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The Unconsoled: A Masochistic Imagining of Narrative and Nation

By

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A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

2007

ABSTRACT

THE UNCONSOLED: A MASOCHISTIC IMAGINING OF NARRATIVE AND NATION

By

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This project reads Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* through analysis of the novel's subject/object relationships and their organization on the terms of masochistic through the discourse of psychoanalytic criticism. Like the creative remembering Georg Lukács envisions in *The Theory of the Novel*, Ishiguro's narrative blurs the distinctions between subject and object and collapses one narrative form upon another. Narrative threads in *The Unconsoled* seem to collapse and spaces of the novel morph into one another. Psychoanalytic criticism helps to figure the subject/object relationships of the novel through a masochistic organization. Feminist film criticism further flushes out the ambiguity that underscores Ishiguro's novel and exposes the relationship between gender and knowing. The masochistically represented nation represents a challenge to dominant power structures. The masochistic lens emphasizes the novel as a loss of totality and process of becoming but reinvests this concept with a postmodern and psychoanalytic understanding of the potential for loss.

There is a sense of loss in the narrative of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* that cannot be processed or is always being processed like a wound that cannot be healed. Probing the wound yields pain and pleasure. Narrative and masochism use mechanisms to imagine subject/object relationships better equipped for coping with loss. Amidst the problematization of repositioning subject/object relationships, Georg Lukács' conception of the novel as a process of becoming allows one to rethink the structure of the novel and give meaning to its incompleteness. The familial structure of the subject/object relationships in *The Unconsoled* and Anderson's *Imagined Communities* disintegrates as the foundation of the nation. However, examining Anderson through the lens of psychoanalytic feminist film criticism highlights the relationship between gender and knowing that informs the ambiguity of the collapsed subject/object relations of Ishiguro's novel. The masochistic or unconsoled condition of narrative and nation emphasizes the novel as a loss of totality and process of becoming but reinvests these concepts with a postmodern and psychoanalytic understanding of the potential for loss and incompleteness.

Masochism binds satisfaction or sexual pleasure to pain, suffering and humiliation. However, the binaries of pain/pleasure transgress the contract between master/slave, and as a result, masochism can potentially subvert the contract by the absurdity of what it excludes. Pain translates into pleasure. Like the substitutions of fetishism, the originality, veracity, or true nature of the object of the sexual aim is irrelevant. 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.

Like masochism, narrative pleasure is similarly bound to pain. For example, plot, its most basic structure, necessarily entails impediments to the satisfaction of knowing.¹ And like masochistic fantasy, narrative too is a translation of knowing into telling. For example, the much-anticipated moment of narrative desire when the author alludes to the title within the text is a moment of confirmation, or perceived correspondence between signifier and signified, a fleeting moment of pleasure in the reading of a text. However, when these moments are frustrated, when representation is frustrated that desire is masochistically satisfied. Just as representations of novels like *The Unconsoled* call into question the ability to represent the outside world, as we will explore later, masochism calls into question the law of the father that it excludes. Narrative and masochism share this subversive condition, both are in a process of becoming that collapses subject and object in honor of a shared incompleteness, masking loss in the pleasure of suffering.

A masochistic narrative structure, shaped by the (mis)translation, displacement of suffering, and narrative process of becoming, materializes 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.

Freud cultivates the uncertainty in order to trouble any linear perception of the narrative/fantasy. For the reader of "A Child is Being Beaten," Freud's conclusion is the only clear endpoint in sight and the majority of the paper is obsessed with ordering the

¹ See Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot*.

process of development of the beating fantasy. Freud's language frustrated my readings. He starts the paper phrasing the fantasy as "A child is being beaten." Generic in all aspects: in the sex of the child, the identity of the adult beating the child, and the nature of the pleasure derived from viewing the act, Freud provides a dynamic example of how subject/object relationships collapse as the terminology of the phrase morphs. Freud will work through this generality to explain all the ways that the fantasy develops, but in starting with this phrasing of the fantasy, punctuated like a recollected patient statement, the reader begins disoriented about the relationship of this initial recollection to the development of the fantasy that Freud will explain in section three. This disorientation, maintained in the first section by the detours Freud takes the reader on, dead ends in regards to the origin of the fantasy. The frustration of the first section represents the resistance of the patient in his or her analysis.

Before reading "A Child is Being Beaten," the reader might expect Freud to criticize the practice, as he does unequivocally with pedophilia; however, Freud's interpretation of the perversion does not correspond with many reader's expectations. The agitation may intensify for the reader as Freud's increasing ambiguity towards the sexual object foreshadows his reading of homosexuality. As a potentially unreliable narrator, Freud cultivates uncertainty but must do so in a way that does not alienate the reader. In the second section of the beating fantasy text, Freud begins to use the first person plural to address his intended audience of colleagues. However, the use of "you," "we" and "our" also seems to position the reader as an analyst. Conscious of his role as a contributor to the study of the origin of sexual perversions, Freud engages in the theories of other analysts, tries out other explanations and abandons them. Freud's rigorous

skepticism gains the trust of the reader, positioning him or her as a coconspirator, while asserting the analytical physician's suspicion that the final solution of the problem (of the beating fantasy) is yet unresolved. Preparing the reader for his argument that the Oedipus complex is the nuclear complex of this neurosis, Freud says of the analytical physician: "He is obliged to admit to himself that to a great extent these phantasies subsist apart from the rest of the content of the neurosis, and find no proper place in its structure (101). Here, the 'disordering' effect of the argument is not its disorienting character, but literally the way that Freud positions himself to the disorder of obsessional neurosis. Freud states that if the sexual component were a sadistic one, one would expect it to result in an obsessional neurosis, and, he adds, this is not contradicted by the results of this study, but throughout the rest of the argument there will never be a formulation of the fantasy that is clearly and undeniably sadistic for Freud. Not only does Freud's reading of the fantasy position him differently in terms of diagnosis, it also repositions the reader by engaging him or her in the analysis and consequently jarring his or her expectations.

However, the real act of disorder in the text is the disordering Freud performs on the origin of the fantasy. While patients seldom refer back to a time earlier than the sixth year, "connections between the experience and the complex which by this time is repressed are bound to remain obscure so long as analysis has not thrown any light on the time before the first "pathogenic" impression" (Freud 113). The *first* fantasies were entertained early in life and connect to school memories, which are then recalled as the *first*, but are really just the *first* traces. The development of the fantasy is a process of interrelations which halfway through the text, and after a section meant to lay out the transformations of the beating fantasies, a section plagued by ordering phrases, Freud

writes: “Nor can we conceal from ourselves that the interrelations and sequence of the three phases of the beating-phantasy, as well as all its other peculiarities, have so far remained quite unintelligible.” This unintelligibility does not go uncommented on: Freud tries to create the effect of unintelligibility before the unveiling of the Oedipal-complex as the origin for sexual aberrations of childhood and mature life. This suspicion, a term Freud uses frequently, seems confirmed by his statement that he will “be careful to avoid being more schematic than is inevitable in presenting an average case” (102). Freud’s control of the presentation mimics the patient’s presentation in analysis, constructed with a motive to conceal.

As Freud stylistically performs the masochistic dance, or the deferral of epistemological desire, 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. Thinking in this essay about the trope of the wound that cannot heal or is always being healed to argue for the masochistic condition of narrative emphasizes Lukács’ theory of the novel as a process of becoming but reinvests this concept with a postmodern and psychoanalytic understanding of the potential for loss and incompleteness. Continuing along this line, the title, what it means to be unconsoled in the novels, can explain the masochistic treatment of loss. A close reading of the title of “the unconsoled” explores ideas that will continue to filter through psychoanalytic negotiations of loss like masochism and in narratological relationships to loss.

The condition of the unconsoled, the inability to mourn a loss due to the impossibility of knowing the object of loss, shields one from knowledge of the loss by

fantasy. *The Unconsoled*, starting with the title and continuing throughout the text, privileges indeterminacy and implies that a distinguishing characteristic of literature is its capacity to suggest meanings that are not easily translatable (Graff 164). Ishiguro's novels, especially *The Unconsoled*, formulate this indeterminacy into a psychoanalytic interpretation/economy of negotiating loss. For even the average reader of *The Unconsoled* the dreamlike qualities appear familiar and, for the meticulous reader, the alliteration between "the unconsoled" and "the unconscious" resonates throughout the text.²

The implications of *The Unconsoled's* alliterative allusion to the comparison between 'the unconsoled' and 'the unconscious' begin the titular play. There is immediately a grammatical tension in the title between the concreteness of a noun and the intangibility of an adjective. The definite article of the title marks as a noun what would otherwise appear to be an adjective and thus connotes a specific and knowable thing. In contrast to this apparent specificity, the word 'unconsoled' evokes the feeling of a mistranslation or an inadequate substitution; it connotes something similar to 'inconsolable' but not the same. Any translation entails some degree of perceptible loss of meaning. Inconsolable means that one is too distressed to be consoled: one is so deeply distressed that nothing can offer any effective comfort. If the "unconsoled" gleans

² If the dreamlike cityscape of *The Unconsoled* evokes a topographical metaphor for the unconscious, the geographic analogy in *A Pale View of Hills* is more both more and less explicit; its geography is "real" but that may make the comparison less obvious to the reader. In chapter seven of *A Pale View of Hills* the metaphor for the unconscious and the allusion to the title are explored in two places. The chapter begins with a discussion of "the wasteground" that troubled the apartment complex residents in general and Etsuko in particular as she made the "loathsome journey" to Sachiko and Mariko's cottage. The wasteground is a result of damage from the war and rebuilding by government bulldozers. Its scarred landscape belongs to both past and present. If Sachiko and Mariko are the unconscious doubles of Etsuko and her daughter Keiko, then the wasteground is the repressive barrier between the conscious of her apartment and the unconscious of Sachiko's cottage.

some difference from “inconsolable” perhaps it suggests that effective comfort can be offered but that comfort will ultimately be insufficient.

The torturous loss of meaning and deferral of epistemological desire demonstrated in the contrast between the two words of the title and the implied difference between inconsolable/ unconsoled indicates that *The Unconsoled* acts as an important paradigm for coping with loss. The OED lists an entry for ‘unconsoled’ but does not list a separate definition, only citing a few nineteenth-century texts where it occurs. The dispersal of the definition within the OED magnifies the small gap between inconsolable and unconsoled. For the reader, further displacement occurs from the meaning of the title “*The Unconsoled*” to the middle of Ishiguro’s novel where an explanation of consolation, and with it a suggestion of what it might mean to be unconsoled, emerges out of the text, and also out of one of the most erotic moments of the narrative, like a building erected in the dreamlike cityscape of the novel. The dispersal of the definition of the title, of any clue to what the novel is about, will signal other dispersals in the text. Mr. Brodsky goes from remembering for Ryder the fantasy that he and Miss Collins used to enact to explaining how his wound cannot be healed. These two narratives link through a comparison of consolation:

‘In Poland, Mr. Ryder, when I was a conductor, even then, I never thought the wound would heal. When I conducted my first orchestra, 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. (313)

Music and Miss Collins console. They 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 temporarily and imperfectly soothes and probes a wound through 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.

What does this condition of the unconsoled mean for the narrative? If narrative is like consolation, always an overcoming of a void, a loss 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? 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 comrades of Ryder and the reader and demonstrates the absurdity of the libidinal investment in authority.

Any attempt to imagine a genealogy of masochism and narrative should consider 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 that is often a "satisfaction in displeasure" (Uebel 4). Furthermore, these critics create, out of this unconscious mechanism for coping with loss, a political strategy of resistance.

Establishing the connection of narrative desire to masochistic desire first means evaluating the traditional binary structures that theorize narrative desire. Thinking of 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," Laura Mulvey characterizes narrative as sadistic. In a response to Mulvey, Teresa de Lauretis argues in "Desire and Narrative" that many formulations of narrative processes fail 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 climax³. De Lauretis goes on with further evidence to suggest that the movement of narrative follows a trajectory of male

³ See Robert Scholes

desire as a passage through a female space. De Lauretis arrives at this statement through the mythical-textual mechanics that she identifies as similar to Mulvey's sadism and narrative.⁴

Opposite pairs...appear to be merely derivatives of the fundamental opposition between boundary and passage; and if passage may be in either direction, from inside to outside, from life to death or vice versa, nonetheless, all these terms are predicated on 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 turns around Mulvey's statement "sadism demands a story" into "story demands sadism, 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 end" (133).

De Lauretis' argument describes the trajectory of many narratives, but does not apply to Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* because the same gendered formations of narrative as a masculine/active passage through a feminine/passive space do not operate in the novel. Peter Brooks further examines the traditional gendering of plots as masculine/active and feminine/passive in *Reading for the Plot* where he suggests in his chapter "Narrative Desire" that the figure of the ambitious male hero can transform, especially 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

⁴ See Propp and Lotman

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.⁵ This morphing of spaces tropes how the unconscious maneuvers, but it also illustrates the indeterminacy of the novel. Furthermore, the representation of spaces in *The Unconsoled* as active places begins to contest the active/sadistic and passive/masochistic binaries.

Misunderstanding masochism as a passive process limits its potential for subversion. A surface reading of *The Unconsoled* may suggest that a masculine formation of masochism operates 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' argument. Many critics, most notably Gilles Deleuze, want to rethink the mechanics of masochism as an active process, not the passive opposite of sadism, but a unique formulation in its own right.

What happens to narrative then, when instead of sadism demanding a story, masochism shamefully stammers a repeated request for a story? What happens to the desire of the protagonist and the desire of the reader if the structure of the narrative assumes a masochistic form instead of a sadistic one? What happens when the normally

⁵ 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.

passive female plot-space takes revenge on the protagonist, or in the Oedipal context of de Lauretis' argument, the sphinx meets every formulation of the riddle with a whip? When the cityscape erects walls obstructing where one would like to go? What happens to narrative in a narrative where narratology becomes parodic, when the telling of the story becomes the narrative repeatedly, as it does in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*?

Narrative "endlessly reconstructs it [the world] as a two-character drama in which the human person creates and recreates himself out of an abstract or purely symbolic other-the womb, the earth, the grave, the woman; all of which ...can be interpreted as mere spaces and thought of as "mutually identical"⁶

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. Filmmaker and critic Monika Treut suggests in "Female Misbehavior" that the sadomasochistic 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," the real violence that always already composes 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).

The subject/object relationships of the novel and its organization on the terms of the masochistic are oriented here in the discourse of psychoanalytic criticism and use

⁶ This quotation is cited in de Lauretis' "Desire in Narrative" but comes from a 1979 article by Jurij Lotman, "The Origin of Plot in the Light of Typology" published in *Poetics Today*.

psychoanalytic feminist film criticism to flush out the relationship between gender and knowing which informs the ambiguity that underscores Ishiguro's novel. The indeterminable setting of the novel suggests the concealed loss of the 'nation'. Much like the metaphor of the wound conceptualized through a masochistic reading of narrative, the founding of a nation shares the unconsolated condition of original rupture. Perhaps because nationality is not immediately binary, 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. Feminist psychoanalytic film criticism is appropriate to think about the troubled representations of 'the nation' because of its history of theorizing marginalized identities. *The Unconsolated* 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 masochistically represented nation is 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, even if gender remains at the heart of any discussion of patriarchalism and if national insider/outsider still operates on binary terms, a social masochism's "radical obedience to the law" could void the dominant social contract.

Treut gestures toward what Deleuze will explain as the contract in masochism, but she still conflates two terms that Deleuze wants to understand separately. Treut does begin to separate masochism around the idea of the contract, or the consensual arrangement between submissive and dominant within the ritual of masochism: “It would be mistaken to believe that the masochist seeks a real sadist as a love object. What he seeks in the other is a desire for power that flourishes not in a destructive fashion but rather in the contained manner of the ritual adhered to by both the dominating and the submissive subject” (110). This ties into an important element of de Lauretis’ argument that difference structures narrative when she argues that desire must be consented to or the reader must be seduced into consent.

Although primarily concerned with film spectatorship, de Lauretis’ question of how female readers consent to or become seduced into consent remains important for a reading of masochistic desire in *The Unconsoled*. Unwilling to leave narrative to Oedipus’ point of view, a masculine and sadistic point of view, the feminist work of narrative that de Lauretis imagines need not be anti-narrative or anti-oedipal. Quite the opposite, she argues it is narrative and Oedipal with a vengeance and rethinks narrative, meaning and pleasure from another point of view (157). *The Unconsoled* could rightly be called narrative and ‘Oedipal with a vengeance’, but, as we will see below, Deleuze’s formulation is not Oedipal. Persisting through the lingering question of Oedipal/primal scene, we can still understand *The Unconsoled* as a vengeful, traumatized, familial structure. There are parallel structures of identity at work in “A Child is Being Beaten” and in Ryder’s web of subject positions. The obsession of primal scene/Oedipal triangle/family structure surfaces in 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 parents. The family structure, reinterpreted and reformulated, encompasses almost all of other major characters of the novel. Subject and object reposition 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.

However, does the masochistic structure achieve a different gendering of desire than the sadistic? How does consent figure into a masochistic reading of the narrative? To answer these questions we must better understand the difference between sadism and masochism and determine if they are different desires, and if so, if they have different implications as narrative structures or genres.

Deleuze rethinks an important revision of Freud's sadomasochistic model and its origin in the Oedipal complex, but by resituating the masochist's investment in the oral stage, Deleuze avoids the gendering that de Lauretis finds problematic and refigures the father's role in masochistic ritual. Deleuze interrogates the differences of sadism and masochism and focuses in particular on the effects of the masochistic mechanism of the contract, which, he posits, is a neglected factor in discussions of masochism. 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).

Deleuze argues that in the masochistic ritual 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. The disordering characteristics of the argument manifest in Freud's juggernaut towards the Oedipal-complex. Later, the fantasy's problematized disordering will manifest itself in other critics' understanding of masochism and its subsequent relocation within the oral stage. Deleuze not only restages masochism, he 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 a woman symbolically, because the fantasy excludes 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. Like Treut, 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 Treut and Deleuze suggest masochism parodies. Confronting de Lauretis with this formulation of masochism shows how the 'passive' position of masochistic desire has transformative and subversive

potential. Masochism has such subversive potential that Rebecca Walkowitz will argue that the masochistic representations in Ishiguro's text are treasons more powerful than any single allegiance (1053).

The literally unspoken contract-like agreement not to speak between Sophie and Gustav in Ishiguro's narrative operates like the masochistic contract that Deleuze describes. As Sophie's father, Gustav is expelled from the mother/child relationship. Yet as Boris' grandfather, he is allowed in but is repeatedly beaten in the sense that he is punished with silence for his wronging his daughter long ago. Besides the contractual relationship Sophie and Gustav have, Ryder has contractual relationships with an endless chain of characters to which he promises some favor. He has a contractual relationship as a performer to the hotel and a similarly formal relationship with certain expectations as a guest at the hotel and elsewhere in the city.

By demonstrating the absurdity of the contract in the context of the familial structure, and then maintaining it and extending it further, Ishiguro hints that another paradigm may operate similarly on this foundation. The traumatized familial structure both organizes and impairs Ishiguro's novel. Benedict Anderson, however, offers another way to work through the substitution of the father, moving from patricide to fratricide, as he thinks through nationalism in the family model in *Imagined Communities*. Early in the text, Anderson makes a linguistic choice and genders the new concept of the nation as 'the Fatherland'. In fact, this concept will surface in a reference that Anderson cites later in the text (143) and in his own language (154). Further complicating the binary gendering, Anderson will use the idea of drag or transvestite to illustrate the transformation of the empire into the nation, or political mixed identities that resist the

measure of the census: “It was only that a certain inventive legerdemain was required to permit the empire to appear attractive in national drag” (87). Representing the transformation of the empire as drag or transvestite makes sense for the discussion of masochism as a way to subvert binaries with fantasy. The drag/transvestite imagining of nation is another way to make Deleuze’s argument that in masochistic fantasy, this time the masochistic fantasy of the nation, the image of the father persists.

This initial wariness of the gendered concepts plays out further. As he relates the genealogy of the nation, Anderson seems to gender the concept of one’s language as the mother tongue and describe a language as learned at a mother’s knee (119 and 138) but the nation, or dynastic realm or political/administrative unit, would be gendered male and identified with the father (85). Although transvestite tropes would sometimes continue to reward one’s reading for fantastic substitution, it is not until the final chapter on fratricide that the pattern of evidence in this text exposes its connection *Civilization and Its Discontent* and the Freudian concept of the inevitability of the desire for patricide in all imaginings of civilization.

A changing relationship to the role of the shows up in the chapter “Creole Pioneers,” as Anderson explains the difference between feudal nobles and the newer absolutist functionaries and introduces the idea of human interchangeability:

Unification meant internal interchangeability of men and documents. Human interchangeability was fostered by recruitment—naturally to varying extents—of *homes novi*, who, just for that reason, had no independent power of their own, and so could serve as emanations of their master’s wills. Absolutist functionaries thus undertook journeys which were basically different from those of feudal nobles. The difference can be represented schematically as follows: In the modal feudal journey, the heir of Noble A, on his father’s death, moves up one step to take that father’s place. This ascension requires a round-trip, to the centre for investiture, and back home to the ancestral demesne. For the new functionary, however, things are more complex. Talent, not death, charts his course. He sees before

him a summit rather than a centre...Sent out to township A at rank V, he may continue to vice-royalty C at Rank Y; and end his pilgrimage in the capital at rank Z. On this journey there is no resting place, every pause is provisional. The last thing the functionary wants is to return home; for he *has* no home with any intrinsic value (55).

Operating on the model of the functionary changes the personal trajectory from the son's interchangeability with the father to what Anderson will later identify as a fraternal conflict.

The idiom of sibling competition rather than inheritance, Anderson argues, is at work in the synchronic naming of "New" cities like New York, New London and New Orleans. Here, in "Memory and Forgetting" Anderson returns to the idea of the importance of simultaneity in the national imagination that he began with in chapter two, looking at the newspaper and the novel. "What is startling in the American namings of the sixteenth to the eighteenth century is that 'new' and 'old' were understood synchronically, coexisting within homogenous, empty time" (187). Like the absolute functionary who works on a different model than the feudal noble, it is not the replacement of the old city that is imagined but a new shared, parallel community. In spite of the parallelism, Anderson admits that this formulation requires one's subordination to the father (188).

The threat to the nation, in Anderson's imagining of narrative and nation, is the persistence of the father's power relations in the 'parallel' fraternal communities. What is missing from this imagining of nation is a way to cope with the persistent image of the father the way that masochistic fantasy is able. For Anderson, the nation is the empire in drag and the illusion of the fraternal community will always resemble the paternal too much. The synchrony of the 'parallel' communities does not have the subversive

potential that masochism has or the ability to cope with loss. In light of the disavowal of the father identified in *The Unconsoled*, one understands the absence of the father differently. The displacement of the mother for the father for 'the law' may always potentially be a displacement of something else. It is especially interesting then that *The Unconsoled* does not imagine any siblings' relationships.⁷ The consolation of fratricide consoles because of a shared family history that preserves the identity of the nation at the expense of its disparate members-it imagines the family at the expense of the brothers. Instead of fraternal relationships, and in addition to the feminist symbiosis with the mother, *The Unconsoled* ends the narrative with the equalized power relationship of the comrade.

Suffering is a predominant feature of the narrative, and in addition to its masochistic valence, it seems to be the organizing condition of several of the communities of the novel. Within this web of subject positions, how is Ryder positioned as insider/outsider to the communities? On what basis is he admitted to these communities?

Ryder's identity in the novel troubles traditional conceptions of insider/outsider. Ryder's anxiety about his parents manifests in his perception 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 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 city/community identity with smaller but equally strong community identities, for

⁷ Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* will explore a special kind of sibling-like relationship in cloning.

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 community identities are likewise fantasized. Shared suffering brings The Citizens' Mutual Support Group together. Likewise, the porters who meet at the Hungarian Café also form their community around their perceived suffering from lack of respect and their symbolic suffering of physical strain. The narratives/fantasies that legitimate behavior and satisfy a particular desire are ways of imagining identities. Imagined communities depend on the stories that a community tells itself in order to reproduce itself. It is difficult to be outside of the fantasy, unless one is the 'objective analyst' or the outsider to the community, 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 community 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 scenes entail a weird displacement of emotion that alleviates Ryder's loneliness.

The insider/outsider dilemma sets up in the beginning of the narrative when Ryder arrives at an unstaffed reception desk in a hotel lobby where an uncomfortable taxi driver is embarrassed that no one is there to greet him. The novel has an unsettling tendency to attribute too much emotional investment to strangers, and, on closer inspection, the first sentence of the novel seems to transfer Ryder's embarrassment to the taxi driver. Conceivably, Ryder, not the taxi driver, is embarrassed at his bleak reception. 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 (*The Unconsoled* 1-2). Instead of what Ryder is literally asked to listen too, the reader must imagine the oral conditions of the first two pages. The novel creates an oral background of mumbling, muttering, and muffled sounds, just as the narrator introduces the reader to the spatial setting. Mumbles, mutterings and muffled sounds are signifiers that are more noticeably detached from their signified, or the shameful stammering of story. They border on nonsense, but like the noises a mother makes they have the potential to soothe a child. This consolation represents orally what Gaylyn Studlar calls the symbiosis of mother and child and becomes another way that uncertainty and coping with loss is troped in the novel.

The end of the novel pictures a more complicated coping of the insider/outsider problem. At the end of the novel, 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 Ryder tries 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 arbitrary name/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 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, 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 scene with the electrician is one example of how the novel uses the mechanisms of masochism to illustrate how suffering is displaced or relocated. In a reading of Anderson's *Imagined Communities* Ernesto Laclau argues that the comradeship of the nation reappropriates suffering. "With the decline of religion at the beginning of modern times," he claims, "there was the need for some kind of existential belonging that occupied the void that religion had left. 'With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear'" (22). In the masochistic narrative of *The Unconsoled*, this suffering appropriates what once was a condition of religion, then the nation, and eventually becomes part of a displacement along a chain of signifiers in a "homogeneous space of equivalential representations" (Laclau 26). This spirit of allegory or analogue likewise surfaces in Freud's fantasy and *The Unconsoled*. The representations traumatized family structure 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.

Like the position of the psychoanalyst outside of the fantasy who identifies the masochistic disavowal of the threat of castration, or the reader outside of the narrative mechanisms of suspension of disbelief or the reliability of the narrator, there is another mechanism at work in the novel to give a presumed insider access to information that

only an outsider would require. In addition to shared suffering, imagined communities share an epistemological economy. There is a cultural obligation to remember what is to be forgotten that enables the insider/outsider binary⁸. This novelistic obligation of telling is troped in Ishiguro's novel in several ways; the positioning of Ryder as hotel guest, tourist, and performer creates ritualized obligations that enable this kind of telling. For example, Ryder and Gustav both endure the obligation of explaining the features of the hotel room. Ryder notes how Gustav goes to great care to personalize this obligatory telling:

'Now sir, if you'll just bear with me a moment,' Gustav said, 'I'll show you the features of the room. That way your stay here will be as comfortable as possible.' I followed Gustav around the room while he pointed out switches and other facilities. At one point he led me into the bathroom and continued his explanations to me there. I had been about to cut him short in the way I am accustomed to doing when being shown a hotel room by a porter, but something about the diligence with which he went about his task, something about his efforts to personalise something he went through many times each day, rather touched me and prevented me from interrupting. And then, as he continued with his explanations, waving a hand towards various parts of the room, it occurred to me that for all his professionalism, for all his genuine desire to see me comfortable, a certain matter that had been preoccupying him throughout the day had again pushed its way to the front of his mind. He was, in other words, worrying once more about his daughter and her little boy. (13)

This scene is important on several levels. It demonstrates an instance of the obligatory remembering, but it also is an important moment for the relationship between the narrator and the reader regarding the reader's desire to know.

The elevator scene where Gustav and Ryder meet might have made the reader slightly uneasy, but here that unease culminates in distrust as the narrator provides the reader with insider information before the reader desires it. This anticipation of the reader's desire to know is temporally problematic. Not only does the interpretation come

⁸ Jonathon Culler's analysis of the cultural obligation to remember revolves around the essay for Anderson's second edition of *Imagined Communities*, "Memory and Forgetting."

out of nowhere, that Gustav is worrying about his daughter and grandson; it is also the narrator's observation that Gustav is worrying about this "once more" that unsettles the reader. How does the narrator know this if he has just met Gustav, and how can he know Gustav's unconscious thoughts? These questions are not to suggest that readers do not confront these issues in the most traditional of narratives, but they are not usually problematized as they are throughout Ishiguro's novel. Thus far, the minor gaps in the reader's appreciation of the spatial and temporal relationships of the novel fold into the story like the tear in the rug that Ryder would incorporate into his childhood army games. Nevertheless, this jarring moment is perhaps the first in the novel where the reader must consider the reliability of the narrator, which could lead to a broader questioning of representation. This exemplifies how narration problematizes the preceding narrative style that can encompass characters unknown to one another and the omniscience of a narrator, his or her ability to access information that characters cannot.

Rebecca Walkowitz describes in "Ishiguro's Floating Worlds" how "unreliable narrators typically articulate values or interpretations that are jarring to the reader's expectations"⁹ She argues that a blurring of the narrator and the reader causes the reader to distrust the narrator. In *The Unconsoled*, plays on the narrator's name even suggest this blurring. Ryder might be "Writer" as Gary Adelman suggests, or more fruitfully for this reading of the unreliable narrator, Ryder combines Writer/Ryder/Reader, which confuses the implied author, the narrator, and the reader of the novel so that in the blurring of these categories, their perception is more tenable.

[T]he unreliable narrator is one whose values are visible, for the category functions only if readers can recognize the speaker's perspective as radically

⁹ See Walkowitz's footnote on the implied author and reader's expectations and Peter Brooks' telling of a story.

different from their own. The *unreliable* narrator emerges in a contested or troubled identification between narrator and reader. In this sense, unreliable narrators are an effect of cultural and conventional disjunction: we know that the narrator's world is not ours, not because we perceive the content of this difference, but because we perceive the fact of difference at all (Walkowitz 1067).

The narrators become the story rather than having a story and reverse the usual projective process where instead of claiming all stories as their own, the unreliable narrators propose that their own stories are always someone else's. This blurring of subject positions echoes the blurring of positions that Freud enacts in his explanation of masochistic desire.

Insider information objectifies readerly desire, but does *The Unconsoled* satisfy that desire or thwart it? The desire of the reader, anxious to glean any bit of useful information opposes the desire of the protagonist, who is extremely reluctant to take any action to resolve his ignorance of what will happen next. The novel seems to give insider information before a reader could even yearn for it. Such anticipation is a strong force within the novel, diagetically and extra-diagetically, but what does it do? Does the narration of *The Unconsoled* problematize the classic realist narrative that is capable of encompassing characters unknown to one another and thus suggest the impossibility of that mode of narrator for the imagined community?

Without understanding the masochistic aesthetic features of the novel other readings might struggle to make sense of insider information and the peculiar way that the narrator offers it to the reader functions as a tortuous suspension of readerly satisfaction. Features of masochism like 1) the special significance of fantasy 2) the factor of suspense 3) the demonstration of humiliation and suffering and 4) the provocative fear or the aggressive demanding of punishment to resolve anxiety and allow

forbidden pleasure play into the narrative features of the novel. One can also work in the opposite direction, applying the narrative mechanism of the unreliable narrator to the masochistic contract. The unreliability of the narrator suggests that the contract needs to be renegotiated so that it reevaluates uncertainty.

The blurring of boundaries like the unreliable narrator and Ryder's insider/outsider status, the morphing of one space into another, the urge to collapse one narrative upon another are all distortions of the narrative that can be sharpened by the masochistic aesthetic perspective. Gaylyn Studlar describes in her chapter "The Masochistic Aesthetic" how regression and progression are part of the dynamic and creative process of combining exploratory forms with unconscious psychological conflict. "In the masochistic aesthetic," she explains, "the interplay of wishes from the past and a current, creative model of consciousness produce something more than a wish-fulfilling expression of an infantile fantasy" (14). Instead, a dream-like dialectic of past and present points to new avenues of adult life. "Like the dream, the masochistic text permits the expression of fantasies that arise from many different periods of life. Fantasies interplay, interlock, combine and fragment in communicating the masochistic wish, its conflicts and contradictions" (25). Ishiguro's text through the masochistic aesthetic creates a desire for what Studlar will call a symbiosis with the mother and what the reader experiences as one space morphing into another, one set of relationships symbolizing another; the symbiosis with the mother is also a symbiosis of time and space, subject and object.

Studlar, Deleuze, and Freud, stress the importance of reconfiguring the masochistic process in the oral stage to reevaluate the mother and reposition the father in

the primal scene. The condition that unites these three elements unite in the condition of the unconsoled or masochistic disavowal. Jing Tsu in “Perversions of Masculinity” describes this condition. Tsu’s reading of the masochistic male subject in two figures of Chinese literature, Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo asks: what is the loss that masochistic fetishistic fantasy tries to preserve from extinction? He links masochism and nation through the process of disavowal. His reading of masochism connects to Deleuze’s where his definition of disavowal comes from: disavowal is a continual persistence in which the subject protects himself from, and claims not to know, the painful restraints and social sacrifices that he must make as a subject (Tsu 290). He outlines how masochism operates as 1) disavowal 2) suspension 3) fantasy. The male masochist’s fetishization “usurps the threat of castration by reenacting and intensifying that threat through the hands of a woman. This usurpation takes the form of suspension, for suspending the paternal law neither affirms nor denies it but radically disavows it” (Tsu 290).

Ryder’s disavowal protects him in *The Unconsoled* with many consolations so that he can continue to pretend he is unconsoled, that he never needed consolation for any loss. This disavowal evidences in the larger scheme of novel as Ryder’s anxiety about his parents’ future arrival morphs into his remembering of his parents’ prior visit to the city at the end of the novel, and this remembering leaves him unconsoled because it is insufficiently remembered, both by Miss Stratman and then by the electrician on the tram. Memories that do not satisfy, like the remembering of Ryder’s parents’ visit to the city, are desired to be deliberately insufficient. “While keeping the threat at bay, the male subject is nonetheless related to it in a most intimate way that memorializes the threat

against itself” (Tsu 291). The condition of the unconsoled is like masochistic disavowal, but how does disavowal work against the idea of the nation?

Metaphors of unconsoled loss, what Tsu calls “unmournable grief” or “ungrieved mourning,” make the loss invisible and unknown. The process of the unconsoled conceals the real desire of the protagonist. The ungrieved renunciation of one’s national identity prior to any suggestion that the desire for national identity operates on this condition of disavowal. One renounces the mother country to conceal the threat of pain and loss. Despite the seemingly familiar relationships, spaces, and knowledge, that indicate Ryder is an insider to this community he himself tells the reader and other characters that he is an outsider. Ryder shows up in a taxi at a hotel, so the reader questions if he is his hometown or his home country. Ryder’s protestations and the overall structure of the narrative renounce his national identity before it is fixed. Furthermore, the structure of masochistic obedience, just like the normative love-relationship, uses absurd adherence to the understood ‘contract’ to make obedience or allegiance to the nation seem absurd.

The Unconsoled presents an unnatural presentation of erotic love and love of country, as Bruce Robbins points out in his article on globalization, but it is the preservation of the traumatic recognition of the nation endangered that only a masochistic reading of the problem provides. Tsu writes, “[t]o love the nation is to love it in the mode of one’s beaten sexual dejection” (305). These masochistic processes conceal the protagonist’s real desire for a national identity. Ryder’s protestations that he is an outsider and his complicated denial of insider information or status mark his insider/outsider status as problematic. Ryder’s ungrieved renunciation of his country

operates on the condition of the unconsolated; he disavows the desire for the lost identity. Tsu's investigation of this concept reevaluates the economy of masochism, which critics like Deleuze value as predominantly as pleasure in displeasure, but whose motivation and real value Tsu proposes is the flight into fantasy, the mournful withdrawal that makes the masochist take action that is the most valuable formulation of masochism.

Reading 'love of country' as it operates on the mechanics of masochism gives us further insight into the novel and to the condition of the unconsolated. But what of my earliest question: What is the relationship between consolation and narrative? What does analysis of the Freudian masochistic fantasy "A child is being beaten" and its routing through Deleuze, Tsu and others reconstruct as the condition of narrative? Walkowitz calls the condition of Ishiguro's narratives a condition of displacement--in aberrant grammar, wandering metaphors, and discordant perspectives--a longing for what has purposefully been left behind (1051).

Just as Tsu asks what loss the masochistic fetishist is trying to disavow, to conceptualize a masochistic reading of the unconsolated condition of narrative in Ishiguro's novel, one must ask how his narrative understands narratologically a present sense of a prior mistake. The novel is often theorized as being incomplete, especially Lukács' *The Theory of the Novel* and his assertion: "The totality of being is possible only where everything is already homogenous before it has been contained by forms..." (34). Lukács seems to argue for a pre-Cartesian separation of subject and object; he desires a totality only possible when forms are not a constraint, but a becoming conscious. Could that form be organized on the condition of the unconsolated: a becoming conscious of the

past loss where the past remains relevant to the present substitution for it and suggests a fantasy for the future that denies any betrayal?

This potential narrative form is one of many connections between the polymorphous quality or the spirit of symbiosis of Ishiguro's novel and Freud's "A Child is Being Beaten." This form illuminates Lukács' *The Theory of the Novel* and his desire that the form of the novel employ memory as a creative force able to surmount the duality of subject and object. Freud's analysis of the beating fantasy, and particularly its narrative structuring and restructuring, telling and retelling, blur the subject and object positions of the fantasy. In his reading of Freud, Tsu claims that Freud's formulates the "original erotic masochism" in the terms of a residual masochism retained in the organism after the destructive instinct projects outward.

[T]he state in which the subject takes himself or herself as object, or the state of reflexivity, is the fundamental configuration of the subject's relation to an object. This structuring moment will then be replayed in the subject's relation to the "object" in the external sense, not identical to yet reminiscent of this original object harbored within oneself (Tsu 304).

The unconsoled is the condition of the subject/object relationship organized on the terms of masochistic. The condition of the unconsoled, the inability to mourn a loss due to the impossibility of knowing the object of loss, is a shielding from knowledge of the loss by fantasy. Masochistic fantasy, like the creative remembering Lukács envisioned, blurs the distinctions between subject and object and collapses one narrative from upon another, upon another much like the narrative threads in *The Unconsoled* seem to collapse upon one another or in the way that the spaces of the novel morph into one another. In both *The Unconsoled* and "A Child is Being Beaten," the Reader is being beaten; bound

within a narrative, tortured with what de Lauretis might call 'narrative with a vengeance,' and endlessly deferring the satisfaction of readerly desire.

Consolation, replacement by something that nearly replicates, pervades the text and makes comrades of Ryder and the Reader. They are comrades in the sense that the nation operates on the same condition of the unconsoled, because of the way that the boundary of subject and object is troubled or blurred by the image of the father that remains in the masochist and is tortured, and further because of the unreliability of the narrator in the novel. However, there is something more amiss in the narrative than the questionable reliability of the narrator. To continue to think in the terms of the mechanics of masochism, what is the castration-like threat to narrative that generates the masochistic aesthetic? Is the process of disavowal, the condition of the unconsoled, also the condition of the postmodern novel? Perhaps the postmodern aesthetic compensates for what is lost to modernism, often punishing the reader with narrative vengeance without proper processing of what is lost. Maybe what is lost is the longing for a totality that appears in Lukács, Freud, and Ishiguro. Narrative, unconsoled by its tortured relationship, fixates in a moment. At that moment, the ungrieved-for loss of the real, or authenticity, or authority, or any of the qualities for which postmodern narratives would claim not to yearn, is the concealed desire of the narrative.

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