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成果報告（精簡版）

Abstract: I propose in this report to read a harem scene in *Jane Eyre* (1847) as trope, as a moment of turning away from a centralizing imperative, but that simultaneously turns upon or hinges upon that same imperative - to property, monogamous marriage, and respectability, in short, happiness ever after for a nineteenth century “good woman” - in character and plot. This turning away can take on more than one meaning, not all of which return to or are resolved by or in the novel. In the second part of the report, I juxtapose the harem scene with a twentieth-century non-fictional remembrance of a discovered scene of illegitimacy at birth. Carolyn Steedman (1986) provides a landscape – a history and a fiction – for her mother and her own psychic and material poverty and longing, as she measures their distance from the emotional and economic centers of the world.

Keywords: masochism, feminist feeling, harem, polygamy, Jane Eyre, illegitimacy

摘要：這篇文章重讀簡愛和男主角羅撒斯特談情說愛過程裡，一段綁與被綁的調情對話與想像。如果將這段對話，以近來兩種分析論述加以對照，將可開啓不同方向的社會關係與歷史情境的異議。對話中不只表達對於婚姻愛情，所謂專偶制度以及浪漫愛慾的嚮往，進一步可以閱讀它如何遮蔽歷史的慾望和階級、種族之關連，同時又成爲歷史不可迴避的性別（不）平權法理矛盾之一種逃逸。

關鍵詞：愉虐（想像），女性主義情感，多妻制，簡愛，私生（非婚生）

Feminist feeling and harem tropes – an outline toward an essay

The word “trope” derives from “turn”; it indicates a turning of a word away from its literal meaning. (Heather Love, *Feeling Backward*, 5)

What if the privileged sanctum of Western subjectivity, the bedroom of the heterosexual couple, in fact has fictional walls opening on all sides onto the social landscape? (John K. Noyes, *The Mastery of Submission*, p. 21)

I propose in this report (toward an essay) to read a harem scene in *Jane Eyre* (1847) as trope, as a moment of turning away from a centralizing imperative, but, that simultaneously turns or hinges upon the same imperative - to property, monogamous marriage, and respectability, in short, happiness ever after for a nineteenth century “good woman” - in character and plot. Needless to say, this turning away can take on more than one meaning, not all of which return to or are resolved by or in the novel. It is these suspended meanings – of the politically undesirable and the historically impossible - that I am interested in entertaining for the sake of conjecture. Masochism is read here as trope in a novel (*Jane Eyre*, 1847) that can be said to slightly predate its “invention” (in the 1890 *Psychopathia Sexualis* by Krafft-Ebing, 1840-1902, on Sacher-Masoch, 1835-1895, according to John K. Noyes). The usefulness of such a displaced reading allows for exploration into the ways in which masochism works as a rhetorical form or figure, one that opens onto the social landscape on all sides of central and centralizing social relations (that are nonetheless spatio-temporally defined and constrained).

In the second part of the report, I juxtapose the harem scene with a twentieth-century non-fictional remembrance of a discovered scene of illegitimacy at birth. Carolyn Steedman provides a landscape – a history and a fiction – for her mother and her own psychic and material poverty and longing, as she measures their distance from the emotional and economic centers of the world. I would like to conclude by suggesting that the propertied and properly (monogamous) married female subject-in-law that Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* longs for, and becomes, demands not just the self-immolation of the West Indian first wife Bertha (Spivak), but also and more invisibly the eclipsing of the “sad and secret stories” (Steedman, 124) of servants and undesirable but infinitely usable caretakers (such as Grace Poole) who may or may not marry, yet sometimes bear offspring, and whose offspring might come to live lives in the shadow of authorization. They can look like but never feel like the authorized.

In the final section, I outline the implications of recent studies on masochism as a theatrical staging of seeming like (parodying) while perverting the feelings of the authorized, in particular for the readings I propose. Leo Bersani (1984) theorizes the deconstruction of the self, and traces the self's ecstatic dissolutions in theatrical and pornographic representations. John K. Noyes (1997) writes of the interplay among stereotyped identities that are assumed so as to enable their disappearance in the high technology sexual practices of masochism; "how masochism had come to occupy this position between affirmation and subversion of cultural stereotypes" (Noyes, 1997: 10). Both suggest a dissolution/multiplication or nomadic appearance/disappearance of selves given specific time-space conditions. It is this last, that is the time-space conditions or constraints that embed the possibility of a meaningful, and pleasurable, turning away from central figurations of bodies in sex. These invisible time-space forms are the stage-frame without which masochism seems difficult to either imagine or practice.



Glad was I to get him out of the silk warehouse, and then out of a jeweller's shop: the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation. As we re-entered the carriage, and I sat back feverish and fagged, I remembered what in a hurry of events, dark and bright, I had wholly forgotten – the letter of my uncle, John Eyre, to Mrs. Reed: his intention to adopt me and make me his legatee. 'It would, indeed, be a relief,' I thought, 'if I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me. I will write to Madeira the moment I get home, and tell my uncle John I am going to be married, and to whom: if I had but a prospect of one day bringing Mr. Rochester an accession of fortune, I could better endure to be kept by him now.' And somewhat relieved by this idea (which I failed not to execute that day), I ventured once more to meet my master's and lover's eye; which most pertinaciously sought mine, though I averted both face and gaze. He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched: I crushed his hand which was ever hunting mine, vigorously, and thrust it back to him red with the passionate pressure –

[...] He chuckled; he rubbed his hands: 'Oh it is rich to see and hear her!' he exclaimed. 'Is she original? Is she piquant? I would not exchange this one little English girl for the grand Turk's whole seraglio; gazelle-eyes, houri forms, and all!'

The Eastern allusion bit me again: ‘I’ll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio,’ I said; ‘so don’t consider me an equivalent for one; if you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazaars of Stamboul without delay; and lay out in extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here.’

‘And what will you do, Janet, while I am bargaining for so many tons of flesh and such an assortment of black eyes?’

‘I’ll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved – your harem inmates amongst the rest. I’ll get admitted there, and I’ll stir up munity; and you, three-tailed bashaw as you are, sir, shall in a trice find yourself fettered amongst our hands: nor will I, for one, consent to cut your bonds till you have signed a charter, the most liberal that despot ever yet conferred.’

‘I would consent to be at your mercy, Jane.’

‘I would have no mercy, Mr. Rochester, if you supplicated for it with an eye like that. While you looked so, I should be certain that whatever charter you might grant under coercion, your first act, when released would be to violate its conditions.’

‘Why, Jane, what would you have? *I fear you will compel me to go through a private marriage ceremony, besides that performed at the altar. You will stipulate, I see, for peculiar terms – what will they be?*’

‘I only want an easy mind, sir; not crushed by crowded obligations. Do you remember what you said of Céline Varens? – of the diamonds, the cashmeres you gave her? I will not be your English Céline Varens. I shall continue as Adèle’s governess; by that I shall earn my board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides. I’ll furnish my own wardrobe out of that money, and you shall give me nothing but’ –

‘Well, but what?’

‘Your regard: and if I give you mine in return, that debt will be quit.’

(Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 229-230; italics added)

The lengthy quotation is necessary. It establishes the harem scene as a story within the larger story of Jane Eyre’s coming into her own – her property and her marriage – her earthly dominion, by the end of the novel. The harem tale is a ploy and play, replacing and displacing a verbal lovemaking laced with ambivalent feelings, at least on the part of the female protagonist. Jane is ambivalent because she feels unequal to Rochester’s love – his gifts shame her (“brilliant amethyst dye, superb pink satin”), transforming her into an inferior class of (foreign) women (such as Céline Varens,

Adèle's mother), whose dependence for distinction on the trappings of wealth signify at once their commodity status and their exchangeability the one for the other. Shame explains her feeling of "degradation." Her "annoyance" arises out of a historically new sense and model of gendered entitlement: she deserves to be treated as equal, not a toy, in courtship and marriage. Rochester's gifts annoy in reminding her of how she is materially not yet entitled to equality, not being an heiress, and therefore without the economic leverage of independent means in matrimonial exchange. The harem scene takes the playful and imaginary place of the wedding at the end of the novel for a suspended moment of imagined masochist reversal.

In its triangulation of property, marriage, gender equality and sexual shame diffused and disguised in the staging of polygamy caught and conquered, Jane Eyre's harem imagining is pivotal for the novel as well as symptomatic for early imperial feminist longing for equality in monogamy. Jane's longing for marriage is disabled by her shame and anger at not having the wherewithal for propertied (class) equality. Desire is then rerouted through punitive storytelling, where Rochester is figured as the libertine-Oriental despot-polygamist whose retrograde desire demands the civilizing sentimental education that Jane Eyre provides to both the female inmates of the harem that she liberates and its "pasha." That sentimental education is then sealed in a charter – a contract that, as Rochester notes, itself constitutes a "private marriage ceremony."

In *Venus in Furs* the contract is intended to set the stage for a pleasurable self-destruction of the juridical subject. [...] Liberalism likes to believe (sic) that the law in general, and the contract in particular, binds civilized human beings together in a voluntary, mutual agreement, allowing them to overcome the inherent violence of human relationships. Sacher-Masoch uses the contract to return the myth of contractually subdued violence to its violent origins. The result is a liberal parody of liberal law. [...] The masochistic contract uses a contractual form to produce voluntary relations whose foundation is the very violence that the contract wants to banish. In the words of Deleuze, the masochist "attacks the law on another flank." The parodic and humoristic move here is no longer the ascension from the law "towards a transcendent higher principle – it is a downward movement from the law to its consequences." (John K. Noyes, p. 71)

"I would consent to be at your mercy, Jane." "I would have no mercy, Mr. Rochester." At the heart of a novel about the conditions for a liberal contractual

marriage and the becoming of an egalitarian minded domestic female subject-in-law, Brontë could be read as invoking in a fantastic way “a contractual form to produce voluntary relations whose foundation is the very violence that the contract wants to banish.” In this case, the masochist scene fantasizes polygamy turned on its head – Jane the dominatrix is flanked by an army of liberated wives, merciless in the face of a trussed libertine-despot. By the end of the novel, the narrative enacts what needs to happen between unequal subjects in order to establish symmetry in the place of, and as a form of, (gender) equality. Symmetry for this novel lies in equalizing the balance of economic power (Jane finds herself an heiress), and symbolically maiming the man (Rochester is blind and cannot walk) so that physical as well as economic balance is realized between the now wed couple.

The mid-nineteenth century was a historical moment when fictional woman as exemplary modern subject was invented with an interiority that mattered for establishing an overvalued domesticity and the new British imperialist world order (Armstrong). The legal (Christian) monogamous form of this conjugal domesticity continues to this day to be defined against a despotic polygamy imagined as located prior in time or assuredly elsewhere than in Britain. The superiority of this marriage form and its candidates or adherents is conceived along the axes of both the juridical and the medical-biological (in *Jane Eyre*, over and against Grace Poole’s physical undesirability and Bertha Mason’s intemperance and monstrous sensuality). Jane Eyre’s insistence on principled (i.e. monogamous) legal union or death attests to the foundational status of a preference coded in the novel as a psycho-biological imperative. The naturalization of a newly minted market value for wifeness seems at stake (Jeff Nunokawa, Verena Stolcke). The wife must simultaneously be woman representative and woman apart from all other women (on the market in marriage) at once. Jane Eyre’s “progress,” her development in the novel amidst the typecasting of other English women and all foreign women mark her as ethically superior and ethnic-nationally distinct.

[Kraft-Ebing] was convinced that Christian Europe’s “mental and material superiority over the polygamic races, and especially over Islam,” was secured when “woman was recognized the peer of man, when monogamy became a law and was consolidated by legal, religious, and moral conditions.” (*Psychopathia Sexualis*, 10). (quoted in John K. Noyes, “Imperialist Man, Civilizing Woman, and the European Male Masochist” in *The Mastery of Submission: inventions of masochism*, Cornell, 1997, p. 107.)¹

¹ “Ainsi on a admis ce fait que l’amour de l’homme, au fur et à mesure que marche la civilisation, ne

The momentary fantasy of infiltrating a harem as one of its members, if only to liberate its actual inhabitants, allows for a scandalous, yet in the logic of the novel and for many of its readers and critics, a trivial and forgettable story – and contract – to be imagined. The pleasurable tying up of Rochester is accompanied by the no less pleasurable recounting of the tale, a rare moment of titillation in a novel often remembered for its voicing an extreme feminine want and female suffering (Virginia Woolf, Adrienne Rich). One might even say that the trope of the harem precedes what could be seen as an eventual return to a familial circle of domestic women not unlike that found in a harem, insofar as feminist critics have affirmed the novel's final vision of Jane Eyre surrounded by a small community of like-minded women (her "found" biological cousins), albeit each with her own husband, in domesticity. The three women (Jane, Mary and Diana Rivers) nonetheless share in common an intense brotherly love for St. John Rivers, who takes up the last paragraph of the novel as he succumbs to a missionary's martyr death in far-away India.



I will now turn to a brilliant mixing of autobiography, history, and fiction (dreams), where the overlapping territories of these three genres and forms of knowledge are explored in order to take psychic, historical and political measure of an abiding sense of feminine non-entitlement in unauthorized lives and experiences.

All the stories that follow, told as this book tells them, aren't stories in their own right: they exist in tension with other more central ones. In the same way, the processes of working-class autobiography, of people's history and of the working-class novel cannot show a proper and valid culture existing in its own right, underneath the official forms, waiting for revelation. Accounts of working-class life are told by tension and ambiguity, out on the borderlands. The story – my mother's story, a hundred thousand others – cannot be absorbed into the central one: it is both its disruption and its essential counterpoint: this is a drama of *class*. (Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of*

peut avoir qu'un caractère monogame et doit se baser sur un traité durable. La nature peut se borner à exiger la perpétuité de la race; mais une communauté, soit famille, soit État, ne peut exister sans garanties pour la prospérité physique, morale et intellectuelle des enfants procréés. *En faisant de la femme l'égale de l'homme, en instituant le mariage monogame et en le consolidant par des liens juridiques, religieux et moraux, les peuples chrétiens ont acquis une supériorité matérielle et intellectuelle sur les peuples polygames et particulièrement sur les partisans de l'Islam.*" Project Gutenberg, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, R. von Krafft-Ebing, p. 8, http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=721470&pageno=8, 2009/2/16 download; italics added.

Two Lives, 1986, 2006: 22)

Carolyn Steedman's narrative of how class matters for women and children in a psychically and materially historical way is framed by a dream vision of a woman in clothing ("the New Look, a coat of beige gabardine which fell in two swaying graceful pleats from her waist at the back [...] a hat tipped forward from hair swept up...") that her mother longs for much of her life. It is this longing in the context of material want, and the decisions (to exchange or gamble on a part of one's body in exchange for the chance to marry) propelled by longing (and jealousy and envy), that orient as they mold the mother-child relation and the illegitimate child's formation.

The child's illegitimacy – an abiding sense of being unauthorized, of life itself as irresolvable contradiction ("To know that, whilst one exists, one also need not have been, that things might be better if one wasn't there at all, presents all the ingredients of contradiction, the holding together of disparate information that sharpens a child's intelligence"²) – is a crucial dimension of this working-class child's make-up, and, as the narrative tells it, perhaps her father's as well. Let me quote in its entirety the two sections that narrate discovery of the narrator's illegitimacy and the story of her grandfather's two families.

Later, in 1977, after my father's death, we found out that they were never married, that we were illegitimate. In 1934 my father left his wife and two-year-old daughter in the North, and came to London. *He and my mother had been together for at least ten years when I was born, and we think now that I was her hostage to fortune, the factor that might persuade him to get a divorce and marry her.* But the ploy failed.

Just before my mother's death, playing about with the photographs on the front bedroom mantelpiece, my niece discovered an old photograph under one of me at three. A woman holds a tiny baby. It's the early 1930s, a picture of the half-sister left behind. But I think I knew about her and her mother long before *I looked them both in the face, or heard about their existence, knew that the half-understood adult conversations around me, the two trips to Burnley in 1951, the quarrels about 'her', the liny of 'she', 'she', 'she' from behind closed doors, made up the figure in the New Look Coat, hurrying away, wearing the clothes that my mother wanted to wear, angry with me yet nervously inviting me to follow, caught finally in the revolving door.* We have proper birth certificates,

² The quotation continues: "but the integration of self and the mirrored self, that provides the basis of sensuality, dies in the little girl, and the refusal to mother, the removal of the looking-glass, reproduces refusal." Steedman, 2006: 96.

because my mother must have told a simple lie to the registrar, a discovery about verisimilitude of documents that worries me a lot as a historian. (Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape*, 39-40, italics added)

What kind of secret was illegitimacy? It was a real secret, that is, the product of an agreed silence on the part of two people about a real event (or absence of event), and it was an extremely well-kept secret. Yet it revealed itself at the time. Often, before I found out about it in 1977 and saw the documents, the sense of my childhood that I carried through the years was that people knew something about me, something that was wrong with me, that I didn't know myself. [...] *It wasn't I think, the legal impropriety that I knew about, the illegitimacy; rather I felt the wider disjuncture of our existence, its lack of authorization.* (Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape*, 1986, 2006: 40-41; italics added)

My father, old but gritty, glamorous in the eyes of the Class of '68, a South London wide boy with an authentic background, described his grandfather's funeral, about 1912, when a whole other family, wife, children, grandchildren, turned up out of the blue from somewhere further down the line where they'd been established on the navy's journey north. (This was a circumstance paralleled at his own funeral, when the friends and relations of the woman he'd been living with for part of the week since the early 1960s, stole the show from us, the pathetic huddle of the family of his middle years.) (Carolyn Steedman, "Landscape for a Good Woman" in *Past Tenses: Essays on writing, autobiography and history*, 1992: 24)

In contrast to the orphans or otherwise isolated, solitary yet highly distinctive individuals ("sans famille" as a 1848 Hector Malot novel proclaims the condition) that are the protagonists of fictions of middle-class inheritance, Steedman traces childhoods and feelings perpetually in the shadow of central characters and stories that can act as metaphors (constituting universal or poetic truths only because a hegemonic culture cements the interplay of particular signs and signification. Steedman's reading of the little watercress girl vis-à-vis Freud's Dora shows how the former's storytelling cannot be deciphered, remains largely illegible in a (capitalist modern) culture where poor children and experiences and feelings arising out of poverty are and continue to be marginalized.

I will provisionally conclude with how Jane Eyre's harem trope might be read,

however incongruously, alongside Carolyn Steedman's reconstruction of failed dreams in marginal, unauthorized lives. Jane Eyre's longing for equalitarian monogamy is at once poignantly signified and parodically tied up, made more complicated, violent, and self-reflexive (politically undesirable and historically impossible), in a harem trope. She might be said to long to leave one harem (Thornfield and the madwoman in the attic, who kills herself in a displaced liberation); but turns out to establish perhaps another of a dissimilar kind (three-woman-centered) at the end of the novel. This is of course to render harem a figment, albeit a pivotal one, of one kind of British proto-feminist imagination.

The illegitimacy and unauthorized sentiment that is recorded in Carolyn Steedman's readings of working-class childhoods illuminates, for the purposes of my reading, an incidental yet understudied aspect of historical familial non-normativity. That is, the illegitimate births and secondary families produced as much in as by the shadows of an ascendant norm of (Christian) monogamous marriage and attendant nuclear family; both of which have reigned as myth and dream in/for modern industrial societies well into the twenty-first century. Such perversions of normative marriage and family forms have been examined in sociology and anthropology as easily recognizable at the peripheries of empire (the West Indies and Asia) since the twentieth century. Excellent scholarly riposte have shown that perhaps these are not anomalies but rather that the very conditions of empires old and new, that is, colonial, post-colonial and neo-colonial processes have spawned racialized class-gender hierarchical relations that look like but cannot ever feel like an "original" – thus parodying and defying "normal" patriarchal marriage and family configurations.

In addressing the lacunae that is working-class women and children's formations and subjectivity in much of left and feminist scholarship, Steedman confronts the normalizing tendencies in both, without however using the term. This is perhaps partially due to how women and girl children's working-class sensuality and sexuality is, in Steedman's story, either used in exchange for something (with its meaning and value therefore limited to function without pleasure; almost a form of self-sacrifice), as in the mother's case ("I was her hostage to fortune") or foregone from the beginning as that self-love which had never had nourishment beyond "good-enough" mothering to grow into what can nonetheless only be imagined as the willed servitude of mothering-as-love.

□□

Societies that develop political technologies to control and discipline the bodies of their subjects must reckon with the possibility that individuals will put these technologies to alternative uses. This is what happens in the case of masochism. It draws on stereotypes of violence and technologies of control in order to convert them into technologies of pleasure. In the process it perpetuates these stereotypes, but it does this – so its proponents would argue – in a way that renders them harmless, parodies them. Masochism is a *techne erotike* in the truest sense. Consequently, the struggles we have come to associate with masochism are struggles for a technology of control. *The body of the masochist is caught in a tug-of-war between technologies that want to render it productive and others that seek to produce sexual pleasure.* (John K. Noyes, 1997: 5; italics added)

The figure of the European masochist arose out of intense inner conflicts and contradictions in discourses of liberalism and modernism, and it is inscribed with the same problems that continue to generate academic and popular debate concerning gender relations, stereotypes, and the exercise of power. To interrogate “masochism” is to interrogate these crises and contradictions in liberal thought. The invention of masochism both as an erotic practice and as a psychopathological and sexological figure was a symptomatic move, an attempt to resolve some of the crises in liberal concepts of agency. (John K. Noyes, 1997: 8)

N.B. The above is a work-in-progress. I will be continuing work on this draft and will submit to the NSC the finished essay as soon as it is done.

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