

## The whipped body: whose's body?

### The missing buttocks in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*

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My presentation derives from two sets of texts. First, there are the publications of Philippe Van Haute and Herman Westerink who have shown that our reading of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* is usually biased by the additions in the 1915 edition. Our reading completely changes once we commit ourselves to scrutinize the 1905 edition (Vienna University Press, 2015). There we learn that there is no Oedipus complex at that time and that perverse sexuality is not considered as the result of transgression but as the simple naming for autonomous functioning erogenous zones.<sup>1</sup> Second, there is the article of Avgi Saketopoulou 'To Suffer Pleasure: The shattering of the ego as the psychic labor of perversity' (Studies in Gender and Sexuality 15: 254-268) and the commentary thereon by Francisco J. González and Tim Dean in the same volume. Those texts deal with the question if the activation of primitive forms of sexuality, especially of masochism, is simply a form of regression. Perhaps there is more at stake, for experience teaches us that this activation can provoke a shattering of the ego that is not necessarily catastrophic. Both the new interest in the original edition of the *Three Essays* and the queer reflection on the effect of masochism bring us to a renewed interest in the building stones of sexuality, which I welcome very much as sex has often faded away in psychoanalysis, as the focus became the theory of attachment and the debate on identity formation.

In my contribution to the debate, I want to go back to my book on religious flagellation I wrote already fifteen years ago.<sup>2</sup> Rereading the last pages of my text, I realized that my attempt to match psychoanalytic theory and the history of flagellation were very tentative. Today I like to make a further step, and in this lecture, I will try to show how Freud's hesitation about the origin of masochism can be traced back to Krafft-Ebing, who in his turn refers to the Medieval's flagellants without giving a fair account of their factual and psychological experience.

Thus my talk is divided into three parts: Freud, Krafft-Ebing, the Medieval flagellants.

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1. I have to mention the excellent book of Philippe Van Haute en Herman Westerink *Reading Freud's Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. From pleasure to the Object* (London: Routledge 2020).

2. *La chair de la Passion. Une histoire de foi : la flagellation*, Paris: Cerf, 2002, 280 pp; Spanish transl.: *Carne de la Pasión. Flagelantes y disciplinantes: contexto histórico-psicológico*, Madrid: Trotta, 2004, 348 pp.

### Freud in the first edition of the *Three Essays*

Freud does not devote much space to sadism and masochism in the first edition of the *Three Essays*. Obviously, homosexuality is his main concern and this is for him a practice not to be considered a perversion, let us stress it *en passant*. It is a different choice of sexual object. Starting with homosexuality, he wants to show that sexuality is not a predetermined instinct, and this is the core of the *Three Essays*. Continuing on the same track, he lists the perversions as they had been described by the sexologists of the last decades of the nineteenth century, Richard Krafft-Ebing in particular. The novelty of Freud is that he does not explain their existence just saying they are deviations. According to him, they are more basically the building stones of adult sexuality. Normally, they would have been neatly assembled in the organized whole of sex, but, for some reason, they were not.

Sadism and masochism are listed by Freud as the most common perversions. He does not pay much attention to the choice of a sexual object needed for those perverse practices, as if this were not intimately linked with the sadistic or masochistic position. This is rather surprising, as in the sources Freud is using, being whipped by a man or by a woman have been distinguished very soon. But it is pain that primarily catches Freud's attention. Let us quote the text (pp. 19-21 in the new 1905 edition by Ph. Van Haute & H. Westerink):

The most common and the most significant of all the perversions, the inclination to inflict pain on the sexual object, and to have pain inflicted upon oneself, is what Krafft-Ebing has identified in both of its forms, the active and the passive one, as sadism and masochism, respectively. Other authors prefer the narrower term algolagnia, which emphasizes the pleasure in pain and cruelty, while the terms chosen by Krafft-Ebing prioritize the pleasure gained from every kind of humiliation and subjection.

Then Freud opens a secondary perspective, which was the prime element in Krafft-Ebing description, and puts the pain-perspective at some distance:

As regards active algolagnia, sadism, its origins are easy to detect in the normal. The sexuality of most men contains an element of aggression, of an inclination to overpower, whose biological significance may be found in overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than wooing. Sadism would thus correspond to an aggressive component of the sexual drive that has now become independent and exaggerated and, by displacement, has taken on the leading role.

Thus enters the usual Darwinian perspective of those days. Considered this point of view, sadism is primarily a man's sake, and at the end of this text, Freud will say that the possible change of sadism in masochism in males has to do with constitutional bisexuality, the man experiencing himself as being a woman. If he would have limited to this

statement, his point of view would have been rather simple, but consistent. But before jumping to this conclusion, some puzzling sentences seem to deal with the underlying and unsolved problem of the relationship between mastery, pain infliction, and humiliation Freud seems to sense.

We can with an equal degree of certainty deduce at least one of the origins of masochism. It emanates from the sexual overvaluation as necessary psychic consequence of the sexual object-choice. The pain that is being overcome here can be linked to disgust and shame opposing the libido as resistances.

That is undoubtedly the most personal statement of Sigmund Freud. With the emphasis put on overvaluation, we leave the Darwinian track and enter into human psychology. But this statement is still embryonic, and we should resist the temptation of seeing here already a glimpse of the fascination for the Other who will become the Ego Ideal. Typical Freudian is also the interpretation of the pain (inflicted or undergone?) as a form of concomitant punishment that allows the *jouissance* of forbidden pleasure. One would have liked to have these elements more elaborated. Unfortunately, they are not. And the remaining sentences, are a rather loose summary of Krafft-Ebing's views, on the link of sadism with the more primitive drive of cannibalism, with a Freudian question mark added to them.<sup>3</sup> And then, he comes to the most puzzling fact, that sadism and masochism often can be found in the same person.

But the most remarkable feature of this perversion is that its active and passive forms are regularly found occurring together in one and the same person. A person who feels pleasure in causing pain to someone else in a sexual relation is also capable of enjoying as pleasure any pain that he may himself derive from sexual relations. A sadist is always at the same time a masochist, even if the active or the passive element of the perversion may be more strongly developed in him, and may represent his predominant sexual activity. Thus we find certain of the inclinations toward perversion regularly occurring as pairs of opposites, and this is of great theoretical significance in relation to material to be considered later. Moreover, it is clear that the existence of the pair of opposites formed by sadism and masochism cannot be directly deduced from the admixture of aggression. One would rather be tempted to relate the simultaneous presence of these opposites to the opposite poles of masculinity and femininity combined in bisexuality.

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3. 'Human cultural history shows beyond any doubt that there is an integral [?; German: *innigst*] connection between cruelty and the sexual drive; but in trying to elucidate this connection, we have not gone beyond asserting the aggressive aspects of the libido. According to some authors, the source of aggression linked to the sexual drive is a relic of cannibalistic pleasures - that is, it involves the apparatus for obtaining mastery, which serves the satisfaction of other, ontogenetically older, needs. It has also been asserted that every pain contains in itself the possibility of a feeling of pleasure. We will content ourselves with the impression that no satisfactory explanation of this perversion has been provided, and that it seems possible that a number of psychical strivings combine to produce a single effect.'

We briefly stated it above: Reading those sentences, we are inclined to interpret them with the subsequent Freudian writings in our mind. But this is exactly what we should not do, as Van Haute and Westerink convinced us. By doing so, we would become locked up in a circular discourse that makes us unaware of how Freudian thought has grown. Let us, therefore, have a brief look at Freud's main source, Richard von Krafft-Ebing.

### **Richard von Krafft-Ebing**

According to Jeffrey Masson,<sup>4</sup> Freud owned 4 editions of the very successful *Psychopathia Sexualis*: 1890<sup>5</sup>, 1872<sup>7</sup>, 1894<sup>9</sup> and 1901<sup>11</sup>. Only the 1894 edition was annotated by him. It should be great if we could read those notes. But, as this is out of reach, let us have an overview of what is discussed in the *Psychopathia sexualis*, using the edition that Freud read. What strikes us, is that the first part deals with the cultural and religious history of sexuality (pp. 1-22), and the second part with the physiological aspects of sexual arousal (pp. 23-34), wherein flagellation is discussed at some length. The medieval flagellants are put to the fore and their behavior is labeled as penance and refusal of the flesh, while this was definitely not the case, as we will see.

Sadism comes up in the third part of the *Psychopathia sexualis*, called 'General Neuro- and Psychopathology of Sexual Life' (pp. 34-320). Having first indicated the abnormal amount of sexual arousal (hyperaesthesia), Krafft-Ebing comes to the 'paraesthesias' or perversions, and sadism is listed as number one. The fact that 'It is well known that there is an intimate link between sexual ecstasy and cruelty'<sup>5</sup> is explained, just as Freud did, with a reference to the animalistic prehistory of mankind where the males had to submit the wives. From there on Krafft-Ebing goes further than Freud will do. He gives cases of murder brought about by sexual arousal, cannibalistic behavior, and having sex with corpses. This all is illustrated by many case stories, and the famous one of Sergeant Bertrand who entered cemeteries at night to fulfill his devouring passion, is quoted at length. Here are the sources Freud alluded to in the rather cryptic sentences quoted above. But just as you think you came at the bottom of sadistic behavior, Krafft-Ebing adds a section on molesting women especially by whipping them. As reader you ask yourself if we are still in a continuum, as this form of torment is not only less serious, but also less deducible from the image of the violent, mating male.

But Krafft-Ebing does not enter into the question of the linear continuity suggested by his proposed scheme. He goes into the question if there is female sadism, and he knows only a few cases. Considered from his Darwinian view, this is something to be expected.<sup>6</sup> Thus he jumps to masochism, and we expect a parallel discourse on the

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4. Jeffrey M. Masson, *The Assault on Truth. Freud's suppression of the seduction theory*, New York 1984.

5. 'Dass Wollust und Grausamkeit häufig mit einander verbunden sind, ist eine längst bekannte und nicht selten zu Beobachten Thatsache.' (p. 57).

6. 'Einmal stellt der Sadismus, in welchem das Bedürfnis nach Unterwerfung des anderen Geschlechts ein constituirendes Element bildet, seiner Natur nach eine pathologische Steigerung des männlichen Geschlechtscharakters dar, zweitens sind die mächtigen Hindernisse, die sich der Äusserung des monstruösen Triebes entgegenstellen,

exaggeration of the female position, masochism thus being essentially specific to women. But this is not the case. Most of the described masochists are men. Are they perhaps homosexuals, conceived as hidden females in a man's body? Krafft-Ebing does not say that, and they appear only incidentally in his text. He follows a different track. He underscores the fact that masochists are not primarily taking pleasure in pain, but enjoying being subjected and despised by someone else. And conceived in this way, women are very often 'masochistic'. They want to become totally dependent on the males they love.<sup>7</sup> The examples and the statements included in his text would surely not have been acclaimed by women today. Let us add that Krafft-Ebing acknowledges also male forms of dependencies of women, and those will neither be acclaimed.<sup>8</sup> But this is not our topic today. When we look at how pain is incorporated in masochism in general, we see that is not an immediate form of sexual pleasure, but just a strong sign of attachment to the beloved one. Actually, in whipping - which is the basic example, time and again - or in other forms of pain, the experience of ecstatic love is so predominant that the hurting dimension fades away (pp. 149-150).<sup>9</sup>

They are also many unsolved problems in Krafft-Ebing text. Masochism seems to have a rather a psychological dimension, wherein the experience of dependence is predominant. Its link with pain seems to be less direct:

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begrifflicher Weise für das Weib noch grösser als für den Mann.' (p. 87).

7. 'Deshalb bedeutet für ein Weib der Mann, den sie hat, das ganze Geschlecht. Seine Wichtigkeit für sie wächst dadurch ins Ungeheure.' p. 144.

8. 'In geschlechtliche Hörigkeit gerathene Männer finden wir im Leben bei jedem Schritt. Hierher gehören bei den Ehemännern die sogenannten Pantoffelhelden, namentlich die alternden Männer, die junge Frauen heirathen und das Missverhältniss der Jahre und körperlichen Eigenschaften durch unbedingte Nachgiebigkeit gegen allen Launen der Gattin auszugleichen trachten; hierher sind zu zählen auch ausserhalb der Ehe die überreifen Männer, die ihre letzten Chancen in der Liebe durch ungemessene Opfer zu verbessern trachten; hierher aber auch Männer jedes Alters, die, von heisser Leidenschaft für ein Weib ergriffen, bei ihm auf Kälte und Berechnung stossen und auf harte Bedingungen capitulieren müssen; verliebte Naturen, die von notorischen Dirnen sich zur Eheschliessung bewegen lassen; ...' p. 143-144.

9. 'Dass passive Flagellation so häufig beim Masochismus vorkommt, erklärt sich einfach daraus, dass sie das stärkste Ausdrucksmittel für das Verhältniss der Unterwerfung sei.

Ich wiederhole es als entscheidend für die Differenzierung von einfacher passiver Flagellation und Flagellation auf Grund masochistischen Verlangens, dass im ersterer Fall die Handlung Mittel zum Zweck des dadurch möglich werdenden Coitus oder wenigstens einer Ejaculation, im letzterer Fall Mittel zum Zweck der Seelischen Befriedigung im Sinne masochistischer Gelüste ist.

Wie wir oben gesehen haben, unterwerfen sich Masochisten auch allen möglichen anderen Misshandlungen und Qualen, bei denen vor reflectorischer Erregung von Wollust nicht die Rede sein kann. Da solche Fälle zahlreich sind, so muss untersucht werden, in welchem Verhältniss bei derartigen Akten (und bei der gleichwerthigen Flagellation der Masochisten) Schmerz und Lust zu einander stehen. Auf Grund der Aussage eines Masochisten ergibt sich Folgendes:

Das Verhältniss ist nicht derart, dass einfach, was sonst psychischen Schmerz verursacht, hier als psychische Lust empfunden wird, sondern der in der masochistischen Ekstase Befindliche fühlt keinen Schmerz, sei es, weil er vermöge seines Affektzustandes (gleich dem Soldaten im Kampfgewühl) die physische Einwirkung auf seine Hautnerven überhaupt nicht apperzipiert, oder weil (wie bei dem religiösen Märtyrer und Ekstatiker) der Ueberfüllung des Bewusstseins mit Lustgefühlen gegenüber die Vorstellung der Misshandlung nur wie ein blosses Zeichen, ohne ihre Schmerzqualität, in ihm stehen bleibt.' (pp. 149-150).

‘Dass Masochismus etwas wesentlich Anderes und Umfassenderes ist als blosse Flagellation, geht aus den Mittheilungen der von dieser Perversion Ergriffenen deutlich hervor.

Für den Masochisten ist die Unterwerfung unter das Weib die Hauptsache, die Misshandlung nur ein Ausdrucksmittel für dieses Verhältniss und zwar eines des stärksten. Die Handlung hat für ihn symbolischen Werth und ist Mittel zum Zweck seelischer Befriedigung im Sinne seiner besonderen Gelüste.

Der nicht masochistische Geschwächte hingegen, der sich flagelliren lässt, sucht nur eine mechanisch vermittelte Reizung seines spinalen Centrums.’ (p. 102)

‘It is not difficult to show that masochism is something essentially different from flagellation, and more comprehensive. For the masochist the principal thing is subjection to the woman; the punishment is only the expression of this relation – the most intense effect of it he can bring upon himself. For him, the act has only a symbolic value and is a means to the end of mental satisfaction of his peculiar desires. On the other hand, the individual that is weakened and not subject to masochism and who has himself flagellated, desires only a mechanical irritation of his spinal centre.’ (The English translation stems from the English adaptation of the 12th ed. by F.J. Rebman (New York: Rebman Company, 1900), p. 141, but it is a correct translation of the German from the 1894 text quoted here).

Especially the question of how masochism establishes itself in so many males remains unsolved. You have the impression that Krafft-Ebing tries to silence all his doubts on those issues by putting a concluding part wherein he stubbornly states that sadism and masochism, are each other’s symmetrical opposites, while he has shown the opposite.<sup>10</sup>

And what is the function of flagellation? According to Krafft-Ebing, it seems obvious that it can be an act both of stimulation and subjection, or only an act of stimulation. But what makes the difference? And can we delve deeper into that question just using physiology, eventually combined with a Darwinian perspective, or do we need cultural history? Time to go to de medieval flagellants.

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10. ‘Das vollkommene Gegenstück des Masochismus ist der Sadismus. Während jener Scherzen leiden und sich der Gewalt unterworfen fühlen will, geht dieser darauf aus, Schmerz zuzufügen und Gewalt auszuüben.

Der Parallelismus ist ein vollständiger. Alle Akten und Situationen, die von Sadisten in der activen Rolle ausgeführt werden, bilden für den Masochisten in der passiven Rolle den Gegenstand der Sehnsucht. Bei beiden Perversionen schreiten diese Akte von rein symbolischen Vorgängen zu schweren Misshandlungen fort.’ (p. 151)

## The flagellants

In order to indicate the psychological impact of flagellation, Krafft-Ebing point to the medieval flagellants and therefore he refers to 'Boileau, *The History of the Flagellants*, London 1783.' (p. 29, note 1). Indeed, the book of the theologian Jacques Boileau (1635-1716), brother of the famous poet Nicolas Boileau (1636-1711), has provided for three centuries the classical account of the history of religious flagellation. The book was published first in Latin (1700) and then in French (1701). However, the book Krafft-Ebing mentions is not just a translation, as the subtitle explicitly mentions: Delolme, John Lewis, *The History of the Flagellants, or The Advantages of Discipline; Being a Paraphrase and Commentary on the Historia Flagellantum of the Abbé Boileau, Doctor of the Sorbonne, Canon of the Holy Chapel, &c. By Somebody who is not Doctor of the Sorbonne*. London: Fielding and Walker, 1777. (Krafft-Ebing refers to a subsequent edition). The paraphrase changes the text completely.

Let me summarize the history of flagellation as I have investigated it in detail in my book *La chair de la passion*. Although flagellation has been a punishment for centuries, it acquired a completely different meaning once it had been introduced in the form of self-flagellation by Peter Damian (1007-1072). Whipping oneself meant not at all self-punishment, as people nowadays are inclined to assume. It was on the contrary a narcissistic pose, the medieval flagellant exhibiting his (very seldom: her) identification with Christ. His body was not his body anymore. Wandering in groups from town to town, the flagellants summoned people to conversion. This seems rather in line with the usual preaches of the clergy, but it was not. On the contrary: the flagellants formed a protest movement against the clergy that intended to intensify its grip on the consciences of the believers in those days. The flagellants refused the doctrine of transubstantiation, they refused to put off their hats at the moment of consecration, arguing that the real blood of Christ was flowing out of their backs as they were flagellating themselves. In different ways, e.g. in imposing their hands on sick people, they exhibited they were really experiencing being Christ themselves, and therefore refusing the mediation by the clergy. But the explicit idea of identification with Christ disappears in the sixteenth century, while penance and self-punishment emerge. From the seventeenth century on, the way of practising flagellation changed as not the back, but the buttocks became the object of flagellation, and a sexual meaning was acknowledged (or: given) to it. The canon and theologian Jacques Boileau reacted to it. (*Historia flagellantium*, Paris: 1700). Boileau depicts with some sympathy the libertarian flagellants of the Middle-Ages, but he sneers at the nuns whipping now their buttocks. Did they not realize that beating the buttocks is completely different from beating the back, as in the former case sexual arousal is provoked! From the eighteenth century on, the adapted English translation of Boileau's book shows how the widespread fantasies on flagellation shifted further on. In this commentary and paraphrase, a lot of texts are ironically added, especially in praise of the human buttocks. Although self-flagellation continued in the monasteries, the popular fantasy became focused on men being whipped by women, and the most famous example is in Sacher-Masoch's novel *The Venus in Furs* (1870).

I could add here very juicy texts, but let us summarize the most puzzling and unsolved questions, as Freud should have discovered them by a critical reading Krafft-Ebing. The latter gives time and again flagellation as the example both of sadism and masochism, but Freud does not mention the topic in his *Three Essays*. Krafft-Ebing distinguishes being whipped just for the erotic stimulus and the masochistic, submissive meaning that can be experienced. This is also missing in Freud. And, probably mistaken by his sources, Krafft-Ebing is unaware of the cultural-historical shifts in the experience of being whipped, whereby self-flagellation is not at all submissive, on the contrary, and whipping on the back is completely different from whipping on the buttocks, the latter being erotic. And, especially, the narcissistic pose in the gesture of self-flagellation while experiencing oneself as being someone else, would deserve further analysis.

Thus we would need a cultural-historic inquiry into the buttocks as an erogenic zone, and how the shift from the back to the buttocks changes completely the experience of being flogged. Especially the experience of 'being someone else' while being flogged, is a fascinating experience. This should have its place in a project in line with Freud's *Three essays*.

## Abstract

Is sadomasochism relational per se or can you isolate the pain experience in order to make of it an erogenic zone as Freud did it in his *Three Essays on the Sexual Theory*? The source he used, Krafft-Ebing's *Sexualpathologie*, brings us back to the history of religious flagellation, a topic on which I devoted a book, *La chair de la passion* (Paris: 2002). Looking back at the material presented in this book, I want to delve deeper into the question of how the history of flagellation shaped Krafft-Ebing's theory of masochism and consequently Freud's view on the psychology of it. Let us briefly recall the original meaning of religious flagellation: it is not a way of punishing oneself, as it is frequently assumed. However, this history is recaptured by Krafft-Ebing, who brings in his way the medieval flagellants to the fore in order to prove the existence of sadomasochism. With this history in our mind, we should go back to Freud's *Three Essays*, investigating how and why the relational and gender aspect is to find back in Freud's first writing on it.

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Ref naar uitg van Kraff-Ebing: Jeffrey Masson ong 1 p voor "The seduction of Emma