the 'banlieue' to join the masked ball, the Sabbat, symbolises moral degradation and transgression. Going to the 'banlieue' means going beyond the limits of ordinary life to indulge in phantasmagoria which one desires but normally dares not fulfil. It is significant that Santos observes Lorrain's obsession with the loss of identity to be described in the form of 'une angoisse toute masochiste'.<sup>11</sup> What he calls the masochistic agony is a melancholic mourning for something lost, that is, a sense of innocence, stability and totality (identity). The immoral desires and activities openly practised in the 'banlieue' disturb Lorrain's protagonists and compel them to

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<sup>11</sup> Santos, *L'art du récit court*, p. 97.



confront the latent desires which they never wished to acknowledge. Lorrain's narrative traces the pleasure and pain caused by the process of this loss of identity and desperate need to recover the loss.

The advantage of the mask is to liberate us from the burden of our identity and everyday responsibility. But wearing a mask also means that risking the loss of our identity, i.e. death; the narrator who has lost his reflection after wearing a mask in 'Les Trous du masque' in *Histoires de masques* cries out, 'j'étais mort' (*Histoires de masques*, p. 75). Lorrain's masochistic sensibility appears in this form of flirtation with the 'death' of the self. I discuss further the theme of masochistic play with disguise and ambiguous oscillations in the protagonist Fréneuse/Phocas' obsession with blue-green things in *Monsieur de Phocas*.

### **– The Ambiguous Tones of Blue and Green –**

In *Monsieur de Phocas*, Fréneuse continuously exhibits a sense of suffering and anxiety over his loss of self-assurance and security: 'je ne sais plus où je vais. [...] Je ne me ressaisis plus, je tournoie, et me heurte, et me sens trébucher dans de l'embûche et de l'épouvante' (*Phocas*, p. 132). Fréneuse's insecurity is caused by the numerous splits in his feelings. He is split between two colours, blue and green, between two men, Thomas and Ethal and between the two worlds which each man represents. Fréneuse ambiguously desires and refuses to declare

what the blue-green object means to him. Through close analysis of the text, however, it is possible to clarify that something blue and something green denote opposite values, such as nature set against art, primitiveness against civilisation, health against sickness. Between these opposing values, the image of Fréneuse ambiguously and perpetually oscillates and falls into a masochistic spell of confusion, anxiety and suffering in suspense.

The blue-green object is a reflection of the perpetual vacillation between two opposite values, positive and negative. The colour of the eyes of a dancer, Izé, for example, suggests for Fréneuse a difference between blue and green. When she is a famous dancer, he loves her blue eyes, which remind him of the eyes of Salome, the celebrated symbol of female seduction and cruelty in *fin-de-siècle* texts. When Izé loses her reputation and becomes a low prostitute, Fréneuse thinks her decay to be reflected in her eyes, for they then appear morbidly green, white and grey as if they reflected the changing colour of the dangerous sea: ‘ses splendides yeux aux prunelles d’agate, ses larges yeux d’un blanc d’émail où s’irradiaient des lueurs grises et vertes, les fameux yeux qui ont regardé la mer’ (p. 153). The green here is a sign of her downfall and degeneration.

Blue eyes appear to Fréneuse as representing a positive personality which is healthy and sane, driven by natural instincts. It is vividly symbolised in the clear sky-blue eyes of a farmer, Jean Destreux, whom Fréneuse, as a boy, adored with the pure and innocent

sentiments of a child. Fréneuse remembers with nostalgia that Destreux's blue eyes held natural beauty and innocence: 'Il y avait comme du ciel dans ses prunelles, tant leur eau bleue souriait dans sa face roussie'; 'Moi, je l'aimais pour la franchise de ses grands yeux clairs, son inaltérable gaieté' (pp.184–185). Hoping for a recovery from his neurotic suffering, Fréneuse goes back to his home country, also called Fréneuse, to meet the memory of Destreux. But he sees only his home changed and contaminated by the effects of modern civilisation and capitalism. The industrialised and urbanised countryside disgusts him and makes him realise that what he expected to see in his hometown has long vanished, together with the loss of his innocent childhood and Destreux himself: 'Jean Destreux n'aurait pas été Jean Destreux sous la charpente neuve d'un toit d'ardoises' (p. 192). Fréneuse realises that he has grown up to be a civilised citizen and he imagines that Destreux's clear blue eyes have been accordingly replaced by green eyes, the colour of corruption. Fréneuse says, 'ce n'est qu'après m'être dépravé et corrompu au contact des hommes, que j'ai convoité follement les yeux verts. La hantise de ces prunelles glauques est déjà une déchéance' (p. 193). The memory of Destreux's blue eyes is a nostalgic symbol of the loss of innocence and simplicity in the past and it works to arouse the painful awareness of the fall from grace to a world of green eyes, civilised people.

Thomas Welcôme is another symbol of blue in the story. Fréneuse sees in him a shared

common masculinity and animated beauty with Destreux's manly charm and exclaims in admiration, 'Comme Thomas Welcôme lui ressemble !' (p. 188). The allegation that Thomas is a murderer is even idealised as a proof of his natural aggressiveness as a man, 'Le goût du sang est la plus noble des ivresses, puisque tout être instinctif est meurtrier'; 'Oui, Thomas Welcôme était un être d'instincts, et c'était là toute la puissance de son charme' (pp. 169–170). This attractive man of instinct invites Fréneuse to travel together around India and other countries in Asia, telling him that there is a golden life of healthy sensations over there. Suffering from the same neurotic obsession with blue-green objects as Fréneuse, Thomas tells Fréneuse to leave Paris and Western 'civilized' countries, because such civilization fosters their sickness and agony. Thomas glorifies 'uncivilised' countries and their people, for the eyes one can discover there are not horrible or oppressive, but bright, self-contained and pure. So Thomas's enthusiastic persuasion ignites Fréneuse's aspiration for escape to a healthy life in primitive societies: 'les larges échappées vers la vie libre et saine [...] l'ivresse des instincts et des civilisations jeunes dans le bleu du ciel et le bleu de la mer, toute la santé et la force des existences au soleil' (p. 145). The association of blue with nature and instinct is repeated in the description of the eyes of a working-class man in Paris. Fréneuse is drawn to the blue eyes of an oarsman, whose 'deux larges yeux brûlaient du bleu le plus intense, du bleu le plus violent et le plus pur, [...] ces yeux de vie et d'inconscience' (p. 48). It is evident that blue

distinctly connotes something natural and healthy, a nostalgic space of lost childhood and innocence, in contrast to Western industrialised civilisation.

In Lorrain's fantasy, the colour blue symbolises nature, in the sky, stones or people's eyes, and it has the power to soothe a neurotic modern man such as him: 'Le sombre azur des saphirs surtout me calmait' (p. 55). Green, in contrast, is not something steady, but a mere gleam ('Lueur de gemme ou regard' [p. 18]) and it suggests culture, civilisation, murder and sickness. Green is a (de)generation from blue and this change of tone lies at the basis of Fréneuse's experience of pleasure and pain. The encounter with the innocent azure eyes of the oarsman on the Seine is important, because they suddenly change colour to a gleaming green. It is this shift that gives Fréneuse a feeling of excitement and fright: 'tout à coup les deux saphirs liquides pâlassaient, verdissaient. Ils s'étaient changés en deux si transparentes émeraudes que j'avais la sensation du gouffre et je me levais droit dans la barque, pris de vertige, ne voulant pas sombrer' (p. 48). Fréneuse's obsession with blue-green objects is manifest in his search for this change in the colour of someone's eyes. He chases a pantomimist, Willie, for her blue-green eyes. Fréneuse observes that her blue eyes sometimes appear as healthy and natural as the oarsman's blue eyes, but at the same time, he expresses his fascination with the artificiality of her eyes. As an actress, her eyes can tell nothing but lies and the lies and artificiality manifested in them are her biggest attraction: 'Quand des yeux

nous paraissent beaux, c'est qu'ils ont la splendeur du mensonge, qu'ils se souviennent d'un portrait, d'un regard de musée ou qu'ils regrettent le Passé. Willie avait des regards appris: les yeux des femmes mentent toujours' (p. 39). Fréneuse's fascination with green eyes comes from their association with the charm of art and its artificiality. And his problem is that he simultaneously desires and fears them, recognising the unstable change between blue and green which puts him into confusion and makes him feel uneasy and insecure.

Fréneuse associates green with the products of Western culture, in particular works of art. It is only artists' skills that are able to capture the allure of green, which would otherwise quickly disappear, and permanently embody them in a material object. Ethal says to Fréneuse: 'C'est un regard de Musée que vous cherchez, mon ami; la civilisation pourrie d'une grande ville comme Paris ou Londres pourra seule vous l'offrir' (p. 98). Fréneuse's wish to place emeralds in the hollow eyes of his favourite statue of Antinoüs is motivated by a desire to replace living beings with works of art. For no living human beings have the eyes he has searched for, but some statues do: 'la chose bleue et verte dont je souffre, la dolente et pâle émeraude qui m'obsède m'est clairement apparue dans les yeux de métal, les yeux d'argent bruni des grandes statues de bronze' (p. 38). Some paintings are more favoured than others because they can immortalise a certain type of green eyes, which Fréneuse looks for—the eyes of sufferers: 'Voilà pourquoi les yeux des portraits de musées sont si hallucinants; ils reflètent

des prières et des tortures, des regrets ou des remords' (p. 142). The relationship between green and works of art indicates the protagonist's preference for masochistic representations which capture the moments of fall, suffering and torment.

The different charms of blue and green are symbolised in the images of the two characters, Ethal and Thomas. They have both an obsession with blue-green eyes, like Fréneuse, and both insist that they can cure Fréneuse's obsession. Thomas persuades Fréneuse to leave the cultured life of the city, which aggravates his sickness, for the blue and golden world of Asia: 'Fuyez toutes les boues raffinées des Londres d'alcool et des Paris de misère; partez, allez vivre votre vie ailleurs' (p. 142). The role of Ethal is to contradict Thomas. He says to Fréneuse, 'la guérison n'est pas là-bas, mais ici' (p. 147), in Paris, the refined artistic world of green. Ethal, a well-known painter, represents culture and civilisation. Compared to the plain beauty of Thomas, Ethal appears to Fréneuse rather repulsive and fearsome. Fréneuse observes that Ethal has 'une âme attentive et sournoise, toute de luxure et d'ironie', a hairy chest, thick fingers decorated with heavy jewels and a 'physionomie malfaisante et sensuelle' (p. 68). The signs of virility become a source of negative feelings in the portrayals of Ethal.

The aggressiveness that Ethal shows is perceived negatively. Fréneuse is afraid of Ethal, because he is abusive; he enjoys penetrating and ripping off others' masks to force them

to confront their latent desires as their own real selves, only to see them tortured. Once, an English princess accused Ethal of causing her a serious shock by a sick joke of his which went too far. He defended himself by insisting that he was only doing her a favour, as ‘elle déclarait toujours qu’en fait de sensations elle n’appréciait que les imprévues, les violentes et les profondes’ (p. 65). Another time, a baroness who was famous for her collection of frogs asked Ethal to paint her portrait. He mockingly painted her as a hideous green frog to humiliate her in society. Fréneuse feels that he is one of Ethal’s victims : ‘je faisais partie de sa collection’ (p. 235). It is solely because Ethal’s penetrating gaze can see his real desire behind the mask: ‘je sens qu’il m’épie et que mon indifférence lui est une déception’ (p. 86); ‘Éthal se taisait, mais je sentais son regard appuyé sur le mien, et c’était, dans mon cerveau congestionné, comme le froid aigu d’une vrille’ (p. 170). As I claim later, the unadmitted desire which Ethal forces Fréneuse to realise with a sense of guilt is homoerotic masochism.

Fréneuse’s desire to be free from the contaminating civilisation which causes torment and suffering is a recurrent theme in Lorrain’s texts. ‘Le mauvais gîte’, in *Histoires de masques*, for example, is about obsessive nightmares and a cure. The protagonist claims that he has finally recovered his strength and composure, having left Paris to go to Marseille and Tunis, the places which he fantasises as ideal, full of sunshine. Becoming muscular and tanned, with an air of calmness and innocence, he proudly declares his perfect health, brought



by the sunshine of Africa, ‘Je suis guéri et bien guéri, va!’ (p. 172). ‘Le possédé’ in the same collection is also the story of a neurotic man, whose obsessions come from a variety of Lorrain’s favourite motifs, such as masks, frogs, orgies, ether and foot fetishism. And again, the civilised life in Paris is said to be responsible for his sickness: ‘il faut que je parte, je retomberais malade dans ce Paris fantomatique’ (p. 190), ‘j’en ai pris mon parti, je fuis cet enfer, je pars’ (p. 193). Paris appears to him to be ‘un bestiaire’ (p. 192), for putrid Parisians are no better than hideous animals which hide their basic instincts under prudent human masks. By idealising non-Western, non-industrialised countries as idyllic places, Lorrain’s stories exhibit a strong abhorrence of civilisation and upset the common bourgeois morality which condemns base instincts.

Despite the distinction between healthy blue and sick green, however, blue and green are on the same spectrum, because they are sometimes merely different tones of the same eyes. And so are the violence of Ethal and that of Thomas in *Monsieur de Phocas*. Although Thomas is usually referred to in relation to the colour blue, his eyes sometimes suggestively have a morbid green gleam, ‘deux grands yeux clairs d’une couleur indéfinissable, à la fois verts et violacés comme l’eau d’un étang mort’ (p. 118). Fréneuse’s preference for Thomas over Ethal is clear, but Thomas’s charms, like Ethal’s, sometimes frighten him: ‘Thomas Welcôme [...] je suis encore sous le charme et, en même temps, je me sens plein d’effroi’ (p.

131). There is a sense of complicity between Thomas and Ethal, for this sadistic Ethal shows a sort of intimacy and respect to Thomas: ‘je sens bien qu’il existe comme une complicité, quelque chose d’irréparable et d’obscur entre ces deux hommes!’ (p. 132). Birkett highlights Fréneuse’s oscillation between Ethal and Thomas and says, ‘Phocas must choose between two selves and two ways of life: desperate, evasive idealism or the murderous pleasures of instinct’.<sup>12</sup> She points out that the violence which the two men symbolise is fundamentally the same, even if Lorrain wishes to create an illusion that the healthier and more virile world of men, represented by Thomas and also Destreux, belongs to ‘sanity’. But in fact, under the imperialist regime in Western Europe, it implies ‘more murders’: Thomas travels around the colonies thanks to a large inheritance gained from his secret murder and Destreux also probably killed people when he served in the army in Africa. So Birkett points out the possibility that the protagonist’s calmness and sense of liberation after killing Ethal is temporary, because he merely enters another violent situation, which in the imperialist context is legitimate.

It must be true that Fréneuse’s torment cannot disappear when he takes refuge in Asia. For it comes from his awareness of his own violent instincts and a masochistic sense of guilt for them. Ethal tries to persuade Fréneuse that his attempt to escape from Paris cannot save him because the problem is inherent: ‘Le regard est en vous et non pas chez les autres. [...]

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<sup>12</sup> Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers*, p. 205.

vous emporterez votre mal avec vous' (*Phocas*, p. 98). When Fréneuse resigns himself to return to Paris from his attempted refuge in his home town, he admits that an escape did not help him, realising that his torment never leaves him, like a punishment: 'Je traîne avec moi ma vie. Quel châtiment!' (p. 199). The colonial countries fantasised by Fréneuse are the utopia where one can be honest with instinctive desires without a moral sense of guilt. However, it is conceivable that his masochism will not be resolved in less 'civilised' countries, as, for example, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902[1899]) and Pierre Loti's *Aziyadé* (1879) dramatise. As Noyes demonstrates, these novels depict male masochism in the context of *fin-de-siècle* European imperialism, showing how masochism comes from a conflict between the aggressiveness which is considered legitimate masculinity and the sense of guilt which a civilised and conscientious man feels for his own violent nature.<sup>13</sup> Lorrain's work is also haunted by the same conflict between the violent self and the remorseful, guilty self. Fréneuse's constant exhibition of torment and guilt is based on the doubt whether identity is stable and fixed, so he is obsessed with the ambiguous images of the mask and blue-green eyes. His fanaticism goes to the extent of dreaming that he can annihilate the idea of identity itself, when he imagines that the masked people he sees are decomposing into shapeless 'larves' (larvae, or phantoms).

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<sup>13</sup> See Noyes, 'Chapter 4: Imperialist Man, Civilizing Woman, and the European Male Masochist', in *The Mastery of Submission*.

– *Decomposition of the Self* –

For Fréneuse, the mask, like the threesome for Séverin (p. 87 above), is both appealing and appalling. The mask exposes a lie about identity. He explains his fascination, saying that the mask creates an illusion, ‘L’énigme du visage’ (*Phocas*, p. 89). Yet like the characters in Lorrain’s short stories, Fréneuse cannot express this pleasure in the mask without a strong sense of fear and pain. He expresses his pain as an effect of his state as someone privileged, who can see through the horrifying truth of the mask, ‘cette clairvoyance atroce? La vérité est que je souffre et meurs de ce que ne voient pas les autres et de ce que, moi, je vois!’ (pp. 55–56). This secret knowledge is the painful insight that people living in the modern civilisation are all wearing masks of hypocrisy, which hide rapacious egoism and predatory behaviour, ‘la laideur des gens rencontrés dans la rue [...] Chacun dans son for intérieur ne songe qu’au moyen de piller et de duper autrui’ (p. 56). Fréneuse is afraid of the mask, for its fascinating power of hiding and lying allows it to raise doubts whether identity is steadfast. It also makes him realise that his own identity is yielding, since he too is always ‘dévisagé et fouillé’ by other masked people (p. 89).

It is possible that Fréneuse’s fear of becoming an object of critical survey leads him to picture his identity being torn apart and himself thrown into chaotic nightmares filled with swarming ‘*larves*’. By this term, Lorrain means the obscure and horrifying existences, larvae

and phantoms which represent the aspect of perversity and anarchy in human sexuality. Agnès Spiquel analyses the same association in Victor Hugo's imagery. According to Spiquel, Hugo utilises the term 'larve' for the images of masks, phantoms and larvae in association with the blood-thirsty goddess Isis (Astarté): 'les dieux larves sont des fantômes, des masques de l'être. Voilée, Isis est plus que toute autre déesse une larve. Le mot introduit aussi une nuance de cruauté'.<sup>14</sup> In Lorrain's texts too, the image of 'larve' means an invocation of menacing creatures in the worship of the goddess Astarté. This vision is clearly depicted in the chapter called 'Les larves', which is about a social night turning into a nightmarish orgy, held by Ethal at his atelier. Maud White, Thomas's sister and an actress, who has green eyes, acts as a high priestess of the green-eyed goddess Isis (Astarté) and recites 'L'appel aux goules, l'appel aux larves' to initiate the orgy (*Phocas*, p. 107). The people gathered there are artists, nobilities and foreign princes and princesses (Slavs, Italians and Americans). Transformed into 'larves', they drop the mask of decent humanity and reveal their true colours, an army of 'perverts': adulterers, homosexuals and nymphomaniacs. Their eccentricity, wealth and foreignness imply that their sense of morality naturally transgresses the common sense of French bourgeois ethics.

Surrounded by those repellent and terrifying 'larves' and the chaotic atmosphere enhanced by opium, Fréneuse starts suffering from a series of horrible visions of his body

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<sup>14</sup> Agnès Spiquel, *La déesse cachée : Isis dans l'œuvre de Victor Hugo* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997), p. 49.

being mutilated by the monsters: 'Je sombrais dans un chaos d'hallucinations brèves, incohérentes, bizarres [...] j'assistais dans l'angoisse et l'épouvante à la chevauchée opprimante des plus effrénés cauchemars, toutes une série de monstres et d'avatars grouillant' (p. 126). This is essentially an intellectual activity to generate space to indulge the sensual pleasure and not-pleasure of masochism. This is the pleasure and pain of being stripped and whipped, bitten, dismembered and violated by a myriad of sharp wings and pointed mouths and this collective rape is expressed as a swoon: 'J'étais captif d'aspirantes caresses, fouaillé par tout mon corps de petites morsures savantes jusqu'à en défaillir: j'étais la proie, des orteils aux cheveux, d'innombrables ventouses; les bêtes fétides se partageaient mon corps, violaient sournoisement toute ma nudité' (p. 128). The image of violation is persistent: a flock of vampire bats attack his naked flesh to penetrate all parts of his body and this rape is again experienced as 'une jouissance atroce' (p. 128). Victimisation, humiliation and passivity are clearly the central themes of this opium dream and the masochistic experience of erotic abuse is linked to the experience of a subjectivity crisis, the self being torn into pieces, each part becoming bare, sensitive and sensual to the abusive contact of others.

Fréneuse's nightmares can be understood as a result of his anxiety about his own identity in flux which other people's abusive power perpetually observes, judges and attacks. His fear of becoming an object of critical survey is described in the scene when he criticises

the elite of society who like to gossip about others' secret affairs, all the while afraid that they will soon victimise him as well on discovering his imputed vices which are nonetheless never clarified in the text. Fréneuse says, 'Toutes ces femmes et tous ces hommes dans ces loges, j'en connaissais les vices et les tares, les misères et les scandales, comme ils connaissaient, eux, la détresse de ma vie et les affreuses légendes chuchotées sur mon nom' (p. 158). It is possible that his masochistic fantasy of decomposing himself into a chaos of '*larves*' is both an affirmation and a refusal of his painful understanding to admit that the control of identity and integrity is lost when humiliating ridicule occurs. As a masochist, the ideas of identity, morality and hierarchy haunt him and he is tormented by the conflict between his instinctual self and his intellectual and moral self.

***– Disavowal of the Aggressive Self –***

In order to resolve this conflict, Fréneuse tries to convince himself that his bestial aspect is not his real self. He never enjoys his own cruel instinct, but is frightened by it: 'la cruauté qui m'effraie. Elle [...] me laisse dans l'épouvante de moi-même' (*Phocas*, p. 49). His homicidal desire is never admitted without an accompanying sense of guilt and torment and without blaming outside forces. Heredity and the conventional idea of man as powerful and aggressive are responsible for it: 'Un autre homme est installé en moi... et quel homme! Quels

effroyables atavismes, quels sinistres aïeux il remue en mon être' (p. 47). Ethal and the blue-green eyes of Astarté have special responsibility for the violent desire. Claiming that this is not his own fault, Fréneuse ambivalently desires to murder and regrets it. Below, I consider Fréneuse's ambiguous struggle with his homicidal impulse, blaming others and claiming his innocence. His indecisiveness gradually reveals that his desire for murder and death does not derive from an active desire to kill, but a masochistic desire to resign, suffer and destroy himself.

The ambiguity related to a desire to kill comes from the fact that Fréneuse tries to pass in society as a sadist, while his manuscript reveals that this is a mere mask. As a dandy, he plays the aloof onlooker, with his cold blue eyes which intimidate others, 'cet œil pâlement bleu, d'une dureté de pierre dure' (p. 20). He pretends to be unthreatened, when a relative warns him not to stay in touch with Ethal, who is notorious for playing ill-natured tricks on the nobility. Yet, behind the impassive mask, Fréneuse embraces an intense anxiety caused by the rumour and the possibility that he will soon become a victim of Ethal's bullying. His honour among the nobility is saved as long as he is considered a sadist, for there is an implication that sadism is inherent in men of power. However, his own manuscript, the whole novel, reveals another face: that of a masochist. It traces his masochistic struggles behind the impassive social mask in the form of a confession.



The gap between Fréneuse's social pose as a sadist and his true self, anxious and masochistic, is also shown in his relationship with the dancer, Izé, who believes the rumour that Fréneuse is sadistic. She tries to become involved with him by provoking his jealousy and cruelty towards her. Yet, instead of arousing his desire for her, her willingness to play the victim withers it. Some years later, Fréneuse and Ethal happen to see her working in a brothel, specialising in sado-masochistic services. Fréneuse, again, is not excited but rather frightened and urges Ethal, who shows his willingness to exploit the opportunity, to leave the place immediately: 'Ça, Claudius, je vous le défends. Partons; j'en ai assez' (p. 154). His confession repeatedly expresses a 'virile' desire to kill, but the main concern of the text is the schism between active and passive within him. He never admits his homicidal instinct without expressing remorse, shame and a sense of guilt: 'la tentation du meurtre! Quelle honte!' (p. 26) ; 'Je rapporte une âme d'assassin, quelle ignominie!' (p. 218) Always putting the blame on others (Ethal, women, or Astarté) or something else (hereditary, instincts, or circumstances), he claims that they lead him to carry out his murderous instincts and then he regrets it.

Ethal obsesses Fréneuse, as the mask and blue-green things obsess him: 'la tyrannique obsession d'Ethal' (p. 95). Fréneuse succumbs to his fascination for Ethal's sarcasm and cruelty, but gradually becomes aware that his relationship with Ethal only exacerbates his hatred of human beings and his thirst for murder: 'Pourquoi Ethal a-t-il éveillé en moi ce

déchaînement de haine ? [...] Tuer, tuer quelqu'un, oh ! [...] Si c'est là la guérison promise !' (p. 70). He blames Ethal for provoking his sadistic impulse: 'Oh ! la roide et cruelle sensualité anglaise, la brutalité de la race et son goût du sang, [...]. C'était comme de la jalousie!... De la jalousie! Quel fond de boue cet Anglais remue-t-il donc en moi?' (pp. 94–95). It is Ethal's explicitly sadistic personality, devoid of remorse, that consumes Fréneuse with envy, but at the same time agitates him. Ethal is blamed for aggravating his longing to see suffering in someone else's eyes: 'Serais-je amoureux d'agonies? Effroyable et déroutant, cet invincible attrait vers tout ce qui souffre et ce qui se meurt! [...] cet Anglais lit à livre ouvert dans mes déplorables instincts... Comme je le hais!' (pp. 97–98). In these passages, it is ambiguous whether Fréneuse's desire for agony is motivated by his sadism or masochism. He generally refuses to admit his passive position towards the look of suffering and his repetitive confession of the desire to kill suggests sadism. Yet it is also evident that his hatred for Ethal comes from his masochistic regret, shame and fear. At the moment when he finally murders Ethal, Fréneuse does not feel himself to be a dominant killer, but rather a helpless victim who kills an aggressor only in self-defence. He makes excuses for his act: 'je ne suis qu'un vulgaire meurtrier, pas même un assassin passionnel qui tue pour le plaisir de tuer, l'assassin de volupté que j'aurais pu être, mais le bourgeois ahuri qui tire en tremblant sur le cambrioleur qu'une chute de meubles a dénoncé' (p. 226). Evidently, he is not a sadist who

heartlessly enjoys violating others, but resembles more a masochist who is obsessed with a sense of guilt for his own aggressiveness and desperately seeks his own innocence, denying that his act was intentional.

Ethal is also responsible for initiating Fréneuse's obsession with the green-eyed goddess Astarté. Ethal's gift to Fréneuse of a statue of Astarté is another way of leading him to appreciate lust and death crystallised in a work of art. Ethal explains to Fréneuse that the statue was worshipped by Thomas and his rich 'friend' in their mysterious rituals and that her green eyes witnessed Thomas's alleged murder of this millionaire. Ethal tells Fréneuse that Astarté will divulge Thomas's secret lust and murder to her devoted follower: 'elle a toute une légende que vous savez, et ses yeux d'émeraude ont vu se dénouer un effroyable drame. Elle seule en connaît le fin mot, fin mot qu'elle vous dira peut-être, si vous lui rendez le culte qu'elle exige et vous montrez fervent adorateur' (p. 201). Due to Ethal's 'education', Astarté becomes for Fréneuse a primal symbol of morbid green and his desire to murder is explained as her possession of him: 'Astarté est revenue [...]. Elle me possède, elle me guette. [...] Ma cruauté aussi est revenue, la cruauté qui m'effraie. [...] j'ai eu honte. J'ai toujours honte' (p. 49). Her green eyes entrance him like a curse, as he says: 'les liquides yeux verts... me persécutent, m'hallucinent, me sollicitent et m'oppressent, m'emplissant de haine, de honte et de rut' (p. 47). Astarté possesses Fréneuse, to his perpetual shame and fear, and this shows his

masochistic submission to her cruelty. Lust and murder, which Astarté symbolises, excite Fréneuse, not because they provoke predatory impulses but because they gratify his latent desire for subjugation.

The mystery of Fréneuse's obsession with these eyes and with murder is repeatedly indicated as something masochistic. The epigraph to his chapter is Charles Vellay's poem, 'Les yeux', about the eyes of sufferers, indicating that Vellay too focuses on the internalisation of others' suffering (and all feeling) through the eyes: 'vivre la vie des yeux [...] rire, chanter, pleurer avec les yeux, [...] s'y noyer comme Narcisse à la fontaine' (p. 34). Vellay is praised because his poem represents the process of identification with the condition of the victim: 'mes yeux [...] ils ne sont plus aujourd'hui qu'un miroir qui réfléchit tous ces regards volés' (p. 35). Moreover, Fréneuse is more attracted to Thomas than to Ethal, because Thomas has a remorseful air, which Fréneuse assumes to refer to his alleged murder. Thomas appears beautiful because he is suffering from the sense of guilt: 'Une atmosphère d'épouvante et de beauté enveloppe toujours l'homme qui a tué. [...] Mais s'était-il libéré du remords?' (pp. 169–170); 'le remords même du bel Irlandais, [était] devenu mon obsession' (p. 173). So the idea that beauty lies in death in the story is conceived from the perspective of masochism, when Fréneuse cites Victor Hugo's phrase, 'La Mort et la Beauté sont deux

choses profondes'.<sup>15</sup>

Ethal initiates masochism in another way also, by persuading Fréneuse that the eyes which obsess him are those of the tortured: 'la divine extase effarée, suppliante, la volupté épouvantée des yeux des sainte Agnès, sainte Catherine de Sienne et des saint Sébastien' (pp. 98–99). Gustave Moreau's paintings are used for the process of initiation, because of 'certains yeux de ses héros et l'audace de ses symboles' (p. 171); 'Vous verrez là d'étranges regards limpides et fixes, des yeux hallucinés d'une expression divine; vous les comparerez aux émeraudes enchâssées dans le fond d'onyx de l'idole' (p. 202). In front of Moreau's pictures, Fréneuse understands what Ethal has suggested. He is convinced that the eyes which obsess him have always been those of masochists celebrating death, after torture and suffering.

Fréneuse's appreciation of Moreau's *Les Prétendants* reveals most vividly his masochistic sensibility. It is a painting which embodies 'une sensualité voluptueuse et cruelle'. First, the three sadistic central figures in the picture are mentioned; they look at the massacre with contempt, indifference and calm: 'Nonchalants et couchés, la coupe à la main, ils semblaient mépriser l'agonie hurlante et désespérée de leurs compagnons. Et une grande admiration me prenait de ce calme et de ce dédain parmi cette foule ruée d'épouvante'. However, two other men in the picture catch his more enthusiastic attention. They are heroically awaiting their imminent death : 'Mais, entre toutes ces nudités divines, toutes de

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<sup>15</sup> Victor Hugo, 'Ave, Dea ; Moriturus te salutat' (1872), in *Le Livre des sonnets* (Paris: Lemerre, 1874).

soies et de bijoux, deux m'attiraient, non pas par la pureté de leurs lignes, mais par le charme impérieux de leurs faces, des faces de résolution et d'angoisse, dont les yeux hallucinés enivraient'. One is standing straight, opening his bluish shirt and proudly showing off his naked stomach to receive an arrow. It is his heroic sacrificial pose that intoxicates Fréneuse: 'C'était l'adolescence même se ruant au gouffre, la soif du martyre, l'offrande d'une jeune âme héroïque au trépas!' Another is sitting at the corner and proudly holding a poisoned cup : 'avec deux profondeurs superbes dans les yeux, [il] buvait la mort'. The two men's gleaming eyes, which express the agony of death, clearly tell us that Fréneuse's obsession with the eyes is masochistic : 'ce que je ne pouvais méconnaître et ce qui me remuait tout entier, c'étaient les yeux, les inexprimables yeux de ces deux agonies! [...] ils vivaient, ces yeux, comme deux phosphorescences'. In this way, the picture captures the intense moment of suffering just before death, 'l'affre de la dernière minute à vivre' and Fréneuse's analyses the process of his identification with those who experience the last moment of agony (pp. 216–217).

Charles Bernheimer states that the painting is 'a celebration of masochistic passivity, a glorification of feminized men' and stresses that the attraction of this picture to Fréneuse is not only masochistic martyrdom but also the homoerotic sensuality conveyed by all androgynous male bodies.<sup>16</sup> This mixture of masochism and homoeroticism echoes the painter's obsession. Peter Cooke examines this picture in detail, referring to various sketches

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<sup>16</sup> Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects*, pp. 120–121.

and writings by Moreau over the years. From Moreau's studies, which intensively focus on descriptions of anguished male nudes, Cooke draws the conclusion that in this painting, Moreau's main concern is to find the most effective poses to exhibit the chaos of agony and sensual beauty of a dying male body.<sup>17</sup> Male homosexuality in nineteenth-century French literature has been discussed in relation to sadism, because of the pornographic representations of Sade's extreme disgust at female sexual organs and the preference for the young male anus apparent in his dramas.<sup>18</sup> However, as noted in the previous chapter, Sacher-Masoch's imagination also contains a hint of male homosexuality, in a different form: the idealisation of the male body, exemplified in the androgynous image of 'the Greek', called Alcibiades by the masochist Séverin. In Lorrain's text, the representation of male homosexuality has more affinity with Sacher-Masoch than with Sade, in particular in terms of the glorification of the violence imposed on men and the ambiguous attraction towards the androgynous male body.

### **– *The Pleasure and Pain between Men* –**

As Michel Foucault's famous analysis of sexuality reveals, the *fin-de-siècle* has a pivotal role when we consider problems of homosexuality. Discourses concerning sex have proliferated

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<sup>17</sup> The idea of this picture was conceived in 1852, took shape as the current composition in 1862 and was later enlarged (1882). See Peter Cooke, 'History Painting as Apocalypse and Poetry: Gustave Moreau's *Les Prétendants* 1852–1897, with Unpublished Documents', *Gazette des beaux-arts* (January, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Jacob Stockinger, 'Homosexuality and the French Enlightenment', in *Homosexualities and French Literature*, ed. by G. Stambouljian and E. Marks (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 175–177.

since then and homosexuality has become a recognised form of identity.<sup>19</sup> Not only in the academic field (such as the studies by Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, or Max Nordau), but also in literature, questions of homosexuality have become more visible and open. Decadent literature is crucial in this, as it has a strong interest in what the period called perversions, such as lesbianism, transvestism and effeminacy, including men's masochistic desires.<sup>20</sup> In particular, homosexual and (sado)masochistic elements are frequently combined in the literature of the period. Martha Vicinus, for instance, says that both violence and ideas of forbidden love combine to cover hidden homosexual desires between men: 'Decadent images and literary devices were used as covers for—or representations of—deviant, concealed desires. Masquerade, duplicity, and concealment seem to go hand in hand with violence'.<sup>21</sup> She highlights the images of androgynous youths in texts by Wilde, Renée Vivien and Vernon Lee and argues that their texts use such images with a notion of transgression to probe into the destructive nature of same-sex relations. Richard Dellamora deals with the figure of Sappho, on which Swinburne based his poetry of lesbianism and sadomasochism. Dellamora says that Swinburne uses the figure of Sappho 'not as a representation of the Greek poet but as a re-presentation in which Swinburne mixes a

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<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (Vintage, 1990 [1976]), pp. 18–43.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*; Barbara Spackman, *Decadent Genealogies: The Rhetoric of Sickness from Baudelaire to D'Annunzio* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1992 [1990]); and Robert Sulzer, Jr., 'Ten Percent: Poetry and Pathology', in: *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. by Richard Dellamora (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Martha Vicinus, 'The Adolescent Boy: Fin-de-Siècle Femme Fatale?', in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, p. 85.



pornographic discourse with the discourse of aesthetic culture in a way that exposes the masculinist structure of Victorian ideology'.<sup>22</sup> He thus finds that the poet, like the contemporary French decadents, deploys the image of Sappho in order to elevate his obsessive interest in unconventional sexual desires to a legitimate form of art.

Surprisingly, reading Lorrain's texts for visible signs of homosexuality leads us to conclude that it is difficult to pinpoint a confession of this tendency. But male homosexuality is certainly not entirely concealed or repressed in his work. In *Monsieur de Phocas*, for example, Lorrain implies the homosexuality of the Irish exile, Thomas, by alluding to Oscar Wilde's homosexual scandal and punishment: 'Thomas un condamné de hard labour' (*Phocas*, p. 156). It is also written that Thomas's victim, the millionaire, had a certain eccentricity: he organised a mysterious cult and had a habit of strolling around suspect places at night. This kind of eccentricity was often a synonym at that time of the secret double life of the homosexual.<sup>23</sup> Fréneuse never discloses his own 'vice', only suggesting that it has been latent since his childhood: 'Il [mon mal] était latent en moi [...] je le caressais depuis... depuis mon enfance peut-être, [...] mais je ne le savais pas !' (*Phocas*, p. 29). He suggests that the vice is something wrongfully diagnosed as illness and has no cure: 'un démon que les médecins traitent avec du bromure et du valérianate d'ammoniaque, comme si les médicaments

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 71.

<sup>23</sup> See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), p. 41.

pouvaient avoir raison d'un tel mal!' (p. 50). Fréneuse further suggests that the illness is related to his susceptibility to occultism and neurosis: his vice is 'les inconscientes tentations d'un être aujourd'hui sombre dans l'occultisme et la névrose' (p. 19). It seems more than likely that Fréneuse's association of a neurotic sense of shame and guilt with his vice is an allusion to homosexuality; this kind of signalling was common to texts in late nineteenth century literature.<sup>24</sup>

It is characteristic of Lorrain's texts that they never plainly admit or deny the homosexuality of his male characters, but leave their sexuality ambiguous. Certainly, Fréneuse exhibits enthusiasm over young male bodies, but it is also written that he frequents brothels for sex with female prostitutes. Thus his dubious night life, expressed as 'le mystère de mes nuits' (*Phocas*, p. 83), can simply mean his consorting with prostitutes, which must also be a shameful 'vice' for such a high-ranking person as the Duke. It can hardly categorise his sexuality as bisexuality, either. As a dandy he insists on his self-sufficient nature, by declaring his lack of capacity to love, 'je n'ai jamais aimé [...] je n'ai jamais eu de maîtresse'. At the same time, as a dandy-aesthete, he defends himself as not apathetic, but extremely sensual and impassioned in certain respects: 'Je suis un damné de luxure' (p. 176). His effeminate appearance could be a suggestion of his homosexuality, too, but, agreeing with

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<sup>24</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp. 43–44.

Thaïs Morgan's analysis of the term effeminacy,<sup>25</sup> I would rather stress the importance of the only clear thing throughout Lorrain's text: that sexuality remains ambiguous and unstable. Addressing Robert Buchanan's fierce attack on the Pre-Raphaelites (Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Simeon Solomon) and Swinburne, Morgan maintains that the concept of effeminacy became problematic, not because it implies a particular type of sexuality, such as homosexuality, but because it violates the contemporary social norms of gender hierarchy making man superior to woman: it '[blurs] boundaries of gender crucial to the maintenance of things as they have been for a long time'.<sup>26</sup> Lorrain's implicit expression of homosexual desires and behaviours could be seen as his tenacious attempts to question the idea of sexual-gender identity, a refusal to confirm or deny anything that could be classified as such, in a society eager to determine what man and woman should be.

It is reasonable to assume that the ambiguity came partly from a sense of self-censorship. Seeing his fellow artists' texts seized by the police, Lorrain must have been well aware that his work would not have been published unless self-censored beforehand.<sup>27</sup> Yet it is strange that he refrained from 'coming out' in his literary works, given the fact that he was not 'in the closet' in real life; he did not hesitate to create a scandal by appearing in feminine disguise at parties accompanied by Rachilde, another problematic literary figure

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<sup>25</sup> Thaïs Morgan, 'Victorian Effeminacies', in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, the preface written by Seguin in Barbey, *Les Diaboliques*, pp. 17–22.

prominent for her cross-dressing, in male clothes. There are indeed several themes which may refer to homosexuality in his texts, such as transvestism, the androgyne (effeminate boys and virile women), lesbianism and intimate friendships between men. But I do not accept that Lorrain's texts should be simply reduced to an attempt to cloak his own homosexual identity; however, I contend that, in his descriptions of identity from the perspective of gender and sexuality, his ambiguity is a component of his masochistic stories.

According to Feldman, the characteristic of Decadent dandyism proposed by Barbey d'Aurevilly is that the identity of the dandy does not synthesise the two genders, but makes them antithetical: 'He requires a habit of mind which associates and analogizes contraries rather than effacing them'.<sup>28</sup> The image of the Decadent dandy is the site where concepts of femininity and those of masculinity collide without resolution. Lorrain's presentation of gender is equally indecisive. The mask and the frog canalise the elusiveness of identity and generate anxiety and excitement, but a more explicit example of ambiguity is the transvestite element in his texts. The transvestite disguise appears both fascinating and grotesque, because it confounds the common belief that identity is something to count on. The narrator in 'Trio de masques' included in *Histoires de masques* first recognises that a dancing couple is composed of two women, one, the tall one, looking beautiful and the other very fat. He is then surprised to perceive that the beautiful woman has a beard and the fat one is 'un affreux gros

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<sup>28</sup> Feldman, *Gender on the Divide*, p. 85.

homme glabre, maquillé et fardé et déguisé en femme' (*Histoires de masques*, p. 66). The revelation is immediately followed by the narrator's moral judgment: the couple is 'obscène'. Yet overall the story is dominated by a sense of anticipation followed by fright and vertigo provoked by the idea that identity is not as sure as we usually prefer to believe: 'nous avons eu un moment de stupeur, la sensation d'une chute dans un gouffre, dans de l'absurde, de l'impossible' (ibid.).

'L'homme au complet mauve' in the same collection is also focused on the mysterious identity of the drag queen. A narrator overhears two women speaking about an unknown man who is named only as 'l'homme au complet mauve'. Curiosity about his identity is the central theme of the story: 'quel homme est-ce? [...] L'homme au complet mauve? Mystère!' (p. 111). At last, one of the women discloses that the man is a transvestite wearing mauve clothes from top to bottom and a thick make-up and jewels, like a female prostitute. The discovery is again followed by a woman's negative opinion about him, 'des indécences!' Like Lorrain's other stories of masks and disguise, the function of this narrative is to generate feelings of anticipation, surprise and thrill regarding the ambiguous identity of the disguised person. Lorrain's writing creates an oppressive and uneasy atmosphere, solely concerned with mystery, a mystery over the ambiguous sexual desires and gender identities of the characters. They are described as victims of moral condemnation as well as powerful agents in provoking

fascination, shock and fear in the narrative.

There is another character who performs a similar function in his stories: the woman. In Lorrain's works, the seduction and danger of women is related to their androgyny. Sometimes their androgynous beauty is shown in their physical attributes, for example, Willie and Izé in *Monsieur de Phocas*. They look boyish and their bodies are flat and less rounded than an average woman's. Willie is portrayed in a way that idealises her androgyny: 'avec ses bras fuselés, son presque pas de hanches, son ventre plat et ses petits seins [...]; l'anatomie d'un gosse' (*Phocas*, p. 36). And Izé is 'mince et musclé [...] Vénus alcibiadée' (p. 40). When women appear fragile and pale, for artists the conventionally feminine look, they will have a virile disposition. For instance, they are arrogant and aggressive, because they have power in society, as princesses, duchesses, or of some high social rank. Otherwise, they possess such attributes as a bloodthirsty will and rapacious sexual urge to dominate and destroy others. Even pious women may look masculine, because of their stoicism, severity and self-discipline for the sake of their religious devotion.

The desire and fear of the virile dominatrix is certainly not peculiar to Lorrain but a common characteristic of Decadent art. In the critiques of Decadence the masculine woman is often regarded as an expression of repressed (sado)masochistic homosexuality. Frédéric Monneyron studies the Decadent figures of the androgyne and insists that Lorrain's use of

masculine *femme fatales* and legendary cruel goddesses, such as Salome and Astarté, offers some of the best examples in Decadent literature of masked homosexual desire.<sup>29</sup> Bernheimer suggests that the phallic figure of the goddess Athena in Moreau's *Les Prétendants* signifies the abdication of men's virility in her worship; he finds that this masculinisation of woman is intentionally employed by the painter to avoid 'the explicitly male-to-male sadomasochistic eroticism his scene nevertheless evokes. It is to this eroticism that Phocas responds'.<sup>30</sup>

Elizabeth Prettejohn shows the similar theme of masochistic homosexual desire in the painting titled 'Habet!' drawn by Simeon Solomon, who was Lorrain's favourite painter.<sup>31</sup> The scene captured is of a combat between gladiators in ancient Rome, although the combat itself does not figure in the painting. When a gladiator fell, the spectators shouted 'Habet!', which means 'He has it!'. The painting depicts aristocratic ladies in Ancient Rome enjoying this brutal show of life and death. The woman at the centre is the Empress; she looks majestic, her expression impassive, even a little bored. The woman next to her is obviously enjoying the carnage, with glittering eyes and a smile on her lips. Another woman next to the Empress has just fainted because of the bloody violence of the scene. Not only in their physical appearance, which looks masculine, but also in their mentality, which mostly does not hesitate

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<sup>29</sup> Frédéric Monneyron, *L'androgynie décadente: Mythe, figure, fantasmes* (Grenoble: Université Stendhal, 1996), pp. 85–87. I further consider his examination of Péladan's cult of androgyny in the next chapter.

<sup>30</sup> Bernheimer, *Decadent Subject*, p. 120.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'The monstrous diversion of a show of gladiator's: Simeon Solomon's Habet!', in *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789–1945*, ed. by Catharine Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

to relish the brutal fight, is the motif of the androgyne created. These women are masculine, because they are cruel.

Prettejohn argues that the masculinised women in the painting allow the painter, as well as the (male) onlookers in *fin-de-siècle*, to be safely identified with women in their imagination, in order that they may share the sexual desire of the women for the absent image of gladiators' beaten and suffering bodies. Prettejohn also suggests another possible form of masochism in the painting, which comes from the identification of the painter with the beaten gladiator himself. In *Monsieur de Phocas* a similar scene to Solomon's is described, and this also would fit Prettejohn's theory. Fréneuse watches an acrobatic show with a friend, who tells him that female audiences are captivated by 'les idées de luxure et de mort', expecting—half-hoping perhaps—to see one of the acrobats fall (*Phocas*, p. 33). Fréneuse is excited about his friends' comment on the show, because he shares the same sensation with the women, intoxicated with anticipation of the imminent death of an attractive male athlete.

Isabelle de Courtivron discusses the image of the 'phallic woman', typically symbolised in the masculine figure of George Sand, which had a provocative power over French Decadent male artists. De Courtivron contends that Decadent artists have a paradoxical sense of fascination and repulsion vis-à-vis phallic woman, whose imputed



lesbianism is a projection of their own 'wish to be woman'.<sup>32</sup> She argues that the male Decadents identify themselves with the androgynous women 'to cross the limits of sexual norms' and to justify their own homoeroticism.<sup>33</sup> Their fear also comes from their masochistic desire to be punished in the form of impotence or castration at the hands of a strong female figure, because they feel that men should not have 'ventured too far into this realm'.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that one of the Decadent artists listed in her analysis is Péladan, whose creation of the princess d'Este, a virile, lesbian heroine in Péladan's saga, is an instrument for enjoying gratification and punishment for transgressing the identity of a man (for more about d'Este, see Chapters 6 and 8, below).

Alfred de Musset was one of the famous victims of Sand and his love poetry is cited in *Monsieur de Phocas*. It is Musset's poem *Adieu* that compels Fréneuse to shed tears and the sudden burst of emotion implicitly comes from a homoerotic desire for Destreux. By identifying himself with the girl who longs for a boy in Musset's poem, Fréneuse attributes the awareness of an unrequited love expressed in the elegy to his own melancholic and romantic feelings for Destreux, who is long dead: 'Adieu, [...] En te perdant, je sens que je t'aimais' (the poem is quoted in *Phocas*, p. 180). In this episode, Fréneuse exhibits suffering from a sense of being split into two, partly having 'le plus profond mépris pour Musset' and

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<sup>32</sup> Isabelle de Courtivron, 'Weak Men and Fatal Women: The Sand Image', in: *Homosexualities and French Literature* (1979), p. 214.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

blaming Musset for writing such a sentimental poem and partly appreciating the poem's emotion. Conceivably, Fréneuse's confusing feeling of rejection and attraction is a form of homosexual panic and implies that the part of himself which represents homosexual desire is not a part which he would want to acknowledge.

It is at the same time highly likely that the explicit descriptions of lesbianism, in contrast to his silence about male homosexuality are a displacement of Lorrain's mixture of desire and fear in the face of the latter. Birkett points out that at the opium party which Ethal organises, Fréneuse 'experiences the pleasure of absolute degradation, and the double pleasure of being both observer and observed, dominant subject and passive object'.<sup>35</sup> Lorrain's obsessive interest in lesbianism can be positioned as a horror of being an object of the critical gaze, due to his own male homosexual desires, which his society defines as a sickness. Lorrain puts lesbianism on display to examine and discusses it with contempt, but there is also a strange sense of complicity, as if he meant that such 'perversion' is not just a woman's problem but extends to man too. Fréneuse's deep anxiety about homosexuality is hinted at by the first narrator's observation that Fréneuse's manuscript increases the degree of confusion when the narrative refers to the rumours about lesbian relationships among the nobility: 'des lacunes déroutantes, des erreurs de date involontaires ou voulues, des altérations d'écriture, une déconcertante incohérence dans tout le manuscrit' (*Phocas*, p. 157). Fréneuse's

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<sup>35</sup> Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers*, p. 204.

writing of this section deals obsessively with the hypocrisy of the mask, worn by prestigious women gathering in a theatre to hide their secret ‘vice’ of lesbianism. Fréneuse hysterically accuses them of being ‘toutes les chevronnées du vice’, ‘tout le Lesbos des premières, toutes les damnées’ and ‘toutes les androgynes’ (p. 157, p. 160 and p. 162). At the same time as these condemnations, there is a sense of complicity between these women and their male partners, as he describes: lesbians are ‘toutes mordues dans leur chair par la même hystérie et par le même désir; Les hommes, eux, lorgnaient et souriaient, ayant compris’ (p. 162). The idea suggested here is that men are equally guilty of perversity, when they are not repelled by women’s homosexual indulgence in each other.

In this scene, it is clear that the role of Ethal is to teach Fréneuse to appreciate not only masochism but homosexuality itself, his innate tendencies propelling him forward all the time. Seeing through Fréneuse’s panic at confronting the spread of lesbianism in high society, Ethal diabolically whispers to Fréneuse, ‘Tous marchent, toutes et tous [...] Regardez. Nous sommes à Rome!’ (pp. 162–163). Comparing their own degenerate modernity to the last days of decadence in the Roman Empire, Ethal tells Fréneuse not to be prudish or timid so long as the public, whose sensibility lies in the ‘élégance de fin de race’, so honestly exhibits a passion for the charm of these sexually ambiguous women, resembling ‘le même charme de chlorose et le même piment maladif’ (p. 162). Using Ethal as an initiator, Lorrain’s narrative

thus aims to reveal Fréneuse's suppressed homosexuality in the form of his masochistic sense of heavy guilt.

There are counterparts to Ethal as initiator of homosexuality in the novel: Thomas and Destreux. We have seen that a habitual trait of Fréneuse is his oscillation between blue and green: the former is associated with the natural and virile beauty of Thomas and Destreux, the latter with the sickness and perverted culture of Ethal. The contrast extends to that between the pleasure and the pain of a homoerotic relationship between men. The role of Thomas is to teach Fréneuse the pleasure of homosexuality whereas Ethal teaches him the pain.

Phillip Winn insists that *Monsieur de Phocas* is a homosexual work, due to the dominance of virility and pederasty and the fact that Thomas and Destreux both represent a passion transcending the social distinctions of sex and class.<sup>36</sup> Destreux is a farmer and working for Fréneuse's family; Thomas is the illegitimate child of a Scottish aristocrat. Thomas is a dandy who possesses no fortune but 'une compromettante beauté de pâtre grec' (*Phocas*, p. 166), which he uses to gain power in high society. Ultimately, he and Fréneuse are not of the same social class, but he and Destreux nonetheless earn Fréneuse's admiration, because of their virile physical attributes as men and their honesty and innocence regarding desires and instincts. Lower-class men were believed still to have such innocence, though

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<sup>36</sup> Phillip Winn, *Sexualités décadentes chez Jean Lorrain: le héros fin de sexe* (Amsterdam; Rodopi, 1997), pp. 194–200.

the upper class had tragically lost it. In late nineteenth century Western Europe, ‘the leading medical theorists of the time [sc. Krafft-Ebing, Ellis and Freud] argued that homosexuality was not a choice but a biological necessity, [...], intrinsic’.<sup>37</sup> The idea that homosexual desires are part of human nature is implicitly defended in its association with youth and nature in the Decadent images of beautiful young males.

Thomas, transcending class distinctions, sets an example of flouting the distinction between morality and instinct by moving from the West to the East. In contrast to Ethal, who makes intimidating and spiteful comments on homosexuality, Thomas idealises it in the way that he praises the virtue of nature and instincts. Fréneuse’s obsession with the eyes of the goddess Astarté was first brought about by the statue of Astarté, which had stood in the room when Thomas allegedly killed his millionaire lover. When Thomas talks to Fréneuse about his own vision of Astarté, the story is turned into a homoerotic and masochistic fantasy of a beautiful male youth in Egypt. The boy in Thomas’ hallucination stands on the shoulder of the luminous Sphinx, his white chest bare and his throat cut and bleeding. The vision is certainly a pleasurable one, because Thomas says that he felt ‘traversé une minute enchantée, vécu quelques instants d’une vie miraculeuse, divine’ (*Phocas*, p. 136). The shift in his talk hints that Thomas’s obsession with Astarté is in fact a masochistic attraction to male adolescents. The image of the boy, a native Egyptian, legitimises sensual experiences which are beyond

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<sup>37</sup> Vicinus, ‘The Adolescent Boy’, p. 86.

conventional morality in the West.

The contrasting images of Thomas and Ethal between which Fréneuse oscillates are another site of an ambiguous homoerotic relationship between men. Thomas persuades Fréneuse to go to Asia with him, which really means that Fréneuse should leave Ethal for him. Thomas tells Fréneuse that 'Ethal est à la fois l'empoisonneur et le César' (p. 134). Ethal forces others to see their inward criminal desires and enjoys watching them being tormented and destroyed by their own sense of guilt. Thomas knows the danger of Ethal's influence, because he was once 'un misérable tout aussi torturé que vous [Fréneuse] l'êtes maintenant' (p. 136). Ethal, conversely, tries to convince Fréneuse that Thomas is a criminal by making the accusation that he murdered his patron. The threesome of Fréneuse and the two men almost resembles a melodrama in which a man is involved with two jealous women at once and is under pressure to choose between them. Although Ethal often appears frightening and repulsive in comparison to Thomas, Fréneuse's attachment to him is evident. When Ethal is away from Paris, Fréneuse misses Ethal so grievously that he insists on an earlier return, as if he were an abandoned lover, 'Ce Claudius Ethal m'a ensorcelé' ; 'Quelle place il a prise dans ma vie! Comme il me manque!' (p. 60 and p. 73). In his condemnatory moral stance, Ethal can be seen to play the role of a severe father figure. In turn, Thomas plays a nurturing and caring mother figure, with 'immense bonté du regard' towards Fréneuse's suffering (p.

132). The masochist Fréneuse is caught in between them and his suspended situation is responsible for increasing his pain and pleasure.

Such intimacy between men was highly appreciated in society at the turn of the century, but was overshadowed by latent homoerotic desire and fear.<sup>38</sup> Vicinus sees that the pedagogical relationship between an experienced older man and an inexperienced youth often portrayed in Decadent literature is a clear representation of homosexuality. This is a Decadent version of the Greek love from which the youth is moulded into an ideal beauty, just as Basil and Lord Henry guide the beautiful youth, Dorian Gray, in Wilde's novel.<sup>39</sup> The same motif of strange intimacy and initiation between men recurs in Lorrain's other fictions.

For example, one of the topics of *Monsieur de Bougreton* is an ambiguously intimate friendship between M. de Bougreton, an aged dandy whom Lorrain modelled on Barbey d'Aurevilly, and his friend M. de Mortimer. Their bond is emphasised throughout the text by the repeated phrase, 'M. de Mortimer et moi', as if they were an inseparable couple.<sup>40</sup> Referring to Bougreton's own comparison of their relationship with that of Achilles and Patroclus, Guy Ducrey adds a footnote in the novel that their relationship is likely to be 'amoureuse', just as Achilles and Patroclus were usually recognised as lovers.<sup>41</sup> Yet, typically

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<sup>38</sup> See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

<sup>39</sup> Vicinus, 'The Adolescent Boy', pp. 84–87.

<sup>40</sup> Jean Lorrain, 'Monsieur de Bougreton', in: *Romans Fin-de-siècle 1890–1900*, ed. by Guy Ducrey (Paris : Robert Laffont, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 1232.

in Lorrain, there is no definite description through which we can determine that their relationship is truly homosexual. Even Winn, the critic who insists on the homosexual nature of Lorrain's work, agrees: 'malgré la profondeur du sentiment qui les rattache l'un à l'autre, rien ne laisse soupçonner que ce rapport dépasse les bornes conventionnelles de l'amitié—il s'agit d'une fidélité absolue'.<sup>42</sup> The novel only blurs the boundary between friendship and eroticism, which is usually considered a strict demarcation.

'Dernier entretien' in *Histoires de masques* narrates an episode similar to that between Fréneuse and Thomas in *Monsieur de Phocas*. It is about a neurotic male protagonist who seeks to cure his obsessions through advice from an experienced man. The recommended cure is to leave Paris for a healthier place such as Nice and explore a new way of life. With the same arguments as Thomas makes to Fréneuse, the older man blames Paris for aggravating the protagonist's suffering and praises an unrefined existence: 'il faut aimer les ciels, les pays, [...] mais se détacher des individus. [...] aimer l'univers [...]. Vivre sa vie, voilà le but final' (*Histoires de masques*, pp. 222–223). Again, the comment is based on a mystical vision of utopia, far away from civilization, where people do not turn natural impulses into criminality and the modern man can cure his obsessions and regain strength. The idea of rebirth after undergoing suffering in Lorrain's imagination echoes Sacher-Masoch's favourite ending in the form of the superior man, the Wanderer, which I examine next.

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<sup>42</sup> Winn, *Sexualités décadentes*, p. 136.



– *The Birth of a New Man* –

I have seen that masochism involves the creation of an imagined reality in which humiliated male masochists and empowered women signify a disavowal of the normal conventions of society. The rigid boundary between reality and fantasy is inevitable, in order to ward off the image of the dominant father excluded from the fantasy in the form of the effeminate pose of the masochist. The return of the father will force the participants to return to reality at any time, as the invasion of ‘the Greek’ ends the masochistic relationship between Séverin and Wanda in Sacher-Masoch’s *La Vénus à la fourrure*. Upon closure, the masochistic self is ‘cured’, but he is reborn as a new man, that is, a tyrannical Séverin, whose cruelty and statue-like coldness resemble those of ‘the Greek’ and Wanda. This is the ultimate message in masochism, a hope of the advent of a new form of masculinity which represents a new order and hardly resembles patriarchal society as he has known it.

Lorrain’s masochistic story *Monsieur de Phocas* has the same structure: the death of the masochist, Fréneuse, and rebirth of a new man, Phocas. Winn says that ‘une certaine virilisation du nom’ from Fréneuse to Phocas means the emergence of a new type of masculinity. Fréneuse’s femininity, suggested by the suffix ‘euse’, is transformed to ‘Phocas’, which suggests a masculine noun ‘Faux cas’ (False thing).<sup>43</sup> The novel starts with this artificially named Phocas, who insists, ‘Le duc de Fréneuse est mort, il n’y a plus que M. de

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<sup>43</sup> Winn, *Sexualités décadentes*, p. 155.

Phocas' (*Phocas*, p. 17). And it ends, 'Ainsi finissait le manuscrit de M. de Phocas' (p. 246).

The masochistic story of Fréneuse is entirely framed inside the writing of the new-born man, Phocas.

The strict structure which confines the masochistic scene is symbolically suggested in the discussion of Moreau's paintings in the novel. The two pictures of Moreau, *Le Triomphe d'Alexandre* and *Les Prétendants* have the same structure as the novel itself. Birkett points out that *Le Triomphe d'Alexandre* depicts the marriage of 'Reason and Violence': the painting is a mixture of the stern power of Reason, which is suggested by the dignified figure on the throne at the centre within the square of the high cliffs, and a violent chaos, which is described by the bustle of human affairs below.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, *Les Prétendants* holds the two opposed worlds: the rigid sadistic dimension and the fluid masochistic one. The phallic figure of Athena and the majestic palace, whose vertical lines emphasise the strict sense of order, enclose the whole chaotic massacre and the silent cries of the suitors. Cooke says, 'To the disorder and effeminate softness of the decadent suitors Moreau opposes a structure of moral uprightness and severity'.<sup>45</sup> He argues that the rigidness and the radiant goddess figure echo the contemporary social ambiance induced by Napoleon III after the Second Republic to celebrate 'a Return to Order in France', while the contradictory depictions of tragic, chaotic and erotic

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<sup>44</sup> Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers*, p. 205.

<sup>45</sup> Cooke, 'History Painting as Apocalypse', p. 36.

suffering possibly reflect Moreau's growing disillusionment with a 'decadent' Second Empire Paris and his disgust at the hypocrisy of his contemporaries.<sup>46</sup> It is evident that this painting is important in Lorrain's novel, not only for its homoerotic and masochistic content, but also in the fact that its structure echoes the structure of the novel itself. The masochistic dramatisation of violence and death must be trapped inside the stern phallic framework to make the masochistic imagination possible, as well as signalling a hope of the advent of a new authority.

In *Monsieur de Phocas*, Lorrain uses the shifting colour of blue-green to signify masochistic pain and pleasure, as we have seen above, while he uses green as a fixed concept to signify death and rebirth. For example, this unchanging green is evoked in the scene when Fréneuse manages to wake up from a series of dreadful opium hallucinations, which are dominated by the colour green. In an impulse of self-defence, he bites a hairy creature which has jumped into his mouth, to enable him to return to wakefulness. In the light of dawn he sees that the green gleams which the chandeliers created last night are now petrified, 'grumelée en stalactites vertes' (*Phocas*, p. 129). This scene holds the suggestion of Fréneuse's killing Ethal, the ugly hairy creature, and consequently, becoming Phocas. At the beginning of the story, Phocas presents himself like a green statue: he wears a mint green suit with a pale green silk tie, in which is a huge emerald, and holds a greenish ivory cane. In

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

contrast to the timid and suffering image of Fréneuse, the image of Phocas is that of a cold, indifferent and impassive dandy. Phocas's sense of superiority to others is also indicated in the scene when the police investigate the death of Ethal. He shows his complete detachment from ordinary human affairs and exhibits a sense of his control over the situation, mocking the incapability of the police to penetrate or punish him for a crime hidden behind his social mask: 'J'étais comme dédoublé. Il me semblait assister en spectateur à un drame judiciaire dont je dirigeais moi-même l'intrigue' (p. 241). This transformation from Fréneuse to Phocas can be seen as one of the examples of the recurrent theme of the rebirth of a masochist as a higher form of man.

Phocas's rebirth as a new ideal of masculinity is indicated by an allusion to the image of Osiris, whose resurrection was effected from his mutilated body parts (without the penis) with the help of his sister-wife, Isis.<sup>47</sup> Osiris is usually painted green to celebrate his power of fertility in nature. Like Osiris, Phocas is reborn with the help of a female goddess, Astarté, after undergoing the degradation of his hallucinations. Astarté is called Isis in Egyptian mythology, Ishtar in Babylonian mythology, Aphrodite in Greek mythology and Venus in Roman mythology, but the name of Astarté is most associated with perverted passion and

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<sup>47</sup> See, James George Frazer, 'Chapter 11: Osiris', 'Chapter 13: Isis', and 'Chapter 14: Mother-kin and Mother Goddesses', in *The Golden Bough: A study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Frazer's account of the legend of Osiris is mostly based on that of Plutarch. According to Tom Hare, since Plutarch it has been told that Osiris's penis was eaten by fish so that Isis was never able to restore it, though there is no mention of this in the Egyptian sources. See Tom Hare, *Remembering Osiris: Number, Gender, and the Word in Ancient Egyptian Representational Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 23; and for the native Egyptian accounts, see Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt* (London: Luzac, 1949), p. 101.

death in the Decadent image of the *femme fatale*.<sup>48</sup> Phocas's rebirth is made possible by the murder of the father-figure, Ethal, for the sake of reunion with Thomas, whose role is nurturing and caring and Phocas's manuscript explains that this transformation is his reconciliation with Astarté. Her emerald eyes haunt and torment him throughout the text, but he claims that he has finally reconciled this devil of lust and blood, for she is now inside him, 'le Démon de luxure [...] ce Démon est en moi' (*Phocas*, p. 18). The protagonist sees the apparition of *femme fatales*, such as dancing Salome and Astarté, who used to appear only to threaten and menace him. But now they are tenderly smiling at him: 'Jamais je n'avais vu de si doux visages de femmes' (p. 243). The reconciliation with the goddess is also described as a reconciliation with himself; as Phocas says: 'Je me suis reconquis et je suis bien moi' (p. 245). The novel's initial title (*Monsieur de Phocas: Astarté*) also makes it explicit that Phocas is Astarté. The Wanderer in the work of Sacher-Masoch becomes a saint with his alliance with the cruel and nurturing goddess of Nature and claims his emancipation from ordinary life. Similarly, Fréneuse becomes Phocas, to wander around the world for the rest of his life, possessed by Astarté. His change of title from Duke to a plain Monsieur is also suggestive of the freedom from his Parisian life, whose moral oppression was the source of his suffering.

This chapter has seen the idea of ambiguity reflected in the unreliable images of masks

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<sup>48</sup> See *Dictionnaire des Mythes littéraires*, ed. by Pierre Brunel (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 1994), pp. 813–815, and *Dictionnaire de la bible*, ed. by André-Marie Gerard (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989), p.110 and p. 117.

and blue-green objects in Lorrain's texts and highlighted the idea that these sifting objects are related to the ambiguous identity of the characters and are used to generate an uncomfortable sense of uncertainty and anticipation, as well as thrill and self-destructive excitement in the narrative. I have also seen that the image of the masculine woman and that of the beautiful male adolescent, both of which characterise Lorrain's Decadent texts, are used to establish the fantasy of transgression in terms of gender identity, sexual normativity and same-sex desire. The boundary between friendship and homoeroticism is not equally respected, which further reinforces the sense of destruction entailed in conventional dichotomies. Lastly, I have argued that what Lorrain intends after the destruction is to bring the hope of regeneration: the advent of a new, higher form of man which maintains a new order. The new masculine authority proposed by Lorrain is similar to Sacher-Masoch's: the feminised form of man, rejecting conventional patriarchy. Another Decadent writer, Péladan, conjured up a similar vision of a new man, the Magus, which I investigate next.

**CHAPTER 6. PÉLADAN'S OCCULT PALINGENESIS: SUFFERING AND THE BIRTH  
OF THE MAGUS**

The aim of Lorrain's narrative is to create a void to increase the ambiguity in the text, which generates a masochistic anticipation and anguish, as well as horror at a secret sensual desire for violence, perversity and death. In principle, Péladan's text does not appear to have this void, since the Christian God fills it. Highly biased by the imperative Christian ethic, the tone of his texts might not appear to be the creation of a passive masochistic subject. However, '[t]he aim of Péladan's art is to recuperate the pleasures of masochism, turning the masochist into a new, heroic model'.<sup>1</sup> This chapter seeks to demonstrate that at the centre of his text is a process of suffering which aims at the birth of a new charismatic man called the Magus. It is identified as the occult idea of 'palingenesis': a regeneration which takes place through a descent into the underworld of Death and in his version the underworld means the human world.<sup>2</sup> In this descent and for the sake of rebirth, Péladan's heroes are doomed to experience suffering in the form of degradation and humiliation, for which contemporary society, empowered women and the power of instincts are responsible. Using the figures of Prometheus, Satan and Cain, familiar tropes in Romantic/Decadent literature, Péladan justifies and exaggerates the importance of suffering to dramatise the ascent to virtue and nobility. At

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<sup>1</sup> Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers*, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> See Pierre A. Riffard, *Dictionnaire de l'ésotérisme* (Paris: Payot, 1983), pp. 250–251.

the end of the initiation, he proposes the transformation of the man into the androgynous Magus, the ideal model of humanity. Traditionally, the androgyne embodies the principle of asexuality, but, Péladan's texts, spiced up with occult additions, reveal that the sexuality of his androgynous ideal being is ambiguous, with unconventional forms of sexuality, such as fetishism, voyeurism and necrophilia. Péladan's unique conceptualisation of the androgyne also includes homosexuality, in particular female homosexuality, from which Péladan proposes the birth of the female version of the androgyne, called the Gynander.

– *Occult Palingenesis: Nature and Sources of Suffering* –

In Péladan's vision, suffering is a privileged experience through which a young elite man can attain occult illumination and become the Magus. The process is termed 'palingenesis' (rebirth) in the occultist tradition, which comes from the Eleusinian myths and was described by Péladan as 'ma doctrine'.<sup>3</sup> This is the idea that an occultist is reborn to be an initiate through the painful experience of dying, as in the myth of Persephone who descended to the Underworld. This resembles what Deleuze calls the masochistic 'parthenogenesis', the idea of a second birth as an androgyne through the pain inflicted by female torturers. In Péladan's case, those responsible for the pain and suffering are interpreted as the autocracy of current social authorities and the instinctual and material needs which men are made aware of, in

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<sup>3</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Terre du Sphinx (Égypte): Les Idées et les formes* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1899), p. 3.



particular by women, in their marital lives.

It is claimed that the experience of suffering is central in the creation of the Magus, as is written in *Comment on devient mage*, 'Utiliser la douleur [...] l'initié voit un avancement de perfection à chaque douleur'.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere in *L'Androgyne*, Péladan suggests that there are two ordinary ways to deal with the sources of suffering: 'on les combat ou on les satisfait'.<sup>5</sup> What Péladan insists is that for the birth of the Magus there is a third way: 'la métamorphose de la douleur par l'exaltation. L'enthousiaste change le peine en plaisir par la force de son élan d'âme'.<sup>6</sup> Thus expressed, to become a Magus is to master the masochistic mechanism: the transformation of pain into rapture.

It may be said that the explanation of the mystic experience cloaks the appreciation of the masochistic sensation, which was in fact not peculiar to Péladan, but common among nineteenth century mystics. Their ideas centred on 'the concept of Christianity as a hard religion, a religion of suffering' as it appears also in the works of Huysmans, Bloy, Péguy, Claudel and Barbey d'Aurevilly, according to Richard Griffiths.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes understood as vicarious, suffering was glorified in Christianity as a noble practice, but 'a certain sado-masochistic element' can be found, in particular in the case of Huysmans.<sup>8</sup> Joyce O.

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<sup>4</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *Amphithéâtre des sciences mortes, I: Comment on devient mage, éthique* (Paris: Chamuel et Cie, 1892 ; repr. Elibron Classics, 2003), p. 173.

<sup>5</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée VIII: L'Androgyne* (Paris: Dentu, 1891), p. 263.

<sup>6</sup> Péladan, *Comment on devient mage*, p. 179.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution: The Catholic Revival in French Literature 1870/1914* (London: Constable, 1966), p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Lowrie in *The Violent Mystique* makes the similar point that the central concern of nineteenth century occult literature lies in the obsession with suffering. She criticises Praz for reducing the dominance of suffering into sadism or algolagnia, which makes it a simple matter of personal sexual orientation. Instead, she claims, the representation of violence and suffering holds a philosophical, theological and cultural significance: ‘While suffering appears everywhere in nineteenth century literature, the specific themes of suffering viewed as a result of retribution and atonement have a definite and symbolic place in Balzac’s system, in Barbey’s world-view, in Bloy’s cosmology, in Huysmans’ mystical theology’.<sup>9</sup> It is pointed out that in their works suffering becomes a desirable experience en route to a spiritual ascent. Lowrie naturally includes Péladan’s occultism in her discussion, but refers to him only as a ridiculed propagandist of occultism, due to his parading in extravagant costumes in public.

While Péladan’s works and occultism have rarely been taken seriously, in *A Light from Eleusis*, Leon Surette emphasises the influential role of Péladan on the formation of Ezra Pound’s occultist ideas.<sup>10</sup> According to Surette, Pound learned about the mystic cult which claims the idea of palingenesis and the idea of a secret history when he reviewed Péladan’s two books (*Origine et esthétique de la tragédie* and *Le Secret des Troubadours*) in 1906. Surette argues that Pound’s recurrent theme of the failed hero is a clear echo of Péladan’s

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<sup>9</sup> Joyce O. Lowrie, *The Violent Mystique: Thematics of Retribution and Expiation in Balzac, Barbey d’Aurevilly, Bloy, and Huysmans* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1974), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Leon Surette, *A light from Eleusis: A Study of Ezra Pound’s ‘Cantos’* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

image of Don Quixote as a failed heroic heir of the troubadours, for he is, as Péladan writes, ‘le héros auquel manque la force et qui aborde le domaine de l’action à l’état de rêve’.<sup>11</sup> The occultists try to find a proof of their force in their own fantasy, because in reality they perceive only their helplessness.

The occultist’s sense of anxiety and inferiority is externalised in the opposite form: elitism; according to Surette, this sense of being privileged is the main characteristic of occultism:

The touchstone for the occult is neither mysticism (which it shares with most world religions) nor, of course, a belief in the divine (which it shares with all religions) but rather a belief that throughout human history certain individuals have had intimate contact with the divine and from this contact have gained special knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Like Pound, who so ‘believed himself to be in the vanguard of a new age that he set out to write an epic poem’, Péladan cherished the idea that he was the chosen Saviour of a corrupted society and for its enlightenment propagated the superior image of the Magus.<sup>13</sup> But this megalomaniac dream is overshadowed by the hero’s conflict with the forces dominating his

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<sup>11</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *Le Secret des troubadours: De Parsifal à Don Quichotte* (Paris: Sansot, 1906), repr. in *Œuvres choisies* (Paris: Les Formes du secret, 1979), p. 120.

<sup>12</sup> Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), pp. 13–14. In this book, Surette regrets that he too greatly emphasised Péladan’s tangible influence on Pound’s idea of occultism in the past. In *A Light from Eleusis*, he says that he ‘exaggerated Péladan’s role’, without recognising that ‘Péladan was just one voice in a babble of occult and mystical speculators’ (p. 142). He instead attributes the source of Pound’s occult palingenesis and the secret history to the Kensington circle (W. B. Yeats) and in particular, Mead. But he is right to admit that ‘Péladan’s own novels are steamy with sexuality, death, and mysticism’ (p. 144).

<sup>13</sup> Surette, *The Birth of Modernism*, p. 124. See Robert Ziegler, ‘The Elitist Metaphysic of Joséphin Péladan’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 16 (1988), 361–371.

society.

Péladan's *Comment on devient mage* repeatedly displays the sense of discontent felt by the Magus, who sees himself as 'l'homme supérieur', against the dominant powers around him, such as militarist privilege and democratic principles.<sup>14</sup> Péladan writes, 'Militaire, tu ne peux être mage', because of the soldier's passive and blind obedience to the established authorities: 'La suprême laideur, c'est la démocratie; la suprême méchanceté, c'est le militarisme'; 'La gloire des conquérants, la gloire des militaires s'appelle, pour le mage, l'opprobre sans nom'.<sup>15</sup> For Péladan, the principle of equality means the humiliation of a man's genius and dignity, by levelling off genius like his own into the mediocre mass. Then it becomes essential for the would-be Magus to detach himself from secular interests, otherwise the man will come to admit his inferior status to others, like '[le] victime du professeur,' who is 'bientôt victime de l'officier'.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, to master himself in a solitary occultist discipline is recognised as a true path to the top of the social hierarchy.

The megalomaniac wish for leadership is motivated by a profound victim mentality. The last part of Péladan's novel *Curieuse!* is an extreme presentation of this sort. Péladan allows himself to abruptly appear as the author and intervene in the flow of the story, only to whine about how impossible it is to conclude his grand narratives. Defending his lack of

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<sup>14</sup> Péladan, *Comment on devient mage*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 31, p. 42, and p. 243.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

physical strength against a militaristic society that sees male intellectuality as inferior, he stresses how badly he was treated by officers during his imprisonment (in 1886), which resulted from his refusing to be conscripted. The tone of his voice is at once proud and vengeful: ‘on me toucha, on me toisa, comme on eut fait d’un cochon, moi tabernacle d’une âme immortelle, créée à l’image de Dieu, médiateur premature de l’*Apocalypse*!’<sup>17</sup>

The mentality of mingled victim and executioner is also seen in the expressions of suicidal heroism. Nébo, the artist-Magus hero in the trilogy (*Curieuse!*, *l’Initiation sentimentale*, and *A cœur perdu*), says that there are two kinds of superior men: one is a Bonaparte, who massacres people and is certainly remembered with fear and hatred for his violent deeds and the other is a ‘hiérophante et poète, sublime recruteur de la légion idéale, racoleur insigne de toute spiritualité [qui] dit à l’humanité féroce la parole d’amour, et, après l’avoir bafoué, on le tue et on l’oublie’.<sup>18</sup> Naturally, Nébo identifies himself with the latter, a martyred poet whose existence turns out to be nothing in history. In the preface to his brother Adrien’s book, Péladan professes a similar resignation in accepting humiliation and death; he compares militarism to intellectualism and defends Adrien’s inadequacy as a soldier on the grounds of his poor health: ‘l’homme intellectuel n’a que deux perspectives militaires : l’abrutissement s’il se soumet, et la mort contre un mur s’il se révolte’.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the

<sup>17</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée II : Curieuse!* (Paris: Librairie de la Presse, 1886 ; repr. Genève: Slatkine, 1979), p. 334.

<sup>18</sup> Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée III: l’Initiation sentimentale* (Paris: Dentu, 1887), p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Introduction’ by Joséphin Péladan, in Adrien fils Péladan, *Anatomie homologique : la triple dualité du corps*

preface of *Le Panthée*, the story of the suffering artist-Magus Bihn, remains symptomatic, conveying the sense of a victim oppressed by society. He writes, ‘Est-ce ma faute? [...] Que me reproche-t-on enfin?’; there was ‘la prévention contre moi parce que j’étais fou’.<sup>20</sup> The reader will find that the situation of the fictional character, Bihn, echoes exactly that of the author. The fictional character’s complaining about his miserable life as neglected artist is Péladan’s own.

Péladan opposes militarism because its principle ridicules the Magus’s physical weakness and considers it effeminate and this is the anxiety that urges him to justify its inferiority. In *Istar*, for instance, when the Magus character Nergal meets a soldier, he justifies his effeminacy by saying, ‘Je ne me battraï pas,—dit Nergal,—je ferai justice’.<sup>21</sup> Péladan describes Nergal’s effeminacy as the deceptive appearance of a victim who is secretly ‘triumphing’ over the one who pities him. Istar’s husband pities and ridicules Nergal for his naïveté in weeping in public, ‘Vous pleurez presque, monsieur Nergal, vous êtes donc une femmelette?’ (*Istar*, p. 247). Nergal reflects to himself that his tears are shed out of a deep pity for the husband, who is ignorant of his wife’s, Istar’s, love for Nergal.

Not only because of their privileges in society, but also because of their mastery over their bodies, soldiers are the rivals of the Magus. For Péladan, mastery is the key to power,

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*humain et la polarité des organes splanchniques, avec une préface de Joséphin Péladan* (Paris: Librairie J.-B. Baillière et fils, 1886), p. xxx.

<sup>20</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée X : le Panthée* (Paris: Dentu, 1892), p. xx and p. xxi.

<sup>21</sup> Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée V : Istar* (Paris: Dentu, 1893 [1888]), p. 464.

because learning to master oneself leads to a mastery over others: ‘si ton esprit fait du corps un esclave [...] alors tu agiras sur autrui dans la proportion même où tu auras agi sur toi’.<sup>22</sup>

Just as the soldier controls his physical limits, the Magus has to transcend physical needs and instinctual desires. This operation is, however, simultaneously recognised as a source of suffering, because Péladan’s heroes always find themselves incompetent, reflecting the author’s own life-long anxiety. In *La Terre du Sphinx*, for example, he dramatises a desperate war between instinct and spirituality in the form of an autobiographical account of the trip to Egypt which he made in 1898. This trip was embarked on in an attempt to overcome his grief, helplessness and solitude in consequence of the failure of his Rosicrucian projects with other occultists and artists.<sup>23</sup> As Nelly Emont observes, however, the trip did not change or resolve Péladan’s anxiety that he was a hopeless intermediate creature whose spiritual quest was always shattered by earthly necessities; instead, the experience in Egypt merely reconfirmed it.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, one of the highlights of the text is the author’s ruminating about the pangs of thirst in the desert: ‘Le corps est vraiment notre limite: nous le dominons, par un effort de l’âme, mais ce n’est qu’un moment presque illusoire’; ‘Organiquement, l’homme, [c’est un] animal d’un instinct indéfini’ (*La Terre du Sphinx*, p. 26 and 27).

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<sup>22</sup> Péladan, *Comment on devient mage*, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> After his rupture with his fellow Rosicrucians (the Ordre de la Rose † Croix founded in 1888), in 1891 Péladan founded his sole Rose † Croix Esthétique and the Salons de la Rose † Croix Catholique, whose early good reputation came into disrepute year by year and in 1897 disappeared. See Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France*.

<sup>24</sup> Nelly Emont, ‘La vie de Joséphin Péladan’, in *Les Péladan*, ed. by J.-P. Laurant and V. Nguyen (Lausanne: l’Âge d’homme, 1990), pp. 32–33.

The frustration which arises from being incapable of mastering one's instincts is connected with a fear of marriage and women. Marriage, in which women gain the power of control over men's desires, is understood by Péladan as the reason for the intellectual man's fall and the obstacle to his attaining the Ideal. Wives, embodying instinctual forces, perpetually threaten their husbands, demanding that they provide them with children and material advantages, of which the male characters are incapable. Consequently, as in Sacher-Masoch's stories, Péladan's fantasy is filled with domestic scenes of humiliated men and domineering women.

The artist-Magus Bihn in *Le Panthée* is one of these suffering husbands in Péladan's saga, because the centre of the story lies in his artistic talent, which is only wasted in supporting his wife and their three children, the results of his carnal desires. The story of Nébo and Paule in the trilogy also traces the process of falling into the dilemma between mind and body. Nébo first appears as an educator seeking to make an androgynous idol out of Paule, but, just as Séverin's attempt with Wanda in *La Vénus à la fourrure* fails when she revolts, Nébo becomes completely subjugated by Paule's domination: 'Ce serait l'heure de se quitter [...] elle n'en a pas l'idée, ni moi la force'.<sup>25</sup> The sense of powerlessness is further stressed when he forgets his overriding priority, a meeting with other occultists, in Paule's embrace: 'Il pleura de honte; lui, le mage tres calme et tres puissant, tout oublier aux bras d'une femme,

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<sup>25</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée IV: A cœur perdu* (Paris: Dentu, 1892 [1887]), p. 372.



même ses serments occultes' (*A cœur perdu*, p. 397). Nébo's final rupture with Paule results solely from a fear of marriage, which is regarded as Paule's total triumph over him.

The most explicit example of such humiliated husbands is the hero Adar in *La victoire du mari*. Referring to Wagner's two operas, *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal*, Péladan dramatises the struggle inflicted upon the Magus character between the instinctual and the spiritual. The wife, Izel, insists that Adar should remain like Tristan, a tragically passionate lover, rather than Parsifal, a pious idealist; she complains, 'Parsifal est chaste, doux et calme, Parsifal résiste à Koundry, c'est le chevalier saint, le mage impavide. Cette œuvre est mon ennemie, elle t'éloignerait de moi'.<sup>26</sup> Wagner's operas signify the ambivalence of sexuality and spirituality. The novel focuses on Adar's suffering, derived from his response to both conditions: when he accepts carnal desires, he is tormented by a sense of guilt and degeneration; when he appreciates serene spiritual moments, he has to suffer from raging sexual desire for his wife.

Furthermore, the title of this novel draws attention to Péladan's ironic view of marriage, because it contradicts the story, which depicts becoming a husband not as a victory, but as a defeat. Adar is a miserable, passive husband and it is always Izel who takes the initiative. He is obliged to comply with her incessant sexual demands and consequently always torments himself with a sense of guilt. The ending of the novel gives another twisted

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<sup>26</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée VI: La victoire du mari* (Paris: Dentu, 1889), p. 91.

meaning to the title, because Adar reappears in the guise of a triumphant husband, winning Izel back from her adulterous suitors, but the truth, which only he is aware of, is another fall. He discerns the fact that he has managed to sustain their marital status by himself playing the role of an adulterous seducer, which implicitly disgraces his real position as husband. So the story ends with his ironic words to himself, ‘Mari, j’étais perdu; amant, je suis sauvé’ (*La victoire du mari*, p. 249). In this way, the novel highlights the image of the inescapable humiliation of the man who has become a husband.

I have noted that Péladan’s obsessive depiction of suffering is based on a sense of discontent with society, which disregards the protagonist’s superiority, as well as on a sense of his inability to master his own animalistic needs. It should be added that the intensity of his torments is increased further by the series of unusual names, standing for divinities in Assyrian-Babylonian myths. Mérodack, who is named after the chief Babylonian God of creation, is the leader of the other Magus characters in Péladan’s epic; Tammuzu, the Assyrian Adonis, represents the perfect androgyne to conquer all women; Ishtar, the equivalent of Venus in Greek mythology or Astarté in the Phoenician (the latter being Lorrain’s favourite literary prop, as was seen in the previous chapter), represents femininity, whose destructive aspect is turned into a form of self-reproach; and her lover Nergal, the Babylonian king of the Underworld, conducts a necrophiliac ritual with Ishtar’s dead body. Other protagonists in the

saga are also named after other deities, such as Nébo (God of wisdom), Samas (Sun God), Sin (Moon God), Adar (God of the glowing sun) and Bélit (the wife of the Babylonian Zeus, Bêl, also known as the Mother of gods).<sup>27</sup> Péladan arranges these non-Christian mythological characters in the context of the modern Arthurian quest, which aims to legitimise the ordeals and suffering experienced by these characters. It should be mentioned that this jumble of mythological settings includes Satan and Prometheus, the great icons of suffering.

**– Icons of Suffering: Satan-Prometheus –**

Péladan's Magus heroes are indeed often compared to Prometheus or Satan. Nergal, for example, says that he is one of 'Les Oelohites, dignes fils de Satan', calling himself 'Lucifer-Prométhé' (*Istar*, p. 265 and p. 44), because, as Jean-Pierre Bonnerot says, Satan and Prometheus became identical as a model of the artist-Magus in Péladan's thought.<sup>28</sup> The word 'diable' or 'daïmon' appearing often in Péladan's texts does not signify the traditional Christian image of absolute Evil, the negative force opposing Good and God, but rather, a type of the 'Romantic Devil', such as Milton's Lucifer, who is attractive in his evil and represents a rebellious prince disowned by the tyrannical Father (God) and seeking salvation in perpetual suffering.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Félix Guirand and Joël Schmidt, *Mythes et Mythologie* (Paris: Larousse-Bordas, 1996), pp. 69–97. A. S. Carrier, 'Tiele on Babylonian-Assyrian Culture. II', in *The Old Testament Student*, 8:6 (1889), 214–219.

<sup>28</sup> See Jean-Pierre Bonnerot, 'Introduction', in Péladan, *Œuvres choisies*, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> As to the unconventional image of the Romantic Devil, see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil*

It is well known that the vogue of Satanism in Decadence hardly ever included seriously abusive aspects of ritual practices, but existed merely as ‘an effective literary expedient, as a method of provoking horror, amazement or a form of erotic delight’.<sup>30</sup> For instance, the dandy with a glaring red ruby ring in Gautier’s fantastic story, *Onuphrius* (1832), is one of such examples of the Devil. The cruel taste and seduction of the dandy and those of the Devil are combined in the malicious elegant figure with whom the artist Onuphrius becomes obsessed until neurosis eventually leads to his ruin and insanity. Balzac’s *Le chef-d’oeuvre inconnu* (1831), a piece much admired by Decadents, including Péladan, also presents the suffering image of the artist Frenhofer, whose possession by ‘quelque chose de diabolique’ is responsible for his insanity and suicide.<sup>31</sup> Influenced by the misogyny of the period, this type of Devil, a seductive destroyer, was often integrated into the dangerous image of a woman. As the previous chapter discussed, Lorrain’s *Monsieur de Phocas* used the image of the Devil for a similar purpose and portrayed it in the bloodthirsty image of the goddess Astarté, ‘le Démon de luxure’ (*Phocas*, p. 18), who possesses and tortures the protagonist.<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, in Péladan’s case, the image of the Devil appears sometimes in association

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in *the Modern World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 168–213.

<sup>30</sup> Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution*, p. 124.

<sup>31</sup> Balzac, *Le chef-d’oeuvre inconnu: Gambara: Massimilla Doni* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), p. 44.

<sup>32</sup> On the traditional association of women with the image of Devil, see Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). See also the final chapter of this thesis.

with women's destructive nature, as the image of the Princess d'Este well exemplifies. But there is another distinctive use of the Devil: the Devil as prototype of the superior form of human being, whom the artist-Magus characters try to become. This is shown when the heroine Bélit in *Cœur en peine* is initiated into the fellowship of the Magi, a 'fée'. Asked to invoke a god with whom she wants to identify during the process, she tries to invoke Prometheus, because she compares her willingness to suffer from her unrequited desire for Tammuz, a self-contained androgyne, to the martyrdom of Prometheus. Instead of Prometheus, Satan appears before her. This switch to Satan may suggest the Decadent's favourite image in association with women, whose sexuality is infinite and destructive, but what Péladan intends to show here is the reverse. He uses Satan to teach Bélit 'la science du salut diabolique' to become a fée. This means that she has to learn 'l'abnégation d'amour' through suffering, in other words, 'la charité' or 'la vertu suprême', the most important virtue in Péladan's view.<sup>33</sup>

Besides Satan, another suffering icon, Prometheus, is used to symbolise the process of attaining perfection. Since Romanticism, Aeschylus's heroic image of Prometheus had been re-evaluated and Prometheus had come to symbolise 'la révolte dans l'ordre métaphysique et religieux, tout comme l'incarnation du refus de l'absurde de la condition humaine'. One of the precursors was Goethe's drama fragment *Prometheus* (1773).<sup>34</sup> The positive view of

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<sup>33</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée VII : Cœur en peine* (Paris: Dentu, 1890), pp. 308–309.

<sup>34</sup> *Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires*, p. 1187.

Prometheus as a noble liberator of human beings corresponded to the Romantic view of Satan and the two figures became identical, in terms of a sense of revolt, with a stronger affinity to human nature than to divinity and a subsequent fall from heaven as punishment. P. B. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), identifying the nature of Prometheus with that of Satan, condemned Zeus as a cruel and ignorant tyrant, while celebrating Prometheus as a new leader whose reign was based on love, forgiveness and compassion. Prometheus was portrayed as a religious saviour of evil humanity in Edgar Quinet's *Prométhée* (1838) and is presented as an inspired artist who struggles to attain 'la flame céleste' in Balzac's *Le chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*.<sup>35</sup> The second half of the nineteenth century, reflecting the era of positivism, added the victimised aspect of the unjust God, the anxious face of an intellectual and artist. Among these, the characteristic of Lorrain's and Péladan's dramas of Prometheus lies in the excessive focus on the suffering of the victimised Prometheus.

The musical tragedy *Prométhée* (1900) by Lorrain and F. A. Hérold, fully explores the graphically masochistic image of torture in bondage.<sup>36</sup> As in Lorrain's stories, the libretto intends throughout to provoke intensified anticipation and fear, by the repetitive use of words like 'effroi', 'douleur', 'épouvante', 'souffrance' and 'horreur'. Prometheus's deed is breaking a taboo, with consequences predicted by the horrified voice of his mother, Gaia, who begs

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<sup>35</sup> Balzac, *Le chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, p. 47.

<sup>36</sup> See Jean Lorrain and F. A. Hérold, *Prométhée : Tragédie Lyrique en 3 actes*, Music by Gabriel Fauré, (Paris: J. Hamelle, 1900).

him not to dare. The lingering process of Prometheus's punishment is designed to be displayed on stage step by step, like a bloody spectacle of execution. The masochistic aspect is also clear in the ironic depiction of Prometheus's situation as a victim of his own art, because it is Prometheus's subordinate god of Art, Héphaïstos, who appears holding chains, nails and a hammer and conducts this bloody ritual. This scene may remind us of Séverin's favourite story of the ox of Dionysius in *La Vénus à la fourrure* and that the first victim of a device of torture is its inventor.

Péladan's drama, *La Prométhéide*, also highlights the victimised aspect of Prometheus, who is called the 'Demon' and whose chained body is present on stage to exhibit pain and complaints. Unlike Lorrain's tragedy, however, Péladan's drama has another purpose: 'le thème de la maturation par la souffrance'.<sup>37</sup> Péladan explains in *Comment on devient artiste* that Prometheus's fate forms an example of occult palingenesis, 'selon les mystères d'Eleusis'.<sup>38</sup> As in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Péladan's play is an attempt to recover Aeschylus's lost act in Prometheus is freed from his chains, because the theme of suffering is as important as that of the rebirth of the sufferer. Although Pierre Albouy considers this play unique in its idea of 'la réconciliation de Zeus et de Prométhée, the l'Ordre et du Progrès', in my view, the important idea is the victory of Prometheus over Zeus, because at the end of his

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<sup>37</sup> *Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires*, p. 1199.

<sup>38</sup> Péladan, *Comment on devient artiste*, p. 18. n. 1.

play, it is Prometheus who rejoices over the fact that ‘il a fallut qu’il [Zeus] se repente!’.<sup>39</sup> It is possible to think that the ending reflects Péladan’s wishful thinking that a talented artist oppressed by an autocratic authority will be celebrated in the end, because he makes it explicit in his preface to the play that the antagonism between Zeus and Prometheus mirrors the conflict between the all-powerful president of the Third Republic and the neglected artist Péladan himself. The image of Prometheus as an unsaleable Parisian writer was later parodied in André Gide’s *Prométhée mal enchaîné* (1899).

Péladan’s Prometheus spits out curses and sarcasm on the unjust Zeus, which echoes Aeschylus’s representation of Prometheus, but the former appears less obnoxious than the latter because Péladan’s Prometheus simultaneously confesses his sense of powerlessness, to summon up pity for the victim. Péladan further follows Aeschylus in terms of the dominant use of female figures; Zeus is absent from the play and becomes a mere symbol of Power and Violence, while it is women who accompany Prometheus’s ordeals and rise throughout the play. Like Aeschylus, Péladan presents Prometheus as a son of Mother Nature, Gaia. Pandora appears as the prototype of the destructive woman, whom Prometheus, as a model of the Magus, tries to teach to become submissive and help men. The ancestress of Heracles, Io, plays the role of a female helper, which is suggested as the way to free the suffering man.

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<sup>39</sup> Pierre Albouy, *Mythes et mythologies dans la littérature française* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1998), p. 117. Joséphine Péladan, *La Prométhéide : trilogie d’Eschyle en quatre tableaux* (Paris: Chamuel, 1895), p. 141.



From Aeschylus's drama, picking up these masochistic uses of women as the source of pain as well as the liberator, Péladan's version stresses the theme further by bringing in the goddess Athena to be the spokeswoman of Zeus. In Péladan, Athena plays the dominatrix who sends Zeus the order to inflict pain on Prometheus, as well as freeing him from his chains at the end.

It is clear, then, that the images of Satan and Prometheus, identified with the artist-Magus figures, were exploited to plot a masochistic story. In addition to them, the figure of Cain plays a decisive role in Péladan, following the literary trend of the period. Although less discussed by critics than Satan and Prometheus, Cain was another favourite literary icon among nineteenth-century artists; Sacher-Masoch and Hugo shared the same ambition to depict 'un vaste panorama de l'humanité' under the name of Cain.<sup>40</sup> Cain's murder was commonly identified with the sins of Satan and the crime of Prometheus and all three figures symbolise, as Albouy puts it, 'la rébellion romantique'.<sup>41</sup> Péladan's use of Cain is found in his *Typhonia* (1892), where he writes, 'le legs de Kaïn, rut et meurtre'.<sup>42</sup> These words are uttered by the hero of this novel, Sin, who finds that his birth town Typhonia is filled with the offspring of Cain, because the town's main attraction is bullfights: 'ce vice, que le marquis de Sade du moins cachait' (*Typhonia*, p. 4). Furthermore, the implication of Cain is evident also

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<sup>40</sup> See Brunel, p. 261. It says that there were a number of works with the theme of Cain: Byron's *Cain* (published in 1821 and translated into French in 1822 by Amédée Pichot and then in 1823 by Fabre d'Olivet); Gérard Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* (1851); Baudelaire's poem, 'Abel et Caïn' in *Les fleurs du mal* (1855); Hugo's *La Fin de Satan* (1886); and Leconte de Lisle's *Qaïn* (1846).

<sup>41</sup> Albouy, *Mythes et mythologies*, p. 97.

<sup>42</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée XI : Typhonia* (Paris: Dentu, 1892), p. 4.

in the name of the town, Typhonia. Typhon in Greek means the people of Set, who in the Egyptian myth kills his brother Osiris to take over his kingdom, just as Cain does in Genesis.<sup>43</sup>

In this way, Péladan employs the great suffering icons, in order to exaggerate the significance of the experience of suffering. Suffering is important in Péladan's imagination and also, as seen in previous chapters, in Sacher-Masoch's and in Lorrain's, because it is the path to initiate a man into a new superior form, the sole key to the resolution of all human suffering. This is the man indicated in the figures of 'The Wanderer' and the perfect androgyne, 'The Greek', in Sacher-Masoch's texts. In Lorrain, it is equally manifested in the images of Phocas and Thomas, other 'wanderers'. In Péladan's fictional world, it is the Magus, who it is hoped, will be born to save the world. The Magus is another 'wanderer', as the original ending of *La Vertu suprême* (1900), the 14<sup>th</sup> volume of the saga, initially planned to show. This symbolically closes with the image of the departing leader-Magus Mérodack exiled to the Orient as an act of penance. His life of wandering is mostly unknown to the reader, without being idealised, as Sacher-Masoch and Lorrain portray it, and is hardly mentioned in the following 6 volumes. In fact, reference to the image of the Magus itself disappears from the narrative of these supplementary volumes, until the finale of the 21-volume saga, *La Torche Renversée* (1925), published posthumously, in which Mérodack

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<sup>43</sup> Beaufils, *Joséphine Péladan*, p. 20.

returns to the West. It is suggested that he has become someone different. The major characteristic of this new Mérodack is a profound sense of humility. Without wishing to proudly call himself the Magus, or anyone special, he now insists that ‘Il n’y a plus de mage [...] je suis un archéologue, un curieux, un homme comme les autres’ and that the Magus has lost his leadership and proves himself to be ‘la torche éteinte’.<sup>44</sup>

As well as wandering, another trait of the newly-born man in masochism is androgyny, proposed as a reconciliation of the perpetual conflict between man and woman. Péladan’s Magus characters are those who try to become androgyne and whose struggle to become so is one of the reasons for their suffering. I conclude this chapter with an account of the cult of androgyny, which has been often discussed as one of the distinctive features in Péladan’s art, from the perspective of a masochistic regeneration.

### – *The Androgyne and the Gynander* –

Péladan’s texts are filled with an obsession with sexuality. As seen above, one of the reasons for the Magus’s suffering is marriage, because marriage makes men submissive ‘males’ to females’ demands, when all the while the man is expected to become a Magus, someone spiritual, superior and dominant. Péladan tries to indicate the significance of the struggle with

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<sup>44</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée XXI: la Torche renversée* (Paris: Editions du Monde moderne, 1925), p. 22 and p. 30.

sexual desire by employing mythological settings, such as the falling image of Satan, ‘un être intermédiaire entre la série spirituelle et la série terrestre’.<sup>45</sup> The Sphinx, or as he calls it the ‘androgynosphinx’, is also used to symbolise the all-embracing creature somewhere between man and woman and between animal and human.<sup>46</sup> Historical events are also used, such as the culture of the troubadours and the Cathars. In *Le Secret des troubadours, de Parsifal à Don Quichotte*, he sees the quality of the Magus in both the troubadours and the Cathars, by establishing the hypothesis that they were identical because they devoted themselves to exactly the same principle: chaste and unrequited love for ‘Des femmes, presque toujours de très hautes dames’ (*Le Secret des troubadours*, p. 104). This means that their culture was based on the Western tradition that ‘passion signifie souffrance’, as De Rougemont identifies.<sup>47</sup> Taking Péladan’s hypothesis seriously, De Rougemont proposes that Western lyricism has, since the twelfth century, been a series of manifestations of suffering love and that it is best crystallised in the myth of Tristan and Isolde. The fear of and fascination with love which leads to death are the motivations for creating a story by which is hoped to ‘ordonner la passion dans un cadre’.<sup>48</sup> Péladan’s writing indeed attempts to control the destructive power of desire in his narratives and the image of the androgyne, a sexually self-sufficient creature, becomes crucial as a resolution.

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<sup>45</sup> Péladan, *Comment on devient artiste*, p. 43.

<sup>46</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *De l’androgyne: théorie plastique: Les Idées et les formes* (Paris: Sansot, 1910), repr. in Péladan, *Œuvres choisies*, p. 230.

<sup>47</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *L’amour et l’occident* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1972 [1938]), p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

The androgyne presumes asexuality, but the androgyne can also display sexual ambiguity, due to its sexual dualities themselves, and Péladan's androgynous characters fall into this latter case. It is obvious that his cult of androgyny does not mean the absence of sexuality, but rather an exhibition of other forms of sexuality, just as the Cathars' abstinence and extreme abhorrence of marital intercourse, which Péladan highly esteemed, contrasted with their notorious indulgence in sensual experiences and homosexual practices.<sup>49</sup> Monneyron categorises Péladan's representation of the androgyne as either masochistic or homoerotic.<sup>50</sup> However, A. J. L. Busst compares the pessimistic and perverted images of the androgynes in the latter half of nineteenth century France to those optimistic and purer examples from the first half of the century and characterises the Romantic and Decadent cult of the androgyne as an abuse of the image of the androgyne which makes the androgyne 'a symbol of vice, particularly of cerebral lechery, demoniality, onanism, homosexuality, sadism and masochism'.<sup>51</sup> Busst's use of the term masochism is conventional in a Prazian way, but cerebral lechery, the intellectualisation of sexuality, does indeed include the sexuality of the masochist Séverin in Sacher-Masoch's *La Vénus à la fourrure*, as mentioned in Chapter 3, above. Séverin's persistent fear of losing Wanda is challenged by Wanda, who insists that he has never really 'possessed' her. The act of 'possession' in masochism does not signify

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>50</sup> See Monneyron, *L'androgyne décadent*.

<sup>51</sup> A. J. L. Busst, 'The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century', in *Romantic mythologies*, ed. by I. Fletcher (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 39.

ordinary sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, but the aesthetic act of appreciating Wanda's beauty and cruel temperament. The sexuality of Péladan's androgynous characters is similarly transformed, manifested as fetishism, voyeurism and necrophilia, all of which concern an act of 'framing' passion in the imaginary possession of others, by means of the occult power, the gaze, or the dead body which never responds, underlying the representation of masochistic pleasure and pain. I also see in Péladan's conceptualisation of lesbianism an ambiguous line drawn between androgyny and homosexuality, and a unique characterisation of the female version of the androgyne, named the Gynander.

For Péladan's characters, physical possession is perceived as vulgar and even horrible, while cerebral lechery, 'transmission fluidique' in Péladan's own words, is highly esteemed as a supreme expression of passion (*A cœur perdu*, p. 148). It is most lingeringly described in the couple of Nébo and Paule. Their relationship is a process of creating an androgyne, so the author turns their nuptial night into a highly ritualised initiation of ultimate love, where Nébo sexualises everything other than genital intercourse to prove their androgyny. Péladan's lingering depiction of fetishist foreplay includes the joy of disguise in theatrical costumes, and even biting each other is recommended, while the moment of penetration is described as merely a brutal torture (see Chapter 8, below). Nébo's attempt to initiate Paule into androgyny fails and the Magus, who always claims 'Ma force réside tout entière dans la négation du

sexe', now helplessly falls into the state of simply being a male (p. 238).

The sexuality of the androgyne takes another form, that of cerebral lechery, which is voyeurism, 'l'erotisme par les yeux' (*L'Androgyne*, p. 264). The male looking at the female body has often been considered a representation of male sadism. Yet, as observed in previous chapters, a male gazing upon a female body is not necessarily sadistic, but masochistic, in particular when these bodies are erotically and aesthetically objectified as a source of desire and prohibition. It is certainly a manifestation of the male desire for mastery, but its aspect of dominance is discreet and this has been seen as a characteristic of masochism (see Chapter 1, above, and Chapter 7, below). Péladan's *L'Androgyne* portrays this type of voyeuristic masochism, which is suggested as a higher form of sexuality than copulation in the process of initiating the virgin hero Samas to become a perfect androgyne. It is the Gynander Stelle's striptease that teaches Samas to desire a female body and simultaneously suffer from a sense of incapacity and humiliation before something unobtainable and unsatisfied. Péladan's use of language tells that the dominant power is held by Stelle and Samas in this scene is only a victim who feels 'condamné', 'supplicié', 'doublement faible, doublement humilié' and even 'violé' (*L'Androgyne*, p. 239, p. 240, p. 249, and p. 267). The drama ends with the failure of the initiation caused by the loss of Samas's virginity, which is described as the death of the androgyne. The conventional act of sexual intercourse is here again described as something

appalling, ‘O l’horreur, androgyne, de se sentir devenir homme!’(p. 261).

In *Istar*, an alternative sexuality is proposed in a far more disturbing way, necrophilia. The couple, the artist-Magus Nergal and his lover Istar, both strive to achieve spirituality and become fellow-Magi, but their story ends by his enacting a necrophiliac ritual on her dead body. This event is a logical result of their fetishistic relationship, because, under the pretext of the virtue of chastity, their adulterous passion is first given voice in Nergal’s producing a novel out of Istar’s misery and martyrdom. Yet this only aggravates Istar’s suffering from sexual repression, the secrecy of their affair and a sense of guilt and eventually she dies from a severe nervous breakdown, which then leads Nergal to engage in the fetishisation of her dead body. The act is called ‘les transports de l’amour’ and also presented as an occult ritual of rebirth, ‘l’incubation’ (*Istar*, p. 467 and p. 468). Nergal plays the role of priest; however, it is not he who actually takes the initiative, but Istar’s impassive body, dominating the scene. A sense of guilt and desperation is the feeling which overwhelms Nergal, when he is tempted to violate her body: ‘lui seul était criminel’ (p. 469). A sense of helplessness is also seen in his willingness to ‘s’inoculer le trépas, de s’en aller avec elle’ (ibid.). Nergal’s failure to revive her is also ironically and morbidly depicted in his misreading of the moistness and softness of her lips, which he at first believed to be a sign of the resurrection of her soul but turns out to be merely a sign of the decomposition of her flesh. Nergal is not presented here as an ‘abuser’



of the female body. Rather, Péladan highlights the intensity of his torment and his sense of failure before Istar's corpse. The aesthetic aspect of necrophiliac fantasy has been studied by Lisa Downing. Following Freudian psychoanalysis, which discusses the death drive as a primary form of human desire, she posits necrophilia as something fundamental to the human psyche, which touches the boundaries of sadism, masochism and fetishism. She argues that a necrophiliac fantasy derives from that sense of complicity and ambiguous identification between murderer and dead female body which is fully expressed in Baudelaire's poems, and in the persistent desire and fear of annihilation of gender identity in Rachilde's novels.<sup>52</sup>

The question of the sexuality of the androgyne includes the issue of homosexuality. A taste for transvestism is found in the process of initiating Paule to become an androgyne, for when she is dressed in male costume Nébo says to her, 'Je t'aime, mon beau page' (*A cœur perdu*, p. 150). But Péladan's texts are less ambiguous than Lorrain's towards homoeroticism, as is shown by Samas's plain rejection of the homoerotic attachment shown by his friend, Agûr. It is also reasoned that Samas's androgynous charm will be lost when he grows up, because, losing its feminine glow, his beauty as simply a man will naturally no longer attract other men as it once did. This simplicity is partly because Péladan is essentially a hetero-sexist and also because, he rejects on principle any sort of sexual activity as a vice. He

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<sup>52</sup> See Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2003).

even contests the confusion between homosexuality and ‘androgynism’, saying that desiring the androgyne is ‘homosexuel et son oeil déforme la pure vision’, while androgynism should be purely aesthetic and concern only ‘l’immatérialité’.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, as one of the Decadents who admired Baudelaire’s poetry, Péladan’s tone when talking about lesbianism is not so straightforwardly condemnatory, but remains ambiguous. There is certain fascination with lesbianism, creating an imaginary erotic focal point in the narrative which may gratify the male artist’s own curiosity about homosexual desires, but simultaneously condemning it takes the place of punishment for his sense of guilt. Yet in *La Gynandre* Péladan uses lesbianism in a far more distinctive way: it becomes a sign of the birth of an ideal female version of the androgyne, the Gynander, made possible because she dismisses heterosexual intercourse.

In the image of Samas in *L’Androgyne*, Péladan has already dealt with his theory that the androgyne can be found among virgins, which, however, ends in failure. In *La Gynandre*, which is the volume after *L’Androgyne*, Péladan presents an image of the perfect androgyne, Tammuz, to show that the androgyne is a man of art and intellect, i.e., a Magus: ‘l’androgyne; idéalement, c’est le puceau; pratiquement, c’est l’homme d’idée, d’art ou de sentiment’.<sup>54</sup> Unlike Péladan’s other Magus heroes, Tammuz rarely exhibits suffering or weakness, but

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<sup>53</sup> Péladan, *De l’androgyne: théorie plastique*, p. 251.

<sup>54</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée IX: la Gynandre* (Paris: Dentu, 1891), p. 254.

plays the role of ‘the Greek’, a dominant seducer. The power of his seduction is stressed in his converting lesbians to hetero-sexual relationships with him; however, his way of seducing them is not conventionally masculine, but rather masochistic. He seduces lesbians by emasculating himself: ‘La Gynandre se déguisait en homme, Tammuz se féminisa : et par cette manœuvre, il rétablit le contact normal’ (*La Gynandre*, p. 135). Tammuz denies all kinds of manly privileges, such as social status, economic prosperity, aggressiveness or physical superiority; he appears as a wandering pacifist without a family or job, except as a missionary for Mérodack’s occult-Catholic sect. He looks like an effeminate and elegant dandy, preferring delicate soft clothes; he lies lazily, like a courtesan, saying disdainfully, ‘L’homme, qui a pour fonction de penser, pourquoi cultiverait-il son système musculaire, portant de lourds souliers et du linge grossier’ (p. 253).<sup>55</sup> It is proposed that by means of this effeminate man, lesbians are to recover a normal heterosexual relationship with men.

In this novel, Péladan’s ambition is clear: to create a new form of superior being in opposition to the identities defined by society. As the androgynous Magus, Tammuz strongly rejects being ranked under any form of sexual identity; when he is asked whether he is effeminate: ‘Je n’avoue rien: le propre de l’homme n’est pas de tendre le jarret en agitant un bout d’acier: ce qui fait l’homme c’est la tête’ (*La Gynandre*, p. 104). This reply suggests that

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<sup>55</sup> Breton writes that Péladan’s Magus figure is a type of Baudelairean dandy, sharing his contempt for contemporary society, his elitism and his desire to escape. See Jean Jacques Breton, *Le mage dans “la Décadence latine” de Joséphin Péladan: Péladan, un Dreyfus de la littérature* (Lyon: Editions du Cosmogone, 1999), pp. 94–95.

Péladan's creation of the Magus is an attempt to disavow the social convention which sees male intellectualism as a sign of homosexuality, inferiority, or impotence, but rather to claim that it is a sign of superiority. As to the Gynander, Péladan's attempt is the same: to create a new unconventional female identity out of the most notorious women, lesbians, reflecting the craze for lesbianism in art and literature of that period.

According to Péladan's logic, the Gynander can be found among lesbians, first because of their 'asexuality' in the sense of their indifference to genital penetration between man and woman. It is said of his notorious lesbian princess Simzerlal that she is a Gynander because '[elle] n'a pas de désir, n'a pas eu de plaisir: c'est une insensuelle' (p. 14). Then Péladan explains the hollowness of the label lesbian, in order to claim that certain women mistakenly call themselves lesbians, but they should call themselves Gynanders. The uselessness of the lesbian identity is explained as twofold: first, there is no lesbianism, because sexual activities between women merely stem from a basic instinct, 'Cela n'est que l'instinct comprimé qui dévie' (p. 15). Secondly, lesbian women are 'vains fantômes' forged by contemporary journalism: 'il y a dix ans Lesbos n'existait pas socialement'; 'Lesbos a été inventée par les journalistes' (p. 270, p. 205, and p. 340). Consequently, some 'lesbians' know the emptiness of social labels and play with them by saying, 'nous sommes en travesti [...] il n'y a pas de femme ici [...] Il n'y a plus de lesbiennes, nous sommes pédérastes' (pp.

164–165). Or, like Rose, who is a celebrated transvestite in high society, the title of lesbian is used by some women who are disappointed with ordinary men and the social conventions which disregard their superiority. Rose is a Gynander, because her calling herself a lesbian derives from this sense of disappointment and also because her lesbianism is not from a desire for same-sex relationships but instead a mask for her spiritualism and intellectualism: ‘je suis vierge, Tammuz, non pas seulement pucelle, vierge et savante’ (p. 110). In this way, Péladan proposes a new image of woman, the Gynander, based on the same key points as the Magus: superior beings are those who struggle with their instincts and with their own society.

This chapter has shown the nature and use of the Magus’s exhibitionistic suffering in relation to the masochistic theme of regeneration. As masochism turns pain into pleasure, so Péladan transforms the suffering felt by those who are not appreciated or are misunderstood by society into the pleasure of being reborn into superior, self-contained androgynes, called Magus and Gynander. These self-authorised new names and significances symbolise Péladan’s desperate attempt to create a new idea of the self which will bring to decadent France a new spiritual regeneration, by idealising the hardships and suffering of its people.

The next and final part of this thesis focuses on the role of the female characters in Lorrain’s and Péladan’s texts, referring to the vogue at the time for depicting hysterical women.

### PART III: The Hysterical Partner

The model of the dominatrix Wanda in Sacher-Masoch's novel is an hysteric. After his masochism is 'cured', Séverin exclaims that he should have beaten her instead of letting her beat him: 'songe à l'effet produit sur nos belles dames nerveuses et hystériques!' (*Vénus*, p. 248). As the young widow of a rich nobleman, she is a sexually frustrated aristocrat, curious for exquisite sensations under the pretext of her adherence to paganism. In reality, however, she is frigid, and promiscuous only in her fantasies; this is a common symptom of hysteria often attributed to Decadent heroines.

The last part of this thesis will examine the nature and role in the Decadent imagination of the domineering female partner in relation to hysteria. Decadent heroines are often called *femmes fatales*, destroyers of men who inflict pain and suffering on the male characters, while the female patients afflicted with hysteria are those who are the victims of pain and suffering. Yet the Decadent artists used the image of hysteria created by physicians for their own fictional characters. I shall examine the link between Decadent female torturers and hysterical female patients and propose the view that they both are necessary components of the masochistic dramas created by male intellectuals and artists. They are the aggressive vehicle through which pain and power are expressed, and the assistant who helps male

authority and dominance to be restored in the artistic creation of a masochistic scenario.

## **CHAPTER 7. THE THEATRE OF HYSTERICAL PAIN AND PLEASURE**

Hysteria was very much in vogue at the turn of the century, providing the public with sensational spectacles of pain and suffering as well as an authoritative medical judgment on the mysterious nature of female sexuality. The chief representative of this authority was the French physician, J.-M. Charcot, whose treatment of hypnotism, demonstrated on hysterical female patients in the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris played a central role in the research on hysteria in Western Europe. Sigmund Freud spent just one year, from 1885 to 1886, working under Charcot's supervision at the Salpêtrière, but he considered Charcot his lifelong mentor, and remarked, “L'École de la Salpêtrière”, c'était bien sûr Charcot lui-même'.<sup>1</sup> Another of Charcot's associates, George Guillain, reports, ‘A partir de 1882, toutes les Revues médicales, philosophiques, littéraire et aussi la presse quotidienne consacrèrent des articles au grand hypnotisme’.<sup>2</sup>

Charcot's regular lectures with hypnotised hysterics in an amphitheatre at the Salpêtrière attracted not only medical doctors but also the general intellectual public in Western Europe, necessarily a wholly male audience.<sup>3</sup> The excessive exposure of hysteria in public often invited the criticism that the lectures were not purely scientific or therapeutic, but

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Charcot’, trans. by Mikkil Borch-Jacobsen, and others (Vienne, 1893), repr. in J.-M. Charcot, *Leçons sur l'hystérie virile*, intro. by Michèle Ouerd (Paris: S.F.I.E.D., 1984), p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> George Guillain, *J.-M. Charcot 1825–1893: sa vie–son œuvre* (Paris: Masson et Cie, 1955), pp. 168–169.

<sup>3</sup> Guy de Maupassant, J.-K. Huysmans, Alphonse and Léon Daudet were among the regular members of the audience who were well-known in the field of art.



sensational and spectacular: ‘The atmosphere of the Salpêtrière has been criticised for being somewhat dramatic and excitable’.<sup>4</sup> It is also said: ‘The hypnotism of the Salpêtrière is a cultist type of hypnotism’; it ‘resembled more a theatrical than a scientific performance. Charcot has been justly criticised for these clinics, which were a little too spectacular’.<sup>5</sup> These criticisms show that the issue of hysteria was known not only as a serious medical matter, but also as a public spectacle, in particular, as Georges Didi-Huberman puts it, ‘le spectacle de la douleur’.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter will consider the characterisation of the hysteric by medical discourses in late nineteenth century France, highlighting some key features of hysteria from the perspective of masochism. Decadent hysteria was masochistic because its basis is in the pain and suffering exhibited by the female patients. The origin and nature of the disease causing women misery were, however, impalpable: it was something related to a cultural conceptualisation of female sexuality and to a masochistic self-torturing personality on the part of the afflicted. Because of the theatrical use of imagined pain by the patients and their physicians, the issue of hysteria appears masochistic. Further, the purpose of curing the hysterical women brings it even closer to masochism. The cure recommended for hysteria was not sought in medicine or science, but the moral and cultural prescription of marriage. The

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<sup>4</sup> A. R. G. Owen, *Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing: the Work of J.-M. Charcot* (London: Dobson, 1971), p. 164.

<sup>5</sup> Guillaumin, *J.-M. Charcot*, p. 170 and p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'Hystérie: Charcot et l'Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (Paris: Éditions Macula, 1982), p. 9.

idea of marriage as a cure echoes the culminating theme in masochism: the recovery, after a struggle between the two parties, of male supremacy over the disturbed woman.

– *The Scenario of Suffering* –

The issue of hysteria in the Decadent period was based mainly on the pain and suffering exhibited by the women affected by hysteria. Yet the origin and nature of the pain remained unknown; as Charcot famously said, ‘le mot hystérie ne signifie rien’.<sup>7</sup> The impossibility of penetrating the mystery prompted doctors to forge various confusing names to match each manifestation of this disorder. Hysteria was associated with symptomatic conditions such as amnesia, anaesthesia, catalepsy, deliria, epilepsy, hallucinations, intestinal issues, obsessions, sight issues, somnambulism, spasm, trouble with movement and a troubled and unstable disposition. One of the most confusing names was neurosis. Charcot, for example, never succeeded in differentiating hysteria from neurosis and often juxtaposed these two terms. Towards the end of his life, Charcot came to dislike using the term hysteria, preferring the term neurosis instead.<sup>8</sup> He even created the name ‘hystero-epileptic’ to define an illness whose characteristic epileptic symptoms were no more than appearances, its real cause being hysteria. Yet the ‘hystero-epileptic’ was one of the grounds for criticising Charcot, because it

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<sup>7</sup> J.-M. Charcot, *Leçons du mardi à la Salpêtrière 1887–1889*, 2 vols (Paris: Lecrosnier & Babé, 1889), II, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Owen, *Hysteria*, p. 58; Guillaïn, *J.-M Charcot*, pp. 133–134.

was a condition hardly ever observed outside the Salpêtrière.<sup>9</sup>

The pain manifested by the patients may have been genuine pain coming from certain organic factors, albeit unidentified. But there were more implications in the medical discourse that the pain was derived from certain psychological factors. Unable to determine the substantial cause in the body of the patient, medical doctors attributed the disorder more to a troubled sense of morality related to female sexuality than to anything purely organic. Since the ancient Greeks, there had been a myth that hysterical symptoms corresponded to disordered moves of the uterus inside the female body. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the myth was recreated by the repressive bourgeois morality that hysteria was related to ‘signs of an aristocratic femininity’, because the abnormal moves of the ‘wandering womb’ were believed to originate from a conflict with repressed sexual desires.<sup>10</sup> While it was believed that middle and upper class women were likely to be vulnerable to hysteria because of their abstinence, working class women and prostitutes were believed to easily become hysterical because of their promiscuity. This paradoxical assumption was put forward in the nineteenth century when physicians found the greatest number of inmates confined in hospitals, including the Salpêtrière, to consist of lower-class women. Prejudiced by class consciousness, physicians invented the new theory that hysteria was caused by immodest

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<sup>9</sup> Guillaumin, *J.-M. Charcot*, p. 136.

<sup>10</sup> Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 131

sexual activities and the decline of moral sensibility.

The shift from one extreme to another (from hysteria as an excessively heightened sense of morality to hysteria as a sign of a degeneration) did not, however, change the fundamental premise that there was a link between hysteria and female sexuality. There were some physicians in the late nineteenth century who tried to refute the dominant conventional link between hysteria and female sexuality and Charcot was one of them. Charcot claimed, ‘je suis loin de croire que la *lubricité* soit toujours en jeu dans l’hystérie; je suis même convaincu du contraire’.<sup>11</sup> In the hope of dissociating hysteria from femininity and sexuality, Charcot tried confining male hysterical patients and giving lectures on male hysteria in the Salpêtrière. However, the attempt was self-defeating. In his demonstrations, Charcot could not help suggesting a connection between hysteria and unconventional sex drives (regarded as deviant), by referring that his male hysterical patients as ‘dégénérés’, sexually and morally.<sup>12</sup> Charcot’s judgment was based on the prejudice of the period against women who were believed to lack control of their sexual appetites. A man who suffers from hysteria faced a moral condemnation under which he was declared not to be a ‘man’, because what separated the male from the female one was the mastery and discipline of the self. So, as Elaine Showalter points out, in the late nineteenth century when men, especially privileged or intellectual men,

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<sup>11</sup> J.-M. Charcot, ‘Leçon sur ces maladies du système nerveux (Leçon 10 : de l’hémianesthésie hystérique)’, in *L’hystérie*, ed. by E. Trillat Edition (Paris: l’Harmattan, 1998), p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> See Charcot, ‘Hystérie et dégénérescence chez l’homme. Leçon du mardi – 1888–89 (pp.392–403)’, in *ibid.*, p. 143.

had hysterical symptoms, physicians preferred a different name for them, such as ‘neurasthenics’, to hysteria. It was disgraceful for a decent man to be hysterical, because a man afflicted with hysteria was believed to be ‘unmanly, effeminate, or homosexual’.<sup>13</sup>

Charcot’s reference to the degeneration of male hysterics included the reflection of another biased idea of the period regarding class distinctions. Those whom Charcot hospitalised were only from the working class. He also wrote in an English dictionary of psychology that the number of hysterics from the upper class was very small, ‘probably due to the rareness of traumatism and intoxication, which in the poorer classes are, *par excellence*, the exciting causes of hysteria’.<sup>14</sup> In this way the medical discourse of hysteria was not purely scientific, but morally biased by class and gender, whereby hysteria was implied to be a mental disorder due to a weakness of the patient’s mind and her lack of control and discipline.

This line of enquiry which dismissed hysterical patients as morally inferior was extended further to suggest that hysterics were innately masochistic. Hysterics were not simply victims of a troubled sense of morality, or their ‘inferior’ class and gender, but also victims of their own self-destructive need. They suffered because they wanted to suffer. The idea was developed by younger Charcot disciples, notably Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud.

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<sup>13</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Histories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London: Picador, 1998 [1997]), pp. 64–65. Elisabeth Roudinesco also writes, ‘L’hystérie masculine, ou l’hystérie nommée névrose’. Roudinesco, *La bataille de cent ans: Histoire de la psychanalyse en France, Vol. 1, 1885–1939* (Paris : Editions Ramsay, 1982), p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> J.-M. Charcot and Pierre Marie, ‘Hysteria’, in *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, ed. by D. Hack Tuke (London: Churchill, 1892), I, 629. As to the matter of hysteria and a sense of class discrimination, also see Showalter, *Histories*, p. 67.

The ideas of Janet and those of Freud concerning hysteria were similar in this respect, and there was even a dispute over plagiarism between them. Janet claimed that it was he who first reported that the cause of hysterical symptoms was the patients' own particular 'personality' in which they sought to torture themselves by compulsively remembering traumatic memories from the past. So treating hysteria was dealing with the patients' 'idée fixe' or 'auto-suggestion' according to Janet.<sup>15</sup> Janet stressed that he based the idea on the work of his mentor Charcot, whose principal concern was the physical factors of hysteria but who had already mentioned in some of his lectures between 1884 and 1885 the close relationship between hysteria and the act of recalling shocking memories of childhood.<sup>16</sup> The article of which first highlighted the relationship between hysteria and an obsession with certain memories was written four years earlier (in 1889) than Freud's publication of his study of hysteria, in which he famously asserted, '*Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences*'.<sup>17</sup>

The emphasis on the specific type of personality of the hysteric means that there was already a doubt about the authenticity of the pain exhibited by hysterics. Indeed, Charcot warned his colleagues against hysterics' malingering and exaggeration of their symptoms, and told them not to be a victim of hysterical deception.<sup>18</sup> Didi-Huberman points out that the

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<sup>15</sup> Pierre Janet, 'L'Anesthésie chez les hystériques (Conférence faite à la Salpêtrière le vendredi 11 mars 1892. par M. Pierre Janet)', in Janet, *Conférences à la Salpêtrière: Anesthésie, amnésie et suggestion chez les hystériques (1892) ; suivies de L'œuvre psychologique de J.-M. Charcot* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2003), p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> See Charcot, 'Leçon du mardi' (I, 98), in *ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, p. 7. See also Freud, 'Charcot', p. 316. n. 18; C.-M. Prévost, *Janet, Freud et la psychologie clinique* (Paris: Payot, 1973), Chapter 5, in particular.

<sup>18</sup> See Charcot, 'De l'ischurie hystérique', in Charcot, *Œuvre complètes*, I, 275–299, cit. in Guillaumin, *J.-M. Charcot*, p. 137.

deception of hysterical patients could be a part of their defensive gesture. The patients felt compelled to demonstrate the way in which their doctors believed hysterics should react. Otherwise they would be diagnosed as ill from something else and be put into a worse ward in the hospital, where patients were treated like animals until they died.<sup>19</sup>

The artificiality and theatricality of hysterical pain makes the issue of hysteria more masochistic, as Didi-Huberman says, ‘Une espèce de fantasme masochiste fonctionnait à plein, selon son *trait démonstratif* (se faire voir souffrir), selon son caractère éminent de *pacte*, de connivence aussi’.<sup>20</sup> The sense of theatricality and complicity between hysterical patients and their doctors are certainly well conveyed in their way of demonstrating the disease in public. It was well known that in the Salpêtrière the patients were usually coached backstage by their doctors in what they were expected to do with Charcot on stage.<sup>21</sup> It was also well known that Charcot never improvised, but, like an actor on stage, acted out his theories in his lectures, which were based on his own written scripts carefully prepared and memorised, in a form which could be published straightaway.<sup>22</sup> Particular hysterical symptoms would have to have been manifested at the right moment, as Charcot expected.

Charcot’s publications about his patients also point to the theatrical aspect of hysteria.

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<sup>19</sup> See Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l’Hystérie*, p. 168. It is known that at the Salpêtrière most hysterics were hospitalised until their death, while at other public hospitals, such as *La Charité*, hysterics were released only some days after their diagnosis. See Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction*, p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l’Hystérie*, p. 69.

<sup>21</sup> See Axel Munthe, *The Story of San Michele* (London: Murray, 1929).

<sup>22</sup> Guillaumin, *J.-M. Charcot*, pp. 54–56.

The apparent purpose of his publication of successive research studies on hysteria was to show the truth of hysteria (the publication includes a series of *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* in 1875, 1876, 1877, 1878 and 1880, which was followed by *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière* in 1888, and *Etudes cliniques sur la grande hystérie ou hystéro-épilepsie* in 1885). Yet the ‘truth’ which these books claimed to tell was as visually spectacular as Charcot’s lectures in the hospital: it was a gallery of a number of disturbing pictures of the moments when the patients were having their hysterical attacks. According to Didi-Huberman, the books were mainly based on a ritualistic routine of photography which Charcot’s patients had to go through on arrival at the hospital. They were requested to pose, wearing nightwear sitting on a bed in front of a camera, and a photographer and physicians waited for them to demonstrate their diagnosed symptoms. So the process of photographing was not truthful or spontaneous, nor was the process of publication. Didi-Huberman reports that Charcot was highly concerned with how to present the hysteric in print, by editing and erasing anything unsuitable from the print, such as an expression of brutality or intimacy between a doctor and a patient, in order to hide a secret complicity between them.<sup>23</sup>

The complicity between physicians and hysterics in the creation of a spectacular theatre of pain was recognised and criticised by Charcot’s contemporaries. Alex Munthe, who once worked in the Salpêtrière with Charcot, put the credibility of hysteria into question and

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<sup>23</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l’Hystérie*, p. 175.



claimed, ‘stage performances of the Salpêtrière before the public of Tout Paris were nothing but an absurd farce, a hopeless muddle of truth and cheating. [...] Many of them were mere frauds, knowing quite well what they were expected to do, delighted to perform their various tricks in public, cheating both doctors and audience with the amazing cunning of the hystériques’.<sup>24</sup> The deception of hysterical patients and Charcot’s treatments was shown by a patient named Gineviève, who was ‘the prima donna of the Tuesday stage performances’ in Charcot’s hospital.<sup>25</sup> Munthe observed that Gineviève was not sick at all, but insisted on remaining in the hospital, playing a role of an hysteric on stage for Charcot and other doctors, because she was more content with being the centre of attention than leading the life of an ordinary peasant girl in her home town.<sup>26</sup> Hysteria as a means of attracting attention is also stressed by the example of one of Munthe’s patients, an upper class woman who came to him with complaints of hysterical symptoms. Munthe diagnosed that she was suffering ‘colitis’, because, according to him, it was the term employed when doctors in late nineteenth century Europe wanted a diagnosis for high ranking women which was not ‘hysteria’. He ironically revealed the lie in which the doctor and the patient had colluded, telling his reader that the patient had written to her friend, ‘I have got colitis! I am so glad’.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Munthe, *The Story of San Michele*, p. 302. Repeated the same on p. 320. As Munthe himself says in his book, his relationship with Charcot during his research at the Salpêtrière was not on good terms. So some think that his account is unjust and revengeful. Also see Guillaumin, *J.-M. Charcot*, pp. 174–175, n. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Munthe, *The Story of San Michele*, p. 306.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 304–313.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

In this way, the vogue of hysteria was a masochistic theatre, because it involved pain and suffering which were imagined, simulated and even performed in collaboration between the hysterics playing tragic heroines and the physicians saviours of women from their misery. In the relationship between the two parties, the aspect of the game was introduced as the theme of cure, that is, the recovery of normalcy, which will be discussed next as another reason why the issue of hysteria was masochistic.

– *The Scenario of Cure* –

Since one of the causes of hysteria was attributed to the patients' malfunction in controlling sexual drives, the commonly recommended cure was not medical but moral, i.e., marriage. What hysterics needed, it was claimed, was a husband who was able, as part of his marital duties, to provide his wife with an adequate amount and degree of sexual intercourse for procreation. The idea was popular in the nineteenth century, because the contemporary medical opinion corresponded to the bourgeois esteem of marriage. When an hysterical woman was not cured by means of marriage, finding intercourse abhorrent and remaining frigid, or else nymphomaniac, her doctor even conducted invasive sexual operations, including electric shocks and sexual lobotomy.<sup>28</sup> This medical reason for curing hysteria can

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<sup>28</sup> Jane M. Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 106–107.

be seen as a cultural scheme to transform hysterical women into obedient wives, and the power of physicians over the disease symbolises the recovery of masculine control over a cheating, deceptive and disturbed femininity. Yet the plan was only hoped for and anticipated in the end as a confrontation of the triumphing mystery of hysteria.

Since the 1960s, the vogue of hysteria at the turn of the century in Western Europe has started to be seen purely as a cultural and social matter. Thomas S. Szasz contended in 1960 that what Charcot, Janet, and Freud did was to create mental illness as a myth. Since Szasz denies that hysteria is a real illness, he regards the entire issue of hysteria and psychiatry as ‘a coercive game’.<sup>29</sup> On the presumption that the relationship between the patients with mental illness and their doctors is fundamentally a game of power, he insists that hysterics are not innocent victims, but people who wish to control others by exhibiting themselves as inferior and helpless, just as powerless children tyrannically demand love, care, and protection from their parents or other adults. Physicians and psychiatrists are willing to regard hysterics as genuinely sick people who are drawn to the game of control, because the conflict allows the doctors to improve their reputation as an authority in society. Hence, Szasz claims, hysteria is a social game of domination-submission, which doctors and patients who seek the power of manipulation consent to play together.

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas S. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundation of a Theory of Personal Conduct*, rev. edn (New York: Harper & Row, 1974 [1960]), p. 216.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Foucault posed a similar question on the conceptualisation of madness: the project constitutes part of his studies about modern Western society as a collective of institutions whose aim is to achieve surveillance and total management of the time, space and body of the citizenry. In *Madness and Civilization* (1961), he proposes that the meaning of madness has undergone drastic changes from the Middle Ages to more modern times, which concludes with the latest changes in the treatment of madness, that is, the hospitalisation of people with mental problems. Madness used to be perceived as something beyond human capacity and even as a form of divine knowledge, so that mad people were simply excluded from society, the world of humanity. Yet since the Early Renaissance, the beginning of the Modern Age, which Foucault defines as being around the seventeenth century, the concept of Madness gradually changes from a secret knowledge that humanity was unable to deal with, to a human weakness and a lack of self-discipline, something that belongs to the realm of governmental institutions; areas built and maintained on human wisdom, reason and human labour. Thus Foucault explains the reason why the number of women with hysteria confined in hospitals such as Charcot's has grown, and says, 'it is no longer because the madman comes from the world of the irrational and bears its stigmata; rather, it is because he crosses the frontiers of bourgeois order of his own accord, and alienates himself outside the sacred limits of its ethics'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (London: Routledge, 2001[1961]), p. 54.

In this social context, as Foucault says later in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), the role of physicians represents the authority of society. It used to be the clergy who dealt with the sufferings and sins of people, ‘the consolation of souls and the alleviation of pain’, but it has since become a physician who deals with the fundamental crises in our lives, whose power has been approved by government.<sup>31</sup> Instead of priests, it is the government and medical authorities that preach to the citizen to keep his soul (mental state) pure and clean, and keep his life from debauchery, such as drinking or eating too much, or indulging promiscuously in sexual activities, because a disordered life-style will be punished by illness. In this way, Foucault analyses the process of increasing the controlling power of medical doctors in modern society, and stresses that the cures which they bring about are related to ethical rather than medical or scientific concerns.

This line of sociological enquiry was further developed from the feminist perspective towards the end of the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the aspect of the gender of the hysterical patients, which is acknowledged by neither of the preceding readings. For instance, Jane M. Ussher, one of the pioneers in the area, proposes the importance of relating misogyny to the issue of hysteria. Highlighting that the confusion over what is termed hysteria remains unresolved in the first place, she surveys how much femininity and madness have been

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<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2000 [1963]), p. 32.

inseparably associated with each other from the Victorian era to the present (i.e. the 1990s). She argues that the issue of hysteria is a cultural and social strategy to enhance the conventional misogynist ideology that women should be dominated by men, and ‘women who dared to question, who attempted to rebel, and who thus speak for us all’ are deemed to be mad, which is akin to the accusation of witchcraft levelled at deviant women in the Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> In this way, she sees the history of hysteria as patriarchal policing and the oppression of women as sick and inferior.

Some literary critics of Decadence interact with the Foucaudian and feminist view in the sociological study of hysteria, which tends to stress the dominant power of patriarchal medical authorities in correcting troubled femininity, but approach more observantly the ambiguous power balance in the medical discourses regarding hysteria. Their studies do not entirely agree that hysteria in art and literature at the turn of the century can be explained as clearly as Foucault distinguishes the modern from the past. Foucault thinks that the shift in the meaning of madness is not limited to medicine but extends to art and literature, and takes examples from literary texts in the early seventeenth century, including the madness of Ophelia and that of King Lear in Shakespeare’s plays, as well as the madness of Cervantes’ Don Quixote. He argues that the idea of madness portrayed in these artists’ creations is

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<sup>32</sup> Ussher, *Women’s Madness*, p. 39. Also see Nicola Wright and Sara Owen, ‘Feminist conceptualization of women’s madness: a review of the literature’, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 36 (2001), 143–150.

archaic: something beyond the intervention of human help, not even that of a physician, and a madness which can end only with death as a final answer. Foucault claims that their works marked the final culmination of the old concept of madness, as the literary works which follow no longer have this absolute and tragic resolution in death, but resort, at most, to a fake death in the form of hospitalisation: ‘Tamed, madness preserves all the appearances of its reign. It now takes part in the measures of reason and in the labor of truth’.<sup>33</sup>

Foucault’s clear distinction may not perfectly fit Decadent literature nor even the narratives by contemporary physicians such as Charcot and Freud. Hysterical women in the texts written during the period of Decadence are not deprived of the mystery and supernatural elements which used to inspire awe, but still function as a portal to superior power for humanity, the superior power, for example of divinity, Death and sexual instinct. Charcot’s interest in the primitive aspect of madness is evident in the horrendous photos of hysterics which he collected in his series of photographic publications (details mentioned above), as well as in his two books, *Les Démoniaques dans l’art* (1887) and *La foi qui guérit* (1897), which deal with this subject alone. The former aims to ‘diagnose’ as the manifestations of hysteria the representations of insanity which were considered to be possession by the Devil. The latter is an attempt to clarify the source of the power and mechanism of faith-healing, with a view to using it for his own patients afflicted with hysteria. Yet the reader will find that

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<sup>33</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, p. 32.

his 'reasonable' discourses are disturbed by the number of alarming ancient drawings and sculptures of mad people which Charcot chooses. Making use of a disturbing vocabulary (pain, suffering, cries, exhaustion, ecstasy, violence and struggle), Charcot dramatically narrates each of the details of the works and implicitly invites the reader to see and sense their recorded pain and suffering, evoking what Foucault would call the pre-modern sense of awe towards the mysterious power of the unknown disorder. Examining the representations of the female saints in trance, he points out that the artists ignored 'toute apparence de violence, tout phénomène convulsif' of hysterical stupor and delirium observed in his hospital (*l'extase hystérique* or *les attitudes passionnelles* in Charcot's terminology), whereby he implicitly exaggerates the suffering of hysteria.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, despite the apparent purpose of his book, he concludes *La foi qui guérit* with Shakespeare's words from *Hamlet*, 'There are more things in heaven and earth', and poetically compares the mental illness with uncharted lands, and himself with a hero who fails.<sup>35</sup>

In the texts of Decadence, the hysterics appear both active and passive. The hysterics are indeed described as the victims of the disease and the subjects of cure and correction, but they are also muses, the overpowering seducers as possessors of mystery and its danger. The superiority of men who try to master these hysterics is challenged in their texts. As Elaine

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<sup>34</sup> J.-M Charcot and Paul Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'art: suivi de 'La Foi qui guérit' de J.M. Charcot* (repr. Paris: Editions Macula, 1984), p. 108. The former was originally published by Adrien Delahaye et Emile Lecrosnier (Paris) in 1887, and the latter in 1892.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 122.



Showalter puts it, 'The doctor needed hysterical women as muses; hysterical women needed doctors to speak for them'.<sup>36</sup>

Jann Matlock has comprehensively researched on the position of prostitutes in the medical, journalistic and literary discourses of hysteria in the *fin-de-siècle*, arguing that prostitutes and hysterical women fulfilled an active and a passive function respectively: the former symbolised those who exulted in desire and the latter, those tormented by desire. The study is mainly based on the mainstream feminist perspective that those discourses made by men were contrived social illusions of desire, which intended to control and censor morality at the expense of female desire. Yet Matlock does not fail to see the ambiguous power relations suggested in their texts between the male intellectuals and artists as authors and the women as subjects, due to the indication in their texts of the sense of consent on the part of the women and of a sense of danger and terror from that of the men. She contends that the male authors were not always the dominant seducers of women, but often reveal themselves as seduced by their hysterical women. She summarises the issue of hysteria as the process of evoking 'a fantasy of seduction'.<sup>37</sup>

Emily Apter's study of Decadent literature makes a similar suggestion that in Decadent fictions hysterical women overpower the male characters. She calls the literature of

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<sup>36</sup> Showalter, *Histories*, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction*, p. 7.

the *fin-de-siècle* fetishist literature, especially the type of Scopophilia, due to the male artists' voyeuristic interest in following the details of hysteria in the medical discourses and probing into the complexities of the female psyche and body in their own fictions. Yet their intention of watching always comes with the image of male characters who are tormented and defeated by the objectified hysterical women, and this consciousness of failure on men's part is one of Apter's focuses. A chapter which deals with Mirbeau's *La Jardin des supplices*, for example, associates the literary production with the medical knowledge that ocular symptoms of hysteria (colour blindness or blurring) are a self-inflicted punishment and sign of repression in deviant (female) sexuality. Apter argues that Mirbeau gratifies his own desire to look into the mystery of femininity and female desires by means of the 'sadistic' voyeurism of the heroine Clara, and simultaneously wishes to expiate a sense of his own guilt through depicting Clara's suffering. In another chapter on the Goncourts' *Madame Gervaisais*, Apter explores further the aspect of the ambiguous relationship between the male authors and their hysterical heroines. Apter argues that the Goncourts use the various signs of hysteria (*les attitudes passionnelles*, in Charcot's terms), such as the delirious mimicry of crucifixion, prayer and devotion performed with erotic implications, and thus make the heroine the instrument to express their own repressed desires of a masochistic self-abjection to a mentality of martyrdom.<sup>38</sup> The reference to masochism is useful, but sadly, Apter only sporadically refers

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<sup>38</sup> See Emily Apter, *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century*

to some of Deleuze's analysis of masochism, without appreciating the important differentiation of the masochistic imagination from the sadistic one, upon which his argument is premised. Instead, her analysis of voyeurism remains rather within the conventional idea that aggressiveness projected inward is masochistic and outward is sadistic, thereby suggesting that the Decadent literature is a representation of the sadistically dominant male gaze over the suffering female body.

It is useful to mention here Kaja Silverman's study of masochism in the films directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, in which she employs Deleuze's analysis of Sacher-Masoch and clearly addresses the distinction between sadism and masochism from the perspective of voyeuristic pleasure. She says that voyeurism has been generally associated with sadism, but sometimes it is the expression of a masochistic voyeur, who is different from the sadist since he 'exteriorises' his identity.<sup>39</sup> This means that the masochist's gaze is characterised as that of a helpless tormented spectator who identifies himself with the suffering object by annihilating his own identity. Silverman's argument implies that the masochist's gaze does not claim to master or dominate the situation, as that of the sadist does, but pretends to be as powerless as the suffering object. Experiencing the feelings of the suffering or humiliated object and disavowing his own active stance, he enjoys being caught by a dreadful terror and overtaken

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*France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, pp. 204–209 and pp. 264–265.

by panic, like the victim.

According to the Freudian psychologist Reik, Baudelaire's poem, 'l'Héautontimorouménos' is a manifestation of this kind of masochistic voyeurism, the pleasure and pain of experiencing of being both an executioner and a victim, 'la victime et le bourreau!'.<sup>40</sup> As seen above in Chapter 2, Reik stresses the role of suspense in masochism, and says that the poetry evokes the masochistic sensation deriving from the suspense of imaginary identification with the unfortunate victim whom the masochist is watching, which is also identification with the executioner, because the masochist's own real situation is outside the calamity.

This ambivalence of the active and the passive is found in Freud's texts, if they are read as a work of the contemporary Decadent literature. The position in which Freud stands as author and the physician is not clearly *de haut en bas*, because his analytical gaze looks more poetic and speculative than indifferent and mechanical, often revealing itself to be troubled, seduced and defeated by his (female) patients. In fact, Freud's studies of hysteria were received coldly by his colleagues, because of the artistic narrative and the nature of psychoanalysis, which is based solely on the story-telling provided by patients and recorded by physicians. In 1896, Freud's paper, 'The Etiology of Hysteria', was dismissed by

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<sup>40</sup> Cit. in Reik, 'Masochism in Modern Man', p. 191.

Krafft-Ebing, who commented: ‘It sounds like a scientific fairy tale’.<sup>41</sup>

Steven Marcus states that ‘Freud is a great writer and [...] one of his major case histories is a great work of literature. [...] yet this triumphant greatness is in part connected with the circumstance that it is about a kind of failure, and [...] part of the failure remains in fact unacknowledged and unconscious’ He compares Freud’s case history of his patient named Dora with the image of Nora in Ibsen’s popular play, *A Doll’s House* (1879).<sup>42</sup> Marcus argues that Nora’s proud and independent disposition, her disappointment with her husband, which leads to her leaving him, echo Dora’s rebellious attitude to the authority of Freud, which resulted in her abrupt refusal of his treatment, not to mention the obvious similarity between her name and that of Ibsen’s heroine. In his narrative dramatising the conflict between Dora and Freud, Marcus argues, Freud appears as both an author and a character in the story, and indirectly exhibits the sense of failure and torment from Dora’s mystery, rejection, and cure without the help of his science, psychoanalysis.

As Bernheimer states, Freud was ‘a man whose “scientific” speculations endorse decadent fantasies’ and there are certain affinities between Freud and the Decadents, who

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<sup>41</sup> The reference by Ernest Jones, quoted in Daniel Blain, ‘Foreword’, in Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (translated from the 12th German edition) (New York: Bell Publishing Company, 1965), pp. ix–x.

<sup>42</sup> Steven Marcus, ‘Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History’, in *In Dora’s case: Freud – Hysteria – Feminism*, ed. by Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, 2nd edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 57. See Sigmund Freud, ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (‘Dora’) (1905 [1901])’, in Freud, *Case Histories I: ‘Dora’ and ‘Little Hans’*, trans. by Alix and James Strachey (Penguin Books, 1990). Dora is the pseudonym of Ida Bauer.

shared the same cultural climate.<sup>43</sup> The similarities can be seen in Freud's artistic mode of thought, such as the 'fiction' of the death drive, which can be seen as one example of the Decadent obsession with Death and sex.<sup>44</sup> And the Oedipus complex can be said to be a threesome vision of masochism: an incestuous mother (Wanda), her weak son (Séverin), and the stern father ('the Greek'), who intervenes only as a reminder of reality and a threat of punishment in collusion with the mother. Freud's affinity is also found in his frequent use of the Decadents' favourite motifs, such as the Sphinx. According to Janine Burke, the image of the Sphinx with which Freud was obsessed throughout his life was not the orthodox model with a lion's body and a human male head, but the Decadent version of a lion's lower body, a human female head and her breasts. Burke says, 'By choosing this myth on which to base a central theory of psychoanalysis, Freud, who identified with Oedipus, hints at the strategies he believed were necessary to control female energy'.<sup>45</sup> Further, Freud was obsessed with Leonardo da Vinci, the artist *par excellence*, whose significance was re-discovered by Péladan and other artists at the time. The popularity of da Vinci owed much to Péladan's successive translations of da Vinci's manuscripts, which were received with great acclaim. One of them (*La dernière leçon de Léonard de Vinci à son Académie de Milan* , 1499) achieved a fifth

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<sup>43</sup> Bernheimer, *Decadent Subject*, p. 171.

<sup>44</sup> See Linda Ruth Williams, *Critical Desire: Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p. 162.

<sup>45</sup> Janine Burke, *The Gods of Freud: Sigmund Freud's Art Collection* (Sydney: Knoph, 2006), p. 27. Also see, 'Freud's collection of antiquities' produced online by the Freud Museum London (<http://www.freud.org.uk/fimcolle.htm>).

edition in 1910, and another (*Léonard de Vinci. Textes choisis. Pensées, théories, préceptes, fables et facéties*) was awarded ‘un prix Charles Blanc’ by the Académie Française.<sup>46</sup> In Péladan’s texts, da Vinci is the great master, because of the cult of androgyny exemplified in his ‘John the Baptist’, and his intellectual zeal for inventions and alchemistic experiment. In 1910, Freud highlighted the same points in his article about da Vinci, but diagnoses him as a latent homosexual, who was suffering from a strong attachment to his mother; Freud concludes that the repressed desire was sublimated in his works, which deal with androgynous images of man.<sup>47</sup> Freud’s story about this genius may appear more ‘decadent’ and sensation-seeking in its sexual implications than Péladan’s.

This chapter attempted to show that the vogue of hysteria which appeared in late nineteenth century Western Europe can be characterized as a cultural production, a masochistic theatre of pain and suffering. I have shown that it used the images of suffering dramatised as spectacle by willing participants, hysterics and physicians. Further, I have argued that the purpose of curing the illness was confined within the volatile framework of the power relations between these two parties, served to tell a story of the failure and

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<sup>46</sup> See Joséphine Péladan, ‘Introduction’, in *Les Manuscrits de Léonard de Vinci: Extraits et description des 14 manuscrits de l’Institut de France* (Paris : Sansot, 1910). Other translations by Péladan include, *La dernière leçon de Léonard de Vinci à son Académie de Milan, 1499, précédée d’une étude sur le maître* (Paris : Sansot, 1904); *da Vinci, Textes choisis: Pensées, théories, préceptes, fables et facéties, traduits dans leur ensemble pour la première fois d’après les manuscrits originaux et mis en ordre méthodique avec une introduction par Péladan* (Paris : Mercure de France, 1907); *La Philosophie de Léonard de Vinci d’après ses manuscrits* (Paris : Alcan, 1910); *da Vinci, Traité de la peinture, traduit intégralement pour la première fois en français sur le Codex vaticanus (Urbinas) 1270* (Paris : Delagrave, 1910), and *de Vinci, Traité du paysage, traduit pour la première fois en français in extenso sur le Codex vaticanus avec un commentaire* (Paris : Delagrave, 1914).

<sup>47</sup> See Freud, ‘Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood’, in *Art and Literature*, trans. by James Strachey (Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 167–171.

incompetence of men, and obscured the implication that it established male mastery triumphantly over the feminine.

The final chapter will study the hysterical heroines in the Decadent texts by Lorrain and Péladan. In their fictions, the victimised image of an hysterical woman becomes less predominant than her seductive, dangerous and domineering image. I want to propose that Lorrain and Péladan created their own heroines in conflict and cooperation with the authoritative medical voices, picking up the masochistic aspects of hysteria and transforming them into their fictional domain of sex and passion.



## **CHAPTER 8: HYSTERICAL MONSTERS IN TABLEAU**

Deleuze claims that the dominatrix is never a female version of the sadist, but someone else: she cannot be sadistic ‘précisément parce qu’elle est *dans* le masochisme, parce qu’elle est partie intégrante de la situation masochiste, élément réalise du phantasme masochiste’.<sup>1</sup> He proposes that the element embodied by the dominatrix is the ambiguously suspended image of woman, named the oral mother, which oscillates perpetually between the two opposing images of the mother, as sadistic and nymphomaniac, mentioned in Chapter 2. Phillips, in her analysis of masochism, contends that the best torturer is ‘another masochist’, because, whereas the sadist seeks for victims, the masochist seeks for a partner who willingly shares the memory of consenting to play a role under strict pre-agreed rules.<sup>2</sup> This chapter explores the implications of this ambiguous figure of the female torturer, equally present in Decadent fictions by Lorrain and Péladan and highlights the Decadent heroines’ ambiguous identity, both active and passive, in relation to their hysteria. I argue that the heroines with hysterical symptoms in Lorrain’s and Péladan’s fictions impersonate an active symbol of power and medium of torture for inflicting suffering and humiliation on male characters, while simultaneously they represent a symbol of hope, who may help a man to be reborn as the

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips, *A Defence of Masochism*, p. 12.

androgynous new man.

In their fictions, Lorrain and Péladan made their heroines hysterical, reiterating and exaggerating the conventional links between hysteria and uncontrolled female sexuality which proliferated in the medical theories of the period. However, unlike the victimised image of the hysterical patients in medicine, these heroines instead look monstrous, imperious and challenging to the heroes, revealing a sense of seduction and conflict between hysterical patients and male physicians hidden in the late nineteenth century vogue of hysteria. As mentioned in the previous chapter, recent critics have started to discover the aspect of power game and conspiracy innate in the issue of hysteria and to discredit its genuineness of hysteria, together with that of psychiatry as a whole. But I argue in this chapter that the Decadent artists, Lorrain and Péladan, exaggerated the untamed aspect of hysteria in the dangerous images of their female characters and stressed the power of mystery, madness, and sexual instinct; by this they attempted to challenge the growing superiority of medicine step by step with the rapid development of industrialisation and bourgeois society.

First, I examine the artists' personal sense of combativeness against medicine: Lorrain and Péladan never hesitate to express it in their fictions. Both Lorrain and Péladan contrast the power of art, and, in Péladan's case, of occultism also, against that of medicine. They insist that their art is superior to medicine and science, because the artist has a true

knowledge of mystery and hysteria. And they create hysterical heroines to show that they know how to manipulate the enigma. I go on to examine how these Decadents developed hysterics into the all-powerful, torturing and yet seductive partners of the heroes. Finally, I highlight the role of the hysterical heroines in the creation of suspense in their texts. In Lorrain's texts, the female characters are compared with works of art, and their threat is ideally frozen in images which eternally convey a sense of horror in beauty. In Péladan's texts, the female characters are equally made into works of art for the Magus characters to appreciate, but the women persistently counter the attempts of the male characters to control them, which create tensions in the text and end in failure. Such failures explain why Lorrain and Péladan dreamed of taking on femininity by and for themselves, in order to give birth (or re-birth) to new iconic, self-sufficient men.

***– Motivation: a Sense of Rivalry –***

The previous chapter mentioned that recent critics have tended to view medical discourses in the period of Decadence not as objectively authoritative but as a branch of literature. Barbara Spackman in *Decadent Genealogies* is one of such critics; she highlights the interaction of literary texts with the contemporary medical discourses by examining the texts of D'Annunzio, Baudelaire and Nietzsche. What is particularly interesting to my research is that

she characterises the Decadent text as a story of ‘convalescence’, whose rhetoric is based on the ambiguity between health and sickness, masculinity and femininity. Spackman argues that the Decadent male writers in their own works of art made enthusiastic use of the medical discourses on hysteria to prove their genius, although such medical doctors as Nordau and Lombroso were bitterly condemning artistic genius as irrational and neurotic. So Decadent art can be understood as an attempt to recover the status of the artist, once demeaned by medicine. Spackman further states that the use of medical knowledge derives from personal experience; because Baudelaire’s text of convalescence, for example, reflects his own state after sickness, which turned the rest of his life into a protracted convalescence.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Mary Donaldson-Evans establishes in the fictions of late nineteenth century France a contradictory ‘hidden agenda’ which aims to undermine the medical authorities.<sup>4</sup> She widely examines the obsession of a wide range of artists (Flaubert, the Goncourts, Zola, Maupassant, Huysmans, and Alphonse and Léon Daudet) with medical discourses of the age of Decadence, and discusses their ambivalent attitudes towards medicine. According to Donaldson-Evans, the artists undoubtedly relied on medicine, because they wanted to make their own fictions as authoritative and plausible as medical texts by demonstrating medical knowledge and jargon. Yet she observes at the same time an antagonistic resistance of the

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<sup>3</sup> Spackman, *Decadent Genealogies*, p. 81. About the link between insanity and artistic genius, see also Carter, *The Idea of Decadence*, pp. 66–69.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Donaldson-Evans, *Medical Examinations: Dissecting the Doctor in French Narrative Prose, 1857–1894* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p. 8.

artists towards doctors and medical authority; at the beginning of the nineteenth century, this was an implicit and subtle expression of frustration in the literature, but towards the second half of the nineteenth century, the era of Decadence, it became a more explicit provocation. One such explicit example in her account is Dr. Torty, from Barbey d'Aurevilly's 'Le bonheur dans le crime' collected in *Les Diaboliques*. Donaldson-Evans argues that the apparent role of Torty, who pathologises the murderous couple in the story, is in fact pathologised by the author Barbey as a 'sadistic' voyeur, given his pleasure in spying and talking about the couple's secret affair to his listener. Evidently Donaldson-Evans' reference to voyeurism is based on the conventional sadism/masochism dyad, but, I would insist, Torty's voyeurism looks more masochistic than sadistic because of the element of suspense in Torty's story-telling, as well as the sense of presentiment and excitement expressed in his suggestive tones and excessive use of exclamation marks. Yet it is useful that Donaldson-Evans sees Barbey as seeking to resolve a grudge against the physicians who diagnosed artistic genius and inspiration as a form of mental illness—he reveals the lie behind the prudent mask of the physician, who can equally be deviant.

It is evident that Lorrain's and Péladan's texts convey a sense of antagonism and combativeness against medicine, Charcot in particular, and an attempt to make men of science look inferior or deviant. In Lorrain's short story 'Lanterne magique' collected in *Histoires de*

*masques*, there is a character who resembles Dr Torty: an electrician who represents science and is portrayed as voyeuristic. The narrator criticises the electrician because ‘La science moderne a tué le Fantastique’, and the story attacks Charcot’s treatments of hysterics in particular. Charcot banishes mystery, i.e. hysteria, by way of analysis, identification, categorisation and electricity (*Histoires de masques*, p. 38). To this criticism, the electrician replies that neither science nor medicine has ever succeeded in unravelling mystery, pointing out that each member of the audience around them in the theatre may be suffering from a ‘perversion’, whether nymphomania, bestiality, lesbianism, incest, addiction, androgyny or hysteria. And he shows that the power of science and medicine is overestimated, because it is powerless before these ‘illnesses’. Inherent in the electrician’s reply is the self-inflicted erosion of the authority of science, whose discourses are turning into mere sensation-seeking gossip. A similar scene is developed in more detail and at greater length in *Monsieur de Phocas*, when Ethal upsets Fréneuse by disclosing the dishonourable deeds and desires hidden behind the respectable social masks of the aristocrats who gather in the theatre (see above, Chapter 5).

Péladan’s defiance of the authority of medicine is expressed in a different way: he places his own science, occultism, higher than medicine and claims that the Magus is superior to the physician. The principal male characters in his epic cycle, such as Mérodack, Nébo, and

Nergal, all practise hypnotism and other occult skills to ‘cure’ sick people, that is to say, morally and sexually degenerate people, hysterical women in particular. Péladan complains that Charcot disregarded the hypnotic practices among occultists and even requested that hypnotism should be restricted by law to physicians alone (*La victoire du mari*, p. xviii). Moreover, he criticises Charcot for the theatricality of his treatment: ‘personne ne se compare mieux à l’homme de théâtre que M. Charcot, ce faux savant qui a donné la comédie à l’hôpital avec pour troupe, ses malades’ (p. xvii). The same criticism is made elsewhere in *Le Panthée*. Péladan describes an episode in which the protagonist, the artist-Magus, Bihn, is confined in a mental hospital, and meets a Charcot-like doctor, ‘un nouveau directeur plus *fin de siècle*’, who exhibits him as ‘le célèbre fou’, making him play the role of a hierophant who worships gold and money in a quasi-religious Wagnerian grand tableau, directed by the doctor (*Le Panthée*, p. 271). In this episode, Péladan’s antagonism towards Charcot is evident, but it ironically reveals that the dominant authority of medicine is indeed strong enough to humiliate the integrity of artists by considering them as irrational as hysterics.

Péladan disagrees with Charcot, also, because ‘M. Charcot magnétise et ne croit pas à l’existence du fluide’ (*La victoire du mari*, p. xviii). ‘Le fluide nerveux’ was a popular term among the *fin-de-siècle* occultists, signifying a sort of psychic power related to emotions and desires. Péladan insisted that hypnotism was a manipulative exchange of this ‘fluide’ between

the hypnotiser and the hypnotised. Under this assumption, Péladan romanticises hypnotism in his fictions as part of the nonsexual exchanges between a couple: a man controls the emotions and desires of his woman in love. There are several scenes in his epic cycle when heroes hypnotise troubled heroines who are subjugated by sexual longing for a man, as a symptom of their hysteria. When Paule is possessed by a ‘singulier effet de la tension nerveuse’, which implies a craving for Nébo, he hypnotises her. The act simultaneously controls and shares their invisible power and their desires, in order to gratify her desires in an incorporeal way (*A cœur perdu* p. 148).

Péladan’s belief in occult knowledge as something privileged is clear in the footnotes pretentiously added to his fictions. In another scene in *A cœur perdu*, when Nébo again hypnotises Paule, Péladan writes in a footnote; ‘Le chapitre qui contenait le traitement psychopathique détaillé a été supprimé, comme exotériquement dangereux. J. P’ (p. 429). In the scene of Nergal’s conducting the rite of resuscitation of the dead heroine in *Istar*, Péladan, the author, appears again in a footnote to say, ‘Le rituel de l’incubation magique est ici supprimé pour la même raison qui a fait couper le traitement psychopathique dans *A cœur perdu*’ (*Istar*, p. 468).

Péladan’s sense of superiority to medical doctors is also expressed when he deals with lesbianism in *La Gynandre*. He opens the book by assessing a medical text, *Psychopathia*



*sexualis* by Henrico Kaan, as ‘nul’ and insists that his present novel will give a more credible and morally valid account on female sexuality.<sup>5</sup> In the twelfth chapter, entitled ‘Hermétique’, of *Le Vice supreme* (1884), he deals with the concept of obsession. It is a pseudo-scientific discourse by an omniscient narrator, making use of the occultist terms popular at the time, such as ‘larve’, ‘les démons succube’, and ‘les démons incubes’, as well as the popular medical assumption, later exemplified in Charcot’s *Les Démoniaques dans l’art*, that everything in the medieval belief of demonic possession can be explained by science. Péladan himself ‘scientifically’ explains the obsession with sexual dreams of someone dead or imaginary. He says the obsession derives from the malfunction of ‘le fluide nerveux’, which is an organic substance produced by a ‘cogitation du cerveau’.<sup>6</sup> The process is explained as followed: ‘le fluide nerveux photographie dans la lumière astral le reflet de l’être évoqué et ce fantôme fluide s’attache à celui qui l’a créé’ (ibid.). He attributes this ‘organic’ process of the psychic power further to vice, perversion and a sense of guilt, which can lead someone such as Macbeth to suicidal frenzy, and concludes that obsession is a problem of something ‘matériel, d’ordre scientifique, [et] d’ordre justicier’, a confusion of different bodies of knowledge (p. 93). In this way, unlike Lorrain, who discredits medical authority by stressing the superiority of mystery, Péladan discredits it by explaining the mysteries of popular

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<sup>5</sup> See Péladan, *La Gynandre*, p. xi. Also see Henrico Kaan, *Psychopathia sexualis* (Lipsiae: Apud Leopoldum Voss, 1844).

<sup>6</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée I: Le Vice suprême* (Paris: Librairie des auteurs modernes, 1884), p. 96.

medical knowledge in an occultist context. It should be remembered that Péladan had no ironic intention; he seriously believed in occultism as a pure science.

In both Lorrain's and Péladan's texts, the authors' own personal grudges, anxieties and frustrations over the matter of hysteria are explicit, possibly because Lorrain felt himself the victim of neurosis and Péladan's practice of hypnotism was not legitimised in public' moreover, in their own lives both of them felt victimised by hysterical women.

Lorrain died early (in 1906 at the age of 51) from the reckless self-treatment for an unidentified illness related to his long ether abuse. Ether and morphine were widely used for treating hysterical symptoms and drug addiction caused the death of most hysterics.<sup>7</sup> Lorrain wrote in a letter, 'j'ai l'âme douce et pardonneuse des gens qui ont failli mourir: des accidents nerveux, des souffrances atroces, des injections à la morphine'.<sup>8</sup> He also caricatures himself elsewhere in another letter, 'la névrose de Jean Lorrain: ce serait trop drôle!'<sup>9</sup>

For Péladan, there were two important male role models, who taught him the sense of superiority of the occultist: his father, a respected Catholic-occultist in Lyon and his elder brother Adrien Péladan, who was a prodigy, occultist and physician.<sup>10</sup> Péladan glorified Adrien and wrote that Mérodack, the principal character in his saga and the greatest god of the

<sup>7</sup> See Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'Hystérie*, pp. 212–213; Philippe Jullian, *Jean Lorrain ou le Satiricon 1900* (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 187; and Jérôme Solal, 'Les Corps qui menacent', in Jean Lorrain, *Contes d'un buveur d'éther* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> A letter in 1886 to his friend Charles Buet, cit. in Jullian, *Jean Lorrain ou le Satiricon*, p. 191.

<sup>9</sup> A letter in September 1890 to his friend Oscar Méténier, cit. in *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Péladan's letter to Henriette witnesses his own jealousy of Adrien; it says that his brother was waiting for their father's death to inherit his fortune. See Christophe Beaufils, 'Henriette Maillat "Amoureuse et dupe"', in *Les Péladan*, p. 147.

Babylonians, with whom Péladan identified himself, was originally a name dedicated to his brother: ‘Mérodach, n’est qu’un portrait du docteur Peladan’.<sup>11</sup> Adrien nonetheless failed to attain a brilliant academic career in medicine and in the end resigned, becoming ‘officier de santé’ in Lyon, a second-rater in the medical field.<sup>12</sup> Péladan used his own works to praise his brother’s genius and take revenge on the academic medical professionals who had failed his brother’s doctoral thesis. He made up the story that an examiner had said to his brother, ‘C’était trop fort pour un élève, j’ai cru que vous aviez copié!’.<sup>13</sup> Adrien’s failed doctoral thesis was a study of a homoepathic treatment for vulvovaginitis, based on the conventional link between sickness and female sexuality. In the thesis, Adrien insists that the cause of the illness is improper indulgence in sexual activities, from erotic conversations and dancing at a ball to masturbation, and concludes that the last stage of the disease will lead women to nervous exhaustion or insanity.<sup>14</sup>

Péladan’s obsession with the link between women, sex and madness was certainly influenced by his brother, whose texts repeatedly insist on the same misogynist idea in the guise of a medical diagnosis. Adrien writes about hysteria elsewhere, ‘On sait que l’hystérie doit être considérée comme un ensemble de symptômes résultant d’un état d’excitation et de

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<sup>11</sup> Péladan, ‘Introduction’, in Adrien fils Peladan, *Anatomie homologique*, p. xx.

<sup>12</sup> *Les Péladan*, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> Péladan, ‘Introduction’, in Adrien, *Anatomie homologique*, p. xxxv.

<sup>14</sup> See *Les Péladan*, pp. 55–57.

souffrance de la matrice, et de la réaction de cet organe sur le système nerveux'.<sup>15</sup> Péladan's misogynist owes much to Adrien, as he quotes from Adrien's *Monographie de la spermatorrhée*: 'Concluons que les femmes sont des courbes dont les sages sont les asymptotes: ils en approchent toujours sans les toucher jamais'.<sup>16</sup> Here Péladan praises his brother for this insight that the man of intellect must avoid women, because women force the man to waste his sperm and consequently spoil his intellectual genius. Adrien's 'medical' books are about homoeopathy and Oriental holistic medicine, but in fact he is only recycling popular pseudo-scientific assumptions about hysteria, as Christophe Beaufils puts it, to 'vulgariser ses découvertes'.<sup>17</sup>

The issue of hysteria was made personal in Lorrain's and Péladan's fictions, furthermore, because they felt surrounded by hysterics in reality. Lorrain called his female acquaintances, such as Sarah Bernhardt, Liane de Pougy, Colette and Rachilde, 'des névropathes, des nymphomanes et des perverses'.<sup>18</sup> But Rachilde for her part regarded her male Decadent colleagues as neurotic: 'elle entendit des névroés, des névrosés comme elle, mais *mieux équilibrés* qu'elle'.<sup>19</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter 5, for Lorrain, the most influential woman, who was hysterical, overwhelming and yet affectionate, was his mother, and the oppressive image of

<sup>15</sup> Adrien, *Anatomie homologique*, p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> Péladan, 'Introduction', in Adrien, *Anatomie homologique*, p. xxi.

<sup>17</sup> Beaufils, 'La thèse de médecine d'Adrien Péladan fils: une conception de la sexualité', in *Les Péladan*, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> Santos, *L'art du récit court*, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Diana Holmes, *Rachilde: Decadence, Gender and the Woman Writer* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 36.

the mother is reflected in the stories of his describing a suffocating loving mother and her weak son. *Les Noronsoff* (1902) tells of Prince Wladimir Noronsoff, neurasthenic and debauched. With his father dead, the prince's life is dominated by his hysterical mother: 'elle ne quittait jamais ce fils trop délicat et trop chéri; elle accompagnait partout cet enfant choyé'.<sup>20</sup> In *Le crime des riches* (1905), a series of stories about the secret crimes of 'les hystériques' in high society, there is a story, 'La villa des Cypres', describing a 'jaloux et tyrannique amour maternel' and the 'despotique égoïsme d'une mère'.<sup>21</sup> What these words insinuate is that the mother was possibly responsible for her son's mysterious death.

In Péladan's personal life, too, there was a grand figure of the hysteric, Henriette Maillat, who was one time Péladan's mistress and patron. Their relationship can be said to be a sort of mother-son patronage, because Henriette was older, wealthier and socially superior. It was Henriette who made it possible for him to enter the Parisian literary circle. Yet among the Decadent artists she had a notorious 'réputation d'hystérique nymphomane'.<sup>22</sup> Her reputation included the alleged murder of her husband (her husband mysteriously committed suicide), her traitorous liaisons with other Decadent artists (Leon Bloy, Barbey d'Aurevilly, and Huysmans) while she was still with Péladan, and her ceaseless complaints in her correspondence with other men about her feeble health. According to René-Louis Doyon,

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<sup>20</sup> Jean Lorrain, *Les Noronsoff* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2002 [1902]), p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Lorrain, *Le crime des riches*, p. 32, p. 77 and p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> Beaufils, 'Henriette Maillat "Amoureuse et dupe"', p. 144.

Lorrain called her ‘la *Chahuteuse mystique*; elle était marquée pour servir d’excitant aux uns, de raillerie aux autres’.<sup>23</sup> Huysmans characterised her as the Satanist Madam Chantelouve in *Là-bas* (1891), which was actually based on his secret affair with her. The relationship between Henriette and Huysmans observable from their letters was dramatic in a masochistic way; Huysmans was overwhelmed and fascinated by the woman who relentlessly exhibited hysterical pain and suffering, and sexual dreams of the Devil and death. Furthermore, the initial anonymity of their correspondence (in 1884) must have contributed to increase the effect of suspense and anticipation in their relationship.<sup>24</sup> To Huysmans, she even repeatedly disclosed her sexual dissatisfaction with Péladan, because ‘il est *trop supérieur* [...] je reste *inassouvie*’.<sup>25</sup> She publicly ridiculed Péladan’s idealism as a mere disguise of incompetence and impotence.

Péladan eventually left her, in order to recover his autonomy and dignity, exactly as some of his heroes left women in his own novels. Their rupture seems to maintain the rules of masochism: the dominatrix seeks help from ‘the Greek’ to ‘cure’ the masochist’s effeminacy. Henriette wrote about him in humiliating terms to the two father figures in his life, his father and Barbey d’Aurevilly: the ‘*grand sacrilège* qui s’appelle Péladan [...] ce *triple* fou (par l’ambition *surtout!*) [...] ce monstre d’ambition (qui ne peut aimer que *lui-même*)’.<sup>26</sup> She was

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<sup>23</sup> René-Louis Doyon, *La Douloureuse Aventure de Péladan* (Paris: La connaissance, 1946), p. 47.

<sup>24</sup> See her letters to Bloy, Barbey, and Huysmans, in *Les Péladan*, pp. 150–163.

<sup>25</sup> Henriette’s letter to Huysmans in 1884 (?), in *ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>26</sup> Henriette’s letter to Barbey d’Aurevilly in 1886 or 1887, in *ibid.*, p. 164.

an embodiment of the monstrosity of hysteria and the torturer of men, and is rightly understood as an inspiration of Péladan's imperious hysterical heroines, such as Léonora d'Este, Paule, and Izel.<sup>27</sup>

I have shown some of the personal reasons why Lorrain and Péladan equally express anxiety and hostility towards medical authority, while recycling popular pseudo-scientific knowledge of hysteria in their own fictions. I have also claimed that their obsession with hysteria was partly because their real lives were filled with the threat of hysteria. Hysteria was perceived as the site where the two threats to art, that is, medicine and women, were combined. Next I look at the way these two writers turn hysterical women into monstrous and atrocious characters in their imaginary worlds.

– *Characterisation: Sexually-Charged Monsters* –

As in a surrealist work, such as Dali's *Phénomène de l'extase* (1933), in which the victimised images of hysterical sufferers are transformed into provocative images of muses, Lorrain and Péladan alter the passive hysterics from the world of medicine into alluring monsters who simultaneously frighten and fascinate men in their literary fantasies. Lorrain's heroines appear more cerebral, immobile and solitary than those of Péladan, who appear more active,

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<sup>27</sup> Another characterisation of Henriette is said to be Anna Trainel in Joséphin Péladan's *La Décadence latine, éthopée XV: Pereat!* (Paris: Flammarion, 1902), who exchanges passionate letters with Father Johannès, the characterisation of Huysmans. See Beaufils, 'Henriette Maillat "Amoureuse et dupe"', p. 148.

flesh-and-blood personages, involved with men in dialogue and resembling Sacher-Masoch's vigorous true-to-life heroines. Yet for both they play the part of a symbolic channel to mystery, sexual desire and death, and help to generate a gripping sense of horror and fear.

Lorrain expresses through his hysterical heroines the idea that morbid sexual fantasies are symptoms of hysteria. Chapter 5 of this thesis has already discussed the two princesses who enjoy sexual dreams in 'La Princesse au Sabbat' and 'La Princesse aux Miroirs' included in *Princesses d'ivoire et d'ivresse*. The collection is, as the title suggests, all about hysterical women who are sickly pale and self-infatuated. 'La Princesse aux Lys rouges' in the collection repeats the image of the hysterical woman who is frail and fragile in appearance but homicidal and deviant in thought. Princess Audovère has 'des yeux gris d'aigle' and is 'austère et froide [...] sérieuse et pensive, comme accablée sous le poids d'un fier secret' (*Princesses d'ivoire*, p. 17 and pp. 17–18). Using this hysteric, Lorrain explores the masochistic scenario of a man crucified by the dominatrix in alliance with her father. Audovère, whose mother died at her birth, identifies herself as 'la fille de son père', an old king (p. 20). In a secret alliance with her father, she habitually scatters curses to kill her father's enemies: one gesture with a cruel smile is related to 'la souffrance et le mort d'un home. Le vieux roi le savait bien' (p. 19). The highlight is her vision of a crucified young soldier while she is crushing, biting and decapitating enemies who are transformed into lilies.



The flowers groan and moan, and she feels ‘des résistances et des caresses de chair’ under her hands and teeth (p. 21). The crucified man appears during this ritual and mimics the Passion of Christ, uttering words which parallel the Bible, ‘Pourquoi m’as-tu frappé? Que t’avais-je fait!’ (p. 21).<sup>28</sup>

The most explicitly hysterical heroine in this collection will be the lethargic princess Bertrade in ‘La Princesse sous Verre’. Lethargy is one of the three grand symptoms of hysteria in Charcot’s demonstration, together with catalepsy and somnambulism. The condition is characterised by Didi-Huberman as a ‘*soumission plastique* [qui] permet une véritable *mise en tableau* du phénomène hypnotique lui-même, à l’exacte image du modèle ailleurs fabriqué pour rendre compte de l’attaque hystérique’.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in Lorrain’s story, the implication of the passivity of lethargy is explicitly transformed into a *tableau*. Bertrade’s still body is turned into a fetish in public, placed in a glass coffin embossed with silver lilies, carried on men’s shoulders, paraded in the kingdom under the pretext of a cure by natural forces, and enthusiastically worshipped by the people on the streets and at ‘l’exposition de la Princesse sous Verre au beau milieu de la cathédrale’ (*Princesses d’ivoire*, p. 150). She is an object of both fear and devotion, even after her hands are torn off by a pack of bulldogs owned by her cousin, Prince Otto. Otto embodies the neurotic *blasé* dandy figure, with a reputation for

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, pourquoi m’as tu abandonné?’ (The Gospel of Mark, 15: 33), cit. in Lorrain, *Princesses d’ivoire*, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l’Hystérie*, p. 191.

ferocity and debauchery; his life in ruins, he becomes a bandit in the wild. In sudden rage he attacks her procession; however, ‘Le prince Otto éperdu d’horreur avait fui devant son sacrilège’, while ‘la princesse vivait toujours’ (p. 152). When she is forgotten by the people and her coffin is thrown into the river, it eventually floats near the convent where Otto has been leading a life of penitence, and brings to him salvation and blessing. Lorrain’s narrative stresses that it is Otto who cries, fears and begs for mercy, while the complete immobility of Bertrade’s hystericised body only shows her impenetrable strength, dominance and divinity, asking others to kneel before her.

In Lorrain’s imagination, hysterical women represent a channel to death and deviant desires in particular, things beyond human power and control. The heroine in ‘La pompe-funèbre’ from *Histoires de Masques*, is one of such clear examples: ‘elle pompe la Mort’. She is a pale aristocratic woman, who is, as Lorrain narrates, probably American or Slavic, whose name no one knows, but who never fails to participate in dangerous and sensational spectacles, such as bull-fighting and acrobatic circuses. She is a symbolic figure at such spectacles. The pleasure she gains from the shocking shows is that of masochistic voyeurism, which means the pleasure of watching for and anticipating an accident or death: ‘on dirait qu’elle épie, qu’elle guette une défaillance, un faux départ, un faux mouvement, la minute de vertige qui fera lâcher prise au trapéziste envolé dans les cintres et le jettera,

cadavre, au pied des spectateurs éclaboussés de sang' (*Histoires de Masques*, pp. 114–115). A similar motif is repeated in *Monsieur de Phocas*, when Fréneuse goes to a circus to look for masochistic and homosexual pleasure by watching a male acrobat's performance, as seen above in Chapter 5. There, it seems as if Fréneuse is identifying himself with the female spectators and sharing their sensations towards the male athletic body and its danger. In 'La pompe-funèbre', the narrator invites the reader to share the excitements of voyeurism which this unknown woman must feel, by exaggerating the intensity of the feeling through exclamations ('Oh!' 'Horror!', etc.).

An almost identical situation is repeated in 'Inconnue', from another short story collection entitled *Sonyeuse*. The narrator introduces almost the same woman, who this time, is in the habit of having affairs with strong young boys picked up from the street. The story reveals that what she really wants is to frame them for a crime and see them executed. Her morbid desire is attributed to hysteria, 'Sans doute, cette femme est une malade, une obsédée, une hystérique'.<sup>30</sup> In this story, Lorrain's narrative more clearly states that her pleasure is masochistic voyeurism : 'Le marquis de Sade raffina la volupté de la Souffrance, la Dame aux lèvres rouges exalte la volupté de la Mort' (*Sonyeuse*, pp. 193–194). Although he uses the name of Sade, what Lorrain provokes is a pleasure in suffering, an essence of masochism (besides, the term masochism had not yet been introduced in France). In sadism, the

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<sup>30</sup> 'Inconnue', in Jean Lorrain, *Sonyeuse: Soirs de province, soirs de Paris* (Paris: Charpentier, 1891), p. 162.

executioners may find pleasure but their victims are not given a chance to take or exhibit pleasure from their sufferings.<sup>31</sup> The hysterical heroine in this story takes pleasure by identifying herself with the executed men, with whom she was once physically united.

Péladan explores the same idea as Lorrain in his fictions that hysterical women are sexually deviant. Léonora d'Este, the principal female figure throughout Péladan's epic cycle, represents the hysterical woman, who has a 'nerveuse croupe' and indulges in intense daydreams of domination-submission (*Le Vice suprême*, p. 41). One of her favourite visions is the image of a woman enslaving a man: 'Les œuvres d'art où la femme triomphe de l'homme l'attiraient invinciblement' (ibid.). A masturbatory day-dream of an ideal man is another symptom of hysteria, the incubus: 'Oh! être deux! deux cœurs et le même battement, deux esprits et la même pensée, deux corps et le même frisson! [...] Mais le Bien-Aimé, où est-il?' (p. 91). Her longing for men is essentially cerebral, as she is attracted to Malatesta, a domineering prince who later becomes her husband, in 'l'état d'éréthisme [...] et de sa nerveuse parole troublante comme un attouchement' (p. 67). Consequently she is simply disgusted by intercourse with him after marriage, saying that she found no poetry in the act: 'Si vous m'aviez satisfaite, je n'aurais rien à vous reprocher; mais vous avez gâché ignoblement une chose qui m'avait tant coûté à conserver... Oh! je ne vous fais pas de scène,

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<sup>31</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer say that the pleasure of libertinage is the only weakness, a sign of natural human emotion, in Sade's works, 'all her rational superiority, Juliette still clings to one superstition. While she recognizes the naivety of sacrilege, in the end it still gives her pleasure'. See Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 82.

je ne pleure pas, je ne récrimine pas' (p. 71). It is plausible that she becomes obsessively attracted to the priest Alta because he is a spiritual man who has taken a vow of celibacy.

Although sexual fantasy is a dominant theme in both Lorrain's and Péladan's characterisation of hysterical women, Péladan's heroines are less solitary and more physically involved with other people. Péladan describes how Léonora d'Este's hysterical fantasy of sex, violence and domination takes actual form in, for example her lesbian relationship with a friend, her nuptial night with Malatesta, and her aggressive sexual advances to Alta. One of the most spectacular scenes is when Léonora is gripped by hysterical rage and acts on her brutal instinct by chasing Gaga, her foster father's mistress and savagely whips her:

Gaga, les doigts arqués en griffes, marcha sur elle, mais Leonora lui cingla ses gros seins, à toute volée. Hurlante, la fille chercha quelque chose à jeter à la tête de la princesse; elle n'en eut pas le temps. Sur ses épaules, sur ses bras, sur ses cuisses, les coups de cravache pleuvaient (p. 59).

She is compared in her theatrical outburst of cruelty to "un de ceux qui châtient Héliodore dans les fresques' (p. 60).

Izel in *La victoire du mari* is another despotic and nymphomaniac heroine and the manifestation of her hysterical suffering comes exclusively from the persistent 'obsessions lubriques' (*La victoire du mari*, p. 99). As mentioned above (Chapter 6), the centre of the story is a series of depictions of the sexual relations and conflict between Izel and her husband

Adar, the artist-Magus. Izel's initiative is clear because it is her hysterical vision of sex related to death, termed 'Nirvana d'amour', that dominates their intercourse: 'un resserrement d'étreinte, des sursauts nerveux et le plaisir ressemblait à une agonie douce. Leur désir tâtonnait autour de la mort' (p. 110). This intensified sensation is provocative but not obscene because it is substantiated by the love scenes of Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde*, which the couple regularly watch together. When Wagner's couple on stage passionately kiss with extravagant gestures and words, Péladan's couple correspondingly kiss in the seat of a dark theatre (p. 86). The idea of occultist exchange further obscures the carnal acts in the novel. When Adar becomes exhausted from answering Izel's incessant sexual demands, a rival Magus, Sexthental, intervenes and provides her with the 'Nirvana d'amour', in her hysterical dream of the incubus: 'c'est de cette sorte de volupté nerveuse, formidable, et cependant moins matérielle [...] le fantôme astral, sorti du corps de Sexthental' (p. 155).

The dematerialisation of carnal love by way of occultist ideas is seen in another couple, Nébo and Paule, in the trilogy of Péladan's saga, who are as sexually obsessed as Izel and Adar. The trilogy centres on the intense passion and conflict between Paule and Nébo. Paule is a Slavic princess, called 'nerveuse' by her aunt; she is 'indomptable, insurveillable, indisciplinable' (*Curieuse!*, p. 5 and p. 8). To counter her insatiable sexual demand, the sign of her hysteria, Nébo approaches her by means of occultist hypnotism, insisting that love is

‘auto-magnétisation’ (*l’Initiation sentimentale*, p. 10) and ‘transmission fluïdique’ (*A cœur perdu*, p. 148). Yet Nébo’s attempt to master her hysteria meets her stubborn revolt and rejection, and ends in failure.

I have shown that Lorrain and Péladan, in creating their female characters, both apply the contemporary medical knowledge that hysteria and unusual sexual drives are linked. They attribute their heroines’ disturbing and destructive desires to symptoms of hysteria. By emphasising the monstrous nature of the illness, they transform a victimised passive image of the hysteric into an active, domineering image of woman, and the exhibition of symptoms, such as morbid fantasies, emotional turmoil and insatiable sexual drives, generates the sense of horror and urge to flight in the narrative. Moreover, in Péladan’s stories in particular, the hysterical women placed in intense romantic or erotic contexts reveal the inherent complicity between the male hypnotiser and the female hysteric, and, in the scenarios of the hypnotiser trying to control the hysteric, he is always defeated. Next I look at the quality of the description of female characters in Lorrain and Péladan’s texts, which is characterised by suspense.

### – *Suspense and Dissolution* –

Deleuze says that masochism is ‘renversement du platonisme’, because the masochist’s ideal

exists in the worst kind of woman, the torturer of men.<sup>32</sup> Matthew Potolsky explores the implication of this reversed Platonism in Sacher-Masoch's *La Vénus à la fourrure* and proposes that the masochistic tale is a story of the failure of a Platonic pedagogical project. The Platonic purpose of education is the opposite of mimesis; it drags the student outside the cave to set him/her free from the shadows (imitations) and see the truth (the original). But 'Severin teaches her [Wanda] to be an imitation of his ideal', because he evokes his favourite art and literature (Messalina, Catherine the Great of Russia, Titian's *Venus with a Mirror*, *Manon Lescaut*, and so on), and urges her to become just like them.<sup>33</sup> The tension created in the story lies in Wanda's countering Séverin's teaching by playing the role of a teacher herself and claiming that her own teaching is a cure, 'correction'. Her role as educator is indicated in the episode when she teaches a German draughtsman how to paint her: 'je vous montre un autre portrait de moi, un portrait que j'ai peint moi-même, vous allez me le copier' (*Vénus*, p. 217). The pedagogical relationship between Wanda and Séverin is based on mimesis, but it is broken by the intervention of 'the Greek', who is a different pedagogical force, a true Platonist teacher. As with Plato, 'the Greek' forces Wanda and Séverin, both trapped in the world of illusions (art), to go outside, toward illumination. Potolsky argues that Séverin's project to create an ideal copy out of Wanda fails, but Sacher-Masoch's narrative does not end

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<sup>32</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 76.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew Potolsky, 'Bild or Bildung? Education and Imitation in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*', *LIT*, 9, (1999), 343–367 (p. 350).



in the proper Platonic fashion. Instead, it still follows the principle of reversed Platonism, because ‘Severin ends up with an imitation of the imitations themselves’.<sup>34</sup> This means that the reborn Séverin, who is cold and cruel, looks exactly like the dominatrix whom he persistently asked Wanda to become for his sake. The producer of the statue fails to turn his woman into a work of art, but ends up as a statue himself, ‘Pygmalion’s miracle in reverse’ as Potolsky puts it.<sup>35</sup>

Potolsky’s analysis is useful in this chapter, because it connects masochism with the desire to turn a flesh-and-blood woman into a work of art. This is one of the Decadents’ favourite themes, as is expressed in Des Esseintes’ affair with a female ventriloquist in Huysmans’s *A rebours*, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s android modelled after an actress in *l’Ève future* (1886) and a series of paintings based on the myth of Pygmalion by Burne-Jones (*The Godhead Fires*, *The Hand Refrains*, *The Heart Desires* and *The Soul Attains*, 1868–70). In the same way, in Lorrain’s and Péladan’s fictions, the female characters are found captured in a frozen moment as objects of desire and fear.

Suspense characterises Lorrain’s texts: there is the element of suspense based on repetitions of the same motifs and plots, and the repetitions of conflicts without resolution between resistance and desire. Renée A. Kingcaid in *Neurosis and Narrative* employs Freud’s

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<sup>34</sup> Potolsky, ‘Bild or Bildung?’, p. 361.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 356. The resemblance between Séverin, Wanda, and ‘the Greek’ as well as the theme of the reconstruction of the male self as a work of art from the perspective of the male characters are discussed in earlier chapters, Chapters 3 (Sacher-Masoch), 5 (Lorrain) and 6 (Péladan) in particular.

idea of the compulsion to repeat and states, 'in Lorrain, neurosis governs narrative as a repetition of the repressed and a resistance to its resolution'.<sup>36</sup> She examines the motifs recurrently used by Lorrain, such as the encounter with a toad, a decapitated head, masks, skulls and Astarté, and argues that Lorrain's texts are literary expressions of the neurotic repetition to re-create and re-experience the unpleasant moments from childhood masked by these objects, where 'all are treated with the same obsessive-compulsive mixture of pleasure and masochism that is indicative of the return of the repressed'.<sup>37</sup>

Santos also draws attention to Lorrain's repetitive use of the same morbid themes and images, particularly apparent in his excessive references to paintings. He says that Lorrain was one of many neurotic Decadents (Baudelaire, Flaubert, Huysmans, etc.) who had 'l'obsession du cadre parfait', i.e. paintings.<sup>38</sup> Highlighting some of the paintings which Lorrain repeatedly invokes in his texts, including those by Rops, Knopff, Toorop, Ensor, Burne-Jones and Moreau, Santos argues that Lorrain uses the paintings of these contemporary painters because they froze the exact moments which ideally convey 'la beauté dans l'horreur'.<sup>39</sup> He concludes that this excessive use of paintings gives Lorrain's narrative 'les qualités d'un tableau', thus suggesting the quality of suspense which Lorrain's narrative

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<sup>36</sup> Renée A. Kingcaid, *Neurosis and Narrative: The Decadent Short Fiction of Proust, Lorrain, and Rachilde* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), p. 80.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>38</sup> Santos, *L'art du récit court*, p. 168.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

controls.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, in *Monsieur de Phocas*, Fréneuse's obsession with the blue-green eyes is a search for the perfectly frozen moment representing his homosexual and masochistic desire, which he finds in the green-eyed statue of Antinoüs and in Moreau's paintings, as seen in Chapter 5. Fréneuse's (and Lorrain's) favourite painter, Rops, is a painter who captures the perfect moment of female monstrosity and seduction, as Lorrain writes elsewhere, 'face glacée et vide, canaille et dure, yeux limpides, au regard fixe, le regard fixe et cruel des Tribades' (*Histoires de masques*, p. 113).<sup>41</sup> Another favourite, Ensor, is an obsessive painter of masks and has the skill to capture in the mask the moment of suspense when the boundary between the two opposites, such as reality and fantasy, truth and lies and the original and the copy, dissolves. Susan J. Navarette in *The Shape of Fear* says that the theme of death-in-life, explored in the series of Ensor's self-portraits accompanied by photographs of the same scenes, is not so much about a *memento-mori* expression but about capturing 'the presentation of the presentation, [...] a composition depicting the artist's own ongoing decomposition'.<sup>42</sup> In *Monsieur Phocas*, Fréneuse finds in the triangle composition of Toorop's *Three Brides*, the suspended image of the ideal woman, which is similar to the three mothers in masochism (the uterine, oral and oedipal mother). The painting is sent to Fréneuse by Ethal as part of his

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>41</sup> Also see Victor Arwas, *Felicien Rops* (London: Academy Editions, 1972).

<sup>42</sup> Susan J. Navarette, *The Shape of Fear: Horror and the Fin de Siècle Culture of Decadence* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), p. 19. Also see *James Ensor 1860-1949: Theatre of Masks* (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1997).

education in masochism, and Fréneuse praises this painting because of the representation of the dominatrix in the balanced composition of the three women:

*Les Trois Fiancées*, la fiancée du Ciel, la fiancée de la Terre et celle de l'Enfer... Et la fiancée de l'Enfer [...] Si elle existait, comme j'aimerais cette femme! [...] *Les Trois Fiancées*, c'est étrange de détails et de composition : c'est du fantastique et du rêve rendus avec une préciosité étonnante (*Phocas*, pp. 73–74).

Similarly, in Péladan's imagination, a sense of suspense is a key to appreciating the female characters, and best described in the tension between Nébo and Paule throughout the trilogy of his saga. Their relationship creates intense conflicts between desire and resistance: between Paule's incessant demands for carnal love and Nébo's refusal; between Nébo's desire to make her his ideal androgyne, the *fée*, and Paule's hesitation and refusal. To prolong these tensions, the techniques used are voyeurism and fetishism. Nébo takes Paule to Parisian brothels and attempts to teach her the pleasure and pain of watching and being watched, without physical engagement or gratification. Paule is requested to disguise herself as a young boy, in imitation of Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and persuaded to resist any physical communication offered by the prostitutes or other men, while simultaneously seducing them as the object of their desire. Nébo's education simply aggravates Paule's craving for him, so he moves to a fetishist sexual congress between them. He transforms their bed into an altar in a room carefully decorated with phallic ornaments and furniture and tall erect flowers.

Disguised as a priest in a red long robe, Nébo chants a spell of worship of Paule, whom he asks to sit like the goddess Istar on a throne, bearing a lotus and a lily in her hands and wearing a thin dress decorated with jewels, in imitation of Salome in Moreau's paintings. He is content with prolonging this ritualised foreplay and has no intention of terminating it by intercourse: 'Ils étaient beaux, ainsi; l'obscénité fuyait devant le grand artiste: jusqu'ici il avait tout sauvé de la vulgarité' (*A cœur perdu* p. 300). Yet Paule is a strong counterforce and finally consummates the union by raping Nébo:

—Non! non, —cria-t-elle en un sursaut violent. [...] Et comme Nébo résistait à son mouvement, elle le ceintura de ses bras et avec une force de femme énervée, elle l'enleva de terre, l'affaissa sur elle, l'étreignant comme si elle eût été le mâle et qu'elle violât (p. 301).

Péladan's narrative compares the pain of ending the suspense to the pain experienced in a torture room: 'Un cri fut-il étouffé? [...] aux boudoirs et aux chambres de torture, [...] l'appareil de la volupté et son émanation voisinent incroyablement celui des supplices et leur exhalaison' (pp. 301–302). The climax leaves only pain in the couple; as Nébo has anticipated, ordinary sexual intercourse is 'le terrain déjà si banal de la bestialité' (p. 255). Then the story recovers a new tension between Nébo and Paule for the last time: Paule seeks for more gratification in marriage and Nébo seeks to end the relationship: 'Paule, ivre de triomphe, ne sentait pas l'esprit de Nebo se lever contre elle' (p. 373). The trilogy ends with the rupture of

the couple, again, leaving them only with pain.

As Nébo asks Paule to imitate his favorite representations in art and literature, it is important that the ideal female participant in a masochistic fantasy becomes herself a work of art, a fetish. Deleuze says that the dominatrix is a fetish because ‘le goût des scènes figées, comme photographiées, stéréotypées ou peintes, se manifeste dans les romans de Masoch au plus haut degré d’intensité. [...] Wanda surgit, avec sa fourrure et son fouet, prenant une pose en suspens, tel un tableau vivant’.<sup>43</sup> The masochist’s pleasure and pain lie in the suspended moment when the whip is just about to fall, so he seeks in its very immobility the ideal dominatrix in a frozen representation of this sort.

The immobility of Lorrain’s female characters is essential in his fictions to provoke a masochistic desire and awe, as in the case of the lassitude of Bertrade in ‘La Princesse sous Verre’. Other female characters are also frozen in the moment when they are compared to paintings. The frigidity of Madame Livintnof in *Très russe* (1886) is compared to the enigma of the Mona Lisa.<sup>44</sup> The sensuality of Maud White in *Monsieur de Phocas* is reduced to portraits by Velázquez, Izel is compared to Salome in Moreau’s paintings, ‘l’éternelle bête impure, la petite fille malfaisante et inconsciemment perverse, qui fripe la moelle des hommes’, and finally, the danger of the entire female species contracts into the blood-thirsty image of

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<sup>43</sup> Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, p. 62.

<sup>44</sup> See Santos, *L’art du récit court*, p. 185.

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The women in Péladan's texts generally look more realistic and active than Lorrain's, but the ideal form of women is proposed as an object of art. Corysandre in *Le Vice suprême* is compared to Ophelia for her chastity and sacrifice, where Mérodack is Hamlet. Istar is another image of the ideal partner of the Magus in the epic, because of her quality as a work of art. Instead of terrorising Nergal, the artist-Magus, with excessive sexual advances as other heroines do, she is consent to give herself to his art, as a heroine in his novel: 'Istar veut seulement être un tome dans votre vie, comme en votre oeuvre' (*Istar*, p. 303).

Another example is Bélit. As mentioned above (Chapter 5), she is initiated to become a *fée*, an ideal partner of the Magus in *Cœur en peine*. Then in the fourteenth volume of his saga, *La Vertu suprême*, she reappears, perfectly achieving the status of the *fée*, that is to say, an aesthetic object of desire. The characteristic of this transformed Bélit is her wafting femininity frozen in a perfect, unthreatening glimpse, 'l'idéal de nous tous, si nous n'étions pas des décadents, serait une Bélit, éteignant notre sexualité sans heurt, sans débat, et nous laissant entiers aux chimères qui sont les seuls coursiers de l'Art. Le véritable amour calme la fièvre'.<sup>46</sup> Péladan dramatically contrasts Bélit's ideal form in *La Vertu suprême* with Léonora d'Este's aggressive sexuality as a woman of flesh in the first volume of the saga, *Le Vice*

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>46</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée XIV: La Vertu suprême* (Paris: Flammarion, 1900), pp. 86–87.

*suprême*. Both volumes start by introducing each heroine with the same phrase: ‘elle est seule’. Then, *Le Vice suprême* continues as follows: ‘Plein d’ombre alanguie et de silence berceur, clos à la lumière, clos au bruit, le boudoir circulaire a le recueillement rêveur’ (*Le Vice suprême*, p. 21). In contrast to this evocation of a gloomy, dark and brooding atmosphere, *La Vertu suprême* continues: ‘Plein de clarté vive et de bruit vernal, ouvert au soleil, overt à la brise, le boudoir octogone a la gaité franche, l’aspect souriant d’une chambre d’épouse aimée’ (*La Vertu suprême*, p. 1). The sense of bliss with an ideal partner suggested in this opening is complemented by the figure of Bélit, who dominates male desires in the capacity of a safe object which seduces men only to allow them to contemplate her beauty, without demanding anything else of them, because she, like any object, possesses no desires of her own.

Although Péladan makes an explicit comparison between the good Bélit and the bad Léonora d’Este, he in fact writes of Léonora d’Este’s transformation in *Finis latinorum*. The story says she has attained the status of the *fée*, giving away her fortune to Mérodack’s Magus brotherhood, which once she tried to destroy, and living chastely as a partner of the self-contained androgyne Tammuz. Péladan writes, ‘les yeux de Léonora brillaient, adoucis; une certaine mollesse dans le mouvement, l’ancienne raideur presque disparue plusieurs



symptômes s’observaient d’une métamorphose qui la faisait charmante’.<sup>47</sup> Her change, like Bélit’s, is characterised as asexuality, calmness and self-abnegation. Mérodack once stood antagonistically against her because she was obsessed with ‘l’asservissement de l’homme’ (*Le Vice suprême*, p. 244). Yet seeing her becoming the ideal, Mérodack now says, ‘je suis actuellement amoureux fou de la d’Este’ (*Finis latinorum*, p. 106).

Léonora d’Este has now become truly one of the ideal partners of the Magus, as is suggested in the comparison with la Nine in *Le Vice suprême*. La Nine is an actress, cross-dresser and mistress of the prince de Courtenay. She regularly invites important men in society to a theatrical debating salon, an imitation of Plato’s *Symposium*. The theatricality can be seen by the ceremonial opening, as follows: ‘La Nine nommait; Courtenay phrasait un accueil préparé; le dominical, après un salut, faisait une passade [...] comme au théâtre. [...] “M. Gadagne, mon père Spirituel,” disait la Nine’ (*Le Vice suprême*, p. 211). Her androgyny is not approved in Péladan’s narrative, because it is ‘inharmonique et discordant’ (p. 185). Like Léonora d’Este, she reigns over men but in her case as an actress, that is to say, as a false goddess in commerce. Her dominance is based on the money which she stole from men by deception and prostitution, so Péladan says, she is ‘consciemment l’androgynie pâle, vampire suprême des civilisations vieilles, dernier monstre avant le feu du ciel’ (ibid.). A similar contrast was found between Mardona and Wewa in Sacher-Masoch’s in *La Mère de Dieu* (see

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<sup>47</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *La Décadence latine, éthopée XIII: Finis latinorum* (Paris: Flammarion, 1899), p. 90.

Chapter 2).

The superiority of the *fée* over the bourgeois ideal is repeated in *Comment on devient fée*, the text in which Péladan as the Magus himself attempts to teach his female readers to become the *fée* in reality. He compares the *fée* with the wife, and says, ‘Si tu n’étais qu’épouse et mère, ce livre serait inutile’, ‘Tu peux être aimée d’un homme ou de tout un public’.<sup>48</sup> This means that becoming the *fée* is to become an object of art, as he repeats, ‘Tu es née du désir de l’homme, tu corresponds à son imperfection’; ‘tu es le miroir où se réfractent devant la contemplation de l’homme’; and ‘Exalte ta beauté, séduis’.<sup>49</sup> This request for passivity for the sake of male pleasure appears to typify Péladan’s chauvinistic and misogynist discourses. It was in fact for this reason that the harsh critic of Decadence, Nordau, praised only Péladan as ‘intellectually the most eminent’ among the Decadents whom he condemned.<sup>50</sup> But it should be recalled that Péladan’s logic rather echoes Sacher-Masoch’s that the legitimacy of the dominatrix comes from her being ‘l’objet désiré’, already discussed above in Chapter 2 (*Vénus*, p. 122).

I have considered that Lorrain’s and Péladan’s texts exhibit the desire to control femininity, mystery and sexual drive, by putting the female characters with hysteria into their own works of art. But they also show that these women revolt and avenge. In Lorrain’s

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<sup>48</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *Amphithéâtre des sciences mortes, II: Comment on devient fée, érotique* (Paris: Chamuel et Cie, 1893), p. 65 and p. 68.

<sup>49</sup> Péladan, *Comment on devient fée*, p. 46, p. 47, and p. 81.

<sup>50</sup> Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 219.

‘Réclamation posthume’, the mystery personified in a female head, which the painter took from a statue and put in his own painting, punishes him for trying to control her. The proud artist is haunted by an apparition of the statue and ends by throwing himself on its mercy as it seeks the head at his atelier. In this story, two kinds of science are ridiculed and threatened by the combination of woman and mystery: medical science as represented by Charcot and occultist represented by Péladan, ‘fumisteries du salon des Rose-Croix’ (*Histoires de masques*, p. 181). In Péladan’s fictions, Magus figures betray their incompetence when demonstrating their science of hypnotism. In *Le Vice suprême*, when Corysandre is raped, Mérodack attempts to heal her by hypnotising her to repress the memory. But she starts to suffer from hysteria, and eventually breaks the hypnotic trance and dies in shame and despair. Mérodack cries out, ‘Vanité de la science! [...] ne pouvoir ni prévoir ni prévenir! [...] et il s’affaissa et s’absorba dans une immobilité de douleur’ (*Le Vice suprême*, p. 370).

The female characters are made into apparently passive objects of desire, and frozen in the male authors’ favourite images. Yet they work as a counter-force of desire and resist the male characters, contributing to intensify the sense of suspense which generates pleasure and pain in the texts. The women’s rejection and destruction of men’s dream to turn them into the ideal female model reduces men to the hope of turning themselves into a work of art: the dandy, Phocas, or the Magus, as seen in Part II of this thesis. In this way they achieve the

reversed story of Pygmalion.

## *CONCLUSION*

This thesis has recorded inter-disciplinary comparative research on the theme of masochism, taking three contemporaneous writers in late nineteenth century Europe: Lorrain, Péladan and Sacher-Masoch. The study has employed both a theoretically grounded approach to masochism, which principally follows Deleuze's analysis of masochism, and a close literary analysis of texts by these three authors, referring to recent critiques of Decadence and masochism. The key aspects which I have emphasised are control and ambiguity.

In *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, Deleuze's theory is a criticism of the psychoanalytical approach to the problem of masochism, because the history and conceptualisation of masochism owe much to psychoanalysis, Freudian in particular. This pathologises masochism and offers a prevailingly simple erotic model of masochism as some 'pervert' crying with joy at being flogged by a 'sadist' in furs or leather.<sup>1</sup> Common ideas of this sort are based on a misapprehension of masochism as a passive counterpart of sadism, but Deleuze insists that masochism was originally a literary expression by the author of the late nineteenth century, just as sadism derives from works of literature written by the author of the

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<sup>1</sup> The entrenched prejudice against masochism is seen in the Spanners' case in the UK. Sixteen men, consenting adults who held SM parties, were arrested in 1992 and convicted of assault occasioning actual bodily harm and unlawful wounding. The accused appealed to the highest court in Britain, contending that they could not be guilty, because the activities took place in private with full consent of those present and with safety precautions against serious injury. In fact, there were no claims of abuse or rape, nor did anyone suffer from any serious injury. The case provoked some controversy. See, e.g., S. Hedley, 'Sado Masochism, Human Rights and the House of Lords', *Cambridge Law Journal*, 52:2, (1993), 194-196 and L. Moran, 'Violence and the Law: The Case of Sado-masochism', *Social and Legal Studies*, 4, (1995), 225-51.

late eighteenth century; thereby, he uncouples masochism from both pathology and sadism. He characterises masochism as the creation of a fantasy of suspense. The suspense is created by ambiguous tensions between two opposite things which are usually separated, such as reality and fantasy, truth and lies, masculinity and femininity, mastery and submission and pleasure and pain. Deleuze proposes that various layers of ambiguity are created and multiplied in Sacher-Masoch's works and claims that the masochistic pleasure and pain lie in the controlling process of blurring boundaries, increasing chaos and disorder and generating and prolonging a sense of uncertainty, unease and anticipation. The masochist's tormented passive appearance is a mask, which hides a desire to plot a story of suspense, cast its participants and direct and perform a scene of tortures of his own.

I have focused on the element of suspense created by the tensions over the ambiguous identity of the masochist. I have examined the ambiguous figure of the masochistic man who, from the socio-cultural perspective, appears both active and passive in the texts of Lorrain, Péladan and Sacher-Masoch. The effeminate and passive pose of the male masochist and the domineering and aggressive appearance of the dominatrix are the subversive inversions of the moral imperatives in an age of capitalism and imperialism, when men were encouraged to dominate and exercise mastery over weak and inferior women and other, 'less civilised' races in the colonies. In this respect, masochism can be perceived as a

problem of subjectivity deriving from a conflict between the self and the social norms of the period; as Roy F. Baumeister says, it is ‘an attempt to escape from the burdens of selfhood’.<sup>2</sup>

I have shown the Decadent dandy as a dream of a new genderless creation, born from a masochistic self, by studying the discourses of dandyism which hide the anxiety over masculine identity felt by the male artists and intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century.

I have also argued that Lorrain’s narrative obsessions with blue-green objects and masks, which bring suffering to his male characters, are expressions of the dissident masculine identity with homosexual and masochistic sexuality. Further, I have seen Péladan’s image of the Magus as a masochistic self, by arguing that Péladan’s texts centre on exhibiting the masochistic martyrdom of the Magus, who is both humiliated by contemporary society, whose egalitarian principles level off genius to the ordinary and whose imperialist norms even lower the integrity of male intellectualism, and also oppressed by empowered and sexually-obsessed women, who turn the virtue of Magus’ idealism and chastity into ‘impuissance’, ‘débilité’ and ‘insuffisance’ (*A cœur perdu*, p. 307).

The element of suspense is also created by the tensions regarding the ambiguous identity of the dominatrix. I have highlighted the ambiguous characterisation of the Decadent heroines as both monstrous torturers of men and victims of hysteria. Lorrain and Péladan adapt the contemporary medical belief that hysteria derived from deviant female sexuality and

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<sup>2</sup> Roy F. Baumeister, *Masochism and the Self* (N.J.: Erlbaum, 1989), p. 39.

create their heroines as hysterics. In the constitution of the female partners a sense of control is evident. Lorrain and Péladan make the suffering of hysterics a symbolic portal to the power of mystery and morbid sexual drives and a reason why female characters inflict torture and humiliation on male characters. I have also pointed out the passive aspect of the hysterical heroines and argued that Lorrain's and Péladan's texts reveal a desire to produce an ideal form of femininity for the sake of the heroes. They do this by comparing the hysterical heroines with certain representations of art and literature, which crystallise the moment when beauty and dominance are ideally manifest for eternity. In Péladan's case, the ideal is called the *fée*, the virtuous woman of all men's desire; for him this was no mere fantasy, but a sincere project to make a model in life of his ideal in reality. Lorrain's and Péladan's texts show the process of carrying out plans to make an ideal female partner, though these are seldom accomplished, due to women's resistance and revolt. The collusion of desire and resistance between male and female characters is the focal site of the text on which tensions are created, producing contradictory feelings of anxiety, fascination and frustration in the reader.

On the premise that masochism is a literary expression reflecting a common cultural sensibility in civilised, industrialised bourgeois society, further possible research, I would propose, could extend the scope of the target, crossing the Channel and examining the English writers of the same period, such as Joseph Conrad, whose cosmopolitan life began in Ukraine,



Sacher-Masoch's homeland, and whose works explore the pessimistic, guilt-ridden view of a tormented white man, his narrator Marlow, of Western society as degenerate and his wish for redemption, confronting the rise of colonies and Asian nationalism (*Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*). The study could also include D. H. Lawrence, although he is usually labelled a modernist, whose works repeatedly deal with unhappy domestic relationships between suffering men and domineering women and long for the advent of a new, superior masculine ideal (*Women in Love* and the so-called trilogy of leadership novels, *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent*). The scope of the research could even cross Asia to the Far East and examine the Japanese novels of the early and mid-twentieth century set in the rapidly modernised and industrialised—that is to say, Westernised—society of the middle class, such as Yukio Mishima and Junichiro Tanizaki, who were both deeply influenced and inspired by French Decadence and created similar frigid and noble *femme fatale* figures in their works (Tanizaki's *The Makioka Sisters*, and Mishima's *Reokumeikan* and *Madame de Sade*). Tanizaki's fictions are characterised by the highly sensual accounts of pleasure and pain inflicted by women and Mishima's fictions include a deep undercurrent of homoerotic masochism (*Confessions of a Mask*), not to mention his own exhibitionistic performances of a tormented man, which culminated in his theatrical *Seppuku* suicide broadcast on TV in 1970. The possible range of the research in masochism will feasibly extend beyond nations, when

masochism is seen as a fantasy created by a conscientious man who feels suffocated and frustrated by the growing bourgeois imperatives for material prosperity and obedience to law and order, threatened by women's emancipation and deeply confused by the collusions and conflicts of different cultural values which upset their own conventional value-systems.

The Decadent literature which I have identified as masochistic is an imagined reality the male artist lapses into, in his search to recover the unity, stability and mastery of male subjectivity, stigmatised by the order and disorder of reality. The fiction of control and ambiguity at heart of Decadent fictions is a kind of masochistic fantasy.

## APPENDIX

An extract of the list of the names and messages sent to Sacher-Masoch for his jubilee published in *Auf der Höhe* (January 1883).<sup>1</sup>

(\*) = 11 of 40 members of the *Académie française* between 1882–1883.

p. 309.

(\*) Victor Hugo (1802–1885) :

‘Meine Glückwünsche dem Jubilar, meinen Segen dem Dichter! [My congratulations on the jubilee, my blessings to the poet!]' (p. 309).

p. 312.

Adam (Madam Edmond) (1883– ?).

(\*) Henri d’Orléans, duc d’Aumale (1822–1897) .

Jules Bapst, Editor-in-Chief of *Journal des Débats*.

Théodore Benzon, (Mme Thérèse Blanc) (1840–1907).

Marcelin Berthelot, Member of *l’Institut*, Senator (1827–1907).

Lucien Biart (1828–1897).

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson.<sup>2</sup>

Blaze de Bury (1813–1888).

Henri de Bornier (1825–1901).

(\*) Albert de Broglie, le duc de (1821–1901).

Charles Buloz, Editor-in-Chief of the *Revue de deux Mondes* :

‘Ich bin um so glücklicher mich bei dieser Gelegenheit den Anderen anschließen zu können, welche das Jubiläum Sacher-Masoch’s feiern, als die Revue in ihrem Hefte vom 1. Dezember 1872 die erste in Frankreich war, welche das große Publikum auf die Werke des berühmten Romanciers aufmerksam gemacht hat. Die Revue hofft, daß Herr Sacher-Masoch ihm ein ebenso gutes Anbieten bewahrt hat als sie ihm [That the 1. December 1872 issue of the Review was the first in France to create in the larger public interest in the works of the renowned novelist Sacher-Masoch makes me all the more pleased to be able to add my name to those celebrating his jubilee. The review hopes that Mr Sacher-Masoch reveres it as much as it reveres him]' (pp. 315–316).

François Coppée (1842–1908).

Alfonse Daudet (1840–1897).

(\*) Alexander Dumas fils (1824–1895).

Camille Flammarion.<sup>3</sup>

p. 313.

C. M. Gariel, Member of the *Académie de médecine*.

Edmond de Goncourt (1822–1896).

Grand-Carteret (1850–1927).

Henry Greville (Mme Alice Durand) (1842–1902).

Charles François Gounod (1818–1893).

Ludovic Halevy (1834–1908).

Houssaye-Arsène (1815–1896).

Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906).

<sup>1</sup> *Auf der Höhe* (January 1883), pp. 308–318. Additional information and translations are mine alone although I should acknowledge the valued assistance of Jennifer Birkett, Jun Fukumoto, and Vasuki Shanmuganathan in aiding my understanding and translations of this article written in *Fraktur*.

<sup>2</sup> A Norwegian playwright and novelist, and Nobel Prize winner in 1903.

<sup>3</sup> A celebrated astronaut.

- (\*) Ernest Legouvé (1807–1903).  
 Marmonter, Professor of the *conservatoire*, Paris.  
 Guy de Maupassant.  
 Catulle Mendès.  
 (\*) Alfred Mézières (1826–1915).  
 Frédéric Mistral (1830–1914).<sup>4</sup>

p. 314.

- (\*) Louis Pasteur (1822–1895).  
 Henry de Réne, Editor of *Gaulois*.  
 (\*) Ernest Renan (1823–1892) :

‘Das Ergebnis der geistigen Kultur wird die Zerstörung jedes Fanatismus sein. Die Liebe zu dem Guten und Wahren wird in Folge dessen nicht abnehmen, aber man wird nicht mehr glauben, daß das Wahre und Gute sich nur in einer einzigen Form darstellen. Die periodischen Blätter, welche unparteiisch sind und auf der geistigen Höhe stehen, sind auf diese Weise das Instrument das am meisten zum Gelingen der wichtigsten Aufgabe unseres Zeitalters mitwirkt [The result of intellectual culture will be the destruction of all forms of fanaticism. The love of good, and truth will not decrease as a consequence of it, but one will not believe that the truth and God will manifest itself in a single form. The periodicals which are non-partisan and stand proudly in the mind, are in this manner the instrument which contributes more than others to the most important tasks of our age]’ (p. 315).

Charles Richet, Editor-in-Chief of the *revue scientifique* (1850–1935).  
 Ricort, Member of the *Académie de médecine*  
 Henry de Rochefort (1830–1913):

‘Die erste Pflicht Desjenigen, der für die Freiheit der Anderen thätig ist, ist für seine Person auf dieselbe zu verzichten [The primary obligation of he, the person striving for freedom of others, is to renounce himself to said others]’ (p. 316).

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921).<sup>5</sup>  
 Francisque Sarcey (1828–1899).  
 Edmond Scherer, Senator, Editor of *Temps* (1815–1889).  
 Gabriel Séailles (1852–1922).  
 Armand Silvestre (1838–1901).

- (\*) Jules Simon (1814–1896) :

‘Mit lebhafter Freude vereinige ich mich mit Ihnen, um Ihren berühmten Landsmann Sacher-Masoch zu feiern. Die Männer von Talent haben ein Vaterland, das sie lieben und ehren, aber das Talent selbst hat sein Vaterland, es gehört der Menschlichkeit. Es ist ihre Freude und ihr Stolz und das gesegnete Werkzeug aller ihrer Fortschritte [I join you with great pleasure to celebrate your compatriot Sacher-Masoch. Men of talent have a fatherland which they love and honour, but the talent itself has its own fatherland—it belongs to the humanity. It is humanity’s joy and pride and talent is the blessed tool of all advances]’ (p. 317).

Jules Soury, Professor of *Collège de France* (1842– ?).  
 Paul Stapfer, Professor of a University, Grenoble (1840–1917).

- (\*) Sully-Prudhomme (1839–1907).<sup>6</sup>  
 (\*) Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893).

p. 315.

Auguste Vitu, Editor of *Figaro* (1823–1891).  
 J.-J. Weiß (1827–1891).  
 Eugène Yung, Editor-in-Chief of the *revue politique et littéraire*.  
 Emile Zola (1840–1902):

‘Die Bewegungen gehen vorüber und folgen einander, die Werke bleiben. Wenn man Genie hat und seinem Zeitalter die

<sup>4</sup> A Provençal poet and the Nobel Prize winner in 1904.

<sup>5</sup> The composer of *Samson et Delila* (1877).

<sup>6</sup> The first Nobel Prize winner in 1901.

Wahrheit sagt, bleibt die Unsterblichkeit nicht aus [Movements (driven by causes) become the past and follow one another, (but) works remain. If one is a genius and tells his age the truth, immortality will not be missing]' (p. 317).

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