

MASOCHISTIC TIME: NARRATIVE DELAY, HISTORICAL PERFORMATIVITY, AND
SADOMASOCHISM IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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The theoretical models for this dissertation bring together Gilles Deleuze's aesthetic of masochism with discussions of queer temporality such as Elizabeth Freeman's to analyze masochistic narrative desire and its affects, especially masochistic time. This project begins examining how a novel produces a masochistic subjectivity by situating the topic of BDSM sexuality in the lesbian feminist public sphere. I build on language, rituals, and ethics of the ethnographic study of Margot Weiss and the genre analysis of Lewis Call to situate a the discussion of BDSM after lesbian SM in the feminist science fiction and fantasy novels of Califia, Piercy, Russ, and Butler. I examine examples of sadomasochism in pornography, feminist science fiction, and neo-slave narrative to develop the formal features of masochism in contemporary texts. I compare representations of BDSM to distinguish between the accelerated temporality of sadism and the slowed temporality of masochism. I intervene into recent scholarship on sadomasochism in African American Literature by comparing the historical performativity of sadomasochism in neo-slave narratives with queer models of thinking about past. I consider the formal features of masochism, the poetics of delay, and I consider how anticipation works in science fiction discourse to discipline the reader to this temporality. I compare Delany's sadomasochism in the science fiction novel with the sadomasochism of his pornographic novel, where I examine the dynamics of BDSM within the context of queer bonds.

I continue the analysis of narrative, language, and masochistic time in Acker. Finally, I analyze the social masochism as an aspect of the masochistic aesthetic at work in Ishiguro.

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INTRODUCTION

“The Language and Temporality of Literary Masochism”

The contemporary compound acronym, BDSM, which we now use to describe the sexual activity that is also known under the umbrella term sadomasochism, includes, of course, the terms sadism and masochism. BDSM is a more expansive term; it refers to the erotic role-play that includes bondage, domination, dominance, submission, slave, and master, as well as sadism and masochism.¹ Drawing on *Publics and Counterpublics* by Michael Warner, Margot Weiss uses the term “counterpublic” to describe the BDSM community: “The SM space [is] a bounded site of personal desire and freely chosen roles. Through its boundaries, rules, and constructions of consent, the SM community produces an understanding of SM as a marked-off, delineated, space of play oppositional to and outside of real power—in short a queer counterpublic” (158). The arc of my argument is to begin with BDSM sexuality, to articulate it as a queer counterpublic, and to imagine how texts might circulate within it. Then I develop readings of masochistic subjectivity in feminist and African American novels. From this broad source of BDSM sexuality, culture, and literature, which I sometimes refer to diffusely as the BDSM aesthetic, I focus in on more specific formulations of BDSM: lesbian SM, literary masochism, masochistic subjectivity, sadomasochism in the neo-slave narrative, narrative delay, masochism as an aesthetic, a temporality, or a set of affects, and social masochism. I apply Gilles Deleuze’s explanation of “The Art of Masochism” to contemporary novels. I want to develop examples of literary masochism in contemporary novels to define what I see as a key idea in Deleuze’s concept, which I will define as masochistic time.

¹ See Margot Weiss’s explanation of the “definitional complexity” of BDSM and in the shifting identity terms like top, bottom, dominant, submissive, switch, pain slut, service top, etc. (xi).

In *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, Deleuze calls the term sadomasochism a “misbegotten name” (34), and Weiss later insists, “[i]n BDSM, terminology matters” (vii). We derive the terms sadism and masochism from the two literary progenitors that bear their names, from eighteenth-century French literature by the Marquis de Sade and nineteenth-century German literature by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Although scholars often use these terms interchangeably or as complements of each other, for Deleuze, these were very different types of erotic literature. As a criteria for distinguishing between the ill-conceived coupling of the two types of literature, Deleuze first distinguishes a category of erotic literature separate from pornography. He identifies “pornology” as a literary text, like that of the Sade or Masoch, which merits such a distinction “because its erotic language cannot be reduced to the elementary functions of ordering and describing” (18). Secondly, Deleuze aims to analyze the terms sadism and masochism as separate literary aesthetics. In this project he is responding to Freud, who links the two instincts in essays such as “The Economic Problem of Masochism” and “A Child is Being Beaten.” Deleuze wants to distinguish between sadism and masochism for two reasons: to understand them primarily as literary aesthetics and not clinical symptomatologies, and, second, to acknowledge that even creating symptomatologies is a question of art, not pathology. Deleuze condenses his argument into eleven propositions for the literary techniques in Sade and Masoch:

- 1) Sadism is speculative-demonstrative, masochism is dialectical-imaginative;
- 2) Sadism operates with the negative and pure negation, masochism with disavowal and suspension;
- 3) Sadism operates by means of quantitative reiteration, masochism by qualitative suspense;
- 4) There’s masochism specific to the sadist, and sadism specific to the masochist, the one never combining with the other;

- 5) Sadism negates mother and inflates father, masochism disavows the mother and abolishes the father;
- 6) The role and significance of the fetish, and the function of fantasy are totally different in each;
- 7) There is an aestheticism (beauty/art) in masochism, while sadism is hostile to the aesthetic attitude;
- 8) Sadism is institutional, masochism is contractual;
- 9) In sadism the superego and the process of identification play the primary role, masochism gives primacy to the ego and the process of idealization;
- 10) Sadism and masochism exhibit totally different forms of desexualization and resexualiation;
- 11) Finally, summing up all these differences, there is a radical difference between sadistic *apathy* and masochistic *coldness* (134).

Deleuze distinguishes between literary techniques used in Masoch's novels versus those techniques used in Sade's novel. The different fantasies use different language constructions, produce different temporalities in their literature, and exhibit different affects. Following Deleuze, I want to develop a definition of masochistic time, which describes the effect of the literary aesthetic of masochism as waiting by considering sadomasochistic sexuality, not as a psychological etiology or an alternative sexuality, but as an aesthetic, which uses motifs of suspension and historical performance in its literature. By identifying these distinctions in literature, I can compare theories of masochism and desire in psychoanalysis, queer theory, African American studies, narrative theory, or film, with their expression in examples of literary masochism, like Masoch, or in contemporary examples.

Deleuze makes distinctions in types of erotic language as the first proposition to distinguish between the two literatures. Masochism is “dialectical imaginative” while sadism is “speculative-demonstrative.” This distinction comes from Deleuze’s claim that literary sadism and masochism are different from pornography, because of their language. He characterizes pornography as a literature of “imperatives” and “obscene descriptions” (17). Although sadism and masochism use imperatives, they are not both obscene. In Sade, we find moments when the heroine’s torturers use her as a listener and confidante. For example, in a novel that Deleuze doesn’t discuss, *Eugénie de Franval*, Eugénie, the daughter is her father’s listener and confidante. She already conforms to her father’s beliefs, so when he confides in her with his desire, and proposes “the crime of love” or incest, she does not need to be persuaded. In contrast, the language of masochism persuades and educates. The victim in masochism is in search of a torturer, and this is why the contract features as a formal characteristic.

For my understanding of literary masochism, the most important propositions are seven and eight, or those that describe the aesthetics of masochism, especially the contract. Many of the formal characteristics of masochism Deleuze borrows from Theodor Reik’s *Masochism and Modern Man*. I argue that Deleuze’s reading of Reik suggests a set of affects associated both psychologically and aesthetically with masochism. Reik identifies four basic characteristics of psychoanalytic masochism, which Deleuze condenses into this list. The first is the “special significance of fantasy,” or “the form of the fantasy. . . the fantasy experienced for its own sake, or the scene which is dreamed, dramatized, ritualized and which is an indispensable element of masochism” (Deleuze 74-75). The second is the “suspense factor,” or “the waiting, the delay, the expressing the way in which anxiety affects sexual tension and inhibits its discharge” (Deleuze 75). The demonstrative feature of masochism is third. Deleuze also labels this “the persuasive

feature,” or “the particular way in which the masochist exhibits his suffering, embarrassment and humiliation” (75). The final factor is “provocative fear,” or the masochist’s aggressive demand for “punishment since it resolves anxiety and allows him to enjoy the forbidden pleasure” (Deleuze 75). The first characteristic suggests an alternative subjective realm, whereas the rest of the features identify the affects of masochism: suspense, (provocative) fear, anxiety, persuasion, suffering, embarrassment, and humiliation. Deleuze’s addition is the fifth characteristic, the form of “the contract” in the masochistic relationship. He explains that the contract “is drawn up between the subject and the torturess...The masochist appears to be held by chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone” (Deleuze 75). The affect produced by disobeying the contract, through “provocative fear,” not only produces fear and the anxiety, which resolves it, but also guilt.

While masochism is waiting in its purest form because it operates through disavowal and suspension, the second and third propositions show how sadism uses negation. In the Marquis de Sade’s *Eugénie de Franval*, the novel negates the influence of the mother, and inflates the influence of the father. There is an excellent example of how the mother is negated very simply when Sade describes with rapture Eugénie’s idolization of her father, and the narrator states: “There was nothing comparable in the sentiments Mademoiselle de Franval had for her worthy, unhappy mother” (Sade 246). Not only does Eugénie describe her own dissatisfaction with her mother, but she manipulates her father to deny his relationship to the mother as well. The mother is denied by both daughter and husband/father. The mother has been removed from the child’s sphere of influence, the father does not permit her to share her religion and beliefs with her child, and the daughter eventually kills her. We do not see Eugénie repent, although the priest says she dies of grief, and she dies almost simultaneously with the mother. The mother while alive, never

knows the love of her daughter. Deleuze describes acceleration in Sade by citing *Juliette*. He claims that Sade relies on quantitative techniques of accumulation and acceleration, mechanically grounded in materialistic theory: reiteration and internal multiplication of the scenes, precipitation, overdetermination. The subject is at once parricide, incestuous, murderer, prostitute and sodomite.

For my definition of the temporalities of masochism, the most important aspect of masochistic fantasy that Deleuze identifies is the sixth proposition, which concerns the role of the fetish and disavowal, or the metaphor of suspension and the poetics of delay that he extends from his reading in Masoch of “the frozen aesthetic.” I want to compare different senses of disavowal. For example, in *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, Laplanche and Pontalis define “Disavowal (Denial)” (*Verleugnung* in German and *déni* in French), as the “term used by Freud in the specific sense of a mode of defence which consists in the subject’s refusing to recognise the reality of a traumatic perception—most especially the perception of the absence of the woman’s penis. Freud invokes this mechanism particularly when accounting for fetishism and the psychoses” (118). About the temporality of disavowal, Freud notes that although it is a mental process, which in the life of “children seems neither uncommon nor very dangerous, but which in an adult would mean the beginning of a psychosis” (qtd. in Laplanche and Pontalis 119). Disavowal’s suspension, as well as the strange temporality of disavowal outside of childhood, or psychosis, informs this temporality of the masochistic fantasy. Deleuze defines the term in “The Role of Descriptions” and it is key to the way that he distinguishes between sadism and masochism:

Disavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists neither in negating nor even in destroying, but rather in radically contesting the

validity of that which is: it suspends disbelief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it. The clearest example given by Freud is fetishism: the fetish is the image or the substitute of the female phallus, that is the means by which we deny that the woman lacks a penis. (*Masochism* 31)

In the French edition, Deleuze writes:

On trouve chez Freud l'analyse de résistances qui, à des titres très divers, impliquent un processus de dénégation . . . Il pour-rait sembler qu'une dénégation en général est beaucoup plus superficielle qu'une négation ou même une destruction partielle. Mais il n'en est rien; il s'agit d'une tout autre opération. Peut-être faut-il comprendre la dénégation comme le point de départ d'une opération qui ne consiste pas à nier ni même à détruire, mais bien plutôt à contester le bien-fondé de ce qui est, à affecter ce qui est d'une sorte de suspension, de neutralisation propres à nous ouvrir au-delà du donné un nouvel horizon non donné. Le meilleur exemple invoqué par Freud est celui du fétichisme: le fétiche est l'image ou le substitute d'un phallus féminin, c'est-à-dire un moyen par lequel nous déniions que la femme manqué de pénis. (*Présentation* 28-29)

In Deleuze's explanation of the role of disavowal, the difference between negation, which he aligns with sadism, and disavowal, which he aligns with masochism, is less obvious than what this binary pair of terms means. In the same quotation from Deleuze in French, the terms, “*dénégation*” and “*négation*” are clear binaries. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “denegation” and “negation” come into English from Middle French. Denegation has two senses; the first is refusal, which makes it hard to distinguish from negation, where the first sense is also refusal. The second sense of “denegation” is denial, which is closer to the English term “disavowal” that Deleuze uses “to refuse to acknowledge.” *Dénégation* and disavowal refer to the psychological

process of refusing to acknowledge, which in masochistic fantasy not only distinguishes it from sadism's negation, but also avoids the assertion that a statement is negative or false.

Disavowal, the best example of which is fetishism, and the suspension and poetics of delay that come from this theory of fetishism, are unique to masochism. The major difference between fetishism, which might secondarily occur in sadism, is the relationship to negation. Masochistic disavowal, or the refusal to acknowledge, to operate on denial and fantasy, suspends the acknowledgement of the "loss of the phallus" in psychoanalytic terms;" or in semiotic terms, the "loss of the sign" as something whole, and recognition of its split into signifier and signified. This suspension of meaning happens via fantasy or other linguistic strategies of deferral. Because these processes have a temporal component of delay, Masoch describes the form of masochism as a state of waiting. This aesthetic also includes, via Deleuze's chapter, "The Art of Masoch," the "ritual scenes of hanging, crucifixion, and other forms of physical suspension" (70-71). Deleuze reasons that "the masochist appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone" (75). I would add to Deleuze's explanation that in these multiple meanings of "suspension," masochism's aesthetic shares something unexpected with "bondage." Although Masoch doesn't use the term bondage, "physical suspension" suggests the practice of being tied up, which acquires a masochistic meaning.

I identify *masochistic time* as the delay caused in the circulation of disruptive signs, which impede the pleasure of signification for the reader. My conceptualization of sadism and masochism understands the gap in post-structural theory between the signifier and signified as a temporal delay (via Deleuze), but I also theorize masochistic delay through the historical performance embedded in sadomasochistic representations. For example, Biman Basu's analysis of this historical performance in the neo-slave narrative in his recent critical work on the

aesthetics of sadomasochism and African American literature, *The Commerce of People*, is the first book length study of sadomasochism in African American literature. Basu focuses on the masochistic subjectivity produced in this genre, and juxtaposes that with the sadistic subjectivity of the slave master depicted in 19th century slave narratives. Associated with this masochistic subjectivity is a “historical anxiety” about the simultaneous enactment of dual temporalities, or of acting out the roles of past slavery and present sadomasochism. I extend the dual temporalities of masochistic subjectivity in the neo-slave narrative to examine temporality in terms of anticipation and delay.

Explanations of BDSM in queer theory demonstrate a queer temporality, which informs the idea of historical performativity that I borrow from Elizabeth Freeman’s *Time Binds: Queer Histories, Queer Temporalities*. Freeman analyzes “sadomasochistic role-play, especially between black people and white people” as erotohistoriography, which uses the props of historically specific periods. BDSM writes history on the body to show the “asymmetrical organizations of power in everyday life. But however one views S/M², it is inescapably true that the body in sadomasochistic ritual becomes a means of invoking history—personal pasts, collective suffering, and quotidian forms of injustice—in an idiom of pleasure” (Freeman 137). I build upon these arguments about disordered experiences of time and sadomasochism, in order to analyze literary masochism as a masochistic experience of waiting, literary criticism on the “frustrated” utopian desire in science fiction, or the anxiety of anticipating the future, is also a sadomasochistic pleasure that informs the poetics of unique to both science fiction and literary masochism. The pornologies of Sade and Masoch, according to Deleuze’s theoretical study of the differences of literary sadism and literary masochism, creates different temporal experiences.

² In both of their books, Basu and Freeman use the term sadomasochism, rather than BDSM.

Masochistic time is slow, an experience of waiting, with a narrative poetics of delay, while sadism accelerates (Deleuze 71).

CHAPTER 1

“Sadomasochism Still?: The Masochistic Reader and the Feminist Public Sphere”

BDSM After Lesbian Sadomasochism: The Feminist Sex Wars as Masochistic Time

A historiography of the literature of the feminist public sphere in the 1970s and early 1980s, such as this chapter proposes, cannot be separated from the visual environment of the same period.³ This analysis of examples of literary masochism develops alongside visual texts as I draw on two examples for imagining how visual culture might operate as a component of the feminist public sphere in which novels about masochism circulate. First, in the introduction to *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner introduces his argument about the circulation of texts in a public by using the photographic image on the cover of his book, where the point of view is subverted by a subject pointing both his own camera and gaze at the viewer, instead of the subject located on the back of the cover. The more one looks, the more the image engages with the image. Like Althusser’s interpellating policeman, Warner will demonstrate, the text too calls at the subject, “Hey, you!” This image of drag queens posing for home pictures in a suburban setting called Casa Susana suggests the public nature of private lives. Warner calls the space one of “collective improvisation, transformative in a way that depends on several publics—including dominant and alien mass public” (13). Through our mere attention to the

³ Media scholar Carol Bronstein uses the term “visual environment” in *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976-1986*, her analysis of the anti-pornography movement’s progression from a campaign against images of sexual violence in mainstream media, especially advertising, to a focus on pornography, including non-violent, sexually explicit expression. The term also describes the larger work of the activist-scholars in the women’s liberation movement analyzing representations of women (143).

cover, Warner will argue, we as readers are part of the several publics of its circulation. In this chapter, where I examine the interconnected counterpublic of lesbian BDSM and the public of feminist science fiction, I focus on visual images, especially book covers, to think about how the discourse between these publics is reflexive, creates a masochistic subject, and circulates a BDSM aesthetic.

As a second example of the relationship between the visual and the literary elements in my formal analysis of these images, I draw on Deleuze's understanding of disavowal and suspension in his literary analysis of masochism in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*. In Masoch's novels, Deleuze describes two visual components of masochistic suspension, first, "the masochistic rites of torture and suffering imply actual physical suspension" and, second, "the woman torturer freezes into postures that identify her with a statue, a painting, or a photograph" (33). In fact, he claims these "photographic scenes" and "arrested images" are one of the key components of Masoch's contribution to literary masochism (33). Therefore, I focus on the "photographic" images, or the visual images of suspension, both physical and that created through the language of disavowal. I argue that suspension creates an experience of masochistic time in the novels. Rather than a linear historical chronology of BDSM, I choose to begin with lesbian BDSM because of the fluidity of sexual identity that scholars of lesbian BDSM, (e.g. Califia and Rubin) describe. In contrast, Lewis Call reads Samuel Delany's BDSM as oriented in the legacy of an earlier gay leather culture where sexual identities were not fluid. The masochistic aesthetics of disavowal from Deleuze and the real sexual practices described by lesbian BDSM practitioners, share a capacity for deferral. In order to understand literary masochism within the context of feminism, we must begin with lesbian sadomasochism and the

feminist sex wars as the context for the circulation of BDSM⁴ images within feminist public spheres. In order to analyze masochistic subjectivity and identify an aesthetic of literary masochism, as unique from literary sadism, this chapter moves back in forth in time, between feminist science fiction of the late 1970s by Marge Piercy and Joanna Russ, and contemporary reactions to BDSM sexuality by anti-pornography feminists and pro-sex feminists such as Patrick Califia, to 21st century ethnographic studies of BDSM publics who claim feminist participants, and recent erotic literature. It looks backward at the BDSM erotic literature through definitions of literary sadism and masochism borrowed from Deleuze's *Masochism*, in order to develop these definitions against contemporary erotic literature, to understand the bestseller status of a BDSM erotic romance novel with questionable feminist politics, and to reconsider well-known pieces of African American literature within the debate of BDSM within feminism. This chapter will historicize BDSM discourse after lesbian sadomasochism and before *Fifty Shades of Grey*, in order to understand the discursive moment that brings about the intersections

⁴ As a contested sexual identity in the late 1970s, Gayle Rubin and Patrick Califia refer to themselves and the members of Samois as SM lesbians. BDSM is a more expansive term, a compound acronym. It refers to the erotic role-play that includes bondage, domination, dominance, submission, sadism, masochism, slave, and master. In different sections of the dissertation, I emphasize different aspects of the term. For example, in a discussion of neo-slave narratives, I emphasize slave/master. In referring to specific behaviors, I try to name them appropriately, although they are often a combination of terms. My definition of literary masochism shows how narratives that feature erotic BDSM, display literary masochism and masochistic time as an experience for the reader that is not necessarily erotic.

of feminism and lesbian sadomasochism in the overlapping public spheres of Feminist Sex Wars, erotic fiction, 1970s feminist utopian science fiction, and contemporary critiques of BDSM.

Has the popularity of *Fifty Shades of Grey*'s sanitized, heteronormative, male dominant spanking finally given the *coup de grâce* to BDSM as an alternative sexual practice? Why is masochism still a turn on for some women? Why in 2012 were millions of readers reading this BDSM pornography-style romance, which even as I write has been adapted into a feature film and continues to generate a pop cultural media frenzy? These questions recall the rhetoric, and, if we are not careful, the morality, of Andrea Dworkin in the antipornography discourse of the 1980s. For example, her article "Why So-Called Radical Men Love and Need Pornography" argues that images of rape and torture terrorize women into silence. Despite its popular success, *Fifty Shades of Grey* represents exactly the type of sadistic, patriarchal practices that Dworkin would have criticized. Decades after feminism's antipornography campaigns, how do we understand the popular success of the bestseller, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and the pangs of feminist guilt that must accompany its sin of submissive success?

In 2012, book reviews of *Fifty Shades of Grey* in Britain and the U.S. repeatedly asked, why women read pornography, especially the kind written by E.L. James, former television executive turned novelist by posting fan fiction online (Bosman 1). In March of 2012, *The New York Times* article, "Discreetly Digital, Erotic Novels Sets American Women Abuzz," noted that the book's overnight success meant that the growing demand of the then obscure e-book, an independent Australian publication, couldn't keep up with the demand created by word of mouth, but especially the buzz created by "Facebook pages," "school functions," and "spin classes" (Bosman 1). Noting the buzz created from woman to woman, in traditional women's spaces, and in the digital public sphere, Julie Bosman wrote: "the problem has been finding it"

(1) At that time American publishers had just fought to rerelease the book through Vintage books, part of the Knopf Doubleday publishing group. Before March, the first book's "distribution ha[d] been limited and sluggish, leaving book stores deprived of copies. The lion's share of sales . . . had come from the ever-discreet e-book downloads" which then promptly propelled it to number one on the *New York Times* e-book best-seller list. The early *New York Times* article is interested in its e-book to blockbuster best-seller status. This article, and many other reviews, suggest that the book's digital access results from its availability online for discreet purchase and reading the book as a digital file. In the early circulation of the text, there is no lurid cover to shame the reader, no brown-papered package arrives in the mail. This circulation combines powerful word of mouth success in the "brick and mortar public sphere", if not in the "brick and mortar bookstore," and online circuits.

A few months later, its transnational popularity had *The Guardian* pose the question, "Why Women Love *Fifty Shades of Grey*," and asking "It's the fastest-selling novel for adults of all time—and it's very adult in content. Why have millions of women been seduced by *Fifty Shades of Grey*" (1). By July, according to *The Guardian*, E.L. James had sold four million copies of the trilogy via the UK publisher, Random House, and 15 million copies in the US and Canada. This review avoids the easy conclusion that technology is the root of E.L. James's success. Reviewer Zoe Williams admits "that women who wouldn't be seen dead reading smut on the tube could read it on their kindle" but also asserts "it was word of mouth that launched the paperback version on the back of the e-book" (2). She claims that the shame of erotic fiction is largely in the imagination, and once people had read it, they feel free to discuss it openly.

The book's easy circulation in public, in private, and across international borders contrasts sharply with the censorship of BDSM erotic literature such as that of Califia some

thirty years before. Califia, perhaps mocking Dworkin and unwittingly anticipating the reviewers' rhetoric for *Fifty Shades of Grey*, asks in the foreword to a new edition of *Macho Sluts*: "Why should anybody buy a book of lesbian S/M smut that was originally published in 1988, especially if the author is now using male pronouns and sporting a rather impressive beard, if I do say so myself?" (*Macho Sluts* 13). Califia begins the foreword not only with the already rich rhetorical question of what lesbian BDSM pornography means, but also with the provocative addition of transgender questions to reframe the topic of gender, both of which qualify his relationship with feminism. As much as Califia's gender and sexuality make him an outsider, the mainstream consumption and commercial success of *Fifty Shades of Grey* is clearly due to the extremely conventional gender roles and heteronormative sexuality of E.L. James's novel, a conventional romance despite its BDSM veneer.

Story of O, the 1970s equivalent to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, written in French by Pauline Réage, was published in English by Olympia Press in 1965, and its sequel was published by Grove Press in 1971.⁵ The novel became a discursive resource for lesbian sadomasochists, yet was criticized by many feminists. To be a SM lesbian at this time was a contested position in the feminist public. I think about the Feminist Sex Wars as responding indirectly to lesbian SM, and I consider the experience of identifying as a lesbian sadomasochist within the shifting political terrain of late 1970s feminism as also my first example of masochistic time.⁶ This period is masochistic when BDSM sexual pleasure acquires a political guilt, a trajectory, which, as recent

⁵ Pauline Réage was a pseudonym for Anne Desclos.

⁶ The Barnard Conference on Sexuality in 1982 is often considered as the beginning of the Feminist Sex Wars, but as we will see the following pages, Samois creates its SM counterpublic in response to feminist criticism in the late 1970s.

histories of feminism as well as debates occurring within the movement at the time would argue, was not inevitable nor did it arise from the fundamental politics of the women's movement.

The political guilt of enjoying BDSM after feminism creates a sense of masochistic time for readers with only a vague sense of feminism's relationship to pornography. I argue that three genres of fiction—erotic literature, science fiction, and neo-slave narratives—as well as the non-fiction on BDSM, the aesthetics of literary masochism and the masochistic subjectivity all manifest as experiences of masochistic time. Subsequently, as I compare how the representations of BDSM operate in the different public spheres.

This historical work comes at a moment when feminist and queer theorists continue to marvel at the fact that they now have a proper history. For those scholars steeped in the theoretical heyday of queer theory and poststructuralism, that self-reflection demonstrates a critical language hyper-aware of temporality. Reflecting on the near past, for example, in Janet Haley and Andrew Parker's collection of essays, *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*, a number of scholars think through theory's relationship to the 1990s not only in the binary of then/now, but also as "still". This use of "still" reminds me of an image circulated widely on social media in the spring of 2012 as women protested more attacks on women's reproductive rights in Virginia—a second wave feminist holds a sign that reads "I can't believe I *still* have to protest this shit."⁷ The introduction to *After Sex?* similarly focuses on *still*—with a sense of

⁷In "The Pro-Choice Reawakening," Irwin Carmen writes for *Salon*: "around the same time that the Democratic National Committee launched Stand With Sandra, to fundraise over the loathsome attacks on the reproductive rights activist Sandra Fluke, images of police in riot gear arresting peaceful protesters of Virginia's mandatory ultrasound law were spreading on

frustration, a fear of being passé or passed-away, yet with a love that persists. The collection of essays asks, "What is it like to be doing queer theory *still*, to be working today in a tradition that has managed to somehow have acquired a past?" (Halley and Parker 9).

As I try to develop an erotics of reading through the idiom of BDSM, I think about Elizabeth Freeman's essay "Still After?" The use of "after" in this essay combines time and erotics. She's lusting "after" queer theory, still in love, still pursuing. When asked "What is least queer about your work?" Freeman starts her answer with marriage, then time and finally, aesthetics:

I am beginning to realize, then, that what might be least queer, least obviously sexual, about my work is its (anachronistic?) investment in aesthetics: in what I experience as a genuinely erotic friction among various genres, modes, literary techniques, allusions, and so on in any given cultural event or object. And this erotics is itself a kind of historicism, a way of confronting the historicity of subjects and politics that finds its queerness in method rather than in object (29-31).

Freeman explains this idea of erotics as a kind of historicism in *Time Binds* where she defines erotohistoriography as method of writing that doesn't fully restore the lost object of pleasure to the historical record. Instead, it treats the present as a hybrid and performs this temporality on the body. In "Time Binds, or Erotohistoriography," she writes that:

Facebook. "Never dreamed I'd be protesting for women's rights in 2012 in Virginia," read one sign . . . Not everyone was surprised. The activists who have for years protested online, in person or in the courts – when women were attacked with fierce misogyny simply for existing in public, when women's healthcare was stigmatized and subject to punishing double standards . . . had another sign to represent them: "I cannot believe I *still* have to protest this shit."

any search for the origins of queer historiographical pleasure. . . would resurrect the very impulses that the texts . . . resist . . . [P]leasure—instead of appearing as foundational to a discipline or identity—flashes up from the past. As the loser in bygone battles between sensory and cognitive modes of apprehending history declared it, history should be understood rather than felt, and written in a genre clearly separable from fiction (if not from narrative) as possible. (95)

My methodology in the chapter reflects this queer historiography in two ways: first, to analyze a counter-archive of lesbian SM; and second, to document a public circulating examples of literary masochism in queer ways, as glimpse, a touch, or a feeling. For example, Freeman would direct us to record the sensations of the body as it encounters the historical record. In an effort to queer affective histories like that of Dipesh Chakrabarty's, Freeman thinks about how the body makes history in through bodily motions: "a grasp, a clutch, a refusal to let go" (xx). The body in sadomasochistic ritual is both method and historical consciousness.⁸ How does "the actual meeting of bodies with other bodies and objects" create BDSM aesthetic or a figure of

⁸ "[D]istinct from the desire for a fully present past, a restoration of bygone times... Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter. Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones that are themselves a form of understanding. It sees the body as a method and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations" (*Time Binds* 95-96).

masochistic subjectivity (Freeman xxi)? How then do we record the affects of a reader's emotional response to a text? Excitement? Indifference? Guilty pleasure? Outrage?

For some feminists, the popular success of *Fifty Shades of Grey* might leave them with a similar feeling of *still* outraged. Why are we *still* fighting against the eroticized violence of pornography? For many feminists then and now, it is *still* uncomfortable to think about championing any pornography. It is that nexus of feminist discourse—against masochism from within feminism—that I want to mark in my analysis of masochistic time where guilty sexual pleasures and the displeasure of political guilt intersect.⁹

There are many possible starting points for discussions of BDSM. Some recent works start with defining terminology¹⁰. The starting point for this erotohistoriography is the discourse of lesbian sadomasochism. Gayle Rubin's history of Samois, "one of the most influential lesbian organizations of its era," reprinted in *The Leather Times*, the quarterly publication of the Leather Archives & Museum in Chicago, describes the name of the organization as a sign that was obscure enough to avoid attention, yet recognizable among this emerging community (6). In that popular French novel, *Story of O*, "*Samois*" is the French place name for the home of the sole female dominant and a site for BDSM activity among women. "Founded in San Francisco in June 1978 and disbanded in May 1983, Samois was the first known public organization devoted to lesbian sadomasochism (S/M) and was a key player in the confluence of the feminist, gay and lesbian, sexual freedom, and S/M movements of the 1970s" (Rubin 3). Rubin describes Samois' place in the emerging network of early S/M organizations in the 1970s, which included the Janus

⁹ See *Against Masochism*.

¹⁰ See "A Note on Terminology" in Margot Weiss's *Techniques of Pleasure*, or "Introduction: BDSM+SF&F=Love" in Lewis Call's *BDSM in American Science Fiction and Fantasy*.

Society in San Francisco and the Eulenspiegel Society in New York, when public discourse on lesbian S/M expanded in the mid-1970s “as women became more visible in their communities and more vocal in the lesbian, feminist, and gay press” (3). In the feminist and lesbian press, a battle waged over the relationship between feminism and S/M. By 1978, Rubin says a “critical mass was reached in the San Francisco Bay Area” where she and Califia formed Samois. On the S/M movement’s relationship to feminism, Rubin says that Samois never claimed that S/M was particularly feminist, only that there was no inherent contradiction or intrinsic conflict between feminist politics and S/M practice. Rubin’s essay focuses on the *politics* of the largely negative reception of publications and public events in the lesbian and feminist press.

Patrick Califia offers a more *personal* explication in the 1980 essay “Feminism and Sadomasochism.” As a lesbian sadomasochist, “ostracized from the lesbian-feminist community,” Califia’s essay focuses on his personal response to the issue “because sadomasochism is usually dealt with in an abstract, self-righteous way by feminist theorists who believe it is the epitome of misogyny, sexism, and violence” (*Public Sex* 169). Since founding Samois, Califia transitioned to male. First a lesbian sadomasochist, and later as a transgender figure, he continues to complicate the problem of masculine sadism for a feminist understanding of the sadomasochistic aesthetic. At that time, he wanted to reclaim sadomasochistic terms from feminists and defend sexual masochism against hostility from the women’s movement of the late 1970s. Califia argues that although society shapes our sexuality, and our ability to make sexual decisions is limited by the culture that surrounds us, S/M roles are no less the result of the institutionalized injustices of heterosexual marriage. However, as he explains, S/M roles are usually egalitarian and consensual: “S/M is more a parody of the hidden sexual nature of fascism than it is a worship of or acquiescence to it” (*Public Sex* 174). In fact, one of the most difficult

aspects of S/M to understand is the issue of pain. For Califia, S/M does not necessarily involve pain, because the exchange of power roles is more important than pain and pain is a subjective experience. He writes that “S/M violates a taboo that preserves the mysticism of romantic sex because any pain involved is deliberate” (*Public Sex* 175). Califia is critical of feminists who aren’t critical of marriage and romantic love, but who are hostile to the deliberate pain endured in S/M.¹¹

From the late 1970s to 1990s, the lesbian SM counterpublic went beyond supporting the sexual identities of its members, fought censorship by the state, and did the work of “world making¹²” by creating fictional worlds that corresponded with their experience. Califia’s essay, written in 1980, was republished in 1994, in a collection of essays published in response to the Meese Commission.¹³ With this publication, Califa “jumped from the marginalized fringes of gay and lesbian magazines to the best-seller charts” (Strub 264). Califia’s first contribution to the discourse of BDSM was a 1979 article in *The Advocate*. “A Secret Side of Lesbian Sexuality” was “one of the first pieces to appear in the gay press about women who do S/M with other women” (*Public Sex* XIII). As many of the subsequent chapters of this dissertation will explore,

¹¹ Califia explains that while SM is “accused of being a hostile or angry kind of sex, as opposed to the gentle and loving kind of sex that feminists should strive for. The woman’s movement has become increasingly pro-romantic love in the last decade. Lesbians are especially prone to this sentimental trend” (*Public Sex* 177).

¹² See Michael Warner’s definition of a public as poetic world making in *Publics and Counterpublics* (114).

¹³ For a list of sources analyzing the MacKinnon-Dworkin and Meese Commission anti-pornography efforts, see Bronstein (24).

guilt is an important aesthetic marker of literary masochism; in non-fiction discourse on BDSM masochistic subjectivity and guilt are also often combined. Califia must take some guilty pleasure in explaining his past relationship as a sexual radical outside of mainstream feminism. During this decade-long span, from 1979 to 1989, in what Whitney Strub calls, “the post-Foucauldian academic world,” works such as Linda Williams’s *Hard Core* eventually took on a critical examination of pornography and “bypassed liberal feminism’s squeamishness regarding prurience” (Strub 264). Meanwhile, outside of academia, writers like Califa were producing their own alternative feminist pornography.

As an organization, Samois worked to legitimize erotic S/M. Its mission statement sought to be consistent with the principles of feminism, and to oppose all forms of gender based social hierarchy, but the fundamental idea was to also oppose all social hierarchies based on sexual preference (Rubin 2). In 2004, Rubin reflects back, after two decades, to point out that the lesbian S/M movement “was groping toward a proto-queer politics that contained a broader and more inclusive sense of sexual oppression based on specific sexual inequalities” (4).

The reception of the two Samois publications, the pamphlet *What Color is Your Handkerchief: A Lesbian S/M Sexuality Reader* in 1979 and the book, *Coming to Power* in 1981, although “wildly popular,” were banned in some feminist bookstores.¹⁴ Califa describes the first pamphlet that he typed, photocopied, collated, and stapled: “Every small printing of the pamphlet sold out quickly, despite the fact that local women’s bookstores either wouldn’t carry it at all or sold it from under the counter” (*Macho Sluts* 17). In its circulation, feminist and lesbian presses

¹⁴ Califa contributed the essay "A Personal View of the History of the Lesbian S/M Community and Movement in San Francisco", published in *Coming to Power* (1981) and edited *What Color is Your Handkerchief*, SAMOIS (1979).

“published excoriating reviews . . . refused to print supportive commentary, and rejected paid advertisements” (Rubin 5). Rubin reached out and presented lectures at several S/M and leather conference about anti-S/M moral panic, but the gay press or other progressive publications ignored it, according to Califia (*Macho Sluts* 69).¹⁵ Eventually, Samois gained notoriety from its role in the feminist sex wars, particularly with Women against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM), which published *Against Sodomasochism* in 1982. Rubin writes that “[d]espite the fact that WAVPM had no explicit stance on S/M, the organization pioneered a characteristic fusion of anti-S/M and antipornography propositions that shaped virtually all subsequent feminist antipornography ideology and activity” (6).¹⁶ Samois’s significance is as the early witness to this ideology in its “embryonic” form. As a result of this resistance, “Samois helped shatter the hegemony of anti-pornography positions and opened up possibilities for broader discussions of sexuality within feminism” (Rubin 6). Despite opening up broader discussion of sexuality within feminism, a static, polarized response to eroticized images of women and violence *still* characterizes some responses.

Today, in the blogosphere of radical feminists, the protest of eroticized violence against women continues to be a feminist issue. Historian Claire Potter, in her blog for *The Chronicle*, “Tenured Radical,” entered the recent discussion on the vogue in mainstream SM reluctantly,

¹⁵ Rubin wrote *Misguided, Dangerous and Wrong: An Analysis of Anti-Pornography Politics*, a revision of an essay presented before NOW as testimony on the pornography hearings in 1986.

¹⁶ For a detailed history of WAVPM and its relationship to WAVAW and WAP, together “the three most influential feminist media reform groups that led to the movement in the 1970s and the early 1980s” see Carol Bronstein’s account of the anti-pornography movement and analysis of the archives of these three groups (2).

prompted by a cover of *Vogue Hommes International* that featured an image of “a woman being groped and choked” by Si Newhouse. Newhouse, Potter chastises, “should have learned his lesson about publishing violent images 35 years ago.” Her response does not note surprise at eroticized violence; rather, she focuses on the lack of media discussions about this specific cover, which do not discuss “eroticized images of violence against women as a longstanding *feminist* issue, with a *feminist* history” (Potter). For Potter, who is writing a history of the anti-pornography movement, that history includes the New York Radical Women’s protest of the Miss America contest in 1968, protest of the Rolling Stones’ *Black and Blue* album by the Women Against Violence Against Women in 1976, and work done through the anti-pornography movement and from within major corporations.¹⁷

About the long feminist history of eroticized violence against women in print media, Potter is passionate; about E.L James’s trilogy specifically, Potter writes incuriously in the beginning of her blog:

Is it interesting that ~~A Trillion~~ *Fifty Shades of Grey* is popular among straight girls? Not really. What’s more interesting from this historian’s perspective, is that the Grey books, which feature the possibilities of changing your life by becoming

¹⁷ See other analysis of the Warner Communications boycott by WAVAM, which was specifically identified as an example of the connections between violence against women in media and their real lives; however, it also demonstrates how the public education and consumer pressure tactics of WAWAW “persuade[d] companies to exercise corporate responsibility with respect to the images of women used to sell products” (20). Bronstein argues that once the conscious raising moved away from this model, and focused attention on pornography specifically, support for the anti-pornography movement declined.

involved with a ~~wealthy~~ kinky man, are being carried in Barnes and Noble; that having a “man do what a woman wants without being asked” doesn’t include having him give her equal pay for equal work; that a good spanking for the 47% is not in the GOP platform; and that the popularization has finally eviscerated S/M as an edgy sexual practice when, in the 1980s, radical feminism and the New York Department of Health only seemed to make power-exchange more attractive to your average suburban couple.

Potter uses the language of the Grey books repurposed in an explicitly feminist utopian imaginary to reveal real material inequalities. What Potter’s comments show us facetiously connects with what other historians of the early feminist movement and its relationship to the anti-pornography movement, and scholars analyzing BDSM sexuality (Weiss), literature (Call), and queer cultural studies (Freeman) all suggest—namely, that any study of BDSM must consider the material conditions of the sadomasochistic performance. The possibility of “S/M as an edgy sexual practice may have been “eviscerated” by the sheer banality of E.L James’s BDSM light, but we are just beginning to define the aesthetics of BDSM in contemporary literature.

Other historians *do* describe this period as part of the feminist counterpublic. For example, Strub would differ slightly from Potter’s recap of the feminist history of eroticized images, only in its unwavering commitment to discussing eroticized violence without a discussion of pornography. Strub argues in *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* that historiographers of the modern feminist movement have been relatively silent on the relationship of anti-pornography discourse to the early feminist movement. Strub recovers what he calls “the shifting analytical terrain of second-wave

feminism's confrontations with pornography, which were much more varied than anti-porn advocates acknowledged" (213). He argues that although second-wave feminists often protested sexism in pornography, they simultaneously created an alternative feminist pornography "in which women held erotic agency" (Strub 214). The very distinction between "pornography" and "erotica" suppressed that agency: first, by "rendering a 'feminist pornography' inherently oxymoronic; and, second, by defining the qualities of erotica in a way that "deprive[d] female sexuality of any pleasurable prurience, reintroducing femininity into a movement initially predicated on the annihilation of gender roles" (Strub 214).

Samois shows us how a counterpublic, however fleetingly, coalesces around a sexual identity. The discourse of "safe, sane, consensual" is attributed to the larger BDSM community, but in the circulation of that discourse in Samois in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it responded to feminist anti-pornography and anti-SM discourse about rape.¹⁸ Califia's BDSM pornography, for example, simultaneously allows for a fantasized hierarchy of men over women and the fantasy of a separate, feminist egalitarian community, but the figure of the male sadist ultimately receives a feminist retribution in the end, much like Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*. Published just a few years after Russ's novel, Samuel Delany's *Trouble on Triton* (1976), singles out male sadism/female masochism as the only relationship that cannot exist in the erotic utopia of Triton. Delany uses the terms "logical sadism" and "logical masochism" to describe these archaic relationships from the point of view of the future feminist utopia. Samois was a feminist counterpublic to anti-pornography and for lesbian BDSM, but certainly all BDSM doesn't imagine itself as a feminist counterpublic.

¹⁸For a recent discussion of rape and anti-abuse activism in BDSM, particularly in the digital public spheres, see Megan Lieff's article "Safe Words" in *Bitch*.

Reminiscent of Califa and Rubin's analyses of the SM scene in San Francisco in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Margot Weiss's recent ethnographic study of the BDSM community revisited San Francisco 30 years later. In *Techniques of Pleasure*, Weiss restages the debates between anti-SM radical feminists and pro-SM queer positions, but she navigates these by arguing that the SM performance is material, and "deeply tied to capitalist cultural formations; rather than allowing for a kind of freedom from racial, gendered, and sexual hierarchies" (6). Weiss departs from a Foucault-inspired analysis of the radical alterity of BDSM practice, and focuses on thinking about BDSM as a circuit of social relations. "Like an electrical circuit, which works when current flows between individual nodes, the circuits of BDSM work when connections are created between realms that are imagined as isolated and oppressed" (Weiss 7). For example, for her chapter on the public politics and private selves, she thinks about public/private as a false binary and describes the circuits between them.¹⁹

BDSM Pornography/Erotica

In the kinky public sphere, if we think of it as Weiss defines the BDSM community, as a circuit between seemingly opposed publics and private spheres, we might imagine an opposition between radical anti-SM feminists and liberal pro-SM feminists and the discourse for or against BDSM erotic play as energizing the circuit of the BDSM scene. Certainly, in Califa's writing, a

¹⁹ Weiss wants to point out the places where real world structures of inequality are not being investigated, and a BDSM subculture full of Heteronormative Male Dominants (HMDs) from Silicon Valley is an easy target. HMDs, more specifically, "CHUDWAHs," clueless heteronormative dominant wannabes, are "heterosexual men new to the scene—the Silicon Valley practitioners who entered the scene in the 1990s [who] . . . presume parallel [DS, or dominant men and submissive women] and naturalized gender roles (Weiss 177).

component of his style is periodizing the masochistic times of the feminist sex wars. For example, in the original 1988 introduction to *Macho Sluts*, Califia acknowledges that the work will be accused of being “pornographic and thus misogynistic,” and that the collection of stories will be misunderstood as a “piece of hate literature” (52). Analyzing how this new genre, lesbian pornography functions, he takes on one of the fundamental questions for cultural studies in the 1980s, not just for lesbians feminists, but for anyone working in popular literatures. However, whereas most scholars of popular culture had only to take on questions of legitimacy in terms of popular literature’s relationship to high literature in the academy, the politics of pornography were more divisive. At its best, pornography was “worthless trash” and at its worst it was “toxic waste” (Califia 53). Califia’s address to “Reader Mine” considers even the most sympathetic reader, “the nicest sort of liberal who opposes censorship . . . [but] assume[s] that porn isn’t worth defending because it’s thrown together , hurriedly produced garbage intended to make a quick buck” (53). Does having a redeeming social value, compatible with feminism, legitimize pornography? Understanding the ontology of feminist pornography, if such a thing can exist, becomes important not just within the discourse and politics of feminism, but in the larger question of obscenity. As late as 1965, obscenity law was still murky, and as contemporary reviews of one supreme court decision suggest, having a “redeeming social value” might avoid an obscenity charge; however, “titillating marketing, ” in other words a salacious book cover, might irredeemably label a book as obscene.²⁰ The censorship of Califia’s work happens in the

²⁰ See “Obscenity and the Supreme Court.” *The Crimson Review*. 1 April 1966. Web. 13 April 2013. “Justice William Brennan Jr.'s majority opinion is puzzling indeed. Brennan explained that the Court could use a publisher's manner of advertising to determine whether the material itself is obscene. A publication with some kind of ‘redeeming social value’ may escape the obscenity

context of the feminist sex wars; its moment of production is the discourse of the feminist pro-sex counterpublic—1978-1988—and *Macho Sluts* is published in 1988.²¹

Calafia fought anti-pornography legislation written by Catherine McKinnon and successfully fought censorship of his erotic fiction by Canadian Customs. In a new introduction to *Macho Sluts* in 2009, he reflects back on this erotic literature's success and the continued censorship:

Canada Customs had no sense of humor, no respect for queer sexuality, and above all else, no feminist consciousness. *Macho Sluts* got confiscated at the border, and became one of the key books defended in a major censorship case. I have no idea how the folks at Little Sister's Bookstore in Vancouver fought their federal government for so many years. The Supreme Court of Canada eventually agreed that customs officials had indeed overstepped their bounds and were systematically censoring gay literature. (20)

charge. But Brennan seemed to be saying that titillating publicity establishes the obscenity of a book's content. When the material's status is uncertain by other tests, the advertising criterion may tip the scale in favor of labeling the publication obscene.”

²¹ Bronstein dates the anti-pornography movement as 1976-1986, ending with the Supreme Court decision ruling against MacKinnon in 1986, but for my purposes in this chapter, I analyze a decade of pro-sex feminism “after lesbian SM”; so, I begin in 1978, and consider *Macho Sluts* in 1988 as an ending point, although its censorship problems continue into late 1980s. I think about how texts published in the 1970s and 1980s would have circulated within this counterpublic of the feminist public sphere after lesbian SM.

Defining obscenity has often been disguised as the task of defending heteronormative sexuality against “perverse” representations of sexuality.

Antipornography feminists’ willingness to call on the power of the State, as Califia’s censorship illustrates and as Strub’s historiography of feminism argues, parts ways with the initial direction of the feminist movement. Strub claims that “[l]esbian feminists—especially wary of censorship, given the lengthy history of their sexuality being seen as ‘obscene’—in particular, resisted these efforts, indeed, lesbian resistance to censorship provides a far more continuous thread with modern feminism that does antiporn activism” (214). Strub analyzes moments of early reactions to pornography from within feminism, by emphasizing specific responses to sexism, and, importantly with a focus on controlling the means of production as part of feminism’s origins in the anticapitalist Left. Feminist antipornography discourse, however, by focusing on sexuality and rallying women issues such as rape, also distracted political energy from the nuclear family and marriage, and attracted support of the New Right, while losing what Strub calls its anticapitalist moorings (215). The main goal of feminist action against publishers of pornography was for women to take control of the means of production, not censorship.²²

²² Strub argues that Grove Press is a typical example of this issue. Known for its subversive pushing of First Amendment boundaries, Grove’s owner, Barney Rosset fired employees who were trying to unionize in 1970. Robin Morgan, who led eight women in an occupation of the Grove offices in protest” (Strub 221). They also protested against Grove press for profiting ““off the base theme of humiliating, degrading, and dehumanizing women through sado-masochistic literature, pornographic films, and oppressive and exploitative practices against its own female employees”” (Strub 221). However, although their list of demands began with the immediate cessation of all books films, and magazines that degraded women, Strub emphasizes its

Action against pornography, Strub argues, enters the debate predicated on the discourse of labor and power. In examples of sadomasochistic images in feminist literature written by women, how are these images appropriated? Are images *still* “dehumanizing women through sado-masochistic literature” or ironically reappropriating them in postmodern de rigueur, or using sadomasochism beyond satire and an inversion of gender power dynamics, and representing class and racial inequalities?

I turn to BDSM pornography specifically because, as I develop examples of literary masochism, it is important to also identify an example of literary sadism. In Deleuze’s distinctions between literary sadism and masochism, he equates sadism with quick repetitions of violence. To paraphrase, sadism is fast, and masochism is slow. In addition to the sadism itself, the amphetamine-fueled bike chases of Califia’s *Doc and Fluff: A Dystopian Girl and Her Biker* provides an important contrast to the definition of literary masochism as a slowed experience of time that I examine in the rest of the dissertation. *Doc and Fluff* was written in 1990, after the feminist sex wars. Its eponymous characters move between two oppositional communities, the patriarchal Angels biker gang, and the Harpies, the peaceful lesbian refuge from the harsh violence of this post-apocalyptic world. The end-of-days violence is the horizon of a full throttle exploration of BDSM sexuality in both communities—staging the theoretical questions of the anti-pornography debate in a critique of feminist utopian communities. Doc, “the bulldagger” who has a precarious relationship with the bikers based on narcotics-trafficking, takes off on her

alignment with left feminism rather than anti-pornography because their demands then call for child-care, training programs for disadvantaged groups, funds for abortion, birth control, the treatment of rape victims, and, finally, the placement of women in control of 51 percent of editorial decisions (221).

motorcycle with Fluff. Ironically, Doc spirits her away from the Prez, the leader of the biker gang, and his BDSM desires, only to then engage in the same sexual practices with Fluff—but safely, sanely, consensually.

The bike chase, the revenge-seeking, the speed, the cocaine, and the relentless parade of violent sex all happen within the sadistic temporality of pornography. Deleuze describes similarly paced scenes in Sade's *Juliette*: "[I]f only an engraver could record . . . this divine and voluptuous scene! But lust . . . might not have allowed the artist time to portray them. It is not easy for art, which is motionless, to depict an activity the essence of which is movement" (Deleuze 70). In one example, Doc has offered amphetamines to Fluff and takes them herself to stay awake during the anticipated clash with the bikers. This describes the novel's aesthetic speed as the drug speed: "There was enough speed in the acid to make perpetual motion seem like a distinct possibility" (*Doc and Fluff* 32). This drugged experience of perpetual motion is in fact a repetition of violence; anal sex with Fluff has gone from consensual to objectionable. "It took [Doc] a while to realize Fluff was leaving out the word "don't" and saying "please stop" (32). As Doc's drug fueled insensitivity to Fluff worsens in the last third of the novel, when Doc has become Fluff's pimp, Fluff compares the negative aspects of their relationship to relationships with men. Califia writes about struggling with the novel's end, but it seems that drugs, as a stand-in for larger socioeconomic problems, come to substitute for the problems of violence in lesbian BDSM sexuality.

Califia's *Doc and Fluff* demonstrates how BDSM sexuality circulates in the lesbian SM public, and offers an example of sadistic temporality. In contrast, as we see in the next section, feminist utopian novels such as Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), create a masochistic aesthetic and subjectivity, and both develop use representations of BDSM to critique women's

separatist movements.²³ Russ and Califia destabilize gender and illustrate power structures through BDSM aesthetics.²⁴ By analyzing representations of BDSM in 1970s feminist utopian science fiction novels, I look for this feminist and proto-queer politics in both Califia's erotic literature as well as three novels, *The Female Man*, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and *Kindred*. These are all novels that reimagine social hierarchies with a feminist consciousness and a number of other minority subject positions that think about feminism and sexuality, and perhaps proto-queer politics, by intersecting feminism with lesbian, class, racial and ethnic challenges to social hierarchies that manifest in masochistic time.

Masochism, Time Travel, and Images of BDSM in Feminist SF

If we only isolated and analyzed pornographic texts in cultivating a definition of literary masochism, we would risk missing the ubiquity of ways that pro-sex feminist and queer sexual politics circulate in more unexpected places, for example, within feminist science fiction novels. Reflecting on his own personal experiences publishing in the incompatible spheres of BDSM and lesbian sexuality, Califia notes that lesbian-feminist fiction of the 1980s did not correspond with the diverse experiences of his lesbian life, out as an S/M dyke (*Public Sex* XVI). Later, Califia writes about the BDSM public sphere lacunas: "You had to be pretty persistent and widely-read

²³ In "Violence and Utopia: John Norman and Pat Califia," Peter Fitting describes Harpy Farm as "an explicit reworking of the single-sex utopias of the 1970s" (98).

²⁴ Delany, in "Joanna Russ and D.W. Griffith," writes that in Russ, man the oppressor and exploiter of women is not defined by biological sex but rather by something constituted "by socioeconomics as a power structure at work on what Foucault would call a biopolitical field" (502).

to find any reference to BDSM between women in the late 1970s. *The Story of O* was one of the few classics that everybody knew about” (*Macho Sluts* 14). For example, in Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*, published in 1976, the representation of BDSM in the novel is as fleeting as the public sphere within which it might circulate. Piercy doesn’t take up BDSM or pornography in any explicit ways; however, she does begin the story in the context of her niece’s paid sex work, and tells a story of how her sexuality is monitored by the state. Piercy’s novel employs the protagonist Connie, who relates, through flashbacks, a series of misfortunes that eventually leads to her psychiatric hospitalization against her will. While in the hospital, and while the analepses show the reader her past life, Connie develops an ability to communicate with the future. These prolepses, if you believe Connie, or psychotic breaks, if you believe her doctors, allow her to travel to the future with Luciente, to the Mattapoissett community.

I compare the fleeting circulation of BDSM images in Piercy with Russ’s *The Female Man* to argue that the images in Piercy demonstrate the similarities between the public sadism of a pornographic novel and the other publics which dominate Connie; while in Russ the representation of BDSM images not only reverses the dominant positions of power in a feminist context, but creates a masochistic subjectivity. Both, by extension from explicit arguments about patriarchy, also implicate technology, and both use time travel, and other experiences of time, as a masochistic literary experience for both characters and readers.

This novel remains important for thinking about time travel because, beyond the obvious anachronisms, it also catalogues a number of dystopian temporalities. In this novel and its dystopian temporalities, I have identified examples of masochistic time in order to compare the sadistic temporality generated by a scene of interrupted reading with several masochistic pleasures of delay and waiting. For example, Connie herself performs misrecognition of gender

outside of the context of patriarchy. One of the important ways that the novel's delays in time happen is when Connie first learns that Luciente is a woman. Until this time, she and the third person narrator have mistakenly been using the pronoun "he" for Luciente. One of the metaphors, besides the science fiction trope of time travel that Piercy uses to compare different modes of temporality is drugged time. Connie's masochistic subjectivity manifests as the experience of masochistic time.

The first example of masochistic time is the control of Connie's body by the state, an example of what Foucault calls bio-power. In this example of slowness, deferred pleasure, and anxiety control Connie's body, but not her resistant spirit:

As she stood in line for medication, she felt like singing out with joy when she saw the little white cups with the pills inside and the cups of water. No more liquid Thorazine burning her throat hoarse. She bit hard on her cheeks to keep her face immobile. This ward meant less snowing. The line moved so slowly she had time to cover her joy, to crush it into a small corner where she could preserve it intact until she had a chance to examine it in safety. Yes, here her head would be clearer. Not today. She was new on the ward and the nurse watched closely as she took the pill. Afterward she walked slowly through the new ward, slowly as inmates always do. She remembered being horrified by that the first time she had been brought here. The drugs caused it, the heaving; but also the lack of anyplace to go and the time, the leaden time, to use it up Sedately she walked through the sleeping room and into the day room. Here she would get the small exercise of walking, but she must not make it obvious she was pacing. That was an offense that would go on her record: patient paces ward (Piercy 95)

The pleasure of knowing that she will be less medicated in the future must be repressed. She must endure this current sedation with no sign of the joy she feels expressed in her bodily movement, so as not to tip off the nursing staff. The slowed, drugged experience of time here is paired with a repressed joy, and repressed anxiety, and a bodily expression of time as a masochistic pleasure. It is not that Connie enjoys being sedated; but rather that she enjoys the anticipation of a future non-sedated time. Like an inmate, Connie explains not only how the body registers masochistic time, but also that the official record of her body will only register her pacing as a negative response to therapy, instead of her own experience of pleasure. Connie likens the experience to the forced slow movement of inmates, who pace out time under the guise of exercise. Here Piercy uses “the Thorazine shuffle” ironically. Thorazine is used to treat schizophrenia, and “the Thorazine shuffle” describes the body’s response to the medication. The desire to move, Connie associates with the typical effect of the drug, but it is simultaneously an effect of her sober joy, and despite her drugged desire to walk she is confined; however, because of her time travel to the Mattapoissett, Connie believes that she does have somewhere to go, despite her chemical restraints. Connie’s example complicates the idea of consent, because she doesn’t consent to be institutionalized, but performs consent by following the expectations. Her lack of consent and submission to the institution would suggest sadism; but her ability to consent to some things in order to achieve others is minimal. There other examples of torture that Connie does not consent to at all.

Piercy’s use of “snowing” is a curious choice of phrase. A snow marks a period of time, one winter. *The Oxford English Dictionary Online* lists a variety of slang connections between snow and cocaine and heroin, and suggested “snowed” as a synonym for intoxication. Here, Connie will be “less snowed,” less medicated, than she was on other wards where liquid

medicine, Thorazine, is given to patients. In this ward, where there are pills, she can hide the pill in her mouth and spit it out later. “Snowed” thus seems to describe any drugged time, both the sped up time of cocaine use and the slowed time of Thorazine. In another example of alternative degrees of consciousness in the novel, when Luciente tries to explain Connie’s receptiveness as a “catcher,” or someone able to time travel, he (Luciente is still perceived as male at this point) tells her that the language of her time is “remarkably weak in descriptions of mental states” (Piercy 42). Interestingly, *The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional Language* describes “snow time” as a mental state; it lists “snow time” as a description of the “infatuated time of a relationship.”²⁵ This stage of puppy love, or “snow time,” is impaired like the drugged time of cocaine use suggests, like the slang “snow blind.” To “be snowed” is to be deceived, by flattery, love, or drug impaired-perceptions. “Snow time,” in contrast to its literal connotation of the bleak days of winter, suggests the pleasure of being blissfully unaware. Like the somnolent condition created by one exhausted from having walked in snow, like Connie pacing out her snowed time in the hospital ward, the body experiencing masochistic time enters a snow-sleep.

Similarly used to describe her loss of consciousness, the “leaden time” that Connie describes in this passage resembles a passage earlier in the novel when she is admitted to the hospital. The scene where her niece and her pimp are in her apartment ends with Connie being knocked out by a punch. There, the next sentence begins with her struggling to regain consciousness. There has been a prolepsis in the narrative, during which, Connie has been admitted to the hospital. The narrator describes this gap in time in language that suggests the

²⁵ It cites usage in *Time Magazine*. See page 46, Aug 24 1959 (qtd. in *New Partridge Dictionary*).

terms of hospital restraint, but because the reader doesn't know she has been admitted to the hospital, one first reads this as a possible kidnapping and torture, or BDSM:

She lay tied with straps to a bed, staring up at a bare bulb, shot up with meds. Thorazine? It felt worse, heavier. A massive dose. Hospital trunks hit her like a bulldozer when she had taken nothing for a long time. Prolixin? Whenever she sank into unconsciousness, she was tortured by clamps on her hips, her breasts, she was trapped in her old Chicago flat in a fire. The flames licked her skin. Her lungs filled with choking smoke. She tried and tried to pull clear of something that had fallen on her, to escape. She could not move. (Piercy 16)

Like the description of sedation time as leaden, this experience of sedation feels “worse, heavier” (Piercy 16). She is tortured by clamps, trapped, and choking under the effects the drug has on her body. It is after this experience of masochistic time in terms of the effects of the drugs on her body that Connie realizes that her body also aches because she has been beaten twice before getting to the hospital. This experience also sends her back in time, figuratively, in an example of analepsis, (not a literal experience of time travel with Luciente) because the trauma reminds her of the fire in her apartment. When Connie refuses her meds in a later scene, and is given four times the dose she had fought, she describes the experience again like a watch running down: “Captivity stretched before her like a hall with no doors and no windows, yawning under dim bulbs. Surely she would die here. Her heart would beat more and more slowly and then stop, like a watch running down. At that thought her heart began to race in her chest” (Piercy 60).

Likewise, when Connie travels back and forth in time she describes this feeling as “leaden, her feet wading through loose sand” (Piercy 78). Luciente tells her this is “only a false spring, a

January thaw of beginning. Back you go” as he sends her back to her time, after a thaw in her snowed-out time at the hospital (Piercy 71).

Masochistic time describes both the experience and the techniques through which Connie’s imprisoned body is subjected to the manipulation of her bio-power. Considering the role of hallucinogenic drugs (and other forms of visual distantiation like the blind fold or strobe light) in the BDSM aesthetic, Freeman argues that this produces a “temporal noncoincidence” which makes one aware of the body as an object (139). This control of Connie’s body contrasts with Luciente’s body, not only in the sense that her body is not imprisoned, but also that for 65 pages it is not clear that she is a woman. Her gender, for the reader, is fluid. This transgendered body in time is created by Connie’s misperception of Luciente’s gender. Connie sees Luciente as a man, because Luciente behaves in ways that are anachronistic for a woman in Connie’s present. Connie perceives Luciente as a boy when (s)he travels to her time, and slowly as a woman when she travels to his(her) time. When she realizes that Luciente has breasts, she is surprised. She describes how gender norms are another way of controlling the body. Again, she anxiously paces as Luciente says:

“You seem surprised that I am female?” . . . Feeling like a fool, Connie did not choose to reply. Instead she paced to the locked door with its peephole and then to the radiator. Luciente spoke, she moved with that air of brisk unself-conscious authority Connie associated with men. Luciente sat down, taking up more space than women ever did. She squatted, she sprawled, she strolled, never thinking about how her body is displayed. It was hard to pace with dignity in the tiny space stained mattress and the wall. Connie no longer felt in the least afraid of Luciente. (Piercy 67)

The anxiety of identifying Luciente's gender is not the only thing that has Connie pacing. Now Connie reads Luciente's body language not only as a body displaced from one time to another, but also as a body displaced from one gender to another. The displacement in time of a utopic feminist body occupies the same time and space—the same tiny, dystopic space—designed to control Connie's pacing body. The experience of these anachronistic juxtapositions of utopic and dystopic feminist bodies can only be a masochistic pleasure for Connie. She explores a possible future where her body would not be controlled by state apparatuses, yet she explores that possibility while she is confined in a state mental hospital in a drug-induced state. As the state's control of her body becomes the most invasive, her ability to time travel to the utopia diminishes.

In order to develop the novel's exploration of masochistic subjectivity through a woman institutionalized against her own will in the context of her class, race, and gender, I want to compare the structure of Piercy's novel to discussions of the structures in African American novels that make distinctions between slave narratives, which tell a tale of captivity in slavery, and neo-slave narratives and liberation narratives, which make finer distinctions about the person's freedom. Connie's first attempt at escape fails, and ultimately sends her back to the mental hospital. Because the end of the novel also continues Connie's stay in the hospital, one could argue that her story is not a liberation narrative; however, it is if one reads her subversive behavior as part of her going to "war." In fact, Connie's first attempt at escape resembles slave narratives and neo-slave narratives where the person fleeing slavery is recaptured. Especially interesting in this scene of the novel is the inclusion of representations of BDSM into this slave narrative aesthetic.

When Connie asks too many questions about the price of the bus ticket to New York, her unkempt appearance and clothes, her lack of money, her poverty and her race tip off the clerk to

her potential criminality—she might be a vagrant. The young man asks: “Don’t you know where you want to go, lady?” (Piercy 256). As in many African American slave narratives, the effects of attempted escape from her imprisonment are written on Connie’s body. The description of her feet swollen and blistered because her shoes have fallen apart, her travelling on foot and avoiding main highways, and her lack of money or food figure her as a runaway. In this uneasy encounter with a young white man, Connie notices the bored clerk reading. Reading is suspicious behavior for Connie; it immediately signals class difference. In the hospital, she reads to prove to the nursing staff that she is well. Connie’s fear of interacting with this man, is a class anxiety, too, and once she sees what he is reading, she seems disgusted:

She could not see the title. He wanted to get back to it and kept his finger stuck between the pages while he talked to her. When he had to let to go get the schedules out, he was irritated. He stuck a pencil in. On the cover two naked women embraced while a man about eight feet tall dressed all in black leather cracked a whip around them. Why would anyone read a dirty book in a bus station, sitting behind the counter? Could he bring himself off back there? Would he go into the john? She then felt embarrassed wondering such things as she looked into his blank young face, sallow under the fluorescent lights. (Piercy 256)

There are three things of note in this example: the reader’s experience of interrupted pleasure, the actual images of BDSM, and, finally, Connie’s reaction to it, or her moral outrage. First, the interruption of reading illustrates an experience of masochistic time, the delay of pleasure and frustrated desire, for the young man who wants to return to his sadistic pornographic narrative, if

we can judge only from the book cover²⁶. This unease caused by the interruption of his narrative reinforces the unease Connie feels in this stage of her escape. Second, this image, as one of the few depictions of BDSM in the novel, seems to correlate with the pattern of violent men in Connie's life: her niece's pimp, her husbands who beat her, the brother who commits her to the hospital, and the male doctors who subject her unwillingly to the implantation of the device in her head. This sadistic image signals a panoptic male gaze, which will send Connie back to her ward in the hospital. Third, Connie's perception of the BDSM image here seems to reinforce

²⁶ Regarding criminal obscenity, see legal cases like the 1965 case, 383 U.S. 502, *Mishkin v. The State of New York*. It describes the appellant's "dominant role" in publishing obscene books. Not only the obscenity of the sexual practices imagined, but also the bookcovers are described: "Fifty books are involved in this case Many have covers with drawings of scantily clad women being whipped, beaten, tortured, or abused. Many, if not most, are photo-offsets of typewritten books written and illustrated by authors and artists according to detailed instructions given by the appellant [O]ne author . . . testified that appellant insisted that the books be 'full of sex scenes and lesbian scenes. . . (T)he sex had to be very strong, it had to be rough, it had to be clearly spelled out . . . (T)he sex scenes had to be unusual sex scenes between men and women, and women and women, and men and men . . . (H)e wanted scenes in which women were making love with women . . . (H)e wanted sex scenes . . . in which there were lesbian scenes. He didn't call it lesbian, but he described women making love to women and men . . . making love to men, and there were spankings and scenes—sex in an abnormal and irregular fashion.' Another author testified that the appellant instructed him 'to deal very graphically with the darkening of the flesh under flagellation.' Artists testified in similar vein as to appellant's instructions regarding illustrations and covers for the books.

traditional power roles in terms of gender: a powerful, sadistic male whips two naked women. Connie's reaction to witnessing someone reading pornography is embarrassment, as she wonders if the man will not only read the dirty book in public, but also masturbate in this public place as well. Connie's embarrassment is part of the masochistic aesthetic, and she is right to sense a threat there will be consequences for this interrupted pleasure. Embarrassment, like suffering, guilt, and humiliation, are affects demonstrated by the masochist in what Deleuze identify as the "persuasive feature" of masochism (75). The masochist unconsciously creates situations in which she is embarrassed. Piercy writes: "The young man whose dirty book she had interrupted had turned her in" (257). The police grab Connie and take her back to the hospital. The image of BDSM that she sees on the cover foreshadows her continued subjection to abuses of power by men, the police, the doctors, and the sadistic male reader.

Connie's mere attention to the BDSM book cover constitutes a public with real consequences of violent bondage for her. Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* would remind us that "a public is constituted through mere attention" (67). By attending to the BDSM sexuality of the book, Connie seems to have created a public in which she is a slave. How the fictional BDSM book cover circulates within the novel in the context of masochistic time illustrates the performative nature of publics and sadomasochism. Even though there are moments of masochistic time, in Piercy's novel, ultimately, the circulation of a sadistic text creates a sadistic public sphere and a subjectivity as a victim. In contrast, Russ's novel, the circulation of a feminist appropriation of a similar image, thus circulates a BDSM image as a feminist counterpublic and a masochistic subjectivity with agency.

The book cover that Connie sees differs greatly from the BDSM image on one of the paperback covers of Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*. The illustrator for this cover, Peter Andrew

Jones, reinterprets Jael and Davy's relationship in artwork titled, "Space Queen." This cover with a scantily clad woman, depicts Jael in the most BDSM-like staging of any other paperback cover for the novel. Jael holds the chains around a more chimp-like Davy chained at her feet. Besides the clear staging of the BDSM relationship, this cover emphasizes the post-human aspects of BDSM by foregrounding Jael's cyborgness and Davy's chimpanzee DNA. The illustrator chooses not to show Davy as the blond-haired and blue-eyed physical ideal that Jael describes in the novel, and instead represents Davy as more animal-like. Jael tells the reader that Davy is "the most beautiful man in the world" . . . "my ice lad in a cloud of gold hair and nudity . . . drowned blue eyes" (Russ 185). Davy is "a limb of the house" who has electrodes in his brain, which are controlled by a central computer. "The original germ-plasma was chimpanzee, I think, but none of the behavior is organically controlled anymore" (199). Clearly, Jones's illustration hones in on this description of Davy, and an earlier description of his behavior as cat-like, rather than his "ice lad" beauty.

Is Davy her sexual slave? To the reader Jael seems clear on Davy's state of mind, she admits a possibility that he has some hidden consciousness, but she "prefers to believe not;" however, it's hard to define Davy's status, because Jael simultaneously taunts and provokes the other women by saying that he is lobotomized or was kidnapped as a child. She flirts with other taboos, and states: "Alas! those who were shocked at my making love that way to a man are now shocked at my making love to a machine; you can't win" (Russ 200). Besides the shock of lesbian eroticism in Janet's utopia, there are layers of ideas about sexuality being challenged here in Jael's behavior: the reversal of gender roles, the sexually aggressive woman, BDSM sex, and sex with a robot/machine.

The Jones' cover of *The Female Man* is a pastiche of Frank Frazetta fantasy art. David Hinkley notes that "after two decades of drawing mainly for comic books and comic strips, ranging from *L'il Abner* to *Playboy's Little Annie Fannie*, Frazetta would have seemed an unlikely candidate to emerge as the premiere artist of fantasy paperback covers in the late 1960s" (144). Foregrounded nearly naked figures are a key part of Frazetta's style. Betty Ballantine, in *The Fantastic Art of Frank Frazetta*, claims that "the Frazetta female . . . is uniquely his own" (n. pag.). Ballantine describes:

the Frazetta female is small of stature but lushly rounded and curved. She is recognizable just about anywhere, whether over the withers of a horse, or the shoulder of a large human male, or sometimes contesting with gigantic creatures from paleolithic times or imperiously commanding a swamp monster, or controlling some fantastic creature of the deep. She is a sorceress, a child, a woman; she is erotic, she is improbable and lovely and very much alive.

Although Ballantine's description suggests "imperiously commanding" or "controlling" monsters and creatures of the deep, in the images in *The Fantastic Art of Frank Frazetta*, the female figure is much more likely to be prostrate, in danger, and eroticized. Exceptions to this type include three different illustrations of a woman and a tiger: "Egyptian Queen" (21), "Tiger Woman" (22), and "Sun Goddess" (38), which picture women somewhat in control of the large tigers and saber tooth tigers that share the frame. In images where a man is present, the woman is on equal footing in two images: one where she is sorceress above a man on a horse in armor in "The Apparition" (14) and in "At the Earth's Core" (18), in which the woman stands up to a giant creature. The images of the woman riding the saber tooth tiger bear the most resemblance to Jones's illustration of *The Female Man*. The pose of Jael in this cover is very similar to the

Egyptian Queen, who stares at the viewer with kohl-lined eyes, large breasts adorned with decoration, and hips and belly thrust forward. Like Davy chained at Jael's feet, there is a tiger chained at the bottom of the "Egyptian Queen" illustration. However, in the "Egyptian Queen" there is a man in the extreme background, lurking in the shadows with a sword. In the illustration of Jael, she has embedded in her nails the steel claws that make her an assassin.

Visually, the BDSM pastiche of the Frank Frazetta style invokes the swords and sorcery/barbarian novel, despite the clear setting in outer space in the Jones illustration. By invoking the sword and sorcery subgenre, the pastiche of Frazetta's work draws on a long history of illustrations that focus on the conflict "between the civilized and the savage" (Hinkley 141). The reversal of the gender roles, when compared to the *Gor*²⁷ novels, for example, is compelling. In Piercy the BDSM book cover represents a threat, but in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, the inclusion of BDSM imagery demonstrates a reversal of power roles. In Jones's illustration and Russ's novel, Jael becomes the post-human cyborg and the figure of strength.

Russ's use of the BDSM aesthetic in the section with Jael and Davy makes a connection between guilt and BDSM by interrupting the scenes where Davy is a man in bondage, and the sex scene with Davy. When the reader first sees Davy, "the most beautiful man in the world," he serves drinks to the women yet is "curled up most unwaiterlike at [Jael's] feet" (Russ 185). The inegalitarian relationship between Davy and Jael plays on the feminist reader's guilt as part of the aesthetics of masochism. In masochistic fantasy, the masochistic subject provokes situations that create anxiety and guilt, for example violating the contract with the torturer, and punishment

²⁷ The first of the *Gor* novels, a widely read SF series infamous for its counter-Earth SM, *Tarnsman of Gor*, was written by John Norman and published in 1966. The 1976 book cover was illustrated by Boris Vallejo.

resolves these feelings. In this case, we could say that the inegalitarian BDSM relationships, such as Jael and Davy's, violate "the contract" with the feminist reader because feminism would ideally do away with all hierarchies, which Davy's male masochistic subjectivity troubles.

Weiss's analysis of BDSM communities as techniques of fashioning the self, helps us to understand and expand on readings of this scene in science fiction criticism. For example, Veronica Hollinger argues in *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction* argues:

It is exemplary of a queer turn, or the deeply unnatural relations among human sex, gender, and sexual orientation. At the centre of [this] reading of *The Female Man* is the novel's 'primal scene,' in which the cyborg assassin Jael . . . fucks her toy-boy Davy, a scene witnessed with shock by her other selves, Joanna, Jeannine, and Janet Evanson. What they think they are seeing, however, is not what is in fact occurring. The truth is even more perverse than the appearance: Russ's cyborg is fucking (with) technology and the stage is set for another fiction about 'sex.' (Hollinger 152)

Hollinger's description of "another fiction" about sex references Judith Butler's description of sex as a fiction in *Bodies that Matter*.²⁸ Jael is also fucking (with) another fiction, the technologies of the self. Like the masochistic subjectivity created in by the circulation of BDSM images in feminist science fiction novels like Piercy and Russ, Octavia Butler's *Kindred* also creates a masochistic subjectivity in the neo-slave narrative that surprisingly draws on the science fiction trope of time travel.

²⁸ See Judith Butler: "If gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this 'sex' except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that 'sex' becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy..." (5).

The Erotics of Masochistic Time in *Kindred*

In discussions of the aesthetics of sadomasochism in African American literature, one might expect the slave narrative to depict the dominant, sadistic desire of the slave owner whipping the submissive slave with pleasure, but, the neo-slave narrative, sometimes counter-intuitively, stages masochistic desire. My reading of masochistic time in *Kindred* posits the importance of temporality in the critical discussion of sadomasochistic desire in the neo-slave narrative²⁹. I argue that the mechanics of time travel are explained through sadomasochistic temporality, and read the disordered experience of time through the conventions of Octavia Butler's neo-slave narrative, *Kindred*, as a hybrid of popular literature genres: science fiction, historical fiction, and erotic fiction. I argue that the anachrony of the novel exceeds an understanding of temporality as a mere crossing-over of 19th and 20th century temporalities. I compare the combination of time travel and other anachronies with masochistic subjectivity as a compelling example of masochistic time. The characteristics of literary masochism come from the role-play, or the historical performance of slavery, and the poetics of delay, waiting, and slowness that subsequent chapters of the dissertation will continue to analyze. I argue that pain focalizes the time travel, and that the anachronies of the novel can best be understood through the aesthetics of masochism, especially the eroticization of the contract in the turning point in Rufus and Dana's relationship. Deleuze's study of masochism analyzes the role of the contract in masochistic fantasy, so reading the contract in this context, rather than simply the historical context of American slavery, adds a different set of aesthetic characteristics. Deleuze identifies four formal

²⁹ Basu claims that Octavia Butler "dismisses the mechanics and the reasons for time travel quite cursorily" (138).

characteristics of masochism that Theodore Reik outlined first, (the special significance of fantasy, the suspense factor, the persuasive feather, and the provocative fear) and adds the fifth characteristic, the contract.³⁰

In *The Commerce of Peoples: The Sadomasochistic Aesthetic in African American Literature*, Biman Basu describes the historical background of sadomasochism by critiquing Foucault's claims about the anachronism of sadomasochism in *Discipline and Punish*, by pointing out that corporeal punishment in the context of American Slavery was not only *still* practiced in the United States mid-nineteenth century, but was *still* circulating in the public sphere in the form of slave narratives and novels about slavery such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

My reading of masochistic time in Butler's novel draws on examples of queer temporality, despite arguments that sadomasochism is a "*normatively*" sexualized practice. Basu focuses on the historical element of sadomasochism and identifies a "utopian past-present-future trajectory in sadomasochistic practice" while I want to recover the anachrony of time travel and other experiences of disordered time, for example, the competing temporalities of slave time, the chronological time of first person narratives, and the postmodern effects of disordered temporality in the neo-slave narrative (4).³¹ Basu identifies sadistic desire in the slave owners

³⁰ In the masochistic relationship, the contract "is drawn up between the subject and the torturess . . . The masochist appears to be held by chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone" (Deleuze 75).

³¹ Pratt makes the argument that although slave narratives unfold in chronological time, telling a progressive tale of humanity, other examples of slave time, such as laboring time and spirit time, even the direct address of the life narratives, are not so linear (158).

executing punishment, for example in Frederick Douglass's narrative.³² The "pleasure" of whipping a slave is an example of sexual sadism. As evidence of sadomasochistic desire, Basu examines the catalog of 19th century cases in Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* as another source of documenting sadomasochistic desire that mentions slavery. He cites one case that references American slavery particularly as a sexual stimulant: "The thought of slavery had something exciting in it for me, alike whether from the standpoint of master or servant . . . [when] reading 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' [I] had erections" (qtd in Basu 33).³³ Most interesting in this example is that the eroticization of slavery can be exciting either from the standpoint of the master or the servant. In contemporary critical analysis, however, eroticizing the masochistic position of the slave often meets with resistance.

In the sadomasochistic desire of the Krafft-Ebing case study, it is hard to extricate the sadistic pleasure from the masochistic pleasure. Basu's research on Freud and Krafft-Ebing about the pleasure derived from reading African American slave narratives argues that the readers identify with the "female/passive/submissive/object," and they "are affectively aligned with the latter (37), even though the Krafft-Ebing example above notes an arousal "whether from the standpoint of master or servant." In my identification of masochistic subjectivity, particularly in the attention to literary masochism, I analyze images of waiting, delay, anticipation, and slowness as part of the affective, temporal aesthetic characteristics of literary masochism and

³² Basu explains, "In the slave narratives we find multiple descriptions of sadistic desire. Perhaps most famous among them is Frederick Douglass's description of that 'most terrible spectacle' when his Aunt Hester is punished by his master, Captain Anthony...Douglass observes that Captain Anthony would 'take great pleasure in whipping a slave'" (35).

³³ See also the Krafft-Ebing Case 57 (95-96).

distinct, in this example, from literary sadism. Although it resembles the slave narratives, the masochistic subjectivity in *Kindred* is part of the neo-slave narrative aesthetic and a temporal hybrid of past and present. To eroticize this masochistic subjectivity is to verge on the pornographic and an out-of-date desire.

The threat of censorship of sadomasochistic sexuality suggests one connection to queer identity; another is Freeman's analysis of queer temporality as a hybrid, which resonates with the African American literary traditions. The personification of the unresolved past that is out of place and haunting the present has themed other "liberatory narratives" such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The past haunts not only fiction, but literary criticism of slave narratives as well. In the literary criticism on twentieth and twenty-first century narratives of historical fiction that revisit the issues of slavery, there is a distinction in terminology between texts that are more or less engaged in rejecting the inheritances of the nineteenth century. Supposedly then, neo-slave narratives similarly mark out less 21st century territory than the liberatory novel. The rejection of the inherited historical and literary master narratives characterizes the goal of the liberatory novel³⁴.

Liberation from the dominant master narratives of patriarchy, or racism begins with a critique of those roles. Freeman thinks about "sadomasochistic role-play, especially between black people and white people" as erotohistoriography:

³⁴ Amanda Davis, in a review of *The Freedom to Remember*, summarizes Angelyn Mitchell's encouragement of "the use of a new vocabulary for how we name and categorize both neo-slave and slave narratives that depart from a language of bondage and that resist fixed definitions of literary traditions...Epistemological liberation from dominant master narratives must begin [with] a critique of the linguist signs that construct and structure our reality" (Davis 302).

By ‘role-play,’ I mean not only the conscious assumption of “top” and “bottom” personae who respectively give and receive pain but also the use of props and costuming that suggests specific social forms of power such as police officer or prison guard, and/or the historically specific time periods such as Nazi Germany or the Spanish Inquisition. The latter activities comment on ‘history’ in simultaneously corporeal and symbolic ways. Sadomasochism has certainly been read as the cumulative effect of traumatic relations between parents and children, as a rehearsal of horrifying misuses of power at particular historical moments, and/or as a commentary on the asymmetrical organizations of power in everyday life. But however one views S/M, it is inescapably true that the body in sadomasochistic ritual becomes a means of invoking history—personal pasts, collective suffering, and quotidian forms of injustice—in an idiom of pleasure.

(137)

Imagining Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* as part of the discourse of sadomasochism allows “a means of invoking history” in an idiom of masochistic pleasure. Published in 1979, the same year as Samois’ first publication, the lesbian SM reader, *Kindred* is part of the moment of production in the discourse of the feminist pro-sex counterpublic. It’s not only important to remember the fracturing in feminism around race simultaneously with the feminist sex wars of the 80s, but to theorize sadomasochistic desire transnationally, as Basu models in his analysis of the transnational public sphere of slavery and the representation of African American slave narratives in a transnational sadomasochistic aesthetic. By moving transnationally, we cross different spatial, geographical and national boundaries, but also different temporalities.

There is certainly something titillating about eroticizing what is often regarded as young adult fiction. As the title might suggest, *Kindred's* kinky potential is not only the eroticized Slave/Master context, but also the peculiar kink of sex with one's ancestor. Despite the anticipated threat of incestuous, sexual violence from the African American protagonist's white ancestors, Butler's *Kindred* is a more traditional narrative of the nuclear family than the feminist science fiction that Piercy or Russ write; in fact, it imagines the problems of the nuclear family as part of a complicated historical tradition of the peculiar intimacies of slavery. A biracial couple centers the novel, but their travel back in time to the early nineteenth century and their interactions with the African-American protagonist's white slave-owning ancestors complicates the epistemology of the family. The novel's suggestion of rape and incest, outside of historical slavery, recontextualizes the peculiar sexualities of slavery.

Although the time traveling creates complicated familial relationships, Kevin and Dana's deviant interracial relationship, of which neither of their families approve, is part of the switching political foreground and background that the novel creates. It is often during violent spells of whipping and physical abuse that Dana travels back in forth in time, and the novel both begins and concludes with the story of the amputated arm that she receives as a result of her time travel and the violent interactions with her ancestors. Of course, in this context the sadomasochistic dynamic has obvious significations about power that are always understood more subtly in the neo-slave narrative. Basu argues that the framing of the representations of slavery with the peculiar intimacies of Dana, Rufus, the slave owner Dana's white ancestor, and Alice, Dana's black ancestor and the mother of Rufus's children, creates what is "new" about the neo-slave narrative: the exploration of masochistic desire (143). Alice, as the slave foil to Dana's willing, masochistic enslavement stands in as the person who has the actual "historical" sexual

relationship with the master, while Dana provides the contemporary, eroticized, critical re-framing of the sexual contract between sadist and masochist.

The prologue to the novel begins with an analepsis, with events that happen near the end of the story. Dana has an injury sustained during her time travel that her husband cannot explain to the police. The story begins *in media res* with a description of masochistic time—a period of anxious waiting, guilt, persuasion, physical pain, and fear. Several features of masochism like the special significance of fantasy, the demonstration of humiliation and suffering, and the provocative fear or the aggressive demanding of punishment to resolve anxiety are exaggerated in this science fiction-like neo-slave narrative. It is Kevin's inability to explain this science fiction, or fantasy wound to the police that begins the story. Thus, the prologue begins with a physically injured Dana trying to convince the police that her husband is not the person who has hurt her. Dana lists the things she has lost: her left arm, a year of her life, and much of the comfort and security of her life; she has not yet lost her husband, Kevin. Butler describes the comfort of Kevin as something that she must *wait* for, and to *persuade* the police to let him out of jail. Dana will translate her unexplainable trauma into a familiar context, when she likens her trauma to that of a victim of robbery or rape—"a victim who survives, but who doesn't feel safe anymore" (17). Dana's trauma, however, performs a historical trauma as well as a personal injury. In contrast with other narratives about slavery—*Beloved*, for example,—where the past manifests as the ghost of a dead child, Dana's traumatic experience of slavery will play out in time travel described in terms of pain and losing consciousness.

The novel explains how pain focalizes the narrative back and forth in time not only in the prologue, and the first incident, but more explicitly the second time that Dana time travels, when a slave patroller beats her. The patroller, like the man reading the BDSM novel in Piercy's novel,

like the police who interrogate her in the prologue, is in fact in a position to survey and to police her movement. She describes the pain of being beaten by him: “I had never been beaten that way before—would never have thought I could absorb so much punishment without losing consciousness” (42). Whether or not Dana will lose consciousness and in which century she will wake up is part of the narrative’s suspense. The next section begins, “[p]ain dragged me back to consciousness,” and Dana confuses her husband for the patroller until she realizes it is Kevin. In addition to pain as the explication for time travel, the metaphor of coming in and out of consciousness also indicates Dana’s switching back and forth between 19th century and 20th century mindsets as Dana grapples with her masochistic identity from the past when she returns to the 1970s. “Consciousness” also suggests her post-civil rights politics and feminist consciousness.

One thing that often distinguishes science fiction from fantasy is the explanation of an unusual event. For example, time travel could be used to distinguish between the genres. In Washington Irvin’s *Rip van Winkle* the character falls into an enchanted sleep and wakes up in the future with no explanation; however, in H.G. Wells’ *Time Machine* the explanation of the time machine is important to the narrative, even though its description is vague (Marsi 4). Piercy and Russ explain time travel as a possibility of a future technology and a receptiveness in the 20th century character. In Piercy’s time travel, there is also a suggestion that Connie’s mind is uniquely able to communicate with the future, despite the fact that the end of the novel undermines that with her schizophrenic diagnosis. There is a strong similarity between the protagonists in *Kindred* and *Woman on the Edge of Time* because the time travel is both physically and psychologically distressing for them. Both of the women, one in the present and one in the past, are institutionally imprisoned or enslaved or institutionally imprisoned against

their own will, and both women's time travel connects to the experience of pain. In other words, a masochistic experience of pain is the "scientific" explanation of their time travel. In *Kindred*, time travel functions as a masochistic experience of historical slavery.³⁵ Both the fantasy of BDSM erotics, and the SF time-travel through masochistic anachronies of slave time, all blur the genre distinctions that help identify it as an example of literary masochism.

The interiority of *Kindred* distinguished it from earlier neo-slave narratives like Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*, because it creates a masochistic subjectivity. *Kindred* shares some things with Russ's earlier novel, *The Female Man*: both imagine a time travel where the contemporary victim can travel back in time to confront a character who stands in for the historical problem. Similarly, in Russ's novel, *Jael*, the female assassin from the future, travels back in time during the women's liberation movement in the U.S. to ally herself with 20th century women. The novel stages sadomasochistic pleasure in this confrontation with patriarchy as a moment of time travel. Analyzing Butler's novel *Kindred* with Freeman's term erotohistoriography in terms of sadomasochism involves first thinking about the role of fiction in telling history. Secondly, we must consider the methodology for analyzing fiction in terms of history written on the body. Finally, we should consider that this fiction is committed to the performance of anachrony, or the disordered experience of time in the novel. In the following example, I explore how the contract between Rufus and Dana allows them to perform the roles of Slave/Master anachronistically (because Dana is a free woman from the post-Civil Rights U.S.).

³⁵ Henry Louis Gates describes American slavery's erasure of the birth date and genealogy as a deprivation of time, and explains that within this "time machine," the slave had no reference points and "stands outside of time" (100-101). See "The Literatures of the Slave," *Figures in Black*, 1986.

Despite the role-play of the contract, Dana is whipped as if she were a “real” slave, and this performance of history is written on the body of the anachronistic Dana. By being out of synch with the nineteenth century, Dana’s suffering in slavery functions as an erotohistoriography of the fictions about the past, able to maintain the affective response of the contemporary reader who identifies with Dana while experiencing the whipping of the slave. The contract in *Kindred* is a rhetorical feature of BDSM communities, and functions as what Weiss, via Foucault, would call a “technique of the self.” In the novel, this contract also re-imagines the legal legacy of slavery. There are several categories of scenes from the slave narrative, which are re-purposed in the neo-slave narrative, but two of them that figure most importantly here are the scenes of service and scenes of corporal punishment. Basu claims that “sexuality cannot be extricated from them” (32); I argue, however, that the eroticization of the contract between Rufus and Dana is the climax in the novel. The desire represented topically, in the story of slavery, simultaneously creates a narrative climax when sadomasochistic desire becomes a threat. When Rufus’s violence finally escalates towards Dana, she describes the event as a violation of a contract: “He hit me. It was a first, and so unexpected that I stumbled backward and fell. And it was a mistake. It was the breaking of an unspoken agreement between us—a very basic agreement—and he knew it” (Butler 239). Dana then cuts her own wrists and returns to 1976. Her decision to cut her wrists sends her back to her time. As someone playing-at slavery, her service and her corporeal punishment have been contractual. Rufus must always know that she is not really a slave—this is the nature of their contract.

The contract is anachronistic. The eroticization of the contract changes diachronically, just as Dana’s relationship to white men is in flux. The novel plays on the anachronisms of submission by combining discourse about domestic violence, letting a man hit you, with

discourse on slavery and slave women's lack of any agency in relationships with white men. In *Kindred*, the explicit legal condition of slavery becomes implicit; and the implicit BDSM contract in the rhetorical discourse of consent becomes explicit, both because Dana is neither completely a slave, nor a free subject. The contract exists in what Freeman would call the hybrid time of a sadomasochistic performance, but Dana's experience of masochistic time complicates critical descriptions of time as binary, or even hybrid.

There are other ways, besides time travel itself, in which Dana operates in two temporalities. *Kindred* might circulate as a neo-slave narrative in most publics, but reading the novel for literary masochism and creation of masochistic subjectivity, shows how the novel uses the conflicting temporalities of slave time to create the poetics of delay, waiting, and slowness. One slave woman's advice to her on her first experience working in the fields is about navigating the imperative to work quickly, yet understanding the necessity of working slowly (212-213). The neo-slave narrative, which doesn't have the same burden to demonstrate a narrative of linear, human progress as the slave narrative, can distort experiences of time in ways that the slave narrative doesn't. This disavowal of laboring time as a non-progressive temporality compares to how other scholars have read the less-examined examples of non-linear temporality in Frederick Douglass.³⁶ In *Kindred*, as in Douglass, there are examples of linear narrative time being disrupted by laboring time. Sometimes, when Dana fades in and out of consciousness, there is a filmic fadeout or transition between the images. She (and the reader) are uncertain about whether she is time traveling, and if Kevin is going with her. The persistence of the image is sometimes described in the novel as "slow motion" (107). At one point, Dana and Kevin have traveled back to 1819 together, and now as the slave owner Weylin whips Dana unconscious, she

³⁶ Pratt 164.

is at risk to travel back to 1976 without her husband. Before Dana receives the first blow of the whip, someone goes to get Kevin, so the whipping scene plays out not only as Dana's violent experience, but also the pained waiting for Kevin and hoping he will be there when she loses consciousness. She is on the ground, whipped, and vomiting when she sees Kevin, "blurred, but somehow still recognizable. I saw him running toward me in slow motion, running. Legs churning, arms pumping, yet he hardly seemed to be getting closer" (107). The slow motion, combined with the whipping, and the knowledge, just as she passes out, that she is leaving Kevin in the past creates a hyper-aware pleasure of slow time.³⁷

Slowness in the context of domination/submission is sometimes a masochistic pleasure for the submissive. In one interaction with her new mistress, Dana starts to think through the paradigms of domination/submission in terms of slowness as subversion and domination as speed. She "[s]lowly, deliberately" turns her back on the mistress. Then she notes that Margaret Weylin, the slave-owner, rushes when no one else is:

She made no move toward me. Instead, she turned and rushed away. It was a hot day, muggy and uncomfortable. No one else was moving very fast except to wave flies. But Margaret Weylin still rushed everywhere. She had little or nothing to do... Margaret supervised—ordered people to do work they were already doing,

³⁷ This use of slow motion is similar to Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* and the way that he combines the slow motion of Blaxploitation film with the reimagining of the neo-slave narrative genre to reveal an awareness of the anachronistic pleasure of the revenge story. In an interview with Henry Louis Gates on *The Root*, Tarantino also includes the spaghetti western as a genre that shapes the extended temporality and exaggerated revenge of this moment in the film as the scene extends time in part, because of the type of weapon Django has, a six-shooter.

criticized their slowness and laziness even when they were quick and industrious.
(Butler 93-94)

Here, as in Deleuze's *Masochism*, sadism and domination are represented through speed, and submission and masochism are slow, sometimes subversively slow and sometimes misperceived as slow even when "quick and industrious." Later in the novel, after another woman accuses her of being too quick to wait on the mistress, Dana thinks about her becoming a slave through the idiom of time: "Was I getting so used to being submissive? . . . I wasn't getting enough time to myself. Once—God knows how long ago—I had worried that I was keeping too much distance between myself and this alien time. Now, there was no distance at all. When had I stopped acting" (221). Time is one of the only commodities the slave has. Time may be used slowly, subversively, and personal time is a rare freedom. For Dana the lack of time by herself, to be her 20th century self, is rare, and she has been collapsed into this "alien time" of submissiveness.

Like Connie in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, a prisoner of the mental hospital, Dana makes distinctions between doing "easy time" and "hard time" in slavery. Butler's novel refers explicitly to a comparison of slavery and psychiatric inpatient hospitalization as a potential threat because of Dana's use of attempted suicide to travel back to Kevin in 1976 (241). The narrator thinks of time through the heuristic of slavery and reinterprets some pleasures, like "time of freedom" through a discourse of guilt and pleasure.³⁸ It's important to remember, however, that in Dana's present, because of her temporary worker status, time is also a commodity.

Literary masochism and the experience of masochistic time explains disordered moments of temporality or anachrony in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *Kindred*. In other chapters of the dissertation, I explore this anachrony in the aesthetics of literary masochism in examples of what

³⁸ See more examples (Butler 191, 203, 219).

I call narrative delay. In the next chapter, I argue that Freeman's queer temporality is a better tool to analyze masochistic time than Basu's linear model of past/present/future in neo-slave narratives or science fiction. The following chapter considers the question of masochistic temporality in the context of utopian past/present/future models like Basu's by comparing Jameson's study of utopia in *Archaeologies of the Future* with the ideas of queer temporality.

CHAPTER 2

“Queer Futures and the Anxiety of Anticipation: Literary Masochism in Samuel R. Delany”

Defining Masochistic Time: You Will Be a Slave

From the first moment of *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*, Samuel Delany uses the temporality of sadomasochism to structure the experiences of Rat Korga, before we see him abused and raped, and before we know anything about his own sexuality. The first section, the novel’s prologue, describes Rat Korga’s life in slavery on the planet Rhyonon. The first few pages of the novel describe Korga performing the speech act of consenting to sell himself to a labor project in exchange for the slave labor of “radical anxiety termination (RAT)” (*Stars* 6). Korga performs his consent with cognitive deficiencies noted by the narrator and without the literacy to read the words “radical anxiety termination.” The first line in the prologue assumes slavery as a certain future condition: “‘Of course,’ they told him in all honesty, ‘you will be a slave.’” (*Stars* 3). Delany describes how, in the incomprehension on Korga’s face, one could read “ignorance’s determinant past, information’s present impossibility, and speculation’s denied futurity” (*Stars* 3). Korga’s past/present/future, the complicated failed temporalities, create for him a history bound to a future slavery. In a clause dependent on the one about slavery, the next words spoken to him make an ironic claim: “but you will be happy” (*Stars* 3). This sets up the utopian sadomasochistic future as one dependent on slavery.

The novel uses third-person omniscient narration, but the two sections, “The Prologue” and “The Monologues,” each align more closely with two protagonists who are worlds apart. In “The Prologue,” the narrative style is different than of the second section. The first narrative is slightly subjective, limited by Korga’s illiteracy and the bleakness of his enslaved life on Rhyonon. Most of “The Monologues” style similarly mimics Marq Dyeth’s cognition—hyper-

literate, fluent in multiple languages and cultures, diplomatic, and aided by innovative technology that anticipates the internet. The internet access is through a biometric device integrated directly into the brain. We see various generations of this General Intelligence system, which prefigures the Apple Iwatch or Google Glass. When we experience delay, or representations of waiting, in Rat's section, it is often coded as illiteracy or ignorance, while in Marq's section delay happens when he evades, and when others evade him.³⁹ Korga will travel between these two worlds, eventually linking the double narratives together by becoming a literal sign that cannot be read. For much of "The Monologues," the main character Marq pretends not to know and perhaps does not know exactly who Rat is. Eventually, he will know that Rat is rumored to be his perfect sexual partner, the object of his desire. In the novel, the mapping of desire needs to be traced out, not only as plot, but as the poetics of delay that I call masochistic time.

My interest in reading the neo-slave conventions of the novel through the terms of sadomasochistic desire will draw on a model of reading eroticism and historical materialism that Elizabeth Freeman calls erotohistoriography.⁴⁰ By analyzing the neo-slave narrative aspects of

³⁹ Deleuze describes one of the formal characteristics of masochistic fantasy in literature as suspension or "the waiting, the delay, expressing the way which anxiety affects sexual tension and inhibits its discharge" (75).

⁴⁰In *Time Binds*, Freeman defines the historicity of SM: "By 'historicity' I mean not only the conditioning of sexual responses over time, as second-wave feminists and critical race theorists would have it, but the use of physical sensation to break apart the present into fragments of times that may not be one's 'own,' or to feel one's present world as both conditioned and contingent" (140).

Delany's SF novel, we can use erotohistoriography to examine how the aesthetics of BDSM change the conventions of the slave or neo-slave narrative, especially complicating a linear experience of time. Erotohistoriography examines how sadomasochistic representations replicate historically unequal power relationships, for example, in the costumes and accoutrements of BDSM scenes; however, thinking of sex as a form of historiography in literary masochism opens up these representations to imagine alternative temporalities and histories.

As a model for complicating what Freeman calls "the linearity of history," and what I will explore as the linear trajectory of the slave narrative form, I use her methodology of erotohistoriography to complicate the binary of past and present in the slave narrative or the neo-slave narrative, and to explain sadomasochistic performance as queer time. Sadomasochism (S/M) is a form of "*écriture historique*, she argues, "writing history with the body" (139). She describes Sadean sex as "using the body to rearrange time" (138). For example, "as originally figured by the Marquis de Sade in his fictional writings, S/M also shuttles (or plays at shuttling) between the power relations proper to the French Revolution and those proper to the *ancient regime*" which she connects to alterations in the Western sociotemporal order through changes to the French calendar (139). Freeman defines sadomasochism, as an example of erotohistoriography, or a way "for sex *itself* to become a kind of historiography, perhaps even an 'ahistoriography' (139). In BDSM sex, Freeman sees two types of asynchrony, or gaps in time: historical asynchrony is "achieved by sexually allegorizing a lost form of imperial power" and temporal asynchrony is "achieved through prying apart impulse and action" (139). Using the body in SM sex to "rearrange time" or to write "history with the body" promises to reveal

something about the textual body; however, like Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text*, Freeman's method suggest revealing pleasure in glimpses, circling around the textual body.⁴¹

Although Biman Basu's recent critical work on the aesthetics of sadomasochism and the neo-slave narrative understands sadomasochism as a historical performance, it is less interested in temporal asynchrony. Basu focuses on the masochistic subjectivity produced in this genre and juxtaposes that with the sadistic subjectivity of the slave master depicted in 19th century slave narratives. Associated with this masochistic subjectivity is a "historical anxiety" about the simultaneous enactment of dual temporalities, or of acting out the roles of past slavery and present sadomasochism.⁴² I extend the dual temporalities of masochistic subjectivity in the neo-slave narrative to examine temporality in Delany's novels in terms of anticipation and delay. In explanations of sadomasochism in queer theory, sadomasochism demonstrates queer time and queer history, the idea of historical performativity that I borrow from Freeman who calls

⁴¹ Barthes he imagines a display of "all the texts *which have given pleasure to someone. . .*" and "display[ing] this textual body (*corpus*: the right word" like "psychoanalysis has exhibited man's erotic body . . ." He fears that "unable to speak itself, pleasure would enter the general path of motivations, *no one of which would be definitive* (if I assert some pleasures of the text here it is always in passing, in a very precarious, never regular fashion)". This couldn't *be written*, he claims, "I could only *circle* such a subject" (34).

⁴² See "dual temporalities" in Basu (140). *The Commerce of People*, the first book length study of sadomasochism in African American literature, does important work; however, one notable omission in the literary and theoretical trajectory that he maps out is the prolific work of the African American author who thoroughly embraces sadomasochistic themes: Samuel Delany.

sadomasochism an “erotic time machine,” if you will.⁴³ I build upon these arguments about disordered experiences of time and sadomasochism, in order to analyze literary masochism as a masochistic experience of waiting, for example, the moment of waiting represented when Rat Korga considers consenting to slavery. Literary criticism of the “frustrated” utopian desire in science fiction, or the anxiety of anticipating the future, is also a sadomasochistic pleasure that informs the poetics unique to both science fiction and literary masochism.⁴⁴ Pornographic literature, according to Deleuze’s theoretical study of the differences between literary sadism and literary masochism, creates different temporal experiences. *Masochistic time* is slow, an experience of waiting, with a narrative poetics of delay, while sadism relies on acceleration (Deleuze 71).

Masochistic time ties together excessive temporality in Delany’s literary masochism as tortured always in the past, bound up already to the anxiety of the future, and yet enjoying the guilty pleasure of this temporal excess in the moment. By putting queer temporality and

⁴³ See “erotic time machine” in Freeman (138). Freeman analyzes “sadomasochistic role-play, especially between black people and white people” as erotohistoriography, which uses the props of historically specific periods. S/M writes history on the body to show the “asymmetrical organizations of power in everyday life. But however one views S/M, it is inescapably true that the body in sadomasochistic ritual becomes a means of invoking history—personal pasts, collective suffering, and quotidian forms of injustice—in an idiom of pleasure” (137).

⁴⁴ Jameson dismisses Freud as a vocabulary for compromise between the wish and what contradicts it. He writes, “We need a nobler word than *frustration* to evoke the dimensions of the Utopian desire which remains unsatisfied, and which cannot be felt to have been fulfilled” (Jameson 84).

sadomasochism in comparison with the temporality of the novel as part of the “utopic past-present-future” of neo-slave narratives, I consider the anxiety of anticipation, a formal feature of *masochistic time*, as the anxiety about queer future, which is relieved by the performance of another anxiety about the past, the sadomasochistic performance of slavery as erotohistoriography. The re-membered past thus punishes the reader with images of slavery in order to relieve the anxiety of queer futurity. This anxiety of anticipation, which is modeled as an epistemological mode familiar to readers of SF discourse, Delany performs as *masochistic time*. Amongst the free-play of Delany’s signification, SF discourse, BDSM narrative desire, and the masochistic experience of time all discipline the reader to wait for the atomic moment, the smallest unit of time, played against the historical performance of slavery as a queer future. My analysis of temporality in the novel will compare the temporalities of fleeting sexual desires and science fiction’s peculiar temporalities in order to examine how a masochistic reader is disciplined.

Through this reading of sadomasochism and temporality, and the issues at stake in critical arguments about BDSM aesthetics, we can understand Delany’s investments in representations of slavery in the context of BDSM as a narrative desire to engage questions of temporality, history, sexuality, and class, as well as race.⁴⁵ Unlike many analyses of how desire structures

⁴⁵ See Delany on narrative desire in “Neither the First Word nor the Last on Deconstruction, Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Semiotics for SF Readers” especially his gloss on Lacan that corresponds with how desire functions in *Stars*. He writes Lacan’s theory of the phallus is a “theory of desire, but not of desire as a force or power located in one subject that impels that subject toward another subject or object. Rather it is a theory about the relationship between the subject and the category that includes desire’s object, which must because it atomizes power into

narrative, such as Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot*, sadomasochism is essential to understanding the dynamic play of the temporalities of desire in the novel on the level of narrative time, as well as the larger questions of historical performance inherent in sadomasochistic role-play. Appreciation of BDSM as an aesthetic theorizes the paraliterary by building on the literary aesthetics of African American literature, science fiction, and queer pornography.⁴⁶ Delany's use of this aesthetic connects two features of his work which criticism takes up frequently, the representations of BDSM and the influence of post-structural theories of language.

One fundamental way that I understand temporality in Delany's work attends to his use of post-structural linguistics. I identify *masochistic time* in Delany as the delay caused in the circulation of disruptive signs, which impede the pleasure of signification for the reader. For example, Delany does this through his experiment with the poetics of delay and the word "he" in *Stars*. This example connects epistemology, how knowledge is produced, with the temporality of masochism, the delay of producing information. My reading of sadomasochism as a representation of time in the novel compares critical discussions of time in African American literature, science fiction, pornography, and queer theory, across genres that Delany might

its constitutive anterior relationships, it can be a useful factor in a theory of power" ("Neither" 155).

⁴⁶ In response to a question about what *is* art, or if comics can be art, Delany defines the paraliterary as precisely those genres which couldn't be considered as art and literature: "SF, comics, pornography, mysteries, westerns... Indeed the definition... of 'paraliterature' and 'paraliterary' is specifically those written genres excluded by the limited, bound value meaning of 'literature' and 'literary' (*Shorter* 236).

describe as the paraliterary. My conceptualization of the aesthetics of masochism emphasizes the importance of language for the masochist—it understands the gap in post-structural theory between the signifier and signified as a temporal delay (via Deleuze); however, methodologically, I will also theorize masochistic delay through the historical performance embedded in sadomasochistic representations (via Freeman). After developing examples of *masochistic time*, I test it as an example of pornographic time in Delany's *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, which contests the literary aesthetics of masochism in Deleuze.

Disciplining the Reader: “He” and the Poetics of Delay as Masochistic Time

Delany's own science fiction criticism corrects and disciplines the reader to respond to a sadomasochistic narrative desire by a frustrated attention to the smallest “atomic” moments: the word and the sentence. I think of these readings as atomizing discourses, or distilling the discourse of science fiction, feminism, or capitalism into close readings of one word. I use the term “atomizing” because Delany uses it in the essay “About Five Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Words” to describe an argument particular to science fiction, and to make a more general comment that we assume as literary critics when we close read something. Delany asks, “[w]hat is gained by atomizing content into its stylistic elements?” (“About” 21). Delany's choice of “atomizing” is interesting because it signals the content of science, yet he argues that there is no content—all content can be reduced to style. It's also ironic because we think of an atom as the smallest particle of something; however, by denying any literal content, this atomizing becomes another sense of the word—atomized into invisibility or nothingness, or all style and no content. Furthermore, as a part of an argument about close reading, we know the word “atom” had the historically scientific sense of reducing something to the smallest measureable amount, but the

oldest meaning of the word has the medieval sense of the smallest unit of time.⁴⁷ Thus, I want to argue that the act of close reading, here atomizing a word to its smallest linguistic part, also implies the reading of one moment of time.

How much difference can one word make? Delany imagines this question in “About 5,750 Words” not as a rhetorical question, but as an epistemological experiment. He takes close reading to new worlds by breaking down the process of reading, distinguishing between reading in the mundane world of literature and the otherworldly realm of science fiction, and finally, by theorizing it as a visual process that is corrective rather than progressive. The science-fiction sentence calls in a unique verbal freedom that “coupled with the corrective process that allows the whole range of the physically explainable universe, can produce the most violent leaps of imagery. For not only does it throw us worlds away, it specifies how we got there” (“About” 33). With carefully controlled masochistic pleasure, Delany works word by word, drawing a quarter of a second’s pleasure into about 5,750 words, and maximizing the tension between the cosmic potential of science fiction’s discourse and the microscopic zone of pleasure, the word.

In this essay about the inseparability of style and content, Delany uses a sadomasochistic style to discipline the reader. Delany uses the imperative to address the reader, saying, “Follow me” and “Look!” (“About” 38, 40). He describes a novel as a series of “corrections” to meaning which create a “tension” and subsequently an “aesthetic pleasure” (“About” 38, 39). Through the essay, as Delany atomizes narrative one word at a time, he describes the meaning accrued by each word as a “correction.” “Correction” has a clear BDSM reference to discipline, or describing reading as an activity that trains one person, the reader, to act in a specific way, often

⁴⁷ “Atom” *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED).

by enforcing rigid codes of conduct. If the style cannot be separated from the content, as Delany persuasively argues, there is some fundamental connection between reading and masochism.

Delany produces a similar explication of how a sentence functions differently in the discourse of science fiction and literature in “Science Fiction and ‘Literature’—or, the Conscience of the King” (“Science” 88). The relationship between the word and the world in science fiction was first “the practically incantatory task of naming nonexistent objects,” although this is no longer poetry or science fiction’s concern. From the naming of objects, science fiction expanded to the contemplation of the relationship between the object and the behavior it causes. Or, as Delany summarizes, when addressing the question of style versus content in science fiction, the genre must “examine precisely what sort of word-beast sits before us” (“About” 36). The sadomasochistic aesthetics of Delany’s prose exemplifies the style of science fiction, the linguistic force of post-structuralism, and brings together the temporal elements of these discursive modes through the suggestive tropes of BDSM that discipline the reader.

One word represents this larger argument in *Stars*. The word, like the referent to which it refers, moves between worlds. In Rat’s world in “The Prologues,” “he” functions much as it does on Earth; however, in Marq’s world, it no longer signifies gender, and instead signifies as a fleeting marker of sexual desire. It marks desire and time because the pronoun changes when the speaker no longer desires the referent. What is missing in the move from Rhyonon to Velm is the evolution of “he,” the mapping of its gender politics between the worlds. So, before I analyze he in *Stars*, first I play with “he” in terms of gender as a historical performance, and then I turn to *Stars*. “Pronoun play” might not be a typical form of BDSM play, but if we understand pain play as sensation and power play, we can see trace the erotic sensations associated with this

pronoun.⁴⁸ The deferral of meaning also works like the forms of disavowal and suspension in Deleuze's understanding of masochism. Let us play for a moment, as masochistic readers, with gender as performance by this word-beast in science fiction.

Before us, in *Stars*, is no alien word-beast of unknown origins. *He* is too familiar, ubiquitous, and knowable.⁴⁹ *He* is a man, a boy maybe, unless *he*'s not human. Whoever, *he* is, especially if *he* is the narrator, *he* is not I. Certainly, if one can say nothing else, *he* was mentioned previously, a lot. For lack of a neutral term, we used *he* for anyone and everyone, so much that *he* caused some to take offense, and now we try to be very careful about using *he*. Signaling a lack, (not exactly that kind of lack) *he* is intimately linked to the want of a third person gender-neutral pronoun. (*Un "On," par exemple, ou "One."*) *He*, the starting point for knowing identity, by its very use, signals the presence and absence of a name. In an obscure sense, *he* can be a *he* when *he* is most uncertain, as in the case of a new baby when *he* might be a *he* or a she, a noun instead of a pronoun. Finally, *he* has absolutely nothing to do with marking sexual desire. Origins? In this future world, *he* comes from the past. *He* is old, old English.

As disciplined, post-Butler feminist readers, we might expect this play with gender, but really, Delany stages sexuality as another kind of performance, the performance of desire as a masochistic pleasure. In *Stars*, Delany compels the reader to change his or her reading practices

⁴⁸ See *Techniques of Pleasure* for Margot Weiss's definition of BDSM sexual practices as different forms of play: "BDSM practices are often called *play*, where play refers to any particular BDSM scene ('Jon and I played last night'), as well as to general categories of BDSM activities ('Sara is really into hot wax play'). BDSM gatherings are called *play parties* (viii).

⁴⁹ I italicize "*he*" in this sense throughout the essay, in order to maintain its foreignness, as a term inherited from English in the language of "Arachnia standard" in the novel.

by changing one word: he. Like the critical experiment Delany enacted in the science fiction criticism, *Stars* brings into play a non-linear mode of reading that calls into question language: the Standard English of the reader and the “Arachnia standard” language of the Monologues’ narrator Marq, and eventually, even the Standard English of the third person narrator of the Prologue⁵⁰.

I am specifically interested in how *he* is used in the first part of the book, when this mundane word does the semiotic work of world building. In the latter parts of the book, once the reader knows that *he* marks desire, the pleasure of its use ultimately performs what Delany says science fiction does so well—imagining the behavior generated by such a word. The subsequent pleasure of reading the word resembles sexual desire, because like the *he* attached to the bitten dirty nails (a specific fetish), its duration is brief; it is a pattern that one repeats and must repeat because it cannot be sustained.⁵¹ *He* shifts rapidly to “she” in Marq’s mind; therefore, even after we determine what the word means, it retains its indeterminacy by marking a desire with a short *durée*. Earlier in the novel, when *he* is still indeterminate, the pleasure of its encounter operates

⁵⁰ See Bray’s explanation of how new habits of perception and increased attention to the text are demanded by this change of one word (18).

⁵¹ In both *Stars* and *Through*, the protagonists, Marq and Eric, share a fetish for bitten nails on the hands of male laborers. Delany writes about his own similar nail fetish in his memoir, *The Motion of Light in Water*, published the same year as *Stars*: “I had been looking at such hands on bus drivers, on garbage men, on construction workers... Their descriptions had been the first naturalism to make its way into the purloined loose-leaf... I knew already that the astonishment was a bodily response such hands could produce in me when I saw them” (*The Motion* 32-33).

differently. This *he* represents the pleasure of the hunt, the pleasure of cruising, and this performance contrasts starkly with having one's sexual object delivered up by unseen forces.

Teasing out the meaning of the word does not happen linearly for the reader. The strangeness of the encounter will cause one to flip back and forth between pages, looking for innuendoes, searching for the first hint of something improper. Eventually one realizes that the mysterious signifier went unnoticed for some fifty-seven pages. In the subjunctive tone of SF, one greets it first as a mundane matter of language, a mis-translation, a cultural unknown related to gender that nonetheless carries a strange connotation, a small difference, such as a woman named Marq. In SF, we anticipate new species, new conventions, new genders, and new sexualities. However, like the new narrator, it also marks a formal change in the narrative, drawing attention to the difference between Rat and Mark, between a sadistic time and a masochistic time.

Another slightly perceptible pleasure lies in the knowledge that both characters, the employer and the industrial diplomat are women; the pleasure of discursive world-building is just the promise of a gender equality that plays on the same sex, without yet any hint of homosexuality. The act of translation is the setting and the topic for this semiotic play. Marq Dyeth, industrial diplomat, communicates with the employer while she hovers around Marq's translator pole: "My friend will take you in the skimkar.' She indicated the other (human) woman. 'He's a careful driver and can answer any questions you might want to put.' The 'he' made me flex an imaginary lip bone—which a human myself, I do not have. But I've known lots who did" (*Stars* 62). Although this is the "first" time the Arachnia standard *he* is used in the novel, it is not a particularly sexy example. In fact, the strangeness for Marq is that it is not sexual at all.

More importantly, the pronoun “he” is indeterminate. Most importantly, its indeterminacy functions nothing like the word “skimkar” which is another unknown, some kind of car. Marq’s response to the *he* calls into question a meaning about which we can only speculate. The context clue is that it causes her to flex her imaginary “lipbone,” another unknown, but already one senses the sexual connotation, like a SF reading teenager giggling at a potential boner. The narrator’s blasé tone also aids the interpretation; she is the jetsetter who knows all and has seen all. When one comes back to this section (and one will), one begins to see the flamboyant posturing of a dating or mating ritual that leaves Marq desiring to flex an appendage she does not have. While the reader carefully pours over the significance of a lipbone flex, the narrator undermines those efforts by wondering herself what a nod means in this world, in this spot; all meaning is arbitrary and indeterminate.

The above example connotes sexuality, but Marq knows she imposes those meanings to the situation and wonders how her employer uses the term: “As we came out under the loud, dark sky, she said: ‘He’s quite something, isn’t he?’ (The second ‘he’ made that imaginary lipbone of mine unflex.) ‘If you knew even a tenth of the work he’s been putting into our emergency situation here, you’d be awed.’” (*Stars* 62). Now the lipbone/boner play has another connotation: Marq seems to have realized her mistaken sexual reaction to the *he*. In other words, her “boner” has evolved from an erect penis (or lipbone) to what is now an embarrassing mistake, or “boner.” Importantly, it is the second *he* that turns Marq off. The admiring tone that her employer utilizes has nothing to do with desire and instead suggests that she admires *his* work. This language is unfamiliar to Marq, but the reader has already witnessed the similar third person admiration of Rat Korga’s labor by those who oppress him. Marq never does quite figure

this *he* out, and it will nag him, but for the reader the two exchanges suggest the discrepancy between *he* as a sexual object and *he* as a slave.

Of course, Rat Korga exists as the ur-*he* signifying in the midst of all the lesser *hes* of the novel. *He* is the *he* not exactly referred to by name because in the narrative of “The Monologues,” he is a disruptive sign, and the frustrated, delayed, object of Marq’s desire. In the first part of the narrative, “rat” is a generic term for a slave, and not a proper noun, but increasingly the pronoun *he* begins to function like a proper noun in place of Korga’s name. This chapter, the first of “The Monologues,” begins with the rhetorical question by Marq that looks like a statement and does not appear to be answered: “The first I heard of Rat Korga or the world Rhyonon? (Look. Listen.)” (*Stars* 61). The conclusion that the reader, if not Marq, comes to about the infamous “second *he*” alludes to Korga through the third person admiration of labor. The parenthetical “Look” and “Listen” also disturb the linearity of the text as they mock the search for the missing antecedent or the transcendental signifier that will stop the free play of *he*. This construction repeats at the end of the first section of this first chapter. Marq converses with the driver of the skimcar and the third *he*-event occurs: ““A few days ago my friend was up on the moon where he heard a perfectly horrible story about— ‘My driver stopped, as though it *were* too horrible to go on with. She grunted. ‘By Okk, what a world this is...’I smiled to hear that most familiar exclamation in this most alien environment. The skimkar skimmed. The clouds hovered. (Listen. Look.)” (*Stars* 61). Like the best science fiction discourse, these parenthetical commands are both strange and familiar. In this novel, it is unclear where these commands come from and to whom they are directed. They may be Marq’s commands to the reader, responses to the unanswered question about Korga, or some manifestation of an interior dialogue. On the other hand, they may be something slightly more “disconnected” from Marq.

Throughout this passage, Marq has been constantly accessing the GI (General Intelligence, his biometric access to all information) by making mental requests, but those have not been transcribed directly; they are filtered through Marq's consciousness. The other parenthetical for comparison is the lipbone detumescence: "(The second "he" made that imaginary lipbone of mine unflex.)" This parenthetical uses the first person, as will a later one, and thus Marq originates the commands, yet she does not appear to follow them. She has lost her *he*-radar that could have signaled the first time she heard about Rat Korga and Rhyonon.

Part of the compulsion to return to these passages demonstrates the indivisibility of style and content. The novel represents sadomasochistic desire in content, especially through the SM fantasy of Rat and Marq, and on the level of style, the performance of waiting and delay, which is a formal characteristic of literary masochism. The masochistic time of semiotic play, troped as Marq's memory or the Web's delay, ultimately becomes simply the reader's habits and response to the text as it eroticizes delay. What it seldom offers is the satisfaction of a right answer. Although the web will clarify that pronoun usage on Nepiy is no different than in Marq's native world, a lingering doubt persists for the narrator and the reader. In spite of this, the reader returns to this passage like a guaranteed erogenous zone, sure that there is something there to satisfy. How easily the reader doubts the narrator! Marq must have missed the use of *he*; she was distracted by the familiar exclamation in this most alien environment. But what if the smile is caused by the exclamation (in horror) of *he*? Now the "Listen" and "Look" advice reassures the reader of Marq's capabilities and the reader's gleaned accomplishments. The real pleasure spot is the space of interpretation that "releases meanings that then come into the play of meanings that is the text" (Delany "Science" 97). The play between both meanings: the reader who has detected something the narrator has missed and the narrator who is the master, especially for having

reeducated the reader, this indeterminacy is “the joy, the wit, the delight of the text [which] comes from that play between *both*” (Delany “Science” 97). This is a lesson in one word bringing into focus an entire discourse. The masochistic desire operates by disavowal, or by fetishizing the lost object, “he.” The text’s suspension of meaning is a masochistic pleasure for the reader. Disciplining the reader happens through SF discourse, BDSM aesthetics, and the masochistic experience of waiting.

Sadomasochism as Historical Performance

Delany uses many of the tropes of science fiction to reimagine the anxiety produced by the dual temporalities of the neo-slave narrative. Biman Basu describes this “historical anxiety” in the neo-slave narrative’s “simultaneous enactment of dual temporalities;” however, this anxiety is not unique to the neo-slave narrative, because critics of sadomasochism often “misread the prevalence of dramaturgical vocabulary” in BDSM play (140).⁵² Basu describes that the difficulty of this temporal slide between past and present is considerable in both sadomasochistic performance and in neo-slave narratives. If we apply the logic of Deleuze reading of masochistic fantasy as a punishment which relieves anxiety, then disciplining the reader relieves the historical anxiety of the neo-slave narrative. By representing erotic play-slavery to critique racial and socioeconomic slavery, Delany’s appropriation of the slave narrative stands out from other contemporary black authors because of the BDSM aesthetic.⁵³ The future slavery depends on an

⁵² See Basu’s reading of Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* in *The Commerce of Peoples* (140).

⁵³ Analyses of BDSM in Delany’s work have been frequent; however, not without misunderstanding his work as liberalism (Call 61), and not without direct response from the author himself (Freedman 180-181). Lewis Call’s *BDSM in American Science Fiction and*

understanding of historical sadomasochism. The world Velm in *Stars* once outlawed all “somasochism,” yet now allows all forms of desired, consensual erotic play. This erotohistoriography also references the “history” of sadomasochism in other worlds, in the existence and then obliteration of the planet Rhyonon, which has non-consensual and non-erotic slavery. Korga’s personal journey through these layers of slavery and sadomasochism orients the reader to the text by alternating between his masochistic subjectivity and Marq’s sadistic subjectivity. In historical slave narratives, like Frederick Douglass, as Phylis Klotman explains, there was a tripartite structure of “Bondage, Escape, and Freedom—in chronological order” (218). She describes that generally greater emphasis was placed on the experience of slavery, the escape section was usually shorter, to protect slave’s access to escape (Klotman 218). For example, “The first twenty-nine chapters of Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* delineate the harrowing life in bondage of the author, but only in one chapter does she describe her flight to freedom” (218). The tripartite, linear structure of the slave narrative usually includes slavery, escape, and freedom, but in Delany, the movement in and out of sadomasochism is not linear.

In Rat’s personal life, he moves in and out of representations of slavery including incarceration on Rhyonon for his illegal sexual predilections, which includes homosexuality under the age of 27 and sex with someone of another height. Another example of incarceration is his enslavement after the radical anxiety treatment. In terms of temporality and slavery, his liberation from Rhyonon and the limbo of his waiting period while learning Marq’s culture are like the indeterminate escape of slave narratives. The stage of freedom, however, complicates the

Fantasy devotes a chapter to Delany in his study of BDSM as a set of ethical practices, specifically within the genres of Science Fiction and Fantasy.

idea of freedom in the African American slave narrative aesthetic because his personal histories are refigured with the conflicting historical and social information about sadomasochism on Velm and Rhyonon.

As an object who moves into a new system of meaning, Rat goes from slave laborer to eroticized slavery. The novel, by layering the images of slavery with eroticism and identifying this as an example of the BDSM aesthetic, shows us sadomasochism in the context of historical examples of enslavement (within the diegesis), which are then symbolized by the historical accoutrements of tyranny—the rings, for example—which become eroticized because of the power they represent. Rat Korga wearing the rings of Marq’s god-like ancestor, Vondramach Okk, resembles the contemporary American cultural use of historical details incorporated into sadomasochistic rituals. The rings, an archaic way to access the biometric system of the web, are simultaneously a symbol of political power and of Rat’s re-imagined bondage. They also mark him as an anachronism. These rings are a relic of Marq’s world, and a feature of Marq’s fantasies about Rat, and a clear marker of power and access to information. Not only are the periods of enslavement non-linear, but they also constantly oscillate between free/slave because of the access to technology, which often marks class.

Temporal experiences are also layered through the sadomasochistic performances of history. In chapter eight, “Strangers and Visitors,” for instance, the Thants visit Marq’s family and new strangers, the students, arrive for orientation and study at Dyethshome. Rat, also a stranger, comes to Dyethshome too. His arrival, like the public/private nature of the home, blurs the lines of public and private life; this is the context for the social and individual history of sadomasochism that Marq relates to the Rat. In a conversation between Marq and Rat before they have sex, we get an erotohistoriography, or a comparison of what types of sexual behaviors were

taboo at what moment in which world. Apart from the sadomasochism implied in Marq's conversation with Clym, this is the first explicit mention of "sadomasochism" in the novel. Despite taking place in the middle of the conversation between Rat and Marq, this information is actually communicated between the reader and the narrator, and it is set off in parenthesis. The information in parenthesis represents something slightly different from stream of consciousness, or perhaps an SF take on how memory works. Instead, it demonstrates Marq's access to General Information, his habit of thinking like and Industrial Diplomat—aware of many competing significations at once—and his internal thoughts.

This reference to sadomasochism seems to be generated by the thought of being 'persecuted for sexual predilections,' which is framed as an interrupted question to Rat, yet it is Marq's own answer that reader accesses first:

(The first I was ever aware one could be was Senthly with Egri and Genya; there all sadomasochism was hunted out and punished with barbaric single-mindedness; especially if concert was written out or clearly specified by verbal contract, which their authorities considered the ultimate disease. It was Genya who, as we left that moon in disgust, first pointed out to ten-year-old me how, even as it was suppressed, sadomasochism there was encouraged by every private park and public building around the polar ocean we lived: all were designed to suggest some weapon or mangle in common use by the local fisherwoman; all were invariably labeled with some written plaque of prohibitions.) (Delany 198)

The narrator Marq's childhood understanding of sadomasochism neutralizes whatever shock value it might have had for the reader. Here, it is situated in a conversation about illegal *same* gender, or *different* species sex on Marq's world, and a comparison of how many fewer sexual

partners Rat has had than Marq. What causes shock, even for the cosmopolitan Marq, is Rat's admission that he's been nearly celibate for 20 years. The performance of the traces in language of erotohistoriography, the history of sexuality and gender on Marq's world, is all communicated with the aid of Vondramarch Okk's rings, which help Rat to think across cultures. Importantly, this historical performativity is associated with the narrator's synchronic historical understanding of sadomasochism.

The first time Rat's cognition is altered is the radical anxiety treatment. The second time is when he puts on the GI glove, another outmoded generation of web biometrics. Like the glove, the rings transform his slave laborer's hand into an other-worldly intelligence. In comparison, the General Information system used by most of the other characters in the novel is located in the brain. Characters think or talk about a subject and the information they require is automatically provided to them. When Rat's artificial intelligence is destroyed, as his captors forcibly remove the glove from him, it is the worst pain described in the novel, like a "shattering erasure" (*Stars* 52). After Rat is returned to his station, his workplace, and his "station" in life, he is found putting work gloves on all the other rats, and trying to communicate, share, and recreate the experience he had with the General Intelligence glove. It is not pain, but pain tied to anticipation that creates a masochistic aesthetic. The anachronistic cultural markers of intelligence, access to information, and the corresponding wealth are painful experiences for Rat, which resound with the novel's BDSM aesthetic, and which provide another example of masochistic time.

This painful, repeated removal of knowledge that returns Rat to his enslaved mind is the trauma the novel restages like an atomic disaster through the trope of the destroyed world Rhyonon. What does it mean to be "a world-survivor" (*Stars* 159)? Rat's world is gone because Rhyonon is gone, but another world of his was taken away when he had the radical anxiety

termination. Like the rebirthing process that restores his body, the rings restore his mental “world” despite Rhyonon’s annihilation. Any descriptions of the trauma that nuclear bomb survivor’s experience, like Japan’s hibakusha⁵⁴, is made extreme by Rat’s science fiction mental status. He describes: “I feel . . . more fear than I’ve felt . . . for many years (*Stars* 161). This historical performance of the atomic trauma combined with the trauma of slavery, but represented in the novel through one sadomasochistic relationship shows us how sadomasochism can “sutur[e] individual trauma to a historically specific structure of systematic oppression” (Freeman 143). The PTSD, or the anxiety that one might expect Rat to feel because of his atomic trauma, does not exist. He experiences a numbness created by his radical anxiety termination. It is a relatively new cognitive state as he is connected to the General Information system through the rings this new feeling he articulates as the “possibility of a [new] world” (*Stars* 164). In place of a dystopian nuclear trauma, Delany creates a utopian sadomasochistic future. This echoes that preposterous promise made to Korga at the start of the novel when he contemplates undergoing the radical anxiety termination: “Of course, you will be a slave. . . . But you will be happy” (*Stars* 3). Is this cognitive state more utopian because it gives information, context, and satisfies, whereas the other cognitive state removed all anxiety, all pain and pleasure? The novel suggests in this example, and in the way information in the narrative is delivered to the reader, that the anxiety of anticipation is an important aspect of pleasure.

⁵⁴ See Heresy’s analysis of atomic survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings: “the Japanese tended to shy away from the term ‘survivors,’ because in its focus on being alive it might suggest some slight to the sacred dead. The class of people . . . came, therefore, to be called by a more neutral name, ‘hibakusha’—literally, ‘explosion-affected persons’” (92).

We are told that Rat, “[b]esides being the single survivor of Rhyonon, . . . happens to be [Marq’s] perfect erotic object—out to about the seventh decimal place” (*Stars* 166). And, Marq is Rat’s perfect erotic object “to nine decimals places” (*Stars* 166). We have previously had hints about Marq’s implicit sexual preferences from his explicit conversation with Clym about what turns Marq on, besides the ubiquitous bitten fingernails. Before the passage below, Marq uses “he” in the narration to refer to Clym. As we will see, this suggests a sexual attraction between Clym and Marq:

‘Within seventy-two hours, my friend, if we still know each other, I am going to take you by force chain you in a special chamber I have already equipped for the purpose, and do some very painful things to your body that will possibly—the chances are four out of five—result in your death, and certainly in your permanent disfigurement, mental and physical.’ (We live in a medically sophisticated age. You have to work very hard to permanently disfigure any body.) ‘I’ve done some checking on you and found that you are a strange human being—at least to me: your sexual predilections run towards only one gender and only of a few species. You make distinctions between pain and pleasure that are baffling to me yet highly interesting to contemplate violating. You’ve informed me of the nature of your desire for me. It is only fair, I feel, to inform you of the nature of mine toward you. You are, of course, free to absent yourself from my company. But if you do not, what I speak of *will* happen. (*Stars* 90)

This future scenario of being the tortured turns Marq off because, despite these implied predilections for sadism, his perfect sexual object is the slave, and when Marq next refers to

Clym, the feminine pronoun “she” is reestablished. The sadistic certainty of what *will* happen contrasts with the uncertainty of *masochistic time*.

This exchange with Clym, as with many other descriptions of Marq’s sexual preferences, suggests a fixed relationship to a specific sexual object. This is the logic of why Rat Korga is such a perfect match for Marq, a relationship that structures most of the novel. In other explanations of sadomasochism, in the lesbian SM counterpublic, for example, in Patrick Califia’s essay on “Sadomasochism and Feminism” for example, the movement between sadism and masochism is often described as a more fluid situation. “S/M relationships are usually egalitarian. Very few bottoms want full-time mistresses. In fact, masochists are known within the community to be stubborn and aggressive. Tops often make nervous jokes about the whims of their bottom’s willingness to play. This gives sadists a mild to severe case of performance anxiety” (Califia 172). This fluidity between the roles of sadism and masochism is called switching.

On the topic of switching in Delany’s work, Lewis Call notes that despite the understanding of “switching” between SM roles in the current American BDSM scene, Delany’s representations of BDSM evolve from an earlier gay leather culture.⁵⁵ “These leathermen favored fixed roles in the structure of erotic power: top or bottom, Master or slave” (Call 4). The

⁵⁵ In the course of Delany’s fiction, critics see changes in how sadomasochism functions. For example, another SF novel, published a few years earlier than *Stars* in 1976, *Trouble on Triton*, singles out male sadism/female masochism as the only relationship that cannot exist in the erotic utopia of Triton. Delany uses the terms “logical sadism” and “logical masochism” to describe these archaic relationships. In this utopia, any combination of roles is possible, except male sadism with a woman, because of the ancient (in the novel’s time) history of patriarchy.

increasing importance of role switching in BDSM in the way in which Califa describes it, and Call subsequently documents its importance, adds ironically a sense of masochistic time to Delany's literary example, even to the experience of the sadist, the least likely of places, because the sadist's "performance anxiety" as Califa describes it, is represented in Marq's refusal of Clym's offer. Marq refuses to play; Clym experiences masochistic time, not only as "performance anxiety" of Marq rejecting the submissive BDSM play. Clym, Marq, and the reader all experience masochistic time, because of the way the Clym functions as assassin in the apparatus of the (State) Web, he represents the power of the Web, and he and the Web are a lingering threat to Marq.

In the BDSM sexual context, switching shows something about way Delany reappropriates the role of slave. The uncertainty of the Slave/Master roles, represented as the uncertain access to information, is not an anxiety for Rat, because he has had the radical anxiety treatment. In contrast, it is an anxiety for the reader. If we consider the structures of time in *Stars* in comparison to the slave narrative tripartite structure, we could say that much of the prologue describes Rat's experiences in bondage. The actual implied, but never witnessed SM sexual relationship between Marq and Rat occurs in the one day that he spends on Marq's world. The novel ends with Rat leaving, or rather Marq being unable to narrate his leaving. For most of the novel, *he* exists as the eroticized object of Marq's fantasy. The suspension of the erotic object, even his proper name, operates like Deleuze's understanding of masochistic fantasy. The uncertainty, the suspension, the masochistic time is something the reader experiences, especially through Delany's style, but also through the specific sadomasochistic neo-slave narrative context of the historical performativity. Historical performativity is not just something that happens to Marq or Rat as they role-play. The unease and guilt of eroticizing the slave through a racial slur

is also one of the most significant ways that Delany's most recent novel explores queer bonds and through which the reader experiences masochism.

Queer Bonds and the Anxiety of Anticipation

Where Delany's *Stars* fails at imagining a queer future, his queer utopia in *Through* eroticizes historical performances in the future. It is not only queer theorists, such as Freeman's *Time Binds* or Love's *Feeling Backward*, who analyze the failure to imagine a queer future. In an unlikely connection, but one that helps to analyze anticipation, or to speculate in SF, Frederic Jameson also argues in *Archaeologies of the Future* that science fiction's inability to imagine Utopia is the result of a systemic, ideological closure of which we are prisoners (289). This position has atrophied the "utopian imagination, the imagination of otherness and radical difference" which means that the genre must succeed by failure, or a meditation on the "all-to-familiar"—a defamiliarization and restructuring of our experience from our own present (Jameson 286). Jameson explains that although stereotypically we expect SF to imagine the future, but the work the genre really does is to dramatize its "incapacity to imagine the future" (288-289). Delany's novel demonstrates this temporally, in the end of the novel, for example, Marq the narrator cannot imagine or describe the morning after his lover left. This queer loss of a future, or even much of a present together, permeates the epilogue, "Morning," with a backward-looking discussion of "lost desire" (*Stars* 344). Nonetheless, there is something specific about anticipation that is key to science fiction's use of language, as Delany argues: the relationship between the object and the behavior it causes. Failure and anticipation are part of the masochistic literary characteristics that Deleuze identifies in *Masochism*, but we must analyze these in contemporary sadomasochism and contemporary literature instead of Sade or Masoch. Delany's

pornography also produces a utopian sadomasochistic future. Next, I consider the bonds of queer intimacy in Delany's most recent novel, *Through*, in order to consider how the sadomasochistic theme evolves across genres from discussions of neo-slave narrative, to science fiction, to pornography.

Delany's *Through* plays not only with the possibility of queer bonds in his utopia, but also with the interplay of the words bond and bind. This play offers another way to think about how Delany uses language to create the BDSM aesthetic. Two senses of "bondage" in the OED denote slavery: first, and specifically, the sexual behavior of acting like a slave: "Sadomasochism of a sexual nature involving the binding of one partner with rope, handcuffs, or the like"; second, the legal status or economic labor related to "the condition of a serf or slave." Sadomasochism can be an erotic historical performance of slavery, especially in scenes of interracial SM. Both of these senses of bondage share in the peculiar intimacies of the bonds created in slavery, so they connote another sense of the word as "subjection to some bond, binding power, influence, or obligation." This more metaphorical sense of a bond that unites through a figurative tie to a family or a marriage partner is explored in the problematization of family bonds in Delany's pornography.

As Freeman's title, *Time Binds*, suggests, her working of ambiguous temporalities through the concept of binding/bonding draws on binding in psychoanalysis.⁵⁶ Freeman draws on

⁵⁶ In Laplanche and Pontalis' *The Language of Psychoanalysis* binding is described as "The term used by Freud in a very general way and on a comparatively distinct levels. . . to denote an operation tending to restrict the free flow of excitations, to link ideas of one another and to constitute and maintain relatively stable forms" (50).

this Freudian definition to describe temporal binding of past and present. In fiction, Delany's sadomasochism binds the past of slavery and the anxiety of queer futurity. He does this not only in *Stars*, but also in an even more utopic vein, in the much more pornographic novel *Through*.

Bondage, as the intimate force that binds one person to another, is explored in what might seem the least likely of places, Delany's explicit novel about the rural Southern Georgia's gay sexual network, which is troped as a beautiful spider's web of connections. Like the "run" that Marq and his lovers visit in *Stars*, a place for public gay sex, or Delany's own experiences in the pornographic movie theaters of *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*, Delany uses the Dump and its networks to examine the boundaries of private and public in gay sexual culture. While in Jameson's discussion of utopia in science fiction we have identified an anxiety about anticipating the future, particularly a queer future, Delany's pornography and creative non-fiction celebrate utopic queer spaces.

In addition to erotic BDSM, Delany uses incest in *Through* as an example of queer bonds. In the novel, Eric, a gay white teenager living with a black former step-father, desires to pass as black, and isn't out yet to this black father figure as being gay. The foil of Dynamite (a white father) and Shit (his black son) further undermines any binary understanding of race in the novel. When we first meet Eric, when he is "passing," his white mother is absent, just as Shit's black mother is absent from his family. The mothers are the missing racial signifiers. Further complicating Dynamite and Shit's relationship is that they "pass" as uncle/nephew and as straight in order to hide the sexual nature of their relationship, especially when outside the queer spaces of their community.⁵⁷ Jameson's description of incest both as an evolution of the alien in

⁵⁷ Incest is not the best term to describe Dynamite and Shit's relationship, because the desire is not pathologized in Delany. Although the majority of *Through* involves consensual sex between

the genre of science fiction and as representing difference, and the (racial) other, is one way to frame Delany's use of the father/son incest, among many other markers of sexual, racial, and class difference that recontextualize ideas of what taboos still challenge the reader.

The incest in *Through* reinforces the eroticization of the racial other. This is explored in *Stars* as well where Delany creates what Jameson identifies as an incestuous relationship in the shared "extended-familial and sexual life with intelligent, six limbed lizards" (Broderick qtd in Jameson 141). Of Delany's "unique compendium of distinct forms of otherness" in *Stars*, Jameson says that although this is an example of when in the mid-eighties, "the SF plot veers into perversion, and sexual intercourse with the alien becomes a figure for everything non-normative or deviant or taboo in human society" (141). If the alien in *Stars* really shows us the racial other, than perhaps incest in *Through*, once it is surrounded by other taboos, returns us to the racial other in an alien way—even a queer way. These layering of taboos of forbidden contact race and incest fetishize otherness in a community where homosexuality, or the "same sex" relationship is no longer taboo. BDSM sexuality still continues to eroticize the other. Curiously, although Jameson describes this exhaustion of taboo and the return to incest in the utopian imagination as a "significant development," he also says it is one "whose future cannot now be predicted" (141).

adults, Dynamite and Shit have had a sexual relationship since he was a baby. Infant sexuality is not limited to the father relationship, but also includes other adult males. Delany describes censorship of other pornographic novels he has written in regards to child pornography in an essay, "Pornography and Censorship," written before that novel, *Hogg*, written in 1973, found a publisher in 1995 (*Shorter* 294-296).

Reviewers of the book attempt to classify their experience of discomfort with the novel: some are tolerant of sexual otherness, but not willing to withstand the quantity of sex; some are uneasy with a few racial descriptions, but aware of the stimulating and ubiquitous use of “nigger.” What I have described as the experience of masochistic reading is similar to what in a Lambda Literary review, Edward Parker discusses as “eas[ing] the reader’s discomfort” with this problematic term “as if Delany somehow manages to temporarily suspend the historical significance of the word as a slur.”⁵⁸ This experience of masochistic reading, the easing of the reader’s discomfort through the eroticized play with this word that usually conjures up one set of master/slave relationships has been partially rehabilitated, “suspended” as an experience of *masochistic time*.

Delany’s use of incest in the novel operates in a similarly controversial mode, but comes off less recuperative than humanizing—he is showing a sexual pattern over several generations.

⁵⁸ Parker describes the reader’s discomfort: “The very liberal use of the problematic word ‘nigger’ by characters both black and white (Eric is sexually aroused by being called ‘nigger’ by his partners) is at first startling, though its frequency and relatively positive playful use curiously ease the reader’s discomfort, as if Delany somehow manages to temporarily suspend the historical significance of the word as a slur. (This occasion marks the first time this polite, white Canadian has ever written the word, and does so with some unease.) While Delany is obviously very deliberate and aware in his use of racial language pertaining to black and white, his references to the relatively few Asian characters seem less thoughtful. Generally, the use of ‘nigger’ appears in dialogue, but Asian characters are often referred to as ‘the Asian’ in narrative passages, even after the characters have been named, which lends them the characteristics of two-dimensional props” (np).

Once something like sadomasochism is no longer a limit case for human sexuality, it creates a space where other sexual limit cases are reexamined if not as acceptable, then perhaps as human. Other reviewers, even in a literary magazine reviewing an entire issue dedicated to erotica, disagree with Delany's graphic pornography included in the issue. Peter Balaskas writes in his review of the issue of *Black Clock*, that even within the genre of erotica, Delany's "scatological and almost unreadable" story was inappropriate.⁵⁹

In terms of temporality, what one notices about the first half of the book, besides the graphic pornography, is the detailed, slow, thorough movement through that difficult subject matter. Story time is slow when the sex is saturated with BDSM activity. The second half of the novel reads more quickly; narrative time in the novel represents the memory of the protagonists—filled with repetitions, gaps, and faulty recollections. The second half of the novel has less graphic pornography, and focuses more on the protagonists, so story time is disruptive for the reader in more familiar ways. Size is important to this argument about temporality; Delany's 800-plus page novel challenges Deleuze's description of sadistic time as an acceleration and *masochistic time* as waiting. For the reader, the slow experience of reading sexual fetishes one may not identify with, catalogued in such detail creates an experience of masochistic time that draws on both sadism and masochism. Conversely, in the second half of the novel, where the graphic BDSM sex is less present in the story, the experience of reading is accelerated by a narration style that changes and that omits detail.

⁵⁹ He argues: "I felt Delany's motif about a young homosexual's journey into dark fetishism involving body fluids and waste was unjustifiably graphic and used for shock value. . . . But what killed the story's emotional potency was the explicit descriptions of the acts themselves, which were so obscene that it became numbing, almost like reading fetish porn" (Balaskas n. pag.).

In *Through*, the two main characters talk out the problems of their often sadomasochistic relationship through simple language; they discuss how a couple bonds. In this gay interracial couple, both like to be called “nigger.” This is one of their constant desires, repellent, as it might seem to the reader. The use of this word seems calculated to offend, like mucophilia—the other sexual proclivity that bonds this couple—the erotic sharing of each other’s mucus. Eroticizing snot is part of loving a man named Shit. The use of the slur radiates all the inequalities of American slavery and a long, violent, history of racial inequality. In the sadistic repetition that Deleuze identifies as the temporality of pornography, the book moves so quickly from one form of disgust to another, it exhausts the reader’s affective response. The dynamics of this queer bond, for many years functions as an alternative to the hetero-normative family. An incestuous, interracial father/son relationship later includes their white lover, who has a black stepfather and fantasizes about being called “nigger” (*Through* 695-97). Eric’s masochistic fantasies resemble a black version of Freud’s “A Child is Being Beaten.” Eric imagines a fantasy that not only imagines a relationship with the father, but it also fantasizes his blond teen self as a black son. The dynamics of sadomasochism in the relationship include the power dynamics of who is urinating on whom, who is sucking on whose feet, who is consuming the bodily substances of whom. Despite the performance of the power inequalities of race, incest, or even age, in their sexual practices this *fluid* (so often literally fluids like semen, urine, snot) exchange of power is seldom sadomasochistic in easy to understand ways.

Another way that the novel represents queer bonds is articulated during a BDSM scene, which happens as Eric is grieving his lover/father who has just died. The practitioners in the scene, black male dominants, discuss BDSM in terms of race, because Eric is white, but the loss of his lover who played a father role for him, adds another layer of role-playing. White Eric is

beaten by his dead black father, instead of being loved by him. One neighborhood BDSM practitioner, when talking to another character about the strange intimacies in the Dump, says from behind his leather mask: ““These motherfuckin’ white sonofbitches can run a nigger crazy”” (*Through* 503). Here the emotional “needs” of the masochist, specifically the grieving white man who is the protagonist, complicate the power dynamic in the relationship: the black man is the master, yet the master is subservient to the needs of the white masochist. This conversation is about Eric, but Bull, the dominant or sadist, has a long-term relationship with a submissive character called Whiteboy whom he treats as a dog. When Eric is emotionally distressed, he feels both envy and repulsion at Whiteboy’s submission. What might seem strange to the reader is that within the aesthetics of BDSM, “a good S&M session” represents normal and easy to understand sexuality, but the truly complex relationship the novel explores centers on the queer bonds of the two lovers-almost-brothers, who are dealing with the death of their father/lover (*Through* 503).

Eric and Shit try to articulate their relationship to one another. When they are part of a threesome with their father/lover, they like to think of themselves as brothers. Shit, uneducated, plays with a series of words related to “bond” to articulate their emotional and sexual relationship (*Through* 540, 541, 770). He tells Eric, ““I want to bind with you.’ The word-bond-had come from Jay [another lover], though Shit could never quite say it right. He was liable to say ‘bounded’ or ‘binded”” (540). In another example, the word suggests fetishizing, “But first I’m gonna sniff your feet and bound—’ ‘Bind, yeah. . . I mean bond”” (*Through* 541). The last example here, a prolepsis, moves back in time to Eric’s father’s judgment of his relationship with Shit and with Shit’s father. Eric tells his father he wants to “bond” with him, but in this dream the “bond” also has a literal meaning as Eric’s father is a welder, and they are welding something

together (*Through 770*). This dreamed of bonding connects to the controlling metaphor of Freeman's book where time binds in a Freudian sense, and sadomasochism binds individuals in ambiguous, multiple temporalities. Their relationship binds the past and the present through Dynamite, the father/lover. The name Dynamite, to borrow from Freeman's metaphor, is the undetonated bomb in their shared past that haunts the present.

CHAPTER 3

“Masochistic Time and Narrative in Acker’s *Empire of the Senseless*”

Language, Narration, and Masochism

My reading of temporality in Acker’s *Empire of the Senseless* proposes that waiting, especially narrative delay, is the crucial feature of literary masochism, not pain. The larger project of this dissertation is to augment Deleuze’s understanding of literary masochism with more acute attention to narrative. I think about time and masochism operating at the level of narrative, and I understand the gap in post-structural theory between the signifier and signified as a temporal delay or masochistic time. Many notice masochism as a feature of Kathy Acker’s *oeuvre*, but few have addressed it in terms of temporality. Most literary criticism on Acker explores the explicit sexual violence and domination in her texts. Many critics note Acker’s debt to Deleuze and Guattari, but few writing about masochism cite or read Acker through Deleuze’s *Masochism*, a canonical theoretical approach to the topic that explains how, as a literary form, masochism manifests as a state of waiting. Thus, defining literary masochism by applying Deleuze’s unique understanding of temporality and masochism will likely produce new understandings of the anachronous moments of her text.

Following in the example of Deleuze interrogating the language of Sade, I ask of Kathy Acker’s *Empire of the Senseless*, “How are we to account for the violent language linked with eroticism” (17). What is Acker’s “pornology,” or, what is nature of the sadomasochistic literary aesthetic in *Empire of the Senseless*? Deleuze distinguishes pornology from pornography as a category for erotic literature. He identifies pornology as a literary text, like that of Sade or Masoch, which merits such a distinction “because its erotic language cannot be reduced to the elementary functions of ordering and describing (18). Deleuze aims, in *Masochism: Coldness*

and Cruelty, to analyze the terms sadism and masochism as separate literary aesthetics. In this project he is responding to Freud who links the two instincts in essays such as “The Economic Problem of Masochism” and “A Child is Being Beaten.” Deleuze wants to articulate the aesthetics associated with sadism and masochism for two reasons: to understand them primarily as literary aesthetics and not clinical symptomatologies, and second to acknowledge that even creating symptomatologies is a question of art, not pathology.

Deleuze’s distinctions allow me to explain how the reader of Acker’s text experiences masochistic time, primarily through moments of narrative delay. First, I examine Acker’s prose to think about how her style sets up connections between language, narration, and masochism. Then, I examine literary masochism as Deleuze articulates it to expand its scope of temporality and pornography to include narrative time. I draw on Deleuze’s model to argue that in Acker’s novel the temporal experience of masochism is a contractual negotiating of violent, frustrating, challenging aesthetics, moments of anachrony, and the psychological experience of the reader negotiating both past/present and sadism/masochism. The contract in Deleuze’s explanation of masochism in *Masoch* includes “a time limit” as well as “reciprocity of duties” (75). Finally, I argue that what I call “masochistic time” functions as a non-diegetic experience of waiting, and the indecipherable sign as a visual passage of time, is an example of deviant time, neither narrative time nor story time.

Representations of sadomasochism in Acker layer different theoretical interpretations of what sadomasochism means, bleed together the personal and political, and use indecipherable language as a part of a masochistic subjectivity created by the narration. Violence and narrative are connected in many ways in the novel. One experiences masochistic time as waiting for the narrator, or in this case the shared first person narration.

The text forces a constant negotiation with the reader regarding the “creation” of the narrator. In the project of demonstrating the fabrication of identities through masochistic forms, one narrative possibility *Empire of the Senseless* conjures up is an origin myth, which Acker conceives of as the rape of the (narrator) daughter by the father. As an alternative creation myth, Abhor’s rape narrative would exist, of course, in competition with other, more legitimate origin myths. Before the myth is even posited, the question of narrative authenticity and authority is subversively introduced in the text. The first chapter, “Rape by the Father,” acknowledges the problem of authorizing narrative truths with the parenthetical subtitle “(Abhor speaks through Thivai)” where there is a disclaimer from the first-person narrator: “This is what Abhor, who’s my partner, part robot, and part black; told me was her childhood” (*Empire* 3). This disclaimer announces several important features of the narrative to the reader. First, the first-person narration will be shared as the narrative “partners” alternate the telling of the story. Secondly, not only will the narrative duties be shared, but Abhor’s own identity is further deferred, compelling the narrativization of her history, her mother and father, and her childhood. Lastly, the image of Abhor speaking through Thivai, like the graphic of the pen piercing the rose at the end of the novel, emphasizes the sexual relationship and the partnering of Thivai and Abhor. Narrative is a personified tension between two forces.

Representation of sadism and masochism in the novel are both private and political. In the first section of the novel, “Elegy for the World of the Fathers,” Acker uses Schreber and Freud to signal the history of diagnosing sexual desires as rooted in the family, the private. Deleuze and Guattari make a similar critique arguing that the Schreber case, and more specifically masochistic desire, comes from the father symbolically, as a stand in for the experience of power in late capitalism.

One example in the novel refers to a character named Dr. Schreber, Abhor's boss, and a reference to his childhood, but the use of Schreber serves to layer a history of explanations about sadomasochism. Schreber, after being described in a childhood corrective device for his posture says: "Daddy, please beat me up again" (*Empire* 45). A few lines later, the first person narrator, Abhor, says: "I'm not hinting at any possible link between the micro-despotism inherent in the American nuclear familial structure and the macro-political despotism of Nazi Germany" (45). Instead, the narrator claims she is giving an "accurate picture of God. . . *God equals capitalism.*" The narrator goes on to describe God as a sadist and humans as his victims: "Humans who do not love (God) suffer" (*Empire* 45-46). This addition of God in the sadomasochistic dynamic also resembles the Schreber case. A few pages earlier, the reader learns that Schreber is Abhor's boss. When Thivai hears this he tells Abhor: "You're masochistic to the point of suicidal and, actually, physically damaged" (*Empire* 31) Now, referring explicitly to the critique of psychoanalytic interpretations, Thivai continues and says: "You were . . . disrupted in your childhood by the usual causes. I'm not the least bit interested in psychological interpretations. They're passé" (31). Both the Schreber example and Abhor's own masochism insist upon childhood origins of trauma, and the importance of the psychological interpretation.

One of the many disorienting things in Acker's novel, especially in terms of temporality, is her performance of what we might understand as an almost geologic time scale. By layering antagonistic desires and competing sexual mores, Acker creates a stratigraphy of sedimentary layers; but instead of layering sediment and volcanic rock, the text layers sadism and masochism. In the striations left on the text, we see the evidence of temporal markers. One example of this erotohistoriography,⁶⁰ or a mapping out masochistic and sadistic desire in the text through

⁶⁰ See Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds*.

multiple layers of theoretical formations of the idea of sadomasochism, opens up multiple possibilities without ruling any out. In Freeman's methodology, for example, of "feeling the historical" or "queer historiography" (93), she defines this method as not a restoration of the past object in the present, but an "encounter of it already in the present, by treating the present itself as a hybrid" (95). She sees the body's responses, including affect, as forms of understanding. In contrast to Deleuze's separate literary categories, Freeman's suggestion for thinking of visual culture and SM as a time machine a hybrid mixture of past and present, pairs well with Acker's style. Like Freeman's analysis of queer temporality and queer history, Acker's novel is an example of a feminist text which is organized against "the dominant arrangement of time and history" (Freeman xi). In Acker we can track the ways that non-sequential forms of time might have been invisible to the historicist's eye; furthermore, in my reading of Acker, I would add to this analysis of sadomasochistic narrative desire, and its attention to certain breaks in narrative order, especially the masochistic form of waiting and the affects associated with it, which has been invisible to the narratologist's eye.

When Acker writes "I'm not hinting at" the micro-political structure of the family and the macro-political structures of capitalism, she is of course circulating that meaning while contesting it and positing another alternative. It is the same with her descriptions of the psychoanalytic interpretations as "passé;" Acker introduces multiple signifiers into play. Acker's style of juggling multiple meanings at once is temporally disorienting because she layers different explanations of masochism as she moves between the personal sexuality of the protagonists and the political experience of power in late capitalism.

In the two subsections, "In Honour of the Arabs" and "Let the Algerians Take Over Paris (Abhor)," Abhor, as the title indicates, speaks or narrates and Perso-Arabic script enters the text;

this adds another layer to the difficulties of narration, language, and semiotics that Acker's version of a sadomasochistic aesthetic creates. In general, the experience of "difficult language" is a key part of the aesthetics of sadomasochism in Acker. More specifically, in terms of the language of sadistic pornography, Deleuze identifies imperatives with sadism. However, in Acker, the imperative mood of the title, "Let the Algerians Take Over Paris," is ironic because of its expression periphrastically in the imperative construction of the verb "let." The title asserts a command, as if giving permission, but it gives permission to undertake a political revolt. It uses the imperative ironically, as if one might *let* the slaves revolt. Literary sadism as an imperative is complicated in Acker. Although an imperative is suggested, the subject, the source of power giving the command is unclear; and the object is the Algerians. Abhor narrates: "France once owned North Africa" (66); "Outside the window Paris was in chaos. Thousands of Algerians were walking freely" (67); and "finally the Algerians won Paris" (80). The once French colonial "slaves" now take the city. Are the French owners "letting" the Algerians win Paris? Who is letting them is unclear. The construction uses the imperative, but suggests a reimagined literary masochism through this fantastic slave revolt.

The examples of masochistic agency and the sadism of political torture are interwoven in Acker's prose with reflections by Abhor on her sexuality as a source of pain. She asserts Voodoo as a tool to defeat Western hegemony, but follows this with a description of white slave masters torturing their slaves. She describes a masochistic subjectivity created by the torture as an ontology of pain: "The minds of whoever survived lived in and were pain" (65). Acker extends this example of literal torture to rethinking the connection between the mind and the body, or her own sexuality, earlier described as masochistic in the conversation with Thivai.

The layering of sadism and masochism in psychoanalytic theory as a performance of “the private” becomes more explicitly political as Acker describes explicit examples of French and American political torture. When Abhor narrates the chaos in Paris, for example, she recalls the violence described early in the novel in mythic style. She retells her origin myth in a straightforward style as a desire for her adopted father, what we might call in this new juxtaposition a post-colonial desire. Acker plays on the idea of suicide as a response to personal violence and also as a masochistic subjectivity as a response to more political violence. Acker writes that in the face of these “suicides” there are two options. The first, “a pure act of will... To bang one’s head against a wall... The Algerians in Paris had banged their heads against the walls for years” (*Empire* 73). The second option is not “exactly one of will”:

Because in almost every nation political torture was a common practice so there was nowhere to which to run. Because most of the nations’ governments are right-wing and the right-wing owns values and meanings: The Algerians, in their carnivals, embraced nonsense, such as Voodoo, and noise. (73)

Here, Acker’s explanation of masochistic subjectivity is again explained as embracing “nonsense.” In Deleuze’s explanation of masochistic fantasy as a strategy, he describes the process of disavowal as suspending “belief in and neutralizing the given” (31). The masochistic strategy of disavowal is different from the sadistic process of “universal negation” (35). In this example of masochism, “nonsense” is similar to “universal disavowal as an ideal of pure imagination” (Deleuze 35). Acker’s two choices distinguish between active/passive, sadistic/masochistic strategies. Acker sets up a connection between power and language that she will explore in the following paragraph as an explicit discussion of colonial violence against a slave literally unable to speak.

In this section, Acker weaves together examples of political torture from three imperial powers: France, England, and America. The setting of Abhor's narrative is often as elusive as the subject of the imperative command, perhaps because the "who" of the imperative also implicates multiple state governments. It's difficult to distinguish between the aesthetics of sadomasochism and the colonial power relations, which describe an eroticization of unequal human and political relationships based on ideas of superiority, practices of dominance, and involving the extension of authority and control of one state or people over another. For example, Acker describes:

The Caribbean English slave-owners in the nineteenth had injected a chemical similar to formic acid, taken from two members of the stinging nettle family, into the already broken skins of their recalcitrant slaves. . . . And forced their unwilling servants to eat Jamaican 'dumbcane' whose leaves, as if they were tiny slivers of glass, irritating the larynx and causing local swelling, made breathing difficult and speaking impossible. *Unwilling to speak means unable to speak.* (74)

The slaves, rendered unable to speak through violence, discipline others to be unwilling to speak through the threat of violence. The Caribbean slave (who cannot speak), Abhor (who struggles to narrate her story), and the Algerians (who embrace nonsense as a strategy) all demonstrate the connection between a violent relationship to language and masochistic subjectivity under the authority of imperial powers. In the final example of the political torture, "a group of white soldiers in the American Embassy" torture and kill Algerian boys and girls who will not speak.

These explicit connections between examples of bondage, torture, discipline, domination, sadism, and masochism are also related in multiple ways to the language that operates outside the dominant language. The importance of language to Acker's use of masochism supports

Deleuze's analysis of the importance of language to the art of masochism, where the erotic cannot be reduced to mere ordering and describing.

Deleuze and Literary Masochism

Present in *Empire of the Senseless* are the four formal characteristics of masochism, which Deleuze borrows from Theodore Reik, and to which he adds the fifth element of the contract.⁶¹ The first characteristic is the special significance of fantasy. In Acker, the Oedipal fantasy definitely has a special significance and its mutations seem to permeate the novel at all levels. I explore the significance of these familiar Oedipal fantasies by playing on the word familiar: *Familiar* has several competing senses, which, if considered in light of how knowledge is constructed in postmodernity, can inform one's reading of the well-known, habitual, ghost of the nuclear family that haunts *Empire of the Senseless*.

The relationship between masochistic time and the Oedipal fantasy in Acker demonstrates several of Deleuze's proposal about masochistic fantasy. The fantasy is repeated and suspended. The repetition of the Oedipal fantasy as a kernel about the family is not reiterated in "the form of quantitative accumulation and precipitation, as in sadism. Its repetition is "qualitative suspense and freezing" (Deleuze 119). First, of course, *familiar* means having to do with a family. But the other senses of *familiar* begin to complicate for Acker how both the nuclear family and oedipal narratives operate in western culture. The second sense of the word is friendly, informal or intimate. Here, Acker would indicate that these friendly narratives are ultimately intimate and incestuous, or in the third sense, "too friendly." They are unduly intimate. Or, like the *familiar* of

⁶¹ See *Masochism in Modern Man* by Reik, and Deleuze's summary of Reik's four basic characteristics of masochism (Deleuze 74-75).

folklore, the nuclear family is a spirit or ghost dwelling inside every subject and organizing it from within. Jameson, reading E.L. Doctorow with Freud's "The Uncanny" in mind, describes the "peculiar familiarity" of the postmodern family in "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." In historiographic novels like Doctorow's which use proper names as well as a fictive family designated as Father, Mother, Older Brother, and so forth, the capitalized family roles reify the characters and "make it impossible for us to receive their representation without the prior interception of an already acquired knowledge or doxa—something which lends the text an extraordinary sense of déjà vu and a peculiar familiarity one is tempted to associate with Freud's "return of the repressed" in "The Uncanny" (24). The self-implosion of the nuclear family in *Empire of the Senseless* works to dismantle the oedipal formations (Hulley 175; O'Donnell 99). Potentially, then, the *familiar* suggests a way to think outside the singularity of The Oedipal Family by insinuating that a narrative may resemble The Family narrative without repeating it exactly; it may look *familiar* without replicating the same politics of The Family. The peculiar familiarity of this fantasy, which haunts Acker's text, contributes to the experience of masochistic time.

The second characteristic of masochism is the suspense factor. In Acker's novel, suspense includes the waiting, the delay, and the anxiety created by the tension in *Empire* in the simultaneous use of English and Persian. The suspense and the anticipation of meaning-making creates a pattern of pain and pleasure. The tension of reading left to right, and then right to left while encountering untranslatable signs, and competing language systems paralyzes the reader. In a performative moment, it renders the reader of the novel much like the frozen aesthetic that Deleuze describes in Masoch's *Venus in Furs*.

The third characteristic of masochism is the persuasive feature of masochism. Within *Empire*, the characters explore many modes of representation in their attempts to operate outside the confines of patriarchal language or the symbolic. The characters and the reader suffer the failure of these attempts; this illustrates the persuasive characteristic of masochism. The persuasive feature of masochism describes the way that the masochist exhibits his humiliation. The text creates situation, from which it proceeds by failure. This repeated suffering, embarrassment, and humiliation in the failure to make-meaning illustrates masochistic time. The fourth characteristic is the provocative fear that motivates the masochist's demands for punishment, which alleviate the anxiety and tension in meaning making. Reading on in Acker is asking for punishment.

It is this persuasive feature of masochism that explicitly connects language and masochistic time, although the temporality of fantasy and the dynamics of provocative fear for the reader for the read all imply a masochistic temporality. In addition to these characteristics, my definition of masochistic time relies on Deleuze's distinctions between the temporalities of sadism and masochism. There are certainly similarities between Acker's semiotics and Deleuze argument that assembling or reassembling a history of symptomology of sadism and masochism is a literary act and a semiotic act, even from the initial moment of naming a disease with a proper name, which then associates the name with a group of signs (16). He cites, for example, Bataille's insistence that "only the victim can describe the torture; the torturer necessarily uses the language of order and power" (qtd. in Deleuze 17).⁶² Further evidence, such as, Sade's *The One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* depends "on tales told to the libertines by 'women chroniclers' and in principle the heroes may not take any initiative in anticipation of these tales"

⁶² See Bataille's *Eroticism* (187-189).

(17-18). Deleuze argues that description and imperative represent the aesthetic of pornographic literature, but Sade uses the language of demonstration. Although the sadistic style or erotic language may demonstrate, it is not the intention to convince, persuade or educate. Instead, Deleuze argues, the sadist wants to demonstrate reason as a form of violence.

Masochism is also a set of texts to be analyzed. Deleuze explains: “In Masoch’s life as well as in his fiction, love affairs are always set in motion by anonymous letters, by the use of pseudonyms or by advertisements in newspapers. They must be regulated by contracts that formalize and verbalize the behavior of the partners. Everything must be stated, promised, announced, and carefully described before being accomplished.” (18). This verbal excess makes Masoch’s work something exceeding pornography.

The main claim underlying Deleuze’s analysis of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch in *Masochism* is separating the fantasies, the literature, and the very concept of the entity known as sadomasochism. Deleuze acknowledges that although psychoanalysis “has long shown the possibility and the reality of transformations between sadism and masochism,” a literary analysis of the differences between Sade and Masoch is necessary to inform the clinical and identify different literary (and symptomatic) aesthetics (13-14). The basic methodology of the book is to examine the similarities and commonalities between sadism and masochism and, from there, to investigate their differences. In the first chapter, the commonality between them lies in the language of pornographic literature. For Sade, the transcendence of the imperative is violence; however, in Masoch, “there is a similar transcendence of the imperative and the descriptive toward a higher function. But in this case it is all persuasion and education” (Deleuze 20). The masochist is a victim in search of a torturer to persuade, and according to Deleuze, this is why

advertisements and contracts are part of masochism and why they are abominations destroyed by sadism.

The aesthetics of sadism and masochism have very different temporal forms, and make different use of the conventions of pornographic literature. Deleuze's argument about the aesthetic differences of sadism and masochism revolve around time. In "The Art of Masoch," Deleuze's analysis reveals a fundamental aesthetic, a frozen statuesque quality, which is part of the reason why Masoch finds in works of art his inspiration for love (69). This frozen, transmuted sensuality in Masoch is contrasted extremely in Sade where lust moves too quickly and sensuality is all about movement. The essential characteristics of the masochistic experience are not the pain pleasure relationship, according to Deleuze, but the state of waiting and suspense: "The masochist is morose: but his moroseness should be related to the experience of waiting and delay" (71). The importance of the pleasure pain mechanism, as well as the affects associated with masochism (pain, humiliation, guilt, anxiety, etc.), is made possible by the temporal form of delay: "Formally speaking, masochism is a state of waiting; the masochist experiences waiting in its pure form" (71). Conversely, sadism relies on a principle of acceleration. These Deleuzian definitions allow me, in what follows, to hypothesize the idea of literary masochism as a state of waiting and suspense in Acker and in the narrative theory.

Masochistic Time: The Aesthetics of Literary Masochism and Waiting

One of the most noted features of Acker's work is the plagiarism or adaptation of other texts. Her repurposing of other texts in new contexts has a temporal element. "Adaptation," in the general sense, suggests that a form might be modified to suite different uses. The text is inevitably re-constructed and re-purposed—something old. Secondly, "adaptation" connotes the

biological, organic nature of an organism adapting to its changed environment—it's something new. These two senses are temporally at odds. The presence of an old text, repurposed from the past and the new text, which is created by the repurposing are part of the irony of Acker's postmodern appropriation, she plagiarizes old texts with new gender and sexual politics. I examine this paradoxical existence within the same space and time of two competing adaptations of texts, or the contemporaneity of adaptation. These moments of adaptation perform a function similar to the moments of anachrony, or moments of chronological disorder in a narrative, that Freeman examines as part of the temporality of the sadomasochistic aesthetic in *Time Binds*. Adaptation in Acker's work is often thought of in terms of the literary traditions that she "plagiarizes" or in terms of her theoretical borrowings. One of the borrowings to consider in *Empire* is the role of the Persian in the interpretation of Acker's experimental non-narrative prose. Here, I think through Deleuze's idea of literary masochism with this example of waiting as the narrative delay in the novel in order to define masochistic time as a part of Acker's sadomasochistic aesthetic.

The Persian operates in a temporality outside of the diegesis of the novel, and outside of the dominant language of English. There are a few hidden diegetic markers of a referent to the Persian scattered within the novel. One example is spoken as a pun to Abhor who has forsaken herself to the desert to "join the horde of Dervish camp followers and ex-whores, trailing along the wake of the North African, mainly Moroccan, infantrywomen and soldiers of the Legion" (83). In a self-reflexive moment the narrator (Abhor), seems to address herself directly. Acker writes, "This is your fortune, girl: A refuge has lent itself to a thousand and one love duels. Each love was a tale because a tail" (84). If the "thousand and one love duels" calls on *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, then perhaps Abhor is Sharazad. Acker puns tale, as story, with tail, as

in a piece of tail, or sex. Acker writes “This will happen again. Everything happens again” (84). The figure of Sharazad continues the conflation of masochistic sexuality and narrative delay as a tool against the power of the king (the state). As I argue below, this fleeting diegetic reference to *Arabian Nights*, the repeated frame story, and the connection between narrative and desire will create a sense of masochistic time through the novel’s use of Persian.

In this section on narrative delay as masochistic time, I focus on a very specific interpretation of masochism as the experience of interpreting a difficult text. The difference between the difficulty of interpreting a difficult modernist novel, like Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, and a difficult postmodern novel, like Acker’s *Empire of the Senseless*, is that Acker has this embedded genealogy of desire, which voices its own masochistic desire self-reflexively. Deleuze would argue that there is no relationship to pain in masochism. Pain is an effect. In contrast to other readings of displeasure as painful reading, such as Laura Frost’s *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and Its Discontents*, I analyze the desire in Acker’s novel.⁶³ We could say, superficially, that reading Acker is a masochistic pleasure. In terms of waiting, in the simplest sense, one reads Acker while waiting for her to make sense. Acker is an acquired taste. Many are repelled by her apparent crudeness: the violence, the sex, the language, even the

⁶³ See Frost’s description of a masochistic modernist model of readership in Trilling: “The reader genuflects before an arrogant, hostile text. Here Trilling presupposes a combative or masochistic model of readership” (20). In the introduction, Frost proposes masochism as a combative interaction sure to include pain and displeasure, which doesn’t suggest masochism is, in fact, persuasive. However, in her reading of Patrick Hamilton and Jean Rhys, she draws on Deleuze, who of course argues that masochism is a form of waiting, or what Frost calls “the suspenseful posture of masochism” (171-172, 200).

plurality of meanings. In the typed manuscript for *Empire of the Senseless* in the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, at Duke University, where Acker's papers are housed, I looked at how the art for Acker's novels, which have images sketched in her own hand, made it into the text. In the archives, as I began to look at her manuscripts, I immediately recognized her handwriting and was somehow disappointed that her crazy scrawl was not an affectation for the pictures, but her "true" hand.

Ultimately, seeing Acker's handwriting filling boxes of spiral notebooks, combined with its immediate recognizability, aided me in the search for how the Farsi had made it into the manuscript. I wanted to know, on the most basic level, if Acker wrote the Farsi, and how well she knew it. I had hoped to find biographical information to corroborate my research; this is not my normal scholarly reaction to the postmodern text or archive. Because of the text's other graphic images and the way the storyline takes up tattooing, I had an idea that the Farsi worked more like artwork than it did text, and I assumed that it had materially entered the text like one of the several images of the novel. I also suspected that the Farsi was being used differently in this Acker text than in previous ones. At the time, I wasn't finding much literary criticism that addressed the Farsi specifically as language to be read closely. I waited for the image of the Farsi to take shape and become meaningful.

There is a connection between the discourse, like Farsi, and the desire that produces it. The story of masochistic desire in Acker might focus on the erotic relationships in the text or the political torture, as the opening examples demonstrate; however, I am interested in how that desire manifests in the discourse itself. Peter Brooks writes in *Reading for the Plot* that "[o]ne could no doubt analyze the opening paragraph of most novels and emerge in each case with the image of a desire taking shape, beginning to seek its objects, beginning to develop a textual

energetics” (38), and that “[n]arratives both tell of desire—typically present some story of desire—and arouse and make use of desire as dynamic of signification” (37). Early in *Empire of the Senseless*, not in the first paragraph, but before the reader has encountered any Farsi, Acker uses the “degradation” of another language, which suggests ways for thinking about language as a hieroglyphic. This examples shows how not only in the Farsi but in other languages as well, Acker plays with forms of deferring meaning and creating the experience for the reader of waiting for language to make sense. She writes:

This is what daddy said to me while he was fucking me: ‘Tradicional estilo de p...argentino. Q...es e. mas j...de t...los e...dentro d. la c...es m...indicando p...entablar g...amistades o t...terulias a... es m... indicado p...entablar g...amistades o t... tertulias a...es m... y s. apoyan l...cinco d... se s... y s. baja l. mano, l...de e... manera y. el c... se h... hombre. origen e profundamente r... y s. han h...interesantes t... en l... jeroglificos e...y m...Es e mas r... para d... de l... comidas p... no c... la de...’ He had become Puerto Rican (17).

In this paragraph, there are only some two dozen words that we can identify as Spanish; however, because of the “degradation,” the absence of syntax, the ellipses and missing letters, one can’t read the passage, even if one does read Spanish—or even Puerto Rican Spanish. One word that stands out to me is the word “*jeroglificos*” or “hieroglyphic.” The legibility of the word “hieroglyphic” suggests that in this difficult to make out writing, one clear word is a word that refers to ancient writing or a secret symbol. The joke, of course, plays with the difficulty of translating hieroglyphics. This is something difficult to read. It also refers to a system of meaning where the picture of an object is a sign for that object; so, ironically, it refers to a language in which the signifier and signified are perfectly united. Acker uses the Spanish like an

image of discourse, like the tattoos in the novel. This paragraph represents painful reading and waiting. One recognizes words and achieves some pleasure, but real meaning-making is deferred. It's not just deferred in the sense that it can't happen now, it is also deferred by the use of ellipses, which represent the passing of time in the sentence, the passing of time in the signification.

In Acker's *Empire*, another feature of the text frustrating the pleasure of linear reading is the Farsi, or, what many critics identify as the inclusion of unexplained passages of Arabic. In Acker's work Farsi is used in several texts, although called by Acker "Persian" in some places, "Farsi" in others, and often referred to as "Arabic" by critics. Part of the confusion between Persian and Arabic, to those unfamiliar with those alphabets, is that Persian is written in a slightly modified form of the Arabic alphabet. The alphabet is called a script because most letters are connected to each other and "there are no separate letter forms corresponding to Latin-alphabet printing" (Thackston xviii). Although the Persian alphabet uses many of the same characters as Arabic, we must be specific and distinguish between characters in the Arabic, or rather the Perso-Arabic script, and descriptions of the Persian language. Culturally, the distinctions between Farsi and Persian are also complicated. Farsi is a transliteration of "parsi" that stems from Arabic which lacks the "p" phoneme in "parsi." "Persian," when used by Acker, suggests the long history of Persian literature.

Literary criticism on Acker has not produced many extensive readings of the "Arabic/Farsi" sections of *Empire of the Senseless*. When I originally read these portions, I assumed that the foreign language implied the possibility of further subterfuge for Acker who is always playing with language: for example, do the English sentences match the Arabic/Farsi ones they are paired with? With the help of a Persian-speaking scholar, I was able to clarify the

“Arabic” portions and identified them as Persian. Persian is the official language of Iran, but it is also spoken in Afghanistan, (although called “Dari”), and called “Tajiki” in Tajikistan, “where until recently it was written in the Cyrillic script” (Thackston ix). Geographically, it does not make sense (in the empire of the senseless) that Algerians, (if that is where the “Arabic” comes from in the story), would speak Persian, because Arabic is more common in Northern Africa and Algeria was not part of the ancient Persian empire. Acker is undoubtedly playing with the Western reader, perhaps in more ways than readily acknowledged.

My examination of the manuscript identified Acker writing the Farsi, first phonetically in Latin script (English characters) and then in Perso-Arabic script. As she typed the manuscript, she left spaces to fill in the Farsi in her own handwriting; the color of the ink and the density of the strokes appear consistent with the other revisions in her handwriting. She makes mistakes, and later revises them, also in her own hand. In attempting to translate parts of the Persian in Acker, I still found that there were many mistakes.

There are approximately twenty-two places in the text where Arabic script occurs, and only one of those is Arabic grammatically, the very first occurrence (45), which is translated as “In the honor of the Arabs.” This is the sole use of Arabic; the rest of the text is in Farsi. One might expect linguistic tricks from Acker because she plays them often enough in English, but, in general, the Iranian translator with whom I worked with said that the text’s Farsi is full of grammatical and syntactic errors, as well as *double entendres*, yet it roughly matches the English text. However, consistently, the style of the English writing is more offensive than the Farsi, meaning that Acker’s use of words like “fucked” doesn’t translate easily.⁶⁴ Acker’s obscenity is

⁶⁴ For example, a sentence like: “Malignant lunatic lust is wonderful” translates easily. However, “the natives fucked like animals” doesn’t translate as well. See *Empire of the Senseless*, page 54.

hard to deny. Deleuze argues that literary masochism isn't obscene, so we would have to understand Acker's reappropriation of a word like "cunt" as a feature of masochism's persuasive feature and the need to educate the reader. Whether or not Acker's language is obscene depends less on the content of the words she uses, and more on the intentions associated with sadism and masochism.

Nicola Pitchford, one critic who is thinking about the role of the Persian, although she calls it Arabic, suggests that the inclusion of a non-western language in the text marks the violence of the Algerians in Paris, the very decolonization of language, perhaps, and the violence of absent meaning to the English-speaking westerners (96). The non-western language is not meaningless, but its meaning eludes the reader; and one can only imagine it as duplicating or contesting the English words with which it shares the page. Although Arabic and Persian are different languages, Arabic script is used to write both languages. This Persian/Arabic confusion indicates another layer of creolization in the text. Even more interesting is the relationship between larger language families. From this indeterminate Arabic script there are two possibilities: a creole mix of Persian, the Indo-European language (related distantly to English) versus the Arabic, an Afro-Asiatic language (that is closer to Semitic.) These two distinct languages may share borrowed words but have distinct grammars, etc. and are basically similar only in script. In the text, this language operates on an entirely graphic, or visual plane. It has ceased to be any distinct language and works more like an untranslated hieroglyphic or tattoo image. This script is the unwanted, unappreciated graffiti that scars the text. Yet, from the position of Otherness, and the indeterminacy of the Perso-Arabic script, Acker creates alternative subjectivities and narrative techniques. Like the tattoo, this feature of the text holds out a place

for indeterminacy—a temporary plane of meaning that shows the circulation of inverted signs and has an ambiguous relationship to institutionalized meaning.

Additionally, the “Arabic,” and potentially this complicated Persian/Arabic conflation, mark the non-western Other. Pitchford notes that any potential breakdown in patriarchal language in *Empire of the Senseless* would involve speaking the languages that are not acceptable:

This potentially liberating breakdown in patriarchal language is also signified in *Empire* by the appearance in the text of Arabic, the language of the West’s increasingly focal Other, signifies the absence of meaning to Acker’s English-speaking westerners. Abhor speaks to her boss in Arabic when she realizes that communication with him has become impossible... Later, when Thivai has been imprisoned, his English is interspersed with Arabic as he tells the tale of Sinbad the Sailor and of Scheherezade (Shahra’zad)... The meaning-disrupting speech of the Other becomes a source of alternative modes of subjectivity (the sailor or pirate) and of narrative itself (a woman’s subversive storytelling as an act of survival and as a rejection of sexual victimhood) (96).

As Pitchford notes, there are several ways to interpret the Arabic/Farsi in the larger interpretation of the story: it appears when communication is impossible for characters (and I would emphasize that it marks that visually) and in this section it alludes to Middle Eastern heroes like Sinbad the Sailor and the Persian Queen Shahrazad as subversive storytellers. The Arabic script is familiar as Other, and familiar in its appearance as “Arabic” without the Arabic/Persian distinction; its familiarity is destabilized in the text if this familiar script marks the intersections of two distinct linguistic genealogies.

If we are looking for an “origin” for the Persian, one source is Acker’s reimagination of the Persian woman, the character Shahrazad, from *The Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. She adapts Shahrazad’s legacy for her own purposes, to combine narrative, masochistic desire, and delay. Although, the history of *The Thousand and One Nights* is vague, the source of the work in Arabic was probably a collection of tales in Middle Persian called the “thousand stories,” which had been translated or adapted from Sanskrit into Persian, and then translated into Arabic.⁶⁵

The Thousand and One Nights contains hundreds of embedded tales, which would include the tales the Vizier tells his daughter, Shahrazad, in order to persuade her not to marry Sharayar, and boxed tales, but the frame story itself, at least in the versions of *Arabian Nights* that have survived, never comes to a full resolution. The conclusion of Husain Hadaway’s *Thousand and One Nights* contains a Translator’s Postscript: “tradition has it that in the course of time Shahrazad bore Sharayah three children and that, having learned to trust and love her, he spared her life and kept her as his queen” (428). However, other sources, such as in the authoritative fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript edited by Muhsin Mahdi, note that the frame story is not resolved. This open-endedness, some scholars argue, is a uniquely Arabic form, comparable to the additive style of mosque architecture.⁶⁶ Shahrazad, and the use of Persian in the novel,

⁶⁵ *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* states the source for “the work in Arabic was probably a collection of tales in Middle Persian called the “thousand stories,” which had been translated or adapted from Sanskrit in the time of the Sassanids (226-652), the last pre-Islamic Iranian dynasty. During the ninth and tenth centuries, a great deal of Persian literature, both popular and courtly, was translated into Arabic” (1566).

⁶⁶ See Katharine Slater Gittes.

embody the experience of waiting and narrative delay, and are evidence of what I will call masochistic time in the novel.

Summarizing *Arabian Nights* in *Empire of the Senseless*, Acker writes: “Finally, one woman, Shahra’zad, wanted to end patriarchy. Finally, one woman, Shahra’zad, wanted to fuck this king more than life. He fucked her. In her prison of herself, or the world, she began to have a marvelous exploit, a tale which lasted one thousand and one nights, which staved off death, which staved off patriarchy” (Acker 151). Acker sees Shahra’zad’s storytelling as a way to fight patriarchy.

The disruption of patriarchal language in Acker’s narrative uses the Persian and narrative disruption in its adaptation of *Arabian Nights*, but this is more than a disruption of power, it is also a disruption of the temporal schema. In addition to these figural temporal suspensions of meaning, the content of Shahrazad’s storytelling literally delays her death and many characters in the embedded stories are granted delays and stays of execution from the king. In the novel, Acker uses Shahrazad as a figure of narrative time. Below, I consider whether the temporal experience of the Persian in the text marks narrative time or story time, drawing on the distinctions of Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse*. The figure of the Persian woman telling stories to toy with the king, and to end patriarchy unfolds neither in story time, nor in narrative time, but it invents one time scheme out of the other time scheme. This temporality is masochistic time.

Non-Diegetic Waiting: Narrative Time, Story Time, and Masochistic Time

Gérard Genette begins the first chapter of *Narrative Discourse* with a quotation from Christian Metz’s *Film Language*, with the terms slightly altered to correspond with the terms of

Genette's project. Like Acker, Genette is thinking about visual culture (film editing and time) as he defines temporal distortions in literary narratives. If we think about narrative time as a binary, we have story time and narrative time. But Genette, always aware of the limitations of his categories as he theorizes from Proust, notes one obvious exception to the binary story time and narrative time. This is the comic strip where we read diachronically, or "a look whose direction is no longer determined by the sequence of images" (35). Acker's novel, with its visual elements, has some aspects of this non-sequential use of narrative time.

With the rhetoric of precision, Genette writes that "pinpointing and measuring these narrative anachronies ... with all the various types of discordance between the two orderings of story and narrative... implicitly assumes" a hypothetical point of perfect correspondence between the two (36). In his reading of Proust, Genette traces complicated movements back and forth in time. He ultimately identifies a moment which leaves the text "open," as he calls it, or not resolving the disturbed correspondence of narrative time and story time. I'll argue below that the narrative time in Acker's novel is open, although I will use the idiom of masochistic pleasure from Deleuze to describe it as waiting, or masochistic time.

Genette brackets the affect of anticipation and retrospection, terms he doesn't want to connote human emotion, or what he calls "psychological connotations" he, rather antiseptically, would prefer to call prolepsis and analepsis (40). Scrupulously cleansed of its affect, we might miss the connection between the affect associated with masochism and the affects connected to these forms of narrative anachrony. Genette identifies many different types of narrative anachrony: heterodiegetic, homodiegetic, open analepses, paralipsis, and lateral ellipsis. Many of Genette's categories depend on the premise of "order" in the sense of disturbing what he calls the

“first narrative.” Does the Farsi “disturb” the first narrative—if we assume as privileged speakers of English that the English is the “first narrative.”

As I argue below, the Persian in *Empire of the Senseless* works differently than the Persian in “The Persian Poems,” the text embedded within the text of *Blood and Guts in High School*. In order to compare the Persian within Acker’s two novels, I argue for another temporal category outside of Genette’s distinction of story time and narrative time. The use of Farsi in *Empire of the Senseless* happens at the level of narrative, while in *Blood and Guts in High School*, the Farsi used in the book happens within the story. In Acker’s earlier novel, Janey is learning Farsi and she authors “The Persian Poems” within the diegesis, the fictional world of the novel: “One day Janey finds a Persian grammar book. She begins to teach herself Persian” (*Blood and Guts* 70.) Within the story, there is a Persian slave trader, and Janey writes: “Twice a day the Persian slave trader came in and taught her how to whore. Otherwise there was nothing. One day she found a pencil stub and scrap paper in a forgotten corner of the room. She began to write down her life . . .” (*Blood and Guts* 65). There are about twenty unnumbered pages of novel that are a text-within-a text, “The Persian Poems” by Janey Smith. The reader learns Persian through Janey’s grammar lessons/poems. In *Blood and Guts*, the Farsi takes time to learn. This time exists within the story. It is, in Genette’s words, “within the temporal order of succession of the events in the story” (Genette 35).

Genette’s distinction between story time and narrative time qualifies narrative time as a “pseudo-time” of the arrangement of the events of the story time within the narrative (35). Acker’s use of Persian in *Empire* doesn’t refer to the events of the story at all; it is non-diegetic. In *Empire*, reading the Farsi takes time to negotiate the absence of meaning. Or, one skips over it, and elides time. In a more traditional narrative, these moments of anachrony would be

narrative time, or perhaps an example of what Genette identifies as a descriptive pause in Proust; but if we consider putting Genette and Deleuze in dialogue, when Deleuze argues that literary masochism is something that cannot be reduced to description, then we have to consider that the questions of temporality, especially in a moment that doesn't seem to produce description, are produced by masochistic narrative desire.⁶⁷ It is masochistic time because it is a formal aspect of the text that signifies waiting, but not waiting for any diegetic event to unfold in story time, and not a descriptive pause.

Douglas A. Martin begins a discussion of Persian in Acker that is useful to build on although he writes primarily about the use of Persian in *Blood and Guts in High School*, and he identifies the alphabet used in *Empire of the Senseless* as Arabic. Martin reflects on various moments of reading visual images conflated with written words in Acker's work. He writes: it was "an experience similar to reading the non-western alphabetic characters in Acker". . . Persian alphabets feature in *Blood and Guts in High School*, Arabic in *Empire of the Senseless*, Farsi lessons in *My Mother*" (164-165).

I also argue that the Farsi in *Blood and Guts in High School* works deconstructively. The example of the *ezâfe* shows Acker manipulating grammatical details to reveal the philosophical instabilities of binaries. The *ezâfe*, the Persian morpheme that "links two entities," displays some "rhyme" with "of" in English. According to Wheeler M. Thackston, the *ezâfe* "serves to link syntactically related nouns and adjectives together" (14). The syntax of Persian is incredibly complex and understanding the proper relationships among the various members of the Persian

⁶⁷ In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette's identifies the "descriptive pause" as a spatio-temporal movement in the novel, represented in Proust, for example, through "the growing importance of very long scenes covering a very short time of story" (93).

sentence cannot be overstated (ix). In some uses it functions as a possessive pronoun. With adjectives that the language classifies as “deviant” and places differently, there is no such linking unit (Martin 65). For example, in the quotation below, Martin points out how grammatically, Janey becomes an object instead of a subject, and thus the text makes a claim about patriarchal language, gender and agency. Martin has an extended reading of Janey’s play with language in *Blood and Guts*:

How two entities *do* link up creates a dynamic trailing across these pages we are meant to read as those Janey is filling up, as she begins to play with language, to pass her days. Through these poems Janey is writing, we see how she realizes she learns to construct her environment through a language-system (e.g. “(is not) (other) (a thing) (chair)= “there is only a chair”), that there are not words for some things in some languages, that “Janey hates prison.” And that textbook examples are not so innocuous, depending on one’s standpoint. The verbs that she is given to work with: to have, to buy, to want, to see, to come to beat up, to eat, to rob, to kidnap, to kill, to know. Janey becomes the object of these verbs, rather than the subject (i.e., “to have Janey,” rather than have Janey have). She translates into her own (English) language, what aspects she chooses to emphasize, prioritize, intensify, and to allow to gain in relevance; the subtexts begin to seem blatantly apparent, once she tries to put herself back into her own language. In order to write “soul” to mark it out as language, there’s a mark you must use, to precede other marks, making the meaning of what follows “immaterial.” Also explored through “Janey/Acker’s written characters is how one represents notions of “indefiniteness.” (65)

The exercises reveal something about Persian grammar to the English reader, but also plays with gender deconstructively. Most importantly, for distinguishing between story time and narrative time, it shows that the Persian is taking place during the story time.

The reader is always waiting for the English referent in Acker's Persian. Between the two novels, this experience of reading the Persian works differently with the side-by-side use of English and Persian in one novel and not the other. In *Blood and Guts* the Persian is used bilingually like a grammar book exercise, whereas in *Empire* the relationship between the English and Persian is not as clear. Just as I use Martin's reading of *Blood and Guts* to contrast the ways that Farsi is used differently in the two texts, Martin himself makes a similar move between *Blood and Guts* and *My Mother* to show that Acker's side-by-side use of Persian and English is a much different experience for the reader than the untranslated sections of German in *My Mother*. He observes that *My Mother* "provides along with the second language nothing like Janey's translations—helping us read what might be strange to our eyes, however liberal the equivalencies accompanying the Persian patches in *Blood and Guts*. In *Blood and Guts*, Janey's diegetic use of the language, her grammatical and poetic engagement with the language within the story, distinguishes this use of the language from that in *Empire*."

Correcting accepted publication history of *Empire*, Martin writes carefully on the migration of the Farsi poems from Acker's early poetry to her later repurposing them as parts of the novels. Although he doesn't describe the process of the interpretation of untranslatable texts in Acker as masochistic, it is a troublesome moment for him as a reader. Ultimately, there is a connection in his reading between "The Persian Poems" and time. Martin writes "[t]he learning of a new meaning-making system, as I read it, takes the time of many pages and exercises" (64).

Although time passes as Janey and the reader learn to read Persian, the time is passing diegetically. In *Empire of the Senseless* the time passes non-diegetically, at the level of narrative.

If the western reader of *Empire of the Senseless* must encounter the Farsi not as a grammar lesson, but as the absence of meaning in the encounter with the Perso-Arabic script, then we should consider how the Perso-Arabic script works visually. One way to think about how the Farsi works in the novel is to think of it as a quasi-filmic montage. In film theory, montage emphasizes the dynamic, often discontinuous relationships between shots and the juxtaposition of images to create ideas not present in either shot by itself. The montage sequence is also understood as a way to represent the passage of time in film. Acker describes her literary techniques as montage when she says: “the harder the cut the better,” describing her own process in *Politics* (*Hannibal Lecter* 31.) She often plays with the changing speeds of the narrative’s development, and its effects on the reader’s comfort zones. Perhaps the juxtaposition of the English and Farsi is like a Soviet montage, a jump cut, more visual than verbal.

Acker conducted two interviews that provide some insight into her own thinking about visual influences in her writing. The first is with William Burroughs. The moniker of ‘The Female William Burroughs’ is “still the opening lead in the publicity for the acquisition of her archive by Duke University (Kathy Acker Papers). The archive, which spans 1972-1997, does not include 1968’s *Politics*, excerpted in *Hannibal Lecter*, *My Father*, as part of the collections. In *Hannibal Lecter*, Acker writes: “I modeled my writing on [Burroughs]. I was 21! I’m 39 now. It’s very old hat.” (*Hannibal Lecter* 31) Later, Acker interviews Burroughs for the “Writers Talk: Ideas of Our Time” series, an extensive collection of videos on Modern Literature and Philosophy, and one for which Acker herself was interviewed by cultural critic Angela McRobbie. Burroughs, in his interview, says that Brion Gysin taught him to see a picture. Like a

Brion Gysin painting of alphabets at odds, Acker wants to keep pursuing different iterations of the word/image relationship.

Another iteration of the word/image relationship in Acker shows up in interview in which she uses the metaphor of an Arabic landscape to explain an undecipherable sign, like the undecipherable Spanish and Persian that she uses in her own fiction. In a tangential moment, Acker reveals how she thinks about experimental contemporary fiction like that of Juan Goytisolo's, and makes connections to themes that run through her own work. Goytisolo, like other inspirations for Acker, Jean Genet and Pasolini, are all artists who used their own sexual oppression to agitate for broader social causes. During an interview with Goytisolo, Acker and the exiled Spanish novelist who lives in Morocco discuss his 1985 novel, *Landscapes After the Battle* or *Paisajes después de la batalla*. Acker tells Goytisolo what it was like for her to read the novel and she compares it to an undecipherable sign that becomes an Arabic landscape:

Well what happens is that when the “I” opened up for me, when there was so many mazes and windings in the “I”, it was—there’s this quote I have that Sardo said of Lima’s work, text that repeats itself that cites itself that plagiarizes itself, a tapestry that is unstrung in order to weave other signs. I mean that’s what happened it seemed, as if other signs that the dissolution of the centralized “I” was leading to the graffiti or to the undecipherable signs, really almost to what becomes very much an Arabic landscape. Was that all in mind? In a sense, the hero is the novel. You know there are various mirrors. The actual geography of the hero and of the landscape is that of very narrow streets that wind on each other. I mean it becomes a maze for me. . . (Kathy Acker Papers)

The undecipherable sign here becomes the Arabic landscape, and later in the interview, the book is likened to the medina, the Arab word for town. Acker makes the connection to how she thinks about the unrepresentability of self and language, so she moves from the undecipherable sign to Arabic painting which doesn't represent human images, and thus problematizes identity and representation:

I was also thinking, I remember that I had once read that in Arabic painting you're not allowed to reproduce the human face, because the human face is the reproduction of God's face, of Allah's face, and then I thought the reproduction here is, yes it's also of the *medina*, but it's also of finally what can't be said. That in one way what you're doing here is you're representing *le Sentier*, the city, but in another way again that message from beyond, you're representing something that cannot be represented. Because underneath there's always that untranslatable language (Kathy Acker Papers).

I have considered several instances of how Acker might think about Arabic text as a visual image. Materially and functionally, the Persian enters the text of *Empire of the Senseless* as a piece of artwork. Theoretically, the Persian as an undecipherable sign suspends time in a manner similar to the frozen piece of artwork that Deleuze considers the aesthetics of masochism. It is this aspect of the narrative that I provokes my return to Genette's description of the dual temporalities in written narrative. In a passage in which he describes time as a global look, he notes the difficulty of describing this in written literature, and discusses "denying the linearity of the signifier," all of which Acker seems to be doing by creating a masochistic experience of reading.⁶⁸

68 Genette describes a "global look" as "a look whose direction is no longer determined by the sequence of images" (34).

In *Empire of the Senseless*, Acker's narrative constructs a deviant state of space and time that creates a sense of history as fantasy through formal experimentation with narrative, the linearity of plot and the temporality of the narrative, as well as psychoanalytic forms (like representations of the mechanisms of desire, the unconscious, the uncanny and the oedipal family), and experiments with ideas about narrative delay, the delay in signification, and aesthetics of sadism and masochism. In explaining the dual temporality of story time and narrative time, Genette describes that texts invite a "kind of global and synchronic look—or at least a look whose direction is no longer determined by the sequence of images" He argues that written literary narrative "can only be 'consumed,' and therefore actualized in a *time* that is obviously reading time, and even if the sequentiality of its components can be undermined by a capricious, repetitive, or selective reading, that undermining nonetheless stops short of perfect analexia" (34). This "synchronic look" seems to describe Acker's work in multiple ways: the contemporaneous adaptation of other texts, the "look" itself as it invokes visual aesthetics and narrative temporality, and as an experiment with the linearity of the signifier. Narrative actualized in time is reading time, and in Acker, the disruptive signs that impede signification create the experience of reading as masochistic time.

Through this examination of masochistic narrative aesthetics and temporality in Acker, I have identified examples of Acker's style, which are normally read in terms of sadomasochistic crudeness, but actually shows us something about temporality yet unarticulated in theories of masochism concerning narrative. The eroticized, violent language of Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* is not the descriptive, imperative language of pornography, but demonstrates that masochism is fundamentally about fantasy, suspense, persuasion, and a contract with the reader, which negotiates time. By comparing narrative theory and masochistic theory, specifically in

terms of temporality, it's clear that the waiting in Acker's narrative describes duration in narrative that is better understood through masochistic narrative desire. Now that I have considered what a reading of Acker's narrative adds to Deleuze's literary masochism, or pornography, I am poised to continue thinking about narrative and masochism in less obviously eroticized terms. Continuing the trajectory of converting private formulations of masochistic desire into public fantasies, in the next chapter I will turn to aesthetics of masochism which are social, in order to examine what Freud calls moral masochism.

CHAPTER 4

“Social Masochism in *The Unconsoled*”

Still Waiting

In Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *The Unconsoled*, the peculiar social anxiety that the protagonist, Mr. Ryder, navigates is both confusing and captivating because he often seems not to know or understand the social relationships he has. This type of social anxiety, and the strange effect on the reader of following a passive character, is not unique to Ishiguro, but it is a repeated theme in many of his novels, including his most recent, *The Buried Giant*, and the “fog of memory” that afflicts not only the elderly protagonists, but also the larger community.⁶⁹ In my reading of this condition in *The Unconsoled*, the social anxiety of not knowing or not remembering is associated with the masochistic point of view, which Freud might label “feminine” passivity. Ryder’s intimate, emotional relationships are with characters in the novel who may or may not be strangers to him. He willingly performs scenes of intimate knowledge as if each episode were an improvised play. Each scene plays out in a state of waiting, which I will argue demonstrates, yet complicates, Deleuze’s temporal form of masochism, especially of the contract, because they express a social masochism.⁷⁰

The scenes of social masochism offer a unique way to understand the social relationships as a set of subject/object relations in masochistic fantasy. Almost every scene in the novel seems to be about waiting. When Ryder first discusses his schedule with Miss Stratmann, the

⁶⁹ See Neil Gaiman’s description of “the fog of memory” in his *New York Times* review of *The Buried Giant*.

⁷⁰ Freud uses the terms sublimated moral masochism, Reik social masochism, and I will use the term social masochism throughout the chapter.

constraints on his time are introduced as a foregone conclusion to which Ryder must acquiesce. Ryder says: “speaking of my schedule . . .’ I paused rather deliberately, expecting the young woman to exclaim at her forgetfulness” (Ishiguro 11). Miss Stratmann is not the first person who has forgotten Ryder, and Ryder is not the first person to trail off in to the ellipses that mark his deliberate pause; however, Miss Stratmann will reiterate the schedule “*is tight*” and *is heavy*” (11). In the next chapter, Ryder’s arrival is described as “delayed” (18) by Mr. Hoffman, the hotel manager, who tells Ryder that he couldn’t “bear to think I was adding further pressure to your schedule” (21). A few minutes later, after describing his own trouble with his memory, when he meets the manager’s son, Stephan Hoffman, the son tells Ryder: “I remember the period when Father was still waiting for your reply” (25). This use of the past progressive, describes an action that begins in the past before something else, an action still in progress. In this example, Hoffman was waiting, before Ryder replied; however, Stephan uses “still,” which emphasizes the continuation of waiting. Stephan is communicating to Ryder that memory of Father still waiting for Ryder’s reply. It is not only Miss Stratmann, Mr. Hoffman, and his son who wait for Ryder. The porter, Gustav, waits for Ryder “next utterance as though for a judgement” (29), and Sophie and Boris, he notes makes him feel “a little taken aback, moreover, that they should be expecting me, and it was a moment or two before I waved back and began making my way towards them” (32). At the end of chapter three, Sophie tells Ryder twice that “for us, I mean for me and you and Boris, time’s slipping away” (3), and “Time’s getting on” (39). The text is rich with examples of uneasy waiting, anxious anticipation, and other peculiar temporalities. What Ishiguro’s novel captures about the relationship between masochism and time, highlights the performative moment of consent—he consents to all the characters who make demands on his time—what Deleuze would call the contract. The novel also emphasizes the social aspects of

masochistic time. What Ishiguro adds to Deleuze is the accumulation of small violations of the idea of a social contract.

In one of the most telling examples of moments of waiting, Ryder simultaneously figures throughout the novel both as the child being beaten and as the ambiguous authority figure beating the child, Boris. In an example from chapter four, it is unclear what Ryder's relationship to the little boy, Boris, is; however, rather than explore that rationally in the novel's explication of the scene, it manifests affectively in an amplified social anxiety. Ryder has Boris with him during an encounter with his old friend, Geoffrey Saunders. As an argument with Saunders is provoked by Boris's innocent comments, Ryder and Saunders argue about the boy, whom Saunders, speaking to Ryder, calls "your boy" (Ishiguro 50). After this, Boris is called again, "the boy," "a small boy," "a boy," until Saunders refers specifically to Boris's indulgence in fantasy. Then Ryder is angered so much that he claims the paternal relationship: "He's my boy, I'll say when it's time for him to..." (Ishiguro 50). Saunders's reference to overindulging in child-like fantasy is something both Ryder and Boris are guilty of doing, so Saunders's judgment of Boris implies a judgment of Ryder. This reframes what might be the humiliation felt in the father/child relationship and makes them guilty equals as the subject of masochistic fantasy. Even though this scene seems to briefly illuminate Ryder's relationship to Boris, through masochistic fantasy's devaluation of the father, we can understand this scene not as a clue to Boris's identity, but, rather, a clue to the narrative's desire.

The scenes of masochistic temporality in Ishiguro's novel are not the frozen tableaux of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus and Furs*, but they do depict moments that frustrate the reader's desire to understand the social relationships as moments of waiting. For example, as the party travels through a village square looking for a bus stop, Saunders tells Ryder and Boris that

they will have to wait at this “recognized” bus stop without a sign. This chapter ends and the next begins with the same scene of waiting: “We [Boris and I] stood beneath the street lamps for several minutes, surrounded by silence” (Ishiguro 53). The pair might have waited anxiously at this supposed bus stop with Boris, discussing if they should worry or not, but another chance encounter brings the period of indefinite waiting to an end. This example shows how a perceived critique of fantasy by Saunders angers Ryder, a scene of pure waiting, and the affects of guilt, humiliation, and anxiety frame the most important piece of information in the scene, Ryder’s claiming Boris as “my boy,” as ambiguous as that claim is in the end. These formal characteristics of masochism especially frame the question that occupies the reader—“How do the characters know one another?” While Boris tells Ryder to be patient, Ryder tells Boris “[s]ometimes things do happen as you expect” and, through a number of similar scenes in the novel, it also conditions the reader’s response to the theme of anticipation and expectation as characteristics of social masochism.

Although the idea of a social masochism comes from Freud, I take the term itself from Reik. To define social masochism from Ishiguro’s novel, I add to my evolving aesthetics of masochism from Deleuze, and to Freud’s competing theories and types of masochism, by considering how sexual difference and gender impact our understanding of masochism in *The Unconsoled*. Mr. Ryder wouldn’t appear to lend himself to a queer or feminist reading easily, although queer feminist psychoanalytic critics such as Gaylyn Studlar have demonstrated how to use Deleuze in such a fashion for film criticism, here I focus on the male literary character, Ryder’s non-sexual suffering (which of course is erotic), the loss and deferral of the sexual object, as the disavowal of the father. Reading the narrative desire of the novel through the lens of masochistic time helps to identity the queer temporality of the novel. Finally, uniting Freud’s

distinct categories of masochism as one, and describing masochism as erotic, “feminine,” and social will help to develop a problem of the masochistic aesthetic and temporality that Deleuze discusses, the problem of a male-identified character exhibiting a “feminine” or passive nature. In his description of the contract, Deleuze notes that unlike the contract in patriarchy, which normally figures the woman as object, the contract in masochism reverses this state of affairs and figures the woman as the subject with whom the contract is entered into by the masochist (92). In the different chapters of the dissertation, I have discussed masochistic time, we haven’t yet fully considered a male masochist with a female torturer.

Intervening in recent literary criticism on the novel, and building upon the previous analyses of waiting and literary masochism undertaken in this dissertation, in this chapter, I identify *The Unconsoled* as an example of social masochism, where the desires for a social sphere, which creates a narrative of the delay, postponement, and interruption.⁷¹ Readings of the novel’s compelling representation of temporality are often taken up in critical discussions of time and space in terms of globalization.⁷² And the claustrophobic interior spaces of *The Unconsoled* are often read as a collapsing of postmodern space which demonstrate an “inability to orient ourselves in the time-space compressions and dislocations of capitalist globalization,” as Patricia

⁷¹ The critical reception of this novel often notes the sense of frustration and anxiety that the novel produces in the reader, and often described the novel in terms of obstruction as Alan Wall does: “a phantasmagoria of frustration, irritation, and presumption.” *Spectator* (13 May 1995): 45. See also Anita Brookner, for example, when she summarizes critical responses as related to the short attention span of reading in the electronic age. “A Superb Achievement.” *Spectator* (24 June 1995):40.

⁷² See Robbin’s article on globalization, time, and space (430-431).

Waugh demonstrates through her comparison of the hotel setting of the novel with Jameson's reading of the Bonaventure Hotel in Las Vegas (17). Despite the postmodern comparison, Waugh's essay connects Ishiguro's representation of temporality with the speeding up of Modernist culture, especially in T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* (18).⁷³ Although Waugh's reading considers time "projected onto the dimension of space" in Ishiguro's novel, and argues that his representation of "lateness" in the spirit of T.S. Eliot's High Modernism, she describes Ryder as a sadist.⁷⁴ Instead of understanding Ryder as a sadist, my reading of masochistic time similarly understands Ryder's affects and the novel's lateness waiting and suspension as characteristics of formal masochism. Reading Ryder's affects through social masochism allows us to understand

⁷³ See also *The Problem with Pleasure*, for Laura Frost's description of Eliot's *The Wasteland* in terms of confronting the reader with "compromised pleasure," and her larger reading of displeasure in other modernists (2).

⁷⁴ In Ishiguro's work, Waugh identifies a "stoic cosmopolitanism" and a tradition of ethical philosophy that requires one to deny any affective attachment to the world (19). Although she describes Ryder as a character who commits "numerous small acts of cruelty, neglect, sadism, and torture," she reads these affects not through a psychoanalytic lens, but as a parody of professionalism and the experience of "affective cosmopolitanism," or an "apatheia that divests itself of attachment" (19). This "Stoical conception of self-denial and self-control" demonstrate "the ideology of professionalism as committed and efficient but 'cool' concept of service and duty" (19). She sees a connection between stoic cosmopolitanism and modernist concepts of impersonality (20).

what seem like negative affects for social relationships in a more productive mode, and developing the masochistic aesthetic.⁷⁵

On both the individual and social level, a masochistic desire explains many of the affects and temporalities of *The Unconsoled*. With a similar backward gaze embraced in Heather Love's *Feeling Backwards*, the characters in the novel seem oriented temporally to something other than the forward progress of Modernity.⁷⁶ Ryder's eyes may gaze upward to a stain on the ceiling, but what he sees is a screen for re-projecting his childhood fantasy. Instead of melancholia, I will

⁷⁵ Ishiguro's novel "is not even nominally circumscribed by time or place," as Natalie Reitano describes in another example of recent criticism on globalism in Ishiguro which also examines temporality with both "the wound" and "community." Reitano also makes the connection between "global" time in *The Unconsoled* and David Harvey's explanation of "time-space compression" in *The Condition of Postmodernity* in which "the horizons of both private and public decision-making have shrunk" (363). Her argument connects the interrupted community with what Jean-Luc Nancy calls the "limit of community" (362). Reitano's mode of comparison considers the opposition between "the time of melancholic repetition to that of interruption" (362).

⁷⁶ See *Feeling Backward* where she creates, by looking at backward gazes, an "image repertoire of queer modernist melancholia." Love writes: "The idea of modernity—with its suggestions of progress, rationality, and the technological advance—is intimately bound up with backwardness. The association of progress and regress is a function not only the failure of modernity's key projects but also the lack of reliance of the concept of modernity on excluded, degraded, and superseded others" (5).

examine what appear at first to be nonsexual examples of masochism, especially narrative desire, and the social affects of masochism.

The Social Contract: Social Fantasy as Masochistic Fantasy

The success of Ishiguro's novel hinges largely on the reader's enjoyment of a never-ending series of anxious social moments that plot out the social space as a set of affects often associated with masochism. In Ishiguro, the reader experiences the anticipation of arrival, a schedule, the expectation of a performance, the embarrassment and shame of pretending, which all make the novel emotionally uncomfortable. In an interview with Pico Iyer, Ishiguro emphasizes the importance of time for readers to understand the book, especially "not having a schedule" as an introductory idea ("Kazuo Ishiguro" n. pag.). In addition to working against the chronological, against flashbacks (his earlier work), for Ishiguro there is a third option: to have the character stumble into other versions of himself or his parents. This character would appropriate the lives of others for his own story. Ishiguro says that an important way that we do this is in dream; however, I argue that Deleuze's reading of Reik suggests a set of affects associated both psychologically and aesthetically with masochism that expand the idea of the dream as a structure for the narrative. Instead of the dream, we have a passive character navigating a space where every social moment operative like a miniature version of Deleuze's contract, and create a constant narrativization of masochistic desire.

Reik identifies four basic characteristics of psychoanalytic masochism, which Deleuze condenses into this list. The first is the "special significance of fantasy," or "the form of the fantasy. . . the fantasy experienced for its own sake, or the scene which is dreamed, dramatized, ritualized and which is an indispensable element of masochism" (Deleuze 74-75). The second is

the “suspense factor,” or “the waiting, the delay, the expressing the way in which anxiety affects sexual tension and inhibits its discharge” (Deleuze 75). The demonstrative feature of masochism is third. Deleuze also class this “the persuasive feature,” or “the particular way in which the masochist exhibits his suffering, embarrassment and humiliation” (75). The final factor is “provocative fear,” or the masochist’s aggressive demand for “punishment since it resolves anxiety and allows him to enjoy the forbidden pleasure” (Deleuze 75). The first characteristic suggests an alternative subjective realm, whereas the rest of the features identify the affects of masochism: suspense, (provocative) fear, anxiety, persuasion, suffering, embarrassment, and humiliation.

Deleuze’s addition is the fifth characteristic, the form of “the contract” in the masochistic relationship. He explains that the contract “is drawn up between the subject and the torturess... The masochist appears to be held by chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone” (Deleuze 75). In Ishiguro’s novel, the torturess is not personified in one woman; rather the masochist’s contract is social. The affect produced by disobeying the contract, through “provocative fear,” not only produces fear and the anxiety that resolves it, but also guilt. Deleuze describes how as a defense, the masochistic protagonist

must evolve a complex strategy to protect his world of fantasy and symbols, and to ward off the hallucinatory inroads of reality. . . [t]his procedure which, as we shall see, is constantly used in masochism is the *contract*. A contract is established between the hero and the woman, whereby at a precise point in time and for a determinate period, she is given every right over him. (66)

In the masochistic ritual, Deleuze argues that the father, who represents the law, is excluded from the mother and son relationship, and what is being beaten is the image of the father that persists in the masochist.

Deleuze not only restages masochism, but reworks Freud's own title to reconceptualize masochism around the father: "It is not a child but a father that is being beaten" (66). Besides excluding the father, Deleuze explains how the master/torturer must be, symbolically, a woman, because this fantasy is about the exclusion of the father. The victim enters into a contract with the mother because the contract is a mitigation of the law and the law becomes displaced from the father onto the mother. Deleuze describes the masochistic contract as operating ironically on the form of the love-relationship whose precondition is the contract:

A contract is drawn up between the subject and torturer, giving a new application to the idea of the jurists of antiquity that slavery is based on a contract. The masochist appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone. The masochistic contract implies not only the necessity of the victim's consent, but his ability to persuade, and his pedagogical and judicial efforts to train his torturer. (75)

His discussion of the contract leads to an argument about guilt and the law. The righteous man obeys the law because of guilt; he is guilty in advance. By scrupulously adhering to this law, the masochist demonstrates in advance the absurdity of the law, just like the absurd obedience of "normative" love relationships that Deleuze suggest masochism parodies.

In Ishiguro's narrative, the literally unspoken contract-like agreement between Sophie and Gustav not to speak operates like the masochistic contract that Deleuze describes. Gustav is the father, expelled from the mother/child relationship, repeatedly beaten in the sense that he is

punished with silence for his wronging his daughter long ago. Ryder has contractual relationships with an endless chain of characters to whom he promises some favor. He has a contractual relationship to the hotel as a performer, and a similarly formal relationship with certain expectations as a guest at the hotel and elsewhere in the city. As I indicated earlier, the schedule is an example of the contract, which would have organized the temporality of the novel. However, the social contract also organizes these social relationships into constellations of the beating fantasy. Violating the contracts produces guilt and suffering.

The social contract, of course, recalls Rousseau's political theory. There are striking similarities between the importance of fantasy to masochism, and the use of fantasy in Rousseau's imagining of the social contract where he asks why man is born free, and yet everywhere he is in chains (45). He writes: "There are some who may believe themselves masters of others, and are no less enslaved than they" (45). Authority and social order are agreed upon conventions, speech acts, much like Deleuze's contract for masochism.

In Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, his language, especially the subjunctive and the conditional perfect, describes the ideal state as if it were a fantasy. The pages before the preface are delivered in a series of past unreal conditional constructions: "If I had had to choose the place of my birth, I would have chosen" is one example (*Discourse* 57). After a number of such conditional and unreal suppositions, the section concludes with the subjunctive mood:

If, less fortunate or wise too late, I were to find myself reduced to ending an infirm and languishing sojourn on earth in other climes, ...I would have at least kept alive in my soul the feelings that I was unable to express in my own country, and, prompted by a tender and disinterested love for my distant fellow citizens, I would have

addressed to them from the bottom of my heart some such words as these. (*Discourse* 61)

Rousseau's language fantasizes the ideal state and his affective relationship to his fellow citizens.

Ironically, then, Rousseau would unveil the fantasy between the people and the sovereign in the second chapter of Book Two of *The Social Contract* where he describes how politicians, by disassembling the rights of the sovereign are "made into a fantastic patchwork; it is as if they have made a man of more than one body, one having eyes, another arms, another feet, and nothing else."⁷⁷ He compares the effect to a magician's dismembering "conjuring trick" (64). This collective fantasy of the disassembled rights of the sovereign, troped as the "dismembering of a child" (64), expresses a social fantasy as a masochistic fantasy. In the following chapter, Rousseau will dissemble the body politic and play with the metaphor of the body and body parts. His language creates a fantastic Frankenstein-like image of bringing to life the dissembled parts of the social body, which is the staging for his conjuring of "The Lawgiver." The Lawgiver is the mechanic who invents the machine and capable of transforming human nature, and Rousseau

⁷⁷I cite the 1994 Oxford edition, translated by Christopher Betts. The 1997 Cambridge edition, *Rousseau: The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, edited and translated by Victor Gourevitch, translates the metaphor as "being that is fantastical and formed of disparate pieces" (58). In another Oxford edition published in 1972, edited by Ronald Grimsley, the text in French corresponds with the Oxford translation in English of the word "patchwork." It states: "*Ils font du souverain un être fantastique et formé de pièces rapportées; c'est come s'ils composaient l'homme de plusieurs corp, don't l'un aurait des yeux, l'autre de bras, l'autre des pieds, et rien de plus*" (126) A footnote in English clarifies that "*rapportées*" means "separate, i.e. a patchwork figure" (126n1).

tells us he is extraordinary (76). His relationship to the people is certainly fantastic, extraordinary, monstrous perhaps, born of the people, but positioned differently from the people, both an insider and outsider. The language of the fantastic continues in the discussion of the ideal size of the state, like the ideal stature of man, outside of which there exists dwarfs and giants. To conclude Book Two, and to continue the trope of fantastic, magical tropes of the Lawgiver, Rousseau argues for the unknown, secret, essential characteristic of the law.

Although perhaps in a different scale, we see the social fantasy of the Lawgiver in Ryder's relationship to the social body in the novel. The fantastic social contract is more mundane in Ishiguro. The schedule that should organize Mr. Ryder's visit is a very specific example of how the social contract materializes. Ishiguro also uses the implied loss of a schedule to organize the temporal chaos of the novel, and create a string of tragicomedies for Mr. Ryder, and constellation of characters who shift into his life as soon as he arrives in their city. As we have seen above, Ryder does not question the implied schedule to which he is supposed to adhere, yet he feels guilty for not having followed it (11). For example, in the first chapter, Ryder feels guilty that he has shown up before he is expected. He seems to share this emotion with the both the reader and the taxi driver who witness the yet unnamed protagonist's implied humiliation: "The taxi driver seemed embarrassed that there was no one—not even a clerk behind the lobby desk—waiting to welcome me" (Ishiguro 3). The taxi driver "mumbles" an excuse, the desk clerk "mumbles" and "mutter[s]" apologies, and the noise outside is "muffled" as Ryder is asked to listen to Mr. Brodsky. Instead of what Ryder is literally asked to listen too, the reader must imagine the aural conditions of the first two pages. Just as the narrator introduces the reader to the spatial setting, there is likewise an aural background of mumbling, muttering, muffled sounds. Mumbles, mutterings and muffled sounds are signifiers that are more noticeably

detached from their signifieds, the shameful stammering of story. They border on nonsense but, like the noises a mother makes, they have the potential to sooth a child, so they echo what Gaylyn Studlar calls “the [child’s] wish for symbiosis with the powerful mother” and become another way that uncertainty and coping with loss is troped as social masochism in the novel (25). This example also explicitly connects the affects we associate with masochism with an experience of waiting.

In another example, Ryder oversleeps, and even this mundane social *faux pas*, especially because it’s related to temporality, creates a sense of guilt that the character and readers share: “When I was roused by the bedside telephone, I had the impression it had been ringing for some time” (Ishiguro 18). Ryder, frustrated both for having slept and for being woken, feels guilty for not having awakened when the phone first rang, for having kept the caller waiting, and, as he will realize, for having missed a vague appointment that he did not know he had. Guilt, humiliation, social anxiety, and frustration permeate the novel’s aesthetics.

The novel suggests early on that pleasure through frustration is possible in fantasy, and thus as a narrative strategy as well. Early in the text, Ryder falls asleep in a hotel room and is transported back in time and space. He recognizes that his hotel room and childhood room *are* the same space: “The room I was now in, I realized, was the very same room that had served as my bedroom” (16). Related to this event, Ryder describes a strategy for incorporating whatever threatens fantasy into the fantasy, and the feeling of satisfaction he describes comes from using this fantasy to block out the domestic discord between his mother and father. This suggests a masochistic fantasy as a strategy for dealing with what might seem like negative affects (humiliation, guilt, social anxiety, and frustration) between consolation and masochism as a positive masochistic pleasure. The example from the novel seems explicitly about space, but it

also demonstrates the queer temporality of the backward gaze to childhood fantasy; this experience of masochistic time is also important.⁷⁸ Masochistic fantasy, recollected in uncertainty, like most psychoanalytic mechanisms, has a latent meaning that is always a product of the unconscious and subject to interpretation. This uncertain aspect of fantasy is another way that waiting is figured as masochistic time, in addition to episodes of actual waiting.

Masochistic fantasy takes certain narrative forms, which are also social. Like masochism, narrative pleasure is similarly bound to pain. For example, plot, its most basic structure, necessarily entails impediments to the satisfaction of knowing.⁷⁹ Instead of reading blocked heterosexual desire, I consider the detours of plot as a satisfaction of masochistic desire, when reading for the plot is frustrated—that desire is masochistically satisfied.

Before Freud defines social masochism in “The Economic Problem of Masochism (1924),” he first describes the masochistic fantasy in “A Child is Being Beaten (1919).” In this essay, Freud’s articulation of masochism focuses on “the agitations of the parental complex” or understanding the parents as loved persons (the Oedipal complex) who play a role in the beating fantasy. I argue that the curious constellation of relationships in *The Unconsoled*, this social masochism, helps us understand Freud’s essay, and to reimagine the relationships between the characters as something less fixed. Critics of *The Unconsoled* are preoccupied with this aspect of the novel; many identify the sets of triangulated relationships, often in Freudian paradigms, but few do so through the “The Economic Problem of Masochism” or “A Child is Being Beaten.”

In “A Child is Being Beaten,” Freud would like to identify clearly whether the masochistic fantasy is sadistic or masochistic; instead, he identifies an unintelligible series of

⁷⁸ See Love on the backward gaze and queer temporality (5).

⁷⁹ See Peter Brooks’s *Reading for the Plot* (37).

interrelations and iterations of sadism and masochism. In “The Economic Problem of Masochism,” Freud’s example of masochism comes under the analyst’s observation in three ways: an erotogenic masochism (a sexual excitation); a feminine masochism in males (“as an expression of feminine nature”); and as a social (moral) masochism, (a norm of behavior) (192). Freud believes that the feminine masochism expressed in males is the easiest to understand, and so he begins there. The obvious interpretation here is not unlike his interpretation of masochism in “A Child is Being Beaten.” The patient wants to be treated like a child, and creates elaborate fantasies in order to maintain a passive role and a sexual relationship with the father. However, dissatisfied with this reading, Freud returns to the close connections between sadism and masochism to analyze the death instinct and the pleasure-principle. Freud suggests that the death instinct remains active in a person; “primal sadism” is actually identical to masochism. A residual part of the death instinct remains in the person and is “the true erotogenic masochism” (195). In this interpretation of the second form of masochism—the feminine, passive masochism—Freud reveals that it is also erotogenic masochism, in addition to showing its close connection to sadism.

Social masochism, which appears to have the loosest connection with sexuality, will, of course, also be revealed as having an erotic component. In a model similar to his reading of feminine masochism, Freud will reveal how the sadistic super-ego will turn some of its death instinct inwards towards the masochistic ego. Social masochists are dominated by their overly sensitive consciences. Like the other forms of masochism, the unconscious guilt of social masochism is a desire for punishment, which is ultimately for Freud a desire to be beaten by the father, or to have a passive, sexual relationship with this authority figure. Although social

masochism is most removed from its object of desire, it is easy to see one's relationship to the social as the object of desire.

In the following pages, I want to think about this “private” and “sexual” version of masochistic fantasy as a template for uncertain social relationships and temporalities. A masochistic narrative structure shaped by the displacement of suffering, and a narrative process of becoming, materialize out of the uncertainty and disorientation inherent in Freud's own polymorphous formulation of the fantasy “A Child is Being Beaten.” The essay seems to call for a reading that works against a fixed meaning because of the very disordering of the fantasy that Freud himself performs again and again. Freud's argument begins with the statement: “A child is being beaten.” “Its [the fantasy's] first appearance,” he warns, “is recollected in uncertainty” (97). This uncertainty is not easily surmounted. The impulse might be to read the masochistic fantasy for sexual aim—*who* is the object of desire? However, my reading analyzes masochistic time and desire—or the uncertain *when* of masochistic desire and narrative.

As Freud stylistically performs masochistic time, or the deferral of epistemological desire, it is as if the text self-destructs to reveal its own inner workings in a performance more intricate than one could wish for. Freud's masochistic fantasy conceptualizes narrative with innovative structural possibility. However, I argue that using the trope of the wound (Ryder's psychological wounds, Brodsky's physical wounds or the social wounds of Gustav) that cannot be healed or is always being healed to identify the masochistic condition of narrative emphasizes postmodern and psychoanalytic understanding of the potential for loss and incompleteness.

Continuing along this line of masochism and deferral of epistemological desire, and returning to the title of Ishiguro's text, what it means to be “unconsoled” in the novel, can explain the masochistic treatment of the suspension of loss. In this passage, Mr. Brodsky goes

from remembering for Ryder the fantasy that he and Miss Collins used to enact to explaining how and why his wound cannot be healed. These two narratives link through a comparison of consolation.

I always touched my wound, caressed it. Some days, I picked at its edges, even pressed it hard between the fingers. You realise soon enough when a wound's not going to heal. The music, even when I was a conductor, I knew that's all it was, a consolation. It helped for a while. I liked the feeling, pressing the wound, it fascinated me. A good wound, it can do that, it fascinates. It looks a little different every day. Has it changed? You wonder. Maybe it's healing at last. You look at it in a mirror, it looks different. You do this year after year, and then you know it's not going to heal and in the end you get tired of it. You get so tired.' He fell silent and looked again at his bouquet. Then he said again: 'You get so tired. You're not tired yet, Mr Ryder? You get so tired.'

'Perhaps,' I said tentatively, 'Miss Collins has the power to heal your wound.'

'Her?' He laughed suddenly then went silent again. After a while he said quietly: 'She'll be like the music. A consolation. A wonderful consolation. That's all I ask now. A consolation. But heal the wound? He shook his head. 'If I showed it to you now, my friend I could show it to you, you'd see that was an impossibility. A medical impossibility. All I want, all I ask for now is a consolation. Even if it's like the way I said, just half-way stiff and we're doing no more than dancing. After that the wound can do what it likes. (Ishiguro 313)

Music and Miss Collins console. They both distract from and substitute for the healing of his wound. But, most importantly, the discussion of consolation also links up with the erotic discussion of the masochistic theatrics that might replace sex, not just the played-at deferral of the scene, but the ultimate deferral of their inability to consummate the relationship because of the physical conditions of their aged bodies. Their simultaneously fantasized future and past union might be a consolation: the “dancing” of their bodies, a close physical intimacy that might approximate sexual intercourse but cannot exactly replace it. Consolation is the temporary and imperfect soothing and probing of a wound by memory and narrative. Mr. Brodsky’s wound remains unconsoled, although there are consolations for it; it cannot be replaced by either his music, or, he imagines, by Miss Collins. This example corresponds with Deleuze’s description of the persuasive feature of masochism, which must demonstrate the humiliation and suffering of the masochistic aesthetic, and the fantasized relationship with Miss Collins, which captures an experience of masochistic time.

Mr. Brodsky’s wound is temporarily consoled by music or Miss Collins. What does this condition of the unconsoled mean for the narrative? If narrative is like consolation, always an overcoming a loss of certainty, or a wound, is not consolation by definition always insufficient, always unable to heal the wound and always unable to substitute for what is missing? Both narrative and masochism use the mechanics of masochism to answer the question of the unconsoled. The spirit of allegory or analogue, the overwhelming urge to substitute and compare in the novel, is part of the displacement of narrative for masochistic loss that makes compatriots of Ryder and the reader and demonstrates the absurdity of the libidinal investment in authority.

Freud’s social masochism and Deleuze’s masochistic aesthetic inform Ishiguro’s use of the wound and loss of certainty. They resonate with Ishiguro’s narrative as masochistic time—

such as a non-linear narrative as a masochistic pleasure, an aesthetic of negative affects—and as social masochism—including non-sexual suffering as masochistic, and an eroticized passive relationship to an authority. Masochism plays out in the social relationships of the novel and the aesthetic forms of the novel.

Masochistic Narrative Desire and Masochistic Social Relationships

As useful as Freud and Deleuze are for thinking about connections between masochistic fantasy and masochistic literature, neither fully addresses questions of narrative. As a result, to continue the genealogy of masochism and narrative, I turn briefly to feminist psychoanalytic film criticism as a crucial perspective for thinking about narrative in terms of the masochistic because it works to analyze and counter the predominant narrative of the masculine, sadistic, fetishistic gaze. Film critics' work on masculine spectatorship and masochism encourages critical analysis of the mechanics of narrative pleasure, a pleasure of satisfaction by displeasure. Furthermore, these critics create, out of this unconscious mechanism for coping with loss, a political strategy of resistance.

One way of establishing the connection between narrative desire and masochistic desire is to evaluate the traditional binary structures that theorize narrative desire. For example, in the 1970s, Laura Mulvey considered narrative and sadism in binary terms of beginning/end and victory/defeat in her essay on the question of pleasure for the female film spectator, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey distinguishes between fetishistic scopophilia and voyeurism, which she associates with sadism. Then she extends the argument from film to narrative and writes: "Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear

time with a beginning and an end” (43). Mulvey’s description of sadism demanding a story resonates with Deleuze’s analysis of the role of descriptions in sadism.⁸⁰ Deleuze also sees sadism as an active process which proceeds through acceleration, rather than the delays of masochism.

In a response to Mulvey in the 1980s, Teresa de Lauretis argues in “Desire and Narrative” that the problem of many formulations of narrative processes is the failure to see subjectivity as “engaged in the cogs of narrative and indeed constituted in the relation of narrative, meaning, and desire; so that the very work of narrativity is the engagement of the subject in certain positionalities of meaning and desire” (117). De Lauretis rejects any analogy between the sexual act and fiction as a reciprocal relationship, like love, that takes two because of the inherent maleness of language used to describe the movement towards climax. De Lauretis goes on with further evidence to suggest that the movement of narrative follows a trajectory of male desire as a passage through a female space. She arrives at this statement through the single figure of the hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. In doing so “the hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and male; he is the active principal of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter” (119). De Lauretis’ argument seems to describe the trajectory of many narratives, but it is not applicable to Ishiguro’s *The Unconsoled* because the same gendered formations of narrative as a masculine/active passage through a feminine/passive space are not operating in the novel; rather, Ryder is a passive masculine agent in an active space.

⁸⁰ See Deleuze on the role of imperative and descriptions as functions of the demonstrative function of sadism(35).

In the 1990s, the traditional gendering of plots as masculine/active and feminine/passive was further examined by Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot* where Brooks suggests in his chapter “Narrative Desire” that the figure of the ambitious male hero can be transformed and is especially reformulated in female plots which “take a more complex stance toward ambition, [through] the formulation of an inner drive toward assertion of selfhood in resistance to the overt and violating male plots of ambition, a counter-dynamic which. . . is only superficially passive and in fact a reinterpretation of the vectors of plot” (39). In *The Unconsoled* plot is not linear and spaces in the novel—rooms, buildings, apartments, walls, roads, etc.—are actively changing places. One space can morph into another; for example, Ryder’s hotel room ephemerally becomes his childhood bedroom. Spaces morph by emotional force: Ryder’s hotel room morphs into his childhood room in a passage that seems guided by anxiety. The first person narrator often notes the spaciousness of a room in positive terms, and uses negative terms for smaller, claustrophobic spaces.⁸¹ This morphing of spaces is obviously a trope for how the unconscious works, but it also establishes the indeterminacy of the novel. Furthermore, the representation of spaces in *The Unconsoled* as active places is one way to begin to contest the active/sadistic and passive/masochistic binaries. Misunderstanding masochism as a passive process limits its

⁸¹ The topographical metaphor for the unconscious and the problematized identity of the main character are evidence of Anthony Vidler’s argument in *Warped Space* where he suggests that the psychological conditions of anxiety, claustrophobia, among others are related to the urban architecture. The connection between psychological and the modern moves Vidler through discussion of various psychological conditions and specific architecture, all the while suggesting relationship between the modern spaces and the digital subject. Vidler argues that as technology changes the subject changes and he laments the loss of traditional perspective.

potential for subversion. A surface reading of *The Unconsoled* suggests that a masculine formation of masochism is operating on this same structure, an active protagonist passing through a passive space, but the masochistic model, specifically because of the mechanics of gender identification that are at the core of this issue, problematizes De Lauretis's argument. Many critics, most notably Deleuze, want to rethink the mechanics of masochism as an active process, not merely the passive opposite of sadism, but as a unique formulation in its own right.

De Lauretis considers masochistic desire, but she dismisses it as the position of impossible passivity for desire. Does she reject masochism because she fears it might continue to normalize the passive position for women, made to long for their own subjugation? A masochistic aesthetic would problematize obedience, not repeat it unquestionably. For example, filmmaker and critic Monika Treut suggests in "Female Misbehavior" that the S/M scene "ironizes actual human power relationships" (112). She argues that the destructive obedience represented in the S/M scene "ironically negates real violence, the actual relationship between domination and oppression," and that the real violence that is always already a component of hetero-normative sex. S/M "does not reproduce violence but plays with violence in order to nullify it. Its subversive character consists in this, and not in the destruction of normal sexuality" (Treut 114). These twentieth century feminist psychoanalytic analyses of masochism consider social masochism, by exploring the feminist politics of masochistic fantasy as a psychological and social process, but they do so by eroticizing and gendering the motives of the masochist. For an alternative to Mulvey's reading of voyeurism as sadistic, "the male gaze as the only position of spectatorial pleasure," and "sexual difference with the female regarded as 'lack'," Gaylyn

Studlar uses Deleuze's *Masochism* as a feminist model.⁸² She understands masochism as obsessively retreating and recreating the movement between concealment, revelation, disappearance, seduction, and rejection. Her essay ends by establishing a position of masochistic identification with the female object.

In *The Unconsoled*, Ryder, although not the female object in cinema, does represent a masochistic identification for the reader. He looks through a kaleidoscope of masochistic fantasy and sees all the relationships of the novel reinterpreted through the beating fantasy. When Ryder spends his first night in the hotel, he is about to fall asleep when he opens his eyes and stares at the ceiling. Before his eyes as the hotel room becomes his childhood bedroom, this projection of fantasy resembles what Studlar describes as the "dream screen" of cinema. She describes a similarity between masochistic fantasy and cinema's restoration of the first sleep environment

⁸² Although outside of the scope of Studlar's project, a film such as Catherine Breillat's *Fat Girl*, released in 2001, executes what Studlar argues via Deleuze's masochistic theory of desire, "challenges the notion that male scopophilic pleasure must center around control—never identification with or submission to the female" (Studlar 208). For example, in Breillat's film the character Anaïs witnesses her sister's sexual encounter and statutory rape, the film does not represent the voyeurism of the sadist, but rather the camera's gaze assumes Anaïs's point of view, a masochistic point of view for her sister's sexual victimization. In the end of the film, to further reinforce the film's masochistic desire and identification with Anaïs, we see her raped after her mother and sister are killed; however, she tells the police "officially" that she was not raped, because in the logic of the film, this rape fantasy was her desired scenario. Breillat's film imagines the masochistic point of view and identification with the female object that Deleuze and Studlar theorize through masochism.

both as apparatuses that “re-establish” the fluid boundaries of self” (217). When Ryder sees his childhood ceiling, he projects his masochistic fantasy, which includes disavowal of his parents’ row, as a way to gratify himself. Ryder says this “childhood sanctuary caused a profound feeling of peace to come over me” (17). Unfortunately, such moments of peace or equilibrium are few.

The subject/object relationships of the novel and its organization in the terms of the masochistic are oriented here in the discourse of psychoanalytic criticism and use psychoanalytic feminist film criticism to flesh out the relationship between masochism and knowing, all of which informs the ambiguity that underscores Ishiguro’s novel. The indeterminable setting of the novel suggests a concealed loss of the “nation” or “empire.” Much like the metaphor of the wound conceptualized through a masochistic reading of narrative, the founding of a nation shares the unconsoled condition of original rupture. Perhaps because nationality is not immediately perceived in binary terms, and because Ishiguro’s novels are not primarily concerned with sexual difference, the possibilities for this indeterminacy need to be articulated. Representations of identity, particularly national identity, are troubled in the novel. *The Unconsoled* might represent nation in terms of the masochistic fantasy so that the traumatic origins of national identities and national stories of suffering can transform the nation into a site of social change with the promise of future satisfaction. In order for the nation to translate pain into pleasure in the mode of masochistic fantasy, the masochistic model would require an acknowledgement of the realities of power relationships and a closing off those possibilities by imagining an alternative. The masochistic subjectivity is, then, another way to represent or imagine a challenge to dominant power structures. Perhaps this challenge is not as immediately polarizing as a similar a challenge represented in terms of gender binaries might be, even if gender still is at the heart of any

discussion of patriarchy and if national insider/outsider still operates on binary terms. Social masochism's "radical obedience to the law" could void the dominant social contract.

We can understand *The Unconsoled* as a having multiple parallel structures of identity at work in "A Child is Being Beaten" and in Ryder's web of subject positions, because most of the major relationships that Ryder has with Sophie, Gustav, Boris, Stephen, Mr. Hoffman and Mrs. Hoffman operate like the spaces of the novel—they can morph into Ryder's own relationship with his parent.⁸³ The primal scene is reinterpreted and reformulated to encompass almost all of other major characters of the novel. Subject and object can be repositioned in whatever way necessary to achieve the desired effect, just like the masochistic beating fantasy. This is an example in the narrative of how wounds remain in the process of being healed, in the process of becoming.

Suffering is a predominant feature of the narrative. In addition to its masochistic valence, this seems to be the organizing condition of several of the social spheres of the novel. Within this web of subject positions, how is Ryder positioned as insider/outsider to the social? On what basis is he admitted to these social spheres? Wilhelm Stekel's mid-century work *Sadism and*

⁸³ One relationship imagined in conventional sadomasochistic terms is between Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman. One critic describes Mr. Hoffman in BDSM terms: "Hoffman's view of her as a lady, and himself as an animal, is a definitive Dostoyevskian erotic relationship. Sadomasochism is his gambit, power to manipulate and humiliate, power to destroy. Hoffman cannot believe and will not hear from Ryder that Stephan is talented because that would diminish him. He would be supplanted by his son" (Adelman 173).

Masochism: The Psychology of Hatred and Cruelty, especially his reading of Freud's beating fantasy, suggests that the child (the author of the masochistic fantasy), or Ryder in our reading of Ishiguro, "cannot bear the lack of affect in its environment. The blows express the greatness of the affect" (369). If Ryder cannot bear the lack of affect in his environment, then perhaps he needs to bear the suffering and the metaphorical blows of the entire social sphere.

Ryder's position in the novel troubles traditional conceptions of insider/outsider. Ryder's anxiety about his parents manifests in his perceptions of the familial relationships around him. The building suspense about his own parents creates a mystery about his origins. Ryder's lack of national identity is one way that the fracturing of his identity is troped. Not only is Ryder without a national identity, the city he is in is without a national identity. It is European-like, but like Ryder, that identity is never fixed. However, instead of merely being perceived as a lack, the lost national identity is replaced by a strong social identity with smaller but equally strong social identities, for example the dedicated porters and those devoted to the arts. Ryder's lonely, orphan-like, troubled identity enables one to examine how a collective identity operates. The novel uses masochism and an individual's psychological strategies to show how social identities are likewise fantasized. In *The Unconsoled*, shared suffering is part of what brings The Citizens' Mutual Support Group together, and the porters who meet at the Hungarian Café also form their social sphere around suffering, both their perceived suffering from lack of respect and their symbolic suffering of physical strain. Thus, the narratives/fantasies that legitimate behavior and satisfy a particular desire are ways of imagining identities. Society depends on the stories and ideologies that it tells itself in order to reproduce itself. It is difficult to exist outside of the fantasy, unless one is the "objective analyst," or the outsider to the society, or the reader of the narrative.

The troubling of this position manifests in Ishiguro's novel in the omniscient first person narration (a compromised position of insider/outsider to the narrative) and in Ryder's weak protestation that he is an outsider to the society and to the various family dramas and may not be able to help the numerous characters who seem to expect so much from him. The novel begins and ends by representing Ryder as an outsider and both the opening and closing scenes entail a strange displacement of emotion, which alleviates Ryder's loneliness.

In the beginning of the narrative, in the taxi scene, and in the novel more broadly, we see an unsettling tendency to attribute too much emotional investment to strangers. The end of the novel pictures a more complicated coping of the insider/outsider problem. Ryder still waits to be reunited with his parents; Gustav dies waiting for word that Ryder had made the speech to the audience on behalf of the porters (525). In another moment "as [he] waited" or in masochistic time, Ryder contemplates the inappropriateness of his own affective responses, the (temporal) demands that people made upon him, and his coping: "After all, if a community could reach some sort of equilibrium without having to be guided by an outsider, then so much the better" (524). Although Ryder seems content to move on from the city's problems, the idea that he has outstayed his responsibility as "the outsider" becomes ironic when he will shortly turn to another stranger as he distances himself emotionally from a conversation about his parent's absence.

At the end of *The Unconsoled*, Ryder's ambition to please his parents seems that it will be unfulfilled, and he characteristically turns to fantasy to fulfill that goal. In the midst of a bus ride where we see Ryder try to cope with loss, the insufficiency of consolation is paramount. An unknown man abruptly and arbitrarily given the name "electrician," taking cues from Ryder himself, corroborates Miss Stratman's story of his parents' enjoyment of their last trip to the city. As the absence of a name suggests, the object of Ryder's aim is arbitrary. Ryder uses the

“electrician” as part of his coping mechanism. In the middle of this strange scene, another family triangle intrudes into the picture as Sophie tells Ryder he is outside of her and Boris’ love and grief. Ryder’s assertions that he is an outsider have finally been seconded and now pose the potential for real pain. Sophie, speaking to Boris, says that Ryder will never be his real father. Ryder’s lost position as father doubles in Sophie’s loss of her father, and then triples in the loss of Ryder’s father (as he is absent in the electrician’s memory of Ryder’s mother.) Again, the electrician consoles Ryder and distracts him with a buffet, and Ryder ends the novel consoling himself from Sophie’s coldness with warm food and the warmer fantasy of the electrician’s congeniality. The affects of the masochistic aesthetic are not purely consolation. Ryder provokes these scenes of suffering as a masochistic identification.

The scene with the electrician is one example of how the novel uses the mechanisms of masochism to illustrate how suffering is displaced and suspended. In the masochistic narrative of *The Unconsoled*, this suffering is again appropriated and becomes part of a displacement along a chain of signifiers. This spirit of allegory or analogue likewise surfaces in Freud’s fantasy and *The Unconsoled*. The masochistic social relationships in the novel seem so simplified in their dreamlike representation that the reader senses that they must stand for something else because the universalism of suffering in the narrative feels over-compensatory. Ryder fantasizes about a shared conviviality and sociability with this stranger, as if they shared a past; yet, simultaneously, he looks forward, to the future, to Helsinki, to a new set of masochistic social relationships.

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