

# Introduction

## I

During the earlier part of the seventeenth century, religious flagellation still survived, even in Protestant England. John Gee (a Church of England clergyman who went through a period of dalliance with Catholicism) recounts how, during the reign of James I, Catholic flagellants marched in procession to Tyburn, and – despite his renewed commitment to the Protestant cause – partly endorses the practice, declaring himself ‘no enemy vnto austeritie of life, and taming or chastening our *bodily sinfull members*’;<sup>1</sup> William Prynne denounces attempts to introduce ‘*Popish Penances*’ and the censorship of attacks on Catholic practices of self-flagellation during the time that William Laud was Archbishop of Canterbury;<sup>2</sup> and, even though a form of sexual flagellant had emerged as an early modern sexual identity,<sup>3</sup> it was not until the Restoration that the explicit conflation of ascetic and sexual masochism began to emerge in ribald plays and verse, only finding its way into anti-Catholic polemic in the final two decades of the century, when the ‘ascetic masochism’<sup>4</sup> that was still practised in public spaces in the early years of the century was widely discredited by association with sexual masochism.<sup>5</sup>

Penitential mortification was not generally sanctioned by Protestant theology, but Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* casts its shadow across the century, and the surest sign that one was among the elect was that one was privileged to suffer for Christ’s sake. ‘As affliction is a sign of God’s love, so the absence of affliction is a sign of his wrath,’<sup>6</sup> and the devout Protestant was ‘bound to be glad that he is afflicted,’ because suffering ‘is such a signe of God’s love, that

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<sup>1</sup> John Gee, *The Foot out of the Snare* (London, 1624), pp. 80–83.

<sup>2</sup> William Prynne, *Canterburies Doome* (London, 1646), pp. 335 and 195.

<sup>3</sup> The earliest printed reference in English appears to be John Davies, *Epigrammes and Elegies* ([London, 1599?]), sig. C3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> This expression appears to have been first used by Eric John Dingwall, *Very Peculiar People: Studies in the Queer, the Abnormal and the Uncanny* (London, 1950), pp. 127 and 132, but is often credited to Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 3, below.

<sup>6</sup> Ann Thompson, *The Art of Suffering and the Impact of Seventeenth-Century Anti-Providential Thought* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 57.

every one *that is not chastened*, is mark't out for *a bastard, and no sonne* [that is, not among the elect].<sup>7</sup> This led, on the one hand, to social unrest, with dissident Protestants finding confirmation of their faith and renewed determination in their persecution by the mainstream (Frances Howgill, for example, says of the Quakers that 'We ... rejoice in our sufferings for Christs sake, neither are we weary, but are willing to bear and suffer, till the Lord arise'<sup>8</sup>), and, on the other, to psychological stress. Suffering is either redemptive or punitive, and the sufferer who seeks redemption is bound to rejoice, but if one is crying out in agony and cannot rejoice in one's suffering, one is additionally burdened with the anxiety of suspecting oneself to be among the reprobate; and when one is in good health and free from persecution one's soul is in greater danger than ever – 'when men cry Peace and Safety then Destruction comes upon them.'<sup>9</sup>

At the same time as accepting – and even extolling – attitudes towards suffering which most people today would think of as perverse, seventeenth-century society was also engaged in an ongoing debate about these attitudes, some of it in a broader humanistic context, much of it in terms of Stoic and Epicurean ideas and their application to Christian belief. Towards the end of the century, this led to widespread rejection of Stoic principles of 'looking upon all Affections as vitious Perturbations, not endeavouring to rule and use them, but to root them out',<sup>10</sup> and acceptance of the basically Epicurean principle that '*Pleasure is the Sovereign Aim of all Men, 'tis that which the Soul naturally and justly desires, and for which 'tis made.*'<sup>11</sup> Endorsement of the pleasure principle did not displace the idea that 'We are also to rejoice, in what God suffers evil Angels (or Men) to do to us, in their implacable Malice'<sup>12</sup> – when necessary, one should suffer willingly and with fortitude – but it placed it in a context; whereas the seventeenth century had begun with ideals of martyrdom and suffering for Christ, along with persistent traces of Catholic practices of mortification, the eighteenth began with a broad recognition that suffering was not a moral imperative, it was not wrong to be in a state of physical and mental ease, and one did not *have* to punish the flesh or humiliate oneself or suffer agonies of doubt

<sup>7</sup> Henry Hammond, *A Practicall Catechisme* (Oxford, 1645), p. 110. The reference is to KJV, Hebrews 12:7–8.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Howgill, *The Mouth of the Pit Stopped* (London, 1659), p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Horton, *One Hundred Select Sermons* (London, 1679), p. 133.

<sup>10</sup> James Dalrymple, *A Vindication of the Divine Perfections Illustrating the Glory of God in them* (London, 1695), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters and Essays* (London, 1694), preface, sig. A3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> George Sikes, *A Wakening Call, or, An Alarm from Heaven to the Wise and Foolish Virgins* (London, 1698), p. 92.

and self-reproach in order to be morally vindicated in this world or gain one's reward in the next.

Put simply, 'the religious upheavals of the early modern period ... affected perceptions of physical pain, and formed a watershed moment in what we might call "the history of pain".'<sup>13</sup> The most decisive result of this 'watershed' is, as I have indicated, in the general perception of the religious or moral need to suffer in order to gain redemption. At the same time, there was a slow but steady change in attitudes towards the infliction of suffering; such 'pleasant spectacles' as bear-baiting, public executions and mutilation by whipping, branding, chopping off ears, and so on, which were more or less taken for granted at the beginning of the century, began to decline in popularity as the century progressed, though – despite the passage of the Bill of Rights in 1689 – the watershed in this respect did not come until much later. The more brutal blood sports were not outlawed until 1835,<sup>14</sup> and 'Executing male rebels by drawing and quartering continued ... until 1814 ... Beheading and quartering were not abolished until 1870. The burning of female felons continued in England until the penalty was repealed in 1790.'<sup>15</sup>

The difference between living in a world where such infliction of pain – such public spectacles – is sanctioned and one where it is not is profound, and is rightly identified as a crucial cultural marker separating today's world from the early modern period. Halttunen, for example, citing David B. Morris's work on the effect of anaesthetics on the perception of pain, says:

Orthodox Christianity had traditionally viewed pain not only as God's punishment for sin (the English term is derived from the Latin *pœna*, punishment) but also as a redemptive opportunity to transcend the world and the flesh by imitating the suffering Christ ... The eighteenth-century cult of sensibility redefined pain as unacceptable and indeed eradicable and thus opened the door to a new revulsion from pain, which, though later regarded as 'instinctive' or 'natural,' has in fact proved to be distinctly modern.<sup>16</sup>

However, while there is an important kernel of truth in this, the 'revulsion from pain' which Halttunen claims as 'distinctly modern' was perceived as perfectly

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<sup>13</sup> Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, 'Religious Meanings of Pain in early Modern England', in Dijkhuizen and Karl A.E. Enenkel (eds), *The Sense of Suffering: Constructions of Physical Pain in Early Modern Culture* (Brill, 2009), pp. 189–219; p. 190.

<sup>14</sup> *A Collection of the Public General Statutes Passed in the Fifth and Sixth Year of the Reign of His Majesty King William the Fourth, 1835* (London, 1835), pp. 344–51.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony F. Granucci, "'Nor Cruel and Unusual Punishments Inflicted": The Original Meaning', *California Law Review*, 57.4 (1969): 855–6.

<sup>16</sup> Karen Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture', *The American Historical Review*, 100.2 (1995): 303–34; p. 304.

natural by Plato, Epicurus and others in the ancient world, by numerous seventeenth-century writers (especially from the 1650s onwards, and even more especially during the 1680s and '90s) and, in all probability, by humans in various periods and places since the Stone Age.<sup>17</sup> Arguably, this is the more universal perception, while the idea that we ought to suffer for the good of our souls is more restricted to particular periods, places, circumstances and individuals.

Halttunen goes on to say that, from the eighteenth century on, 'the pornography of pain ... represented pain as obscenely titillating precisely because the humanitarian society deemed it unacceptable, taboo.'<sup>18</sup> Again, I query the timeframe somewhat; the roots of the modern western 'pornography of pain' go back at least to such seventeenth-century works as Chorier, *Satyra Sotadica* and [Jean Barrin?], *Venus dans le Cloître*, and possibly further. Overall, though, the point is well taken; with processions of flagellating penitents in the streets, the burning of women as witches, aspirants to martyrdom and common criminals alike enduring public mutilation and sometimes death, women as well as men stripped to the waist and whipped, and the tormenting of animals for entertainment, there clearly was nothing resembling the taboo on pain in the public sphere today. In the absence of such a taboo, the titillation of breaking the taboo is, quite simply, inaccessible and hence, while there may have been acts of extreme cruelty, some of it even explicitly sexual in nature, there cannot have been what we understand today as sadism or masochism in such a context.

This, on the face of it, is a strong argument, substantiated by Foucault's analysis of modern sexual identities as social constructs of fairly recent (mainly nineteenth-century) origin. Foucault contends that, 'Au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle encore, une certaine franchise avait cours ... Les pratiques ne cherchaient guère le secret ... on avait, avec l'illicite, une certaine familiarité tolérante' [At the beginning of the seventeenth century there was still ... a certain frankness. [Sexual] practices were hardly kept secret ... people had a certain tolerant familiarity with the illicit].<sup>19</sup> Discussion of sex<sup>20</sup> was, he says, focused on acts

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that there is no difference at all between modern attitudes and those in former ages. The art of pain management, in particular, was much more prominent, and the use of pain as a form of punishment was broadly taken for granted; but the general principle that pain (whether suffered or inflicted) is an evil to be avoided wherever possible has a long history.

<sup>18</sup> Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain', p. 304.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité 1: La Volonté de Savoir* [History of sexuality 1: the wish to know] (Paris, 1976), p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> The difficulties of discussing these issues in these terms are exacerbated by the fact that, in addition to the anachronism of the words 'sadistic' and 'masochistic', the seventeenth century did not even understand the word 'sex' as I am using it here. I use it throughout in this sense as shorthand for 'Physical contact between individuals involving sexual stimulation' (*OED*).

(of which their authors were the 'sujet juridique'<sup>21</sup>) and expressed in strands interwoven among discourse on other topics, rather than in terms of identities (whose acts are taken to be an expression of their essential being), or woven into a coherent discourse of sexuality. During the course of the century, this 'plein jour' of sexual frankness gave way to the 'crépuscule' of sexual repressiveness, leading to the 'nuits monotones' of the Victorian period,<sup>22</sup> during which it was transformed into a taxonomy of sexual identities and sexual discourse, whose long shadow still falls on us today.

However, while some of Foucault's points help to make sense of the period, there are some basic weaknesses that need to be addressed. The applicability or otherwise of Foucault's analysis to early modern perceptions of perverse attitudes towards suffering can best be illustrated through specific examples. Pico della Mirandola's anecdote about a sexual flagellant (published in 1496, after the author's death), described by Havelock Ellis as 'The earliest distinct reference to a masochistic flagellant',<sup>23</sup> is indeed a strand in a discourse on a quite different topic (the nature of astrology), and the flagellant is defined primarily by his acts, rather than by psychological predisposition: 'Viuit adhuc homo mihi notus prodigosæ libidinis et inaudita Nam ad uenerem nunquam accenditur nisi uapulet' [There is also a man, known to me, with a prodigious and unheard-of sexual appetite, for he can never be sexually aroused unless he is beaten];<sup>24</sup> and, whereas much modern theory of sexuality is predicated on the belief that 'sexual identity is discovered rather than chosen',<sup>25</sup> Pico selects this example in support of his belief that one's fate is not determined by the stars (that is to say, it is an accidental, or circumstantial feature of the flagellant that he is predisposed towards being beaten, not an essential part of his inner nature). All this is as Foucault predicts.

Profound as the differences between early modern and present-day perceptions are, though, emphasizing the differences too strongly may blind us to significant details, such as the way in which Pico relates the flagellant's behaviour to his overall character; 'Is cum non alioquin pessimus sit morbum suum agnoscit et odiat' [Apart from this [that is, his unusual sexuality], he is not such a bad person, and he recognizes his sickness and hates it]. The fact

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<sup>21</sup> 'juridical subject': Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité*, p. 59. Foucault is talking specifically about sodomy.

<sup>22</sup> 'full daylight', 'twilight', 'monotonous nights': *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, vol. 3: Analysis of the Sexual Impulse; Love and Pain; The Sexual Impulse in Women* (2nd edn, Philadelphia, 1920), p. 132.

<sup>24</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes ... Aduersus Astrologiã Diuinatricem* [Arguments against astrological divination] (Bologna, 1496; edition used, [Lyons, 1498?]), sig. h5r.

<sup>25</sup> David E. Mungello, *Western Queers in China: Flight to the Land of Oz* (Lanham, MD, 2012), p. 4.

that the flagellant hates ('odiat') his condition suggests that he would change it if he could, but is powerless to do so, and the description of the flagellant's behaviour as a kind of sickness ('morbum'), suggests an equivalence between the relationship of sexual act to sexual identity and that of illness to patient. The implication that he has picked up something nasty is reinforced by Pico's attempt to trace the cause of his proclivities to formative experiences during childhood; 'educatum se cum pueris scælestissimis inter quos conuenisset hac cedendi licentia quasi præcio quodam mutuuum sibi uendere flagitiosa alternatione pudorem' [he was educated with some wicked boys among whom there was a disgraceful agreement [to whip each other], bought, as it were, at the cost of their shame].<sup>26</sup> In some ways, Pico is not so far removed from modern debate on sexual identities, which hinges on the extent to which they are determined by genetic, social and psychological factors, their integration or otherwise with other aspects of the individual's character and identity, and a general recognition that, once established, such identities are difficult to change.<sup>27</sup>

Most significant of all, though, is Pico's awareness that what he says is shocking, and that by mentioning it he risks causing offence; 'Hoc ego factum licet graue auribus liberalibus: ideo nō suppressi' [Although it is a harsh thing for liberal ears, I have not on that account censored this exploit].<sup>28</sup> Sexual identities are still sexual identities, whether defined in terms of outward behaviour or inner nature, and, while the distinction is a useful insight, one can perhaps make too much of it; a society which sees sexuality in terms of acts does not necessarily engage in frank and open discussion – much less tolerance or acceptance. Pico practised ascetic flagellation,<sup>29</sup> and, judging from the amount of knowledge he has about the background of his flagellant, it is at least possible that his anecdote is actually autobiographical. If so, he was quite likely motivated to disguise the fact by more than mere reticence. Meibom (whose 1639 treatise on flagellation as a form of sexual stimulation is an early example of specifically sexual discourse) rejoices that no sexual flagellants exist in his native Germany, asserting that

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., sig. h5<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, 'Close Relationships', Ch. 9 of Saul Kassin et al., *Social Psychology*, 8th edn (Belmont, CA, 2011), pp. 339–88. The principle that one does not 'establish' one's sexual identity, but discovers it as one goes through life, is, as it stands, in stark contrast with Pico's view, but modern thinking is rather inconsistent on this subject, applying the principle to heterosexual and homosexual identities, but not, in general, extending it to sadomasochistic or other sexual identities.

<sup>28</sup> Pico, *Disputationes Aduersus Astrologiã*, sig. h5<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, *Here is Cōteyned the Lyfe of Iohan Picus Erle of Myrãdula*, trans. from the Latin by Thomas More (London, 1510), sig. B3<sup>v</sup>.

should such an abomination be found that person would be burnt to death,<sup>30</sup> and early modern references to the male sexual flagellant (who by 1673 had acquired the name of ‘flogging cully’<sup>31</sup> in English) are generally couched in terms that are either shameful, condemnatory, or mocking. Even the basically neutral account of Otto Brunfels, which mostly maintains an objective tone, betrays an underlying moral judgement in its use of the word ‘excessively’ (‘inmodice’); ‘Ad Coitum quidam sunt impotentes, nisi plagis, & uirgarum conuerberatio nibus inmodice cædantur’ [Some [men] are incapable of sexual intercourse, unless they are excessively flayed by beatings and strokes of the rod].<sup>32</sup>

A similar admixture of endorsement, adjustment and outright rejection of Foucauldian principles is involved in a close reading of Saint Jerome’s account of a young man being bound naked to a bed, whereupon ‘meretrix speciosa venisset, cœpit delicatis stringere colla complexibus, &, quod dictu quoque scelus est, manibus atrectare virilia, ut corpore in libidinem concitato, se victrix impudica superiaceret’ [a beautiful prostitute came and began, while delicately embracing him, to squeeze his neck and – though it is wicked even to speak of it – caressed his member with her hands, so that, having stimulated his body to lust, the shameless conqueress might mount him].<sup>33</sup> Jerome’s anecdote, like Pico’s, is merely a fragment in a discourse on a quite different topic, and he is indeed startlingly frank in his portrayal of this sexual act. However, he too – writing over a thousand years before Pico – is aware that he is breaking rules of propriety; ‘it is wicked even to speak of it’ (‘quod dictu quoque scelus est’), and, as I demonstrate in Chapter 8, early modern translators into the vernacular all across Europe showed (to differing degrees) unease with this passage. Not one translates it without some degree of censorship, and, in particular, the point at which the narrative coalesces into something resembling a sexual identity – the ‘shameless conqueress’ (‘victrix impudica’), who recognizably resembles, even if she does not equate to, the dominatrix of modern discourse – is, as far as I can ascertain, omitted from all the translations (into Dutch, French, German, Italian and Spanish, as well as English) from 1475 to the end of the seventeenth century.

The censorship of the Jerome passage is a further indication that there were definite limits to frankness in the description of sexual acts in early modern

<sup>30</sup> Johann Heinrich Meibom, *De Flagrorum Usu in Re Veneria* [On the use of whips in sexual circumstances] (Leyden, 1639; edition used, Leyden, 1643), p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Head, *The Canting Academy* (London, 1673), p. 148.

<sup>32</sup> Otto Brunfels, *Onomasticon Medicinæ* (Strasbourg, 1534), sig. g3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Saint Jerome, ‘Vita Pauli Eremitæ’ (edition used, *Catalogus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum ... ex Nouissima Recognitione D. Erasmi*, Frankfurt, 1549, part two, *Libellus Variorum Exemplorum*, fols 89<sup>r</sup>–96<sup>r</sup>; fol. 90<sup>r</sup>). Jerome’s anecdote is discussed in detail in Chapter 8, below.

times. The fact that it (along with many other sexually explicit narratives, those of Pico and Meibom among them) was available unexpurgated in Latin suggests that there was, after all, a kind of taboo, restricting women, young children and the uneducated from access to certain material; 'access to Latin and Greek marked an important rite of passage forced upon (and jealously reserved for) boys.'<sup>34</sup> Krafft-Ebing's derivation of sadism and masochism from the names of Sade and Sacher-Masoch<sup>35</sup> may not be fully analogous to Freud's appropriation of the name of Oedipus, but still less can the relationship between Sade and Sacher-Masoch and their creations be compared to that of, say, Faraday to the light bulb; on the spectrum between creating something that simply did not exist before and giving a name to something which has always existed in the human psyche, it makes more sense to see Sade and Sacher-Masoch as weaving into a sustained discourse strands of narrative and impulse that reflect something intrinsic to human nature. Or, to speak in terms of a more immediate context, 'Le Moyen-Age, avec profondeur, distinguait deux sortes de diabolisme, ou deux perversions fondamentales: l'une par possession, l'autre par pacte d'alliance' [The Middle Ages, with profound insight, distinguished two sorts of diabolism, or two basic perversions; the one by possession, the second by a pact of alliance];<sup>36</sup> sadism, Deleuze suggests, is a development from, or form of, the first, as masochism is from/of the second. The seventeenth century, with its belief in witchcraft, retains elements of the medieval *Weltanschauung*, while at the same time highlighting prurience in discourses on suffering – sometimes with the frankness that Foucault speaks of, but sometimes through censorship or proto-pornographic narrative – in a way that foreshadows the cataloguing of sadism and masochism in nineteenth-century sexual taxonomy.

## II

From a socio-psychological point of view, Baumeister sums up the broad consensus that 'most sexual practices have been known and enjoyed throughout history, but masochism is a rare exception ... which spread through Western society during the early modern period.' He cites a number of sources confirming the apparent absence of masochism in the ancient and medieval worlds, noting that during the Middle Ages the Church pronounced its views on 'Homosexuality, bestiality,

<sup>34</sup> James Turner, *Schooling Sex: Libertine Literature and Erotic Education in Italy, France and England, 1534–1685* (Oxford, 2003), p. 56.

<sup>35</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: eine Klinisch-Forensische Studie* [Sexual psychopathy: a clinical/forensic study] (Stuttgart, 1886; edition used, 1894), p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch* (Paris, 1967), p. 20.



masturbation, abortion, contraception, adultery, coprophilia, prostitution, anal sex, transvestism, and a variety of other practices ... but apparently there was no mention of masochism', from which he concludes that there was 'a lack of masochistic sexual activity'. He contrasts the 'abundant evidence of masochistic activity beginning in the eighteenth century' with the 'lack of any such activities prior to the Renaissance', and notes that, while prostitutes through the ages are on record as catering for a variety of sexual appetites, there is no reference to 'prostitutes providing sadomasochistic services' in the ancient and medieval worlds, concluding 'there is no disputing the contrast between the abundant evidence of masochism after 1700 and the paucity of such evidence before 1600 ... sexual masochism underwent a dramatic increase in Western culture late in the early modern period.'<sup>37</sup>

The one area in which there is some doubt in this seemingly ironclad argument is the suffering people have undergone over the ages in the name of religion. Baumeister is more tentative about this, but tends to see it as unrelated to masochism: 'Probably it is a mistake to regard those activities as masochistic ... sex and religion provide radically different contexts, and it seems unwarranted to assume that activities have the same meaning in religious ritual as they have in sexual play.'<sup>38</sup> Baumeister finds broad support for this view in the work of Vern L. Bullough and Reay Tannahill, but ignores the fact that the architects of the concept of masochism – Charcot, Lombroso, Breuer, Freud, Krafft-Ebing and Lacan – all saw it as closely related to religion, particularly to ascetic flagellation.

The complexity and sensitivity of this issue helps to explain why the first part of this book, on the suffering self, is so much longer than the following two parts. Part of the complexity arises from the difficulty of defining the limits of what masochism actually is. Initially a simple enough idea (the deriving of sexual pleasure from suffering, as Severin apparently does in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz*<sup>39</sup>), it is complicated by many factors, among them Freud's postulation of three types of masochism – erotic, feminine and moral<sup>40</sup> – and Dingwall and Bell's addition of ascetic masochism. The spread of the semantic range of the word 'masochism' – particularly into contexts where there is only the concept of some underlying displacement of sexuality and no actual overt sexual activity – leaves

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<sup>37</sup> Roy F. Baumeister, 'Masochism as Escape from Self', in Baumeister (ed.), *Social Psychology and Human Sexuality: Essential Readings* (Philadelphia, 2001), pp. 296–313; pp. 308–9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>39</sup> Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus im Pelz* [Venus in furs], in Sacher-Masoch, *Das Vermächtnis Kains* [The legacy of Cain] (Stuttgart, 1870), Part 2, pp. 121–367.

<sup>40</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Das Ökonomische Problem des Masochismus' [The economic problem of masochism], *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*, 10.2 (1924): 121–33.

it open to such a wide range of interpretation that it begins to lose its value as a conceptual tool. Bersani compounds the difficulties, extending the word in the opposite direction and attempting (developing from Bataille) to see *all* sexuality as 'self-shattering' and consequently masochistic; 'sexuality ... could be thought of as a tautology for masochism.' As he himself recognizes, this kind of 'breakdown of conceptual distinctions' leads to 'logical incoherence' and, while for him such incoherence may have value in so far as it 'accurately represents the overdetermined mind prescribed by psychoanalysis', it presents huge practical problems.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time – as Baumeister observes – it is precisely the concept of masochism which pinpoints the seventeenth century as pivotal in the history of suffering. One cannot simply discard it, nor can one wholly reject the accretion of meanings which have grown up around the original impulse to be dominated of Sacher-Masoch's Severin, but at the same time, if one is to explore 'the relationship between asceticism and sadomasochistic eroticism',<sup>42</sup> one needs to heed Bataille's basic caveat; although 'both experiences have an extreme intensity', Bataille does not intend to imply that 'eroticism and sanctity are of the same nature.' On the contrary, while sanctity 'brings us closer to other men' (that is, other people), eroticism (which 'is defined by secrecy and taboo') 'cuts us off from them and leaves us in solitude.'<sup>43</sup> The sadomasochistic discourse explored in the following pages arises 'from the ruins of politicoreligious means for achieving submission or shattering of the self';<sup>44</sup> it is, at least in part, a consequence of the early modern transition from the 'inclusive-existential' or *sub specie aeternitatis* world-view, with its hermits, its monastic orders, its martyrs, to 'positional-existential' ideologies, with their emphasis on personal identity in the social context.<sup>45</sup> As the individual's inner relationship with God starts to give way to societal relationships, the sense of division between the public sphere and private identity grows. The communion of recognition that all are sinners is replaced by the isolation of inner shame:

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<sup>41</sup> Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?: And Other Essays* (Chicago, 2010), pp. 25, 109 and 100. These essays reflect the development of Bersani's thoughts over a period of years, starting with *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York, 1986).

<sup>42</sup> Virginia Burrus, *Sex Lives of Saints* (Philadelphia, 2004), p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo*, trans. by Mary Dalwood (New York, 1962), pp. 252–3. The original reference is Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme* [Eroticism] (Paris, 1957), pp. 275–6.

<sup>44</sup> Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore, 2002), p. 103.

<sup>45</sup> The terms 'inclusive-existential' and 'positional-existential' denote two of the four meta-categories of ideology postulated by Göran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London, 1980), pp. 22–7.

In one way it is easier to be receptive to de Sade's eroticism than to the religious demands of old. No-one today could deny that the impulses connecting sexuality and the desire to hurt and to kill do exist. Hence the so-called sadistic instincts enable the ordinary man to account for certain acts of cruelty, while religious impulses are explained away as aberrations.<sup>46</sup>

This conceptual gulf calls into question the representation of 'sodomasochism as a possible realm of spirituality for the nominally agnostic';<sup>47</sup> can we reasonably equate an attempt to resist or sublimate the impulses by which, 'selon le jugement reçu, l'être humain se ravale à la bête'<sup>48</sup> with the unresisting indulgence of those impulses? An enquiry into discourse patterns cannot be expected to provide a definitive answer to such a question, but it should be able to shed some light on the issue. The fact that the Catholic ideologies of the Latin South and the Protestant ideologies of the Germanic North responded in such different ways to the 'impulses connecting sexuality and the desire to hurt and kill' (as well, of course, as the urge to suffer) has given us a unique opportunity to compare and contrast discourse communities, to see how, through translations and imitations, the language and values of the one impinge on the perceptions and understanding of the other. One of the insights we have gained is that it was far from evident to Protestants during the earlier part of the seventeenth century that there is a point at which, as Mazzoni puts it (summing up the conflating of the ascetic and the erotic in late nineteenth-century psychology), 'Christian mysticism and masochism coincide (whereas sadism characterizes the human sacrifices of the pagans).'<sup>49</sup> Had this perception been available to anti-Catholic polemicists during the earlier part of the seventeenth century, they would doubtless have made use of it, but it does not begin to become a feature of controversial writings until the second half of the century, and only really comes into its own during the 1680s.

On the other hand, it is not wholly unreasonable to suppose that the severe attitudes of the puritans towards sex did indeed lead to some displacement of sexuality into a form of moral (and perhaps sexual) masochism; even less unreasonable to suppose that the overt attempt in Catholic monasticism to suppress sexuality through flagellation and penance more often led to the

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<sup>46</sup> Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, p. 183; *L'Érotisme*, p. 202.

<sup>47</sup> Bonnie Shullenberger, 'Much Affliction and Anguish of Heart: *Story of O* and Spirituality', *The Massachusetts Review*, 46.2 (2005): 249–72; p. 250.

<sup>48</sup> 'by conventional standards, the human being is reduced to the level of an animal': Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, p. 167.

<sup>49</sup> Cristina Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture* (New York, 1996), p. 42.

masochistic displacement of sexual urges than to their complete elimination, or even their sublimation.

Bersani's apparent descent into conceptual chaos may actually provide constructive insights here. The big problem with Baumeister's analysis is that, at the same time as supposing that 'sadism is historically older than masochism', he seeks to turn on its head the 'prevailing theoretical position ... that masochism is [psychologically] derived from sadism', arguing that 'it is implausible to argue that masochism is derived from sadism. Rather, sadism must be the secondary, derivative pattern.'<sup>50</sup> It is hard to understand how masochism can be psychologically more fundamental yet historically younger than sadism, but Bersani hints at an explanation. In his interpretation, the first reality the infant is faced with is an outside world of tremendous power. It cannot possibly fight or protect itself against such power, and gains reassurance by surrendering itself to it. Sex, in adult life, is, by Bersani's analysis, simply a re-enactment of that early masochistic surrender.<sup>51</sup> If Bersani is right, masochism is not discussed prior to the early modern period, not because it is nowhere, but because it is everywhere. One's life is not one's own, but held in trust; sexual congress is an act of naked, defenceless self-exposure; those who 'take the sword' are merely preparing to 'perish with the sword';<sup>52</sup> and man's only hope is to place himself abjectly under the heel of his God and cast himself at his mercy. It is only as society moves away from the 'inclusive-existential' preoccupation with the meaning and purpose of a transient and uncertain life towards the 'positional-existential' drive to identify oneself in terms of one's relationships with others that the impulse to surrender starts to become deprived of legitimate contexts, manifesting itself in that particular nexus of neuroses and anxieties and compulsive self-destructive behaviour that modern psychopathology terms 'masochistic'.

### III

By contrast with the complexity of the evolution of the concept of perverse suffering during the seventeenth century, the concept of perverse infliction of suffering is comparatively simple. The idea that cruelty to others could be – or, rather, *was*, more or less by definition – perverse was commonplace from the outset. William Vaughan, summarizing ideas culled from Seneca and Ammianus Marcellinus, says, 'There bee two sortes of cruelty: whereof the one is nothing

<sup>50</sup> Baumeister, 'Masochism as Escape from Self', pp. 308 (footnote) and 208.

<sup>51</sup> Bersani, *The Freudian Body*, p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> KJV, Matthew 26:52.

els, then *a fiercenesse of the minde in inflicting of punishmēts*. The other is a certain madnes, together with a delight in cruelty, of which brood I accoūt thē to be, who are cruell without cause.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps the reason for the difference between perceptions of perverse suffering and perceptions of cruelty (that is, the perverse infliction of suffering) lies in the words ‘without cause’. Suffering, from the early modern ‘inclusive-existential’ point of view, is either punitive or redemptive; it is never without cause. Even if one suffers at the hands of mindless, motiveless brutes, if there is a meaning to life – if there is a God – there has to be some purpose to one’s suffering; it is never just ‘madnes’. Cruelty, on the other hand, is a perversion, either of justice or of human nature itself, the one evolving, in terms of modern discourse, into megalomania and ‘messianic sadism’,<sup>54</sup> and the other into psychopathy, with elements of sexual sadism – naked victims, sexual mutilation, references to the torturers’ lust, and so forth – frequently forming part of the narrative.

As a topic for discourse, cruelty is inseparable from suffering; the perpetrators of cruelty cannot be seen directly, but only through the mirror of the ghastly mutilation and torment of their victims. Bartolomé de las Casas’s *Breuissima Relacion*<sup>55</sup> was, for its contemporary English readers, not so much an account of the suffering of the native inhabitants of the New World as of the cruelty of the Spanish, as the timing of many of its editions in English translation (coinciding with periods of heightened tensions between Spain and England) testifies. Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, too, is at least as much about the cruelty of the Catholics as the sufferings of the martyrs; through works of this kind, the accusation of cruelty becomes a political tool, demonizing the torturers and exalting their victims.

Works such as these push suffering into the ‘inclusive-historical’<sup>56</sup> dimension, that of such cultural markers as ethnicity, nationality and religion. They also appear to mark a break from medieval discourse, to the extent that Baraz suggests that the crucial watershed period for discourse on cruelty was the sixteenth century, the main development being that

A more relativistic attitude to the issue of cruelty ... led ... to the positioning of absolute quantitative boundaries beyond which pain and violence were always cruel, regardless of any justification. This relativistic approach to cruelty, together with the intensive

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<sup>53</sup> William Vaughan, *The Golden-Groue Moralized in Three Bookes* (London, 1600), sig. K1<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Edward Bruce Bynum, *Transcending Psychoneurotic Disturbances: New Approaches in Psychospirituality and Personality Development* (New York, 1994), p. 116.

<sup>55</sup> Bartolomé de las Casas, *Breuissima Relacion de la Destruycion de las Indias* [A short history of the destruction of the Indies] (Seville, 1552).

<sup>56</sup> Therborn, *Ideology of Power*, p. 24.

preoccupation with the subject itself, are the main innovative, even revolutionary, aspects of the early modern treatment of cruelty.<sup>57</sup>

The idea that, no matter what the intention behind a particular act, some acts are simply wrong implies that, no matter what crimes one may have committed, there are some fates which no one deserves to suffer, which in turn implies that people have rights; they have a right not to be subjected to certain forms of treatment.

Baraz may be right in seeing in the sixteenth century signs of a break with medieval attitudes, but the contrast between the sixteenth century and the seventeenth is, I think, even more pronounced. A search of *EEBO TCP* indicates that (including variant spellings) cruel/cruelty is closely collocated with unjust/injustice or iniquity – normally conveying the idea that an act is cruel if the intention behind it is unjust – in only about 80 texts during the whole of the sixteenth century. However, during the seventeenth century, there are over 1,500 such collocations, more than a third of which were published between 1680 and 1700.

Even allowing for the steady increase in the number of texts published, these figures evince a tremendous upsurge of discourse relating cruelty to intentions during the final decades of the seventeenth century, reflecting the intense debate on the nature of suffering during this period, the most tangible result of which was the 1689 Bill of Rights. Ironically, while scant regret was ever shown for the fifteen or so Catholics executed and the many others mistreated (some driven from their homes, others dying in prison in appalling conditions) as a consequence of the supposed Popish Plot, it was the severity of the whipping imposed on Titus Oates for fabricating the plot that led (in part) to the Bill's prohibition of 'cruel and unusual punishment'. However, the purpose of the Bill was not to prohibit specific types of punishment, and the expression 'cruel and unusual' in this context 'seems to have meant a severe punishment unauthorized by statute and not within the jurisdiction of the court to impose'<sup>58</sup> – that is, state-inflicted cruelty is a result of authority exceeding its mandate – rather than what we understand by that expression today. The terms of the seventeenth-century association of cruelty with injustice may be different from 'the medieval ethical system that emphasized intentions', but the insight that changes in

<sup>57</sup> Daniel Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty: Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), p. 145. Speaking of Jean de Léry, *Histoire d'un Voyage Fait en la Terre du Bresil, Autrement Dite Amerique* [History of a voyage made to the land of Brazil, otherwise called America], 4th edn (1600), Baraz says, 'There is no parallel medieval text whose declared subject is cruelty and that piles up various deeds of cruelty at such length' (p. 168), indicating the emergence of cruelty as a discourse in its own right in Europe during this period.

<sup>58</sup> Granucci, "Cruel and Unusual Punishments", p. 859.

the concept of cruelty are related to the development of the concept of rights puts the seventeenth century more firmly in the frame than the sixteenth as a watershed period for discourse on cruelty, although, as pointed out earlier on, the crucial legal reforms were not actually enacted until (for the most part) the nineteenth century.

#### IV

The central thesis of the present work is that discourses of suffering and cruelty are evolving throughout the seventeenth century, not simply in and of themselves, but in a constantly interweaving dynamic of two distinct *types* of discourse. Political and religious opponents – but particularly Catholics – are depicted as taking pleasure in inflicting cruelty, as are the ancient Romans, with their gory battles, gladiatorial contests and persecution of early Christians. Behind English accounts of Catholic atrocities lie Latin histories of bloodshed and Spanish, French and Italian narratives of romance and revenge, which blend together to produce what may be loosely termed a southern/Latin/Catholic discourse, largely derived from translations, but also imitated and adapted in the works of English writers. In these works, which explore the dynamics of power and submission in all their forms, both sadistic and masochistic impulses are chronicled with relish. Even in Catholic devotional works – particularly hagiographical works – there is a strong admixture of what Burrus (speaking of the writings of the early Christians) calls an ‘exuberant eroticism.’<sup>59</sup> This southern discourse, in its English context, infiltrates, subverts and influences the prevailing northern/Germanic/Protestant discourse, with its greater tendency to dispassion, to ‘rejoice’ unsmilingly in suffering, and to broach the topic of sex furtively or not at all.

I begin, in what follows, with an account of attitudes towards the experience of suffering in Protestant England during the seventeenth century, leading from attempts to reconcile Stoic and Epicurean ideals with reformist Christianity to covenantal puritanism and the impact of the biblical injunction to ‘rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings.’<sup>60</sup> This is followed by a study of the approach to suffering in Catholic lives of saints (most – though not all – of which were translated into English from Latin or other Latin languages), emphasizing the performativity of the text and the extent to which the commitment to chastity and the punishing of the flesh formed part of a conceptual continuum. The first part of the book concludes with a chapter showing how

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<sup>59</sup> Virginia Burrus, *Sex Lives of Saints* (Philadelphia, PA, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> KJV, 1 Peter 4:13.

Catholic ideals of penance and mortification were subverted in English discourse through a mixture (partly native and partly imported via translations) of anti-Catholic polemic, early pornography and the concept of 'saint-errantry'.

The second part of the book focuses on discourses of cruelty – particularly Protestant perceptions of Catholic cruelty – responses to cruelty in the broader humanist context, and the experience of witnessing others suffer. A coherent and richly textured narrative of sadistic Catholic cruelty – much of it supported by scenes and expressions translated from literature in Latin or in other Latin languages – is contrasted with the self-attribution by the Protestant English of compassion and love.

Finally, I look more directly at gender-focused suffering and develop a theme which runs implicitly through much of the first two parts of the book – the relationship between contemporary perceptions of sexuality and gender and the representation of suffering and cruelty. However, rather than dwelling on the already well-documented early modern paradigm of feminine submissiveness and subservience, I emphasize the subversion of that paradigm, and trace the emergence of powerful/sadistic women and concomitantly anxious/masochistic men.

My main interest is in the broadly humanistic implications of suffering, with particular reference to the perverse enjoyment of enduring or inflicting suffering. Suffering in other contexts – war, punishment under the law, sickness and medicine, the persecution of supposed witches, the disciplining of schoolchildren, cruelty to animals, and so on – is touched on only tangentially. My focus is on discourse, and hence on the analysis of primary material, and most of the texts discussed are connected with religion in some way – devotional, polemical, hagiographic, with a fair admixture of Christian humanism – since this was the main context in which issues relating to suffering were discussed, though I have brought in other material where it seems to cast light on the topic, especially in Chapter 7, which focuses mainly on romance literature. Among the various analytical approaches brought to bear are broad surveys of the range of distribution of particular discourse features (often centred on a single phrase or concept, such as the 'pleasant spectacle' of suffering, or the 'bowels' of compassion), identifying salient features of particular types of discourse (such as the performative link between chastity and penance in Catholic hagiography), tracing changes and variations in discourse patterns (the development, for example, of a more moderate attitude towards penance among English Catholics), examining the discourse of a particular writer or work (Bunyan, Butler's *Hudibras*), and comparing and contrasting original texts with translations (Jerome, Gracián). One consequence of this eclectic approach is that, while the chapters and chapter sections link together as part of an overall picture, individual sections are fairly self-contained, and can be read as short



essays; but the main purpose is to compare conclusions that seem to emerge from taking one approach with those which result from another, in order to arrive at an understanding of 'what the literature shows us, rather than allowing a preconceived ... context to determine our interpretive possibilities'.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Melissa E. Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature* (Oxford, 2011), p. 240.