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Masochism

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Coldness and Cruelty

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Venus in Furs

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch

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Father and Mother

It is argued that the overtness of the masochist's conflict with the mother, his readiness to incriminate her, should convince us that it is not the mother but the father who plays the central role. But this is to assume that all resistances spring from repression; and in any case the masochist's alleged resistance might just as easily take the form of a displacement from one mother figure to another. It is not enough either to point to the muscular build and the furs of the torturer as evidence of a composite image. The "father" hypothesis stands in need of serious phenomenological or symptomatological support and cannot be made to rest on a line of reasoning which already presupposes an etiology, and with it the fallacious concept of a sadomasochistic entity. It is assumed that since the father-image is a determinant in sadism, this must also be true for masochism, the same factors operating in both cases, once one allows for the inversions, projections and blurring characteristic of masochism. From this viewpoint the masochist would start by wishing to take the place of the father and steal his potency (the sadistic stage); a feeling of guilt would then arise, and with it the fear of castration, leading him to renounce the active aim and take the place of the mother in soliciting the father's love. But in order to avoid the new onset of guilt and castration fear to which the

passive role gives rise, he would now replace the desire to be loved by the father with the "desire to be beaten," which not only represents a lesser form of punishment, but is a substitute for the love relationship itself. But why is it the mother who does the beating and not, as we should expect, the father? We are given various reasons for this: first the need to avoid a choice which is too blatantly homosexual; second the need to preserve the first stage where the mother was the desired object, and graft onto it the punishing action of the father; finally the need to present the whole process as a kind of demonstration or plea addressed solely to the father: "You see, it is not I who wanted to take your place, it is she who hurts, castrates and beats me..."

If the father appears to play the decisive role throughout these successive stages, it is because masochism is treated as a combination of highly abstract elements subject to various transformations. There is a failure to appreciate the total concrete situation, the specific world of the perversion: we are not given a genuinely differential diagnosis because the symptoms themselves have been obscured by a preconceived etiology. Even such notions as castration and guilt lose their explanatory force when they are used to show that situations that are fundamentally unrelated nevertheless reverse into one another and are thus related after all. Modes of equivalence and translation are mistaken for systems of transition and transformation. Even a psychoanalyst of Reik's insight can say: "Whenever we had the opportunity to study a case we found the father or his representative hidden behind the figure of the beating woman." In making such a statement we need to be far more specific about the meaning of "hidden," and to explain under what conditions someone or something can be said to be hidden in the relation between symptoms and causes. The same author adds: "After having considered, tested,

and put all this in the balance, there yet remains a doubt... does not the oldest stratum of masochism as phantasy and action regress after all to the mother-child relationship as to a historical reality?" And yet he upholds what he calls his "impression" concerning the essential and constant role of the father.¹⁴ Is he speaking about symptoms or offering an etiology based on combinations of abstractions? We are again faced with the question whether the belief in the determinant role of the father in masochism is not simply the result of the preconceived notion of a sadomasochistic entity.

The paternal and patriarchal theme undoubtedly predominates in sadism. There are many heroines in Sade's novels, but their actions, the pleasures they enjoy together and their common projects are all in imitation of man; man is the spectator and presiding genius to whom all their activities are dedicated. Sade's androgynous creations are the product of an incestuous union of father and daughter. Although parricide occurs as frequently as matricide in the work of Sade, the two forms of crime are far from equivalent. Sade equates the mother with secondary nature, which is composed of "soft" molecules and is subject to the laws of creation, conservation and reproduction; the father by contrast only belongs to this nature through social conservatism. Intrinsically he represents primary nature, which is beyond all constituted order and is made up of wild and lacerating molecules that carry disorder and anarchy: *pater sive Natura prima*. Therefore the father is murdered only insofar as he departs from his true nature and function, while the mother is murdered because she remains faithful to hers. As Klossowski has shown with the greatest insight, the sadistic fantasy ultimately rests on the theme of the father destroying his own family, by inciting the daughter to torture and murder the mother.¹⁵ In sadism the Oedipal image of woman is made, as it were, to explode: the mother

becomes the victim *par excellence*, while the daughter is elevated to the position of incestuous accomplice. For since the institution of the family and even the law are affected by the maternal character of secondary nature, the father can only be a father by overriding the law, by dissolving the family and prostituting its members. The father represents nature as a primitive anarchic force that can only be restored to its original state by destroying the laws and the secondary beings that are subject to them. The ultimate aim of the sadist is to put an effective end to all procreation, since it competes with primary nature. What makes Sade's heroines sadistic is their sodomitic union with the father in a fundamental alliance against the mother. Sadism is in every sense an active negation of the mother and an exaltation of the father who is beyond all laws.

In "The Passing of the Oedipus Complex," Freud points to two possible outcomes: the active-sadistic, where the child identifies with the father, and the passive-masochistic, where he takes instead the place of the mother and desires to be loved by the father. The theory of partial impulses allows for the coexistence of these two entities and thus lends support to the belief in the unity of sadism and masochism. Freud says of the Wolf Man: "In his sadism he maintained his ancient identification with his father; but in his masochism he chose him as a sexual object." So when we are told that the character who does the beating in masochism is the father, we are entitled to ask: Who in reality is being beaten? Where is the father hidden? Could it not be in the person who is being beaten? The masochist feels guilty, he asks to be beaten, he expiates, but why and for what crime? Is it not precisely the father-image in him that is thus miniaturized, beaten, ridiculed and humiliated? What the subject atones for is his resemblance to the father and the father's likeness in him; the formula of masochism is the humiliated father. Hence the father is not so much

the beater as the beaten. A point of great significance in the fantasy of the three mothers is the symbolic transfer or redistribution of all paternal functions to the threefold feminine figure: the father is excluded and completely nullified. Most of Masoch's novels contain a hunting scene which is described in minute detail: the ideal woman hunts a bear or a wolf and despoils it of its fur. We could interpret this symbolically as the struggle of woman against man, from which woman emerges triumphant. But this would be a mistake, since woman has already triumphed when masochism begins, the bear and the fur have already been invested with an exclusively feminine significance. The animal stands for the primitive heteroerotic mother, the pre-birth mother, it is hunted and despoiled for the benefit of the oral mother, with the aim of achieving a rebirth, a parthenogenetic second birth in which, as we shall see, the father has no part. It is true that man reappears at the opposite pole, on the side of the Oedipal mother: an alliance is contracted between the third woman and the sadistic man (Elizabeth and Ipolkar in *The Fountain of Youth*, Dragomira and Boguslav in *The Fisher of Souls*, and Wanda and the Greek in *Venus*). But this reappearance of man is compatible with masochism only to the extent that the Oedipal mother maintains her rights and her integrity; not only does the man appear in effeminate, transvestite form (the Greek in *Venus*), but in contrast to what happens in sadism, the mother-representative is the accomplice and the young girl is the victim. (In *The Fountain of Youth*, the masochistic hero allows Elizabeth to murder Gisèle, the young girl he loves.) Where the sadistic man happens to triumph, as he does at the end of *Venus*, all masochistic activity ceases; like the Forms in Plato, it withdraws or perishes rather than unite with its opposite, sadism.

However, the transfer of the functions of the father onto the three mother-images is only one aspect of the fantasy. The main

significance of the fantasy lies in the concentration of all the maternal functions in the person of the second mother, the oral or "good" mother. It is a mistake to relate masochism to the theme of the bad mother. There are of course bad mothers in masochism (the two extremes of the uterine mother and the Oedipal mother) but this is because the whole tendency of masochism is to idealize the functions of the bad mother and transfer them onto the good mother. The function of prostitution belongs specifically to the uterine, heteric mother, and is transformed by the sadistic hero into an institution designed to destroy the Oedipal mother and make the daughter into an accomplice. Although we find in Masoch and masochism a similar propensity to prostitute the woman, we should not regard this as proof that sadism and masochism share in a common nature. The important difference in this case is that in masochism the woman assumes the function of prostitution in her capacity as honest woman, the mother in her capacity as the good oral mother. Wanda relates how Masoch persuaded her to look for lovers, to answer advertisements and to prostitute herself. But he justified this desire as follows: "How delightful to find in one's own respectable, honest and good wife a voluptuousness that must usually be sought among women of easy virtue." The mother, insofar as she is oral, respectable and pure, must assume the function of prostitute normally reserved for the uterine mother. The same is true of the sadistic functions of the Oedipal mother: the administration of cruelty is taken over by the good mother and is thus profoundly transformed and put to the service of the masochistic ideal of expiation and rebirth. Prostitution should not therefore be regarded as a common feature that links up the two perversions. The dream of universal prostitution, as it appears in Sade's "society of the friends of crime," is embodied in an *objective institution* that aims to destroy the mother and give preferment to the daughter

(the mother becomes an outcast and the daughter a partner). In Masoch on the contrary the ideal form of prostitution is based on a *private* contract whereby the masochist persuades his wife, in her capacity as good mother, to give herself to other men.¹⁶ Thus the oral mother as the ideal of masochism is expected to assume all the functions of the other female figures; in taking on these functions, she transforms and sublimates them. This is why we feel that psychoanalytic interpretations relating masochism to the "bad mother" are of very limited applicability.

This concentration of functions in the person of the good oral mother is one of the ways in which the father is cancelled out, and his parts and functions distributed among the three women. The way is thus made clear for the struggle and the epiphany of the three women, which will eventually result in the triumph of the oral woman. In short the three women constitute a symbolic order in which and through which the father is abolished in advance — for all time. This eternal, timeless supremacy of the mother can only be expressed in the language of myths, which is therefore essential to masochism: everything has already happened, and the entire action takes place between the mother images (thus the hunt and the conquest of the fur). It is therefore surprising that even the most enlightened psychoanalytic writers link the emergence of a symbolic order with the "name of the father." This is surely to cling to the singularly unanalytical conception of the mother as the representative of nature and the father as sole principle and representative of culture and law. The masochist experiences the symbolic order as an intermaternal order in which the mother represents the law under certain prescribed conditions; she generates the symbolism through which the masochist expresses himself. It is not a case of identification with the mother, as is mistakenly believed. The threefold division of the mother literally expels the father from the masochistic

universe. In *The Siren*, Masoch tells the story of a young boy who allows people to believe that his father is dead merely because he finds it easier and more polite not to dispel a misunderstanding. There is a disavowal of the mother by magnifying her ("symbolically the mother lacks nothing") and a corresponding disavowal of the father by degrading him ("the father is nothing," in other words he is deprived of all symbolic function).

We need therefore to examine more closely the way in which man, the third element, is introduced or reintroduced in the masochistic fantasy. The life and work of Masoch were dominated by the quest for this third party whom he calls "the Greek." However, in *Venus* the character has two aspects. The first or fantasy aspect is effeminate: the Greek is "like a woman. . . . In Paris he has been seen dressed up as a woman, and men were showering him with love letters." The second aspect is virile and marks on the contrary the end of the fantasy and of the masochistic exercise. When the Greek takes up the whip and thrashes Severin the supersensual charm quickly dissolves: "voluptuous dream, woman and love," all melt away. The novel has a sublime and humorous ending, with Severin giving up masochism and turning sadist. We may therefore conclude that the father, though abolished in the symbolic order, nevertheless continues to act in the order of the real,¹⁷ or of experience. There is a fundamental law, first formulated by Jacques Lacan, according to which an object which has been abolished on the symbolic plane resurges in "the real" in a hallucinatory form.¹⁸ The final episode of *Venus* is a typical instance of the aggressive and hallucinatory return of the father in a world that has symbolically abolished him. Everything in the text suggests that the full "reality" of the scene can only be experienced in a hallucinatory manner: the hallucination in return makes the pursuit or continuance of the fantasy impossible. It would therefore be thoroughly misleading to confuse the fantasy

that comes into play in the symbolic order and the hallucination that represents the return of what had been symbolically abolished. Theodor Reik quotes a case where all the "magic" vanishes from the masochistic scene because the subject thinks he recognizes in the woman about to strike him a trait that reminds him of the father.¹⁹ (The same thing happens at the end of *Venus*, and even more strikingly, since here, as a result of the actual substitution of a father figure, the Greek, for the torturess, Severin is moved to give up the masochistic aim altogether.) Reik seems to regard the case quoted above as proof that the torturess essentially represents the father and that the mother-image is the father in disguise — an argument once again in favor of a sadomasochistic entity. In our opinion the conclusion should be quite the reverse; Reik maintains that the subject is "disillusioned," but we ought rather to say that he is "disfantasized," fantasy giving way to hallucination and a hallucinatory state. Far from being the truth behind masochism and the confirmation of its connection with sadism, the aggressive return of the father disrupts the masochistic situation; it represents the constant threat from the side of reality to the masochist's world and to the defenses that condition and limit the symbolic world of his perversion. It would be "wild" psychoanalysis to favor this breakdown of his defenses by mistaking the "protest" from external reality for the expression of an inner reality.

What are the masochistic defenses against both the reality and the hallucination of the father's aggressive return? The masochistic hero must evolve a complex strategy to protect his world of fantasy and symbols, and to ward off the hallucinatory inroads of reality (or to put it differently, the real attacks of hallucination). This 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 deter-

minate period she is given every right over him. By this means the masochist tries to exorcise the danger of the father and to ensure that the temporal order of reality and experience will be in conformity with the symbolic order, in which the father has been abolished for all time. Through the contract, that is through the most rational and temporarily determinate act, the masochist reaches toward the most mythical and the most timeless realms, where the three mother-images dwell. Finally, he ensures that he will be beaten; we have seen that what is beaten, humiliated and ridiculed in him is the image and the likeness of the father, and the possibility of the father's aggressive return. *It is not a child but a father that is being beaten.* The masochist thus liberates himself in preparation for a rebirth in which the father will have no part.

But how shall we account for the fact that even in the contract the masochist requires a third party, the Greek? Why should he so ardently desire this third party? The answer is that the Greek, while he undoubtedly evokes the danger of the aggressive return of the father, also stands for something more — something of an entirely different kind, namely the hope of a rebirth, the projection of the new man that will result from the masochistic experiment. The Greek is a compound figure combining various elements: when he is idealized he foreshadows the outcome of masochism and stands for the new man; in his sadistic role, by contrast, he represents the dangerous father who brutally interrupts the experiment and interferes with the outcome. Let us remind ourselves of the fundamental structure of fantasy in general, for the art of masochism is the art of fantasy. Fantasy plays on two series, two opposite "margins," and the resonance thus set up gives life to and creates the heart of the fantasy. In masochism the two symbolic margins are the uterine mother and the Oedipal mother: between them and moving from one to the other is the oral mother, the core of the fantasy. The masochist plays

on the two extremes and causes them to produce a resonance in the oral mother. He thereby invests her with an amplitude which repeatedly brings her very close to the figures of her rivals. The oral mother must wrest from the uterine mother her hetaeric functions (prostitution) and from the Oedipal mother her sadistic functions (punishment). At either end of her pendulumlike motion, the good mother must confront the third party: the anonymous uterine mother and the sadistic Oedipal mother. But in point of fact (unless things take a turn for the worse as a result of the hallucinatory return of the father) the third party is never invited or sought after for its own sake, but to be neutralized by the substitution of the good mother for the uterine and the Oedipal mother. The adventure with Ludwig II admirably illustrates this: its comic effect is due to the parties put up by the two characters in confrontation.²⁰ When Masoch receives the first letters from "Anatole" he sincerely hopes that his correspondent is a woman. But he has already planned his party in case it should be a man: he will introduce Wanda into the affair and in collusion with the third party will get her to perform a hetaeric or sadistic function, but in her capacity as good mother. Whereupon Anatole, who has other plans, replies with an unexpected party, and introduces his hunchbacked cousin who is intended to neutralize Wanda herself, contrary to all Masoch's intentions. The question whether masochism is feminine and passive and sadism virile and active is only of secondary importance. In any case it arises from the presupposition that sadism and masochism are complementary, the one being the reverse of the other. But sadism and masochism do not together constitute a single entity; they are not respectively made up of partial impulses, but each is complete in itself. The masochist's experience is grounded in an alliance between the son and the oral mother; the sadist's in the alliance of father and daughter. In both cases this alliance is confirmed

CHAPTER VII

Humor, Irony and the Law

The classical conception of the law found its perfect expression in Plato and in that form gained universal acceptance throughout the Christian world. According to this conception, the law may be viewed either in the light of its underlying principles or in the light of its consequences. From the first point of view, the law itself is not a primary but only a secondary or delegated power dependent on a supreme principle which is the Good. If men knew what the Good was, or knew how to conform to it, they would not need laws: the law is only a representative of the Good in a world that the Good has more or less forsaken. Hence, from the point of view of its consequences, obedience to the law is "best," the best being in the image of the Good. The righteous man obeys the laws of the country of his birth or residence, and in so doing acts for the best, even though he retains his freedom of thought, freedom to think of the Good and for the sake of the Good.

This conception, which is seemingly so conventional, nevertheless conceals elements of irony and humor which made political philosophy possible, for it allows the free play of thought at the upper and lower limits of the scale of the law. The death of Socrates is an exemplary illustration of this: the laws place their

fate in the hands of the condemned man, and ask that he should sanction their authority by submitting to them as a rational man. There is indeed a great deal of irony in the operation that seeks to trace the laws back to an absolute Good as the necessary principle of their foundation. Equally, there is considerable humor in the attempt to reduce the laws to a relative Best in order to persuade us that we should obey them. Thus it appears that the notion of law is not self-sufficient unless backed by force; ideally it needs to rest on a higher principle as well as on a consideration of its remote consequences. This may be why, according to the mysterious text in the *Phaedo*, the disciples present at the death of Socrates could not help laughing. Irony and humor are the essential forms through which we apprehend the law. It is in this essential relation to the law that they acquire their function and their significance. Irony is the process of thought whereby the law is made to depend on an infinitely superior Good, just as humor is the attempt to sanction the law by recourse to an infinitely more righteous Best.

The final overthrow of the classical conception of the law was certainly not the result of the discovery of the relativity and variability of laws, since these were fully recognized and understood in this conception and were indeed an integral part of it. The true cause must be sought elsewhere. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant gave a rigorous formulation of a radically new conception, in which the law is no longer regarded as dependent on the Good, but on the contrary, the Good itself is made to depend on the law. This means that the law no longer has its foundation in some higher principle from which it would derive its authority, but that it is self-grounded and valid solely by virtue of its own form. For the first time we can now speak of THE LAW, regarded as an absolute, without further specification or reference to an object. Whereas the classical conception only dealt with *the laws* accord-

ing to the various spheres of the Good or the various circumstances attending the Best, Kant can speak of the moral law, and of its application to what otherwise remains totally undetermined. The moral law is the representation of a pure form and is independent of content or object, spheres of activity or circumstances. The moral law is THE LAW, the form of the law and as such it cannot be grounded in a higher principle. In this sense Kant is one of the first to break away from the classical conception of the law and to give us a truly modern conception. The Copernican revolution in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* consisted in viewing the objects of knowledge as revolving around the subject; but the *Critique of Practical Reason*, where the Good is conceived as revolving around the Law, is perhaps even more revolutionary. It probably reflected major changes in the world. It may have been the expression of the ultimate consequences of a return beyond Christianity to Judaic thought, or it may even have foreshadowed a return to the pre-Socratic (Oedipal) conception of the law, beyond to the world of Plato. However that may be, Kant, by establishing that THE LAW is an ultimate ground or principle, added an essential dimension to modern thought: the object of the law is by definition unknowable and elusive.²⁶

But there is yet a further dimension. We are not concerned here with the architectonics of Kant's system (and the manner in which he salvages the Good in the system), but with a second discovery which is correlated with and complementary to the first. The law can no longer be grounded on the superior principle of the Good, but neither can it be sanctioned any more by recourse to the idea of the Best as representing the good will of the righteous. Clearly THE LAW, as defined by its pure form, without substance or object or any determination whatsoever, is such that no one knows nor can know what it is. It operates without making itself known. It defines a realm of transgression where

one is already guilty, and where one oversteps the bounds without knowing what they are, as in the case of Oedipus. Even guilt and punishment do not tell us what the law is, but leave it in a state of indeterminacy equaled only by the extreme specificity of the punishment. This is the world described by Kafka. The point is not to compare Kant and Kafka, but to delineate two dimensions of the modern conception of the law.

If the law is no longer based on the Good as a preexisting, higher principle, and it is valid by virtue of its form alone, the content remaining entirely undetermined, it becomes impossible to say that the righteous man obeys the law for the sake of the Best. In other words, the man who obeys the law does not thereby become righteous or feel righteous; on the contrary, he feels guilty and is guilty in advance, and the more strict his obedience, the greater his guilt. This is the process by which the law manifests itself in its absolute purity, and proves us guilty. The two fundamental propositions of the classical conception are overthrown together: the law as grounded in the further principle of the Good; the law as sanctioned by righteousness. Freud was the first to recognize the extraordinary paradox of the conscience. It is far from the case that obedience to the law secures a feeling of righteousness, "for the more virtuous a man is, the more severe and distrustful" is the behavior of his conscience toward him; Freud goes on to remark on "the extraordinary severity of conscience in the best and most tractable people."²⁷

Freud resolved the paradox by showing that the renunciation of instinctual gratification is not the product of conscience, but on the contrary that conscience itself is born of such renunciation. Hence it follows that the strength and severity of conscience increases in direct proportion to the strength and severity of the renunciation. Conscience is heir to the repressed instinctual drives. "The effect of instinctual renunciation on the conscience

then is that every piece of aggression whose satisfaction the subject gives up is taken over by the superego and increases the latter's aggressiveness (against the ego)." We are now in a position to unravel the second paradox concerning the fundamentally undetermined character of the law. In Lacan's words, the law is the same as repressed desire. The law cannot specify its object without self-contradiction, nor can it define itself with reference to a content without removing the repression on which it rests. The object of the law and the object of desire are one and the same, and remain equally concealed. When Freud shows that the essential nature of the object relates to the mother while that of desire and the law relates to the father, he does not thereby try to restore a determinate content to the law; he does indeed almost the opposite, he shows how the law, by virtue of its Oedipal origins, must of necessity conceal its content in order to operate as a pure form which is the result of a renunciation both of the object (the mother) and of the subject (the father).

The classical irony and humor of Plato that had for so long dominated all thinking on the subject of the law are thus turned upside down. The upper and lower limits of the law, that is to say the superior principle of the Good and the sanction of the righteous in the light of the Best are reduced to nothingness. All that remains is the indeterminate character of the law on the one hand and the specificity of the punishment on the other. Irony and humor immediately take on a different, modern aspect. They still represent a way of conceiving the law, but the law is now seen in terms of the indeterminacy of its content and of the guilt of the person who submits to it. Kafka gives to humor and irony their full modern significance in agreement with the transformed character of the law. Max Brod recalls that when Kafka gave a reading of *The Trial*, everyone present, including Kafka himself, was overcome by laughter – as mysterious a phenomenon as the laugh-

ter that greeted the death of Socrates. A spurious sense of tragedy dulls our intelligence; how many authors are distorted by placing a childishly tragic construction on what is more often the expression of an aggressively comic force! The comic is the only possible mode of conceiving the law, in a peculiar combination of irony and humor.

In modern thought irony and humor take on a new form: they are now directed at a subversion of the law. This leads us back to Sade and Masoch, who represent the two main attempts at subversion, at turning the law upside down. Irony is still in the process or movement which bypasses the law as a merely secondary power and aims at transcending it toward a higher principle. But what if the higher principle no longer exists, and if the Good can no longer provide a basis for the law or a justification of its power? Sade's answer is that in all its forms — natural, moral and political — the law represents the rule of secondary nature which is always geared to the demands of conservation; it is a usurpation of true sovereignty. It is irrelevant whether we see the law as the expression of the rule of the strongest or as the product of the self-protective union of the weak. Masters and slaves, the strong and the weak, all are creatures of secondary nature; the union of the weak merely favors the emergence of the tyrant; his existence depends on it. In every case the law is a mystification; it is not a delegated but a usurped power that depends on the infamous complicity of slaves and masters. It is significant that Sade attacks the regime of laws as being the regime of the tyrannized and of the tyrants. Only the law can tyrannize: "I have infinitely less reason to fear my neighbor's passions than the law's injustice, for my neighbor's passions are contained by mine, whereas nothing stops or contains the injustices of the law." Tyrants are created by the law alone: they flourish by virtue of the law. As Chigi says in *Juliette*, "Tyrants are never born in anarchy, they only flour-

ish in the shadow of the laws and draw their authority from them." Sade's hatred of tyranny, his demonstration that the law enables the tyrant to exist, form the essence of his thinking. The tyrant speaks the language of the law, and acknowledges no other, for he lives "in the shadow of the laws." The heroes of Sade are inspired with an extraordinary passion against tyranny; they speak as no tyrant ever spoke or could ever speak; theirs is the counter-language of tyranny.

We now note a new attempt to transcend the law, this time no longer in the direction of the Good as superior principle and ground of the law, but in the direction of its opposite, the Idea of Evil, the supreme principle of wickedness, which subverts the law and turns Platonism upside down. Here, the transcendence of the law implies the discovery of a primary nature which is in every way opposed to the demands and the rule of secondary nature. It follows that the idea of absolute evil embodied in primary nature cannot be equated either with tyranny — for tyranny still presupposes laws — or with a combination of whims and arbitrariness; its higher, impersonal model is rather to be found in the anarchic institutions of perpetual motion and permanent revolution. Sade often stresses the fact that the law can only be transcended toward an institutional model of anarchy. The fact that anarchy can only exist in the interval between two regimes based on laws, abolishing the old to give birth to the new, does not prevent this divine interval, this vanishing instant, from testifying to its fundamental difference from all forms of the law. "The reign of laws is pernicious; it is inferior to that of anarchy; the best proof of this is that all governments are forced to plunge into anarchy when they wish to remake their constitutions." The law can only be transcended by virtue of a principle that subverts it and denies its power.

While the sadian hero subverts the law, the masochist should

not by contrast be regarded as gladly submitting to it. The element of contempt in the submission of the masochist has often been emphasized: his apparent obedience conceals a criticism and a provocation. He simply attacks the law on another flank. What we call humor — in contradistinction to the upward movement of irony toward a transcendent higher principle — is a downward movement from the law to its consequences. We all know ways of twisting the law by excess of zeal. By scrupulously applying the law we are able to demonstrate its absurdity and provoke the very disorder that it is intended to prevent or to conjure. By observing the very letter of the law, we refrain from questioning its ultimate or primary character; we then behave as if the supreme sovereignty of the law conferred upon it the enjoyment of all those pleasures that it denies us; hence, by the closest adherence to it, and by zealously embracing it, we may hope to partake of its pleasures. The law is no longer subverted by the upward movement of irony to a principle that overrides it, but by the downward movement of humor which seeks to reduce the law to its furthest consequences. A close examination of masochistic fantasies or rites reveals that while they bring into play the very strictest application of the law, the result in every case is the opposite of what might be expected (thus whipping, far from punishing or preventing an erection, provokes and ensures it). It is a demonstration of the law's absurdity. The masochist regards the law as a punitive process and therefore begins by having the punishment inflicted upon himself; once he has undergone the punishment, he feels that he is allowed or indeed commanded to experience the pleasure that the law was supposed to forbid. The essence of masochistic humor lies in this, that the very law which forbids the satisfaction of a desire under threat of subsequent punishment is converted into one which demands the punishment first and then orders that the satisfaction of the desire

should necessarily follow upon the punishment. Once more, Theodor Reik gives an excellent analysis of this process: masochism is not pleasure in pain, nor even in punishment; at most, the masochist gets a preliminary pleasure from punishment or discomfort; his real pleasure is obtained subsequently, in that which is made possible by the punishment. The masochist must undergo punishment before experiencing pleasure. It would be a mistake to confuse this temporal succession with logical causality: suffering is not the cause of pleasure itself but the necessary precondition for achieving it. "The temporal reversal points at a reversal of the contents. . . . The previous 'You must not do that' has been transmuted into 'You have to do that!' . . . What else but a demonstration of absurdity is aimed at, when the punishment for forbidden pleasure brings about this very same pleasure?"²⁸ The same process is reflected in the other features of masochism, such as disavowal, suspense and fantasy, which should be regarded as so many forms or aspects of humor. The masochist is insolent in his obsequiousness, rebellious in his submission; in short, he is a humorist, a logician of consequences, just as the ironic sadist is a logician of principles.

From the idea that the law should not be based on the principle of the Good but on its form alone, the sadist fashions a new method of ascending from the law to a superior principle; this principle, however, is the informal element of a primary nature which aims at the subversion of all laws. In the other modern discovery that the law increases the guilt of the person who submits to it, the masochist in his turn finds a new way of descending from the law to its consequences; he stands guilt on its head by making punishment into a condition that makes possible the forbidden pleasure. In so doing he overthrows the law as radically as the sadist, though in a different way. We have seen how these methods proceed, ideologically speaking. The Oedipal content,

which always remains concealed, undergoes a dual transformation – as though the mother-father complementarity had been shattered twice and asymmetrically. In the case of sadism the father is placed above the laws; he becomes a higher principle with the mother as his essential victim. In the case of masochism the totality of the law is invested upon the mother, who expels the father from the symbolic realm.